

WRITING FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

Communication 334

Fall 2015

Sections 1 and 2 (Writing Emphasis)

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Office Hours: Tuesday: 3:00 - 4: 15 p.m. Wednesday: 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

And by appointment.

NOTE:

Turn off all electronics. No laptop use in class except on a special case basis. In this event, you must sit in the first row of the classroom.

Texts: 1) Thomas Bivins, *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style*

and Format. Sixth Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. Other editions on hand at the bookstore are acceptable.

2) *Associated Press Stylebook*. (Latest edition in bookstore.)

you This is a text you should have saved from Comm. 221. If not,

must repurchase one. It is not listed as a purchase text for this course. On-line versions are okay.

3) Yale and Carothers *The Publicity Handbook, New Edition*. Most recent edition. (optional)

Recommended supplementary material: one or two good dictionaries (*American Heritage; Webster's New Collegiate; Random House*, for example); at least two grammar/usage books (*Harbrace College Handbook*, any fairly recent edition; *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*, Bryan A. Garner; *Modern American Usage*, Wilson Follett; *The Elements of Style*, Strunk and White; *Working with Words, 4th ed.*, Brooks, Pinson, Wilson; *When Words Collide, 3rd ed.* + and on, Kessler, McDonald; *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage*).

The instructor is partial to *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynne Truss.

Objective: Writing for Public Relations is a course designed to improve your writing skills and familiarize you with the various modes of written public relations communication. As you proceed with the course you will also learn more about the functions of public relations in a variety of organizations.

This course will attempt to advance the program competencies for the Division of Communication:

By the time they graduate, students should be able to

- communicate effectively using appropriate technologies for diverse audiences;

- plan, evaluate and conduct basic (quantitative and qualitative) communication research;
- use communication theories to understand and solve communication problems;
- apply historical communication perspectives to contemporary issues and practices;
- and apply principles of ethical decision making in communication contexts.

Format: The number of written assignments will depend upon the progress of the class as a whole; nonetheless, you can count on at least 15 written assignments. This may include rewrites.

You may be required to write at least two assignments IN CLASS.

The rewrite policy will be discussed in class. This is a summary for your reference: Not all rewritten material qualifies for a higher grade. **The rewritten material must earn the increase.** The most an assignment can improve is one-half a letter grade. No rewrite can exceed a B. Example, a C can be improved to a C+. A C+ can be improved to a B-. While any assignment may be rewritten more than once (by either the request of the instructor or wish of the student); each assignment is limited to one grade improvement.

All material must be typed. Be sure that your ink is sufficiently dark. All written work must be double-spaced and on good bond paper. Others rules and regulations will be discussed in class. Spelling, grammatical and usage errors count heavily against you. Overall neatness counts.

All work must be handed in on time. Timeliness is an essential aspect of public relations writing. A late paper will lose one whole letter grade for each day it is late. Rewritten material must be turned in on the following class period.

Evaluation of specific writing assignments:

The exact expectations for each specific assignment cannot be listed here without this syllabus becoming a book. The specific expectations will be covered in the prepping that precedes each assignment. Nonetheless, here are some of the general guidelines that explain the general grades:

A grade of **B** will given to a piece of writing that demonstrates competence in the areas of mechanics (grammar, syntax, spelling,

punctuation, documentation); vocabulary skills (proper word selection in terms of both intended meaning and intended audience; sentence skills (a variety of sentences: simple, compound, complex); paragraph skills (development of an idea); organizational skills (control of the whole structure with an emphasis upon logical order, overall coherence, achievement of purpose).

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The foregoing considerations are made in the primary context of journalistic writing; however, other writing styles may be used (and expected), depending upon the assignment, intended audience, and such.

The B writing also achieves the purpose of the individual assignment. There is a clear sense of purpose, audience, both individual reader and collective media environment. At all times, the writing is done with an awareness of specific public relations objectives.

All writing reflects an awareness of the Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics.

A grade of **A** achieves the foregoing with excellence. When judged comparatively, the A paper will stand out amongst the other papers in the class. An **A** is a universal **A**, one that would be valid at Harvard or Stanford. The **A** paper reflects an exceptionally high degree of professionalism. Its overall tone reflects accomplishment in writing; its appearance reflects awareness of the importance of presentation. The **A** paper contains few if any errors.

