

PR 562: The Foundations of Effective PR Writing

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Section Instructor:
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Credit hours: 4

Course description

This course is designed to provide students with practical writing experience. Special emphasis is placed on composing materials for a variety of audiences and an array of assignments. Through writing drills—many of them timed, to replicate the pace of today’s business world—and evaluation of one another’s work, students will learn to write more effectively; that is, to ensure that the intended audience not only pays attention but is persuaded to take action, whether it be to vote for a candidate, donate to a cause, purchase a product or foster understanding of an issue.

Module 1: Public Relations Writing Fundamentals

- All About Word Choices
- Persuasive Writing Begins with the Lead
- Specialized Writing: Headlines, Story Structure, Nut Graphs
- Specialized Writing: The Full Story
- Specialized Writing: Crafting Your Opinion

Module 2: Creating Outstanding Content

- What Is Hot in the Content World
- Methods of Organizing Information: Information Kits Objectives Joining the “Convo”
- The Window to the Organization, Its Website; FAQs
- Controlled Media is NOT Dead! Newsletters, Bulletins - e- and otherwise
- Writing for Business: emails, traditional correspondence
- Content is King (or Queen!)

Learning objectives

- Write with clarity, insight and skill.
- Judge the importance of information, set priorities and tailor writing to meet the needs of different audiences.
- Edit and proofread material so it is publishable
- Adapt to the 24/7 nature of public relations writing while maintaining Quality

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 specific writing styles for print, online and broadcast media, as well as copy for brochures, newsletters and social media.

Students will be expected to take on their assignments with a professional attitude and a willingness to learn new techniques. Good writing takes practice, hard work and passion.

Course Outcomes

This course is designed to provide students with the following outcomes:

1. An understanding of proper writing styles with sensitivity to the requirements of different situations, 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. Confidence in judging importance and making content decisions in writing.
4. An understanding of what.
5. Familiarity with persuasive writing techniques and knowledge of when to apply them.

The course is divided into two distinct modules: Writing Fundamentals and Creating Outstanding Content.

Textbooks and materials

Required:

- Newsom, D. & Haynes, J (2017) *Public Relations Writing Strategies and Structures* (11 ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. ISBN-10: 1305500008
- Associated Press. (2017). *Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* (46th ed.). Basic Books. ISBN-10: 0465062946

Recommended:

- 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.
- Strunk and White. (1999). *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.). Longman. ISBN 10: 020530902X
- Your local metropolitan daily newspaper (i.e., Boston Globe, Dallas Morning News, Los Angeles Times) magazines, trade publications, websites and other publications as required by assignments or your own interests.)

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. I also believe that reading books for pleasure is an important way to build your writing skills.

If you have a general area of interest, please make it known to your instructor so they can customize readings to your needs. For instance, if you are interested in Travel and Tourism, she will devise a set of readings that reflect that interest.

Sessions and days of the week

The course is divided into **two modules; the first is five weeks, whereas the second is the remaining ten weeks of the course**. Due dates for assignments and discussions are stated in day numbers. Day 1 is Wednesday, the first day of the beginning of each weekly session.

Day 1	Wednesday
Day 2	Thursday

Day 3	Friday
Day 4	Saturday
Day 5	Sunday
Day 6	Monday
Day 7	Tuesday

Assignments are due no later than **11:55 p.m. in the Pacific time zone** on the day that is stated in the assignments section.

Grading policy

Course components

Component	Points Toward Final Grade
Final Project	350 points
Midterm Exercise	150 points
Cumulative Writing Assignments	300 points
Other Homework Assignments (i.e., group projects, commentary)	100 points
Participation	100 points
Total Points	1,000 points

Grade ranges

Grade	Range
A	93.0% or higher
A-	90.0%-92.9%
B+	87.0%-89.9%
B	83.0%-86.9%
B-	80.0%-82.9%
C+	77.0%-79.9%
C	73.0%-76.9%
C-	70.0%-72.9%
D	60.0%-69.9%
F	59.9% or lower

The Annenberg School's writing standards apply here as well:

A: Publishable (or broadcast-worthy) with minor editing in a medium-sized corporate, non-profit, niche or news publication. Writing must be precise and concise, with virtually no errors.

B: Publishable with medium editing

- C: Publishable with major editing
- D: Requires extensive rewrite.
- F: Not rewritable

You will receive an individual assessment based on the rubric for every writing assignment. You should aim to see steady improvement as the semester progresses.

Formatting guidelines for all written work

- All documents should be in Microsoft Word format.
- Papers must be typewritten or word-processed, double-spaced, with 12 point font.
- Make sure you keep a copy of all submitted papers.
- Please ensure that each paper is written in APA style. Refer to the APA manual. (6th Edition)
- Finally, typos and spelling errors are unforgivable at this level and reflect poorly on you.
- All page length requirements are for double-spaced pages, with 1-inch margins, in 12-point Times New Roman font.
- Please note that some assignments may vary from this format. Please read instructor announcements carefully.

Lateness

To allow faster feedback and better discussion, students will also be required to email certain assignments to the instructor no later than Day 7 at 11:55 p.m. Pacific time. It is strongly suggested that you try to email earlier than the deadline in case of server problems or other technical trouble. Late assignments will not be accepted, except as noted in the previous paragraph. Deadlines are firm. If emergencies prevent you from doing homework assignments by the submission date, a makeup assignment may be possible at the discretion of the instructor.

Live Sessions

This course has **one** optional and **three** required Live Sessions. Your instructor will post the times and further information about these sessions within the Live Session Archive.

