

# Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3421-M50

Fall 2020

eCourseware/Online

**Teri Del Rosso, Ph.D.**

**Office:** 326 Meeman Journalism Building

**Office Hours:** By appointment only

**Email:** t.l.d@memphis.edu

**Twitter:** @tldelrosso

**IG:** @dr\_powerblazer

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog Description

Emphasis on communication tactics; plan, write, and produce public relations tools; audience and media selection; print and electronic media.

### Prerequisites

JRSM 2121, PBRL 3400

### Textbooks

The Public Relations Writer's Handbook. Lehmann, W. (2020). New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-8153-6528-0 eBook ISBN: 978-1-3512-6192-0

The Associated Press Stylebook 2019 (or 2018). New York: Basic Books ISBN: 978-0-917360-68-8

\*You can also access The AP Stylebook as an online publication or through an app. Get details about these options online at [apstylebook.com](http://apstylebook.com)

Other readings will be assigned and posted to eCourseware.

### Classroom format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, we have no scheduled meeting time. This can be convenient for you, but it also means that it is essential for you to be an organized, motivated student.

You must have internet access and Microsoft Word to generate a ".doc" or ".docx" extension. All assignments MUST be filed in a ".doc" or ".docx" format; type must be double-spaced with indented paragraphs.

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis home page: <http://www.memphis.edu>
2. Click on the "MyMemphis" link at the bottom of the left column menu.

3. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
4. Click on the “eCampus Resources” tab.
5. In the center column of the page, click on the blue UofM eCourseware link
6. Down on that page, in the FALL 2019 course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 3421 - M50 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

### **Students with disabilities & accommodations**

If you will need accommodations through [Disability Resources](#) to meet any of the requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. Remember, this does not mean you are incapable or receiving special treatment. We all have specific tools we use to do our best work. I encourage you to consider which tools you need to be your best in this class.

### **Trauma & emotional needs**

This class is just one component of your life. It is important, but sometimes we experience trauma and crisis, and we need to reprioritize. As your instructor, I feel your health and well-being is more important than this class, especially under the circumstances. If completing this course or an assignment to the best of your abilities is challenging, please let me know as soon as possible. I am here for you and want to work with you.

### **COVID-19 illness accommodations**

I hope that this is the most worthless syllabus section I’ve ever written. I hope that COVID-19 comes nowhere near you or your loved ones, and doesn’t affect you in any way, including physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially, and mentally. COVID-19 will likely affect one of us in one of those ways, however. Here’s how we’ll adapt:

#### **If you get sick:**

I recommend you take an incomplete for the semester. Given that it’s hard to know how your body will react, and cases range from asymptomatic to months of illness to death, we should prepare for you to dedicate a substantial amount of your time to feeling better. Your health is more important than this course. *Honor code: no documentation required.*

#### **If you need to take care of someone who gets sick:**

Depending on the severity of their illness, I recommend you consider taking an incomplete. If you are the primary caretaker of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 with symptoms, your priority should be remaining healthy and supporting that person. *Honor code: no documentation required.*

#### **If you are exposed to someone who tests positive:**

You must isolate and monitor your symptoms. Please let me know as soon as possible if that affects your access to resources and technology. *Honor code: no documentation required.*

#### **Resources specific to physical health and wellness:**

[Mental health Services](#)

[UofM Student Health Center](#)

[Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources](#)

#### **If you are affected financially because of COVID-19:**

There are many resources available through the Dean of Students including:

Dr. Rosie Phillips Bingham Student Emergency Fund  
Emergency Food Resources, which includes Tiger Pantry  
Emergency Housing  
Specific COVID-19 relief funds

### **Course expectation**

As a writing-focused class, our mission is to use strategic writing to tell our clients' stories. While considering the big picture (what's going on in our communities, nation, and world) and combining that with a commitment to targeting and understanding audiences, conducting solid primary and secondary research, and building strong relationships; we will use our strategic storytelling tools to develop news releases, infographics, media kits, and other strategic writing tools.

For this fall class, you will pick one local client of your choice (with approval from me—mostly to make sure there's enough to write about) and this client will serve as the inspiration for every assignment (with exceptions to the personal branding work).

### **Client examples**

Girls Inc., CHOICES, OUT Memphis, Muddy's Bakery, Memphis Rox, Fox & CatVintage, Buff City Soaps, Novel books

Course work will be accomplished every week. Each assignment must be completed by its due date and time, which is Sunday at 11:59 p.m. CT unless otherwise noted.

As part of this class you will be required to earn your Hootsuite Platform Certification. The Hootsuite Platform Certification is industry-recognized and demonstrates your expertise with the social media management platform Hootsuite. Details about this process will be provided separately.

Other parts of your grade will come from writing and submitting assignments, and participating in online discussions and Twitter chats. These assignments must be submitted per instructions; no credit will be given outside of the proper submission guidelines.

You will need to get in the habit of checking eCourseware regularly. I use this platform to communicate with the class.

