

JOMC 232.003-Public Relations Writing - Spring 2011

Instructor: Lois Boynton
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Classroom: 142 Carroll Hall
Time: T/Th 2-3:15 p.m.

Office hours: T 11 a.m.-noon and 3:30-4:30 p.m.
W 10-11 a.m. and 2-4 p.m.; Thurs 3:30-4:30 p.m.
and by appointment.



Course Overview: This course is an applied writing skills laboratory and a service-learning class. We will cover major communication tools of the public relations trade for multiple communication platforms, including news releases, features, speeches, pitch letters, fact sheets, public service announcements, and more. ***The skills of writing are learned by doing; you will have ample opportunities to learn.***

Course Objectives: By the end of the course, students should be able to

- **quickly produce** any of the professional written materials required in the public relations profession;
- **integrate strategy** into communication pieces to target appropriate/diverse audiences and media and to effectively advocate a cause;
- because this course simulates the working conditions of most public relations firms,
 - you will learn to **professionally present** material,
 - **establish client relations** through service learning,
 - and **work as part of a creative team**;
- finally, you will **develop a portfolio**.

Prerequisites: To take this course as an undergraduate, you must have successfully completed **JOMC 153: News writing** and **J137: Principles of Advertising and Public Relations**. No exceptions.

Required Text: Thomas H. Bivins, ***Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format***, 6th ed.; and ***The Associated Press Stylebook***. All assigned readings should be completed 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 material.

Recommended Texts: Webster's *New World Dictionary*. Other materials may be handed out or posted on Blackboard. Dictionaries are available in the classroom.

Computer Supplies: All work should be saved to your H-drive (or other personal drives) and not to the hard drive (it gets dumped regularly). Murphy's law is alive and well in computer labs, and snafus do occur. Save early and often – I can't resurrect lost documents!

Reference Materials: Use of reference materials to double check accuracy is encouraged (in fact, I'm begging you!). These materials are available in the classroom and in the School's library.

News Content: Keep up with current events by reading ***The Daily Tar Heel, Raleigh News & Observer*** and by following other news sources, such as National Public Radio (91.5 FM). 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. Makes you an effective practitioner!

Assignments and Deadlines: All writing assignments must be typed, double-spaced and turned in on time. For outside assignments, late papers (anything after 2 p.m.) will receive a reduced grade unless you and I agree before the assignment is

due that it can be late. Otherwise the assignment will receive an F. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline.

Outside Assignments and APPLES clients: As part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, you will work with client organizations to produce communication pieces for them. You will be expected to do periodic check-ins on the APPLES experiences and meet with the instructor to discuss progress in your APPLES placement. Failure to do the check-ins will affect your grade. Due dates for client pieces you produce are on the attached week-by-week syllabus. At the end of the class, you should present your materials to your client.

The APPLES experience is valuable in that it provides professional pieces for your portfolio and gives you experience in working in the nonprofit realm. Do not forget, however, that you are representing the University in general and the public relations sequence in particular in the community. Professionalism is expected.

Blackboard: I encourage you to use the Blackboard Discussion Board feature to discuss client issues among your peers – there’s a folder called “Client Stuff” just for this purpose. It’s an effective way to ask questions, find out who faces similar challenges/opportunities and share successes. Additionally, all PowerPoints and other handouts are/will be posted up on Blackboard for your convenience – see the Course Documents link. Please consult these materials to ensure you produce quality communication tools in this class. This syllabus is also filed under Course Information, and assignments will be posted in the Assignments folder (how original!).

Exams: Two exams, a midterm and a final, will be given. The midterm exam will be a 75-minute writing exercise. The final (take-home) exam will be a longer writing exercise that covers the full semester. Failure to show up for the midterm exam or to make prior arrangements to take it later will result in a grade of F. Failure to complete the final will result in an AB.

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

In-class assignments	30%	Grading scale:	A = 90-100
Client assignments	30%		B = 80-89
Midterm exam	15%		C = 70-79 (+/-, too)
Final exam	15%		D = 60-69
Participation (class/client)	10%		F = below 60

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-minus in the course will have to retake the class.

Honor and Campus Code: It is the responsibility of each student to abide by the UNC Honor Code, which prohibits lying, cheating or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University, student or academic personnel acting in an official capacity; and the Campus Code, which prohibits students from significantly impairing the welfare or educational opportunities of others in the University community. If you haven't read the code in a while, please revisit it!

