



PR 535: Persuasive Writing
3 Units

Fall 2021 – Wednesdays – 6:30-9 p.m.

Section: 21555D

Location: ANN 308

Instructor: Kate Flynn Jacobs

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 5:30 p.m., or by appointment at
<https://calendly.com/kfj>

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

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:

- 1) 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;
- 2) Applying those skills to standard persuasive PR and advertising copywriting assignments.
- 3) Tackling the prevailing digital standards such as writing for social media, websites and other digital media as well as traditional printed materials.
- 4) Learning the basics of strategic 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, hard work and passion.

II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment

PR 535 is designed to provide students with the following outcomes: to develop competence – and confidence – in writing mechanics and grammar, headlines, structure and the ability to express information clearly and write in an objective style; to delve into the world of advertising content development, specifically copywriting; to craft persuasive material with the use of facts and figures, and knowledge of when to apply objective or persuasive styles. Students will be abandoning the concepts they've learned for essay and term-paper writing throughout their education, and this takes time and thoughtful practice.

Therefore, the goals of this class are to teach students how 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
- Write, edit and proofread any material so it is publishable
- Craft persuasive messages for any medium that meet the client's objectives
- Devise digital ad copy for a variety of mediums, including print, online, TV, radio and outdoor based on sound advertising strategy

III. Course Notes

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:

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

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME:

1. I am open to your questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss any issues concerning you. Please don't hesitate to talk to me, email me or call me. Never hesitate to reach out.
2. I am fair. When you get an assignment back from me, you should have a good idea why you earned the grade you did and what can be done to improve your writing. However, if things are not clear, let's talk. The more discussion, the better the understanding.

3. This syllabus is a general guideline for what we will cover during the semester. There will be in-class writing homework and other assignments. Feel free to suggest topics that are of interest to you and I will do my best to incorporate those ideas into assignments so that we can broaden our horizons into more diverse storytelling.
4. I'll guide you along to improve your writing, but feel free to help guide our discussions. Bring to class your questions, observations and opinions about how you see the role of public relations at work in the real world. Our most pertinent and interesting class time will come from what's happening in our world today.
5. I am available for questions and conversations before and after class and by appointment. Best access is email. I will respond to all messages within 24 hours, unless my message service indicates otherwise.
6. I will provide feedback on your assignments both in class and in graded work. During class, I will review your work-in-progress and provide guidance. I will return your graded homework with detailed comments, typically before our next class.
7. Office hours: I use Calendly so students can see my availability to meet. Simply go to <https://calendly.com/kfj> to schedule a time. If there is not a time listed that works for you, email me and we can find a time. I will also be on campus before our class, so let me know if you want to meet in person.
8. Ask Me (almost) Anything. 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.

IV. Description of Assignments

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

V. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

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

b. Grading Scale

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 the following grading scale:

<p>A Range: Writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited vocabulary; supporting facts/figures; quotes as required). Excellent organization and flow; original thinking. Showed creativity in packaging/distribution method. High end of scale: publishable today as is. Made me want to keep reading. You will not get in the A range if you have any misspelled words.</p> <p>B Range: Two-five spelling, grammar or AP Style mistakes. One or more required elements missing or poorly displayed (i.e., boring headline; confusing lead, etc.). Shows potential as a good writer. Adhered to inverted pyramid. High end of scale will have at least one extraordinary element such as astonishing lead or little-known facts or pithy quote. Some creativity shown.</p> <p>C Range: 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.</p> <p>D Range: 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.</p> <p>Failing: Not rewritable or no assignment turned in.</p>

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.

VI. 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.

VII. 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/viewer of radio and television news, podcasts, YouTube videos.

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.

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

X. 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. 25: 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. 1: 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. 8: 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. 15: 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. 22: 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

WEEK 6/SEPT. 29: PR WRITING SUMMARY

- Review of writing elements covered to date. How PR writing collateral fits together as part of overall strategic plan.

In-class writing exercise: TBD

Homework: Readings: AP Style Q - Z

WEEK 7/OCT. 6: 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 8/OCT. 13: 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 9/OCT. 20: 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. 27: 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. 3: 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. 10: 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.

In-class:

- Create complementary Facebook and Instagram ads

Homework: Finish social media ads

WEEK 13: NOV. 17: 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. 1

WEEK 14/NOV. 24: NO CLASS - Thanksgiving break

WEEK 15/DEC. 1: 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: Wed., Dec. 8, 7-9 p.m.

- Final summative semester review

XI. Policies and Procedures

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 by the last class. 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 Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

usc.sa.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.

XII. About Your Instructor

Kate Flynn Jacobs is a communications consultant specializing in strategic planning, writing communications and media training. Her more than 30 years of experience includes media relations, speechwriting, communications planning, crisis communications, annual report writing, and corporate newspaper editing. She has won awards from the Public Relations Society of American and the International Association of Business Communicators. For 20 years, she has taught at USC's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, focusing introductory and advanced Public Relations theory and writing courses for graduate and undergraduate classes. Fíric spraoi ("fun fact" in Irish): She has dual Irish/American citizenship. 

FINAL PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS

You will prepare a detailed information package that contains advertising and public relations elements. There are required and optional elements, all designed to help you hone your writing skills AND to craft a kit that is worthy to share with a potential employer.

You will choose your own topic around which the materials you create will all support the overall strategic objective of your topic. You are responsible for researching and writing all of the collateral. All content must be original. Be careful when selecting your topic. Your kit should not be a mirror reflection of materials and strategies already employed by an existing company. For example, if you choose Starbucks, you should create a new product, idea or initiative the company is launching. With this example, each component of the final project will be related to the promoting the new product,

No material may be used from outside sources. The writing must be 100% yours. Your materials should not be a repackaging or rewording of information already created by another company. Make sure you proofread your work. I suggest having someone read it over for editing or to give you feedback to make sure what you're writing is being received the way you want it to.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

1. **Creative Brief outline** (six questions, per the model shown in class) that also addresses the 4 Cs Analysis on your topic (no more than two pages with 3-5 bullets and one insight per category). *(upload as word document)*
2. **News Release** (maximum two pages, double spaced, 12-pt. type). You must explain the audience and outlet for the release. *(upload as word document)*
3. **Thought Leadership piece** (700-800 words) *(upload as word document)*
4. **Tagline/Print advertisement/Billboard**

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS:

In addition, the kit MUST include one of the following elements.

1. **Paid Social Media ad portfolio** Complementary Instagram and Facebook ads (different images and messaging) *(upload as pdf)*
2. **Fact Sheet/Infographic**

Due Dec. 1 at 6:30 p.m. No late submissions will be accepted.
