

# CMN 3960: Advocacy and Message Design

## Fall 2013

Instructor: Matthew Gill, Ph.D.  
Time: T, R 11:00-12:15  
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Office hours: M 10:00-12:00 & F 12:00-2:00  
or by appointment

### **Text**

Wilcox, D., & Reber, B. (2013). *Public relations writing and media techniques*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

AP Style Book (Recommended)

### **Course Description**

This course is intended to develop the basic writing skills necessary to advocate on behalf of another (organization, individual, etc.). These skills will serve as the basis for a career in public relations, corporate communication, public affairs and other communication based professions. The activities and assignments in this course will provide you with first hand experience in many of the writing tasks you may be given during your first public relations job.

This course is **writing intensive**. Over 35% of the final course grade will be determined by writing assignments inside and outside of class. I will be demanding when it comes to the quality of your writing. Poorly written public relations documents have cost people their jobs. It is better to fail and learn from your mistakes here than in your first job. Your primary concern should be becoming a better writer. Writing is a process and you should expect to complete a number of drafts. No one gets it right the first time.

### **Course Objectives**

1. You will be able to identify advocacy attempts in the world around you.
2. You will be able to write several basic public relations documents in correct style and content.
3. You will be able to critique public relations and other corporate communication documents.
4. You will be able to understand the fundamental principles of public relations message design and construction.
5. You will be able to understand the legal and ethical issues surrounding public relations messages.

### Attendance

No attendance will be taken. You are expected, however, to attend each class meeting. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments *from another student*.

On the other hand, being late to class is disruptive and presents problems for me and your classmates. So there is a late policy. You will be considered late if you come into class more than five minutes after class has started (the clock in the classroom will be used as the official class time). You will be given two “free” late arrivals and for every time you are late after that you will lose 7 points (1%) off your final grade. Please do not make me enforce this. Show up on time.

### Late work policy

Deadlines are critical in public relations and therefore they will also be critical in this class. Late work will not be accepted. If an emergency or school function prevents you from being in class for an exam or when a major assignment is due, these are your options:

- 1) Turn in the assignment early (no penalty)
- 2) Bring me documentation of your absence in advance
- 3) Bring specific documentation of your absence within 1 week after the missed class if the absence was an unavoidable emergency
- 4) Receive a 0 for the assignment

Daily assignments **cannot** be made-up regardless of the reason you missed class. However, there is some measure of grace: though there are 9 daily assignments, your final assignment grade will be determined based on only 7 assignments. *Also, every point you earn on daily assignments, even if you turn in more than 7, is yours to keep.* So if you do all the assignments it is possible to receive a better than perfect mark on your daily assignment grade. This builds in the possibility for **perfect attenders** to earn extra credit, and it also builds in lenience for a couple of missed classes. *No other extra credit will be offered.*

### Plagiarism and Cheating

For information on Eastern’s policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty, please see [http://catalog.eiu.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=307#acad\\_inte](http://catalog.eiu.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=307#acad_inte)

You are responsible for knowing the university policy on what constitutes academic dishonesty. Here is the short version: **ALWAYS** give credit—I will assume that everything you turn in (unless otherwise noted) is your own personal work, not borrowed work or group-created work. **It is important to remember that plagiarism is not based upon intent.** Just because it wasn’t intentional or it was an accident does not mean that it was not plagiarism. It is!

If you turn in something without giving credit to others whose ideas or words you used, you will definitely receive a 0 for the assignment; additional consequences can include failure of the course and even expulsion from the university.

If you collaborate with someone else on an assignment and turn in substantially similar work, you are both guilty of plagiarism.

If you turn in something written by someone else, expect to fail the course and be reported to the Dean of Students. Do your own work. Give credit where credit is due.

### **Disabilities**

If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 581-6583.

### **Cell Phones**

If you have a cell phone please turn it off before class. If there is some sort of situation in which you need to keep your phone on please consult with me before class. Text messaging in class is a growing issue. If I see that you are text messaging in class I will ask you to stop. If you continue to text message I reserve the right to ask you to leave class.

### **Email**

You should use your university email account to contact me with any matters concerning class. Mail sent from other email addresses may be filtered out by the Eastern system. Therefore, I may not receive your message if you don't use your university account.

You are expected to check your official email address on a frequent and consistent basis in order to stay current with departmental and course communications. Students have the responsibility to recognize that certain communications may be time-critical. "I didn't check my email", error in foreign mail accounts, or email returned to the department/instructor with "mailbox full" or "user unknown" are not acceptable excuses for missing department/course communication sent via email. Students who have questions related to their university email account may consult the following URL <http://www.eiu.edu/~itshelp/email/student/password.php>

### **Assignments**

**SPELLING AND GRAMMAR ALWAYS COUNT, ESPECIALLY IN PR!!!**

*Exams* – There will be two exams throughout the semester, a midterm and a final. The final will be comprehensive.

*Daily Assignments* - There will be 9 daily assignments given throughout the semester. These assignments are only given in class and many of them will be completed in class. These assignments **cannot** be made up. Either you attend class and complete the assignment or you don't.

