



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

Fall 2022 – Thursdays – 9 a.m.-12:20 p.m.

Section: 21071D

Location: ANN 307

Instructor: Austin Foxxe, EdD

Office: Classroom/virtual

Office Hours: After class or by appointment

Contact Info: foxxe@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 provides 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 weekly writing exercises. Some exercises take place in class and are in addition to take-home assignments. Some writing will be on deadline, which is an essential skill for public relations.

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: press release and additional specified item or items; 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	15%
Quizzes	5%
In-class writing	10%
Midterm exam	25%
Class participation	10%
Final project	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

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.
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 Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/22/22 – 12/2/22)

Friday, September 9: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, September 9: Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, September 9: Last day to drop a class and receive a refund to avoid a mark of "W" on student record and STARS report

Friday, September 9: Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

Tuesday, September 13: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or to change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, October 7: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript only. 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 for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, October 7: Last day to change a Pass/No Pass course to letter grade

Friday, November 11: 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 probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.*

WEEK 1/Aug. 25: 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.

- Write your own bio. It should be one to one-and-a-quarter pages in length. Be sure to include what you hope to accomplish in college, what you want to get out of this class, and how that relates to your career plans. Font should be 12 pt. or a little larger if the font tends to run small; line spacing 1.5.

Homework:

- Write a one- to two-page summary and reflective essay on Chapter 6 in the Newsom text discussing the importance of research in general for a public relations practitioner. Be sure to discuss two or three specific topics from the chapter that resonate with you particularly and how they will factor into your practice as a public relations professional.
- Readings: AP Style Punctuation Guide, A, B.

Supplemental Exercises:

- Bring two (2) news releases to class. Be prepared to come to class to talk about the key messages being conveyed.

WEEK 2/Sept. 1: PROFESSIONAL BIOS

- Review overall performance on in-class writing from Week 1. Discuss individual feedback in one-on-one sessions.

In-Class Assignment:

- Modify your personal bio to craft a professional bio. Project yourself 10 years into the future and write a bio that includes information related to your then-current/projected position and the three positions that you held prior to that one.

Homework:

- Complete take-home quiz on Chapter 3 of Newsom text
- Readings: AP Style C, D, E, F.

Supplemental Exercises:

- Using the two press 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.

WEEK 3/Sept. 8: NEWS RELEASES, INVERTED PYRAMID, KEY MESSAGES, HEADLINES, LEADS, SUBJECT LINES

- An overview of public relations process and strategy. Review press releases. Discuss the Inverted Pyramid and why we use it. Where do third-party sources fit into press releases? Citations, formatting documents, etc.

In-Class Assignment:

- News release writing exercise

Homework:

- Discuss/summarize the process of writing a news release including a description of each component and why it is important (see Chapter 9 in the Newsom text). Be sure to include the Inverted Pyramid in your discussion. One to two pages, 12 pt. font, 1.5 line spacing.
- Readings: AP Style G, H, I, J, K

WEEK 4/Sept. 15: NEWS RELEASES CONTINUED

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

In-Class Assignment:

- News release writing exercise

Homework:

- Finish your news release if you did not finish it in class.
- Readings: AP Style L, M, N, O, P
- **Complete AP Style quiz**

WEEK 5/Sept. 22: QUOTES AND STATEMENTS

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

In-Class Assignment:

- News release writing exercise. Practice writing and revising quotes to be included in your news release.

Homework:

- Keep working on news release
- Readings: AP Style Q, R, S, T, U, V

WEEK 6/Sept. 29: NEWS RELEASES WRAPUP

- We will continue to review examples and practice writing news releases. Individual feedback in preparation for take-home portion of midterm. Review for midterm.

In-Class Assignment:

- News release writing exercise

Homework:

- **Complete take-home portion of midterm.**
- Readings: AP Style W, X, Y, Z

WEEK 7/Oct. 6: MIDTERM

- Complete the in-class portion of the midterm.

