



**PR 535: Persuasive Writing**  
**3 Units**

**Fall 2020 – Tuesdays – 6:30-9 p.m.**

**Section:** 21553D

**Location:** ANN 308 & Online

**Note: Until further notice, all class sessions will be conducted online**

**Instructor: Professor Jacqueline Liu**

### **I. Course Description**

This course introduces students to the array of writing assignments today's PR and advertising practitioners might encounter. It is divided into four distinct modules:

- Mastering the School of Journalism's rigorous writing standards. Through in-class drills and homework, students will learn to organize and plan their writing both with and without deadline pressure.
- Applying those skills to standard persuasive PR and advertising copywriting assignments.
- Tackling the prevailing digital standards such as writing for social media, websites and other digital media as well as traditional printed materials.
- Learning the basics of messaging and copywriting in the advertising realm.

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

### **II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment**

By the end of this class, students should be able to:

- Master the fundamentals of proper PR and advertising writing styles with sensitivity to the requirements of different situations and mediums.
- 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.
- Craft persuasive messages for any medium that meet the client's objectives.
- Devise ad copy for a variety of mediums, such as print, online, TV, podcasts and outdoor, based on sound advertising strategy.

### **III. Description of Assignments**

You must have access to a computer during each class session. If we meet in-person, students are required to bring their laptops to the classroom. During online sessions, students must be able to type assignments on Microsoft Word and submit them during the class as dictated by the professor. Every session includes an in-class writing assignment.

Each week, we will review the previous week's homework assignments and introduce new writing elements. It is not unusual for the coursework to be slowed down sometime during the semester as students learn to perfect accepted writing standards, write in active (not passive) voice, edit and proofread their work, and understand how the content they are devising fits into the PR or advertising realms – or both. These assignments culminate in a comprehensive information package (full description below) that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the principles and techniques taught throughout the semester.

While this course is primarily dedicated to improving your writing and editing skills, you also will be exposed to PR and Advertising strategies as they relate to messaging and content assignments. *The course will keep pace with the PR and advertising fundamentals you'll be learning simultaneously in PR 508.*

To maximize your understanding of the demand of advertising copywriting, you will be expected to view a pre-recorded lecture on the Role of the Advertising Strategist prior to our advertising copywriting module.

#### **DIGITAL LOUNGE SUPPLEMENTAL COURSEWORK**

Special instruction on specific elements of this coursework may be available through the Digital Lounge. Professor Liu will post applicable workshops and times as available.

#### **WRITING EXERCISES and ASSIGNMENTS**

Classes include a weekly writing exercise. Some exercises take place in class and are in addition to take-home assignments. Some writing will be on deadline, which is an essential skill for public relations and advertising.

#### **HOMEWORK DEADLINES:**

Assignments will be due via email or Blackboard as I designate each week. All assignments will be complete and typed, with no handwritten edits. Assignments not following directions will be graded lower. Be sure to submit on Word and not a pdf so the professor may provide you with detailed edits/feedback.

It is strongly suggested that you try to email a few minutes earlier than the deadline in case of server problems or other technical trouble. *If you miss the email deadline, send it anyway. It will be accepted but the assignment will be marked down.* If it is more than an hour late, you will receive a 0 but the work will still be reviewed.

**IF YOU WILL BE ABSENT**, try to let the instructor know before class by email. 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 assignments but you will receive relevant handouts/instructional materials.

#### **QUIZZES**

Based on readings, AP Stylebook, grammar, proofreading and current news events.

### **MIDTERM**

The midterm will test your ability to write on deadline and to proofread and edit your work.

### **FINAL PROJECT**

Before the midterm, each student will choose a topic specialty. It's often helpful to choose a company, product, brand or industry you're interested in.

Throughout the semester, you will be practicing the elements that will eventually comprise your information kit. If you find you are struggling with any of the components, please make an appointment with Professor Liu to discuss and review the concepts.

**Final Project: Due Tuesday, NOVEMBER 17 at 6:30 p.m. No late submissions will be accepted.**

You will prepare a detailed information package that contains common elements PR practitioners rely on. It also must include some advertising "crossover" materials that today's professional needs to be prepared to craft. There are required and optional elements, all designed to help you hone your writing skills AND to craft a package that is worthy to share with a potential employer. Here are your instructions:

#### **All packages must include:**

- A creative brief (per the model shown in class) that outlines and explains the overall strategic plan.
- A news release (maximum two pages, double-spaced). In the creative brief, you must explain the audience and intended outlet for distribution.
- Advertising copy for two complementary mediums: i.e., podcast script for a host + social media copy for an influencer.
- A feature story (700-800 words).

**In addition, the package must include TWO special elements.** Discuss your special elements with the instructor if you are unsure what to select.

- Fact sheet
- Opinion piece (500 words minimum)
- Paid social media ad portfolio
- Print advertisement

You will be expected to present your information package during the last class session. Your presentation should be approximately 10 minutes and cover: the basic overview of your selected topic; a discussion about each element; any challenges you faced during the planning, writing and/or editing of the materials.

