

MEJO 332.001–Public Relations Writing – Fall 2023

Instructor: Marshéle Carter

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Email: marshele@live.unc.edu

Class Time: T/Th 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m. EST

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1-2 p.m. and 5-6 p.m. EST and by appointment

Zoom Room: <https://unc.zoom.us/my/marshele> Meeting ID: 235 192 7874

Course Overview

This course is an applied writing skills laboratory and a service-learning class. We will cover best practices for many communication tools of the public relations trade for multiple platforms, including news releases for print and broadcast, fact sheets, media advisories, public service announcements, feature pitches, speech writing, direct mail and more. ***The skills of writing are learned by doing. You will have ample opportunities to learn by writing every day and by studying my edits of your work.***

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, my students should be able to

- **produce quickly** any of the basic, professional, written materials required in the public relations profession;
- **integrate strategy** into communication pieces to target appropriate/diverse audiences and media and to advocate effectively for a cause;
- **format and present materials professionally**, and
- **develop a personal, pre-professional, public relations portfolio.**

Prerequisites: To enroll in this course as an undergraduate student, you must have successfully completed **MEJO 153: Writing and Reporting** and **MEJO 137: Principles of Advertising and Public Relations**. No exceptions.

Required Texts: Barbara Diggs-Brown's *The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice (Third Edition)* and *The Associated Press Stylebook (newest edition)*. I assign supplemental materials/additional resources/files for your benefit. These reminders are listed in your syllabus and on Canvas. **All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned** to prepare you for class discussions and to ensure that you are prepared to write. If necessary, I will conduct pop quizzes on text and lecture materials.

Phones (calls and texts) and all social networking activity on any device will not be tolerated in class unless the platform is part of the day's lesson plan. You will receive only ONE warning. Any following incident will result in 30 points lost for the day's assignment. Please silence your phones and exit all social media before class begins.

Reference Materials: Use of reference materials – a dictionary and a thesaurus to double-check accuracy—is encouraged. These materials are available online and in the Park Library.

News Content: Keep up with current events! It's important to know what's going on in the world, and what issues your clients (today and in the future) are facing or will face. This makes you a more effective practitioner! Come to class ready to share and discuss breaking and developing news related to your client's mission.

Assignments and Deadlines: All writing assignments must be turned in on time. Late papers will receive a reduced grade **unless you and I agree before the assignment is due** that it can be submitted late. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline **without prior notice by you and confirmation by me.**

APPLES Service-Learning Program and clients: As part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, you will work with a community partner/client as a team member to produce communication pieces. You will be expected to discuss your APPLES deliverables and client relations in class with the instructor. Failure to provide updates will affect your grade. At the end of the course, you will showcase your materials in an online portfolio. The APPLES experience is valuable in that it provides professional pieces for your portfolio and gives you experience in client relations in the professional realm.

Canvas: All recorded classes and additional resources/files will be posted on Canvas for your convenience. Please consult these materials to ensure that you produce quality communication tools in this class. This syllabus is also available in the Syllabus folder, and assignments will be posted in the Assignments folder.

Exams: You will have two exams – a midterm and a final. The midterm exam is a 75-minute writing exercise. The final exam will be a longer writing exercise that covers the full semester. Failure to complete the scheduled midterm exam or to make prior arrangements to take it later will result in a grade of F. Failure to complete the final exam or to make prior arrangements to take it at an earlier time will result in a grade of AB.

Course Grade Calculation: I will calculate your final grade as follows:

Grading Scale:	A = 94-100	B = 84-86	C = 74-76	F = below 60
	A- = 90-93	B- = 80-83	C- = 70-73	
	B+ = 87-89	C+ = 77-79	D = 60-69	

In-class assignments	40%
Portfolio	20%
Midterm exam	15%
Final exam	15%
Participation (class/client)	10%

I follow the University's Grading Standards:

"A" students do not miss classes during the semester. They read and critically engage all the assigned textbook chapters and any optional readings on reserve before the material is covered in class. Written assignments and exams are not only complete but cover more than just the minimum requirements. The assignments exhibit proper style and format, are well organized, integrate strategic planning and targeting, and are written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time or early, and all rewrite opportunities are used. These students keep up with current events.

"B" students miss one or two classes during the semester, but these are excused absences. They usually read the assigned textbook chapters and some of the optional readings on reserve in the library before the material is covered in class. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, integrate strategic planning and targeting, are well organized, and are written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time, and all rewrite opportunities are used. These students tend to keep up with current events.

