

Public Relations Writing
MC 4001, Section 1

Fall 2009

TR 8:00 – 10:10 a.m.

111 Journalism Building

Professor: Meghan S. Sanders

Office: 212 Hodges Hall

Phone: 578-7380

Office Hours: TR 12-2 p.m. and by appointment

Mail: 211 Journalism Building

Email: msand@lsu.edu

Course information available on Moodle at <http://moodle.lsu.edu>

Prerequisites: MC2010 (Media Writing), MC3010

Course Objectives

1. Demonstrate the ability to apply skills in writing and designing public relations copy for a variety of media, publics/audiences, and contexts to meet specific and identified needs of a client/community partner
2. Demonstrate an understanding of social, community, and industry issues that contribute to various community and public relations problems
3. Demonstrate an understanding of social issues in our community and each individual's civic responsibility to that community through reflective essays, class discussion, presentation and other methods
4. Demonstrate skills in writing copy on long and short deadlines and within space and time requirements
5. Demonstrate skills in copy revision and proofreading
6. Demonstrate knowledge of Associated Press and house style requirements
7. Demonstrate competence in writing for each stage of the public relations process (ROPES, RACE, SWOT, etc.)

This course is double-certified as a service-learning course and a "Communication-Intensive Course." Service-learning courses are "credit-bearing educational experience(s) in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (from Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). This course also meets all of the requirements explained on the CxC Web site: <http://cxc.lsu.edu>, including the following: Emphases on formal and informal assignments in written and visual communication, class time spent on communication, 40% of the final grade based on communication projects, revisions after faculty feedback on 2 formal projects (one for each emphasis), and a student/faculty ratio of 35:1. Because it meets these requirements, students may count it toward "Distinguished Communicator" certification on LSU transcripts.

Required Texts

Bivins, T. H. (2008). *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format (6th ed.)*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Additional readings as announced

Recommended Texts

Diggs-Brown, B. (2007). *The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice (2nd ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Additional Required Materials

Each student is required to bring one ream (500 sheets) of 20lb. white copy paper to 116 Journalism Building. Please make sure your name, PAWS id, course and section number are written legibly on the outside of the package.

Policies and Guidelines

- Attendance in this class is extremely important, and therefore daily attendance is required. Although attendance will not be recorded in the traditional way, most class meetings involve some assignment or exercise that will be completed during class. If you are absent during those days, you will not receive credit. Make-up assignments and quizzes will not be given except in cases of religious holiday, verified illness, emergency, or absence due to a university-approved function (i.e. conference, absence due to student athletic activity, etc.). You must let the professor know **prior** to the class in which the assignment or exam will be missed if you are to avoid receiving zero points.
- It is your responsibility to come to each class having read and studied the assigned readings for the day. This course will involve very few formal lectures and will instead be based primarily on discussion and problem-solving and in-class activities. Consequently, preparation for class and readiness to participate is essential to your success.
- The Moodle site for this course includes a copy of the syllabus, supplemental materials for the course topics, and documents used in the course. These materials are intended to be **a supplement – not a replacement for coming to class. Students should refrain from posting such materials in NoteSwap and other note-sharing websites as these actions could constitute copyright violations.**
- This class meets in a computer lab because we will make heavy use of technologies throughout the course. Printing is for coursework only. There will be many times when you will be working on the Internet or using other software during class. **Other use of the computers for non-course related purposes will not be tolerated. Surfing the Web, checking your e-mail, using Instant Messenger, checking FaceBook etc., demonstrates a disregard for your classmates and for the professor. If you find that you cannot resist these electronic temptations, you will be asked to leave the classroom, and as a result, all missed in-class assignments will receive zero credit. No gum, food or drink is allowed in labs.**

Course Format

The breakdown of grades is as follows:

In-class Writings & Homework	35%	Final Project	35%
Participation	10%	Quizzes	15%

Final grades are calculated using the following scale (there will be no rounding up):

- 93-100 A range
- 86-92.99 B range
- 80-86.99 C range
- 73-79.9 D range
- < 72.99 F

Students will have two weeks after a grade has been received to contest it. In order to contest a grade, students should provide some justification as to why the grade is incorrect. Appeals should be typed and turned in to the professor and students should also make an appointment with the professor to discuss the appeal. After the two week period, the grade will be final.