A paper that is **less than B** will fall short of the aforementioned expectations. A **B- or C+** paper will generally lack a sense of audience, be less accomplished in word choice (diction) and be less fluid in the combination of sentences.

A paper that earns a grade of **less than C+** has serious deficiencies in mechanics, vocabulary, sentence structure and organization. The student may also lack a sense of journalistic writing as opposed to other types of written communication. These errors are serious and require extensive consultation with the instructor.

Warning: This is not Freshman English. It certainly is not Remedial English. Further, Communication 221 is a prerequisite for this class. It is right and proper for the instructor to assume that you are literate. Basic writing errors will be severely penalized. **If these occur, it is the student's responsibility to seek remedial help outside of this class.** See the grammar grade reduction sheet for a detailed account of how your grade may be lowered owing to basic writing deficiencies.

Course Grade Evaluation: Written assignments: 95%.

Participation: 5%.

Note: The final exam exercise will be equivalent to 2.5 regular writing assignments.

(Excessive absences will be penalized. An absence from class

does not absolve one from the responsibility of handing assignments in on time.)

The following list will give you an idea of what will be covered in this course and in what approximate order. Given the nature of this course, a more detailed schedule is neither possible nor desirable.

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1. Review of ground rules. The nature of promotion, publicity and public relations. Assign diagnostic paper.
2. Discussion of the basic news release; discussion of resumes.
3. Review of grammar and usage. Review of public relations principles. Basics of the resume.
4. More on resumes. More public relations review.
5. Cover letters. Special considerations regarding news releases.
6. Crisis public relations. Video news releases; YouTube and similar applications.
7. Interviewing. The interview article. PSA's. Radio.
8. Newsletters. The group project: a newsletter. **Due: Section ONE: Tuesday, October 20, beginning of class. Section TWO: Monday, October 19, beginning of class.** Groups will present their work to the class at this time.
9. Product publicity. The Press Kit. The trade press.
10. Brochures. Individual critique.
11. Group project: brochure design and cost estimates.
12. Brochure presentations. **Section One:** Thursday, December 10. **Section Two:** Wednesday, December 9. Plan to turn them in on the same day. This list leaves time for group meetings and unexpected emergencies.

Throughout the course, references will be made to the latest developments in technology. We will discuss all material in terms of the Internet, Web and social media as appropriate.

The scheduled final exam period will be discussed in class. **Section One:** Monday, December 21, 10:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. **Section Two:** Monday, December 21, 7:15 p.m. – 9:15 p.m.

WPR: Newsletters

Possible and likely articles for the newsletter:

Interview with a leader within the organization
Summary of a survey
Report on a past social event
Update on a coming social event
News about conventions pertaining to the groups' interests
News about anything connected with the group ---you have to be a clip hound here.
Clip art
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Cartoons (pertinent to the group and area of interest). Be mindful of copyright laws.
Quotes from notables
Pictures
Information regarding a personality in the organization
Information for potential members. Include application blanks.
FILL SIX PAGES

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Ground rules:

- **No eating or drinking in class. Water bottles are okay if you are in danger of dehydration.**
- **To repeat, if you must use a laptop or similar device for some reason, you must sit in the first row. NO EXCEPTIONS.**
- **No other electronic devices are to be used in class. Turn off all your gadgets and toys.**
- **Texting in class results in a punishment so horrible that I cannot write it here.**

If you do not like these rules, drop the class NOW.

Emergency Procedures:

The University, ever so concerned about your welfare, has reminded me to remind you to become familiar with “Emergency Procedures.” Find this on the UWSP main page by searching for Emergency Procedures.

This will tell you what you need to know in case of severe weather and assorted dangers including natural gas leaks, the non-human variety.

You should also know what to do if and when there is a bomb threat, a hostage situation, violent or criminal behavior and, I kid you not, “suspicious objects and people.” Of course, you are not allowed to carry a weapon (not my rule). Also, you cannot keep reporting the creepy guy sitting next to you as a “suspicious person.”

In case of emergencies, I will remind you of the appropriate course of action.

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