



PR 535: Writing for Strategic Public Relations
3 Units

Fall 2019 – Wednesdays – 6:30-9 p.m.

Section: 21555D

Location: ANN 413

Instructor: Kate Flynn Jacobs

Office: ANN classroom or lobby

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 6-6:30 p.m., or by appointment

Contact Info: kfj@usc.edu, 626-487-2444 (email is best)

I. Course Description

This course introduces students to the array of writing assignments a PR practitioner might encounter. It is based on the School of Journalism's rigorous newswriting standards. Through in-class drills 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 marketing and human resources departments as well as clients. Specific writing styles for print, online and broadcast media will be reviewed, plus copy for online content, newsletters and business correspondence.

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

II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment

PR 535 is designed to provide students with the following outcomes: to develop competence – and confidence – in writing mechanics and grammar, headlines, structure and the ability to express information clearly; to understand news and the nuances of how it is defined by a wide variety of media, and an ability to write in objective journalism style; to craft opinion with the use of facts and figures, and knowledge of when to apply objective or persuasive styles.

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

- Understand proper PR writing styles with sensitivity to the requirements of different situations, media and publications
- Judge the importance of information, set priorities and tailor writing to meet the needs of different audiences
- Edit and proofread any material so it is publishable

III. Description of Assignments

Students are required to bring their laptops to every class session. Every session includes an in-class writing assignment that the student will execute with instant feedback from the instructor. Each week, Professor Jacobs will provide an in-depth review of the previous week's homework assignments, then, she will introduce new writing elements. It is not unusual for the coursework to be slowed down sometime during the semester as students learn to perfect the Inverted Pyramid, basic AP style guidelines, write in active (not passive) voice, edit and proofread their work, and understand how the content they are devising fits into the PR realm. These assignments culminate in a comprehensive information kit (on an organization of each student's choosing) that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the principles and techniques taught throughout the semester.

WRITING EXERCISES and ASSIGNMENTS

Writing on deadline is an essential skill for public relations as well as other fields. Students need to be able to do assignments in Microsoft Word or a similar program, and type fast. Know how to insert accents and other symbols before turning in assignments.

Writing assignments must be double-spaced. Leave blank space and margins to allow space for editing comments.

Accepted proofreading symbols will be distributed in class. Professor Jacobs will utilize these symbols when grading your work.

HOMEWORK DEADLINES:

All students must submit in-class assignments at the end of class as instructed by the professor. To allow for faster feedback and better discussion, students will also be required to email certain assignments to the instructor prior to the next class by a deadline designated by the instructor.

It is strongly suggested that you try to email earlier than the deadline in case of server problems or other technical trouble. If you miss the email deadline, send it anyway. I will still provide feedback, although no credit will be given. **No late assignments will be accepted for credit.**

IF YOU WILL BE ABSENT, you are still responsible for finding out what transpired during class and to confirm what the homework is. You may NOT make up in-class writing exercises.

QUIZZES/REQUIRED GSP EXAMINATION

Quizzes will be given regularly. Some will be announced; some will not. If you are absent, you may not make up the quiz.

The Annenberg School of Journalism requires all majors to successfully complete an online Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation Exam. Your instructor will provide you with information regarding practice tests and coaching. The Exam will be held during regular class hours and is usually conducted in mid-November. **Your score on the GSP does NOT factor into your PR 535 grade.**

MIDTERM and FINAL PROJECT

The **midterm** will test your ability to write on deadline and to proofread and edit your work. The **final project** will be elements of an information kit, preferably one for a real person or organization that does not already have one.

FINAL PROJECT

By no later than the third class, each student will choose a topic specialty that will be the subject of several assignments and will be related to the final project. No two students may choose the same topic.

You will be expected to follow this topic area closely through the semester and find background materials about it. The topic should be one that interests you and can reasonably be expected to be the subject of news releases and other media materials, trade or magazine stories during the course. For instance, Professor Jacobs may allow you to construct an FAQ on your topic as part of an in-class assignment.