In-Class Writings & Homework

This course is writing-intensive. Each week you will write in a number of different formats for all types of media using the techniques discussed in lecture. These writings include formal and informal in-class and homework assignments.

All assignments, with the exception of quizzes, are expected to be **(a) typed, double-spaced, 12-point type, and stapled, (b) written in a clear, concise, and error-free manner, (c) on time (d) and in accordance with AP Style rules.** Problems including grammatical errors, ineffective organization, and unclear and/or unsupported arguments and analyses lead to reader confusion, and thus, reduction of reader understanding and your grade. Deadlines are also essential for PR practitioners and the professional world in general, so assignments are expected to be turned in ***at the beginning of class*** the day a homework assignment is due. Have a backup plan for computer and/or printer problems, etc, as errors attributed to computers and printers will not be acceptable as an excuse for late submission of work nor will papers be accepted by email without prior approval. **Late assignments will NOT be accepted.**

Writings will be graded on – but not exclusively on – the following:

- Grammar, punctuation, syntax and sentence structure
- Completeness
- Accuracy
- Creativity
- Style and formatting
- Whether or not the writing meets the objectives and goals of the assignment

Deductions:

- *Each* factual error (including misspelled names) will receive a deduction of 10 points.
- *Each* error in AP style, grammar and punctuation will lower your grade by 5 points.

Assignments will be graded **more rigorously** as the semester progresses. Please make use of the attached Manship Writing Essentials Guide and your AP Stylebook.

An “A” assignment:

- Successfully meets assignment objectives
- Uses an appropriate persuasive strategy
- Includes statements that are appropriate to the target public(s) and the medium that the piece will be distributed through
- Makes use of appropriate formatting, AP & PR style
- Uses correct, effective grammatical constructions
- Uses paragraphs effectively, makes transitions clear thus giving the piece a good flow
- Spells words correctly
- Presents information accurately, and completely (answers all major and minor questions)
- Engages the reader, presents the information in an interesting, yet clear, way

A “C” assignment:

- Somewhat meets assignment objectives
- Uses a persuasive strategy, but the strategy is unclear
- Includes some statements that are appropriate to the target public(s) and the medium that the piece will be distributed through, but others that do not
- Has formatting, AP and/or PR style errors
- Has grammatical errors
- Has effective paragraphs, but is not organized in a logical way and does not make use of transitions
- Has spelling mistakes
- Leaves minor questions unanswered, but answers only some of the major questions
- Presents the information, but does not make use of strong words, creativity, etc.

An “F” assignment

- Does not meet assignment objectives
- Does not make use of a persuasive strategy
- Does not make statements that are appropriate to the target public(s) and the medium that the piece will be distributed through
- Has formatting, AP and/or PR style errors
- Has grammatical and spelling errors
- Pieces are not organized in a logical way
- Has spelling mistakes
- Leaves minor and major questions unanswered
- Poorly presents the information

“B” assignments would accomplish some of the things in the “A” area and others in “C.” “D” assignments would accomplish some of the things a “C” assignment does, but has some of the components of an “F” assignment.

Participation

This course relies heavily on your active participation, as your insights and questions are vital for our learning and achieving the objectives of this course. Therefore, you are expected to attend class regularly (awake, alert, and on time), keep current on reading assignments, be prepared to discuss the issues and/or cases, and be able to provide constructive feedback to classmates. Everyone should be prepared with questions, comments, and examples of a topic under discussion that show that you have read and thought about the readings. Similarly, every person should be prepared to answer questions that the professor, guest lecturers, and other students may pose. Because it is very difficult to participate if you are absent, attendance becomes a key component and vital part of the class. Your participation grade, therefore, will reflect any absences. Additionally, each student will be required to keep a weekly log of all of the activities they perform in completing their final project. These logs will also be included in the participation grade.