"C" students miss one or two classes during the semester, usually excused. They read the assigned textbook chapters and some of the optional readings on reserve in the library just before the material is covered on the exam. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, but they do not always integrate strategic planning and targeting and are not always well organized or written

precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time, and most rewrite opportunities are used. These students sometimes keep up with current events.

"D" students miss three or more classes during the semester and skim assigned readings. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, but they often lack integrated strategic planning and targeting and are often not well organized or written precisely and concisely. Materials are not always turned in on time; only some rewrite opportunities are used. They don't keep up with current events.

"F" students fail to come to class on a regular basis. They miss exams and written assignments and fail to use rewrite opportunities.

Please note: Students who earn less than a C in the course will have to retake the class.

Attendance: An unexcused absence will result in a zero for that day's assignment. Regular, on-time class attendance is your obligation, and you are responsible for all work, including tests and written work, for all class meetings. No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any given number of class meetings. **Note:** In practical terms, 40% of your grade is based on writing assignments, making consistent class attendance vital. **Again, an unexcused absence will result in a zero for that day's assignment.**

Absences: You may make up work you missed **if an absence is pre-approved**. It will be easier to obtain permission than forgiveness. **Please inform me by email of any anticipated absences no later than 24 hours before class, if possible.** If the reason for your absence is illness or other urgent situation, please text me before class to let me know. I will take roll during every class.

Honor Code: It is expected that students in this class will conduct themselves within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you haven't read the code in a while, please revisit it. **Important: Please see the policy for this class related to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as CHAT/GPT, below.**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools: Artificial intelligence (AI) holds enormous potential for public relations, as it does for many industries. However, we are still in the early stages of discovering its advantages and drawbacks. I believe it is crucial to maintain a balance between the application of AI-assisted tools and the cultivation of your creativity and critical thinking. I will allow the use of AI tools for tasks like grammar and AP style checks, brainstorming ideas and angles, and collecting data and leads for stories. **However, I strongly discourage use of AI for writing assignments.** If you decide to apply AI tools in your writing assignments, you must provide the tool's name, version (if applicable), and the date of access. If you use AI and do not disclose and cite your use of AI properly and honestly on any writing assignment, you will receive a 0 (zero) for the assignment and will be held to the school's honor policy. Remember, the purpose of this course is to enhance your writing skills and explore the responsible use of AI in the writing process. Let's work together to ensure that AI serves as a tool for your growth and learning, rather than a means of compromising your academic integrity. **As always, you are 100% responsible for your final product.** (Disclosure: Portions of these guidelines were developed using CHAT/GPT 3.5 13 Feb. version. Open AI, 20 August 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.)

Seeking Help:

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem, whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a family or personal hardship, disability or illness.

Counseling and psychological services:

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short- or long-term needs. Go to the website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit the facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

To initiate services with the Hussman Embedded Counselor, Carolyn Ebeling, email them at cebeling@email.unc.edu to schedule. Carolyn meets with students by appointment only and works exclusively with Hussman students. Available services include an initial assessment of needs, individualized planning for reported concerns, initiating engagement in brief therapy, connection to group therapy services, medication management, and referral coordination. Services are offered both in-person and by telehealth. Same-day, walk-in services are available at CAPS (3rd floor, Campus Health) Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

For crisis or 24/7 support, call CAPS at 919-966-3658 or call/text 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Diversity:

The [University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination](#) is outlined in the Undergraduate Bulletin. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Special Accommodations:

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities, visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;

- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.
- Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

Pep Talk: This class will be time-consuming and challenging. Your first few assignments possibly will receive low grades, which can be discouraging. Realize that if you invest the effort and make the most of rewrite opportunities when available, your work should improve throughout the semester, and this improvement will be reflected in your grades.

Please, meet with me at any time if you have questions or concerns about the course. My objective for the course is to make it a positive, learning experience, admittedly through your hard work. I am a resource available for your help, not an obstacle in your path.

Guidelines for Grading of Assignments

See the next page, which is a modified version of the MEJO 153, “News writing” criteria, for how writing assignments will be graded. The following guidelines also apply:

Assignments:

- Assignments are due at the **beginning** of class time. Late assignments (and, yes, that includes one minute late!) are docked 30 points. Assignments turned in more than 24 hours late automatically will be assigned a grade of 0.
- Assignments should be **picture-perfect** when they are turned in.

