

## MEJO 332.003 Public Relations Writing – Spring 2024

<b>Instructor:</b> Sarah Whitmarsh	<b>Time:</b> Tues and Thurs 2-3:15 p.m. EST
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<b>Office hours:</b> Tuesdays 3:30-4:30 p.m. or by appointment	<b>Zoom room (if needed):</b> <a href="https://unc.zoom.us/j/5973882917">https://unc.zoom.us/j/5973882917</a> Meeting ID: 597 388 2917

### Course Overview

This course is an applied writing skills laboratory and a service-learning class. We will cover major communication tools and techniques for public relations, including content for digital, print and broadcast media; strategic feature pitches; media toolkits and advisories; public service announcements; newsletters and more. ***We learn writing skills by doing. You will have ample opportunities to learn and improve.***

### Course Objectives

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

- **quickly produce** any of the basic, professional, written materials required in the public relations profession;
- **integrate strategy** into communication pieces to target appropriate/diverse audiences and to advocate effectively;
- **learn to present material professionally;**
- **work as part of a creative team;** 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 as well – see the syllabus and Canvas for details. **You must complete all assigned readings before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned** to generate discussion and ensure you're prepared to write. If necessary, I will conduct pop quizzes on text and lecture materials.

## **Devices**

This course will require you to use a computer and/or cell phone during class time. Research suggests that the human brain is not as excellent at multitasking as we think it is. Please be respectful of your classmates and restrict your use of digital devices to course content only. If I see that you or your peers are distracted, I will ask you to put your devices away or ask you to leave class, and you may forfeit your ability to earn participation points that day. There will be times when you have completed your work, but your peers have not. I ask that you use that time to review your notes while you wait for others to finish. The classroom should be a place apart, however briefly, from the outside world and distractions. You will learn more if you concentrate on the course while you are here, and your classmates will thank you for not impeding their ability to learn.

## **Reference Materials**

Use of reference materials such as a dictionary or thesaurus is encouraged.

## **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) face or will face. This makes you a more effective practitioner.

## **Assignments and Deadlines**

All writing assignments must be typed, correctly formatted and 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 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.

## **Artificial Intelligence Policy**

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 support the use of AI tools for tasks like brainstorming, outlining and grammar checks. Because the core elements of crafting compelling narratives and understanding target audiences remain firmly rooted in human insight and expertise, I will prohibit use of AI for generating copy for your writing assignments. As always, **you are 100% responsible for your final product**. This policy will be discussed during the semester and potentially updated as experiences with AI warrant or university guidelines change.

## **Outside Assignments and APPLES clients**

As part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, you will work with a client organization 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

class, you will present 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. Professionalism is expected at all times.

**Canvas**

All slide decks and other handouts are/will be posted on Canvas for your convenience. 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.

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

<b>A = 94-100</b>	<b>B = 84-86</b>	<b>C = 74-76</b>
<b>A- = 90-93</b>	<b>B- = 80-83</b>	<b>C- = 70-73</b>
<b>B+ = 87-89</b>	<b>C+ = 77-79</b>	<b>D = 60-69</b>
<b>F = below 60</b>		

<b>Assignments</b>	<b>Proportion of final grade</b>
Assignments (both in-class and out-of-class)	40%
Final Portfolio	20%
Midterm exam	15%
Final exam	15%
Participation and Professionalism (class/client)	10%

***I follow the University's Grading Standards***

"A" students 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 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 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 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 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**

More than one-third of your grade is based on in-class assignments, making regular class attendance vital. Regular, on-time class attendance is your obligation. However, I understand that illnesses and family emergencies may occasionally affect attendance. Please refer to the university's guidelines for absences and exemptions due to illness.

### **Absences**

You may make up work you missed **if an absence is pre-approved**. However, you may still forfeit participation points for that day. It is your responsibility to acquire class notes, review recordings, and turn in makeup assignments. It will be easier to obtain permission than forgiveness.

### **Honor Code**

It is the responsibility of every student to abide by 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!