Quizzes

Students will be given quizzes throughout the semester. These quizzes are designed to test students’ knowledge of the formats that are specific to various PR pieces, as well as the grammatical and language techniques that are important for PR writing. These dates are marked on the course schedule. Additionally, unannounced reading quizzes will also be given throughout the semester. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class so it is important that students are on time for class. If you are more than five (5) minutes late, you will not be allowed to take the quiz and you will receive zero (0) credit.

Final Project

The final project requires groups of students (4-5 members each) to utilize the knowledge conveyed and skills covered in this course to create essential PR pieces (i.e. press releases, fact sheets, public service announcements, etc.) based on the needs of a community partner. In order to do this, you will meet regularly with your partners, conduct research on those audiences with whom the partners wish to communicate, and create a comprehensive plan (i.e. objectives, strategies, tactics) from which your writing will be based. Some class time will be devoted to working on this project, but groups are expected to meet outside of class. Each group will:

- Have a site visit and informational meeting with their community partner during the third week of classes. From this visit, you should be able to report on the partner’s needs and preliminary objectives and goals for the semester.
- Come up with weekly assignments for each individual group member
- Complete a communication plan that will be approved by the community partner and the professor
- Give a final, formal presentation of the media pieces created for its community partner. This presentation should focus on an overview of your client, along with your goals and objectives and how you used the written pieces to achieve them.

You will meet with a pool of community partners during the second week of classes; each group will be paired with a community partner by the beginning of the third week of classes.

Additionally, each student will reflect on their service-learning experience throughout the semester. Reflection encourages students to look back on the implications of their actions and evaluate the benefits and losses, and connect these conclusions to a larger societal context. More specifically, these activities will help you gain a deeper understanding of course content and its applicability to the real world. You will see how you can use your skills to help others and simultaneously forge a stronger sense of personal responsibility to the Baton Rouge community. Reflection will take place in various ways (online surveys, podcasts, class blog, reflective essays).

Additional details on the final project will be provided in a separate handout.

Graduate Credit

Graduate students are required to complete an additional assignment. Graduate students registered for the course should meet with the professor to discuss the specifics of this assignment.

All final grades are final. Emails received asking for “grade bumps,” additional extra credit assignments, or any kind of grade reconsideration will not receive a response.

The professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus during the semester.

Academic Integrity

This course follows the *LSU Code of Student Conduct*. Knowing the Code is your responsibility as a student. All students are expected to act with civility and personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights and property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their own efforts. An environment of academic integrity is requisite to respect for self and others and a civil community.

“Academic Misconduct” includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, any act designed to give an unfair academic advantage to the student (such as, but not limited to, submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructors, providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment), or the attempt to commit such an act.

As students studying communications, you should understand and avoid plagiarism. “Plagiarism” is defined as the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else's words, structure, ideas, or data. When a student submits work as his/her own that includes the words, structure, ideas, or data of others, the source of this information must be acknowledged through complete, accurate, and specific references, and, if verbatim statements are included, through quotation marks as well. Failure to identify any source (including interviews, surveys, etc.) published in any medium (including the Internet) or unpublished, from which words, structure, ideas, or data have been taken, constitutes plagiarism.

The University's statement on academic misconduct, from which the above statements are drawn, is available at [http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/judicialaffairs.nsf/\\$Content/Code+of+Student+Conduct?OpenDocument](http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/judicialaffairs.nsf/$Content/Code+of+Student+Conduct?OpenDocument) and in the LSU Code of Student Conduct, Section 5.1 “Academic Dishonesty.” Any student with a question is strongly encouraged to discuss it with the professor.

All work from printed or interview sources should be attributed. This is a basic canon of journalism, and a violation will result in dire consequences. Assignments should be the work of the student whose name is on the completed task. Material copied from classmates will be considered plagiarism. Internet material that is not attributed is also considered to be plagiarism. Suspected plagiarism and/or cheating will be reported to the dean of students.

