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INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Learn how PR industry practitioners define public relations as a profession and what role PR writing plays.
- 1.2 Describe how the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines public relations.
- 1.3 Identify what public relations writing is and what public relations writing is not.
- 1.4 Understand how public relations writing is used in PR campaigns to communicate with audiences.
- 1.5 Use proven approaches to create quality content for PR writing.

INTRODUCTION

Public relations writing is different from many other literary forms, because creating content and advocating for a client or a cause challenge the writer to be more creative, intentional, innovative and persuasive with their words absent of the journalistic parameters in news writing and reporting, which are carried out solely through the lens of objectivity. As a matter of practice, public relations writing often demands subjectivity because it is fueled by an agenda — for a client, for a campaign, for the greater public good.

Make no mistake, public relations writing needs to be well researched, accurate and written with high standards for spelling, grammar and style — but also with purpose and passion! Public relations writing is exhilarating, and content creation is fulfilling because the process, like every story, begins with a blank page, then results in copy that informs and inspires or motivates and mobilizes people to take action.

Public relations writing comes in many forms and sizes, from international messaging campaigns for global health organizations to social media posts for local nonprofit community outreach events and everything in between.

1.1 — DEFINING PR

To get a solid grasp on understanding public relations writing, it is important to know first what public relations is and how industry experts and professionals define the term. **Public relations** is the art and science of managing relationships and communicating specific messages to target audiences to achieve desired, measurable outcomes using multimedia platforms (V. K. Fields, PR PROS, LLC). This hybrid definition of public relations blends the theoretical and practical aspects of the industry and also defines the process and results often sought by PR practitioners. What follows is a breakdown of the PR definition to explain how each phrase fulfills the overall definition.

Art and Science

Representing both the creative and formulaic aspects of the industry, the art of public relations derives from innovative and imaginative storytelling that uses words and imagery to convey messages. The science of the industry relies on tools, data, statistics, metrics and replicable processes that offer quantitative measures of performance and results.

Managing Relationships

Whether it is client to agency, client to audience, or media to client, managing relationships is a core function of public relations work, which focuses on building and maintaining trust to establish and reinforce communication between all parties. In every definition of public relations, the role of managing relationships is an essential function and priority within the industry.

Communicating Specific Messages

A lot of public relations research and planning is driven by strategy, the “how” and intentional approach for getting things accomplished within a PR campaign. Communicating specific messages means understanding who the audience is and what is important to them and then developing and delivering messages in a meaningful way.

Target Audiences

Every message is not the same for every audience, because the needs and wants of the publics within target audiences are different. Understanding the priorities and motivations of target audiences will help the PR practitioner develop key messages that resonate with the receivers.

Desired, Measurable Outcomes

Depending upon the PR campaign goals and objectives, the process of measuring outcomes may vary. What matters is that every objective, goal and strategy has a built-in metric that allows progress to be monitored and success to be measured during the evaluation phase of the campaign.

Multimedia Platforms

Historically, traditional public relations relied primarily on press releases, press conferences, wire services and media impressions that measured the number of people exposed to a message. Now public relations utilizes traditional media, digital media and social media platforms with back-end metrics for insights and analytics that also incorporate media contacts and media relations efforts and leverage the power of direct-to-consumer messaging, hence streamlining the communication process. Most PR campaigns use a blend of every relevant and accessible outlet in order to extend audience reach and amplify messages to the largest target audiences possible.

1.2 — PR IN PRACTICE

The following section describes how the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), a trade and advocacy organization for the PR industry, introduces and defines public relations to its membership.

PRSA DEFINES PUBLIC RELATIONS

The formal practice of what is now commonly referred to as “public relations” dates to the early 20th century. Since that time, public relations has been defined in myriad ways, the definition often evolving alongside public relations’ changing roles and advances in technology. The earliest definitions emphasized press agency and publicity, while more modern definitions incorporate the concepts of “engagement” and “relationship building.” In 1982, PRSA adopted the following definition: “Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.”

A more modern definition of public relations was drafted several decades later, a definition that still stands today: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.”

