

# Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3421-001

Spring 2022

Tuesday/Thursday 11:20 a.m. - 12:45 p.m., Meeman Room 212

**Prof. Taylor Nicole Ackerman**

Preferred Pronouns: She/Her

**Office:** Meeman Journalism Building Room 332

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
Wednesdays, 10 a.m. – noon; 1-3 p.m.  
Thursdays, 10 - 11 a.m.

If you'd like to meet for my office hours listed or at any other time, please reach out via email or text prior to dropping by so I can make sure I'm in my office. I'm also available via Zoom outside of office hours. Please don't hesitate to reach out.

**Email:** [tckerman@memphis.edu](mailto:tckerman@memphis.edu)

**Phone:** 731-225-7656 Text only please :)

## Catalog Description

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

## Prerequisites

JRSM 2121, PBRL 3400

## Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

*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

\*Available in hard copy or eBook. eBook is available for rent via Amazon for approximately \$25

*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 Canvas.

## Classroom Format

This class will be presented through lectures, discussions, multimedia, and group activities both in class and utilizing online platforms including Canvas, podcasts, and social media sites. This class will meet in person twice a week in room 212. Regular attendance and participation in class is expected and will affect your grade. Part of academic success at the collegiate level is being able to add to discussions

with informed ideas and thoughts, as well as being willing to ask questions if you are unsure about anything. There will be many opportunities to contribute, engage, or explore topics that may be confusing or unclear in class, and I encourage each and every one of you to speak up when appropriate. Remember there is no such thing as a stupid question.

Class discussions taking place both online and in person should remain respectful and professional, and show respect to all people regardless of background, sex, race, or any other factor. Hate speech will not be tolerated in my classroom and I reserve the right to ask any student to leave if they violate this boundary. Remember: Public relations is all about creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships and our classroom should be no different.

This class is meant to build and improve your public relations writing skills as well as build your skills in writing in AP format. In class, you will write a variety of public relations pieces and begin developing a portfolio of relevant documents and creative pieces. There will be an emphasis on media relations, social media, and content creation.

Students will upload all required assignments to Canvas, and feedback will be given to encourage student improvement. Access to a computer or an electronic device will be required. Please be sure to read the instructions for each assignment carefully, as requirements for each assignment will vary. Assignments being turned in will all need to be submitted as a .doc, .pdf or .pptx file unless otherwise noted. Reach out in class or via email if anything is unclear to you. All out-of-class assignments and quizzes will be due Sunday nights at 11:59 p.m. central time unless otherwise noted. To allow time for response and clarification, please reach out with any assignment questions at least 48 hours prior to the deadline.

In order to succeed in this course, it's imperative to attend class and stay engaged in all coursework. If at any point you are concerned about your grade or struggling to grasp course concepts, I encourage you to make an appointment during my office hours so we can work to find a good solution. Remember that in order for me to help you, communication is key. Also remember that much more can be done if you reach out early on in the semester - if you wait until the middle of April, there likely isn't much we can do to turn things around.

**Meeman Lab Availability:** Open labs 4:30-7:30 p.m. Monday-Tuesday and noon-4 p.m. Friday. Masks and social distancing required. In addition to Meeman, labs are available in the Tech Hub and the Library.

For students who might not have access to a computer, the McWherter Library has laptops on loan. Please visit the Checkout desk in the library or visit:

<https://www.memphis.edu/libraries/technology/laptop.php>

### **Accessing the course website**

1. Go to the University of Memphis Canvas home page: <https://memphis.instructure.com/>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JRSM 3421 – 001 to enter the 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. I'm happy to work with you to make sure you are able to be successful in this course.

If at any point in the semester you are struggling with the course load or a specific assignment, please reach out to me for a meeting so we can work to get you back on track. I'm happy to help in any way I'm able, but you must be an advocate for yourself. It's impossible for me to help if I don't know there's a problem.

## **Trauma & Emotional Needs**

I understand that outside of this course, you have many things going on that could add stress or take away attention from your school work. This course should be taken seriously, but I am happy to work with you to make sure that you stay healthy, well, and in the right mindset to do your best work. I've been a student also, and understand the challenges of balancing academics with work, family, and life. Please let me know if completing a requirement for the course is challenging or if something comes up throughout the semester that is hindering your success with this course. I care about what is going on with you and I'm happy to help where I can. My door (and Zoom room) is always open to you. Also remember it's much easier to tackle a problem at the first sight of trouble, rather than after things have piled on.

I also recommend taking advantage of the free counseling services offered by the University of Memphis (because quite frankly, therapy is amazing and free therapy is even better). Please see below for links that could be helpful for you.

**Campus and Community Resources:** <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/>

### **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](#)

### **Academic Services:**

[Writing Center](#)

[Tutoring](#)

### **Communities & Inclusion:**

[Multicultural Affairs](#)

[LGBTQ+](#)

## **COVID-19 Accommodations & Requirements**

Masks will be required in class and indoors anywhere on campus.