WEEK 8/Oct. 13: NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

WEEK 9/Oct. 20: FACT SHEETS

- 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 a one- to two-page summary and reflective essay on Chapter 7 in the Newsom text. Be sure to discuss two or three specific topics from the chapter that resonate with you particularly and how they will factor into your practice as a public relations professional.

WEEK 10/Oct. 27: FAQ and Q&A

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

In-Class Assignment:

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

Homework:

- Finish your FAQ and Q&A documents.

- Write a one- to two-page summary and reflective essay on Chapter 8 in the Newsom text. Be sure to discuss two or three specific topics from the chapter that resonate with you particularly and how they will factor into your practice as a public relations professional.

WEEK 11/Nov. 3: INITIATING A PITCH

- Thinking about the best way to get the media’s attention.

In-Class Assignment:

- Write an email pitch, complete with subject line.

Homework:

- Write a one- to two-page summary and reflective essay on Chapter 10 in the Newsom text. Be sure to discuss two or three specific topics from the chapter that resonate with you particularly and how they will factor into your practice as a public relations professional.

WEEK 12/Nov. 10: ATTRACTING THE MEDIA—PITCHING CONTINUED

- Review examples of pitch letters and email subject lines.

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a pitch letter.

Homework:

- Write a one- to two-page summary and reflective essay on Chapter 2 in the Newsom text discussing the importance of ethics and legal awareness in general for a public relations practitioner. Be sure to discuss two or three specific topics from the chapter that resonate with you particularly and how they will factor into your practice as a public relations professional.
- Work on your final project.

WEEK 13/Nov. 17: MEDIA ADVISORY

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

In-Class Assignment:

- Write a media advisory.

Homework:

- Work on your final project.

WEEK 14/Sept. 24: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING DAY

WEEK 15/Dec. 2: GUEST SPEAKER (TBD)

- A conversation with a professional who works in public relations and will do their best to answer all your burning questions about working and growing in the field public relations.

Homework:

- Work on your final project

FINAL EXAM PERIOD/Dec. 8, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: PARTING WORDS/PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PROJECTS

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

XI. Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

What I Expect From You

- Class starts on time. You don't have to ask me for permission to come to class, leave early or come late, or provide a written excuse. I leave those decisions to you. You receive no credit for in-class work that day. There is no make-up for material we cover in a class you miss.
- Assignments are due to me at the time I designate. All assignments must be complete and typed, with no handwritten edits. Assignments completed not following directions will be graded lower. If you are absent, you are responsible for getting me your homework by the due date/time. **No late assignments are accepted.**
- There will be no make-ups for the midterm. There will be no extensions for the final project. You must complete the midterm and final project to pass the class.
- If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments from a fellow student. I do not email notes or handouts.
- Class participation is expected and will help your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute. Lack of participation will reduce your participation grade.
- No texting or any use of cell phones or other forms of electronic communication during class. Doing so will have a negative impact on your grade. Computers are for class work only. If I have to stop class to ask you to stop using your cell phone or other device, you will lose participation points for that class.
- There should only be one discussion going on at a time in class. Paying attention to the speaker, whether it is the instructor, fellow student or guest, is a sign of respect and professionalism. Disruptive behavior, such as talking out of turn and carrying on side conversations, will negatively impact your grade.
- The syllabus is our guideline and will change during the course of the semester to accommodate current events and speaker schedules.
- You are expected to check Blackboard every week for updates on homework and assignments. I will post the week's homework within 24 hours of our last class. You are also responsible for checking your USC email account, which is how I will communicate with you.

What You Can Expect From Me

- I come to class each week with enthusiasm and a strong desire to help you learn. My goal is to help you become a competent and practiced PR writer.
- I am open to your questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss any issues concerning you. Please don't hesitate to talk to me.
- When you get a paper back from me, you'll 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.
- This syllabus is a general guideline for what we will cover during the semester. Other assignments, such as written homework and class projects, will be given as needed. In addition, we will have in-class writing most weeks.