At its core, public relations is about influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders across numerous platforms in order to shape and frame the public perception of an organization. Public relations also encompasses the following:

- Anticipating, analyzing and interpreting public opinion, attitudes and issues that might have an impact, for good or ill, on the operations and plans of the organization.
- Counseling management at all levels in the organization with regard to policy decisions, courses of action and communications — including crisis communications — taking into account their public ramifications and the organization’s social or citizenship responsibilities.
- Protecting the reputation of an organization.
- Researching, conducting and evaluating, on a continuing basis, programs of action and communications to achieve the informed public understanding necessary to the success of an organization’s aims. These may include marketing; financial; fundraising; employee, community or government relations; and other programs.

- Planning and implementing the organization's efforts to influence or change public policy.
- Setting objectives, planning, budgeting, recruiting and training staff, developing facilities — in short, managing the resources needed to perform all of the above.
- Overseeing the creation of content to drive customer engagement and generate leads.

Below are some of the disciplines/functions within PR:

- Corporate Communications
- Crisis Communications
- Executive Communications
- Internal Communications
- Investor Relations Communications
- Marketing Communications
- Integrated Marketing/Integrated Marketing Communications
- Media Relations
- Content Creation
- Events
- Social Media
- Multimedia
- Reputation Management
- Speechwriting
- Brand Journalism

Source: Public Relations Society of America. (n.d.). *About public relations*. <https://www.prsa.org/about/all-about-pr>

1.3 — REALITIES OF PR

This section will highlight what public relations writing is but also what public relations writing is not. At the core of every quality PR campaign is good content, which relies on a skilled and talented writer. Even brief social media posts and article headlines need to be well written in order to effectively capture and keep the reader's attention.

Public relations writing is not singular in its purpose, meaning that the creation of content that is shared with target audiences is not a one-dimensional endeavor. Rather, public relations writing can be layered and complex, as strategic messaging is used to hone and fine-tune communications to key publics using a variety of media vehicles. Even straightforward campaigns that seek to produce a specific outcome can be nuanced in how the goals and objectives are accomplished. PR professionals may utilize words, imagery, repetition and persuasive tactics to compel the end user to feel, think or act in a certain manner. Public relations writing is multifaceted in its approach to generating results and desirable outcomes on behalf of causes and clients.

In addition to its multifaceted nature, the realities of public relations writing also underscore the significance of adaptability and responsiveness. On a daily basis, PR professionals navigate a dynamic landscape where public opinions, media trends and communication platforms are constantly evolving. As such, effective PR writing requires the ability to pivot swiftly,

adjusting strategies and messaging to leverage emerging opportunities or address unexpected challenges. This adaptability extends beyond content creation; it encompasses a strategic agility that enables PR practitioners to capitalize on current events, industry shifts or online trends, morphing their communication approach to maintain relevance.

Another reality in PR focuses on the ethical considerations that play a pivotal role in public relations writing. The content created should not only be compelling but also adhere to a set of moral and professional standards. Ethical dilemmas may arise in crafting persuasive messages, and PR professionals need to balance the interests of clients or causes with a commitment to honesty, transparency and respect for diverse perspectives. Negotiating this ethical terrain is an ongoing responsibility, as the public relations field continually grapples with issues such as misinformation, authenticity and the impact of persuasive communication on society. In reality, understanding and navigating the ethical dimensions of PR writing is crucial for practitioners in building and maintaining trust with their audiences over the long term.

What PR Writing Is Not

Now that there is a clearer understanding of what public relations writing is and what it can accomplish, it is also necessary to clarify what public relations writing is not. With so many misconceptions and misunderstandings about the PR industry overall, there is a lot of value in acknowledging and correcting some of the assumptions often connected with the profession. Public relations writing is not:

- hype
- publicity stunts
- lying, spin and misdirection
- promotions and publicity
- marketing
- advertising
- singular in purpose

Hype

There is a reason the phrase “Don’t believe the hype” became commonly linked with the public relations industry. **Hype** is a form of extreme and exaggerated publicity for an individual, product or service, often leading people to believe that the subject of the promotion is better than it is in reality. Hype generates a lot of conversation in the media and a lot of buzz on social media but is often more sizzle than substance. PR cannot rely just on hype for success, because an engaged audience eventually will see through the smokescreen.