The topic may relate to the student's hobbies or place of employment. It cannot be too general, (i.e., *transportation*), nor too specific (*parking tickets*). So, for example, possible topics in the transportation area could be: Airport Security; Southwest Airlines; Harley-Davidson; Vacationing by Train; Yachting Safety. Be assured that the sky is the limit here: in 2014, the topics ranged from drone technology to a new nail polish line.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:

1. Class starts at on time. Chronic tardiness will affect your participation grade, as will absences. You don't have to ask me for permission to miss class, leave early or come late. I leave those decisions to you; however, you will lose participation points. There is no make-up for in-class work for missed classes.
2. If you are requesting an excused absence, you must provide documentation.
3. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments from a fellow student. I do not email notes or handouts.
4. Assignments are due at the time I designate. Assignments not following directions will be graded lower. If you are absent, you are responsible for getting me your homework by the due date/time. **No late assignments are accepted.**
5. There will be no make-ups for the midterm. There will be no extensions for the final project. You must complete the midterm and final project to pass the class.
6. Class participation is expected and will help your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute. Lack of participation will reduce your participation grade. Hearing from each of you makes for a more enriching class for all of us.
7. No texting or any use of cell phones or other forms of electronic communication during class. Doing so will have a negative impact on your grade. Computers for class work ONLY. Turn off your messaging on your laptop during class. Messaging during class will lower your participation grade.
8. There should only be one discussion going on at a time in class. Paying attention to the speaker, whether it is the instructor, fellow student or guest is a sign of respect and professionalism. Disruptive behavior, such as talking out of turn and carrying on side conversations, will negatively impact your grade.
9. The syllabus is our guideline and will change during the course of the semester to accommodate current events and speaker schedules.
10. You are expected to check BlackBoard every week for updates on homework and assignments. I will post the week's homework within 24 hours of our last class. You are also responsible for checking your USC email account, which is how I will communicate with you. The homework schedule will be reflected on BlackBoard.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME:

1. I am open to your questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss any issues concerning you. Please don't hesitate to talk to me, email me or call me. Never hesitate to reach out.
2. I am fair. When you get an assignment back from me, you should have a good idea why you earned the grade you did and what can be done to improve your writing. However, if things are not clear, let's talk. The more discussion, the better the understanding.
3. This syllabus is a general guideline for what we will cover during the semester. There will be in-class writing homework and other assignments. Feel free to suggest topics that are of interest to you and I will do my best to incorporate those ideas into assignments so that we can broaden our horizons into more diverse storytelling.
4. I'll guide you along to improve your writing, but feel free to help guide our discussions. Bring to class your questions, observations and opinions about how you see the role of public relations at work in the real world. Our most pertinent and interesting class time will come from what's happening in our world today.
5. I am available for questions and conversations before and after class and by appointment. Ready access is through email. I will respond to all messages within 24 hours, unless my message service indicates otherwise.

IV. Grading**a. Breakdown of Grade**

Assignment	% of Grade
Participation	10%
Writing	25%
Homework	10%
Quizzes	5%
Midterm	15%
Final	35%
TOTAL	100%

b. Grading Scale/Standards

A Range (A+=95-100 A-=90-94)	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. Made me want to keep reading.
B Range (B+=87-89 B=84-86 B-=80-83)	Two-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.
C Range (C+=77-79 C=74-76 C-=70-73)	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.
D Range (D+=67-69 D=64-66 D-=60-63)	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.
Failing: (F=59 or below)	Not rewritable or no assignment turned in.

You will receive an individual assessment based on this rubric for every writing assignment. You should aim to see steady improvement as the semester progresses.

