

1-2012

COMM 322.50: Public Relations Writing

Kathryn D. Hubbell

University of Montana - Missoula

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COMM 322 PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING

Spring 2012

Instructor: Kathryn D. Hubbell, APR, MS, Fellow PRSA



CONTACT INFORMATION

Virtual Office Hours: Available most evenings from 6-10 p.m. Mountain Time for a Skype call or live chat. Please request a minimum of 24 hours in advance.

E-mail: kathryn.hubbell@umontana.edu

Phone: 406-531-9355



Please note: this syllabus is subject to change according to the needs of the class and current events.

The links below are to help you find your way around the syllabus. If you click "back to top," it will bring you back here.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our focus in this class is to move beyond a simple understanding of the role of a public relations practitioner to learning how to do the writing work required in the profession. We'll be writing in a number of formats and for a number of audiences. We will explore the process of writing, and practice writing a number of different public relations documents for different media; and we'll investigate the process necessary to understand which public relations documents to use in which situations. At the end of this course, you will have produced many of the elements for a professional portfolio to use as you move forward in your career.

This is a fast-paced, writing-intensive class. There are no tests, but you will be writing extensively and expected to adhere to the specific directions for writing each individual assignment. Because of the number of writing assignments, deadlines cannot be missed.

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Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Understand the role of an ethical public relations practitioner in the 21st century
- Comprehend the scope of activities necessary for successful public relations work
- Craft a variety of written messages for a variety of media (both online and off)
- Plan out which written messages are necessary given specific contextual factors
- Feel confident in writing clean, coherent, concise messages
- Have pieces for a professional portfolio to show prospective employers

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COURSE MATERIALS

Required Text:

Smith, R. D. (2012). *Becoming a public relations writer*. (4th Edition). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. ISBN 978-0-415-88802-8

2012 AP Stylebook: Associated Press

Highly recommended:

1. *The Everyday Writer*, Fourth Edition, Andrea A. Lunsford, Franklin E. Horowitz, 2009, St. Martins. ISBN-13: 9780312594565 ISBN-10: 0312594569

OR

2. *A Writer=s Reference*, Sixth Edition. Diana Hacker. 2009, Bedford/St. Martins ISBN-13: 978-0-312-59332-2

Online articles will be posted throughout the course.

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Notes about Taking an Online Class

If this is your first online class:

The rhythm of an online course is very different from on-campus courses. Rather than one class meeting per week, the course activities are distributed over a week to allow for flexibility in participation. Students and instructors may make postings to the course around the clock. Regular participation in discussion board assignment and in all other parts of this course site is mandatory. Though work may be posted at any time of day or night, students need to be accountable to assignment deadlines spelled out in course assignment pages and the course syllabus. All classes will include weekly discussion assignments in addition to papers, case studies and/or any specific projects assigned.

For those who have taken an online course before:

Students report that if they have had a bad experience with an online class, it=s usually due to one of two major reasons: either the instructor was not engaged and rarely present online, or expectations and instructions were not clear. You=ll find I=m online every day. And if expectations and instructions are not clearly spelled out, please let me know. I=ll do all I can to clear things up immediately.

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Teaching Philosophy and Methodology

This is a very results-oriented class, because that=s what counts for PR professionals in the field. Each session is meant to give you a framework through which to think and write about the material, theory or concept presented, and then to bring it all down to earth with real-life examples and questions. Your results in your class will be the writing you do.

I have found the more contact students make (both with their peers and with their instructors) the more successful they are in the course. You=ll have multiple opportunities to communicate and multiple formats for participating; I encourage you to interact and engage as fully as possible. An online class works extremely well when students go beyond participating to supporting and learning from each other.

Our interaction will take place via discussion boards, e-mails, and live chats and/or Skype calls. If you have not downloaded Skype into your computer from www.skype.com, please do so now. It=s free, and it enables us to talk long distance via our computers at no charge. When you have your Skype account set up, please send me your Skype name; I will compile

the names into a group, and initiate a group call from here. Skype calls and live chats are not mandatory, but will earn you extra credit.

You'll need to fill out the initial student survey, unless you have filled one out for me in another class. This stays completely confidential and private between you and me. The survey gives me information about your background, any difficulties you've had with other online classes, your learning style, what you hope to get out of the class, and any concerns or worries you may have. This helps me to better help you. I refer to these surveys often during the class so that I can fine-tune my responses to your questions and concerns.