Rewrites:

- You may rewrite any *assignment that receives a grade of 60 or lower*. (This allowance pertains only to writing assignments, not to the midterm exam or the final exam.) The rewrite is due no later than two class days after you receive the assignment back from the instructor, no later than the beginning of that second class period. It is your responsibility to meet this deadline. The rewrite grade and the original grade will be averaged to determine your final grade for that assignment.
- You must return the original work with your rewrite. If no original is submitted with the rewrite, the rewrite will not be graded.
- Rewrites will be subject to greater scrutiny. Mistakes that I may have missed on your original assignment will most likely be caught on the subsequent read. Proofread your rewrites carefully!

Grading Criteria for All Assignments and Exams

There are two components to each of your grades: Strategy addresses appropriateness and accuracy of the content and approach; and AP/technique addresses spelling, grammar, punctuation, AP style and other formatting issues. I average the two components' scores to calculate your final grade for each assignment and exam.

I. Writing

- +5 for an exceptionally effective lead and supporting material
- +5 to +10 for exceptionally effective organization and treatment of material
- +2 for effective transition or introduction of material
- +2 to +10 for excellence in quality of information gathered and used
- +2 to +10 for excellence in determining targeting strategy
- 2 to -5 for ineffective or missing treatment of material, including, but not limited to, wordiness; use of jargon or clichés; inclusion of unnecessary or obvious information; redundancy; inappropriate choice or use of quoted material; incorrect word choice, including sexist language
- 5 to -10 for an ineffective lead that needs work or for lack of supporting material for lead
- 15 to -20 for missing the lead entirely or burying it
- 10 for failure to include contact information on pieces
- 10 for failure to include phone number, address, etc., of your organization or your client's organization

II. Mechanics

- 5 for each error or inconsistency in style
- 2 for excessively long or complicated sentences or paragraphs
- 5 for each spelling error (yes, typos are spelling errors)
- 5 for each punctuation error
- 5 for each grammatical error
- 10 for each minor factual error
- 50 for misspelling a proper noun**; -10 for each subsequent misspelling of a proper noun

III. Research/Gathering Information

- +/-5 to 10 for resource selection: quality and number of sources used; appropriateness of individual sources, including the level of expertise or authority involved
- +/-5 to 20 for thoroughness of material: existence of loose ends, holes or unanswered questions; development of significant angles; inclusion of needed detail
- +/-5 to 15 for backgrounding; research necessary to make the work complete or to provide needed explanations
- +/-20 for handling of legal matters, such as libel, violation of legal right of privacy, and copyright violations
- +/-15 for addressing material to appropriate publics
- +/-15 for making the message or statement clear (i.e., a news peg; inclusion of key message)

Note: Inappropriate or missing attribution/citation for all sources, including use of AI/GPT tools, will result in a grade of 0 (zero) for the writing assignment.

Note: Many of these plus and minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors or for continual superior performance.

Service Learning and Client Portfolio

STEP ONE – CREATING A SITE FOR YOUR ONLINE PORTFOLIO

If you haven't created a website/online portfolio, this is the semester to do it! There are several free website creation sites. Resources at SkillFUL Workshops (Undergraduate Library) and on Canvas may help you as you develop this showcase of your work. Browse these student examples for inspiration and as a guide:

Noah Dolgoff <https://noahd08.wixsite.com/mysite/1st-gallery>

Jessica Reid <https://jessicacamrynreid.weebly.com/portfolio.html>

Annaliese Zola <https://tarheels.live/zola/theater-delta/>

STEP TWO – BUILDING YOUR ONLINE PORTFOLIO

At the end of the semester, your online portfolio should include the following:

1. **Résumé** - An updated résumé (including your service-learning work for this semester)
2. **Reflection Essay** - A one- to two-page, single-spaced reflection essay – How did this experience contribute to your education and preparation for the real world? What was the most-valuable part of your service-learning experience? Most challenging? Least valuable? What recommendations would you make to the client regarding its PR efforts? What recommendations would you make to the Carolina Center for Public Service regarding this particular client as a future APPLES client/community partner?
3. **Final time sheet** – You may create your own time log, chart or spreadsheet to track volunteer hours or use the APPLES form (the time log is the last page of [this booklet](#) of service-learning forms).
4. **Communication Audit – The audit is a TEAM EFFORT** and should provide an up-to-date overview of your client's communication mix, including background, SWOT/situational analysis, and, most importantly, your team's recommendations. Your team report should be developed through discussions with the client, classmates and the instructor, and through an assessment of the client's current communication materials/vehicles. Aim at five pages single-spaced.

