

Instructor's Manual

Public Relations Writing Form & Style

TENTH EDITION

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Introduction

Skilled PR writers are in demand as the complexity of message creation and instant delivery in a global communication environment increases impact. Ethical and legal hurdles in the process of persuasive writing require conscientious consideration of responsibilities.

Your authors had to rethink the PR writer's role. Thus, the 10th edition of the textbook introduces some major revisions, many in response to reviewers' and other users' insightful comments.

One major change is an entire chapter on writing for posting in social media and responding to messages from "friends" and "followers," now Chapter 8. Since templates abound for many formats, design and advertising are now part of a new chapter (12) on Designing Messages for Controlled Content Media.

Because some students seem to be depending on the "Conclusions" at the end of chapters for test review, we've moved those from the text and into this book. You can choose from these and mix with your own lecture material to develop presentations and create test questions, although we do have test suggestions for you too.

The Internet is a primary deliverer of messages as well as a major tool for both secondary and primary research, discussed in Chapter 4. Secondary research is easy to access but a challenge to verify. Audience feedback is now more direct, aiding primary research, to discover if your message is reaching your priority audiences. You'll find that clients and employers rely on analytics for evidence of your effectiveness.

The communication channel chosen for delivery always affects the format and style of messages. However, interactive media allow for more immediacy, which demands a higher skill level.

There's less time to rewrite and polish, more need for instant accuracy in fact, form, grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Both style and mechanics have to be ready resources for today's communicator, as well as a command of many different software designs. Although public relations writing courses are now standard offerings in most curricula, teaching them is more challenging. So is learning, despite the growing list of electronic aids such as grammar and spelling checkers, templates for various formats and copyfitting devices.

Chapters 6 and 7 set the scene for demands placed on the public relations writer. Priority is placed on writing to clarify and simplify the complex in a high-tech world. Part of clarity depends on careful attention to grammar, spelling and punctuation, the "rules of the road" for all writers, but especially public relations writers preparing materials for multiple media and an expanding variety of publics, usually global in scope. Your message recipients are all over the world, whether or not you intend them to be.

Access to social media introduced more symmetry to the public relations process. A thorough discussion appears in the new Chapter 8. In social media, competing message statements as well as complementary, and sometimes complimentary, ones appear. Whether your students ever go into communication careers,

these first eight chapters will stand them in good stead in any career.

Our students—all of them—will be expected to translate much of today’s “high tech” information into comprehensible forms for diversified audiences. Not only are audiences in the USA more diversified, much of the writing public relations people do now goes to people in other countries. Often it has to be translated or, rather, interpreted because direct translations seldom work. The clarity and simplicity of public relations writing is critical for global understanding.

With this 10th edition of the text, the question of integrated communication is a reality as organizations strive to speak from their mission statements with one clear voice. Chapter 9 on Media Kits, Backgrounders, Columns and Media Contacts (Pitches), emphasizes the need for unified message approaches across all media. Message consistency is important for credibility, but accomplishing this is complicated by the increased number and sources of competing media. Media kits from nonprofit organizations usually include both print and broadcast public service announcements (PSAs), you’ll see how the message transcends all media.

With messages available in a digital format, it is easier for recipients to compare them for unity and consistency. Social media and converged news media have significantly affected public relations message designs to make them more attractive, accessible, responsive and, often, interactive. Building more personal relationships among publics has become imperative, although a persuasive voice remains. How a public relations writer reaches a variety of traditional media audiences can be demonstrated in class since so many media kits are available electronically.

The groundswell of a message or “debate” in social media is a factor in driving traditional media there for stories. As a result, most publics you want to reach are getting their “news” online, making convergence compulsory for traditional media.

A new Chapter 10 discusses writing for converged traditional media and getting your messages out to social media as well. Traditional media expect use of Associated Press print and broadcast styles.

News releases for traditional media are often picked up by international news services and used “as written” in English language publications abroad. Being aware of that possibility means reminding students again to pay careful attention to the style chapters since English words don’t necessarily mean the same thing to different English language users. The mechanics of messages remain important.