In addition, we maintain the highest standards of ethical writing/editing. The following are some other circumstances that would warrant a grade of “F” and potential USC/Annenberg disciplinary action:

- Fabricating a story or making up quotes or information (unless you are specifically assigned to insert fictional facts/quotes by your instructor for learning purposes)
- Plagiarizing an article, part of a script/article or information from any source. This includes improper attribution, lifting ideas from another source and/or representing any work as your own.
- Missing a deadline.

V. Assignment Submission Policy

- A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F. **I do not accept make-up assignments.**
- B. Assignments must be submitted via email either at the end of a class session or by the due date specified by the instructor.

VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. “*Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format*,” by Thomas Bivins. McGraw-Hill. 8th Edition, 2014. ***Required**
2. “*The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*.” Latest edition preferred. ***Required** You are allowed to utilize the online version BUT in my experience, it helps to have the hard copy with you while executing in-class assignments.

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. *“Woe is I”* by Patricia O’Connor and *“The Elements of Style”* by Strunk and White are among the best of the shorter volumes. We will discuss other references. The bottom line: know where to look when you have questions about writing.
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](http://www.latimes.com), which is free. See the press releases services described at <http://www.latimes.com/pressreleases>. You should be familiar with <http://www.pnewswire.com>, <http://www.businesswire.com> and other press release services.
5. Some reading assignments will be posted on Blackboard and will be indicated either on the syllabus or on the white board at the beginning of the class session.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

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.

VII. 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](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website.

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

Friday, Sept. 13: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

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

Friday, Oct. 11: Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the week three equivalent for short sessions) to avoid tuition charges.]

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

VIII. 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. To accommodate timely, late-breaking topics and events and the unique needs of each student, the instructor retains the right to repeat, delay or even certain assignments. Students having any doubt or question about assignments, schedules, homework changes, etc., should check Blackboard. In addition, Professor Jacobs will always write the correct homework assignment/due date on the white board at the beginning of each class. It's your responsibility to check the board.*

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 8/28	Introduction. Detailed review of syllabus, texts and policies. What is AP Style? Interviews for biographies. In-class writing assignment: Profile of fellow student.	Readings: 1. Bivins: Chapter 1 2. “Basics of Grammar” and “Basics of Style” posted on Blackboard under Readings.	Your profile is due via upload on Blackboard by noon, Sunday.

Week 2 9/4	All about leads We will concentrate on the two most essential elements of any writing you will do: Headline/Subject lines and Leads	Readings: 1. AP Stylebook: Punctuation Guide, A-B 2. Bivins: Chapter 7 3. Review the Inverted Pyramid (on Blackboard) for next class. Writing homework: Leads rewrite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads Rewrite Upload via BlackBoard by Sunday, Sunday. Upload by start of class an analysis of two news articles: one you think is well-written and one you think is poorly written.
Week 3 9/11	Leads, headlines, story structure Ordering of facts for news stories and releases. More on headlines, leads, story structure. In-class exercise: crafting a full news release.	Readings: 1. AP Stylebook: C-K 2. Bivins: Chapter 5 Writing homework: Continue working on your news release.	Carefully edit and proofread your news release and upload via Blackboard by noon, Sunday.
Week 4 9/18	Information Kits Overview of content of information kits. In-class writing exercise: Write fact sheet	Readings: 1. AP Stylebook: L-P 2. Bivins: Chapter 4 Writing homework: Fact Sheet	Fact sheet is due via upload on Blackboard by noon, Sunday.
Week 5 9/25	Pitching the Media How and when to talk to the media; what media to target; how to get your story delivered. In-class writing exercise: Write a pitch letter.	Readings: 1. AP Stylebook: Q-Z 2. Review Bivins 129-134 Writing homework: Polish your pitch letter	Pitch letter is due via upload on Blackboard by noon, Sunday.
Week 6 10/2	Crafting Your Opinion Public relations practitioners will need to know how to write in the editorial or opinion voice. In-class writing exercise: Write an op-ed.	Readings: Bivins: Chapter 2 Writing homework: Polish your opinion piece	Opinion piece is due via upload on Blackboard by noon, Sunday.
Week 7 10/9	Midterm review: writing fundamentals	Write take-home portion of midterm. Prepare for in-class portions.	The take home portion of your midterm is due at the beginning of class.
Week 8 10/16	Midterm	Readings: Bivins: Chapter 3	I do not allow makeups for the midterm so plan accordingly.
Week 9 10/23	Know Your Audience We summarize the necessity for public relations practitioners to harness content. Forget about the medium: you must be able to communicate whether you are writing 280 characters or 1400 words. And that means knowing who your audience is. The PR Triad In-class writing exercise: FAQ	Writing homework: FAQ	Working from the stories discussed in class, pick one new audience segment to whom you can target a story; create key message(s) to connect with audience; find a specific outlet where you see your story running. Upload via Blackboard by noon, Sunday Upload FAQ by noon, Sunday

