

# Writing for Public Relations & Advertising

Sam Houston State University  
Department of Mass Communication  
Fall Semester 2009  
3 Credit Hours  
Prerequisite: MCM 132

MCM 383W, 8 a.m.-9:20 a.m., Tuesday & Thursday  
Room 205  
Dan Rather Communications Building

**Instructor:** Peter Roussel

**Office Information:** The instructor's office is Room #123, Dan Rather Communications Building  
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**Office Hours:** Tuesday, 1 p.m.; Thursday, 1 p.m. Also by appointment.

## **Course Description:**

This course examines the process of communicating to persuade and inform. Students learn the techniques of strategic thinking and practice writing for public relations and advertising, including for news releases, newsletters, brochures, speeches, fact sheets, videos and other materials. The course will explore how these tactics are utilized as integral parts of an overall promotional plan. The growing area of online communications for internal and external audiences will also be explored.

## **Course Objectives:**

- To refine writing skills utilized in producing public relations and advertising materials
- To explore the variety of tactics used in the public relations and advertising fields and how writing techniques vary in their creation
- To appreciate the role of creative thinking in this writing process
- To gain insight into the team aspects of preparing communications plans
- To provide overall preparation for a career in these fields

## **Textbooks:**

Doug Newsom & Jim Haynes, *Public Relations Writing: Form and Style, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed.*, ISBN 9780495566762  
*The Associated Press Stylebook*, 2007, ISBN 9780465004898

The material discussed in this course will be based on the instructor's firsthand experiences and affiliation with five different public relations and advertising firms. Those experiences, and the knowledge gained from them, will serve as the foundation for this course. The two textbooks referenced above will serve as an additional resource to complement class discussions.

## **Video:**

From time to time the instructor may utilize videos and other career materials as examples of writing techniques used in the public relations and advertising arenas. Also, the instructor will seek to have public relations/advertising professionals periodically visit the class and share firsthand career experiences with students.

### **Attendance Policy:**

Active participation in class discussions will be an essential factor in preparing for the quiz, team exercise and term paper. Regular attendance is most strongly advised and will be recorded. For those that have to miss the quiz, a make-up will be provided. For delay in turning in the term paper, an appropriate cause should be provided.

### **Exam:**

There will be one exam, a midterm quiz. The quiz will consist of 25 questions, utilizing a format of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank and true-false questions. It will be based on material that has been discussed in class up to that point. There will be no essay questions. The quiz will account for ten percent of the final grade.

### **Team Exercise:**

For purposes of this exercise, the class will be divided into teams. Each team, in behalf of a client, will write a magazine article and copy for a full page print ad. The theme of the article will be: *Change & Sam Houston State University*. They will also write a press release regarding the article for media distribution. Each group will make a presentation of their results to the class. Each team will receive a grade based on the material presented. Half of the team grade will be the result of the students grading each other and the other half from the instructor, the combination of which will be the final grade for this exercise

The criteria used for the grading of the team exercise, both by students and the instructor will be:

Press release: a) grammar; b) creativity in the headline; c) content: the information provided

Article: a) grammar; b) content: the information provided and does it address the theme of the article—change?

Ad copy: a) creativity

The team exercise will account for thirty percent of the final grade.

### **Term Paper:**

It will be based on what has been discussed in class. It will be graded on three components. One, is the paper well organized? Does it use correct spelling and grammar? Two, does it cite specific points from class discussion? Example: Citing the ten biggest challenges of writing for public relations and advertising that will have been a class subject. Three, does it answer (citing specific details from class discussion) the question: what are the most important aspects of writing for public relations and advertising learned in this course? Example: The importance of three sets of eyes to review press releases, a topic that will have been discussed in class. The term paper will be due on the last class day of the semester. It will account for sixty percent of the final grade.

### **Grading:**

The final grade received in the course will be based on three components: the midterm quiz, the team exercise and the term paper. The material on which the quiz will be based is described above under **Exam**. The criteria used in grading the team exercise are described above under **Team Exercise**. The term paper will be based on material from the class discussions. The criteria used in grading the term paper are described above under **Term Paper**. 90-100=A; 80-90=B; 70-80=C; 60-70=D.

Midterm quiz—10 percent    Team Exercise—30 percent    Term paper—60 percent

### **Academic Dishonesty:**

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of research materials.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act:**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

### **Religious Holidays:**

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

### **Visitors in the Classroom:**

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

### **Instructor Evaluation:**

Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

### **Assignments:**

Please see the information above under **Exam, Team Exercise** and **Term paper**. Writing assignments will be given in class.

### **Classroom Rules of Conduct:**

Section 5.2.22 of the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines classroom disturbances.

