

Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3212 001

Spring 2025

Meeman Journalism 206

Prof. Taylor Ackerman, APR, MA

She/Her

Office: Meeman 332

Office hours: Tuesday, 10am - 12pm

Tuesday, 2:30 pm - 3 pm

Wednesday, 10:30 am - 2 pm

If you'd like to meet for the office hours listed, please reach out via text or email prior to dropping by so I can make sure I'm in my office and not in another meeting.

I'm also available via Teams outside of the listed office hours upon request.

Email: tckerman@memphis.edu

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

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Emphasis on the strategic aspects of public relations writing and further development of writing skills for a wide variety of public relations vehicles including preparation of more complex materials such as speeches, feature stories, white papers, videos and materials for special events and crises.

Prerequisites

PBRL 3421 / STRM 3210

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Smith, R.D (2020). *Becoming a Public Relations Writer: Strategic Writing for Emerging and Established Media*, 6th Edition. New York: Routledge

ISBN 978-1506315737

The Associated Press stylebook. New York: Basic Books. *Note: Any edition from the last five years.*

*You can also access The AP Stylebook as an online publication or through an app. Get details about these options online at apstylebook.com

Classroom format

Our class will meet in person in room 206 in the Meeman Journalism building twice a week.

Attending class in person is **imperative and necessary for your success in this class, as part of your**

grade will depend on in class activities. Our class will be based around many types of public relations writing and will have you create a number of different pieces.

Not only will you produce several quality, advanced level pieces for real world clients to put into your portfolio, you will also polish the planning and editing stages of writing. Additionally, you will prepare for your future career through Hootsuite Certifications (or equivalent certification if already completed, and polishing your online portfolio.

Through lectures, slide decks, multimedia examples, special guests, workshops, course activities and class discussions, you will further develop your writing and understanding of public relations materials. Your learning will be assessed through writing samples, quizzes, assignments, and activities.

Some in class activities will require giving classmates feedback on their assignments as well as group brainstorming. Class critiques and conversations should remain respectful at all times. Hate speech, threatening language or offensive statements will not be tolerated and will result in being asked to leave the class. If it happens multiple times it could result in you being dropped from the course for misconduct.

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 unless otherwise noted. Failure to turn in assignments in the proper format will result in only one warning for the semester, and then a zero on subsequent assignments.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. Click on the link for STRM 3212 to enter our course

Course Requirements

This is a rigorous course with high professional and academic standards. It is the highest writing course for PR majors and, as such, is your gateway into the professional world. Careers in public relations demand the very best in writing ability and sometimes your writing ability (or lack thereof) will be what sets you apart from the competition when applying for positions. Keep this in mind as we work our way through the various writing assignments and don't ever hesitate to ask me for help or guidance when you need it.

Many of the writing projects will require planning, multiple-drafts, strategy and edits. If you find yourself rushing through an assignment in 15 minutes to beat the deadline, it's very likely it's not going to be up to par or result in a good grade. Give yourself time to work on assignments through the week and revisit them with a fresh mindset prior to turning them in. Part of this course is learning more positive writing habits for success. Even though we all cut it a little too close sometimes (fellow procrastinator, here), you'll be surprised at how your work can grow with some planning and finesse.

We are upping the ante a bit this semester: Part of your learning experience will be working with a real-world client to produce a number of pieces for the organization to put to use. That means a few things here: 1, You'll be able to use real, published pieces in your portfolio as well as potentially have additional references 2, The work must be taken more seriously. *This is not a drill.* The organizations are counting on us to produce specific pieces they are relying on. The deadlines will be very real, as well as the need for excellence. You will be assigned a client that

you meet, and they will receive the pieces that you make and give you feedback. Assignments *must* be publish ready for them, free of mistakes.

Most of your writing assignments will be graded with feedback, but some will be marked for being complete and on time. In lieu of a midterm and final exam, we will have a series of tests/quizzes throughout the semester. These will all be administered via Canvas.

Quality of Work

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of public relations and advertising 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. When in doubt, ask. If I catch work that seems eerily similar to something from a previous class and you have not discussed it with me, it will be an automatic zero. 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).

Chat GPT/AI

You must obtain permission from the instructor before using ChatGPT or other AI tools to assist with assignments in this course. Once permission is granted, AI may only be used as directed. Assignment submissions may run through AI detection software. Unauthorized use may result in a failing grade or a request to resubmit an assignment. Be prepared to submit any prompts you used for assistance with your assignment as well as the original ChatGPT output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work.

Questions about Grades

If you would like to ask about a grade, let's set up a Teams or office meeting so we can talk about it with clarity. I'm often flexible about allowing students to redo an assignment they may not be satisfied with *if* they come to me about it in a timely manner and show significant improvements in the work and understanding.

I will not discuss grades or disputes via email - this must be done in a scheduled meeting or phone call setting where we can have a conversation.

Additionally, you are responsible for tracking your assignments 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.

Virtual Meetings: On the off chance that we decide to have any of our class meetings over Teams this semester, you will be required to attend with your camera on. Failure to attend the class, or having your camera off for more than half of the call, will count against your allotted absences for the course. While virtual meetings can be fantastic for flexibility, it doesn't discount the importance of the class nor permit you to attend while going through a drive-thru, grocery shopping, driving a boat, cooking pancakes, etc.

