

CMN 3960

Public Relations Writing (3 Credit Hours)**Spring 2019**

Section 001: M, W, & F 10 a.m. -10:50 a.m. in CH 3210

Dr. Claudia Janssen Danyi

Buzzard Hall 2544

Office Hours: Mon & Wed 11 a.m. - noon
 Tues 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.
 or by appointment.

Writing is an essential skill for public relations professionals who advocate on behalf of an organization. Effective press releases, pitch letters, campaign kits, speeches, blogs, tweets, and web pages get your message out to publics and stakeholders. This requires the ability to write for diverse audiences and to master different genres and styles of public relations writing. This course introduces you to public relations writing. It is an applied course designed to develop essential writing skills for a career in advertising, corporate communication, public relations or other areas in communication. Our different writing assignments will provide an opportunity for you to not only strengthen your writing skills, but to build your own professional portfolio and to prepare for PR writing tests when interviewing for jobs.

After participating actively in this class and completing all assignments carefully you will:

1. understand and have practiced fundamentals of structure and message construction.
2. understand and have practiced stylistic elements as well as how to write for various media.
3. have examined legal and ethical issues.
4. understand how to tailor your messages to different situations and audiences.
5. be able to use AP style.
6. have crafted at least three quality documents for your professional PR portfolio.
7. be prepared for public relations writing assessment tests when on the job market.

Books (available at textbook rental):

Wilcox, D. L. (2012). *Public relations writing and media techniques*, Prentice Hall.

Associated Press. (2014). *Associated Press stylebook 2014*. New York, NY: The Associated Press.

Assignments:

Attendance & Participation	14%
HW & Workshops	10%
Press Release & Revisions	15%
Pitch Letter & Revisions	15%
Campaign Kit & Presentation	18%
PR Writing Tests (2)	20%
Tweetfolio	8%
Total	100%

Grading Scale:

900 – 1000	A
800- 899	B
700- 799	C
600 - 699	D
599 or less	F

Grading: PR writing assignments will be graded following these general standards (a detailed rubric with specific criteria will be provided in class):

- A = publishable with no or marginal edits
- B = publishable with minor revisions
- C = publishable with major revisions
- D = publishable only when major parts are re-written
- F = not a sufficient basis to develop a publishable document

Course Work

Homework & Workshops:

- You will complete several homework assignments and workshops in class. They provide an opportunity for you to practice your writing and editing, to reflect on reading assignments, and to polish your drafts before turning them in. Sometimes, your response to the homework assignment will also be used for in-class activities and discussions.
- Some of the HW assignments will be graded while others will be assessed on a pass/fail basis. This will be indicated on each homework sheet and before each exercise.
- Homework will be posted on D2L at least two days before the due date. Your answers have to be uploaded to the D2L homework dropbox. Everything handed in after assignments have been collected in class will count as late work. Your responses should be typed and written in full sentences unless indicated differently. Note that I will not accept emailed assignments.

Readings Assignments:

- You will be asked to complete regular reading assignments. In order to do well on the assignments, exams, and to participate meaningfully in exercises and discussions you need to read the chapters carefully before coming to class.
- You can find the reading assignments for each class on the course schedule. They will not always be announced in class. Make sure to keep track of what you are supposed to read. If you are unsure feel free to ask.
- Not all content of the reading assignments will be covered in class (there is simply not enough time). However, I expect you to be able to apply what you have read **independently** to your writing assignments. Therefore, it is essential that you ask any questions you might have in class. There really ARE NO STUPID QUESTIONS and chances are that you are not the only one who needs clarification. Additionally, you are always welcome to consult me during my office hours.