Publicity Stunts

A **publicity stunt** is an event orchestrated solely for the purpose of attracting attention to a person or an organization. The stunt is often designed with over-the-top elements as part of its construction to generate interest and media coverage. Another common saying associated with the PR industry is “There is no such thing as bad publicity, as long as they spell your name right.” However, anyone who has worked in PR knows that bad publicity for the sake of publicity is a losing proposition, because stunts ultimately erode public trust along with the credibility of the PR practitioners who are orchestrating them.

Lying, Spin and Misdirection

Lying, **spin** and misdirection are different words for the same act, which is deception. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for people outside the PR industry to associate public relations with misinformation and disinformation — terms distinguished by the intent to distribute inaccurate information unintentionally versus intentionally. The history of dishonest PR representatives traces back to the industry’s origination, when PR work was synonymous with hype and press coverage at any cost. Fortunately, the industry has grown and progressed beyond those narrow and negative perceptions.

Promotions and Publicity

Promotions and publicity are very much a part of what public relations offers to the communications profession overall; however, limiting PR writing to simply pitching products and ideas for the sake of publicity in the media understates the power of PR to influence policy, legislation and public opinion on matters of concern ranging from free speech to climate change, medical and health standards and safety regulations, school board educational priorities and policies, and more.

Marketing

Rapidly changing technologies and ubiquitous accessibility to online content, along with innovative software applications, changed how PR practitioners develop and distribute content and how audiences access information. Long gone are the siloed days of advertising in one bucket and public relations in another bucket. PR clients and agencies are consistently and simultaneously using multiple communication channels to engage with audiences, which also introduced strategic communication and integrated marketing to the process. While marketing used to be generally defined as the process of bringing a product or service to consumers based on product, price, placement, promotion and one-way communication that simply pushed out messages to audiences, it is now more dynamic and interactive and uses elements from marketing, advertising, public relations and user-generated content for two-way conversations and engagement to effectively introduce and establish a presence in the marketplace. While all of these strategic options can be used by PR professionals, none of them wholly encompasses PR writing.

Advertising

Traditional advertising focused on paid placements in print publications or on radio or television stations. Now advertising is part of overarching strategic communication practices and

integrated marketing processes. As advertising has expanded to include paid or “sponsored” social media content and paid promotional placements in quasi-editorial content, its distinction from public relations is based on the fact that advertising professionals pay to acquire space and guarantee visibility in front of target audiences. While public relations campaigns may sometimes incorporate paid or sponsored content into a larger campaign, this tactic is one spoke in a larger wheel of activities that fulfill the public relations role of managing relationships and reputations.

Singular in Purpose

As previously stated, public relations is not singular in purpose. However, early definitions of PR relegated its role mostly to publicity, then eventually expanded to include press agency. Though the industry continues to evolve, it is clear that PR is multifaceted and multilayered in terms of the scope and scale of what can be accomplished. Public relations writing also showcases a multipronged approach to securing desired outcomes and measurable results. PR writing can be used for persuasion in political campaigns, promotions on social media, educating audiences using position papers and other research documents, reassuring the public in crisis communication, informing investors in financial releases, engaging with customers using digital storytelling, and countless more undertakings. Public relations doesn’t simply accomplish one thing; it can be used to achieve corporate and community objectives and to fulfill important campaign goals, reaching millions around the globe, connecting a niche online community, or targeting a neighborhood in the suburbs—based solely on what is needed to manage the respective relationships for effective communication.

1.4 — WRITING FOR PR CAMPAIGNS

This segment explores some of the essential skills required to craft compelling content that forms the backbone of successful public relations campaigns. From shaping strategic narratives to deploying persuasive tactics, this chapter unveils the key principles and techniques that transform words into powerful instruments for achieving organizational goals in comprehensive PR campaigns.

Announce New Products, Services and Upcoming Events

Whether a company or brand plans to introduce a new product or announce a special event, PR writing documents help facilitate the process of publishing and distributing news to the media and to target audiences. Documents such as news releases, media advisories, fact sheets and infographics can concisely answer questions and share pertinent information that is of interest to reporters and consumers.

