

# Write Like a PR Pro

## COMM 3334

### Strategic Message Design

Spring 2019

WF 11:10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Journalism 216 – Section 17036

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Office Hours: Wed. 1-3:30 p.m., Friday 9:30-11 a.m., by appointment

### DESCRIPTION OF COURSE

Though there is an ever-growing bank of options for HOW to share a message (think ground-cling ads, Instagram/Facebook stories, video), content remains king. Print and electronic communication, social media and visual mediums all require a core skill: writing. Emerging professional communicators must master writing and message production skills, and layer this on top of solid planning. This course is an intensive workshop in public relations writing that grows students' ability to plan and write strategically, concisely and effectively for many of the communication channels used in the current public relations environment. It emphasizes the strategy of selecting the appropriate medium for a message, and then crafting key messages tailored to specific audiences and organizational objectives. Many assignments require knowledge of Associated Press style.

The course also familiarizes students with local professionals and companies and the types of writing and other skills needed to be competitive in the current communication job market. Students will learn about message creation from local subject matter experts and develop their portfolio of writing clips and professional qualifications. Class time will include discussion, hands-on instruction and individual/group activities to apply concepts from the readings. **Completing assigned reading before class is necessary to successfully complete both online quizzes and in-class activities. The best way to improve your writing is to write. A lot.**

### COURSE GOALS

- Students will recognize the critical role of strong writing in the public relations process.
- Students will solidify professional writing skills and learn to write strategically, concisely, accurately and effectively for various communication channels.
- Students will develop key messages tailored to target audiences and organizational objectives.
- Students will connect the course content to its application in a professional setting, gaining a greater understanding of how professionals are creating messages for their companies and clients.
- Students will grow their appreciation for the different career paths available in communication and the fundamentals skills required.

### COURSE TEXTS

Write Like a PR Pro, Mary Sterenberg: <https://osu.pb.unizin.org/writelikeapro/> (This is a free, online textbook. You will be the first semester to use it so please ask questions if you have them and I'll be asking for feedback.)

### COURSE EVALUATION

Application Assignments	100 points
Writing Samples	75 points
Client Project	145 points
Quizzes	80 points
<b>Total Possible Points</b>	<b>400 points</b>

## COURSE GRADING SCALE

A	93-100%	B-	80-82%	D+	67-69%
A-	90-92%	C+	77-79%	D	60-66%
B+	87-89%	C	73-76%	F	Less than 60%
B	83-86%	C-	70-72%		

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments should be turned in hardcopy and should follow AP style guidelines, unless otherwise instructed. Check Carmen for additional information on assignments. Save early and save often.

### Application Assignments (100 points)

In an internship or job, it is mandatory that you show up and give a strong effort every day to learn and grow new skills. This course adopts the same mentality as it is designed to begin bridging the gap between the academic and professional worlds. Application assignments allow students to put class concepts into action and learn by doing through both in-class and out-of-class exercises. Interactive course material provided outside of class will allow for more hands-on application during class period with the benefit of peer and instructor review, feedback and discussion. Due dates for larger point assignments such as the Hootsuite Certification and the Social Media Best/Worst Practice assignment are listed on the syllabus. Instructions and due dates for lower point assignments will be provided in class. **Assignments completed in class cannot be made up regardless of the reason for absence. If you know you will miss class for an excused reason, talk to me IN ADVANCE about options for completing the assignment.**

### Writing Samples (75 points)

You will strategically plan and create a several professional communications. They will take your writing to a higher level by requiring more complex analyses of key messages for target audiences and awareness of appropriate “voice.” They will also ask you to think strategically beyond the writing – considering visuals, timing, choice of communication platforms, etc. Any assignment containing a major factual error will drop a full letter grade. A major factual error is defined as one that gives the wrong information to the audience, including such things as misspelling the client’s name, incorrect identification of key sources or having the wrong place and time for an upcoming event. Errors with a smaller impact on the audience will be graded somewhat more leniently, but all factual errors will be considered serious.

### Client Project (140 points)

Student groups will correspond with a local organization/company/brand, completing a “discovery” process to analyze and evaluate its current use (or lack thereof) of communication channels to reach intended audiences and achieve objectives. Groups will create communication analysis/audit reports that share findings and offer specific recommendations for improving each organization’s strategic communication. Groups will support these recommendations by developing portfolio-quality communication collateral items (i.e. news release, media advisory, social media editorial calendar). Each group will submit a formal analysis report and collateral package and present to the class about its experience. All reports and superior collateral items will be provided to clients.

### Quizzes (85 points)

Class time will often be used for planning, writing and other activities that allow you to apply and build on the skills you’re learning. This is only possible if you complete assigned readings prior to class. To evaluate your understanding of the course material and ensure all students come prepared to apply new skills, there will be quizzes on assigned readings & lecture material (content included on each quiz is provided in the “Quiz Topics” document on Carmen).