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Deadlines

Although many time constraints have been released for you in this course, deadlines are still inevitable – and in the field of public relations, they are everything. To keep you caught up in the course there are deadlines by which each assignment must be completed.

Assignments may always be completed earlier than the deadline, *but any assignment that is not up-loaded to the website by 10 p.m. in your time zone on the date due will receive a grade of 0.* Think of it this way: If you don't send out that press release on time, the newspaper doesn't care; the presses run anyway. The online "e-zine" doesn't care; it has plenty of news to post for the day. The traditionally-printed magazine doesn't care; its deadlines are set six months to a year in advance.

Submitting your work:

Please save all work in a Microsoft Word file, if at all possible. If you do not have access to Microsoft Word, you must save the file in rich text format, or "rtf." Although your formatting might not come through, this should guarantee your content makes it to me through cyberspace. I'll convert it back into Word at this end. You'll have a problem when it comes to submitting a brochure or a social media release – basically, anything which requires graphics and formatting. **If you can create those materials and save them in a PDF file, let me know in advance.**

Be VERY CAREFUL in submitting your work to me. You are responsible for making sure the assignment you send is correctly uploaded and readable before or on the due date. I cannot accept assignments which are unreadable; you will not receive credit and will not be able to re-submit such assignments.

This requires some double checking on your part, but it is necessary. **That specifically means that if you're concerned at all, you should e-mail me and ask if I've received the assignment so that I can confirm it for you. If you have not received a confirmation from me, it may not have come through. It is your responsibility to check. I am not going to come looking for you if I do not see your written assignment turned in that week.**

All of your assignments will either be submitted to the discussion board or to me directly through your digital drop box. No assignments are to be submitted via e-mail without specific permission; do **not** submit to e-mail as a backup to the drop box. Just check with me if you are concerned, and wait for my confirmation.

Your assignment files should be saved and named in the following format, so it's clear to me what you are sending in:

Last name, assignment, date

Example:

Hubbell, social media release, Jan 12

Technology

A known fact of technology is that it sometimes fails. Computers crash, printers run out of ink, Internet connections falter. Since the Internet is your only main link to the class, your guiding principles should be to think ahead and be prepared. Save your work often, and in several places. Leave yourself time before assignments are due, and before live chats and Skype calls, to allow for connection errors. Familiarize yourself with communication resources (public libraries, perhaps a friend) in your area in case you need to use them as a back-up to complete your assignments.

The only acceptable technology-related excuse for not meeting the requirements of this course is a documented failure of the Moodle system. If you find the system is not working, e-mail me – but also realize I'll probably find out just as soon as you do. If necessary (if we haven't all received an e-mail about the problem) I'll contact the help desk at CIS – you can as well (Help Desk: 406.243.4357, helpdesk@umontana.edu). You should also continue attempting to access the system – any failures in the system are usually resolved within an hour. If documented failures of the system occurred when an assignment was due, you will not be docked late points, but it is expected that you will try again to get an assignment in as soon as the system is up again.

Flexibility

I understand the needs of working adults: I earned my bachelor's degree while a single parent with two young children, and my master's while running a public relations consulting firm. I try to be as flexible as possible in accommodating your needs.

However, in an emergency, you need to contact me a minimum of 24 hours in advance if you anticipate some problems, or *as soon* as you realize an emergency is taking place that will disrupt your life. Emergencies in this class do not include your involvement in university sports, the large number of classes you are taking, or the fact that your parents are visiting. It is up to you to manage your time well. If you tell me after the fact, there will not be the same leeway. Example: don't tell me two weeks later that your computer crashed and ask if you can make up assignments. I'll tell you no, because it's not fair to the students who did turn in their work on time, when you should have gone to a public library, or a computer lab on campus, or borrowed the use of a friend's computer to complete your work.

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Consideration

The overall atmosphere in the class should be that of respect for yourself, your instructor and everyone else in the class. Help foster an atmosphere where a priority for education and a respect for all students are valued by engaging in comments that relate to course content and showing tolerance for opinions different from your own.

If you decide to work in a public communications field, you need to learn both compassion and respect for others who may differ greatly from you. In public relations, you'll always be speaking and writing on behalf of someone else. Learning to walk in another person's shoes is an extremely important skill in this profession. It almost goes without saying, then, that harassment of any kind is both inappropriate and intolerable; disciplinary action will be taken should it occur.