Consolidate Multiple Perspectives Into a Concise, Cohesive Message

One of the tenets of messaging strategy within the PR specialized area of crisis communication is referred to as “one voice,” meaning that the authorized spokespeople and company

representatives all say the same thing in response to public or media inquiries. In essence, they all respond the same way and stick to an approved script or “talk track” to present a united front and to speak as though the company has only one voice, for consistency and credibility purposes.

Define a Corporate Position on Important Issues

Whether through a white paper, position statement or company backgrounder, PR writing can be used to clearly articulate how a corporation has responded in the past or will react or respond in the future to major issues using well-written research documents to define stances about topics related to general business operations.

Direct a Public Relations Campaign

A public relations plan is one of the basic documents used to outline and guide campaign implementation and timelines. Simple in construction, the PR plan — used along with other tools explained in following chapters, such as Venn diagrams, organizational charts and spreadsheets, SWOT analysis (an assessment tool to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and Gantt charts to plan campaign roll-outs — are utilized to guide the course of PR campaigns and messaging strategies.

Elevate Brand Awareness

PR writing can be used to amplify messages and extend audience reach to connect with the maximum number of people possible for a targeted campaign. Print, broadcast and online media outlets all support the work of PR writing to get the word out about a company or organization and its newsworthy announcements.

Explain or Simplify Complex Data or Statistics

In some instances, PR writing can be used to help audiences better comprehend information. Documents such as one sheets and infographics use clear, concise writing along with visually engaging graphics to condense a lot of data or statistics into digestible amounts of information for reader or viewer consumption.

Influence Public Opinion

Persuasive writing is the bedrock of influence campaigns, where the objective is to change the opinions, perspective and actions of the target audience. Using logic, reason and emotional appeals, PR writing professionals present information and make compelling arguments to advocate for clients and causes with the end goal of swaying opinions and potentially influencing outcomes.

Reassure the Public During a Crisis Situation

Crisis communication is a niche sector of public relations that helps to orchestrate communication and inform audiences during an emergency or crisis situation. Carefully chosen words — delivered in a timely fashion — that are offered in a composed, confident and empathetic manner can reassure the public and also rebuild trust and credibility for companies experiencing a crisis.

Shift the Media Narrative

For the most part, PR writing does not tell people what to think, but it can tell people what to think about. Sometimes introducing a new topic into the conversation is a simple and effective way of getting people to talk about something else. PR practitioners often have a direct line of communication to editors and producers who determine what gets printed and published or aired on the radio or television. A savvy PR professional armed with an interesting story idea can pitch a story to journalists or media outlets and shift the media narrative and audience focus to a new topic.

Tell the Client's Story

At the heart of public relations writing is good storytelling, which is often the reason brands hire PR agencies — to help tell their story. Through media relations, content creation, social media engagement and generating original, owned content, PR writing develops and distributes information that introduces and reinforces individual and corporate client stories to their target audiences.

Essential PR Writing

Several key characteristics of quality PR writing are consistent regardless of which type of document is being created. At a minimum, writing needs to be honest, transparent, clear, concise and inclusive. As the professional roles taken on by public relations practitioners continue to adapt and expand due to industry innovations and technology and as they continue to evolve with changing times, expectations and societal norms, what will not change is the need to quickly absorb new ideas and information and to develop compelling content that meets stakeholder groups where they are and appropriately addresses the needs and wants of target audiences through strategic communication.

As the demand for more and more quality content continues to increase, the need for skilled PR writers who are adept at writing anything and everything will become even more prevalent. Being equipped with a diverse repertoire for content development, ranging from press releases and media kits to social media posts, long-form narrative, executive speeches, researched white papers, intriguing media pitches and more, will serve the practitioner well.

It is easy to see online and elsewhere that quality, well-written content is becoming a lost art. Those who become proficient in this skill can do well; however, those who excel will find that

the doors of opportunity will swing wide open to welcome them and at the same time help meet the demand for content.

