



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

**Fall 2021 – Thursdays – 6:30-9 p.m.**

**Section:** 21489

**Location:** ANN 413

**Instructor:** Jacqueline Liu

**Office Hours:** Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. or Zoom by appointment

**Contact Info:** [liuj@usc.edu](mailto:liuj@usc.edu)

**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.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

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.

**Course Notes**

Some class sessions may be conducted via Zoom. Synchronous sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously. Lecture slides are posted on Blackboard within 24 hours of each class session (if applicable). It's your responsibility to check for updated content before and after each class session.

## Description and Assessment of Assignments

- . In-class assignments/homework
- . Take-home writing assignments
- . Quizzes
- . Participation
- . Midterm Examination
- . Final Project

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.*

## 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 Thursday, December 2, at 6:30 p.m. No late submissions will be accepted.**

### Grading

#### a. Breakdown of Grade

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

#### 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

Writing courses in the Public Relations program follow this 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. A grade of F also will be assigned for any plagiarized and/or fabricated material that is submitted.

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.

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

- . 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.**
- . Assignments must be submitted exactly as instructed.

**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.

### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

1. *"The AP Stylebook," 55th Edition, 2020-2022* \***Required**
2. 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.
3. Newspapers, magazines, trade publications, websites and other publications as required by assignments or your own interests.
4. 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.

### **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: 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

### **Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

***Important note to students:** This syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class. To accommodate current 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 questions about assignments, schedules, homework changes, etc., should check Blackboard. Follow Blackboard for homework/assignments, not the syllabus.*

### **WEEK 1 /AUG. 26: INTRODUCTIONS. SYLLABUS REVIEW. FUNDAMENTALS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING.**

- Housekeeping: Presentation of syllabus. Going over class requirements and policies. Outlining of what to expect over the semester.
- What is AP Style? What is persuasive writing? Introduction to basic fundamentals of writing for PR vs. advertising.

**In-class:** Profile of fellow student.

#### **Homework:**

- Finish profile. Upload on Blackboard by Monday, noon
- Readings: AP Style Punctuation Guide, A, B

### **WEEK 2 /SEPT. 2: LEADS, HEADLINES, 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.
- Inverted pyramid: organizing the story.
- **In-class:** News Release

#### **Homework:**

- Finish release. Upload on Blackboard by Monday, noon.
- Readings: AP Style C - K

### **WEEK 3/SEPT. 9: DEFINING THE AUDIENCE**

- Discuss the perceived target audience for the news release. Identify key messages aimed at audience

- Discuss why the story might be carried by specific outlets
- Development of target audience, creation of messages to connect with specific audiences and the choice of outlets to reach each audience segment.

***In class:*** The Public Relations Triad: Find a specific outlet where you see your news release running.

**HOMEWORK:** Rework the news release for a new audience. Develop key messages and find specific outlet where you see the story running.

#### **WEEK 4/SEPT. 16: PUBLIC RELATIONS and ADVERTISING COLLATERAL**

- Packaging of materials: First the news release and then what? Review of myriad collateral pieces created and used by both public relations and advertising

***In-class writing exercise:*** Fact Sheet

**Homework:**

- Finish fact sheet
- Turn fact sheet into an infographic to be posted on a social media site.
- Readings: AP Style L - P

#### **WEEK 5/SEPT. 23: THOUGHT LEADERSHIP 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 exercise:*** Thought leadership piece

**Homework:**

- Finish piece. Upload on Blackboard by Monday, noon.
- Readings: AP Style Q - Z

#### **WEEK 6/SEPT. 30: MIDTERM REVIEW**

- Overview of writing fundamentals covered so far.

***In-class writing exercise:*** Practice midterm piece.

**Homework:** Take-home portion of midterm. Upload by start of class next week.

#### **WEEK 7/OCT. 7: 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 Monday, noon. Be prepared to discuss in class.

#### **WEEK 8/OCT. 14: NO CLASS – Fall Recess**

#### **WEEK 9/OCT. 21: 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:** During this session, you will work in teams to craft a 4 Cs map for a major brand.

**Homework:** Develop a Creative Brief and 4Cs

### **WEEK 10/OCT. 28: AD COPYWRITING PART 1**

- Fundamentals of ad copywriting: What strategies are employed for effective advertising.

**In-class:** Taglines

**Homework:** Create a billboard incorporating tagline. Upload by Monday, noon.

### **WEEK 11/NOV. 4: AD COPYWRITING PART 2**

- Expanding the horizon for advertising collateral. How to create different looks and messaging for same campaign: Changing target audiences; adapting to different visual media.

**In-class:** Print ad that complements billboard and tagline.

**Homework:** Finish print ad

### **WEEK 12/NOV. 11: COORDINATING PR AND ADVERTISING MESSAGING: DIFFERENT VOICES**

- 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. Analyze ads vs. boosted ads vs. sponsored ad vs. posts.
- There's the voice of the client and there's the voice of the paid sponsor to read your copy. We'll analyze how to get the client message in the voice of the host.

**In-class:**

- Create complementary Facebook and Instagram ads
- Discuss podcast: voices, messaging and ad copy

**Homework:** TBD

### **WEEK 13: NOV. 18: 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, due Dec. 2

### **WEEK 14/NOV. 25: NO CLASS - Thanksgiving break**

### **WEEK 15/DEC. 2: 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: Thurs., Dec. 9, 7-9 p.m.**

- Final summative semester review

## **Policies and Procedures**

### **Email Me**

This is always the best way to reach me: [liuj@usc.edu](mailto:liuj@usc.edu). I try to respond within the same day, but please give me up to 24 hours.

### **Scheduling Meetings**

I use Calendly so students can see my availability to meet via Zoom. Simply go to [www.calendly.com/liuofficehours](http://www.calendly.com/liuofficehours) to schedule a time (15- and 30-minute sessions available). I have office hours on-campus from 5:30 pm – 6:30 pm on Thursdays.

### **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](http://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](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**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

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

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

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

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

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

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberг.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.

**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 209: Writing for Strategic Public Relations. Jackie is an LA native, and hates mayonnaise, cilantro and having her picture taken.