



University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

College of Fine Arts and Communication
Division of Communication

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Communication 334: Writing for Public Relations

T 1p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

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M: 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.	: Office Hours
W: 3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	
By appointment	

Required Texts:

- Thomas H. Bivins, *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format*, Eighth Edition (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2014). Available: UWSP Text Rental.
- Additional readings posted to our class D2L site.

Course Description

Whether you are interested in working for a non-profit, corporation or political campaign, effective written communication is paramount for success. Throughout the semester we will take a hands-on approach to public relations writing, as well as internal communication best practices. We will research a variety of strategic communication case studies where written communication was used effectively and ineffectively. Alongside analyzing real-life and fictional case studies, this course will help you build your own strategic communication writing and editing skills. As part of the course, you will be asked to write news releases, news advisories, fact sheets, key messages, blog and Twitter posts, newsletters, press kits, and speeches. To reach these goals, we will rely on our textbook, as well as additional readings. Each class session is designed to incorporate discussion, as well as individual and group assignments.

Course Objectives

1. Compose effective Public Relations messages through AP Style, flawless grammar, and clear writing.
2. Analyze one's target audience, as well as the immediate opportunities and constraints that help/hinder communication with that audience.
3. Create a digital newsroom of basic Strategic Communication Materials to appeal to a target audience.
4. Demonstrate understanding of the ethical principles surrounding the field of Public Relations.

Division of Communication Learning Objectives for Communication Majors

This course will help you achieve the Division's objectives for all majors, especially numbers 1 and 2

1. Communicate effectively using appropriate technologies for diverse audiences.

2. Plan, evaluate and conduct basic communication research.
3. Use communication theories to understand and solve communication problems.
4. Apply historical communication perspectives to contemporary issues and practices.
5. Apply principles of ethical decision making in communication contexts.

Course Requirements

Assignments	Points
Course Policies Agreement	20
In-Class Activities and Professionalism	80
Weekly Homework (8 @ 62.5 points each)	500
In-Class Group Activities (4 @ 50 points each)	200
Quizzes (3 -- 2 @ 50 points ; 1 @ 100 points)	200
TOTAL	1,000

Extra Credit: Extra credit may be announced in class only. These opportunities are optional. Specific directions will be provided when the opportunity arises.

Course Policies Agreement

At the start of the semester students will electronically sign a course policies agreement and upload it to the D2L dropbox. The course policy agreement lists documents that must be reviewed before the course begins. To receive credit, students must read the appropriate documents, indicate that the materials have been read, and then upload the agreement to the D2L dropbox.

In-Class Professionalism

Class discussions and activities are vital to your understanding of key course concepts. Just like in the public relations world, many of the activities and presentations in this course are collaborative. That being said, it is vital for you to come to class, and constructively collaborate with your colleagues. This will help you better understand the course concepts, and prepare you for collaborating on graded group projects. As such, attendance is strongly encouraged.

Throughout the semester **80 points** will be allocated toward your In-Class Professionalism grade. **Please note that simply attending class does not constitute as full professionalism.** Students are expected to be active in class (i.e., engaged in discussion/activities and making substantive connections to the course material/textbook). Below are four Professionalism principles. Students who follow all four of these principles will receive full points for professionalism.

- **Participation:** Participation includes making helpful comments, grounded in key course concepts. These comments should help others in the class better understand the material. Remember that active listening is another key communication component.
- **Preparation:** Everyone is expected to have their book and read the assigned chapter(s) before attending class.
- **Punctuality:** There are unavoidable circumstances to be late, but make every effort to always arrive on time. If, for some reason, you run late on presentation days, **do not walk into the classroom or knock on the door while one of your classmates is presenting.** Please wait until the presentation has

finished to enter.

- **Politeness:** The classroom is an inclusive and professional environment. Everyone is to be treated with respect. Do not engage in side conversations, or be disruptive, when someone is speaking in front of the room. All types of communication in this course should be formal and professional. For example, when emailing the instructor or your colleagues, remember to include a proper subject line, greeting, and proper grammar.

Anyone who misses a class should make arrangements with another student to copy notes, review announcements, and so forth. The instructor will present course materials only during designated class periods and will not reiterate materials from an entire class session during office hours. If students have specific questions that seek clarification about course content from a previous class period, they should not hesitate to ask, and the instructor will gladly work to clarify the course materials. However, students should not arrive at an instructor's office hours with the assumption that the instructor will "go over whatever I missed." Continually arriving late and/or leaving early is strongly discouraged. If it becomes a distraction, the instructor will reach out directly to the student via email or face-to-face.

