

Write Like a PR Pro

COMM 3334- HYBRID Strategic Message Design

Spring 2026

Wed. 9:35-10:55 a.m. Journalism Building 342 – Section 17896

Instructor

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Office Hours

Monday 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. (virtually) by appointment, Thursday 12:30-2:30 p.m. (in person or virtual) by appointment. I will find other times to meet if these hours don't work. Email me to schedule.

Office Hours Zoom:

<https://osu.zoom.us/j/94162584331?pwd=bE1RQ2k2RFo1S2krcE1Ya3lieFBnUT09>

Meeting ID: 941 6258 4331
Password: 906047

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Though there is an ever-growing bank of options for HOW to share a message However, all of these different mediums require two core skills: writing and strategic intent. Even with support from artificial intelligence, emerging professional communicators must master strong writing and message production (this is an employer expectation). This course is an intensive workshop in public relations writing and strategy designed to hone your ability to plan and write compelling messaging across channels – messaging that is tailored to specific audiences and organizational objectives.

Strong writing with an understanding of grammar and AP Style is a critical PR skill. Therefore, in addition to strategy and planning, this course will emphasize the importance of creating client-ready materials that follow AP style and are free of mistakes. Many assignments require knowledge of Associated Press style. It is recommended, but not required, that you take this class AFTER Comm 2321. Students who have not worked with AP Style before are responsible for the extra efforts required to write in this format and are encouraged to leverage resources listed in Carmen.

This course also familiarizes students with local professionals and companies and the types of writing and other skills needed to be competitive in the current communications 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 OBJECTIVES

- 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 fundamental skills required.

COURSE TEXTS

Write Like a PR Pro, Mary Sterenberg: <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/> (This is a free, online textbook.)

Recommended: The Associated Press Stylebook 2024-26. The Associated Press.

HYBRID COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This course will have in-person and online components, but students should plan to attend the weekly IN-PERSON class period. Do not schedule work or other commitments during class periods. Students will complete and submit assignments that apply what we learn in class virtually as part of the online component of the course. Students must:

- Have access to reliable Wi-Fi and take responsibility for ensuring you can access online resources such as discussion boards, video/audio materials and quizzes. You have access to course expectations and deadlines in advance, and the Carmen team and I are available to help with technical issues PRIOR to due dates. Refer to <https://resourcecenter.odee.osu.edu/carmencanvas> for answers to many Carmen problems or questions for the Carmen support team.
- Bring a computer to any in-person classes so you can access online materials, discussions and resources.
- You must complete all assigned readings BEFORE coming to class each week. This will help ensure you don't lose points in online discussions/reading quizzes and are ready to begin applying concepts during our limited time together in class. Quizzes and readings are due by 11:59 p.m. **THE DAY BEFORE CLASS**, as noted on the syllabus. DO NOT collaborate with classmates on quizzes.
- Application Assignments will open after in-person class and remain open until Sundays at 11:59 p.m. See due dates noted on the syllabus course schedule below.
- **MY ADVICE:** Complete all readings, quizzes and assignments listed to do BEFORE coming to the in-person class. Attend in-person class. Then begin work on Application Assignments and any Writing Sample assignments to submit by 11:59 p.m. on Sundays. Then move to the next week's assigned readings and quizzes. This prevents confusion with the material.

COURSE EVALUATION

Writing Samples	100 points (2 assignments x 50 points)
Application Assignments	100 points (10 assignments x 10 points each)
Quizzes	80 points (11 quizzes. Two lowest scores dropped)
Class Participation	70 points
Client Project	50 points
Total Possible Points	400 points

COURSE GRADING SCALE

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

C 73-76% F Less than 60%

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments should follow AP Style and be “Client-Ready.” Client-ready means they are:

- Free from grammar and spelling mistakes
- Written for the intended audience
- Formatted appropriately for ease of reading, including layout
- Concise and to the point

Class Participation (70 points)

During each class, you will complete and submit an assignment that relates to the lecture or topic we’re discussing. This might be a short writing assignment based on a provided prompt or your response to an in-class exercise. It could happen at the start of class and be based on your understanding of the assigned reading, or it could happen later in the class as part of an in-class exercise. Class participation also rewards active engagement with your group during any class periods where we work on the Client Project (which is most class periods). **Your lowest score in this category will be dropped, which allows for one absence without penalty (the equivalent of one week of class because we only meet in person once a week).** More than three absences (including excused) will result in a **full letter grade reduction** for the course. Excessive tardiness or early departures that cumulatively equal two full classes will count as one absence toward this threshold.