Attendance, Participation, and Tardiness:

- I want you to do well in this class and attendance is KEY to that. Your attendance & participation count 140 points. Penalties start kicking in after the first two absences. This means that you are **allowed THREE “freebie” absences** after which there will be a **loss of 1% from your final grade** per absence for **up to SIX absences**. These points will be subtracted from the total points. **After your sevenths total (including your freebies) absence, you will lose 10% points on attendance.** This is equal to the loss of an entire letter grade. For any additional absence (beyond six absences), 1 additional percentage point will be deducted from your final class score.
- **You are a vital part of this class and I look forward to your contributions to our class discussions and activities!** I expect that you participate actively and to complete the exercises in class. A constant lack of participation, tardiness, as well as disruptive behaviors will result in a significant loss of participation points.

- This is a no-brainer, but please do make sure to come to class on time and do not interrupt class by entering the classroom late.

Writing Center:

- A central goal of this class is to help you improve your PR writing skills. Throughout the semester you can take advantage of the Writing Center. Make sure you use this opportunity to get that final edge on your writing assignments and to be ready for PR writing tasks on the job market and beyond.
- In these 30-minute sessions, a writing fellow will talk with you in a stress-free, open environment. She/he will ask questions and suggest strategies that prompt you to revise and edit your own work. Please bring the writing prompt and a copy of your draft.

Writing Tests:

- We will take two PR writing tests. Both will include elements of common writing tests used by PR agencies to select new employees. Further information will be provided in class.
- Your attendance on the exam dates is crucial. If you miss an exam and did not contact me in advance, I will allow a make-up exam only as a rare exception (for instance a sudden medical emergency). In this case you will need to provide detailed proof that a condition prevented you from taking an exam at the scheduled day and time.

PR Writing Assignments

Press Release: The press release is the most common and basic tool of the PR writer and a major focus of this class. Mastering this genre is an important skill employers expect you to have. You will write one press release for a client. Further information will be provided in class.

Pitch Letter: This document is more aggressive and straightforward than a press release. It pitches an event, topic, person, product, research finding, etcetera, to the to journalists and bloggers. For this assignment you will write a pitch a topic of your choice that has the potential to trigger coverage about the Department of Communication in an appropriate news outlet you select. Further information will be provided in class.

Campaign Kit: In groups of three or four, you will create a campaign kit for a for-profit or non-profit organization. This assignment requires you to define clear goals and audiences for your project. The kit will include a press release or pitch letter, and at least two additional documents that are best suited to get your message across and into the news (e.g., a backgrounder, a Q&A sheet, a bio, a feature story, a flyer, a schedule, etcetera). At the end of the semester you will present and pitch your work and rationale for the campaign kit in class. Further information will be provided in class.

Policies

Late Work: Late work, which is every assignment after the assignments have been collected at the beginning of the class period it was due, will be penalized by -5 points per day it is late and only accepted until two days after the due date. Any work handed in after that will receive 0 points. If you know that you have to miss a class, you need to make sure to hand in a hard copy of your work before class.

Grade Appeals:

- You may always ask me about a grade you received on assignments, and I am open to REASONABLE appeals. If you would like to question a grade, please wait 24 hours after it has been handed back to you, but no longer than ONE week.

- I will NOT discuss grades at the end of the semester unless you believe I made an error in recording and/or calculating your score. Please be advised that I will ignore any requests for “mercy points” at the end of the semester.

Disability: Support is available for students with a documented disability. Please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) for academic accommodations.

Office Hours: You can always consult me during my daily office hours about any question you might have related to the class and your assignments. My office hours are reserved just for my students and are a good opportunity to seek advice and information. In case none of the scheduled office hours work with your course schedule, please feel free to ask for an individual appointment.

Academic Integrity & Student Standards: Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU’s Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards

Any instance of plagiarism will result (at minimum) in zero points for the assignment and be reported to the Office of Student Standards. Do not take this lightly; plagiarism may also result in failing the class or being expelled from the university.

Cell Phones: Please turn off your cell phones and other electronic devices for our class time. Laptops may be used for class purposes only.

The Student Success Center: Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Finally, I want you to do well in this class and am here to help you. Please, never hesitate to talk to me after class or during my office hours about any questions you may have.

