



**PR 209: Effective Writing for Strategic
Public Relations
4 Units**

Spring 2021 – Wednesdays – 6-9:20 p.m.
Section: 21066D
Location: Online

Course Description

This is the first course of a three-part journey that includes PR 351a and 351b.

PR 209 is an intensive, skills-based writing course designed focused on preparing and writing news materials for use in media relations. It also provide students with the following:

1. Familiarity with proper writing styles with sensitivity to the requirements of 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. Familiarity with the Inverted Pyramid and prioritizing facts.
4. Ability to judge what constitutes news and the nuances of how it is defined by a wide variety of media.

Student Learning Outcomes

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

- Write with clarity, insight and skill.
- Judge the importance of information, set priorities and tailor writing to meet the needs of different media and reporters.
- Edit and proofread material so it is publishable.

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.

Students will be expected to take on their assignments with a professional attitude and a willingness to learn new techniques. Writing solid news materials take **practice** and hard work.

*** Based on the progress of each student, certain exercises and/or assignments may be changed. ***

Classes include a weekly quiz and writing exercises. 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.

Course Notes

Copies of lecture slides are typically uploaded to Blackboard but may vary weekly.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

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.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. *Public Relations Writing, Form and Style* by Doug Newsom and Jim Haynes. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning. Eleventh Edition, 2016.
2. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. **Latest edition required.**
3. Dictionaries and other writing references are indispensable.
4. It's impossible to learn about writing and improve your writing skills without reading topical news and feature writing, and watching quality news broadcasts. Be regular readers of newspapers, magazines, trade publications, websites and other publications as required by assignment or your own interest. You should be familiar with <http://www.prnewswire.com> and <http://www.businesswire.com> and other news release services.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Homework: Various readings, writing assignment news materials, and/or research.

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

Writing (in-class and homework): An array of writing assignment news materials.

Midterm exam: Take-home and in-class; take-home is a writing assignment: news release and detailed fact sheet; in-class is a series of drills to test spelling, grammar, AP Style, proofreading and writing TBD documents.

Class participation: Response to readings, posing questions and comments.

Final project: See final project description attached to syllabus

Grading Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Homework assignments	5%
Quizzes	5%
Writing drills (in-class and homework)	35%
Midterm exam	15%
Class participation	10%
Final project	30%
TOTAL	100%

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

Grading Standards

“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.

Grading Timeline

Graded assignments are typically due by noon on the Saturday following each class session, though this may vary. Students can expect to receive their grades and feedback by the next class session.

Assignment Submission Policy

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. If you are absent, you are responsible for getting me your homework when it is due. **No late assignments are accepted.**

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.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/15/2021 – 4/30/2021; Final Exam Period: 5/5-12/2021)

Friday, February 5: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, February 5: Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 9: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, March 5: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. 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 (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, March 5: 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, April 9: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

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.*

JAN. 20 WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS – FUNDAMENTALS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING

- Introductions, detailed review of syllabus, texts, policies, and components of news materials. Review the PESO model, AP style and the Inverted Pyramid.

In-Class Assignment:

- Interview a classmate and write a one-page bio and submit by the end of this class.

Homework:

- Bring two (2) news releases to class. Be prepared to come to class to talk about the key messages being conveyed.
- Readings: AP Style Punctuation Guide, A, B.

JAN. 27 WEEK 2: INVERTED PYRAMID, KEY MESSAGES, HEADLINES, LEADS, SUBJECT LINES

- Review news releases. Discuss the Inverted Pyramid and why we use it. Where do third-party sources fit in to news releases? Citations, formatting documents, etc.

In-Class Assignment:

- Using a fictitious concept, write four key messages.

Homework:

- Using the two news releases you found, identify what you believe to be the intended key messages. Write a brief report with your summary.
- Watch three separate morning, afternoon, and evening newscasts. Listen to one AM radio news show. Be prepared to identify the news anchors. Try to figure out which was a PR-generated news story.
- Readings: AP Style C, D, E, F.

FEB. 3 WEEK 3: UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND PITCHING

- An immersive discussion to understand how the media operates, what types of stories they look for, and how stories get chosen and created. Guest speaker: ANN media or a local editor/assignment desk editor.