How Points are Earned

Full Score

- Arrives on time and stays for the entire class.
- Submits the required in-class assignment before the end of the class period and the response demonstrates a solid understanding of the day’s course content.
- Actively engages in group work (contributes ideas, collaborates, listens, and participates in discussions).
- Not distracted (e.g., no phone use, unrelated work).

Half Score

- Arrives late or leaves early **OR**
- Minimal engagement during group work time (rarely contributes, off-task behavior, distracted by phone or unrelated work).

Zero

- Absent **OR**
- Present but not engaged (not participating, consistently off-task, sitting silently during group meetings)
- Note: Simply attending class does **not** guarantee points – you must show understanding of the day’s course material and actively participate during any group time.

Writing Samples (100 points)

You will strategically plan and create two 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. A detailed assignment sheet and rubric will be provided on Carmen for all writing sample assignments.

Application Assignments (100 points)

As a hybrid class, we meet IN PERSON once a week and you will complete an Application Assignment after class individually nearly every week. These application assignments allow you to practice the concepts learned in class and gain more writing experience. Application assignments instructions are provided on Carmen and will open after each in-person class and are due by 11:59 p.m. on Sundays. Late work will not be accepted.

Quizzes (100 points)

To evaluate your understanding of the course material and ensure all students come to class prepared to apply new knowledge and skills, there will be quizzes on assigned readings & lecture material (content included on each quiz is provided in the “Quiz Topics” document on Carmen). This course uses quizzes in lieu of exams to align more closely with application of the concepts.

Quizzes are available via Carmen and should be completed BY 11:59 P.M. THE DAY BEFORE CLASS. They open the previous week AFTER CLASS (to ensure you have all needed lecture material) and you have 15 minutes to complete each quiz once it begins. There are 10 questions on all quizzes. Plan to take quizzes with enough time before the due date/time so that you have a buffer on time in case you face sickness, tech issues or other problems. 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. There are 10 quizzes and your top 8 scores will be counted. If you have tech issues, add the course late, forget a quiz or get sick and miss a quiz, that becomes one of your dropped quizzes. If you take all quizzes, your lowest two scores will be dropped. THERE ARE NO MAKEUP QUIZZES as we discuss answers in class and move on with applying the content.

Quizzes use the LockDown Browser feature on Carmen, which limits you to just the quiz browser while taking the quiz to reduce distraction. You will need to download this tool before taking your first quiz. See [university instructions for downloading](#).

Client Project (50 pts)

You will be working in a group throughout the semester with a real client to create an analysis/audit of the company’s existing communication activities in the four categories we discuss in class: paid, earned, shared and owned. You will also conduct a SWOT analysis and identify a key opportunity for the client with additional communication recommendations packaged in a client-ready communication analysis/audit document. Your group will also report back to the class on your client work so that students learn from one another’s client experiences. A detailed rubric will be provided.

Extra Credit: There are several extra credit points available in this class. Occasionally I will award extra credit beyond these points to students for in-class activities as discussed in class. Extra credit will be applied to the final grade point total. *Submit all extra credit on Carmen by the final day of class (not counting finals week).*

- **Professional Development Activities (4 points):** Participate in an on-campus professional development activity during the semester (i.e., PRSSA or BASCA meeting or other events as approved by the course instructor) and submit responses to the questions in the Extra Credit assignment on Carmen as well as proof of attendance. If you have me for multiple classes, you may not count the same event for both classes. You may attend multiple events and submit a different event for each class.
- **Client Project Class Favorite (2 points):** All students will vote following the final client project presentations at the end of the semester for the group they feel presented the strongest client work.

- **SEI class response rate (1 point):** If the class hits an 80% response rate on SEIs, I will give the entire class a point.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance & Participation

In an internship or job, attendance is expected and missing a day of work can cost you income and damage your personal brand. But sickness and other unexpected obligations do happen. The attendance policy for this class allows one absence with no penalty (this is why one in-class assignment is dropped). **Because Communication 3334 is a hybrid class that only meets once a week in person and requires group work during class time, it is important to attend class.** Additional absences will cost in-class participation points, which WILL lower your overall grade. More than three absences (including excused) will result in a **full letter grade reduction** for the course. The final course grade then will be lowered one-third of a letter grade for each additional missed class (i.e., C to C-). If you require accommodation due to a documented issue, please contact the instructor right away.