Attendance: Regular, on-time class attendance is a student obligation, and a student is 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, almost one-third of your grade is based on in-class assignments, making regular class attendance vital. An unexcused absence will result in a 0 for that day's assignment.

Absences: You may make up work you missed because of an absence that's pre-approved. It will be easier to obtain permission than forgiveness.

Special Note: If you have a condition requiring special assistance of any sort, please notify me as soon as possible so that I may help ensure your needs are met.

Pep Talk: This class will at intervals be time consuming and difficult. Your first few assignments possibly will receive low grades, which can be discouraging. Realize that if you put forth the effort, your work should improve throughout the semester, and this improvement will be reflected in your grades. ***Please, come talk to 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 sheet, which is a modified version of the JOMC 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 may not always complete the piece, however. Don't worry. If you have a good first three paragraphs, you have what is necessary to write the piece. Speed comes with practice. I only grade what you turn in.
- Don't wait until the last moment to print your copy. Give yourself time to proofread. 'Tis better to have quality work that's not yet complete than a completed assignment riddled with errors! I will alert you when there are about 10 minutes remaining in class. Save, save, save!
- For in-class assignments only, edit on your hard copy. Use the standard proofreading marks given in *The Associated Press Stylebook*. I must be able to read your changes!

Out-of-class assignments (mostly for client):

- 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 must be typewritten; assignments not typewritten will be docked 30 points. 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.
- Out-of-class assignments should be picture perfect when they are turned in. They may not be edited on hard copy. Obvious corrections, such as penned-in material, correction fluid, typeovers, etc., will be penalized 10 points each.

Rewrites:

- You may rewrite any assignment (in class or out of class) that receives a grade of 60 or lower. The rewrite is due no later than one week after you receive the assignment back, no later than the beginning of the 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 FIRMLY attach the original work with your rewrite. If no original is attached, the rewrite will not be graded.
- Rewrites also will be subject to greater scrutiny. Mistakes I missed the first time around I may catch on the second read. Proofread your rewrites carefully!

Grading Criteria for All Assignments (Look familiar??)

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

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 name**; -10 for each subsequent misspelling of a proper name

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: 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

This semester’s service-learning experience will involve working with nonprofit organizations. There are a number of relevant activities for this semester – **particularly** if you take the initiative and use your growing knowledge of strategic communication to help advance the visibility of the organization you’re involved with.

You may work individually or with other classmates on any aspects of client activities. It’s your call, but it is imperative that you begin **now** to determine how you want to contribute to these clients.

Remember: Through service learning, you will gain valuable experience participating with groups that are eager to use your skills. You will develop client contact skills, which are essential for professional development. Be sure to write up this experience on your resume and include any communication items you produced/helped create in your portfolio. Much class time will be spent discussing these assignments, and more handouts will follow.

The Portfolio you turn in at the end of the semester should include:

1. An updated **resume** (including your service-learning work for this semester)
2. A 1-2 page **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?
3. **Final time sheet** – see: <http://www.unc.edu/apples/students/courses/index.html#Forms>
4. A **Communication Audit** (see readings on Blackboard) should provide an up-to-date overview of your organization’s communications, including background, issues, SWOT/situational analysis, product/service description, implementation methods, and evaluation strategies. Your report should be developed through discussions with people at your nonprofit and through an assessment of its current communication materials/vehicles. The report will run 5-8 pages. You may work independently or with your class teammate.
5. The **News Release** (print or e-release) may be either a hard news release (1 to 2 pages) or a feature news release (3 to 4 pages). The topic of the release is up to you and the client.
6. The **Broadcast News Release OR PSA** on a topic decided by you and your client. BNR should run no more than 60 seconds; PSA should be no less than 30 seconds.
7. Additionally, working with the client, prepare **pieces of the client's choice**. These pieces must total at least four points and must be cleared with me. Deadlines for turning in the additional pieces will be on your week-to-week syllabus. Suggestions for pieces and point values follow, but other ideas are welcome. You may find that some items are worth more or less than what is noted. We can talk about any additional items or modifications as needed. This is flexible!