In-Class Assignment:

- Write an email subject line

Homework:

- Readings: AP Style G, H, I, J, K

FEB. 10 WEEK 4: WRITING A NEWS RELEASE

- Discuss messaging and how it connects to audiences. What is the client trying to achieve?

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a news release based on the previous class lesson.

Homework:

- Finish your news release.
- Readings: AP Style L, M, N, O, P

FEB. 17 WEEK 5: QUOTES AND STATEMENTS

- No fluff allowed. We'll practice writing quotes for news releases and corporate statements in a variety of settings.

In-Class Assignment:

- Revise the quote you included in your last news release.

Homework:

- Readings: AP Style Q, R, S, T, U, V

FEB. 24 WEEK 6: NEWS RELEASES, PART TWO

- We will continue to review examples and practice writing news releases. Discuss boilerplates.

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a news release.

Homework:

- Finish your news release and write the boilerplate that would be attached to it.
- Readings: AP Style W, X, Y, Z

MAR. 3 WEEK 7: FACT SHEET

- Review examples. Overview of news kits. How does a journalist use a kit? Which components are imperative and which are just nice to have?

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a fact sheet.

Homework:

- Write the take-home portion of the midterm. Prepare for in-class portions. The take-home portion is due at the beginning of class. No late submissions will be accepted. Ask your questions before class ends because the instructor will not field any questions after the take-home is handed out.

MAR. 10 WEEK 8: MIDTERM

- Bring to class the take-home portion that you've already completed. I do not allow makeups for the midterm so plan accordingly.

MAR. 17 WEEK 9: FAQ and Q&A

- What's the difference between the two and how are they used? We'll review examples.

In-Class Assignment:

- Using key messages, write FAQ and Q&A documents.

Homework:

- Finish your FAQ and Q&A documents.

MAR. 24 WEEK 10: TALKING POINTS

- Create an executive "talk track" based on your key messages and news materials. Brainstorm anticipated interview questions as a class.

In-Class Assignment:

- Answer the questions we collectively come up with.

Homework:

- Finish your talking points.

MAR. 31 WEEK 11: ATTRACTING THE MEDIA

- Review examples of pitch letters and email subject lines.

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a pitch letter.

Homework:

- TBD

APR. 7 WEEK 12: WELLNESS DAY, NO CLASS

APR. 14 WEEK 13: BIOS

- Formal, fun and hybrid versions will be reviewed and written.

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a formal official bio.

Homework:

- TBD

APR. 21 WEEK 14: MEDIA ADVISORY

- Discuss essential information that must be included and how reporters/editors use advisories.

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a media advisory.

Homework:

- Work on your final project.

APR. 28 WEEK 15: GUEST SPEAKERS

- A panel of experts who work in public relations, marketing, and human resources. They answer all your burning questions about internships, jobs, networking, salaries, and more.

Homework:

- Work on your final project

MAY 5, 7-9 p.m. FINAL EXAM PERIOD: PARTING WORDS/PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PROJECTS

- Final project due. You will proudly show your classmates your completed kits.

Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

What I Expect From You

- Class starts on time. You don't have to ask me for permission to come to class, leave early or come late, or provide a written excuse. I leave those decisions to you. You receive no credit for in-class work that day. There is no make-up for material we cover in a class you miss.
- Assignments are due to me at the time I designate. All assignments must be complete and typed, with no handwritten edits. Assignments completed 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.**
- 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.
- If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments from a fellow student. I do not email notes or handouts.
- Class participation is expected and will help your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute. Lack of participation will reduce your participation grade.
- 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 are for class work only. If I have to stop class to ask you to stop using your cell phone or other device, you will lose participation points for that class.
- 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.
- The syllabus is our guideline and will change during the course of the semester to accommodate current events and speaker schedules.
- 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.

Communication

I am always available to speak or meet with students to answer questions, review assignments, or share career advice. Please feel free to contact me by email to set up a time to meet. If you cannot make my office hours, we can arrange another method of communication. I do my best to reply to all emails the same day but please allow for 24 hours.

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 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 or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

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 Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" 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, 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

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

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

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, 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 Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

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://annenbergsuccessfund.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.

About Your Instructor

Jacqueline Liu is Vice President at The Pollack PR Marketing Group and provides strategic guidance on branding initiatives, 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.