#### IV. Grading

##### a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
In-class writing, homework, quizzes, Digital Lounge course completion	40%
Midterm	25%
Final	35%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

In this course, participation is factored into your in-class work as well as your comments/questions related to the writing assignments. A separate grading rubric will be provided for your Final Project.

##### b. Grading Scale/Standards

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

Writing courses in the Public Relations program follow the following grading scale:

**“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.

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 on the syllabus. **Unless otherwise noted on the syllabus or I dictate otherwise, all writing assignments are due by 9:00 p.m. on the Friday before the next class.**

**A note about attendance:** Class time and timeliness are important. If you are late, YOU are responsible for finding out what was missed. The instructor won't repeat advice, instructions, quizzes or explanations.

Missing a single class is 7% of the term. Because much of the learning takes place in class and participation counts toward the grade, lateness or an absence can adversely affect your final grade.

#### **VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

1. *“The AP Stylebook,” 55<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2020-222* **\*Required**

2. *The AdWeek Copywriting Handbook: The Ultimate Guide to Writing Powerful Advertising and Marketing Copy from One of America's Top Copywriters* —Joseph Sugarman **\*Required**
3. *Hey Whipple, Squeeze This*, Luke Sullivan **\*Recommended**
4. Dictionaries and other writing references are indispensable.
5. Newspapers, magazines, trade publications, websites and other publications as required by assignments or your own interests.
6. Some reading materials will be posted on Blackboard.

### 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, podcasts, and YouTube videos.

### Zoom etiquette

At the beginning of the semester, the entire class will contribute to and formalize a contract of discussion norms that we will all abide by.

### Synchronous session recording notice

Synchronous sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously.

### IN PREPARATION FOR THE COURSE

Please review the pre-recorded session on Tips for Effective PR Writing, posted on Blackboard.

### VII. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (13 weeks: 8/17/20 – 11/13/20)

**Friday, September 4:** Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

**Friday, September 4:** Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

**Friday, September 4:** Last day to drop a class and receive a refund to avoid a mark of "W" on student record and STARS report

**Friday, September 4:** Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

**Friday, October 2:** Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript only. Mark of "W" will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. [Please drop any course by the end of week three for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

**Friday, October 2:** Last day to change a Pass/No Pass course to letter grade

**Friday, November 6:** 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. 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 cancel certain assignments. Students having any doubt or question about assignments, schedules, homework changes, etc., should check Blackboard. *Please note that pre-recorded materials are indicated on the Course Schedule in red throughout the syllabus.*

### **WEEK 1/AUGUST 18: INTRODUCTIONS, SYLLABUS REVIEW, FUNDAMENTALS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING**

- Introductions, detailed review of syllabus, texts, policies, and a discussion of norms for conducting class online. What is AP Style? What is persuasive writing? View a pre-recorded lecture from David Measer, advertising executive and long-time adjunct professor, to learn more about the intersection of PR and advertising as it relates to writing and messaging.

#### **In-Class Assignment:**

- Profile of fellow student.

#### **Homework:**

- Finish profile and upload on Blackboard by Saturday at noon.
- Readings: AP Style Punctuation Guide, A, B; Adweek Chapter 1

### **WEEK 2/AUGUST 25: INVERTED PYRAMID, HEADLINES, LEADS, STORY STRUCTURE**

- We will concentrate on the most essential elements of any writing you will do: headlines, subject lines, and leads – how to capture the audience’s attention at the beginning. Discuss the Inverted Pyramid and why we use it.

#### **In-Class Assignment:**

- News release

#### **Homework:**

- Finish release and upload to Blackboard by Saturday at noon.
- Readings: AP Style C – K

### **WEEK 3/SEPTEMBER 1: DEFINING THE AUDIENCE**

- Discuss the perceived target audience for the news release. Identify key messages aimed at audiences. Discuss why the story might be carried by specific outlets. Development of target audience and creation of messages to connect with specific groups and the choice of outlets to reach each audience segment.

#### **In-Class Assignment:**

- Messaging/Audience/Outlet exercise (triad).

#### **Homework:**

- Revise your news release for a new audience. Develop key messages and find specific outlet where you see the story running. Reminder: Labor Day is Monday, September 7.
- Readings: AP Stylebook L – P

#### **WEEK 4/SEPTEMBER 8: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING COLLATERAL**

- Packaging of materials: First the news release and then what? Overview of press kits and information kits. How does a journalist use a kit? Review of myriad collateral pieces created and used by both public relations and advertising.

##### **In-Class Assignment:**

- Write a fact sheet.

##### **Homework:**

- Finish fact sheet, then turn it into an infographic to be posted on a social media platform.
- Readings: AP Style Q – Z

#### **WEEK 5/SEPTEMBER 15: FEATURE WRITING**

- The nuances of feature writing. Here we expand the Inverted Pyramid, adding layers as needed, depending upon our audience.
- Features are more in-depth than traditional news stories and go beyond providing straight facts. These stories are focused more on providing deeper and more personal insight. We will look at human interest stories, personality profiles, trend stories and other ways to add dimension to client communications and audience connection.