Additionally, you will be required to update your online portfolio to showcase your work and continue to build your professional online presence. Specific requirements and details will be provided separately.

### **Grading**

A+ = 97-100%; A = 93-96%; A- = 90-92%  
B+ = 87-89%; B = 83-86%; B- = 80-82%  
C+ = 77-79%; C = 73-76%; C- = 70-72%  
D+ = 67-69%; D = 60-66%  
F 0-59%

## Plagiarism policy

*First offense:* Redo for 50%, plus meet with Teri

*Second offense:* Automatic 0, no redo

*Third offense:* Automatic class fail

*Final assignment, regardless of which offense:* Automatic 0 on assignment

## Citation policy

For this class, we'll use AP Style (<https://www.apstylebook.com>) and APA style ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html)).

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar and language. A large part of public relations is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points.

I expect your work to be good – and to be yours. What is not yours should be fully cited. In documenting sources, you must use APA formatting. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources. In addition, Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource, and can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

## Late work

<24 hours late: -10% (perfect = 90% A)

24-48 hours late: -20% (perfect = 80% B)

48-72 hours late: -30% (perfect = 70% C)

Final call: Up to 50% credit (perfect = 50% F)

## Your deliverables

Writing Assignments	Points
Fact sheet	5 points
Media pitch	5 points
Backgrounder	5 points
News release	10 points
Hootsuite Certificate	10 points
Twitter chat	10 points
Professional social media network	5 points
Current events discussion board lead	5 points
Discussion board participation	10 points
Email exercise	5 points
AP Style Quizzes	10 points
Portfolio components	10 points
Online portfolio (final)	10 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 points</b>

## Weekly Assignments Details

This is a quick breakdown of some of the weekly assignments you'll do over the semester. More detailed guidelines are posted to eCourseware. These two assignments (discussion board and AP style quizzes) are pass/fail and exempt from the late policy.

**Discussion board.** Despite being an online course, students are expected to have active class participation. Participation will be evaluated by your response and activity in eCourseware discussion forums. Each week your peers will be responsible for guiding one or more discussions about topics covered in the readings or the PR industry in general. Discussion may take the form of written, audio or video requirements. If written, your responses should be well articulated and substantial. Clearly indicate your main idea or point of view and support it with facts, logic and references as appropriate. When asked to provide feedback on your peer's discussion posts, simply stating, for example, "Yes," "No," "I agree," or "I don't think so" is not acceptable will not be considered participation. As a guideline, I recommend your original written posts should be at least 150 words and replies to your peers should be at least 100 words. I expect regular participation and active students will demonstrate that by regular posts that meet the requirements and deadlines. Discussion board posts are exempt from the late policy

Discussion board leaders must post no later than 11:59 p.m. on the Monday of their assigned week. Discussion board participants have until Thursday at 11:59 p.m. to respond to the original post, and until Sunday at 11:59 p.m. to comment on their peers' posts.

**AP Style Quizzes.** There will be AP (Associated Press) Style quizzes throughout the semester. Quizzes will open on Monday and must be completed by Sunday night at 11:59 p.m. (CST). Missed quizzes cannot be made up.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, please understand that changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced as soon as possible. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m. C.T. unless otherwise noted. We will start each week on Monday.

### *Week 1, August 17: Course Introduction/What is PR Writing*

Readings: Chapter 1

Assignments: Multiple check-in assignments on the eCourseware discussion board. These will be due at different times throughout the first week.

### *Week 2, August 24: Media Relations: News Releases and Pitches*

Readings: Chapter 2-3

Assignments: AP Style Quiz 1

NOTE: August 30 is the LAST DAY TO DROP.

### *Week 3, August 31: Media Relations + Bloggers*

Readings: Chapter 4 and 6

Assignments: AP Style Quiz 2  
News release due 9/6

*Week 4, September 7: Storytelling*

Readings: Chapter 8, 9  
Assignments: AP Style Quiz 3  
Media pitch due 9/13

*Week 5, September 14: Writing for Digital Media*

Readings: Chapter 13  
Assignments: AP Style Quiz 4  
Fact sheet due 9/20

*Week 6, September 21: Writing for Social Media*

Readings: Chapter 14  
Assignments: AP Style Quiz 5  
Backgrounder due 9/27  
Twitter chat questions due 9/27

*Week 7, September 28: Midterm/"Fall Break"*

Use this week to catch up on any missing or late work. We will meet on Twitter for a class Twitter chat. Work on your Hootsuite.

Readings: No readings assigned  
Assignments: AP Style Quiz 6  
Twitter chat due TBD  
You may submit late, missing, or failing work redos. Please see the redo policy.

NOTE: October 2 is the last day to WITHDRAW (Courses dropped during this period will have "W" grades assigned and will appear on your transcript. Courses cannot be dropped online after this period).