*Press Release* – The press release is the most fundamental public relations document. Given basic information you will be asked to write a press release correct in form, content, grammar, and spelling. (This first press release assignment may be revised if you so choose.)

*Social media assignments* – Given certain information you will be asked to create appropriate social media messages.

*PR Campaign Plan* – The campaign plan will require you to put together a proposal for a campaign, including PR documents/items for an organization of your choice. The easiest organizational choice would probably be an organization with which you have some connection. That connection can be a parent, a friend or simply someplace that you work or spend your time. One of the items in the kit **must** be a press release and there must be a social media presence. The other items can be anything you deem appropriate from the list of possibilities we discuss in class. Many more details will be provided when the plan is assigned.

### **Grading**

This class will be based on a system of 650 points:

Midterm Exam	100 points
Final exam (comprehensive)	100 points
Daily assignments	70 points
Social media assignment 1	30 points
Social media assignment 2	50 points
Press release	50 points
Press release 2	50 points
Campaign plan	200 points

### **Grading Scale**

650-585 Points = A
584-520 Points = B
519-455 Points = C
454-390 Points = D
389-0 Points = F

## Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignment: Due the day it appears</u>
8/20	Introduction and overview	
8/22	The PR portfolio	
8/27	Writing for the press	Read Ch. 5
8/29	Writing for the press	Read Ch. 3
9/3	Public relations writing	<b>Press release assigned</b> Read Ch. 1
9/5	Public relations writing	Read Ch. 2
9/10	Public relations writing	<b>Press release due</b>
9/12	Writing guidelines	
9/17	Writing guidelines	<b>Revised press release due</b>
9/19	Business writing & media kits	Read Ch. 6
9/24	Ethics	<b>Press release 2 assigned</b>
9/26	Ethics	
10/1	Metaphor	
10/3	Metaphor	<b>Press release 2 due</b>
10/8	<b>MIDTERM</b>	
10/10	Tips, tricks and things you should know	
10/15	Public opinion and audience analysis	
10/17	Public opinion and audience analysis	
10/22	<b>Graduate School Fair – NO CLASS</b>	
10/24	Research & Measurement	Read Ch. 19
10/29	Research & Measurement	<b>PR Campaign Plan Assigned</b> Read Ch. 18
10/31	PR and social media	Read Ch. 12
11/5	PR and social media	<b>Social media #1 assigned</b>
11/7	PR and social media	Read Ch. 4
11/12	Crisis communication	<b>Social media #1 due</b>
11/14	Crisis communication	
11/19	Cultural influences	
11/21	Cultural influences	<b>PR Campaign Plan Due</b> <b>Social media #2 assigned</b>
11/26	<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>	
11/28	<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>	
12/3	Legal issues	<b>Social media #2 due</b> Read Ch. 11
12/5	Review for final	
Exam Week	<b>Final Exam: Monday December 9<sup>th</sup>, 10:15-12:15</b>	

# Writing Rubric

An “A” in this course recognizes superior work, work that demonstrates critical thinking and that exceeds the basic requirements. Work that meets the basic requirements of an assignment adequately earns a “C.” Do not assume that turning in *acceptable* work is the same thing as turning in “A” work. For the exact standards by which your work in this course will be evaluated, study the rubric below. Every writing assignment (except for skills assignments like writing leads or boilerplates) will be assessed according to this rubric. This rubric helps you know what to expect and helps maintain consistency across writing assignments.

## A

An A paper features insightful development of ideas and is **clearly excellent**. Writing demonstrates a very strong understanding of concepts and the problem at hand. It features a clear argument (thesis statement when appropriate), persuasive reasoning, and good support and examples. In addition, it shows insight that goes beyond the basic requirements of the assignment. Transitions help the writing flow smoothly from one idea to the next, and there are almost no errors in grammar or spelling.

## B

A B paper is **clearly competent**. Writing demonstrates clear understanding of concepts and the problem, but does not display novel or particularly insightful approaches. It features a clear argument (thesis statement) and appropriate support and examples. Transitions create a generally smooth flow of ideas, and there are minimal errors in grammar or spelling. This paper is good, but not exceptional.

## C

A C paper is **satisfactory**: it meets the requirements of the assignment. Writing demonstrates understanding of concepts and the problem at hand, but no creative applications. There is an argument (or the thesis statement makes a claim), but support, though present, may be sketchy or underdeveloped. Transitions are somewhat awkward, and errors in grammar or spelling are present.

## D

A D paper is **unsatisfactory**: it fails to meet the basic requirements of the assignment. Significant shortcomings include one or more of the following: writing demonstrates problems in understanding concepts or the purpose of the piece. The argument (thesis statement) does not make a clear claim, rendering support not well-connected to the central claim. Examples may be irrelevant, and errors in logic may be present. The writing is disjointed and may have many distracting grammar and spelling errors.

## F

A F paper exhibits **serious weaknesses or even severe difficulties**. It fails to meet the basic requirements of the assignment in one or more ways, and writing demonstrates a failure to understand key concepts and the problem. The argument (thesis) is unclear or missing, and examples may appear arbitrary, not clearly supporting claims. Errors in

logic are present, and there is not sufficient development of ideas. This paper is difficult to read, full of grammar, spelling, and transition problems.