Media Kit for Your Client (All media kit content is independent work.)

5. **News Release for your client** – Your news release must have clear news value related to your client and must follow the proper traditional or digital format and AP style.
6. **Profile for your client** – Your profile should run two to four pages. A profile is a feature article about a newsworthy person who **founded, directs or benefits from** your client's services. Please also include a photo of your interviewee. (Interviews can be a team effort; writing is independent work.)
7. **FAQ or Fact Sheet for your client** – What questions might a potential volunteer, potential funder or potential program participant have about your client? What facts can be helpful? Your fact sheet is independent work.
8. **Additional piece for your client** – You must also include at least one additional piece as independent work for your portfolio. There are a lot of potential options for you to choose from, and several ideas follow. If you come up with another idea, please let me know.

- 1- to 2-minute info video	- Direct mail letter	- Website updates
- News release-print	- Media list	- Speech/public statement
- News release-broadcast	- Media advisory	- 2 blog posts (300 words each)
- Letter to the editor	- Brochure	- 2 PSAs (60 seconds each)
- Fact sheet or FAQ	- Media Relations Guide	- Podcast pitch to actual producer
- LinkedIn profile	- Social Media Guide	- Feature pitch to actual editor
-Newsletter template, content	- Social media posts (4-6)	

Class Schedule Fall 2023

(Note: This is a guide for the semester, subject to change.
You will be notified of any modifications.)

Date	Topic	Complete before class/lecture:
Unit 1 *****	<u>Public Relations Style, Structure and Strategy</u>	*****
Aug. 22	Welcome! Introductions and Course Overview	
Aug. 24	PR Tools and Resources, Associated Style (AP) Review	FDOC writing assignments; Read The PR Style Guide AP Primer pp. 112-116 and Appendix D Editing Marks; Review AP Stylebook Editing Marks p. 519; Read additional Canvas resources
Unit 2 *****	<u>APPLES Service-Learning Kick-Off</u>	*****
Aug. 29	Intro to Nonprofit PR More AP Style!	AP technique exercise #1; Read The PR Style Guide sections "What Are They?" for Chapters 1-16; Read additional Canvas resources
Aug. 31	Intro to APPLES Service-Learning Program	AP technique exercises #2; View APPLES online course module ; read time log form and about funding opportunities for APPLES students/teams; Read additional Canvas resources
Sept. 5	Well-being Day	No Class
Sept. 7	Communication Audits, More AP Style!	AP technique exercises #3; Read all resources in Online Portfolio resource file/folder; Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 4; Coordinate with team and client to schedule first meeting with client no later than Sept. 22
Unit 3 *****	<u>Media Relations and Media Kit Basics</u>	*****
Sept. 12	Media Relations	AP technique exercise #4; Client research exercise; Read AP Stylebook "The Associated Press statement of news values and principles" pp. 498-511; Read additional Canvas resources: Self-grade and send scores for AP Technique exercises 1-4 to instructor by Sept. 15; Coordinate with team and client to schedule first meeting with client no later than Sept. 22
Sept. 14	Media Kits and Media Advisories	Communication audit exercise; Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 6 and pp. 207-208; Coordinate with team and client to schedule first meeting with client no later than Sept. 22
Sept. 19	Fact Sheets	Media advisory assignment; Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 7 and 8; Read additional Canvas resources; Coordinate with team and client to schedule first meeting with client no later than Sept. 22
Sept. 21	News Releases: Essentials Round 1	Fact sheet assignment; Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 11; Read additional Canvas resources; Teams apply for APPLES Partnership Grant by Sept. 29. Initial team meeting with client by Sept. 22.
Sept. 26	News Releases: Essentials Round 2	News release assignment; Read The PR Style Guide Boilerplate Language p. 205; Read additional Canvas resources (boilerplate examples/info); Teams apply for APPLES Partnership Grant by Sept. 29
Sept. 28	News Releases: Essentials Round 3	Boilerplate assignment; Read additional Canvas resources; Teams apply for APPLES Partnership Grant by Sept. 29