Synchronous session recording notice

Live class sessions will be recorded and made available to students through Moodle (including transcriptions). Please remember that USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. As a student, you are responsible for the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing SCampus policies regarding class notes (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/>). These rules will be strictly enforced, and violations will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

Participation and Zoom Etiquette

The online modality of teaching includes synchronous and asynchronous lessons, assignments, exercises, and evaluation processes, and each affords different types of participation. This may include talking, when appropriate, during a Zoom meeting, or using the chat function to generate or participate in discussions. Although you are not obligated to turn your camera on, we highly recommend it. Please wear appropriate clothing. Please keep your microphone muted during Zoom sessions, except when you're asked to unmute for discussion or questions. Please use appropriate backgrounds. The distant nature of our learning environments may prompt us to forget that we are a community and that each of us and our ideas deserve respect. For this reason, it is imperative that you remember to respect others, regardless of how much you may disagree with them.

Final Project

- **Final Project – (Worked on throughout the semester.)**
 - By no later than the third week, each student will choose a topic specialty that will be the subject of several assignments and will be related to the final project. No two students may choose the same topic. You will be expected to follow this topic area closely through the semester and find press materials about it. It can provide examples that students can cite in class. The topic should be one that interests the student and can reasonably be expected to be the subject of fact sheets, feature stories and other content during the course. The topic can relate to the student's hobbies or employment. It cannot be too general, (i.e., "transportation"), nor too specific ("parking tickets"). So, for example, possible topics in the transportation area could be: Airport Security; Southwest Airlines; Harley-Davidson; Vacationing by Train; Boating Safety.
 - **Final Project Instructions - Detailed Information Kit:**
 - You will compile a detailed Information Kit containing the required elements listed below PLUS some optional materials. Preparing all of your materials in a digital format but you may wish to create/present a "paper" version as well. All Kits must include:
 1. **A one-page fact or tip sheet of some kind, either about the organization or about the specific purpose**
 2. **An editorial/op-ed (500 words minimum). Assume it would appear either on the organization's website or internal publication.**
 3. **An FAQ**

You also must include ONE of the optional items below to include in your kit:

- A listicle with at least eight (8) items. *** Extra points if you choose this option and include recommendations for accompanying graphic elements. DO NOT include graphics; simply make suggestions.
- An Infographic with at least 40 words (use one of the sites provided to obtain a template; you are only being graded on the verbiage)
- A feature story (500 words minimum) that could appear in a printed or online bulletin or newsletter

Group work

- Your group will be assigned for you prior to the start of the course.
- You can find your group by clicking on the **'Roster' link** in the right bar of the main course page.
- Please be aware that you and your group members will be completing a **Peer Feedback Survey** at the end of this course that will inform your participation grade.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity Policy:

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student

Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in [SCampus in Part B](#), Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards." Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on [scientific misconduct](#).

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, without approval of the instructor.

Support Systems:

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

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

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

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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

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

[Sexual Assault Resource Center](#)

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources.

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

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.

[Bias Assessment Response and Support](#)

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response.

[The Office of Disability Services and Programs](#)

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

[Student Support and Advocacy](#) – (213) 821-4710

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

[Diversity at USC](#)

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

[USC Emergency Information](#)

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

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community.

[Annenberg Student Success Fund](#)

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.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. [Website for DSP](#) and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu

Library access

As a USC student, you have access to all the library resources and the Annenberg Librarian, Chimene Tucker (cetucker@usc.edu), is available to assist you with any inquiry you may have.

Technical Support and Technical Requirements

A full description of the technical requirements for this course can be found on our [technical support page](#).

Assistance to resolve technical problems is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. This service is provided by Pearson Education, and it is restricted primarily to problems associated with the functionality of the course delivery platform.

Pearson Education Group's Help Desk staff for assistance to resolve problems you believe are not associated with the computer hardware and software you have purchased from a vendor.

Examples of problems that fall within this category are:

- Unable to view multimedia files.
- Unable to view responses to comments you have posted in the Discussion area.

If you are not sure whether the problem is due to your computer system, contact Pearson's Help Desk for guidance; otherwise, contact the vendor.

To talk to a live technical support agent, please call the following number:

Toll-free

877-646-1885

Weekly Readings	
Week 00	<p>Required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AP Stylebook: Punctuation Guide • Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chapter 1: Public Relations and the Writer ◦ Chapter 4: Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation
Week 01	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chapter 3: Writing to Clarify and Simplify the Complex • AP Stylebook: Continue to read and refer to the stylebook. It is suggested you finish before the midterm.
Week 02	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chapter 9: Writing for Public Media
Week 03	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chapter 6: Research for the Public Relations Writer • Op-Eds (provided via the Instructor Announcements).
Week 04	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the sample Infographics and Listicles • Infographics: Well-Written Vs. Confusing
Week 05	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for the midterm. Review all readings up to date.
Week 06	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chapter 5: Social Media Writing • "Eight Ways to Create Killer Content Online."
Week 07	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chapter 2: Ethical & Legal Responsibilities of the PR Writer • Society of Professional Journalists - Code of Ethics
Week 08	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the websites for either USC Annenberg or Starbucks. Make note of the following:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What the homepage said (lots of words? Categories plus an ad?) ○ How many steps it took you to navigate to the section you were interested in (usually called the “landing” page). ○ Whether it has an FAQ section and, if so, where does it reside?
Week 09	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chapter 8: Media Kits (p. 152-162) ○ Chapter 11: Newsletters ● Review e-newsletters/bulletins posted in previous weeks.
Week 10	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chapter 10: Emails, Memos, Letters. ● 25 tips for Perfecting Your Email Etiquette (PDF)
Week 11	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review the readings from the entire course (Weeks 0-10).
Week 12	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample Fact Sheets (provided via the Instructor Announcements). ● 25 Ways to Create Highly Shareable Content (provided via the Instructor Announcements).
Week 13	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). Public Relations Writing, Form and Style (11th ed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chapter 7: Writing to Persuade
Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None