1.5 — PROVEN WRITING TECHNIQUES

There is a common saying often borrowed and paraphrased from authors and songwriters that states, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” For the purposes of PR writing, this means if the communications professional does not begin the writing process with a purpose, goal, plan and strategy in place, then the destination will be uncertain and the outcome likely will be unsuccessful.

Prior to writing content, a beneficial step is to map out the purpose, plan and desired outcome to determine the documents that need to be written. Basic questions that inform the planning process revolve around knowing who the target audience is, what desired action the audience should take, which key messages should be conveyed, and which options are the best channels and outlets to deliver messages to the appropriate individuals and to achieve the stated goals and objectives.

Though many documents are written on behalf of a client and their respective campaign with the goal of elevating brand awareness or announcing important news, the materials still need to be written with consideration of what’s in it for the recipient. Ultimately, audiences want to know what’s in it for them. Answering that particular question during the research and planning process is what infuses value and purpose into the content and makes it useful to members of the media and the desired target audiences. Providing journalists with newsworthy content that aligns with their readers’ and viewers’ needs helps them do their jobs more effectively and efficiently. Presenting content that informs or entertains readers by offering useful information or addressing their interests is what makes the content worth reading or watching. PR writing is a strategic and intentional process, and becoming successful as a content creator is more likely to occur if the PR professional starts the writing process by beginning with the end in mind.

“RACE” Model

Countless PR writing and PR-industry-related textbooks tout the “RACE” model of PR as the foundational basis for approaching and implementing a PR campaign and the requisite PR writing that supports the campaign agenda. The acronym stands for Research, Action, Communication and Evaluation.

(R) Research

This first step sets the stage and helps to answer the question “Why?” before launching into the strategic “How?” of a PR campaign where PR writing and other content creation is required. Research facilitates a look back, reflects on what brought about the current situation facing an organization, and often includes a situation analysis that details the circumstances that led up to the current problem or opportunity to address. Primary and secondary research often provide data and other statistical information that inform the PR practitioner with quantitative metrics

and anecdotal qualitative insights, which help guide the direction of PR planning and campaign implementation.

(A) Action

In the “RACE” PR model, the Action step employs the research findings to plot, plan and finalize the best course of activities to implement a campaign. Action in PR writing is bordered by planning and communicating — the background and foreground of public-facing PR practices. Action is all about getting things done, which is reflected in a PR plan that highlights and details objectives, goals, strategies, tactics, timelines, deadlines and budgets.

(C) Communication

This step in PR practice is what creates messaging content for interaction and engagement with the media and with the public. As indicated earlier in the chapter, PR is defined as *communicating specific messages to target audiences to achieve desired, measurable outcomes using multimedia platforms*. PR communication efforts leverage any and all relevant and accessible media outlets and communication channels to reach the right audiences.

(E) Evaluation

Almost every PR practice model ends with evaluation, which allows PR professionals to assess, review and measure what worked well or not so well within a campaign. Evaluation is not a final step but rather a transitional step from which practitioners can learn lessons and then apply them to ongoing or future campaigns. Evaluation should be used as part of growth and development for communication professionals to better serve clients, stakeholder groups, target audiences and key publics, as findings can be used to update and adapt future planning and to launch the entire process again for the next campaign.

Tips for Quality PR Writing

Nothing connects with people like stories. Any student desiring to learn how to write well for the PR industry needs to endeavor to learn how to tell a good story. Weaving together words and images that motivate, inspire and connect with people on both practical and emotional levels is a winning formula for successful communication campaigns. Of all the lessons, principles and concepts shared in this textbook, the common theme found throughout these pages is related to the ability to tell a good story in writing. The following pointers and tips in this section explain various resources, practices and habits that strong, versatile writers use to create quality content.

Start Writing Based on What Is Known and Confirmed

PR writing usually is not reliant on the creative muscles of fictitious narrative; rather, there is a client, cause or campaign with built-in details that need to be conveyed simply and clearly to an audience. Sometimes starting the writing process can be difficult because there are many competing messages in the marketplace that challenge writers who may struggle with making original copy stand out. A simple tip to kick-start the process is to start writing based on what information is confirmed and approved for publication. Even if the artistic writing juices are not yet flowing,

putting words on a blank screen or sheet of paper can fuel momentum to keep writing. As an example, if the assignment is a feature profile that ultimately will be published on the client's blog and social media sites, begin writing what is known — even if it ends up being deleted. Describe who or what is known about the feature subject. What is the mission of the organization or the purpose for profiling a specific individual? When and where will an impact be made by the person or company at the core of the article? Why will the audience care about learning this information, and what will the audience gain by investing the time to read the content that was created?