Your attitude matters in this class, because it matters in public relations. If you whine and complain about the work load, you are more than welcome to leave the class. If, however, you get through any needed re-writes with a cheerful attitude; if you participate each week with a positive outlook; if you encourage your classmates and work to clear up anything that's confusing to you rather than waiting until the last week of class, these things will all be factored into your final grade.

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Grading and Assignments

Grading Components	Possible Points
Discussion board assignments: 1 each week @ 10 pts. each; 2 discussion boards in second week, 13 total weeks (first introductory discussion board is not graded; no discussion board in final week)	130
Week 1, Exercise 1.3 – Free-writing assignment due	25
Week 2: 500-word essay on chosen organization	35
Week 3: Planning sheet due	25
Week 4: Backgrounder/fact sheet	25
Week 5: Memo with newsworthy ideas, activities for organization	25
Week 6: Exercise 7.8 – Re-written newsletter story	25
Week 7: Traditional press release	35
Week 8: Broadcast news release	35
Week 9: Social media news release	35
Week 10: Organizational feature story OR opinion piece	35
Week 12: Blog	35
Week 13: Brochure PSA	35 35
Week 14: Speech: 15 extra-credit points if recorded AND written	35
Total possible points	570

Extra Credit Options:

Creation of a television script and storyboard as outlined in Chapter 17: 20 pts.

Participation in any of the scheduled live chats or Skype calls - 10 points each. MUST RSVP 24 hours in ADVANCE.

Grading is not done on a curve, but by a strict percentage of the total number of points possible, plus any earned extra credit:

A: 95%-100%

A-: 90%- 94%

B+: 87%- 89%

B: 84%- 86%

B-: 80%- 83%

C+: 77%-79%

C: 74%-76%

C-: 70%-73%

D+: 67%-69%

D: 64%-66%

D-: 60%-63%

F: Anything below 60%

Contesting Grades: I am willing to go over any assignment with you to discuss your concerns. Please wait 24 hours after receiving an assignment back before you contact me. When you do contact me, please write down your specific concerns and your backing for these concerns, and I will research your situation. We'll take it from there should further discussion need to occur.

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ASSIGNMENT FORMAT

All assignments must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins on all sides of each page. All assignments MUST be spell-checked and grammar-checked; lack of running a spellchecker and grammar checker will result in a 0 for the assignment. All assignments must include a heading on the paper itself that provides your name, the name of the class, the name of the assignment, and the date the assignment is due. The electronic file name of your assignment must also reflect your last name, the name of the assignment, and the date the assignment is due in this format:

Hubbell, social media release, Jan 12
(do not use periods when naming a file; periods are a command)

Failure to follow this guideline will result in an automatic 10 percent grade reduction.

All assignments are due by 10 p.m. your time on the assigned date. Students are expected to meet all deadlines. Unless you have received specific written permission to hand in a late assignment, it will not be accepted. Directions for each assignment will be posted on our course website. See deadlines section above.

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How Written Assignments are Graded

NOTE: See the "Checklist before you turn in a written assignment" sheet posted on the class site.

Each assignment is read twice before grading: the first time is for content, and the second time is for sentence structure, AP style, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Points are docked heavily for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, AP style, and the like. For the most part, suggestions are provided if there is a problem with content, unless the content has no relevance to the assignment. *If the basic assignment wasn't followed, and/or it is obvious that instructions have not been read, you will either receive 0 points for not following instructions or be asked for a re-write. If you have been asked for a re-write and do not submit it within the week, you will receive 0 points.* Written assignments are normally graded and returned before the beginning of the next week.

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Discussion Forums

Each week you will have the opportunity to participate on the discussion board section of the course website. Message board topics will appear on Monday mornings along with the week's assignments (see below). Your original discussion board post is due by 10 p.m. Friday; you must reply to two of your classmates by 10 p.m. Saturday. You must make every attempt to reply to a student who has not had any response so far that week.

Students learn most when they engage not only with the course content, but also with one another. While I monitor the discussion boards, I don't normally get involved unless you all have a question you need to ask me about the topic at hand, or unless I see you going off

track and misunderstanding some things. It's your chance to be creative and learn from each other.

The discussion boards are worth 10 points each. To earn full credit on the message boards, you must meet the following criteria:

- **You must exhibit that you've read the material.** This means I expect to see parenthetical references (Author, p.#) to applicable sections of the text/notes.
- **You must reply to at least one of your peer's postings.** Your replies must be substantive in nature; that is, I expect you to specifically address what you agree or disagree with, or find interesting or relevant.
- **You must use proper grammar and punctuation.** I recommend typing your response in Word first, running spell and grammar checks, and carefully reviewing your reply before you post it.
- **You must address all parts of the question.** Most discussion questions involve two or more questions. To receive credit, you must address all parts.