Quizzes are available via Carmen and must be completed BY THE DATE/TIME LISTED ON THE SYLLABUS. There are no make-up quizzes. There will be no study guides, and it is the responsibility of the student to complete assigned readings, take notes in class, prepare for and take quizzes independently. STUDENTS MAY NOT WORK TOGETHER OR COLLABORATE IN ANY WAY ON QUIZZES. Though students are quizzed on the same topics, each student does not receive identical quiz questions. There are 5-10 questions on each quiz, and students have 10 minutes to complete the quiz once they begin. Questions are available one at a time and lock after the answer is submitted, so students may not go back after answering a question.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Attendance and Late Policy**

In an internship or job, attendance is expected and missing a day of work can cost you income and damage your personal brand. I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences, but I understand that sickness and other life circumstances occur so you have many opportunities to earn points in this course. **However, after the equivalent of one week of missed class, 5 points will be deducted from your final grade for each class you miss thereafter. In-class assignments cannot be made up.** If you are absent a day an assignment is discussed or assigned, it is your responsibility. Assignments completed in class cannot be made up. If you are absent a day an assignment is discussed or assigned, it is your responsibility to get details from me or a classmate. **I do not accept late work.** If you will be absent the day an assignment is discussed or due, contact me in advance for assignment details and turn it in early in class or in my office. Under no circumstances are assignments accepted via email unless explicitly stated otherwise. If you are absent the day an assignment is handed back, it is your responsibility to pick up your assignment from my office. I will not bring it with me to class. Personal computer and/or printer problems are not valid excuses. There are computer labs throughout campus, some of which are open 24 hours a day: <http://lt.osu.edu/locations-hours>.

### **COMMUNICATION**

I will notify you of any reminders, schedule changes, other updates, etc. by email, so check your email frequently. Email is a professional obligation. The best way to contact me is through email at [stereberg.2@osu.edu](mailto:stereberg.2@osu.edu). For email, please include COMM 3334 in the subject line to ensure your email receives high priority in my inbox.

### **CARMEN**

I will post course information, readings and notes on Carmen. Your grades also will be posted on Carmen. You have one week after grades have been posted to inquire about a missing grade or a grade you believe to be incorrect.

### **Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>

### **Copyright Disclaimer**

The materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection and are only for the use of students officially enrolled in the course for the educational purposes associated with the course. Copyright law must be considered before copying, retaining, or disseminating materials outside of the course.

### **Title IX**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at [titleix@osu.edu](mailto:titleix@osu.edu)

## **Accessibility accommodations for students with disabilities**

Requesting accommodations

**The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible.**

**If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability**

**(including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know via email immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You are also welcome to register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu) ; 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu) ; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.**

**DISCLAIMER**

I reserve the right to alter the scheduled topics as the semester progresses. These changes will be announced in class.

## Tentative Course Schedule

### Part 1: PR Planning & Writing Basics

Week 1 1/9, 11	Why Writing Matters/Professional Inventory Cornerstones of Communication (Ch. 1)	
Week 2 1/16, 18	Persuasive Messaging Client Project Kickoff Discovery Phase/Communication Audit (Ch. 2)	<b>Quiz #1 (Friday, 1/18 by 10 a.m.)</b>
Week 3 1/23, 25	Understanding Branding Identifying audiences and objectives	<i>Twitter/Hootsuite accounts (submit by start of class 1/25)</i>
Week 4 1/30, 2/1	Message strategy and communication plans (Ch. 3) Client Project: Discovery process (Online status update required)	<b>Client Project:</b> confirmed client name (submit by midnight to Carmen on 1/31) <b>Quiz #2 (Friday, 2/1 by 10 a.m.)</b>

### Part 2: Development of Strategic Messages

Week 5 2/6, 8	<b>Owned media writing:</b> Newsletters Blogs/web (Ch. 4) Client project: Methodology and Assignments (Online status update required)	<b>Writing Sample:</b> Messaging document (submit by start of class 2/6) <b>Quiz #3 (Friday, 2/8 by 10 a.m.)</b>
Week 6 2/13, 15	Social content strategy (Ch. 5 & 6) Social content creation	<b>Quiz #4 (Wednesday, 2/13 by 10 a.m.)</b> <b>Writing Sample:</b> Blog post (submit by start of class 2/15)
Week 7 2/20, 22	Social media best/worst practices (Ch. 7, 8, 9) Client Project: Competitor/Landscape Analysis	<b>Quiz #5 (Wednesday, 2/20 by 10 a.m.)</b> Client Project: Competitor/Landscape Analysis (5 p.m., 2/22); peer review on Carmen by 5 p.m. 2/26)
Week 8 2/27, 3/1	Video (Ch. 10) Visual Messaging (Ch. 11)	<b>Quiz #6 (Wednesday, 2/27 by 10 a.m.)</b> <i>Hootsuite certification (submit by start of class 3/1)</i>
Week 9 3/6, 8	Design/Infographics <b>Paid media writing:</b> Advertising/Fliers	<b>Quiz #7 (Wednesday, 3/6 by 10 a.m.)</b>
Week 10 3/13, 15	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
Week 11 3/20, 22	Client Project: Client Communication Analysis/SWOT <b>Earned Media Writing:</b>	<b>Quiz #8 (Wednesday, 3/20 by 10 a.m.)</b> Client Project: Client Communication Analysis/SWOT (submit by start of class, 3/22);

Finding/Making News (Ch. 12 & 13)  
Media Advisories

peer review on Carmen by 5 p.m. 3/26)

Week 12  
3/27, 29  
News releases  
Client presentation overview  
Client Project: Recommendations/Collateral items  
(Online status update required)

**Quiz #9 and news release application assignment (Wednesday, 3/27 by 5 p.m.)**  
**Writing Sample:** Media Advisory (submit by start of class 3/29)

#### **Part 4: Delivering Client Strategies & Messaging**

Week 13  
4/3, 5  
Guest Speaker (tentative)  
PR case study development/Feedback requests

**Client Project:** Collateral items (submit by start of class on 4/3; peer review on Carmen by 4/5)

Week 14  
4/10, 12  
Client Project: Finalizing Client Audit  
Building client project presentations

**Client Project:** Final comm audit (submit one per group to Carmen by start of class 4/12)

Week 15  
4/17, 19  
Client project presentations

**Client Project:** Presentations (submit to Carmen by start of class, 4/17)

Week 16  
4/22  
Client experience reflection & class vote