**PR 209: Effective Writing for Strategic Public**

**Relations**

**4 Units**

**Fall 2019 – Mondays – 2-5:20 p.m.**

**Section:** 21072D

**Location:** ANN 413

**Instructor: Pat Maio**

**Office:** ANN lobby or classroom

**Office Hours:** Mondays, 8-9 a.m. or 1-2 p.m.

**Contact Info:** [pmaio@usc.edu](mailto:pmaio@usc.edu), 951.283.2184; or Skype, “Pat Maio”

**I. Course Description**

PR 209 is an intensive, hands-on writing course designed to provide students with the following:

1. An understanding of proper writing styles with sensitivity to the requirements of different situations, media and publications.
2. Competence in writing mechanics and grammar, headlines, labels, structure and the ability to express information clearly to the intended audience(s).
3. Confidence in judging importance and making content decisions in writing.
4. An understanding of what constitutes news and the nuances of how it is defined by a wide variety of media: general news publications and broadcast outlets, specialized trade publications, websites, blogs and internal communications.
5. Familiarity with persuasive writing techniques and knowledge of when to apply them.
6. Enhanced storytelling ability.

**II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment**

The goal of this class is to teach students how to:

1. Write in a variety of media with clarity, insight and skill.

2.) Judge the importance of information, set priorities and tailor writing to meet the needs of different audiences.

3.) Edit and proofread material so it is publishable.

**III. Course Notes**

Copies of lecture slides and other class information will be posted on Blackboard.

**IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments**

Through in-class assignments and homework, students will learn to organize and plan their writing both with and without deadline pressure. Some assignments will cover the essentials of news and the basic building blocks of providing information; others will include elements designed to provide insight for working with the news media. Specific writing styles for print, online and broadcast media will be reviewed, as well as copy for brochures and newsletters (for print and e-publication).

Students will be expected to take on their assignments with a professional attitude and a willingness to learn new techniques. Good writing takes practice, hard work and passion.

**V. Grading**

**a. Breakdown of Grade**

| Assignment | % of Grade |
| --- | --- |
| Homework assignments (writing assignments such as news releases, cover letter, media advisory, fact sheet, FAQ) | **15%** |
| Quizzes (based on readings, AP Stylebook, grammar handouts and proofreading guidelines) | **15%** |
| In-class writing drills (array of writing assignments including media advisory/alert; business correspondence, multiple fact sheets; op-ed; position paper) | **15%** |
| Midterm test (take home and in-class; take home is writing assignment - news release and detailed fact sheet; in-class is a series of drills to test spelling, grammar, AP Style, proof reading and writing one-page biographies | **20%** |
| Class participation (response to readings, posing questions/comments) | **10%** |
| Final project (see final project description attached to syllabus) | **25%** |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** |

**b. Grading Scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 95% to 100%: A | 80% to 83%: B- | 67% to 69%: D+ |
| 90% to 94%: A- | 77% to 79%: C+ | 64% to 66%: D |
| 87% to 89%: B+ | 74% to 76%: C | 60% to 63%: D- |
| 84% to 86%: B | 70% to 73%: C- | 0% to 59%: F |

**c. Grading Standards**

***Public Relations*“A” projects** have writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited material. All required elements included (catchy headline, solid lead, varied vocabulary; supporting facts/figures; quotes as required). Excellent organization and flow; original thinking. Showed creativity in packaging/distribution method. High end of scale: publishable today as is.

**“B” projects** have two to five spelling, grammar or AP Style mistakes. One or more required elements missing or poorly displayed (i.e., boring headline; confusing lead, etc.). Shows potential as a good writer. Adhered to inverted pyramid. High end of scale will have at least one extraordinary element such as astonishing lead or little-known facts or pithy quote. Some creativity shown. Publishable with medium editing.   
  
**“C” projects** have more than five errors (spelling, grammar, AP style). Poorly edited and/or proofread. May have adhered to inverted pyramid but strayed at beginning or end. Hackneyed elements such as trite headline or uninteresting lead. Little or no facts/figures included. Passive rather than active verbs become the norm. Little or no creativity shown. Publishable with major editing.  
  
“**D” projects** have more than 10 errors (spelling, grammar). Needs to be completely rewritten. Poorly organized with little or no understanding of journalistic style/standards. Needs to work with writing coach.  
  
**“F” projects** are not rewritable, late or not turned in.

**d. Grading Timeline**

Students will receive back their graded homework, quizzes and tests at the beginning of the class following assignment.