In an effort to accommodate all students and stop the spread of COVID-19, if you are experiencing any symptoms or have tested COVID positive, a Zoom link for class can be provided upon request. Attendance will be counted if you are present and alert via Zoom. Healthy students experiencing no symptoms are encouraged to come to class in-person. Zoom access is intended to only be a tool for students experiencing illness and is not meant to replace in-person attendance for the entire semester. Please talk to me privately if there are any questions or concerns.

### **Course and Assignment Expectations**

Course work will be accomplished every week, including readings, assignments and quizzes to check your learning and comprehension. Each assignment must be completed by its due date and time (Central Time), which may vary by assignment, so make sure to check each individual due date and time to ensure that you post by the deadline.

### **Quality of Work**

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 original, meaning it's yours. If you quote anything or get information from any other source, it should be fully cited. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources.

### **Repetition of Courses and Coursework**

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 resume and logo).

### **Questions about Grades**

If you would like to ask about a grade, please make an appointment to meet with me outside of class time, as I will not discuss grades via email or during class.

Additionally, you are responsible for tracking your grade and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your overall grade. Meeting early and often can help both parties involved find ways to improve student-instructor understanding and quality of work.

### **Plagiarism policy**

*First offense:* Redo for 50%, warning

*Second offense:* Automatic 0, no redo

*Third offense:* Automatic class fail

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

**\*\*Any instances of plagiarism may result in a note being added to your department file.**

### **Late work**

**\*\*\*Please note that the below late policy applies only to larger writing assignments and projects. In class work, discussions, and surveys will not be accepted late. Each student has the opportunity to makeup a quiz *once* during the semester (with a valid reason) and will not be permitted to submit any additional quizzes late.**

**<24 hours late: -5% (perfect = 95% A)**

**24-48 hours late: -10% (perfect = 90% A)**

**1 Week late: -20% (perfect = 80% B)**

**Final call: Up to 70% credit (perfect = 70% C)**

### **Grading**

There are 1,200 possible points in this class. At the end of the semester, your class points will be calculated and rounded up to the nearest whole number. Letter grades will be determined according to the scale below.

**A: 1080 - 1200 points**

**B: 960 - 1079 points**

**C: 840 - 959 points**

**D: 720 - 839**

**F: 719 and below**

### **Grading Philosophy**

A=Professional quality work that could be used with little or no modification

B=Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement, but would require revision to be used professionally

C=Satisfactory work and adequately meets requirement, but would need significant revision

D=Barely satisfies minimum requirement and below average quality

F=Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirement

### **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. The work you create in this course should be professional and "publish ready", and this means being properly edited and polished. This includes all class work and presentations, and is particularly important in regards to your written pieces. Problems in these areas will lead to a deduction in points. In order to polish your AP skills, quizzes and lessons will be given throughout the semester.

If you are including information from outside sources, you need to include full citations in APA formatting. Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource, and can be found at

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

### Individual Assignments

Writing Projects	380 points
Personal Branding Assignments	80 points
In Class Assignments	120 points
Weekly Assignments	140 points
Quizzes	150 points
AP Quizzes	125 points
Class Attendance & Participation	100 points
Hootsuite Certification	105 points
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,200 points</b>

### Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

**In Class Assignments:** In class activities will be completed to build on course concepts through experiential learning. Students must be present in class to complete the in class assignment unless a special circumstance has been cleared with the instructor *prior* to class. The lowest in class assignment grade will be dropped.

**Weekly Assignments:** Weekly assignments will vary in nature as well as points and be used to build on the concepts we are learning each week in class, as well as gauge your progress in the course.

**Writing Projects.** As a writing-focused class, our mission is to use strategic writing to tell our clients' stories. Often the best way to learn can be learning by experience, creating the documents we are learning about in this class to refine our skills and exercise our creative "muscles." You will create a total of 8 communication pieces, worth a total of 380 points. These writing projects will be featured within your online portfolios. The following pieces will be created:

**Media Pitch:** Two media pitches worth a total of 60 points

**News Release:** Two news releases worth a total of 80 points

**Backgrounder:** 40 points

**Fact Sheet:** 60 points

**Radio Spot:** 40 points

**Piece of Choice\*:** 100 points

\*\* Students will have a choice of different writing projects for the piece of choice, which will also count as the final project.

**Quizzes:** A total of three quizzes will be given throughout the semester to test your understanding of course concepts. Quizzes will be given on Canvas with a time limit of 30 minutes. You will have two attempts for each quiz with the highest grade taken. You are welcome to use your notes or book to help assist you on the quiz, but working with another student is prohibited.

**AP Quizzes:** There will be five AP quizzes throughout the semester to check your understanding of AP style rules. Quizzes will be given on Canvas with a time limit of 30 minutes. You will have two attempts for each quiz with the highest grade taken. You are welcome to use your notes or book to help assist you on the quiz, but working with another student is prohibited.