Communication

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

Internships

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

b. Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

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

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

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

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

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

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

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

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

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

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

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

A two-time Trojan, I have a master's in communication management from USC Annenberg and a doctorate with an emphasis in learning and motivation from USC Rossier. Before coming to USC, I worked at a boutique PR agency with a small but diverse roster of clients (in the same year I accompanied a client to the Grammys and helped to secure coverage on KTLA 5 for the championship round of the Honda Campus All-Star Challenge). After leaving the agency, I went to the other side of the equation, working as a writer and editor for various publications. I very much enjoy working with writers, helping them to make their writing better, and I look forward to doing so in this class.

PR 209 FINAL PROJECT: Detailed information kit

You will prepare a detailed information kit on an organization or person of your choice. You are responsible for researching and writing all the material. All content must be original.

The topic may reflect the type of public relations you think you might be interested in. For example, if you're interested in corporate social responsibility, Patagonia or Lego might be interesting organizations for you to examine. However, your kit should not be a mirror reflection of materials and strategies already employed by an existing company. Unless you select or create a brand-new organization, you should not plan to prepare a corporate information kit. Rather, you should select some new aspect of that organization to highlight. For example, Starbucks' new philanthropy initiative (not real), or Lush Cosmetics' partnership with Time's Up (also not real).

While this is primarily a writing course, we also expect you to begin thinking creatively about how you would package and distribute your kit. To earn an A on this project, you must show some evidence of your intent to package/distribute it.

Writing should be your own. Your materials should not be a repackaging of information already created by another company. Please, no organizations or persons that are USC and/or campus-related.

Required Elements – All kits must include:

1. Strategic-style memo to the client/boss/instructor explaining the purpose of the kit and how it fits your overall public relations strategy. The memo should outline the details of your strategy, tactics, audience and distribution. Tell me what each piece is meant to accomplish, for whom and how that audience is meant to get your information. Maximum length: three pages.
 - a. Include in your memo a list of all the other materials you would include if you were doing a complete kit. This list would include additional written sections, photos or graphics, etc. Include a sentence or two of description as needed. This is where you would demonstrate your grasp of strategy and how you would create a plan that goes beyond the basic requirements of the project.
2. An FAQ or Q&A that could be published as a printed document or posted on a website. Choose the option that most fits your topic. Minimum: eight questions.
3. A fact sheet of some kind, either about the organization, about the specific purpose or a topic that enhances your subject. Minimum: two pages.
4. A news release
5. A PowerPoint or Keynote deck that you will use to present to the class. The deck should provide contextual information to help your audience (your classmates) understand why you chose this topic, how it relates to the “bigger picture” of world news, and why it’s newsworthy. It should be a maximum of 10 slides. You should plan to speak for about 10 minutes on Zoom.

Additional Elements

In addition, the kit **must** include **two** additional elements. Among your options:

1. Pitch letter. Maximum: one page
2. A formal bio. Maximum: two pages
3. An additional fact sheet. It must be completely different than #3 in the required elements. Do not have any duplicate information from your required fact sheet. This could include a Q&A if you are doing an FAQ as a required element, or vice versa.

Important!

- Clean copy is a must. Your grade will be lowered if your copy is sloppy.
- Showcase substance. Visuals are an important element, but don’t try to hide a lack of substantive copy with overuse of visuals. Visuals should complement the story, not overpower it.
- When I say one page or two pages, they must be FULL pages.
- Documents should be single-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides.
- Your class presentation will take place on Monday, December 13. All materials must be uploaded to Blackboard no later than 9 a.m. Monday, December 13. No email submissions allowed.
- Please do not plagiarize. Acceptable: You may borrow basic template language about an organization like the company boilerplate. Unacceptable: You may not copy and paste an interview that exists online and pass it off as your own.