1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
news release, PSA	Web page update	brochure (design	media relations guide
fact/info sheet	feature (3-4 pgs)	and text)	Web site from scratch
letters	table-top display		special event plan
media advisory	newsletter design		
direct mail piece	backgrounder		
pitch letter	media list from scratch	OTHER IDEAS WELCOME!!!	
flyer	company or donor list		
media list update	bulletin board display		
fact/info sheet	PowerPoint with script		
tweet series	Blog posts (≥2)		

Class Schedule

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

B=Bivins textbook; D-B=Diggs-Brown; Bbd =readings on Blackboard

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings and Assignments for the Day</u>
Jan. 11	Welcome! Introductory writing Exercise	Course syllabus; re-introduce yourself to your <i>AP Stylebook</i> – you’ll love it!
Jan. 13	Basics and background; planning, evaluation	B – Ch. 1 & 2
What client activities do you want to do? Submit to Lois (e-mail is fine) a preliminary list of what you want to work on this semester.		
Jan. 18	Communication audits	D-B – Communication Audits. Bbd – Hallmark’s Communication Audit. (for other sample audits, look in Course Information on Bbd within the 2 posted sample portfolios) ***Research exercise due at beginning of class***
Jan. 20	Persuasion platform	B -Ch. 3; Platform example (Bbd); Also – ‘Punctuation R Us,’ ‘Why grammar stinks’ (Bbd)
Jan. 25	News basics, advisories	D-B -Advisories, pp.206-211; Media advisory format; Advisory examples (Bbd) ***Persuasion platform exercise due at beginning of class***
Jan. 27	Blogs, tweets, etc.	B – Ch. 13; ‘Top 5 blogging mistakes’ (Bbd). ‘Introduction to Blogs’ (Bbd) Find a PR-related blog that you’d like to critique
Report in on client activities (e-mail is fine) – what are you working on? What will you work on thru break?		
Feb. 1	Fact sheets	D-B , pp. 143-149; Facts R Us; examples (Bbd)
Feb. 3	Client contact reports	Memo writing; contact report example, format (Bbd)
Feb. 8	News releases	B -Ch. 6; release examples (Bbd)
Feb. 10	Boilerplate, media lists	Safe harbor statements, boilerplate examples; Electronic Disclaimers, Releases Not Sales Promotion (Bbd) <u>Extra credit</u> : Fog Index assignment
Feb. 15	e-releases	B -revisit Ch. 13 *** Client assignment #1 due – Communication audit <u>and</u> updated time sheet.
Feb. 17	Photo captions	B -Ch. 5; Photo caption tips; Photo caption format; photo release form (Bbd)
Feb. 22	Media relations	B -Ch. 4; What’s your media IQ? Media relations campaign of the week (Bbd)
Feb. 24	Broadcast and streaming media	B -Ch. 11; Writing for the Ear, and broadcast examples (Bbd)
March 1	Midterm exam (ewww!)	Open book, open note
March 3	NO FORMAL CLASS – meet with Lois on client project before break is <u>required</u> ! Bring your time sheet to the meeting. Spring Break starts 5 p.m. March 4. No class through Sunday, March 13. Have fun!!	

Class Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings and Assignments for the Day</u>
March 15	Reconnecting with broadcast writing	'VNR goals and guidelines' by the Consumer Product Safety Commission - http://www.cpsc.gov/businfo/vnrprod.html
March 17	PSAs *** Client assignment #2 due – news release <u>and</u> updated time sheet	Review B-Ch. 11; PSA examples (Bbd)
March 22	More PSAs	Online PSA examples (Bbd)
March 24	Letters to the editor	D-B – Opinion-Editorials (Bbd); Issue Column-Cornucopia; letter to editor examples (Bbd)
March 29	Features and feature pitches	B-Ch. 7 ; Feature Facts; feature examples (Bbd)
March 31	More pitching	Features-Storytelling; feature pitching tips; Aflac pitch (Bbd)
April 5	Direct mail letters	B -pp. 56-57; B-D -pp. 48-62; BP letter (Bbd)
April 7	More direct mail *** Client assignment #3 due – PSA or broadcast release <u>and</u> updated time sheet	see selection of direct mail examples on Bbd
April 12	Portfolios, writing job cover letters	Cover letter specifics; PR portfolios; Items for Portfolios(Bbd); UNC Career Services Web page- letters, found online at http://careers.unc.edu/students/resumes-and-letters/cover-letters.html
April 14	Brochures	B – Ch. 8
April 19	Speeches and face-to-face communication	B-Ch. 12 ; TV Turnoff Week Speech (Bbd)
April 21	More speeches	10 tips for successful public speaking; Speech – Ethics in advertising (Bbd)
April 26	Last day of class – reflect, review, reminisce... oh yeah, and ... FINAL COPY OF CLIENT PORTFOLIO DUE (see <u>assignment</u> for items to include)	
April 30	Take-home exam, due no later than <u>4 p.m., Saturday, April 30</u>. Early papers cheerfully accepted!	