**VI. Assignment Submission Policy**

All assignments are due on the dates specified. No late assignments accepted except if reason for late submission is discussed in advance and approved by the instructor. Absence from class is not a valid reason. Submit assignments by email to [pmaio@usc.edu](mailto:pmaio@usc.edu).

**VII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

1. “Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format,” by Thomas H. Bivens. McGraw Hill. Eight, 2015. ISBN-978-0-07-352623-2
2. “The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law.” Latest edition required (2019) ISBN: 978-0-917360-68-8.
3. Dictionaries and other writing references are indispensable. You need to have easy access to one or more guides to spelling, grammar, punctuation and writing style. “The Elements of Style” by Strunk and White is among the best and shortest volumes.
4. Newspapers, magazines, trade publications, websites and other publications as required by assignments or your own interests. In particular, you must be a registered user of latimes.com, which is free. See the news releases services described at <http://www.latimes.com/pressreleases>.You should be familiar with <http://www.prnewswire.com>, <http://www.businesswire.com> and other news release services.

It's impossible to learn about writing and improve your writing skills without reading topical news and feature writing and watching quality news broadcasts. It's also important to be aware of news, government, history and media. *If you don’t already do so, plan to be a regular reader of newspapers, magazines, specialized publications and websites as well as a listener of radio and television news.*

**VIII. Laptop Policy**

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [**Annenberg Digital Lounge**](http://www.annenbergdl.org/) for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s [Information Technology Services](http://itservices.usc.edu/wireless/support/) website.