*Week 8, October 5: Personal branding and portfolio prep*

Readings: Chapter 10  
Assignments: AP Style Quiz 7

*Week 9, October 12: PSAs and Persuasive communication*

Readings: Chapter 5  
Assignments: No AP Style Quiz!  
Hootsuite certification due 10/18

*Week 10, October 19: Writing for Internal and Executive Publics*

Readings: Chapter 15  
Assignments: AP Style Quiz 8

*Week 11, October 26: PRSSA Conference week*

Readings: Writing for events chapters—Chap. 17-18

Assignments: Discussion boards this week  
AP Style Quiz 9  
Professional social media network due 11/1

*Week 12, November 2: Portfolio critique*

Readings: see eCourseware  
Assignments: AP Style Quiz 10  
Portfolio prep due 11/8

*Week 13, November 9: Writing for voice (speeches and presentations)*

Readings: Chapter 7, 16  
Assignments: No AP Style Quiz!  
Email exercise due 11/15

*Week 14, LAST CLASS: November 16*

Monday- Tuesday: Classes are still in session  
W: This is the first day of finals. Note: there is no reading day this semester  
Readings: see eCourseware  
Assignments: You may submit late, missing, or failing work redos for weeks 8-14. Please see the redo policy.

*Exams week: November 18-24*

Assignments: Final portfolio due November 20, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. This is exempt from the late policy.

## ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

### Five Pillars in PBRL 3421

- *Critical Thinking:* Students must demonstrate an understanding of writing for a specific public, writing from a specific point of view for an organization and how to choose the best media channel to communicate their message to a target audience.
- *Media Literacy:* Students learn how to engage with both traditional and social media; how relationships and communities are built within these channels; and how to choose the appropriate media channels based on their desired target audience.
- *Multimedia:* Students look at the use of social media in public relations, including the potential for community engagement and management, the importance of consistent organizational voice across multiple platforms and how to translate one message into a variety of social media platforms. Students also add collateral pieces to their online portfolios.
- *Professionalism:* Students learn the professional and ethical standards of the public relations industry by discussing ethics statements from a variety of professional organizations, working through simulated ethical scenarios from a variety of perspectives and learning how and why legal ramifications may exist within the field. Students continue work on their personal portfolio sites as a way of establishing their personal professional brand.
- *Writing:* Students focus on writing for a variety of public relations formats, including press releases, position or white papers, fact sheets, press conference statements, brochures and

newsletters, various social media platforms, and feature releases. Students edit and critique not only their work but also the work of their peers.

### **Professional values and competencies for PBRL 3421**

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances.
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communication.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

### **How professional values and competencies will be met**

#### *Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)*

- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations products and appropriate channels to reach the target audience.
- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public and requirements of the medium affect style and content.
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing, including within the freedoms of speech and the press.
- Recognize potential problems and solutions in media relations.
- Understand the differences between writing for various mediums.
- Evaluate their own and other's public relations writing for accuracy, clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style, as well as suitability for specified medium.
- Understand how to use appropriate software and hardware to create public relations products, as well as how to effectively utilize social media channels to communicate with the target audience.

#### *Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and exams.
- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.



- Identify appropriate images/graphics to accompany public relations products based on medium, platform and target audience.
- Identify common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write a press release, position or white paper, fact sheet, press conference statement, brochure and newsletter for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.
- Apply Associated Press guidelines to written public relations materials.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

## How assessment of student learning will be met

### *Awareness*

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media.
- Learn about the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content.
- Learn about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Learn about the different public relations products, which tools are used to create them, and what media each is best suited for.

### *Understanding*

- Understand how to be strategic in public relations writing.
- Recognize how the diversity and cultural difference of an organization's stakeholders and target audience inform the development of public relations content.
- Recognize potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to proofread their own and other's writing for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Understand which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

### *Application*

- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Write a press release, position or white paper, fact sheet, press conference statement, brochure and newsletter for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

## JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

### Portfolio requirement

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain

an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or Squarespace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional lives, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files and writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

## Email

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

## Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

## Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make

arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a “job” in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

### **Course repetition**

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (“C-”) in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student’s online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo).

### **Academic integrity**

In addition to University-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, as this is a journalism and strategic media class, students are expected to comply with copyright law and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas. Also to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may require to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all. (*Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018*)

### **Online SETEs**

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray “Student” tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. Students needing an extension on an

assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. Students are responsible for learning these rules and checking their work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Media reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the University is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.

### **Student support**

Student who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.

## **COVID-19 protocols for this course**

### **Student Accommodations**

Students with accessibility issues or learning accommodation issues due to a disability should contact Disability Resources for Students (DRS) to submit an official request for course accommodations. Contact DRS at 901.678.2880 or at [drs@memphis.edu](mailto:drs@memphis.edu). (<https://www.memphis.edu/drs/index.php>)

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. Students guilty of academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly, through participation or

assistance, are immediately responsible to the instructor of the class in addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the regular institutional disciplinary procedures. (<https://www.memphis.edu/osa/students/academic-misconduct.php>)

### **Student Health**

Students who have a positive COVID-19 test should contact the Dean of Students at [deanofstudents@memphis.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@memphis.edu).

### **Student Resources**

Students who need additional resources can visit the Dean of Students Office website at <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php>.