### **Special Accommodations**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All

accommodations are coordinated through the [Accessibility Resources and Service Office](#). Please feel free to message me or speak with me about how I can help with an accommodation.

### **Mental Health**

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. UNC services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the [broad range of confidential mental health services](#) available on campus. Carroll Hall also has an embedded CAPS counselor for Hussman students, [Carolyn Ebeling](#) (room 391).

### **Diversity**

The University's Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Related Misconduct is outlined [here](#). 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.

### **Professional values and competencies**

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media's accrediting body outlines values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them [here](#). Collectively, Hussman classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. The values and competencies below are most relevant for this course:

- 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;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- 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 tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

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

***Please, come talk 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 and want to see you succeed.***

## Guidelines for Grading of Assignments

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

### In-class assignments

- Ample time will be given in class to work on in-class assignments. You are expected to complete all assignments within the allotted time—as this is what’s required in the real PR profession. Good writers write. You will be given plenty of opportunities to perfect your speed and writing skills.
- Don’t wait until the last moment to proofread your copy. I will alert you when there are about 10 minutes remaining in class. Edit, proof, and save, save, save!
- Use the standard proofreading marks given in *The Associated Press Stylebook* for AP style quizzes and in-class editing assignments. No handwritten edits on assignments turned in to me.

### Out-of-Class Assignments

- Unless otherwise indicated, assignments are due by noon the day of class. 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. In the “real world,” computer glitches and printing problems happen but are not excused. The same is true in this classroom. Leave yourself plenty of time to cope with these problems and still make your deadline.

### Rewrites

- You may rewrite any *assignment* that receives a grade of 60 or lower. (This allowance pertains only to writing assignments, not the midterm exam or the final exam.) The rewrite is due no later than two class days after you receive the assignment back, no later than the beginning of that 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.
- Rewrites also will be subject to greater scrutiny. Mistakes I may have missed the first time around I may catch on the subsequent read.

## Grading Rubric and Criteria for All Assignments and Exams

There are two components to each of your writing assignment 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 scores for each writing assignment and exam.

Unless otherwise indicated on Canvas, writing assignments will use the following rubric. Note that misspelling a proper name is an **automatic 50 point deduction** of your technical score, meaning you will earn 0 points on both the grammar and factual accuracy line items.

<b>Technical (out of 20)</b>	<b>Points</b>
Accuracy and Comprehensiveness in Adhering to Lecture/Readings/Template 1 element missing = Excellent (5) 5+ Elements missing = Poor (1)	<b>5</b>
Grammar and Sentence Structure 1 error or less = Excellent (5) 5+ errors = Poor (1) Misspelled proper noun = 0	<b>5</b>
Accuracy of Facts (Major and Detail Errors) 0 errors = Excellent (5) 1 major error or 5+ detail errors = Poor (1) Misspelled proper noun = 0	<b>5</b>
Logic: Sequencing Transition and Flow	<b>5</b>
<b>Strategy (out of 25)</b>	
Appropriateness for Intended Audiences	<b>5</b>
Appropriate Elements within the Lead (5 W's) 0 elements missing = Excellent (5) 1 major element or 3+ minor elements = Poor (1)	<b>5</b>
Evidence of Inverted Pyramid Format	<b>5</b>
Evidence of Research/Knowledge	<b>5</b>
Creativity: Potential to "Wow" Client and Audiences	<b>5</b>

**I will reward/deduct points based on the following criteria:**

### **I. Writing**

- + for an exceptionally effective lead and supporting material
- + for exceptionally effective organization and treatment of material
- + for effective transition or introduction of material
- + for excellence in quality of information gathered and used
- + for excellence in determining targeting strategy
- 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
- for an ineffective lead that needs work or for lack of supporting material for lead
  - for missing the lead entirely or burying it
  - for failure to include contact information on pieces
  - for failure to include phone number, address, etc., of your organization or your client's organization

## II. Formatting and Mechanics

- + for adherence to template provided
- + for effective application of concepts we discuss in class
- for each error or inconsistency in style
- for excessively long or complicated sentences or paragraphs
- for each spelling error (yes, typos are spelling errors)
- for each punctuation error
- for each grammatical error
- for each minor factual error
- **-50 for misspelling a proper noun**; -10 for each subsequent misspelling of a proper noun

## III. Research/Gathering Information

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

**Note:** Many of these plus and minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors or for continual superior performance. Please note that MS Word spellchecker does not reliably catch spelling errors. Please proofread your work! I recommend doing so in hard copy.