Grading

If you receive less than five points, it means you have not responded to your classmates and have some spelling and grammar problems as well.

If you receive five points, it means your original post might have been fine, but you did not respond to your classmates.

If you receive six or seven points, it means you may have responded to your classmates, but somehow you had some grammar and spelling problems or a lot of trouble expressing your thoughts.

If you received eight or nine points, you did a good job but still need to work on some things and those are probably mentioned in the comments section.

If you received 10 points, you did a superior job.

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Weekly Routine

Monday mornings: Check for new assignments, readings for the week, and the discussion board topic

Fridays by 10 pm Mountain Time: Original discussion board comments due.

Saturdays, by 10 p.m. Mountain Time: Responses to two classmates due on discussion boards.

Sundays by 10 p.m. Mountain time: Written assignments are due.

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Class Schedule

WEEK	TOPIC/READING	ASSIGNMENT	DUE
1 <i>Jan. 23-29</i>	Chapter 1: Writing – and what it means to you Chapter 2: Effective writing <input type="checkbox"/> Overview of public relations	<input type="checkbox"/> Fill out initial student survey <input type="checkbox"/> Introduce self and project on first discussion board <input type="checkbox"/> First free-writing assignment due; instructions posted separately	Jan. 27 Jan. 27 Jan. 29
2 <i>Jan. 29- Feb. 5</i>	Chapter 3: Persuasive and ethical communication Review of Chapters 1 and 2 2 discussion boards this week	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board posts due (2) <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates on discussion board due (2 each) <input type="checkbox"/> 500-word essay on chosen organization with contact information for the person with whom you're in touch	Feb. 3 Feb. 4 Feb. 5
3 <i>Feb. 6-12</i>	Chapter 4: The Writing Process	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Planning sheet due	Feb. 10 Feb. 11 Feb. 12
4 <i>Feb. 13-19</i>	Chapter 5: Public Relations Writing for Journalistic Media	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Respond to Message Board Post <input type="checkbox"/> Memo on newsworthy ideas, activities due	Feb. 17 Feb. 18 Feb. 19
5 <i>Feb. 20-26</i>	Chapter 6: Fact Sheet and Advisory	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Backgrounder fact sheet due	Feb. 24 Feb. 25 Feb. 26
6 <i>Feb. 27- Mar. 4</i>	Chapter 7: News Writing Style/legal issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise 7.8: re-written newsletter story due	Mar. 2 Mar. 3 Mar. 4
7 <i>Mar. 5-11</i>	Chapter 8: Print News Release	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Response to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional news release due	Mar. 9 Mar. 10 Mar. 11
8 <i>Mar. 12-18</i>	Chapter 9: Broadcast News Release	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Broadcast news release due	Mar. 16 Mar. 17 Mar. 18
9 <i>Mar. 19-25</i>	Chapter 10: Multimedia and Social Media Release	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board posts due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Social media release due	Mar. 23 Mar. 24 Mar. 25
10 <i>Mar. 26- April 1</i>	Chapter 11: Organizational Feature Chapter 12: Advocacy and Opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational feature story OR opinion piece due	Mar. 30 Mar. 31 Apr. 1
11 <i>April 2-8</i>	Spring break!	<input type="checkbox"/>	

12 April 9-15	Chapter 14: Website, Blog and Wiki	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Blog due	Apr. 6 Apr. 7 Apr. 8
13 April 16-22	Chapter 15: Flier and Brochure Chapter 17: Public Relations Advertising	<input type="checkbox"/> No discussion board this week <input type="checkbox"/> Brochure due <input type="checkbox"/> PSA due	Apr. 22 Apr. 22
14 April 23-29	Chapter 18: Speeches	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board post due <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to classmates due <input type="checkbox"/> Speech due <input type="checkbox"/> Recording of speech due (optional, extra-credit)	Apr. 27 Apr. 28 Apr. 29 Apr. 29
15 April 30- May 6	Tweak Week – choose any two already-graded assignments and re-do them for a higher grade this week	<input type="checkbox"/> No discussion board this week <input type="checkbox"/> Extra credit TV script/storyboard due <input type="checkbox"/> Re-done assignment due	May 3 – note early deadline May 6
16 May 7-13	Wrap-up: Final portfolio due	<input type="checkbox"/> Portfolio final deadline	May 10

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Getting Started

Initial Class Survey

There is a survey posted on our class site for you to tell me more about yourself, your background, your learning style, and any concerns or doubts you might have about an online class or the general format of this class. Filling out this survey is mandatory, but it is ungraded. The information you provide will stay confidential between you and me, but it will help me to know how to help you.