You’ll recognize this particularly in Chapter 11 on email and other instant electronic messages, memos, letters, proposals and reports. The reason for this placement is that more writing of this kind is done than almost any other. That organizational persuasive voice is even in letters and memos—maybe even *especially* in letters and memos, as organizations seek to build relationships through interaction with their diverse publics. Certainly proposals are expected to be persuasive because these are often viewed in a competitive framework. Reports are more factual in presentation, but generally reflect an organizational perspective. Some of these are project reports. Some are public interest reports, and some are special reports on issues or new management initiatives.

Illustrations here are helpful. Companies and organizations will send you their public interest reports so that you can use them in class to illustrate specific points. Reports

from multinationals are useful because they often have to accommodate at least one other language.

The new Chapter 12 incorporates advertising and the designs adapted for all media, appearing on posters and billboards, in print publications and in broadcast media as well as on the Internet. While there's no question about advertising content's being intentionally persuasive, this chapter helps move students toward a more descriptive style. The focus is on what to say and how to say it. They will understand how to blend the creative and the persuasive strategy in this chapter. Students can learn more about production in a layout and design class.

Some basic knowledge of layout and design, though, is needed for students to understand the mechanics of newsletters as well as brochures and magazines. Chapter 13 is devoted to newsletters. Although many newsletters are online, they still have to be designed. Of course, content and writing are the focus of this text, so we have included illustrations that provide, for example, "15 Tips for Newsletter Writing and Editing." Internal and external newsletters have a different focus, and require a different "voice" and design. Some appear in print and online, some are one or the other. Then, there are "subscription" newsletters, both online and print, that demand a fee for delivery in either medium.

Chapter 14 is devoted to magazines and brochures. Magazines can be for internal or external audiences, while brochures usually are for external audiences. Annual reports are included too.

Although most corporate annual reports now are the SEC Form 10K delivered electronically, a printed version is available with a corporate "wrap around" containing information from the leadership and pictures of various activities. Nonprofit organizations

also publish annual reports to give to donors who want to know how their gifts are being used and how effectively the organization is using contributions.

Some may assume that newly hired PR writers wouldn't be involved in such undertakings, but that is not the case, especially with local nonprofit organizations. Management sets the approach and the tone of such efforts, but it is the writer's job to interpret that to appeal to various publics.

Another such assumption often applies to speeches too, but, again many public relations writers get a start in interviewing the person who is giving the speech, and having to develop PowerPoint© presentations. Often the PR writer is also the presenter and has to be sure the message of their presentation fits the organization's mission statement and accomplishes the designated goal for the presentation to a particular audience. All of this is in Chapter 15 because although students already have had some speech writing experience, probably even before coming to college, and get more concentrated information in oral communication classes in college, what they probably don't have experience doing is writing speeches for others to deliver. Also, they probably have not thought about speeches in the context of being a spokesperson for their organization to the news media.

Also, speeches and scripts are a significant employee as well as customer relations' tool. This chapter on speeches and other presentations such as introductions and recognition in giving awards and such is a skill they will use, and not just in public relations.

The book's final chapter is in the section called "Writing in Turbulent Times." That's where you would expect to find the Crisis Communication information, Chapter 16.

Crisis communication is last because it combines all of the elements of previous chapters and provides a good setting for using all of the writing and problem-solving skills. The use of social media in crises has a special emphasis because a crisis may appear on the Internet first, as a contribution from a citizen journalist.” Then, again, something on the Internet may initiate a crisis.

Instructors, this is your tool to use in creating projects and exercises for your students, but you’ll find some suggestions here as well as

in the text. The Internet offers opportunities for you enliven your class presentations and stimulate some good conversations about best practices as a PR writer. You might challenge your students to comment on the new definition of PR from the Public Relations Society of America: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.”

Course Syllabus

The first step with any course is the development of an outline for the course. A syllabus is an implied contract between you and your students, so you must structure it carefully to be sure that all materials can be covered in the time designated. Any course syllabus should include:

1. Course number and description; prerequisites, if any.
2. Instructor's name, contact information, where and when available to students.
3. Description of course.
4. Learning objectives for course.
5. Lists of texts and supplementary readings and where these may be found.
6. Materials needed for the course.
7. Attendance policies.
8. Grading policies.
9. A topical outline for the semester, complete with standing assignments, scheduled examinations, readings and projects, including due dates.
10. Description of any expectations unique to the course.