## 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>

Ella York <https://tarheels.live/ellayork1/mejo-332/>

### **STEP TWO – BUILDING YOUR ONLINE PORTFOLIO**

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

1. **Resume** - An updated resume (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 to track volunteer hours or use the APPLES form (the time log is the last page of this booklet of service-learning forms): <https://ccps.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/741/2019/08/Service-Learning-Forms.pdf>
4. **Communication Audit** – Your audit is a **team effort** and should provide an up-to-date overview of your client's communications, including background, SWOT/situational analysis, and, most importantly, your team's recommendations. Your team report should be developed through discussions with the client, fellow students and the instructor, and through an assessment of the client's current communication materials/vehicles. The report will run about five pages.

#### **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 three to four pages. A profile is a feature article about a newsworthy person who founded, directs, volunteers with or benefits from your client's services. Please also get 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 student,

potential funder or potential program participant or potential volunteer have about your client? What facts can be helpful? Your fact sheet is independent work

8. **Additional piece for your client** – You must also complete 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                           |
| - Fact sheet or FAQ         | - Media Relations Guide    | - Podcast pitch to actual producer |
| - LinkedIn page/materials   | - Social Media Guide       | - Feature pitch to actual editor   |
|                             | - Social media posts (4-6) | <b>Other ideas welcome!!</b>       |

### Class Schedule Spring 2024

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

	Topic	Complete before class/lecture:
<b>Unit 1: PR Basics and AP Style</b>		
<b>Thurs., Jan 11</b>	Welcome! Introductions and Course Overview	None
<b>Tues., Jan 16</b>	PR Writing: History, Tools, and Strategy; Associated Style (AP) Review	FDOC writing assignment due  Read The PR Style Guide Appendix D Editing Marks; Review AP Stylebook Editing Marks p. 519  Read/watch additional Canvas resources  Homework: AP Quiz #1
<b>Thurs., Jan 18</b>	Intro to Nonprofits and Nonprofit PR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read The PR Style Guide sections “What Are They?” for Chapters 1-16</li> </ul> Homework: AP Quiz #2
<b>Tues., Jan 23</b>	Intro to APPLES Service-Learning and Client Assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>View <a href="#">APPLES online course module</a></li> <li>Read <a href="#">time log</a> form, <a href="#">service agreement</a>, and about <a href="#">funding opportunities</a> for APPLES students/teams</li> <li><b>Coordinate with team to schedule first meeting with client</b></li> </ul> Homework: AP Quiz #3
<b>Thurs., Jan 25</b>	Communication Audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 4</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch <a href="#">Communications audits: Why you should perform an audit</a> by Ragan Consulting (1:07)</li> </ul> <p>Homework: Client research exercise</p>
<b>Tues., Jan 30</b>	Understanding Framing and Calls to Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read "<a href="#">Asset-Framing for Nonprofits</a>" by Friday.Us</li> </ul> <p>Homework: AP Quiz #4</p>
<b>Thurs., Feb 1</b>	Media Relations Basics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read AP Stylebook "The Associated Press statement of news values and principles" pp. 498-511</li> <li>• Read <a href="#">What is the PESO Model for Marketing?</a> by Brilliant Metrics</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework: Initial team meeting with client by Friday, Feb 2</b></p>
<b>Unit 2: PR Strategies and Tools, Focusing on Print and Online Media</b>		
<b>Tues., Feb 6</b>	Media Advisories and Media Kits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 6. and pp. 207-208</li> <li>• Watch additional videos on Canvas</li> </ul> <p>Homework: Media advisory assignment</p>
<b>Thurs., Feb 8</b>	News Releases Part 1, Essentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 11; Read/watch additional Canvas resources</li> </ul> <p>Homework: Press release assignment 1</p>
<b>Tues., Feb 13</b>	<b>***NO CLASS***</b>	<b>WELLNESS DAY</b>
<b>Thurs., Feb 15</b>	News Releases Part 2, Boilerplates and Safe Harbor Statements	<p>Read The PR Style Guide page 205; See readings on Canvas</p> <p>In-class assignment: Write a boilerplate</p>
<b>Tues., Feb 20</b>	News Releases Part 3, Putting it all together	In-class assignment: Press release assignment 2
<b>Thurs., Feb 22</b>	Fact Sheets	<p>Read the PR Style Guide pp. 62-63, 72, 81</p> <p>Homework: Fact sheet</p>
<b>Tues., Feb 27</b>	Visuals and Captions	<p>Read/review AP Stylebook Images pp. 506-508; additional Canvas resources</p> <p>Homework: Photo caption assignment</p>
<b>Thurs., Feb 29</b>	Newsletters and Brochures	Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 3 and 10
<b>Tues., Mar 5</b>	Email and Direct Mail	<p>Read the PR Style Guide Ch. 5 and pp. 205-206</p> <p>Review for Midterm Exam</p>

