

CMA 313 – Writing for Public Relations

Hood College, Spring 2009

Class meets Wednesday, 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
215 Rosenstock Hall

Instructor April Finnen

E-mail finnen@hood.edu

Phone 301-693-9799 (do not call after 9:00 p.m.)

Office hours Immediately before and after class, and by appointment
Office: 211 Rosenstock Hall

Course Description

Mastering the art of public relations writing is key to a career in any area of the field. Professional communicators must be able to clearly and expertly communicate messages to any audience, often on-demand. This course will prepare students for their first jobs in the field of public relations, where they will be expected to write and produce a variety of publicity materials. The course will focus on practical writing skills, including formatting and grammar. Students will create a portfolio of work samples.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you will:

- Be better prepared for your first job in the field of public relations or marketing.
- Understand the various formats available to you as a public relations writer, and have practical experience creating many of them.
- Understand the importance of grammar, spelling, style and tone, and know how to apply these correctly to a variety of documents and electronic materials.
- Have a portfolio of work samples, which will be useful for job interviews in the public relations field.

Prerequisites

- To be successful in this class, you need to have passed:
 - CMA 201 and 310
 - ENGL 100, 101 or 3 credits from ENGL 110-139
- You need to be familiar with AP Style.

Required Text

This is the required textbook for this course; it contains examples of writing styles and formats which you will need to review to successfully complete most of the assignments in this course. Additional readings may be required; these will be provided by the instructor.

- *The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice*, Barbara Diggs-Brown, 2nd edition

Recommended Reading and Resources

The following are good resources for any public relations professional, both for this course and for your future career.

- *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar & Style*, Kessler and McDonald, 7th edition
- *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*, edited by Norm Goldstein
- *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format*, Thomas H. Bivins, 6th edition
- A dictionary and a thesaurus
- *The Washington Post* or the *Frederick News-Post* (daily newspapers) – These newspapers will be the basis for brief current events discussion in each class.

Class Policies and Expectations

This class is designed to help you prepare for a professional environment. We will follow generally accepted business etiquette, as if you were attending a meeting required for a professional job, instead of a college class.

In the business world, if you do not follow the rules, you will very likely be fired from your job. In this class, if you fail to follow the rules listed below, class participation points will be deducted; the number of points deducted will depend upon the frequency and severity of breaches. You are expected to:

- Notify the instructor in advance if you will miss a class. More than one unexcused absence will result in a reduction of 100 points (one letter grade) from your *total* course grade per additional unexcused absence.
 - You must attend class on **both** April 8 and April 15, regardless of which day you are presenting, unless you have prior written consent from the instructor. Peer evaluations on both days will count toward your grade.
- Arrive on time and be ready to begin when class starts, promptly at 5:30 p.m. Consistent lateness—even by a few minutes—will lower your participation grade.
- Devote your full attention to the task at hand: this class.
- Please do not eat dinner in class.
- iPods, text messaging and cell phones are not allowed in business meetings. Silence your phone, or turn it off. **Do not answer the phone, send text messages or listen to your iPod or headphones during class.** Do not sleep during class.
 - Participation is an important part of your grade, and if you do any of these things, you will receive a zero for class participation for that day, and the instructor may ask you to leave for the day.
 - If you do any of these things more than once, you will receive a zero for class participation for the semester.
- If classes are canceled for weather or other reasons, by the college or by the instructor, assignments are still due by 5:30 p.m. on the due date, submitted electronically.

Class Rules

- Student participation in class discussions and exercises is encouraged and will count toward your final grade. *The Washington Post* will be the basis of group discussion on current events at the beginning of each class. (The online version is fine, and is available free with registration.)
- Unexcused and/or excessive absences will negatively impact your final grade.
- Assigned readings in your textbooks should be completed prior to class.
- Assignments are due on the specified date before class begins for electronically submitted assignments or during class for non-electronically submitted assignments. Points will be deducted for late assignments at the instructor's discretion.
- Students are expected to abide by and uphold the Hood College Honor Code.

Writing Assignment Guidelines

Unless specified otherwise, all assignments must adhere to the following formatting guidelines:

- Typed
- Double-spaced
- 12 point serif font (for example, Times New Roman)
- 1 inch margins (top, bottom, right, left)
- Left-justified
- 8 ½" x 11" white paper
- Proofread / checked for spelling and grammatical errors
- Student name and assignment number on all pages

Blackboard is Required

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are to be submitted in Blackboard.

I will use the course list in Blackboard to send out course-related announcements periodically, so please check your Hood e-mail for updates, or update your e-mail address in Blackboard so that it will automatically send to the address you prefer.

Evaluation and Grading

You will have a total of 1000 possible points for the semester. Each assignment will contribute points to your final grade, along with points for class participation, peer evaluations of in-class presentations, and optional extra credit points. To determine your final grade, divide the total number of points you have earned by 100 at the end of the semester.

Writing assignments	65%
Final portfolio	15%
Class participation	10%
Grammar exercises	9%
Peer evaluation	1%
	100%

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	0-59

This is a writing class. All assignments should be proofread and checked for spelling and grammar errors, AP style compliance and overall presentation before you turn them in. Points will be deducted for spelling, grammar and AP style errors, particularly if it is an error or usage point that we have covered in class. Please re-read instructions for each assignment before you submit your work, to ensure that you have included required elements.