Syllabus Format

Name of Academic Unit

Number and Name of Course

Semester, Time of Class, Place of Class

Instructor's Name and Office Location

Phone numbers where instructor can be reached

Fax number and/or email address for instructor

Office hours for instructor

Course Description

Include here the official catalogue description. But you also should add sufficient explanation so students will know what to expect. Here's a suggestion: Instruction and writing practice designed to develop the professional-level writing skills expected of beginning public relations practitioners, emphasizing the different approaches required for particular audiences and media.

Prerequisites

Each school has its own set of requirements, and you should list them here. Students who have not fulfilled these should not be allowed to take this course.

Required Texts

Doug Newsom and Jim Haynes, *Public Relations Writing: Form and Style*, 10th ed., Wadsworth/Cengage, Boston, MA., 2013.

We believe the current editions of *The Associated Press Stylebook* (print and broadcast) are essential tools for learning. Students will be preparing many materials for mass media and AP is the most generally accepted style. Students who have taken a media writing course prior to this course may already have copies.

Supplementary Textbooks

These should be in the classroom and/or writing lab for reference, although some students may want to buy their own copies. One suggestion is books for inclusive language.

References

These should include a dictionary (paperback if students want to buy, unabridged for classroom general reference); a thesaurus (in dictionary form for classroom general reference). These will be needed even if students have access to spell-check and grammar software.

For guides to inclusive language in addition to any books you may choose there are websites for gender, ethnicity, physical and mental differences. Regarding gender, many students are often far behind the times in using the male pronoun in a generic sense. This just isn't done anymore in the workplace. In addition to sexism, there are many other considerations such as how to refer to people with various sorts of physical and mental challenges.

Expectations

You need to say something here about what you expect from students. Here is something one of the authors uses: The significant idea is professional level. You will be graded with professional standards. However, your work will be graded incrementally, with greater weight on the later assignments since you are not expected to come into the course with professional public relations writing skills. Having passed media writing, you are expected to bring into the course good journalistic skills in both broadcast and print media. You are expected to read, view and listen to the media for which you will be writing, mass and specialized. Furthermore, you are expected to come to class having already read what is assigned to you in the text for that week. You will be tested from time to time to see if you understand what you are reading.

Standards

Attendance—Insert your policy here, but if you don't have one, consider this: Public relations professionals should be on the job, so attendance is mandatory. Attendance records will be used in determining borderline grade decisions. More than three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.

Deadlines—Your policy should be here. Ours follows: Deadlines are strictly observed. Papers not in on time will not be accepted, and on time means at the beginning of a class period. No work done in class, including tests of any kind, can be made up. If you know you must miss class, your work has to be turned in prior to the date you expect to miss. If illness or another officially excused absence causes you to miss class, your absence should be documented, and arrangements made individually. In most cases, dropping this class will be necessary for extended illness.

Plagiarism—Your school probably has a statement on this, and it should be used here. Additionally, you might want to include something like this: If you use content from already published materials of any kind, print or electronic, generally you have to get permission for such use and give credit to the source. As far as assignments are concerned, you are expected to do your own work. Use of someone else's work amounts to academic dishonesty, and you should see the student handbook for policies in that regard.

Accuracy—You should include your own or the department's standards here. Ours are fairly severe, an F for errors in fact, grammar, style or spelling, even if the latter is clearly typographical, i.e., carelessness or the result of failing to check correct spelling.

Some instructors find this too severe, and if you are teaching the course during the

same semester with other instructors, you need to negotiate consistent standards across all sections. An acceptable compromise is to lower grades ten points for each error in fact, grammar, style or spelling. That usually gets students' attention, but not as dramatically as the F.

Format—Your practices should match those of others teaching the course. We suggest the following: All assignments must be computer-generated, printed in class, when possible or submitted on 8.5-by-11-inch paper. There are no exceptions ever. The appropriate format for each type of public relations writing assignment must be followed or the material will not be accepted for grading. (Some instructors prefer to receive the students' assignments digitally. However, students are less likely to catch their errors when they do this. Once their copy is printed, it seems they are more likely to detect problems.)