Simply put, writing inspires more writing. Begin with short, declarative sentences. Use sentence fragments, if needed, to add variety. Write something, and then keep writing something else until the thoughts and ideas begin to gel. Write more than is needed so there is room to cut for clarity and conciseness.

Write Clearly and Concisely

Clear and concise content is not just a guide for the writer but also a gift to the reader. The easier it is to understand, the more widespread the content will become, based on its accessibility to people of all educational and skill levels. Unnecessary technical jargon or run-on sentences with an excess of polysyllabic words will definitely deter audiences and make readers less likely to return for more in the future. Shorter sentences and shorter paragraphs that focus on one topic at a time are easier to read and help the reader get through the information faster with higher levels of understanding.

Answer the Basic Questions First

PR writing content should focus on what the audience needs and wants to know. Oftentimes, a key public is the media, which serves as a conduit to reach end-user consumer audiences. Producing content that answers or addresses the basic questions and concerns that a journalist will have usually covers all the bases and ensures that no pertinent details are omitted that might potentially mislead the audience or create confusion for the recipient. At a minimum, answering the 5Ws and the H, “Who?” “What?” “When?” “Where?” “Why?” and “How?” — plus “Who Cares?” — will provide enough information to make a story complete.

In PR Writing, Less Is More

There are a few reasons why long-form content is less common than in previous years. The proliferation of platforms that limit words and character counts is a big reason that writing in short snippets became an elevated practice. Also, the massive volumes of content that inundate readers make it less likely that they will spend more time reading more information; rather, they will spend less time scanning or scrolling through many different types of information presented in various formats, such as audiobooks and podcasts, webcasts or social media video posts. PR practitioners need to be well versed in writing pieces of any and every length and for every platform, because fluency in writing at every level of the industry can propel a professional toward greater success within the industry.

Know and Understand the Audience

Great content that does not resonate with the audience is not great content. One of the primary rules of PR writing is to know and understand who the audience is. Based on the intended audience, certain words, terms or phrases may not make the cut because of education, cultural references, age-related contexts or other considerations. Additionally, knowing the audience and understanding their motivations to take action help assist the writer in developing useful and meaningful content.

Check Content for Authenticity

The concept of “fake news” is nothing new; however, with more and more publishers and distributors of content arriving on cable “news” stations and online media platforms, there are very few standards of accountability in place to ensure that the information being shared is accurate. Even some traditional news outlets are outnumbered by analysts, pundits and entertainers versus trained, professional journalists who are bound by journalistic standards of truth, honesty, objectivity, fairness, balance, ethics and independence in reporting. Just because there is a lot of noise in the marketplace does not grant PR practitioners permission to divulge themselves of their responsibility to truth telling, honesty, integrity and transparency in communication. Whether creating original content or referencing and citing existing content, PR writing requires research and fact-checking for accuracy and confirming that what is being shared is reliable information that can be trusted.

Review for Inclusion and Offensive Content

PR audiences have always been diverse; however, PR writing has not always been inclusive and written with diverse audiences in mind. Before posting or publishing content for the world to see and react to, it is worth a review to check for inflammatory or offensive content. A good rule of thumb (especially for larger teams) is to request editing and proofing from a diverse group of readers or reviewers to look for aspects within the content that might be harmful or offensive to underrepresented groups. During the review process, it also can be helpful to read the content aloud as though preparing for a speech to a real or imagined audience that reflects a diverse mix of the population, to include various ages, races, genders, ethnicities, income and educational levels, etc., just to make sure that the words, phrases and references used are not inflammatory, offensive or exclusionary to potential recipients.