##### **In-class writing assignment:**

- Feature Story

##### **Homework:**

- Finish feature. Upload on Blackboard by Saturday, noon.

#### **WEEK 6/SEPTEMBER 22: OPINION WRITING**

Public relations practitioners will need to know how to write in the editorial/opinion voice. We will learn how to incorporate outside research, data and expert opinion in order to substantiate our point of view.

##### **In-class writing assignment:** Opinion piece

#### **WEEK 7/SEPTEMBER 29: MIDTERM REVIEW**

- Overview of writing fundamentals covered so far.

##### **In-class writing assignment:**

- Practice midterm piece.

##### **Homework:**

- Take-home portion of midterm. Please upload to Blackboard before class starts on Tuesday, October 6.

#### **WEEK 8/OCTOBER 6: MIDTERM**

- In-class writing exam.

##### **Homework:**

- Select what you think is one great and ineffective ad in any medium. Type up a brief explanation as to why you felt each was good or bad. Upload to Blackboard by Saturday, noon. Be prepared to discuss in class.



### **WEEK 9/OCTOBER 13: CRAFTING AN AD: AN OVERVIEW**

- Review of ads
- We will establish the general tenets of advertising writing, advertising strategy and the role of the Creative Brief, a strategic outline for an advertising campaign. The focus will be on what advertisers call the 4 Cs research on audience composition and insights. (4 Cs = consumer, category, company, culture).

#### **In-class writing:**

- During this session, you will work in teams to craft a 4 Cs map for a major brand.

#### **Homework:**

- Develop a Creative Brief

### **WEEK 10/OCTOBER 20: AD COPYWRITING PART 1**

- Fundamentals of ad copywriting: What strategies are employed for effective advertising.
- **Guest speaker TBA.**

#### **In-class writing:**

- Craft a print ad

#### **Homework:**

- Finish ad. Upload to Blackboard by Saturday at noon.

### **WEEK 11/OCTOBER 27: AD COPYWRITING PART 2**

- Expanding the horizon for advertising collateral
- Differences and similarities between ad and PR writing: Knowing the distinct role of each; how they complement each other and help achieve the same objectives for the client.

#### **In-class writing:**

- Write an ad for a podcast host – your favorite one is preferable.

#### **Homework:**

- Finish podcast ad script
- Create a related paid social ad

### **WEEK 12/NOVEMBER 3: CRAFTING YOUR INFORMATION KIT**

This entire class session will be devoted to polishing the materials in your information package. You will first work in teams to discuss common issues, then the class will reconvene to review and answer those issues. The remainder of the session you may work on your own materials and the instructor will provide feedback.

#### **In-class writing:**

- Working on final project

#### **Homework:**

- Continue working on final projects
- Prepare brief showcase of your final project to be presented in class next week.

### **WEEK 13/NOVEMBER 10: PRESENTATION OF FINAL PROJECTS**

You will showcase your completed final project. Present an overview of your selected organization/brand, walk us through the contents, describe any challenges you encountered.

#### **FINAL EXAM PERIOD/NOVEMBER 17 at 7-9 p.m.**

- Final projects due
- Final summative semester review

### **IX. Policies and Procedures**

#### **Additional Policies**

#### **Scheduling “Get to Know You” Appointments and Other Meetings**

I use Calendly so students can see my availability to meet. Simply go to [www.calendly.com/liuofficehours](http://www.calendly.com/liuofficehours) to schedule a time (15- and 30-minute sessions available). Because we are not able to engage in-person, **it is mandatory for every student to schedule one 15-minute session with me within the first two weeks of class.**

#### **Ask me a “Dumb” Question**

There are no dumb questions, but some may seem embarrassing or uncomfortable to ask in a large group setting. I use a [Google Form](#) for students to ask whatever they want. I will do my best to answer it during our next class. If I don’t know the answer to your question, we will find it together as a class. I also use the form as a safe channel for students to ‘check’ me. If I’ve said something offensive, off-color or inappropriate in class, I am committed to fixing that right away.

#### **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://scampus.usc.edu/b/11-00-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. 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."

#### **b. Support Systems**

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

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

##### *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

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

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

##### *Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

##### *Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

##### *Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.* Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

**X. About Your Instructor**

Jacqueline Liu is Vice President at The Pollack PR Marketing Group and provides strategic guidance on managing public relations campaigns, creating integrated marketing campaigns, branding, corporate messaging and reputation management. Prior to that, she spent 12 years working as a communications professional in the automotive industry and consultant, executing regional and national events for global automotive, food and beverage companies. She also teaches PR 535: Persuasive Writing. Jackie is an LA native, and hates mayonnaise, cilantro and having her picture taken. Follow her on Twitter @jackie\_liu5.