I look forward to working with you this semester!

Tentative Course Schedule CMN 3960 – Spring 2017

	Topic	To Dos
Jan. 7	Welcome! - Introduction to the class	
Jan. 9	What is PR? What is PR writing?	Read syllabus and schedule; read Ch. 1, p. 1-5 HW #1 DUE – See instructions on D2L (homework folder)
Jan. 11	Know why you write: Goals, strategy, objectives & tactics	
Jan. 14	Know why you write: Goals, strategy, objectives & tactics	
Jan. 16	Audiences for PR writing	Read Ch. 2, pp. 32-43
Jan. 18	Audiences for PR writing	
Jan. 21	MLK Birthday	No class
Jan. 23	Rules of style in PR writing	
Jan. 25	Rules of style in PR writing	Read Ch. 1, pp. 19-31
Jan. 28	Rules of style in PR writing	Listen to the Grammar Girl podcasts (link posted on D2L) HW #2 DUE
Jan. 30	Rules of style in PR writing	
Feb. 1	Media Relations	Read Ch. 4 pp. 87-112 & Ch. 10
Feb. 4	Exam Review Session	
Feb. 6	Writing press releases How does my press release make the news? Understanding news values <i>Assign Press Release</i>	Read Ch. 3 Read Ch. 5, p. 117-123 & 133
Feb. 8	PR Writing Test #1	Bring your AP style book to the exam
Feb. 11	Understanding News Values Cont'd.	
Feb. 13	How should I structure the content of a news release?	Ch. 5, pp. 120-132 HW#4
Feb. 15	How should I structure the content of a news release? Boilerplates	
Feb. 18	Lincoln's Birthday	No class
Feb. 20	Writing headlines & leads	HW #5
Feb. 22	Writing headlines & leads	
Feb. 25	Press release workshop	<i>Bring a copy of your draft to class</i>
Feb. 27	Digital and social media writing <i>Assign Tweetfolio</i>	Read Ch. 5, pp. 133-141 Press Release DUE Submit to dropbox by midnight

Mar. 1	Digital and social media writing cont'd	Read Ch. 12
Mar. 4	Pitching a story <i>Assign Pitch Letter</i>	Read Ch. 7 & Ch. 13 Press Release Revision DUE
Mar. 6	Pitching a story cont'd.	
Mar. 8	Pitching a story cont.'d.	
Mar. 11	SPRING BREAK	
Mar. 13	SPRING BREAK	
Mar. 15	Pitch Letter workshop	<i>Bring a complete draft of your pitch letter to class</i>
Mar. 18	PR Writing and Ethics	Pitch Letter DUE Read PRSA Code of Ethics http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics/CodeEnglish/index.html#.VKg6_GTF-8E
Mar. 20	PR Writing and Ethics	
Mar. 22	Campaign kits <i>Assign campaign kit</i>	Read Ch. 6 & 7 Submit to dropbox by midnight
Mar. 25	Campaign kit documents	Pitch Letter Revisions DUE
Mar. 27	Campaign kit documents <i>Exam Review</i>	Read Ch. 8 HW #6 DUE
Mar. 29	Campaign kit documents	
Apr. 1	Writing Test #2	
Apr. 3	Writing in an organizational crisis	
Apr. 5	Writing in an organizational crisis	Read Chapter posted on D2L
Apr. 8	Writing in an organizational crisis	
Apr. 10	Writing in an organizational crisis	
Apr. 12	TBA/Guest Speaker	Read Ch. 11
Apr. 15	Campaign Kit Workshop	Tweetfolio DUE Submit to D2L by midnight
Apr. 17	Group conferences	Meet in class
Apr. 19	Group conferences	
Apr. 22	Campaign presentations	
Apr. 24	Campaign presentations	
April 26	Campaign presentations	
	Finals Week	All campaign kits DUE