**Personal Branding Assignment:** Each student will complete a series of activities to begin building their own brands. More details will be given in class.

**Attendance & Participation:** Students are expected to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions, and this participation will count for 100 points in class. Students are allowed up to four absences before it begins to affect their grade.

**Hootsuite Certification:** 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. The normal cost of this certification is \$99 but as a member of this class, you will be able to access the training materials and the exam FREE. Details about this process will be provided separately. The Hootsuite Certification will be worth 105 points.

## Course Schedule

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although we will try to stick with this schedule, please understand that changes to the schedule and assignments due 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 in our first class meeting of the week on Tuesdays.

### Week 1, January 18, 20

Order your textbook

Assignments: Assignment 1 Opening Survey

In class activity (20th)

### Week 2, January 25, 27

Readings: Chapter 1

Assignments: AP Quiz #1

Assignment 2 (Online Newsrooms/Web Materials)

In class activity (25th & 27th)

### Week 3, February 1, 3

Readings: Chapters 2 & 3, check Canvas for additional materials

Assignments: Media Pitch Due

In class activity (3rd)

AP Quiz #2

### Week 4, February 8, 10

Readings: Chapters 4 & 6

Assignments: News Release Due  
AP quiz #3  
In class activity (10th)

**Week 5, February 15, 17**

Readings: Check Canvas  
Assignments: In class activity (15th)  
Quiz 1  
AP Quiz #4  
Assignment 3 (Podcast)

**Week 6, February 22, 24**

Readings: Chapters 7 & 10  
Assignments: AP Quiz #5  
Second News Release Due  
In class activity (24th)

**Week 7, March 1, 3**

Readings: Chapter 8  
Assignments: Second Media Pitch Due  
Backgrounder due

**Week 8, March 7-13, Spring Break**

No readings this week  
*Use this week to work on Hootsuite Certification (due in a couple weeks) and give yourself a break! Do some self-care this week.*

**Week 9, March 15, 17**

Readings: Chapter 9, Check Canvas  
Assignments: Fact Sheet due  
Quiz 2

**Week 10, March 22, 24**

Readings: Chapters 13 & 15  
Assignments: Hootsuite Certification due

**Week 11, March 29, 31**

Readings: Check Canvas  
Assignments: Radio Script due  
Assignment 4 due (Podcasts on writing/social)  
In class activity (31st)

**Week 12, April 5, 7**

Readings: Chapter 14, Check Canvas  
Assignments: In class activity (7th)  
Assignment 5 due (Social Media)

**Week 13, April 12, 14**



Readings: Check Canvas  
Assignments: In class activity  
Personal Branding Components due

#### **Week 14, April 19, 21**

Readings: Check Canvas  
Assignments: In class activity  
Piece of Choice Due!

#### **Week 15, April 26**

Readings: No readings this week!  
Assignments: Assignment 6 Closing Survey  
Quiz 3

### **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**

#### **COVID-19 Health and Safety Policy - Masks and Social Distancing**

Faculty, staff, students and visitors are expected to monitor current health and safety measure requirements posted to our website and shared through other official communication channels including, but not limited to University email. Definitions related to those requirements and enforcement mechanisms appear in the [COVID-19 Health and Safety Policy \(GE2040\)](#). **Please be reminded that the University currently requires that all persons, regardless of vaccination status, wear masks indoors and in places where appropriate social distancing is not possible.**

Classroom experiences from recent semesters have shown that the campus community generally understands and complies voluntarily with the mask requirement. The policy does permit faculty members to take action for non-compliance of mask use. Additionally, if students have concerns about faculty or staff mask use, contact Human Resources at [hr@memphis.edu](mailto:hr@memphis.edu) or 901.678.3573. Faculty who are delivering on-campus instruction may remove their face mask to teach, provided they are located within a delineated teaching area that is no less than 6 feet from students.

#### **Student Health**

Students who are experiencing symptoms such as sneezing, coughing or a higher than normal temperature should inform me by email so they can be excused from class and should stay home. Students should contact their health care provider or the Student Health Center at <https://www.memphis.edu/health/>.

Students who have a positive COVID-19 test should contact the Dean of Students at [deanofstudents@memphis.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@memphis.edu) or 901.678.2187.

#### **Testing & Notification**

The University will continue to provide testing for the entire campus community. The details regarding test availability and locations can be found [here](#). Do not come to campus if you are experiencing symptoms, are in isolation or quarantine due to positive test results or exposure, pending test results, or have reason to believe you have come in contact with the virus.

#### **Student Resources**

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

**Guidelines for classes, labs and equipment in Meeman Journalism Building in Spring 2022**

- Anyone feeling sick should stay home.
- Social distance from all others at least 6 feet when possible.
- Wear a mask at all times when in University buildings and outside when social distancing isn't possible.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer regularly.
- No more than one person in the elevator at a time.
- Disinfect your workstation before and after use, including desks, keyboards, mice and screens. Wash your hands after cleaning.
- Air purifiers must run at all times during class meetings.