<b>Thurs., Mar 7</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	Open book, open notes
<b>SPRING BREAK (MARCH 11 – 15)</b>		

<b>Unit 3: More PR Strategies and Tools, Focusing on Broadcast and Social Media</b>		
<b>Tues., Mar 19</b>	Writing for the Ear Part 1: Public Service Announcements	Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 13; Read additional Canvas resources  Homework: PSA assignment
<b>Thurs., Mar 21</b>	Writing for the Ear Part 2: Speeches and Speech Writing	Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 14; Read/watch additional Canvas resources  Homework: Speech assignment
<b>Tues., Mar 26</b>	Press Conferences and Media Interviews	Read The PR Style Guide pp 209-211 and additional Canvas resources  In-class activity: Mock media interviews
<b>Thurs., Mar 28</b>	<b>***NO CLASS***</b>	<b>WELLBEING DAY</b>
<b>Tues., Apr 2</b>	Social Media, Part 1: Overview, History, and Audience Engagement/Segmentation;	Read Canvas resources  Homework: Social media assignment
<b>Thurs., Apr 4</b>	Social Media, Part 2: Social Media Storytelling, Short-form Video; Instagram Reels and TikTok	Read Canvas resources
<b>Unit 4: Specialized and Long-form Projects</b>		
<b>Tues., Apr 9</b>	Feature profiles and pitching	Read The PR Style Guide pp. 211-212; Canvas resources  Homework: Build a feature idea
<b>Thurs., Apr 11</b>	Op-eds and letters to the editor	Read The PR Style Guide Ch. 12; Read additional Canvas resources  Homework: Pitch assignment
<b>Tues., Apr 16</b>	Building an ePortfolio  <u>Guest lecturer:</u> B. Lynn Eades, Technology Integration Librarian, Media & Design Center,	<b>*Bring your most up-to-date resume to class*</b>

	Undergraduate Library <i>Resume workshop</i>	
<b>Thurs., Apr 18</b>	ChatGPT and other Artificial Intelligence Tools	Read Canvas resources In-class activity: Evaluating AI generated copy
<b>Tues., Apr 23</b>	Virtual Team Check-ins	Zoom class session; team sign-up sheet to be circulated
<b>Thurs., Apr 25</b>	Portfolio Work Day	No class
<b>Tues., Apr 30</b>	Portfolio Due	Submit the link in the Canvas assignment by 5 p.m.
<b>***CLASSES END***</b>		
	<b>Final Exam</b>	Details TBD