

CMN 3960: Public Relations Writing and Production

3 credit hours – Spring 2024

Instructor: Matthew Gill, Ph.D.

Time: M & W 3:00-4:15

Room: Coleman 1691

Office: Buzzard 2526

Phone: 581-6003 (office)

E-mail: mjgill@eiu.edu

Office hours: By appointment

Text

Thompson, W., & Browning, N. (2022). *Writing for public relations and strategic communication*. San Diego, CA: Cognella.

AP Style Book

Course Description

This course introduces students to basic principles and practices of public relations writing. It is a writing intensive class that will develop essential writing skills for a) advocacy on behalf of organizations and causes and b) building and maintaining positive relationships with organizational stakeholders. WI.

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

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain and critique central informative and persuasive genres of public relations writing.
2. Generate and interpret strategic goals and objectives for public relations writing.
3. Produce and critique audience-centered and strategic public relations messages in different contexts
4. Recall and implement stylistic rules for public relations writing
5. Apply effective editing strategies to revise public relations documents

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*.

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 no credit for the assignment

Academic integrity

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct <https://www.eiu.edu/deanofstudents/conductcode.php>

Violations will be reported to the Dean of Students. <https://www.eiu.edu/deanofstudents/>

Section 1 of the [Standards of Student Conduct](#) defines plagiarism at EIU. While you are responsible for understanding how to avoid plagiarism, but here's the short version: ALWAYS give credit. I expect that everything you turn in (unless otherwise noted) is your own personal work - not borrowed, not group-created, or copied from the Internet. Please remember that **plagiarism is not based upon intent**. Just because it wasn't intentional does not mean you didn't plagiarize. Consequences for plagiarism can range from failing an assignment to failure of the course or expulsion from the university. Do your own work. Give credit where credit is due.

Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Accessibility & Accommodations (OAA). All accommodations must be approved through OAA. Please stop by McAfee Gym, Room 1272, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

The Academic Support Center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Academic Support Center <https://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 Academic Support Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee Gym, Room 2230.

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 8 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 Releases – 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.)

Infographic – The increasing importance of visual media in public relations (and all communication) cannot be denied. This assignment will give you the opportunity to practice putting information into an infographic form.

PR documents – There will be 7 opportunities to complete a variety of public relations documents/writing, of your choosing, beyond the press release assignments. Details will be discussed when the work is assigned.

Grading

Your course grade is determined by the amount of quality work you choose to do. Assignments are bundled together at each grade level based on amount of work and/or level of complexity. The A bundle of assignments requires more work, and work of greater complexity, than the B bundle, which is likewise more challenging than the C bundle, etc. Rather than earning a grade for each assignment, you earn your course grade by **meeting the expectations on all of the assignments within a bundle**. You have an opportunity to think ahead about what grade you would like to earn in this course and plan your workload accordingly, but your chosen grade is not set in stone – you can reevaluate this choice at any time.

Your work (except for exams) will be evaluated by determining if it has met expectations based on specific criteria for each assignment. You will get credit for an assignment when it meets ALL the criteria. There are no points, percentages, or gradations of quality – an assignment either meets expectations, or it does not.

Criteria are communicated on the assignment sheet and/or the grading rubric so that you can choose how to calibrate your work to the criteria before you turn it in.

You will also get 3 virtual “tokens,” which you may redeem for any of the following purposes:

- Revise and resubmit a press release (other than the first, which you can do without a token), a PR document, or the infographic assignment. All revised documents are due 1 week after I return your work to you with comments. When you submit your revision also include the original and my feedback.
- Receive an extension of 48 hours on the press release, infographic, or PR document deadline
- Receive credit for a missed in-class activity (can only be used 1 time).
- Add 5 points to an exam of your choosing

You can earn an extra token for each PR document, that meet expectations, you complete beyond the four required to earn an A. So, if you complete a fifth PR document that meets expectation you will earn an extra token. If you complete a sixth, you will earn another token (and so on).

Grading scale

Assignment	To earn an A	To earn a B	To earn a C	To earn a D
Midterm/Final	Avg. 75%	Avg. 70%	Avg. 65%	Avg. 60%
Press Releases (3)	2 that meet expectations to earn an A; 1 that meets the expectations to earn a B	2 that meet expectations to earn a B; 1 that meets expectations to earn a C	2 that meet expectations to earn a C	1 that meets expectations to earn a D
In-class activities (8)	7 that meet the expectations of the assignment	6 that meet the expectations of the assignment	5 that meet the expectations of the assignment	4 that meet the expectations of the assignment
Infographic	Meet expectations to earn an A	Meet expectations to earn a B	Meet expectations to earn a C	Meet expectations to earn a D
PR documents (7)	4 that meet expectations	3 that meet expectations	2 that meet expectations	1 that meets expectations

*Students who fail to meet the requirements for a D will earn an F in the course.

Each grade bundle is an indivisible unit; all assignments in a bundle must meet expectations to earn the associated grade. In other words, the lowest level assignment you complete sets the ceiling for your grade. For example, if you only complete 5 in-class activities, you cannot earn more than a C in the course, even if you have otherwise completed most of the A bundle.

Course Outline and Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignment: Due the day it appears</u>
1/8	Introduction and overview	
1/10	Audience centered communication	Read: pp. 25-37
1/15	NO CLASS – MLK DAY	
1/17	Audience centered communication	
1/22	Audience centered communication	
1/24	Public relations writing	Read: Chapter 1; pp. 37-46
1/29	Public relations writing	
1/31	Writing for the media	Read: Ch. 6
2/5	Writing for the media	Read: Ch. 7
2/7	Writing for the media	Press release assigned
2/12	Writing for the media	
2/14	Writing guidelines	Press release 1 due
2/19	Writing guidelines	
2/21	Business writing & media kits	Read: Ch. 10 PR Documents Assigned
2/26	Business writing & media kits	Revised press 1 release due
2/28	Objectives	Read: pp. 48-56 Press release 2 assigned PR Document Due Day
3/4	MIDTERM	
3/6	Target audiences	Read: pp. 56-65 Press release 2 due PR Document Due Day
3/11	AI in public relations writing	
3/13	AI in public relations writing	
3/18	NO CLASS – Spring Break	
3/20	NO CLASS – Spring Break	
3/25	Delivering uncontrolled messages	Read: Ch. 11
3/27	Photos and graphics	Read: Ch. 8 PR Document Due Day
4/1	Photos and graphics	
4/3	Photos and graphics	Infographic Assigned PR Document Due Day
4/8	Organizational influences	Press release 3 assigned
4/10	Organizational influences	PR Document Due Day
4/15	Tips & tricks you should know	Infographic Due
4/17	Tips & tricks you should know	Press release 3 due PR Document Due Day
4/22	Ethics & legal issues	Read: Ch. 5
4/24	Ethics & legal issues	PR Document Due Day
Exam Week	Final exam: Thurs., May 2, 12:30-2:30	