Support Services

- **Louisiana State University Office of Disability Services** is located at 111A Johnston Hall. This office offers assistance for LSU students who have disability-related concerns. Disability accommodations are effective after documentation has been reviewed, approved and the student has completed the Office of Disability Services registration with their designated staff member. Accommodations are not retroactive. For more information, visit their website at <http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/ods.nsf/index> or call (225) 578-5919.
- **The Louisiana State University Libraries** offer many resources related to this course. In addition to the LSU Online Catalog, the library provides free of charge many databases, some of which are full text, for use by currently registered LSU students via the University Libraries Website at <http://lsu.louislibraries.org>.
- **Center for Community Engagement, Learning and Leadership (CCELL)** is located in B-31 Coates Hall. This office guides students through their hands-on learning experiences, provides information on service-learning courses offered at the university, and keeps students informed of all volunteer community activities. For more information, visit their website at www.ccell.lsu.edu
- **CxC (Communication Across the Curriculum)** assists students as they develop communication skills across the disciplines. You can use the latest digital technologies in the Communication Studios designed to support students and faculty who need state-of-the-art workspaces and technology for written, oral, visual, and technological communication projects. For more information, visit www.cxc.lsu.edu

Tentative Course Schedule

Tuesdays	Thursdays
8/25: Introduction to MC 4001	8/27: News and the PR Writer Read Ch. 1
9/1: Visit from Community Partners	9/3: Planning Before You Write Read Ch. 2
9/8: Visit to Community Site	9/10: Letters, Memos & Reports Read Ch. 9; additional reading <i>Quiz 1</i>
9/15: News Releases Read Ch. 6	9/17: News Releases <i>Quiz 2</i>
9/22: Newsletters & Features Read Ch. 7	9/24: Newsletters & Features
9/29: Work Day on Communication Plan	10/1: Fall Holiday
10/6: Fact Sheets & Media Advisories Reading TBA <i>Quiz 3</i>	10/8: Media Kits Read pp. 76-84
10/13: Backgrounders	10/15: Backgrounders <i>Quiz 4</i>
10/20: PR and Social Media Reading TBA	10/22: PR and Social Media
10/27: Making Presentations & Speeches Read Ch. 12	10/29: Photoshop/InDesign Recap In-Class Lab on Final Project
11/3: Brochures Read Ch. 8	11/5: Brochures
11/10: Radio & Television Read Ch. 11 <i>Quiz 5</i>	11/12: Radio & Television
11/17: Visit with Community Partner	11/19: Group Consultation with Professor
11/24: Lab Day	11/26: Thanksgiving Holiday
12/1: Lab Day	12/3: Final Presentations

Manship School of Mass Communication

WRITING ESSENTIALS

Writing skills are essential for all of our students, and writing is a skill to be developed in all courses offered in the Manship School of Mass Communication. Manship faculty will evaluate student writing with consideration for these fundamental writing concepts.

WORD CHOICE	<p>The following words are often confused or misused in writing. Make sure you understand the difference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept, except • a lot • all right • affect, effect • among, between • anxious, eager • because, since • due to, because of • farther, further • fewer, less • its, it's • media (plural), medium (singular) • principal, principle • stationary, stationery 	
ACTIVE/PASSIVE VOICE	<p>English sentences have three basic elements: a subject, a verb, and an object. In active voice sentences, the verb is the action element of the sentence, the subject is the "doer" of the action, and the object is the recipient of the action. In passive voice sentences, the subject is not "doer" of the action; the object becomes the "doer" of the action. These sentences flip-flop the subject and the object. In general, active voice sentences are preferred because they focus the reader's attention on the "doer of the action." Active voice is also more concise because it usually involves fewer words. Although there are situations where passive voice is proper, reliance on passive voice produces a cumbersome text.</p>	<p>Active: The executive committee <u>approved</u> the new policy.</p> <p>Passive: The new policy <u>was approved</u> by the executive committee.</p>
ANTECEDENT/ PRONOUN AGREEMENT	<p>A pronoun usually refers to something earlier in the text (its <u>antecedent</u>) and must agree in number — singular/plural — with that to which it refers. A pronoun's antecedent may be either a noun or another pronoun, but it <i>must</i> be clear what the antecedent is in either case.</p> <p>A pronoun should have only one possible antecedent. If there is more than one possible antecedent for a personal pronoun in a sentence, make sure that the pronoun refers only to one of them:</p> <p>Also, please note that countries and organizations are NOT people. In a sentence in which a country or organization is the subject, the second reference is to "it" (singular) and "its" (singular possessive).</p>	<p>Incorrect: If a student loses their books, they should go to lost and found.</p> <p>Correct: If students lose their books, they should go to lost and found.</p> <p>Incorrect: Jerry called Steve 12 times while he was in Reno.</p> <p>Rationale: The pronoun "he" could refer either to "Jerry" or to "Steve."</p> <p>Incorrect: McDonald's cancelled all of their advertising, and they later regretted doing so.</p> <p>Correct: McDonald's cancelled all of its advertising, and it later regretted doing so.</p>

PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION	<p>An article or a preposition applying to all the members of a series must be used either before the first term or be repeated before each term.</p> <p>Correlative expressions (both, and; not, but; not only, but also; either, or; first, second, third; and the like) should be followed by the same grammatical construction.</p> <p>When making comparisons, the things you compare should be couched in parallel structures whenever that is possible and appropriate.</p>	<p>Incorrect: The French, the Italians, Spanish and Portuguese Correct: The French, the Italians, the Spanish and the Portuguese</p> <p>Incorrect: It was both a long ceremony and very tedious. Correct: The ceremony was both long and tedious.</p> <p>Incorrect: My income is smaller than my wife. Correct: My income is smaller than my wife's.</p>
ATTRIBUTION/ CITING	<p>Presenting ideas and phrases from another writer as your own is plagiarism and is unacceptable.</p> <p>In journalistic writing, attribution is indicating your source for a piece of information. You must attribute any judgment or opinion statements. You should not attribute known facts.</p>	
PUNCTUATION OF QUOTES	<p>Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks. Semi-colons and colons do not go inside quotation marks. If a statement ends in a quoted <u>question</u>, allow the question mark within the quotation marks to end the sentence. On the other hand, if a question ends with a quoted statement that is <u>not</u> a question, the question mark will go outside the closing quotation mark.</p>	<p>“I like to go swimming,” she said, “but I am afraid of getting sunburned.”</p> <p>May asked her daughter, "Who are you going out with tonight?"</p> <p>Who said, "Fame means when your computer modem is broken, the repair guy comes out to your house a little faster"?</p>
SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT	<p>Singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs. Collective nouns (herd, team, board, faculty, etc.) take singular verbs.</p>	<p>My brother <u>is</u> a nutritionist. My sisters <u>are</u> mathematicians.</p>
PREPOSITIONS	<p>A preposition describes a relationship between other words in a sentence. Examples are: after, at, beside, between, during, into, on, with, etc. In everyday speech we often use prepositions where they are not necessary. Eliminate unnecessary prepositions, particularly those at the end of sentences.</p>	<p>The book fell off of the desk. Where did they go to? Where is your college at?</p>

For more help with writing style, the following Web sites and books are recommended:

The Guide to Grammar and Writing - <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>
The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
Latest edition of Strunk, W., White, E. & Angell, R. *The Elements of Style*, Longman.
Latest edition of The Associated Press *Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*

Graduate Component

This additional assignment involves writing a communication plan for the non-profit organization for which you will be working. While you may be working with a classmate on creating the specific PR tactics, the communication plan is an individual assignment and should be treated as such. Your ideas may be collaborative, but the document itself should be completed individually. The plan will consist of the following parts:

- **Research summary (4-5 pages)**—this should be a summary of the research you conduct on your organization, audiences, and any other areas that are an integral part of your plan.
- **Situation analysis (1-2 pages)**—This should be a description of the problem or opportunity that you are addressing on behalf of your client.
- **Target publics (2 pages)**—List the target publics that you have decided to focus on and the justification for selecting them. The selection should be based on your research findings.
- **Plan (3-5 pages)**—Explain the goals, objectives, strategies, messages and tactics (minimum of 8 writing pieces) you recommend for your program. Each of these should be justified and link back to the overall goal and address the problem/opportunity introduced in the situation analysis.