AI Course Policy

Given that the learning goals of this class are to strengthen your writing skills by building your understanding of what good writing looks like for different professional platforms/audiences and to give you experience with the tools and process being used in the industry to develop strong strategy and writing, in this course, students are welcome to explore innovative tools and technologies for data analysis, brainstorming, presentation design and copyediting, including generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Students are permitted to use GenAI tools for most course assignments, except for reflection assignments that specifically ask for your opinions/thoughts and for drafting entire writing assignments. Your written assignments, including Application Assignments and Writing Sample Assignments, should be your own original work and should reflect a strong understanding of the messaging strategies and good writing skills being learned in class.

I am in ongoing conversations with industry professionals to ensure course policies around AI reflect the current industry standard. Communication professionals share that they use AI for idea generation, data analysis, drafting smaller content pieces such as headlines and social media content that then go through a rigorous review process, but that they do NOT allow drafting of materials intended to go directly to clients or audiences. I want you to feel confident in your knowledge and use of AI, as this likely will be an expectation of employers in our industry. I also want you to understand the ethical, legal and professional repercussions of using AI in ways that cross lines in any of these areas.

If I suspect that you have used GenAI on an assignment for which it is prohibited, I will ask you to explain your process for completing the assignment in question. Submission of GenAI-generated content as your own original work is considered a violation of Ohio State's Academic Integrity policy and [Code of Student Conduct](#) because the work is not your own. The unauthorized use of GenAI tools will result in referral to the [Committee on Academic Misconduct](#).

GenAI is evolving rapidly. If you have questions about this course policy or your use of GenAI, whether in standalone applications like Microsoft Copilot or embedded in other tools, please contact me at Sterenberg.2@osu.edu.

Weather or other short-term closing

Should in-person classes be canceled; we will meet virtually via CarmenZoom during our regularly scheduled time. I will share any updates via email/Carmen announcement.

Course Technology

For help with your password, university e-mail, Carmen, or any other technology issues, questions, or requests, contact the OSU IT Service Desk. Standard support hours are available at <https://ocio.osu.edu/help/hours>, and support for urgent issues is available 24x7.

Carmen:

- I will post course information, readings and notes on Carmen, Ohio State's Learning Management System. 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. To access Carmen, visit [Carmen.osu.edu](https://carmen.osu.edu).
- Help guides on the use of Carmen can be found at <https://resourcecenter.odee.osu.edu/carmen>
- This hybrid course requires use of Carmen (Ohio State's learning management system) and other online communication and multimedia tools. If you need additional services to use these technologies, please request accommodations with your instructor. [Carmen accessibility](#)

Office Hours & Email

I will hold office hours weekly both in person and via Zoom ([Carmen Zoom](#) help guide). Office hours are the best place to ask in-depth questions about course readings or lectures, as well as any question about grades. I am also happy to give you feedback on your work *at least 48 hours before* the assignment is due during office hours. Email should be used to schedule an appointment during or outside of office hours or for *short* questions clarifying class assignments or specific items from lectures.

Office Hours Zoom:

<https://osu.zoom.us/j/94162584331?pwd=bE1RQ2k2RFo1S2krcE1Ya3lieFBnUT09>

Meeting ID: 941 6258 4331

Password: 906047

Course 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 sterenberg.2@osu.edu. For email, please include COMM 3334 in the subject line to ensure your email receives high priority in my inbox.

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.

This course follows university requirements in the following areas:

- [Religious Accommodations](#)
- [Academic Misconduct](#)
- [Disability Statement \(with Accommodations for Illness\)](#)
- [Intellectual Diversity](#)
- [Grievances and Solving Problems](#)
- [Creating an Environment Free from Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct](#)

Food Security

The Ohio State University is committed to ensuring that all students have access to adequate and healthy food. Any undergraduate or graduate student with a BuckID may confidentially use the Buckeye Food Alliance food pantries. No proof of need is required. The pantry is located in Lincoln Tower, Suite 150 (1800 Cannon Dr., Columbus, OH 43210). Check the website or call for current hours. (<https://www.buckeyefoodalliance.org/>, 614-688-2508)

PLEASE TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF (Mental Health Statement)

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 or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing.

If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614-292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766 and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 by dialing 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

DISCLAIMER: I reserve the right to alter the scheduled topics or class format as the semester progresses. These changes will be announced via Carmen announcements or email so please check regularly, especially on class mornings.