Course & Campus Resources

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.

Support: 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 by communicating with me and making me aware of any problems. It's impossible for me to help if I don't know there's a problem.

I am happy to meet with you outside of class, hop on a Teams call, or provide support over email. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you find yourself falling behind, feeling overwhelmed, or struggling.

With that being said, the earlier you let me know there's an issue, the more likely I am to be able to help. Unfortunately, if you wait until week 11 or later to let me know there's been a problem throughout the semester, it's likely going to be too late for me to extend grace or alternative arrangements.

Meeman Lab Availability: Open labs 9:30-4:30 Monday-Friday. In addition to Meeman, labs are available in the Tech Hub and the Library. We also have equipment rental available. Check your university email for details.

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+](#)

Grading

There are 1,000 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. If additional points are added or subtracted from this possible point total, the letter scale will be adjusted.

A+ = 967 – 1,000 points, **A** = 934 – 966, **A-** = 900 – 933 points

B+ = 867 – 899 points, **B** = 834 – 866 points, **B-** = 800 – 833 points

C+ = 767 – 799 points, **C** = 734 – 766 points, **C-** = 700 – 733 points

D = 667 – 600 points

F = 600 and fewer points

Grading Philosophy. A=Professional quality work that could be use 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 requirements

Assignments

In Class Activities	150 points
Writing Projects	400 points
Certifications	100 points
Quizzes	100 points
Individual Assignments	250 points
Total:	1,000 points

Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

In Class Activities: A variety of in class activities will be done through the semester and counted for a grade. These activities may vary, but will likely consist of things such as attending guest lectures, participating in writing workshops, review sessions, presenting information or client meetings. In order to receive credit, you must be in class for the activity that is offered that day unless otherwise noted ahead of time. **In class activities will not be able to be made up outside of class time in most circumstances.** If there is an opportunity to make up the project, it will be done at the responsibility and

time of the student. The instructor does not have to allow you to make up an assignment that was done during class time.

Writing Projects: Throughout the semester, you will turn in a variety of assignments that are meant to demonstrate what you have learned throughout the course. These assignments will vary in nature as well as work required. Some sample projects in the past have included news releases, speeches, fact sheets and white papers, however specifics may vary.

Hootsuite Certifications: Through the class, you will have the opportunity (and requirement) to complete professional platform training through Hootsuite. Turning in these certifications will be for a grade, and you will also complete a reflection. If you have already completed Hootsuite for a different class, you need to let the instructor know immediately so that they can assign you an alternative assignment. Hootsuite certifications completed in previous semesters will not be accepted for this assignment.

Individual Assignments: Throughout the semester there are a number of smaller assignments aimed at making sure you are prepared for/understand class concepts. These assignments will vary in nature and will each have specific instructions.

Quizzes: A total of three quizzes will be provided throughout the semester to check your knowledge on course topics. While you are welcome to use your notes, the quizzes will be timed and require you to have a base knowledge of course concepts. You will have two attempts with the highest grade sticking. Working with another student is prohibited and will result in receiving a zero for the quiz.

Miscellaneous Policies

Late Work: In strategic media deadlines are imperative. In the field, we are often creating work for clients or pitch meetings with hard deadlines. As such, try to turn everything in on time. I do recognize life happens, and as such if you have to turn something in late, the following late policy will apply with the exception of quizzes and discussions, which will not be accepted late.

<24 hours late: 5% off

<48 hours late: 10% off

<One week late: 20% off

One to three weeks late: 30% off

Over three weeks late: No credit

Student Responsibility: This is college; this course is an upper division requirement for your major. It is not my duty to remind you about projects, announce syllabus policies on a regular basis, or make sure you are doing your work. I cannot chase you or beg you to participate. You have to have responsibility and work ethic in order to be successful at this level of your academic career. If you have questions, concerns or any confusion regarding any class requirement, assignment or something said in class, it is your responsibility to reach out and ask the question in a timely manner. I have provided a number of ways to contact me and encourage you to use them. "I was confused" will not be an accepted excuse for not performing at the appropriate level (nor will it be when you enter your career.) *Please, please* clarify anything you are uncertain about.

Additionally, as communication experts I expect each of you to stay in communication with me about what is happening with you or if there is anything hindering your ability in my class. I cannot extend grace if I don't know about something until the end of the semester.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 3212

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- 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.

How professional values and competencies will be met

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

- Understand how public relations writing tactics can tell stories and build relationships across a variety of disciplines and careers.
- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations products
- Structure messages on the appropriate channels to reach diverse 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.
- Understand the differences between writing for various media.
- 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 specific medium.
- Understand their role as a content creator influences culture, norms and discourse.

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

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and engagement exercises.
- Define an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Identify appropriate multimedia components to accompany public relations writing based on medium, platform and target audience.
- Name and illustrate common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write PR collateral for an organization including press releases, speeches, media pitches, message maps, blog posts and position papers.
- 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.
- Associate successful outcomes with the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content.
- Give examples about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.

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.
- Examine 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.
- Identify which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

Application

- Write PR collateral for an organization including press releases, speeches, media pitches, message maps, blog posts and position papers.
- 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

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, 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

Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

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

AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You 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. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and 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, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws 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 and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). 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.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; 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 seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. 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.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

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

Disability and accommodations

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

Weather policy

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.