Weekly Homework

Because this is a hybrid class, throughout the semester students will be asked to complete regular homework assignments following lecture/discussion. Homework assignments will be handed out at the end of class. Homework assignments are due Saturdays by 11:59 p.m. Instructions and grading criteria for each week's homework will be given in class.

Reading/Lecture/AP Style Quizzes

There will be four quizzes throughout the semester. Quizzes are to test key ideas from the readings, lectures, class discussions and your grasp on grammar and AP style. Each quiz will be a different format (i.e., multiple choice, fill in the blank, short answer, etc.).

GENERAL GRADING POLICIES

Submission of Assignments

All assignments should be submitted **on D2L** by the specified date. You do not need to print off hard copies (unless otherwise specified).

Grading Policy

All course work is due by the date and time listed in the schedule unless otherwise noted. Requests to extend a due date for an assignment will be handled on a case-by-case basis, and the instructor has final say about any such arrangement. Requests should be made before an assignment is due—except in extenuating circumstances with documentation. Late work automatically will be docked 10% for each 24 hours after an assignment is due. *Please note: Even if an assignment is turned in 1-minute past the deadline it will be considered late and subject to the 10% penalty.*

Discussion of grades on assignments must take place before two weeks have elapsed from the receipt of the grade. After this, students are free to contact the instructor for clarification about a grade, but all numeric scores for assignments are final and will not be modified, regardless of the result of the discussion. In other words, don't wait until the last week of the class to ask about a possible grading

error on an assignment that was completed more than two weeks prior. Grade disputes must be submitted in a written format (printed document or via email). In the document, provide concrete and defensible reasons for disputing a grade. Following receipt of the document, the instructor will review it and either reply with an explanation and/or may request a meeting with the student.

Grading Criteria for All Written Assignments

Written assignments for this class should follow the assignment guidelines. In any written work, please remember to provide arguments with ample evidence. This course is graded with the idea that an “A” is reserved for outstanding work. This means that the assignment demonstrates strong critical-thinking skills, makes an argument, supports it with ample evidence and is virtually error free. In contrast, a “C” is reserved for average work. This means that the assignment follows the minimum requirements, but may be unclear or not contain enough support.

Here are a few guidelines to follow before submitting written documents:

- Assignments should follow ALL the guidelines posted to D2L.
- Ideas are clearly expressed and supported with ample evidence from the course readings and/or outside sources.
- Assignments contain proper grammar and spelling (i.e., the paper has been thoroughly proofread). One way to ensure a paper is error free and easy to read is to read the paper out loud prior to submitting.
- Any assignment should follow AP style guidelines.
- Specific grading rubrics for each assignment will be available prior to its submission.

Revision Policy

One of the key aspects to this course is to hone in your writing skills. As part of that focus, editing is always the most important part of the writing process. Those who earn less than an 80 percent on a written homework assignment will be permitted to revise the assignment in order to improve the grade, according to the following policy:

1. No revisions will be allowed for written assignments earning an 80 percent or higher.
2. A revision does NOT guarantee a higher grade. You must show significant improvement to earn a higher grade.
3. A revision can improve the grade by up to 5 percentage points.
4. No revisions will be permitted for group projects or the final project.
5. Revisions will be due one week after you receive feedback.
6. Late work cannot be revised.

Final Grade Scale

Grading Scale	Letter Grade
1000-925	A
924-895	A-
894-875	B+
874-825	B
824-795	B-
794-775	C+

774-725	C
724-695	C-
694-675	D+
674-625	D
624-595	D-
594-0	F

GENERAL COURSE POLICIES

Read the following policies carefully. Enrollment in the class constitutes agreement with and understanding of these policies. Ignorance of these policies does not excuse their violation.

Technology in the Classroom

Laptops or tablets may be used to take notes and for collaborative in-class assignments. Cell phones should be silenced and not used in the classroom. If you are expecting a phone call or text message that is absolutely urgent, please let the instructor know ahead of time, and then quietly excuse yourself from the room to take care of the matter. Adherence of this technology policy is part of the Participation and Professionalism course grade.

Excuses for Missed Work

Your instructor, on a case-by-case basis, will evaluate excuses for missed work. Permission to make up missed work will be granted only in the most unusual of circumstances, and only for excused absences. Any work missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up. These requirements are necessarily strict and enforced in order to provide fairness to all class participants.