Week 10 10/30	Feature Writing: The nuances of feature writing. Here we expand the Inverted Pyramid, adding layers as needed, depending upon our audience.	Readings: Bivins: Chapter 6	Upload feature by noon, Sunday.
Week 11 11/6	Social Media Writing Strategic writing for social media means understanding the voice of the company and the appropriate channels to connect with the right audience. • Cover Letters	Readings: Bivins: Chapters 8 and 9 Writing homework: Continue working on your cover letter.	Upload link to a newsletter by start of class. Cover letter due via Blackboard upload by noon, Sunday.
Week 12 11/13	Controlled media: Review newsletters. How does controlled media differ from news materials? Overview of newsletters and infographics In-class writing exercise: Newsletters/infographics	Writing homework: Infographic	Upload completed newsletter or infographic by start of class.
Week 13 11/20	Writing for business: Emails, memos and business correspondence. Fundamentals of business writing. Email etiquette and content will be analyzed. In-class writing exercise: persuasive memo about your final project.	Final project memo and outline. You'll use this as a blueprint for crafting your actual project. GSP Exam will be administered during this class session, so it's imperative that you attend. The GSP is a mandatory requirement of the School of Journalism.	Memo due via upload on Blackboard by noon, Sunday.
Week 14 11/27	No class due to Thanksgiving break.		Work on your final project.
Week 15 12/4	Presentation of Final Projects.		All final projects are due at the beginning of the class session on Wednesday, December 4 at 6:30 p.m. No late submissions will be accepted.
FINAL EXAM Dec. 11, 7-9 p.m.	Final summative semester review		

Final Project

You will prepare a detailed information kit that contains common elements PR practitioners rely on. There are required and optional elements, all designed to help you hone your writing skills AND to craft a kit that is worthy to share with a potential employer.

IX. Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

CLASS GROUND RULES AND PARTICIPATION

Class discussions display the communication skills required for your craft. They also can reveal your curiosity, tenacity and ability to connect with sources to obtain information. It is equally important to respect the class and your fellow students. Cell phone rings, side conversations, noisy wrappers, web surfing and other distractions and interruptions have no place in the classroom.

Ideas are to be treated with respect as well, but criticism plays a crucial role in learning. The craft of writing is made up of revision and rewriting. Constructive comments on your classmates' work are expected. Not only should you not be bothered by critiques from fellow students and the instructor, you should seek out honest reactions to your work.

Lastly, this is a graduate-level course and as such, will require you to be engaged and involved in the world around you: read a newspaper; watch actual TV news; be aware of breaking stories and issues.

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 be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism 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

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

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

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, 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

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

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

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

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, 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

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.

X. About Your Instructor

Kate Flynn Jacobs is a communications consultant specializing in strategic planning, writing communications and media training. Her more than 30 years of experience includes media relations, speechwriting, communications planning, crisis communications, annual report writing, and corporate newspaper editing. She has won awards from the Public Relations Society of American and the International Association of Business Communicators. For 20 years, she has taught at USC's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, focusing graduate and undergraduate on Public Relations theory and writing courses. She received a master's in Communication Management from the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism.