

Texas A&M University-Commerce/Journalism Division
J329, Writing for Public Relations
Spring, 2014, MW 12:30-1:45 p.m.
Journalism Building 205

Instructor: Dr. Lamar W. Bridges, Professor of Journalism
Office: Room 127, Journalism Building (inside Room 126)
Office hours: appointments, please, or afternoons
Telephones: 903-886-5229 (office;); 903-886-4703 (home); or you may reach the Department's secretary in the afternoons at 903-886-5346
FAX number: for the Division is 903-886-5230
E-mail: Lamar_Bridges@tamuc.edu

Catalog description: "The preparation of and the writing of various documents in the field of public relations with both lecture and laboratory sessions. Emphasis is upon writing and research for public relations formats. Prerequisite: Jour 328 or consent of the instructor."

Objectives of the course broadly stated: (1) to learn to write with correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and syntax; (2) to learn to write with clarity and logical organization in several formats suitable for public relations; (3) to improve one's ability to find and to use reliable sources of information and data for public relations "copy"; (4) to learn to interview skillfully and to use attribution of materials.

Summary: to improve writing beyond the 5Ws and H and to learn about public relations formats that students will utilize professionally.

Advisory: unfortunately, J329 does not present enough time in one semester to include all formats and to include the repetitive and concentrated level of writing that students need. So, students are advised to write for *The East Texan*, for other publications, and/or to undertake freelance assignments that expand one's use of language and foster development of style in one's writing.

Textbook: *The PR Style Guide, Formats for Public Relations Practice* (THIRD edition) by Barbara Diggs-Brown (softcover). Used copies might be available.

In addition, I would suggest you consider a book such as *Style, The Basics of Clarity and Grace* by Joseph M. Williams to help you with language concerns and to help you improve your use of the language. **There are numerous other books.** The Williams' book is a recent one, a concise one, and a good guidebook.

There are websites which claim to assist writers with language concerns. Some may be okay, while others are useless. One site cited is The Grammarlady Online (<http://www.grammarlady.com>).

Grammar work will be incorporated into J329 because of the weakness of students with language.

Outside assignments: any outside reading assignments or materials deemed necessary for this class will be placed on two-hour reserve in Gee Library. Or, if available, online sources may be utilized.

Class attendance policy: Class attendance is mandatory, and absences will be recorded. This is a writing class, and missed classes will result in missed assignments; missed assignments are not acceptable nor are they acceptable in the professional world.

The University policy on attendance is stated in the Catalog. Read it online.

At the third absence, Dr. Bridges reserves the right to drop you administratively through the dean's office. **In the professional world, you would be fired; in our "world", you will be asked to drop, or if you do not, you will fail (F).**

I also expect students to be in class on time. Attendance is checked at the beginning of the class. Do not, please, constantly enter the classroom late. It is distracting. Be here and be on time. Writers are on time with their copy complete for review.

University statement: And, of course, the instructor expects all students to act with civility toward other persons in the classroom. In addition, please note the two University-sanctioned advisories that follow this paragraph.

◆ One: Students enrolled at the University should exhibit common decency and acceptable behavior toward their fellow classmates, faculty and staff members, and individuals they encounter on campus.

◆ Two: Students requesting accommodations for disabilities should contact the Office of Student Disability Resources and Services. That office's statement will be distributed.

Plagiarism: I will distribute a copy of a statement about plagiarism. Your signed acknowledgment is kept on file and remains in effect. Please note that I consider academic dishonesty of any form a serious offense and one that must be dealt with by the instructor and the "acting" head of the Department of Mass Media, Communication, and Theatre. If there is a question about this topic or enforcement, please see me.

Content requirements: Please note these statements regarding your work for Journalism 329. It is your responsibility to follow these guidelines.

(1) Do not offer excuses for lack of preparation, work, or submission of work in J329.

(2) Prepare all assignments on a word processor and always -- and I mean always -- check or "proofread" your copy for errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, and syntax. When you have done so, *place your signature at the end of the copy*. This says to the instructor that you have reviewed and checked your work. It says you have verified your work and stand by it -- for good or for bad.

