

**WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Communication**  
**PR 358, Public Relations Writing & Production**

**Faculty Name:** Kenneth D. Payne

**Course Title:** Public Relations Writing & Production

**Class Days / Hours:** Online

**Course Number:** PR 358

**Semester:** Spring

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**Office Hours:** Monday and Tuesday: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. - or by appointment

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**CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Effective writing for various media to achieve organizational goals. Includes news, features, public service announcements, backgrounders and newsletter copy, using governing communication and persuasion techniques.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

After this course, students will:

1. Have the skills to plan, produce and evaluate public relations communication intended for internal and external publics, and for the mass media;
2. Be able to identify and use reliable sources of information;
3. Be familiar with the talents, knowledge, skills and techniques needed to effectively communicate internally and externally, including global communication with its historical, linguistic and cultural nuances;
4. Have the understanding of the legal, ethical and moral considerations inherent in PR;
5. Be familiar with the knowledge, skills, and talents needed to enhance an organization's internal and external images through effective communication; and
6. Be able to write without spelling, grammatical or punctuation errors.
7. Be able to understand the issues and perspectives that are inclusive in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation

**OVERVIEW OF CONTENT: MAJOR TOPICS**

PR358 is divided into three (3) sections.

**Part One: The Basics of Public Relations Writing**

This section provides the basic framework of today's public relations practice and the role of the public relations writer. **Chapter 1** reviews the basic concepts of good writing, errors to avoid, and what resources are needed. **Chapter 2** continues with the components of persuasive writing, provides a brief overview of major

communication theories, and ends with the ethical responsibilities of the public relations writer. **Chapter 3** helps you think strategically and creatively about what makes news. Traditional journalistic values are emphasized, but you are also shown how to brainstorm ideas to generate news through special events, contests, and even stunts. **Chapter 4** is about effective media relations—how public relations personnel work with journalists and bloggers for everyone’s mutual benefit. How to communicate during a crisis also is covered.

### **Part Two: Writing for Mass Media**

The focus of this section is on how to prepare basic materials for distribution to traditional mass media outlets and online news sites. **Chapter 5** thoroughly details the structure and format of the news release. Attention is given to writing and formatting digital news releases, including multimedia ones, that are distributed via email, web-sites, and wire services. **Chapter 6** continues the process by detailing how to prepare fact sheets, media advisories, and media kits. Particularly valuable is a detailed section on how to “pitch” journalists a story. **Chapter 7** focuses on the writing of news features, such as personality profiles and product-application stories. The writing of opinion pieces, such as op-eds, is also discussed. **Chapter 8** examines the elements of good publicity photos and infographics, which often make a story more attractive to editors. It also offers suggestions on how to work with photographers and how to write photo captions. **Chapter 9** is about writing news releases for radio and television. The mechanics of video news releases (VNRs) and B-roll packages are explained, as well as how to book guests on talk shows and conduct a satellite media tour. The chapter ends with tips on how to produce a video for YouTube or a company intranet. **Chapter 10** is a detailed examination of how to use media databases and distribute public relations materials a number of ways, including via email, online newsrooms, wire services, social media, mobile devices, apps, and even QR codes. The pros and cons of each method are discussed.

### **Part Three: Writing for Other Media**

A major aspect of public relations is writing for “controlled” or “sponsored” media; in other words, media that don’t have external gatekeepers who filter the organization’s messages. **Chapter 13** offers information on how to write and design print and online newsletters and brochures. The writing format for company intranets, as well as annual reports, is also discussed. **Chapter 14** offers students tips on email etiquette, how to write a business letter, and how to organize a proposal offering public relations services. **Chapter 15** is about how to write and give speeches and presentations. Guidelines for PowerPoint and Prezi are provided. **Chapter 16** is about preparing direct mail pieces, primarily for nonprofit organizations, and the key elements of public relations advertising. Other media such as billboards, transit panels, and event T-shirts are discussed.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES AND METHODOLOGY**

1. Lectures and discussions
2. Demonstrations and simulations

3. Group activities
4. Individual conferences
5. Reading and writing assignments
6. Guest lectures and field experiences

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

See also Assignment Schedule (Blackboard)

Here are brief descriptions for the major written assignments in this course. More details and grading rubrics will be posted to Blackboard.

### **Content Creation and Online Newsroom Management (Assignments)**

You will develop and maintain an online newsroom in support of your communication campaign to influence the target behavior and effect behavioral change. The shell of the online newsroom is created for you in Wordpress. It is your responsibility to fill the online newsroom content and messaging that will **support your client and influence the target behavior**. All media products developed in this class, and there are many, will ultimately find their way to the online newsroom. Grading for this assignment will include the individual media products themselves, and their overall distribution through traditional and social media channels.

**The online newsroom and content contained within account for 40% of your final grade for the course.**

### **Press Kit**

The final project for the course will be to assemble a Press Kit from all individual digital assets posted to the online newsroom. Special care should be noted for all individual assignments proceeding the press kit assignment as mistakes and oversights will only be compounded when the digital assets are aggregated and distributed. Details on how you will accomplish this assignment will be discussed in detail on Blackboard.

**This assignment accounts for 20% of your final grade for the course.**

### **Reading Guides**

Each chapter of the assigned text has an associated reading guide consisting of 10-20 multiple-choice or true/false questions.