Portfolio and Writing Assignments

Details for each assignment will be available at least one week before the assignment is due. Instructions and due dates for the first few assignments are included in the following pages.

The basis for all of your writing assignments (unless otherwise specified) will be a fictional non-profit organization of your choosing. While your organization may resemble a real organization in mission and/or name, you may not copy an actual organization's mission, Web site or other materials. Copying or slightly altering any existing organization's materials or another student's work is considered plagiarism and a violation of the Hood College Honor Code.

Assignments will be submitted using both in-class submission and Blackboard. Please refer to the assignment detail pages for submission instructions for each assignment. Your first three assignments will be due in class.

Any assignments submitted electronically (via Blackboard or e-mail) must be submitted before class begins (5:30 p.m.) on the day they are due, or earlier, even if you will not be in class that day. If you must miss a class where an assignment is to be turned in in-person, your assignment must be turned in before class begins that day (or earlier).

For your final portfolio, you will submit corrected versions of assignments #2 through #9, and two or three additional pieces (the third additional piece is optional, to earn possible extra credit points). Further detail will be provided on the assignment description.

Late Assignments

I will subtract 5 points per 24-hour period an assignment is late. Because most assignments in this class are worth 50 points, this is equivalent to one letter grade. So, if your assignment is due at 5:30 p.m. on January 28 and you submit it at 5:31 p.m. according to the time stamp in Blackboard, I will subtract 5 points from your assignment grade (not including deductions for any errors made in the actual assignment). If you submit it the following day (January 29) at 5:31 p.m. or later, I will subtract 10 points, and so on. If you submit a 50-point assignment more than 4 days late (-20 points), you will receive a failing grade, and you will have to complete most assignments before the end of the semester anyway to receive credit for your portfolio.

Things happen – people get sick, accidents happen, technology fails. **Don't wait until the last minute to complete and submit your assignments.** I am not unreasonable, and if you have a true emergency, I will work with you. However, what I consider a true emergency is rare. No matter how creative you are about it, I am not interested in excuses. In the real world, if you don't show up and do the work (or if you turn it in past the deadline) you get fired.

Late grammar assignments will not be accepted, and will receive a grade of 0.

Spring 2009 Class Schedule

**Subject to change due to inclement weather cancellations or other circumstances.*

Class/ Date	Lecture Topics	Assigned Readings	Assignments Due
class 1	Introduction and syllabus review		
Jan. 21	Writing for PR / Business writing - part 1 Importance of grammar		
class 2	The process of writing	Text: pp. 205-206	Your "organization"
Jan. 28	Planning, research and defining your audience Fact sheets and boilerplates 10 secrets of writing well	Appendix B p. 222-226 Grammar: 1,2	defined / approved (1)
class 3	Media relations writing - part 1	Text: Ch. 10 and	Boilerplate (2)
Feb. 4	News releases Pitches Parts of speech 1 - verbs	pp. 211-214 Grammar: 3	Fact sheet (3) Organization revisions (if required)
class 4	Newsletters	Text: Ch. 9	Print news release (4)
Feb. 11	Feature articles Parts of speech 2 - everything else	Grammar: 4	
class 5	Online/Web/Internet writing	Text: Ch. 15	Newsletter article w/ photo caption and "pull quotes" (5)
Feb. 18	Sentence structure, passive voice	Grammar: 5	
class 6	Media relations writing - part 2	Text: Ch. 6,7,12	Web page (6)
Feb. 25	Backgrounders & media advisories PSAs and press kits Agreement	p.p. 209, 218-219 Grammar: 6	
class 7	Internal communication	pp. 207, 220	PSA script (7)
March 4	Social media		Grammar: Exercise 1 - Agreement
March 11	SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS	
class 8	Visual style	Text: Ch. 3	
March 18	Brochures Punctuation	Grammar: 8	
class 9	Media relations writing - part 3	Text: Ch. 2, 8, 14	Brochure (8)
March 25	Media tours, broadcast, crisis communication Spelling	Grammar: 9	Grammar: Exercise 2 - Punctuation
class 10	Business writing - part 2	Text: Ch. 13	Print news release - crisis (9)
April 1	Presentations, speeches, PowerPoint 101 3 C's and writing style	pp. 216 Grammar: 10, 11	Grammar: Exercise 3 - Spell Checking/Word Use
class 11	In-class presentations - GROUP 1	Sensitivity/PC reading	Presentation (10)
April 8	Special events Advertising copy Sensitivity / political correctness	Grammar: 12	PPT w/speaker notes and in-class presentation ALL GROUPS SUBMIT PPT
class 12	In-class presentations - GROUP 2	Text: Ch. 1, 5	
April 15	Direct mail, annual reports Cover letters and resumes		
class 13	Review of portfolio progress (optional)		Cover letter (11)
April 22	TBA		
class 14	Effective editing	Ethics reading	Portfolio w/ additional assignments due (12,13)
April 29	Ethics	Text: p. xviii	OPTIONAL - extra piece (14) for 25 possible extra credit pts.