	To do BEFORE in-person class	During IN PERSON CLASS	To do AFTER class Note: Application Assignments open after class Wednesday and are due by 11:59 p.m. Sunday.
Week 1 1/14	Review syllabus and familiarize yourself with the Carmen course structure	- Cornerstones of Communication (Ch. 1) - Introductions & Course Review - Case study competition	Application Assignment: Professional inventory, personal brand (10pts)
Week 2 1/21	READ: Intro, Chapters 1 & 2 COMPLETE: Quiz #1 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class)	- The Discovery Process (Ch. 2) - PESO Overview - Understand Your Brand, Identify Audiences, Objectives - Muck Rack & Client Project Kickoff	Application Assignment: Muck Rack Certification (10pts)
Week 3 1/28	READ: Chapter 5 WATCH: Owned Media Writing Lecture COMPLETE: Quiz #2 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class)	OWNED MEDIA - Writing for the Web (Ch. 5) - Blog post assigned - Group work: Submit top three client ideas.	Application Assignment: Blog research & outline (10pts) Client Project: Watch for instructor approval on client ideas. Work to secure client.
Week 4 2/4	READ: Chapter 6 COMPLETE: Quiz #3 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class) SUBMIT: Confirmed client	OWNED MEDIA - Executive Writing: Business Emails (Ch. 6) - Group work: Discovery on owned media. Client interview framework.	Application Assignment: Mailchimp workshop (10pts) Client Project: Discovery and interview prep continue. Schedule interview for Week 5 or 6. Writing Sample: Be working on your blog post
Week 5 2/11	SUBMIT: Blog post READ: Chapters 7 & 8 WATCH: Social Strategy	SHARED MEDIA - Different Sides of Social (Ch. 7) - Setting an Up-Front Social	Application Assignment: Competitor analysis (10pts)

	Lecture	<p>Strategy (Ch. 8)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group work: Develop Executive Summary & Industry Analysis. Competitors identified and assigned. 	<p>Client Project: Discuss feedback and finalize audiences, opportunity statement and messaging</p> <p>Client Project: Hold client interview</p>
Week 6 2/18	<p>READ: Chapter 9</p> <p>WATCH: Social Content Lecture</p> <p>COMPLETE: Quiz #4 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Content Creation (Ch. 9) - Group work: Discovery on owned & shared media. 	<p>Client Project: Hold client interview if you haven't</p>
Week 7 2/25	<p>READ: Chapter 10</p> <p>WATCH: Finding/Making News Lecture</p> <p>COMPLETE: Quiz #5 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class)</p>	<p>EARNED MEDIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding/Making News (Ch. 10) - Pitching Media/Media Advisories - Group work: Discovery on earned media. Research key media outlets and media pitch ideas. 	<p>Application Assignment: Media advisory outline/draft (10pts)</p>
Week 8 3/4		<p>EARNED MEDIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing for Earned Media - Writing strong headlines, leads and quotes - Group work: Develop SWOT analysis. 	<p>Writing Sample: Be working on your Media Advisory/Pitch</p> <p>Application Assignment: Mid-semester reflection (5)</p>
Week 9 3/11	<p>SUBMIT: Media Advisory/ Pitch</p> <p>READ: Chapters 11, 12</p> <p>WATCH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advertising Lecture <p>COMPLETE: Quiz #6 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class)</p>	<p>PAID MEDIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advertising/Fliers (Ch 11) - Video Messaging (Ch. 12) Guest speaker (tentative) - Group work: Discovery on paid media. Brainstorm creative paid recommendations (or ways paid could amplify other PESO areas). 	
Week 10 3/18		NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK	
Week 11 3/25	COMPLETE: Quiz #7 (Can be completed anytime during the semester before the due date)	Group work: Brainstorm with/for another group.	Application Assignment: Feedback to another group

Week 12 4/1	READ: Chapter 3 COMPLETE: Quiz #8 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyzing Audiences (Ch. 3) - Audience segmentation - Group work: Consider unique insights on existing audience and potential new audience segments (existing or potential). Assign audience segments for further research. 	Application Assignment: Audience segmentation & consumer profile creation (10pts)
Week 13 4/8	READ: Chapter 4 WATCH: Messaging Lecture COMPLETE: Quiz #9 (by 11:59 p.m. night before class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic Messaging (Ch. 4) - Opportunity Statements - Group work: Develop opportunity statement and finalize recommendations. 	Application Assignment: Messaging document and message development. (10pts)
Week 14 4/15	READ: Chapters 13 WATCH: Design Lecture COMPLETE: Quiz #10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review final presentation requirements and show examples Group work: Work on final presentations/plan. 	
Week 15 4/22	SUBMIT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication Audits (ALL GROUPS) - Presentations (one of each submitted per group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Client Project Presentations Day - Submit feedback of another group's presentation (the group you need to review will be assigned in class) 	Finalize Communication Audits & Presentations Application Assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Class reflection & peer evaluation (your group members) (5pts)