Use the AP Stylebook

The **Associated Press stylebook** is not just for journalists; it is also a useful tool for PR professionals who create content for media audiences. The AP stylebook outlines basic rules and guidelines for writers related to spelling, grammar, punctuation, usage and inclusive language. Additionally, the stylebook shares explanations and recommendations for writing conventions that aid in accurately and consistently communicating with diverse audiences and in developing inclusive content. The stylebook is a practical resource that is organized into several sections and categories and provides guidance for accurate and consistent writing related to business, health and science law, religion, social media, sports, and other relevant topics likely to be covered in the media. The book is filled with terms, phrases and titles in alphabetical order and lists

fundamental rules, recommendations and guidelines for spelling, abbreviations, capitalization, grammar, style, industry-specific verbiage, inclusive language, punctuation, technical terminology and general word usage for effective communication to standardize professional writing.

Keep a Dictionary and Thesaurus Handy

Sometimes it can be difficult to find just the right word or phrase. Every PR writing professional needs an online version or up-to-date hard copy of the dictionary nearby that can be used to keep content clear by helping to ensure that the correct words are being used and that they are being used accurately to reflect the intended meaning. Though repetition is common in PR writing as a result of “repurposed” content, approved messaging strategies and talking points, and frequent media responses that repeat the same information, the process of content development still presents opportunities for creativity — and the dictionary and thesaurus are copywriting and editing resources that help elevate and refine the craft.

Review, Edit, Proof, Repeat

Accuracy is nonnegotiable in PR writing and is just as important to PR practitioners as it is to reporters and media professionals. Names need to be spelled correctly. Titles should be accurate. Dates have to be correct. Facts and figures matter. A lot of damage can be done when a name has one incorrect letter or an age, date or dollar amount includes an incorrect numeral. With so many in-person and online resources available, there is no excuse for not checking and double-checking to make sure all the facts and figures are accurate. PR writing should be reviewed for spelling, grammar, substance, appropriate language and inclusion, as well as Associated Press style for documents developed for the media. In addition to using word-processing software to check spelling and grammar, reviews by a quality editor or proofreader are invaluable for checking proper nouns that may not be familiar to online apps. Two quick tips for catching errors are reading the content aloud and reviewing the content backward from the end to the beginning to easily check for spelling and capitalization errors. Once the editing and proofing are done, there is no harm in repeating the process . . . just to be sure.

In the following chapters, this textbook will prepare students to accurately, effectively and efficiently create content for various types of PR writing, including media relations and writing for journalists; virtual storytelling for online platforms, audiences and social media sites; writing socially conscious and inclusive content; strategic communication for business-related and corporate clients with internal and external audiences; writing for business development to secure new opportunities; broadcast writing for radio, television and online podcasts or webcasts; developing creative content for branding and marketing collateral materials; and persuasive writing to inform, educate and advocate various causes or community relations efforts or to influence public opinion.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Effective public relations writing is honest, transparent, clear, concise and inclusive.

Honesty and transparency in communications reflect two of the ethical guidelines and professional standards that industry professionals commit to practice upon entering the field. Clear and concise content is easier and faster to read, making the information more likely to be used by media contacts or end-user consumers and target audience members. Inclusion and equity in content creation continue to be priorities as PR work becomes more global in nature and increasingly diverse audiences collaborate in business and community-related endeavors.

Understanding what public relations writing is and what public relations writing is not is a good starting point for developing effective skills within the practice. PR writing is used to announce new products and services, direct PR campaign strategy, increase awareness and elevate brands, influence public opinion and public policy, and motivate target audiences to take action. Public relations writing appears in many different forms and formats across various types of communication channels, allowing the PR practitioner to be creative, expressive, informative, persuasive and engaging on a daily basis.

KEY TERMS

Associated Press stylebook
hype
public relations

publicity stunt
spin

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does public relations writing differ from other types of writing, such as news writing, advertising copy, literary narrative or prose?
2. How does using the Associated Press stylebook assist in PR writing?
3. What does it mean to say that PR writing is not singular in purpose?
4. How can the RACE (Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation) PR model help guide the planning and writing process?

WRITING EXERCISES

1. Write two paragraphs explaining the role of PR writing in a public relations professional's daily activities.
2. Write a brief overview explaining the importance of ethics in PR writing.

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