Objectives

You should set your own. Consider these:

1. To be able to write clear, concise copy that is accurate and logically organized;
2. To write with correct grammar, spelling and punctuation;
3. To know how to find and use reliable sources of information, and
4. To use basic information in different formats.

Grades

Grading should be based on your own teaching methods. We have used 25 percent for weekly assignments, 20 percent *each* for two major exams and 35 percent for the final project. You may choose not to give a final exam in this course if you give a mid-semester exam and comprehensive exam on the text and class experiences toward the end of the semester. You might also consider a division like 20 percent for exams, 20 percent for exercises and pop quizzes and 60 percent

for major writing assignments. The emphasis, we feel, should be on the writing.

Final Project

Whether you use something from a local organization or develop your own case study situation, students should demonstrate expertise in each of these areas:

1. backgrounder or position paper;
2. policy/planning memorandum;
3. newsletter;
4. brochure and website design (use home page for complete design and explanation of following screens and links);
5. speech or slide/video script, along with an appropriate introduction;
6. ads and commercials, whether for a profit-making organization or of a public service nature for a nonprofit organization;
7. employee publication article, generally to show skill at writing a feature, and
8. a media kit complete with fact sheet, one news story prepared for print and broadcast, one feature which may be a profile and a cover letter to media personnel.

Exams

Include as many as you think necessary. Many campuses require a mid-semester grade of some type. You should have a traditional examination score over the text and lectures to include with the writing assignments. You may want to include weekly checks of some sort to see if students are keeping up with the reading.

There should be a comprehensive test to see if students can relate material in one portion of the course to other portions and to their writing assignments. We give a final exam within a two and a half hour time frame that uses a created scenario that demands certain types of writing examples, usually about four. We do allow dictionaries and stylebooks (print and broadcast) but no textbooks.

Writing Assignments

You may want to break the final project assignments into pieces that you require at times appropriate to material covered in the text. To do that well, the students have to get the “client” at the very beginning of the course. If you do this, you can select a subject for the class early enough to schedule a presentation to students in the first week or so.

Course Schedule

We suggest that you develop your course schedule very carefully. Above all, do not wander from it. Be sure to list any dates you know the class will not meet—holidays, breaks, etc. Give the specific time, date and location of the final exam if one is given.

There is always the question of what to do when students don't appear to learn a section of material. Our experience is that you can get *far* behind in a course like this,

sometimes with the deliberate help of students, if you don't keep to your course outline. Cover the material designated. Some students will fall behind and fail. Perhaps they should take the class again.

Following is a suggested schedule you may use as a model. It is designed for a semester system. If you operate in a quarter system, the schedule must be compressed accordingly.

Week 1 Chapters 1, *Public Relations and the Writer* and 2, *The Global Public Relations Environment*. (Legal and Ethical Responsibilities of the PR Writer.)

Have students complete a personal data sheet and a media use sheet—which newspapers and news magazines as well as other specialized publications they read, which broadcast stations they use, and which websites and blogs they regularly access.

Administer a baseline grammar, spelling and punctuation test for evaluation, not for a grade.

Week 2 Chapters 3, *Persuasion* and 4, *Research for the Public Relations Writer*

Present the class project. Have students develop a list of publics and a media list for the project; get them to document at least five major sources for background material on the project or related areas.

Or, if you don't yet have a project, give them a current issue and have them locate sources to gain information and document the legitimacy of each source. Have them write an unbiased essay on the issue, including who is affected by the problem.

Week 3 Chapter 5, *The Public Relations Planning Process*

Do at least one in-class or lab exercise, preferably one directly related to the class project, or to the issue they studied last week. In either case, assign the creation of a basic fact sheet on the project or the issue.

Week 4 Chapter 6, *Writing to Clarify and Simplify the Complex*

Use the exercise in this manual to see how well the students do, or locate another article from a newspaper or magazine and ask the students to try their hand at making the content available to a fourth grader.

- Week 5** Chapter 7, *Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation*.
Use the exercise in this manual to measure the spelling abilities of your students.
- Week 6** Chapter 8, *PR's Role in Social Media: Monitoring and Participating*.
Ask the students to write a Tweet addressing the project subject matter or the issue used in Week 2. Develop some possible responses that the Tweet might stimulate and ask students how to react in writing or in some posting of words and video on YouTube.
- Week 7** Chapter 9, *Media Kits, Media Pitches, Backgrounders and Columns*.
Ask students (either as individuals or groups) to give backgrounder reports on the subject matter of the project or the issue used earlier. Assign a column to be written on the topic. Have students write public service announcements for the class project or the issue, for print media, broadcast and social media.
- Week 8** Review and give Mid-Semester Exam on Chapters 1-9.
Be sure the class project is presented no later than this week.
- Week 9** Chapter 10, *Writing for Traditional Media*.
Assign the class, based on the topic—issue or project, a basic news release in print style and one in broadcast style. Invite suggestions about photos/video that could accompany the releases.
- Week 10** Chapter 11, *Email, Memos, Letters, Proposals and Reports*.
Assign students to write an email, a memo and a letter appropriate to the class project or do these as stand-alone exercises. Hear individual or group reports to the class regarding the findings about publics and media related to the class project and how these may affect creative, persuasive strategy in the project.
- Week 11** Chapter 12, *Designing Messages for Controlled Content Media*
Use the project to challenge students to create a message statement and then adapt it for as many media as they can think of for the project—posters, billboards, pop-up Internet messages, etc. Ask them to use free artwork from electronic sources or design something appropriate.
- Week 12** Chapter 13, *Newsletters and Magazines*
Have students design a newsletter for their project and write the introductory article. The students should be given a choice of whether they are designing an online or print newsletter and how the presentation would change for the alternate choice.

Week 13 Chapter 14, *Brochures and Magazines*

Ask students to explain how they would rewrite the newsletter article for an external print magazine.

Have them prepare a brochure for their project.

Week 14 Chapter 15, *Speeches and Presentations and Other Orally Delivered Messages*.

Assign students to write a presentation for their project.

Week 15 Chapter 16 *Crisis Communication*

Assign students to outline a crisis communication plan for the class project client.

Comprehensive exam on the text. Review all materials needed for the final presentation of the class project.

Week 16 Class projects due and final exam date and time.

Additional Thoughts

Each chapter has exercises at the end. This Instructor's Manual also has some suggested assignments. You may prefer to use generic exercises and to let the students work independently on a project. Any exercise is good if students learn what they need to know.

Writing Evaluations

Students are not professional writers who have become accustomed to criticism from

peers and bosses. Most of them, at least the ones we've taught, are very sensitive to criticism. Furthermore, they often feel that an instructor's evaluation is more subjective than professional. You need to be very explicit about your evaluation of their writing.

Give students this format for their work, then they have a framework for your expectations and are more likely to respond positively to your critique.

P.1

Preparation for Writing Assignment Form

Project: (nature of project)

Contact: (resource person/s, name/s, address/es, phone number/s)

Writer:

Objective/purpose of piece:

Publics:

Message statement: (one central statement)

Description of message statement form: (as in, "one-page news release to be mailed to 50 weekly newspapers in state")

Main points to be covered in expanded message statement to achieve purpose:

Draft needed by: (date and time)

Finished copy needed by: (date and time)

Distribution method: (to media/ to audiences)

Comments: (special guidance)

Chapter 1

Public Relations and the Writer

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the differences in public relations writing and other kinds of writing.
2. To know how and why different types of public relations activity call for different styles and forms of writing.
3. To realize and prepare for the versatility demanded of a public relations writer to effectively incorporate design, art and sound into messages.
4. To be aware of the different types of career opportunities public relations writing offers.

Definitions

There are many different definitions of *public relations*, ranging from the simple, “Public relations is responsibility and responsiveness in policy and information to the best interests of the institution and its publics” (Newsom) to the complex, “Public relations is the overall ‘umbrella’ term used to describe the wide variety of activities and communication that organizations undertake to monitor, evaluate, influence and adjust to the attitudes, opinions and behaviors of groups or individuals who constitute that organization’s publics” (PRSA).