**Each reading guide is worth 100 points and in total accounts for 15% of your final grade for the course. (Your lowest two grades will be dropped for this assignment)**

### **Online Newsroom Analysis**

You will choose from a list a group of companies within a specific industry and analyze their online newsroom efforts. Details on how you will accomplish with this assignment will be discussed in detail on Blackboard.

**This assignment accounts for 5% of your final grade for the course.**

### **Media Monitoring**

As part of surveying your environment, you will establish and monitor an electronic clip sheet of the target behavior and those entities, events and products that surround the target behavior. Details on how you will accomplish this assignment will be discussed in detail on Blackboard.

**This assignment accounts for 5% of your final grade for the course.**

### **Indirect Measures of Beliefs**

As part of evaluating local attitudes toward the target behavior, you will conduct an informal focus group using subjects within the target demographic and report your findings. Details on how you will accomplish this assignment will be discussed in detail on Blackboard.

**This assignment accounts for 5% of your final grade for the course.**

### **White Paper**

As part of your reporting process, you will write a 2-page white paper detailing your background and primary research as it pertains to the target behavior and group. Details on how you will accomplish this assignment will be discussed in detail on Blackboard.

**This assignment accounts for 5% of your final grade for the course.**

### **Cision University**

As part of your learning process, you will complete the Cision University Program utilizing the CisionPoint software solution for media list building. Details on how you will accomplish this assignment will be discussed in detail on Blackboard.

**This assignment accounts for 5% of your final grade for the course.**

### **REQUIRED TEXTBOOK(S)/RESOURCES**

Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques, Seventh Edition

**ISBN-13:** 9780205211678

**Author(s):** Dennis L. Wilcox; Bryan H. Reber

**I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THE EBOOK! See "Get The Book" link on this course site for details.**

## **GRADE SCALE**

Course grades will be assigned based on the following ratio:

Online Newsroom and Production Assignments - 40%

Reading Guides - 20%

Press Kit - 20%

Media Monitoring - 5%

White Paper - 5%

Online Newsroom Analysis - 5%

Indirect Measures of Behavioral Beliefs - 5%

90 - 100 = A; 80 - 89 = B; 70 - 79 = C; 60 - 69 = D; 0 - 59 = F

## **GENERAL REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS**

### **Special accommodations:**

*In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course just contact the Office for Student Disability Services in DUC A-200 of the Student Success Center in Downing University Center. The OFSDS telephone number is (270)745-5004 V/TDD. Please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services*

### **Academic Dishonesty**

To represent ideas or interpretations taken from another source as one's own is plagiarism. Plagiarism is a serious offense. The academic work of a student must be his or her own. Students must give the author(s) credit for any source material used. To lift content directly from a source without giving credit is a flagrant act. To present a borrowed passage after having changed a few words, even if the source is cited, is also plagiarism. Disposition of Offenses - Students who commit any act of academic dishonesty may receive from the instructor a failing grade in that portion of the course work in which the act is detected or a failing grade in the course without possibility of withdrawal.

### **Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy**

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) at

<https://wku.edu/eoo/documents/titleix/wkutitleixpolicyandgrievanceprocedure.pdf>

and

Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) at

[https://wku.edu/policies/hr\\_policies/2040\\_discrimination\\_harassment\\_policy.pdf](https://wku.edu/policies/hr_policies/2040_discrimination_harassment_policy.pdf).

Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.

Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are “Responsible Employees” of the University and **MUST** report what you share to WKU’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU’s Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

I view teaching as behavior that strengthens and motivates the intent to learn, and learning as the acquisition and command of a realm of knowledge and skills. Thus, as Dr. Steve Thien from Kansas State University reminds us; “teaching others to learn is a teacher’s most important gift.” To accomplish this learn-to-learn goal, I’ve developed a set of tenets that I use to not only develop and design my classes, but also measure my teaching effectiveness and student learning. They are:

#### **Encourage students to take risks.**

Experiences of discovery are invitations to deep learning. Whether such experiences take the form of invention, insight, seeing new landscapes, or seeing familiar landscapes in new ways, their impact on the learner is to open new horizons and to develop the habit of curiosity. This philosophy implies a level of accepted risk.

I encourage students to take risks – and hold the ladder when necessary.

#### **Allow students to fail.**

Collaborative learning thrives on problem-based curricula that require students to grapple with ambiguous and difficult dilemmas. Too often the value of collaboration is thought in terms of a division of labor, instead of leveraging diverse expertise and perspectives to cope with difficult challenges. As one well known business leader lamented, “I never learned anything from my successes, only my failures.”

I allow students to fail – and pick them up when necessary.

#### **Challenge students to think.**

Student' s presentations and projects that are given without the benefit of an appointed critic deprive students of meaningful opportunities to model critical thinking. In this manner, students have ample opportunity to hone their skills in critical thinking and dialogue – not only by comparing the performance of other groups with their own, but also by gaining practice in offering tactful and constructive criticism.

I challenge students to think – and support their views when necessary.

**Evaluate students based on performance.**

The learn-to-learn model relies strongly upon the use of rubric-based assessment to distinguish among levels of competency. Rubrics are criteria by which students can judge their own work and the work of others – a way to generalize levels of competency. Assessment criteria are public and provide a helpful way to reinforce expectations for student performance and to benchmark one's own progress on skill development.

I evaluate student performance – and hold them responsible for results.