

PR 209: Effective Writing for Strategic Public Relations 4 units

Fall 2021 – Thursdays – 6-9:20 p.m.

Section: 21074

Location: Online

Required Texts:

1. Haynes. Public Relations Writing: Strategies & Structures.
2. Associated Press. AP Stylebook 2020 (2020-2022)(55th Ed.)
ISBN: 9780917360695

Office: Online

Office Hours: by appointment

Contact Info: beyahc@usc.edu

I. 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 press 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.

II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment

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 press materials take practice and hard work.

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

Classes include quizzes, writing exercises, and when possible guest speakers. 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. Quizzes will be given regularly; some will be announced, most will not.

III. Course Notes

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

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

Homework: Various readings, writing assignment press 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 press 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

V. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Homework Assignments & Writing Drills (in class and homework)	30%
Quizzes	10%
Midterm exam	25%
Class participation	15%
Final project	20%
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

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; quote 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! You will not get in the A range if you have any misspelled words.
B Range (B+ = 87-89 B = 84-86 B- = 80-82)	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.

C Range (C+ = 77-79 C = 74-76 C- = 70-73)	More than 5 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.
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 or journalistic style/standards. Needs to work with writing coach.
Failing (F = 59 or below)	Late, not rewritable or no assignment turned in.

d. 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.

VI. Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will be due via email, in person 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.**

VII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. **You must bring your laptop to every class.** Failure to do so will result in no credit for in-class work. It's a good idea to bring your charger as well. If you can't complete the assignment due to lack of a computer, you will not receive credit.
2. A pen or pencil to take quizzes.
3. *Public Relations Writing, Form and Style* by Doug Newsom and Jim Haynes. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning. Eleventh Edition, 2016.
4. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. **Latest edition required.**
5. 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. Highly recommended: *Woe is I* by Patricia O'Connor and *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White.
6. 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 press release services.

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** for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's **Information Technology Services** website.

IX. Add/Drop for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/23/21 – 12/3/21)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20213/calendar/>

Friday, September 10: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, September 10: Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, September 10: Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

Tuesday, September 14: Last day to add or drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, October 8: 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, October 8: 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 12: 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 will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

WEEK 1 (8/26): INTRODUCTIONS – FUNDAMENTALS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING

• Introductions, detailed review of syllabus, texts, policies, and components of press 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.

WEEK 2 (9/2): INVERTED PYRAMID, KEY MESSAGES, HEADLINES, LEADS, SUBJECT LINES

• AP Style QUIZ • 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. • Review Gallery of Award Winning Headlines • Readings: AP Style C, D, E, F.

WEEK 3 (9/9): 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

WEEK 4 (9/16): 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. • Collect three quotations from different organizations (Nonprofit, Corporate, Entertainment) • Readings: AP Style L, M, N, O, P

WEEK 5 (9/23): 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

WEEK 6 (9/30): 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 • Bring Two fact sheets: corporate websites good place to look

WEEK 7 (10/7): FACT SHEET

• Review examples. Overview of press 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.

WEEK 8 (10/14): NO CLASSES FALL RECESS

WEEK 9 (10/21): MIDTERM

• Bring to class the take-home portion that you’ve already completed. I do not allow makeups for the midterm so plan accordingly. • Look at FAQ page from favorite brand, share 5 “questions” from the FAQ

WEEK 10 (10/28): 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. • No "Yes/ No" questions, be sure to put them in the correct order Homework: • Finish your FAQ and Q&A documents.

WEEK 11 (11/4): TALKING POINTS

• Create an executive "talk track" based on your key messages and press materials. Brainstorm anticipated interview questions as a class. In-Class Assignment: • Answer the questions we collectively come up with. Homework: • Finish your talking points.

WEEK 12 (11/11): ATTRACTING THE MEDIA

• Review examples of pitch letters and email subject lines. In-Class Assignment: • Write a pitch letter. Homework: • TBD

WEEK 13 (11/18): BIOS

• Formal, fun and hybrid versions will be reviewed and written. In-Class Assignment: • Write a formal official bio. Homework: • TBD

WEEK 14 (11/25): NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

WEEK 15 (12/2): MEDIA ADVISORY

• Discuss essential information that must be included and how reporters/editors use advisories. In-Class Assignment: • Write a media advisory and other interactions with the journalists (email, calls) Homework: • Work on your final project.

FINAL EXAM PERIOD (12/9, 7-9 p.m.): PARTING WORDS/PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PROJECTS • Final project due. You will proudly show your classmates your completed kits.

XI. Policies and Procedures

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 or final exam.
- 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. You are also responsible for checking your USC email account, which is how I will communicate with you.

What You Can Expect From Me

1. I am open to your questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss any issues concerning you. Reach out to me. I am here for you. **beyahc@usc.edu**
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. Please 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 writing.

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 by appointment. Ready access is through email. I will respond to all messages, unless my message service indicates otherwise.

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. I do my best to reply to all emails within 48 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 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.symlicity.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 Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.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://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.

XII. About Your Instructor

Clarissa Beyah is currently the Chief Communications Officer [Union Pacific railroad](#) and a Professor of Professional Practice at USC.

Clarissa's expertise spans professional services, healthcare, technology, transportation and utilities sectors. Clarissa is the Founder of the [Writer's Block Ink](#) – a nonprofit organization dedicated to cultivating and launching diverse young leaders using the arts. Since its inception the Writer's Block has helped more than 1,000 at-risk youth use the arts to transform their lives.

Clarissa has led teams on nearly every continent and served as a chief communication advisor for numerous Fortune 50 companies. Some of her prior roles include Vice President, Global Communications, Aon; Vice President, Pepco Holdings Communications, Exelon; Chief Communications Officer, GE Transportation; Global Communications Leader GE Healthcare IT; and Vice President,

Corporate Communications, Northwestern Mutual. Clarissa spent a decade at Pfizer and held several roles including head of Communications for Europe and of Pfizer's first generics business unit, which grew from \$2B to \$18B in four years.

Clarissa is an educator with a passion for engaging and empowering youth. She founded the Writer's Block Ink to help at-risk youth *ignite social change on the page and stage*. Writer's Block productions address social issues ranging from domestic abuse to genocide. Youth enter as artists and rise to become leaders. Past Writer's Block participants hold community leadership roles across the nation.