Choosing your organization:

This semester, you will act as the PR person for an organization of your choosing (your employer, a family business, a place you volunteer, a nonprofit, etc.). I believe using the same "client" for all assignments in this class not only makes the project more meaningful and real to you, but it makes you a better writer. Anyone can just schlep together information they've gleaned from the Internet, but it takes more skill and effort to find and create your own news. You will write all of your assignments for this organization, and thus you need to choose an organization worthy of a semester-long project. I'm not saying McDonald's or the Old Post are not worthwhile organizations, but I am saying it will be more difficult for you to complete certain elements of this course (e.g. organizational features, news releases) if you choose an organization that really doesn't have much going on. *Hint: non-profits work really well for these types of projects.*

All that being said, please don't swallow the whale. Don't choose a national or regional organization: choose something small and local which is easily accessible to you. You'll need to call for an interview and you might need to go back more than once.

By the beginning of the second week of class, email me the **name of the organization, your contact person's name, their phone number, and their email address.** Be sure to CC your email to your contact person so I can verify it is legit.

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Academic Integrity

All students taking this course must adhere to the University of Montana's academic dishonesty policy as presented in the Student Conduct Code (SCC). As noted in the code, students are expected to practice academic honesty. Any actions that include, but are not limited to, the following behaviors are reasons for pursuing academic and university sanctions: plagiarism, copying another student's exam, allowing another student to copy from your exam or work, sharing information with another student during testing sessions, acquiring or possessing an exam without the instructor's permission, tampering with course materials or resources (including library references) submitting false information (data, quotations, citations, etc.), representing someone else's work as your own, etc. Anyone caught in any act of academic dishonesty will, at the very least, receive 0 points for the assignment. In addition, steps will be taken to initiate University sanctions, as provided for in the SCC. You are responsible for reading and understanding this code – if you have any questions, please contact me or the department chair. The SCC can be viewed at www.umt.edu/studentaffairs/sccAcademicConduct.htm#9

Original Work – I expect all the work you do in this class to be completely original. No work that has been done by classmates (current or previous) may be used by you, in whole or in part, for your work in this class. No work that you have done for any other course - or in this course if you have taken it previously - may be submitted to fulfill the assignments in this class. Finally, absolutely no [plagiarism](#) (from the web, from organizations, from any other source) will be tolerated – be sure that everything you write in this class is completely your own creation. ***I will be checking the hot links in your documents as well as your sources; and you should know that I am very sensitive to writing style.*** If something in your paper is completely different from the way you normally write, it'll raise a red flag and I'll start looking for the actual source.

Bottom line: do your own thinking. Ask me tons of questions – there is no such thing as a stupid question, ever – but stretch your own brains and come to your own conclusions. These things will bring out your own individual personalities and unique traits, and when it comes to public communications those are highly valuable attributes to have.

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About the Instructor

Kathryn D. Hubbell, APR, M.S., Fellow PRSA, and owner of AdScripts, Inc. (www.adscripts.com) has 28 years' experience in public relations, marketing and advertising. She holds a degree in journalism with a focus in public relations from the University of Oregon, is accredited in public relations through the Public Relations Society of America, and holds a Master's in Communications Management from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University in New York. Stories she has written for her clients have appeared in local, national and international publications and broadcast outlets, and she has won awards for her work in advertising as well as for her work in public relations.

Kathy has specialized expertise in research and strategic planning, marketing, media relations, crisis communications and interview training. She has worked in fields as diverse as tourism, healthcare, commercial real estate development, the quick-lube industry, professional services, the wood and paper products industries, public utilities, government services, law enforcement, and manufacturing.

Kathy was the original founder of the Missoula Businesswomen's Network in 1984, an organization still going strong with more than 200 members; and she founded the Montana Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. She served as 2001 Chair of PRSA's

North Pacific District, encompassing eight western states and served on the national PRSA Board of Directors from 2008-2009. She was inducted into PRSA's College of Fellows in 2006.

On a personal note, she loves annual trips to Glacier National Park, respites at the Oregon Coast, music, theater, hiking, sailing, writing and reading, and spending time with her grandchildren.

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