(3) Submit clean copy on one side of the sheet - unless otherwise directed - and use white paper -- unless otherwise directed. DO NOT submit work on blue, pink, purple or any other fashionable color of the day -- unless otherwise directed.

(4) Use standard fonts, not "fancy" ones, and use font sizes of about 12 or 14 points for most copy. Standard fonts to the instructor would include Palatino, Times, Bookman, New York, Garamond -- and so on. Do not write copy with italics, do not use boldface, and do not underline unless asked. Use a standard line length. Do not write a title (headline) on copy unless asked to do so.

(5) Save a copy of all assignments. You will be asked to keep a portfolio of your work.

(6) Be sure you do your own work. You will learn to write not by trying to "follow" a prescribed, rigid wording from the book but by shaping copy that has meaning and a clear use of the language.

(7) You should have access to an AP stylebook, but your emphasis should be on shaping content, not memorizing AP style. Various style manuals exist, and the point to realize is a stylebook is used for consistency within a writing environment. An AP manual is in Room 205.

The AP book is useful to answer basic questions, just as it was in J214.

(8) Remember what you learned writing for *The East Texan*, but keep in mind that just because that publication wishes to "do something" one way does not mean J329 will require the same approaches.

(9) One requirement is essential: **proper attribution**. Individuals grant interviews and data to writers because they are knowledgeable. Writers should always give careful credit to others' opinions, ideas and information. **Be forewarned: the instructor is "passionate" about careful attribution.**

Instructor's marks: I will read copy first for content. Then, I will "put a pencil" to your work. If that work is unsatisfactory upon an initial reading, the work will be returned to you with a zero (based on points for assignment) for a rewrite. If the rewrite is not acceptable, the document will be returned to you for a second rewrite. And, so on. With each rewrite, the possible value one may earn declines.

You should not be alarmed at having to rewrite. All good writers do so, and have had to do so. You will not be working under deadlines, for the most part, so you will have ample time to prepare careful copy. If you choose not to do so, then you have made a decision.

Copy returned to you will/may have these marks.*

SP = indicates a spelling error.

GR = indicates an error in grammar and/or punctuation.

L before a line indicates a graph (I will use, so don't fret.).

STOP = means tired of reading this "bad copy".

Syntax - means reconsider the arrangement of the words, parts of speech.

***(others may be added during the term)**

For some exercises, points may/will be deducted for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation. These errors would be for what the instructor calls "major or flagrant" errors.

For example, if you confuse its and it's, you might lose a point. If you were to drop a comma in a series, I would not take off because AP style says omit the last comma. Watch out for confusion between the plural and the possessive, for sentence fragments (always think subject, verb, and object), and for agreement between subject and verb (in number, singular, plural).

You may always challenge me on these deductions.

Please note, then, that it is possible "to go into negative territory" on an assignment.

Finally, note this important point. A rewrite is not going through and correcting/changing what the instructor marks on the copy. In other words, rewriting is not correcting mistakes in grammar or correcting typos. If you adopt that attitude, you will not realize the process of improving drafts.

YOU MUST BE A CAPABLE WRITER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS. There is no substitute for this skill. DO NOT talk writing; do not tell me how one writes or how you write. Show me through your writing. **The delivery system is not the focus; the message is the focus.** So, your command of computer keys and software is not a substitute for clear, focused text.

Grading: your final course evaluation will be based upon:

Two examinations	100 points (50 each)
Writing assignments	300 points*
Project	50 points (TBD)
Participation/Attendance	<u>50 points</u>
	500 points
	*In-class and out-of-class

Course outline: Previous experience has demonstrated to the instructor that it is best that we proceed as slowly or as quickly as the backgrounds of the enrollees dictates. Nevertheless, an outline follows. We will cover all or most of the chapters (formats) in the textbook, but if the instructor feels the class is not advancing as it should, modifications to this outline will be made.

This approach affords flexibility and the opportunity to address writing concerns.

Assignments, therefore, will be announced week-to-week. Do not ask to submit late assignments for whatever reason. Professional writers do not make excuses. Nor should students.

Spring, 2014: I have decided to distribute a sked after meeting the class.