**IX. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/26/19 – 12/6/19)**

**Friday, September 13:** Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

**Friday, September 13:** Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

**Tuesday, September 17**: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund for Session 001

**Friday, October 11:** Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

**Friday, October 11:** Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

**Friday, November 15:** Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

**X. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

***Important note to students:*** *Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability. A list of holy days can be found here:*[***http://orl.usc.edu/life/calendar/***](http://orl.usc.edu/life/calendar/)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Topics/Daily Activities | Readings and Homework | Deliverable/Due Dates |
| Week 1  Date: 8/26 | Introductions, detailed review of syllabus, texts and policies. Check out classroom. What is AP style? What is PR?  **In-class writing assignment:** Write a  1-page bio.  -- Rewrite a PR (Riverside Unified) | **For Week 2 class:**  • Bring to class hard copies of two news articles: one you think was well written and one you think was poorly written. Justify with a typed, brief analysis: no more than one page double-spaced. Be prepared to present in class.  **Readings**:  Bivins: Chapters 1 (Writing for Public Relations), pgs. 1-7, and Chapter 2 (Ethical and Legal Issues in Public Relations Writing), pgs. 8-26  • AP Stylebook Punctuation Guide, A, B | **Due:** No later than midnight on Fri., Sept. 6.  Assessment of news articles |
| Week 2  Date: 9/2 | No Class: Labor Day |  |  |
| Week 3  Date: 9/9 | Discuss writing and editing sources. Review assignments. Establish the tenets of PR writing. What are leads and how do you write one? Ordering of facts. Basic introduction to public relations documents.  Possible grammar quiz  **In-class writing assignment:** Interview a classmate for a profile piece.  Grammar Quiz #1 | **For Week 3 class:**  **Readings**: Bivins: Chpt. 3 (Planning and Research), pgs. 27-46 and Chpt. 4 (Choosing the Right Message and Medium), pgs. 47-66  Worksheet handed out.  • AP Stylebook C, D, E, | Complete in-class writing assignment, if needed.  **Due**: No later than midnight on Fri., Sept. 13. |
| Week 4  Date: 9/16 | Review assignments. More on what is news. What comprises the “Inverted Pyramid?” Headlines, key messages, leads, hooks, story structure.  After examining examples, we will write a sample together in class.  Possible grammar quiz  Hand out media kit sample plus details on what to include. Review. | **For Week 4 class:**  **Readings:** Bivins: Chpt. 5 (Media Relations and Placement), pgs. 67-90, and Chpt. 6 (Writing for Web and Social Media), pgs. 91-104.  Worksheet handed out.  • AP Stylebook G, H, I, J, K  Write two news release leads based on provided facts (Cordon exercise) | **For Week 4 class**:  Write two news release leads based on provided facts  **Due**: No later than midnight on Fri., Sept. 20  Determine the subject of your final information kit project. Write a one-page proposal and defend why it is an appropriate subject. Bring to class on Sept. 23. This will be a 10-minute presentation. |
| Week 5  Date: 9/23 | Whether writing a news release, a pitch, or a fact sheet, you need to be an effective storyteller and consumer of news.  In class you will write everything from a delayed to a blind lead; especially important when vying for journalists’ and readers’ attention. We’ll examine examples of fact sheets, Q&A and email pitches.  **In-class writing assignment:** News Release from provided facts, leads and headlines.  Grammar Quiz #3 | **For Week 5 class:**  Reading:  **Readings**:  Bivins: Chpt. 7, News Releases and Related Materials), pgs. 105-153.  Worksheet handed out.  • AP Stylebook L, M, N, O, P  **Homework**: Write a fact sheet from provided facts.  Write a news release from provided facts.  Information kit proposals due. | **Due:** No later than midnight on Fri., Sept. 27. |
| Week 6  Date: 9/30 | Leads writing.  Practice headlines and leads again with handouts, using real news.  -- Lots of in-class writing assignments.  -- Overview of information kits. How do print versions differ from electronic ones? How does a journalist use the kit? Which components are imperative and which are just nice to have? How to make your media kit an all-­‐purpose information kit.  Grammar Quiz #4 | **Homework:** Write a fact sheet or FAQ from provided facts.  **Reading:**  • AP Stylebook Q, R, S, T U, V | **Due:** No later than midnight on Fri., Oct. 4. |
| Week 7  Date: 10/7 | Review Fact Sheets, FAQ  Review releases.  We’ll practice headlines and leads again, this time using real news.  Prepare for Midterm  **In-class writing assignment:** Write a FAQ from facts provided.  Grammar Quiz #5 | **For Week 7 class:**  Reading:  • AP Stylebook Q, R, S, T U, V  Write at-home portion of midterm. Prepare for in-class portions. At-home portion of the exam is due Oct. 11 – three days before the Oct. 14 class. No late submissions will be accepted. Ask your questions before class ends, because the instructor will NOT field any questions after the at-home portion is handed out. | Email the at-home portion of midterm no later than noon on Tues., Oct. 8 – return to me by Fri., midnight, Oct. 11. |
| Week 8  Date: 10/14 | First part of midterm due, Monday, Oct. 14. Send via email or place in my mailbox in Old Annenberg Building, First Floor. Mailbox 174, Room 124  Remaining half of midterm is administered, in-class. | **Readings**:  Bivins: Chapter 9 (Design, Printing and Desktop Publishing), pgs. 229-263.  AP Stylebook W, X, Y, Z | **Due:** No later than midnight on Sun., Oct. 20.  [**Fall Recess:** Thursday, October 17 and Friday, October 18] |
| Week 9  Date: 10/21 | Review information kits discussed in Chapter 8.  More writing exercises.  Grammar Quiz #6 | **For Week 9 class:**  • Write a news release on an event related to the subject of your final project.  **Readings:** Bivins, Chapter 10 (Television and Radio), pages 264 – 290.  Worksheet handed out. | **Due**: No later than midnight on Fri., Oct. 25. |
| Week 10  Date: 10/28 | Writing for social media isn’t just a matter of editing your words. “ur gonna learn u don’t need 2 write caveman style 2 have a convo ttyl” Timed social media drills.  Grammar Quiz #7 | **For Week 10 Class:**  Write a blog post for the subject of your final project.  - Bios for information kit.  Reading:  Chapter 11 (pages 245-263).  Worksheet handed out. | **Due**: No later than midnight on Fri., Nov. 1. |
| Week 11  Date: 11/4 | Review Homework Assignment  Fundamentals of business writing. Email etiquette and content will be analyzed. Class critique of select websites.  **In-class writing assignment:** cover letter  Grammar Quiz #8 | **For Week 11 class:**  Reading:  **Readings:** Bivins, Chapter 11 (Speeches and Presentations), pages 291-303  Worksheet handed out  • Bring to class a brochure. Be prepared to discuss what you do and don’t like about it.  - Newsletter assignment.  Write a memo to the professor about your final project. | Email memo no later than midnight on Fri., Nov. 8. |
| Week 12  Date: 11/11 | Review of cover letter, Emails  Review of selected brochures, and newsletters….  In Class: Begin newsletter related to your final project | **For Week 12 class:**  Complete newsletter related to your final project. | **Due**: No later than midnight on Fri., Nov. 15.  Bring to class the address for a website of a controlled media related to your final project. Be prepared to discuss with class. |
| Week 13  Date: 11/18 | **In class:** Review of selected controlled media websites related to your final project. | **For Week 13 class**:  Begin writing a news release about your company for controlled media  Review the websites/blog traffic for website related to your final project. Be prepared to discuss the content/tone of the writing in class  - Bring draft information kit to class. | **Due**: Press release about your controlled media is due no later than midnight on Fri., Nov. 22.  Be prepared to work on your final projects on Nov. 25. Be prepared to discuss with class**.** |
| Week 14  Date: 11/25 | Complete in class assignment, if necessary. Work on an optional element such as a listicle. | **For Week 14 class**:  Work on your final projects in-class. You will be expected to make a brief presentation summarizing your chosen organization, how you arranged your information kit and what you learned. | [**Thanksgiving Recess:** Wednesday, Nov. 27 - Sunday, Dec. 1] |
| Week 15  Date: 12/2 | Fill out and submit your USC course evaluations.  Informal presentations: Final Projects. |  | (**Final** USC Course Evaluations.) |
| FINAL EXAM PERIOD 12/13, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. | Summative Experience |  |  |