### **About the Instructor:**

Peter Roussel has served twice in the White House and has had professional associations with President Ronald Reagan, President Gerald R. Ford, President George H.W. Bush, Secretary James A. Baker, III, and other national figures. He served as press secretary when Mr. Bush was U.S. Congressman, 1969-70, when he ran for the U.S. Senate, 1970, when he was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, 1971-73, and when he was Chairman of the Republican National Committee, 1973-74. Mr. Roussel's first tour of duty in the White House was as staff assistant to President Ford, 1974-76. In 1976 Mr. Roussel was special assistant to James A. Baker, III when Secretary Baker was director of the Ford for President campaign. Mr. Roussel was special assistant and deputy press secretary to President Reagan, 1981-87. His duties as a White House spokesman included briefings of the press corps and accompanying President Reagan on domestic and foreign trips. He helped plan the U.S. media participation for four Economic Summits. One of his first assignments in the Reagan White House was to handle media relations for the historic appointment of Sandra Day O'Connor as Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. In 1990 he was communications director for the Houston Economic Summit Host Committee. From 1996-2003 he was executive vice president and a managing partner of the Houston public relations firm, Neumann Roussel. His career in public relations and advertising began in 1966 with the firm of Rives, Dyke & Co. and has included professional experience with five firms in three cities. From 2004 to 2008 he was a columnist for *Intown* magazine, writing a monthly column and serving as editor from June 2005 to May 2008. He is a 1965 graduate of the University of Houston where he was honored in 1983 as a Distinguished Alumnus. In 1986 he received the first Distinguished Communications Alumnus Award presented by that university.

### **Course Requirements:**

A primary goal of this course is to encourage as much student participation as possible. Students are encouraged to ask questions, to express opinions freely, and to challenge the views of the instructor as well as fellow students.

### **Instructor's Comment:**

My goal is for students to enjoy this class, and most importantly, to learn from it based on firsthand experiences in the fields of public relations and advertising that have been a part of the instructor's career.

## **Course Outline (Tentative)**

### **1. Defining Public Relations & Advertising**

- Initial writing exercises
- Before writing for pr/advertising, how do we define?
  - Example of same client pr/advertising
  - Off the wall exercise

- The importance of writing skills and what pr/advertising firms seek
  - As a pr firm employer, what is the first question often asked of applicants?
- What is the essential rule for effective writing for pr/advertising?
  - Review, discuss examples
  - Focused message writing exercises
- The biggest challenges in writing for pr/advertising?
  - Review, discuss list of ten challenges
  - Challenge #1--research exercise
- Read Chapters 1, 2

## 2. **Role of the Client**

- For whom are we writing?
- Three methods of acquiring clients
  - Here, too, writing is a factor
  - Not just about writing for clients—it's also about writing that helps get clients
  - New client writing assignment
- Four forms of client association
- What should they expect?
- Types of clients/projects
  - Corporate
    - Short/long term
    - Project
    - Product or service
  - Small Business
    - Start-up
    - Project
    - Product or service
  - Individual
    - Reactive or pro-active?
  - Issue Management

- Reactive or pro-active
  - Community related?
- Special Events
  - Size and purpose?
  - Grand openings, product launches, anniversaries, etc.
- Other
  - The PR firm or ad agency
  - Non-profits
  - The media itself
  - Other
  - Review advertorial writing example
- Read Chapters 3, 4

### **3. Next Step: Writing the Strategic Communications Plan**

- Three Phases
  - Learn and research the business
  - Develop and write the plan
  - Implement the plan
- Learn the business
  - Information gathering
  - Communications audit. What's already in place? Effective or not?
  - Off the wall session
  - Outline
- Develop and write the plan
  - Goals
  - Objectives
  - Key Audiences
  - Key Messages
  - Key Issues
  - Key Dates (Timetable)
  - Spokesperson
  - Allies (Positives)
  - Adversaries (Negatives)
  - Concerns

- Media Relations (Local, state, national)
  - Public relations
  - Advertising
  - Internet
  - Other initiatives
- Implement the plan
- Read Chapter 5

#### **4. A Key Essential in Communications Writing: The Press Release**

- What works—and what doesn't
  - Format
  - Content
  - Accuracy
- The stages of development—where to begin?
  - Research
  - Writing
  - Rewriting
- Review examples, including press release to actual publication examples
- Press release writing exercise
- Read Chapters 7 & 9

#### **5. Communications Writing—Other**

- Review writing for other tactics and examples
  - Fact Sheets
  - Q&As
  - Brochures
  - Newsletters
  - Opinion editorials/Articles
  - Letters to the editor
  - Direct Mail

- Press conference statements
  - Speeches
  - Letters
  - Video news releases
- Letter to the editor writing exercise
- Speechwriting exercise
- Writing for Advertising
  - TV/Radio Commercials
- Commercial writing exercise
- Writing for the Internet
  - Blogs
  - Website
  - Banner ads
  - E-mail distribution
- Other
  - Documentary scripts
- Team writing exercise
- Read Chapters 13, 15

## **6. Writing To Get the Media's Attention**

- Is it written to effectively reach the media?
  - Methods of contact and distribution
  - The importance of contacts
- Writing it—and also making sure it's right
  - Keeping a record if rewriting is necessary
- Ground rules
  - Exercise in advocacy of what has been written
- Read Chapters 17 & 18

## 7. Writing for Public Relations/Advertising As A Career

- Agency or sole proprietor?
  - Public relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century often means specialization—part of the team approach
- Media outlets
  - The media need public relations professionals, too
- Corporations
  - Public relations, communications, marketing, etc.
- Non-profits
  - Often a one-person responsibility
- Other
  - Small business, medical, sports, specialized areas, etc.
- How to effectively interview
  - Writing ability
  - Writing samples
  - Interview the interviewer