To be eligible for permission to make up an assignment due to a verified absence, you must provide:

- Written evidence of the absolute need for you to be absent (emails are not acceptable)
- This evidence must be from an appropriate, verifiable source

Evidence must be presented to your instructor no later than one week after the missed assignment. Except in the cases of extreme emergency, however, students who need to be absent should contact their Instructor at least one week *prior* to the date they will be absent. The primary requirement of the evidence for the absence is that it must demonstrate that a circumstance beyond your control required you to miss class on that day. Not being able to find a parking space is not a circumstance beyond your control, nor is oversleeping. On the other hand, if you have a note from a doctor verifying that you had an illness that prevented you from attending class, that would count as a circumstance beyond your control, as would being called up for military service or jury duty, as long as you provide the appropriate documentation. When it comes to being present and prepared on the days a quiz or class assignment is being given, it is presumed that most things are under your control. You will only be permitted to make up a quiz or assignment due to extraordinary crises. Carelessness and unpreparedness, and all the things that result from them, will not be considered valid reasons for making up a speech or exam.

Technology Requirements

Written work must be posted to the D2L dropbox in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or PDF formats only. No other formats will be accepted. If the instructor cannot open your document, it will not count as

being turned in, and you must reformat and repost. Late penalties will apply. Be sure to keep copies of your work and the feedback for the entire duration of the class.

When necessary, the instructor will communicate with the class and/or individual students via the email address listed in your D2L account. It is your responsibility to check that email account regularly.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

From the UWSP 14.01 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES – Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others’ academic endeavors. Students who violate these standards must be confronted and must accept the consequences of their actions. For more info: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>

Note: Submissions via D2L will be automatically screened for plagiarism.

Students with Special Needs/Disabilities

If you have a disability and require accommodation, please register with the Disability and Assistive Technology Center (6th floor of the Learning Resource Center – that is, the Library) and contact me at the beginning of the course. More information is available here:

<http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency, this course complies with UWSP’s outline for various situations. A full list of these emergency plans is available here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures/default.aspx>

A Note on Achieving Academic Success in this Course

I cannot wait to work with each and every one of you throughout the semester. I want everyone in this course to achieve their academic goals. To reach this end, I am happy to be here for you as much as you’d like. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email or stop by my office at any time. Throughout the semester there will be at least one required one-on-one individual appointment to discuss class participation and course goals. However, if you’d like to discuss individual assignments or anything, do not hesitate to reach out.

Course Schedule

This schedule reflects major readings and writing assignments. Additional assignments may be required throughout the semester. I may make changes to this schedule as I see fit to meet the needs of the class and take advantage of opportunities on your behalf.

Class Date	Topic	Readings	Graded Assignments
Jan. 23	Introduction to the Course	Syllabus Bivins Chapter 1	
Jan. 30	News Vs. Public Relations	Bivins Chapter 7 In-Class Activity on News Releases Vs. News	Course Policies Agreement

	News Releases	Bring to class 1 piece of controlled information and 1 piece of uncontrolled information	
Feb. 6	The Role of Rhetoric in PR Writing	Heinrichs, "Thank You For Arguing," Chapter 12, 13 & 24 Arguments and Term Shifting vs. Redefining Activity	Homework 1
Feb. 13	In-Class Activity	In-Class Activity – Writing an Impromptu News Releases	Homework 2
Feb. 20	Quiz 1	Quiz 1	
Feb. 27	Defining Your Goals / Purpose	Heinrichs, "Thank You For Arguing," Chapter 2, 3 & 4,	
March 6	Speaking to Your Audience	Heinrichs, "Thank You For Arguing," 6, 7 & 8	Homework 3
March 13	Interviewing and Professional Writing	Beebe and Mottet, Interviewing In-Class Activity on Interviewing Skills	Homework 4
March 20	Quiz 2	Quiz 2	
March 27		SPRING BREAK	
April 3	In-Class Activity	Group Interview / Improptu News Conference	Homework 5
April 10	Long-Form Writing and Controlled Publication	TBD Heinrichs, "Thank You For Arguing," Chapter 20	
April 17	In-Class Group Activity	In-Class Group Activity – Creating a Digital Newsroom	Homework 6
April 24	Writing Speeches	Bivins, Chapter 11	Homework 7
May 1	Writing a Meeting Agenda / Running a Meeting	Beebe and Mottet, Meetings Work with groups for next week	Homework 8
May 8	In-Class Activity	In-Class Meeting Activity – Running a Meeting	
Finals Week	Quiz 3	Quiz 3	