**FINAL PROJECT: Detailed information kit**

You will prepare a detailed information kit on an organization or person of your choice. You are responsible for researching and writing all of the material. The only content that you may use as is from an organization is the mission statement and/or boilerplate. All other content must be original.

Be careful when selecting your focus topic. You will be referring to this topic during several class sessions throughout the course. The topic should not only keep your interest, but should reflect the type of public relations you think you might be interested in. For example, if you are interested in corporate social responsibility, Toms Shoes or Ben & Jerry’s might be interesting organizations for you to examine. Unless you select a start-up organization, you should not plan to prepare a corporate information kit. Rather, you should select some aspect of that organization to highlight. A perfect example would be to write an information kit on Starbuck’s Fair Trade policy, not on the overall corporation.

While this is primarily a writing course, we also expect you to begin thinking creatively about how you would package and distribute your kit. To earn an A on this project, you must show some evidence of your intent to package/distribute your kit.

**Required Elements: All Kits must include**

1.) Strategic-style memo to client/boss/instructor explaining the purpose of kit and how it fits overall public relations strategy. The memo should outline the details of your strategy, tactics, audience and distribution. Tell me what each piece is meant to accomplish, for whom and how that audience is meant to get your information. Maximum length: two pages

Include in your memo a list of all the other materials you would include if you were doing a complete kit. This list would include additional written sections, photos or graphics or whatever. Include a sentence or two of description as needed.

2.) An FAQ of one-page fact sheet that could be published as a printed document or posted on a website. Choose the one that most fits your topic. It can be about either the organization or about the specific purpose or topic that enhances your subject.

3.) A news release key to the specific purpose or topic of your final project.

4.) A newsletter or infographic of at least 300 words.

**Additional Elements:**

In addition, the kit must include two special elements. NOTE: All items must be at least one page. At least one of these items must be at least two-pages long. Among your options:

1. A profile of one key person.
2. Blog post or listicle.
3. An additional FAQ or fact sheet. It must be completely different than #2 in the required elements. Do not have any duplicate information from your required fact sheet. This could include a Q&A if you are doing an FAQ as a required element, or vice versa.

**XI. Policies and Procedures**

**Communication**

Students are encouraged to contact the instructor outside of class if you cannot come to office hours to arrange a meeting time by whichever method you prefer (email, text, etc.). I typically reply to emails or calls within 24 hours.

**Internships**

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must by unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations class.

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**a. Academic Conduct**

*Plagiarism*

Presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (<http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>).

*USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity*

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

**b. Support Systems**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086*

[equity.usc.edu](https://equity.usc.edu/), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu/)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu/)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

*Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]*

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.

**XII. About Your Instructor**

Pat Maio has held various reporting and editorial management positions over the past 25 years, having specialized in business and government reporting. He has held reporting jobs with the San Diego Union-Tribune, Orange County Register, Dow Jones News and other newspapers in Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. In San Diego, he won writing awards for his investigations of farm worker shortages, a recovery in welding jobs following the Great Recession, and high honey prices caused by an unknown disease decimating local honey bee populations. He also has held business editor positions with several mid-size newspapers, including the San Bernardino Sun / Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, The Desert Sun in Palm Springs and North County Times in San Diego. He also was the bureau chief of the Dow Jones News Service in Los Angeles where he directed coverage of electricity deregulation in California and the western United States, and regularly contributed stories to the Wall Street Journal. A native of Cincinnati, Ohio, Maio is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history in 1980. In 1982, he earned a master’s degree in journalism at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, where he wrote a thesis examining the effects of union leadership on the United Mine Workers Journal during the Tony Boyle and Arnold Miller administrations.