It’s important to discriminate between public relations and *publicity*. Not all public relations is publicity, not by any measure. Publicity is “a function of public relations that involves dissemination of purposefully planned and executed messages through selected media, without

payment to the media, to further the particular organization or person” (PRSA).

Advertising is generally defined as paid-for time or space, but in public relations practice nonprofit organizations are allowed *public service announcements* in print and broadcast media.

This is allowed if the nonprofit organizations have official (Internal Revenue Service) nonprofit status and if no time or space is being bought in a competing medium for the message. In handling public service announcements, the public relations person deals with advertising directors in the print media and public service directors in the broadcast media. It is not the same as publicity, either in form, content or placement. It is like advertising, but it is not purchased and therefore there is no control over placement, *i.e.*, whether it is used or not, where or when.

Publics/Stakeholders

To familiarize students with the process involved in developing a typology of publics for an organization, ask students to list your university’s publics/stakeholders. Then ask them to prioritize these in terms of the school’s usual communication activities, including recruitment of students, sports, other universities, students and their families, donors, government entities, media, the local community, etc. Parenthetically, when you discuss the research chapter, you could ask students to identify the demographics and psychographics of those publics that most

often constitute the university's primary publics. How might they go about finding these?

Public Relations Materials

Students often have not been exposed to some public relations materials, such as position papers. Even when public relations materials are familiar, such as newsletters or brochures, students probably haven't thought much about producing them. For that reason, it's a good idea to begin the class by introducing students to a wide assortment of PR materials.

You might collect a number of these from the school itself things like recruitment brochures and letters, the admission officer's video presentations, ads the university has run in various publications, various promotional materials (especially from your own department), websites—the university's, your college's, and your unit's (school or department's since these websites usually have historical facts sheets and mission statements. See if the university has a Facebook page, a Twitter account. Get news releases from your news service and sports information offices, magazines that go to alumni, solicitation letters to alumni, newsletters to alumni, faculty and staff, speeches given by the president or dean, etc. The list is endless.

Just looking at how the school presents itself to its various publics will be interesting to the students and something they can relate to.

PR Writing Questions

1. What should be the performance expectations for someone hiring public relations writer—the role and function of the job?
2. What are some major differences between public relations writing, reporting and other types of writing?
3. Define and describe public relations, publicity and advertising. Your university may use an integrated communication model. How is that reflected in its communications?
4. Who are the publics of public relations? (Students should at least name the eight major areas from which a typology is derived.)
5. Describe who is likely to be an internal public and who would be an external public and the types of media that will reach each.

Chapter 1 Conclusions

- A public relations writer's work is purposeful, persuasive and principled.
- Public relations writers must be versatile in tailoring all types of messages for any medium, a mix of formats and a variety of individuals anywhere in the world.
- Social media content for clients and organizations provide needed feedback.
- Appropriate responses in online communication are critical to an organization's credibility.
- Employers of public relations writers are emphasizing accountability—evidence that messages work.
- Best practices in public relations have always involved two-way communication, and technology has forced symmetry, so public relations writers are crafting responses to a electronic messages from multiple sources and initiating messages directly to multiple publics, including individuals.
- Messages to individuals often reach much wider publics and build constituencies.
- Messages—a combination of words, images and often sound—are frequently communicated electronically and may be received anywhere in the world, whether or not that is the intent of the sender.
- Always and remaining critical talents for public relations people are the ability to recognize potential news stories and anticipating how these might be received by global audience.
- A public relations writer is responsible for helping an organization establish good relationships with its publics.
- Choosing words and illustrations requires a keen understanding of the complex, and often conflicting, values held among diverse publics.
- There are two aspects to this responsibility: *strategy* of determining what and when to communicate to whom and *tactics* for handling that communication through the appropriate channels so that receivers understand the policies and performance of the institution.
- The lines between advertising and publicity are blurred and frequently not clear to clients or employers.

- Many different tools go into other PR writer responsibilities such as preparing materials for promotions, special events, campaigns, crises and specialized areas, such as investor relations.
- Advertising is time or space bought to carry a buyer's message, but public service announcements, although appearing in the same time or space as commercial copy, are carried at the discretion of the medium.
- Publicity is information supplied to the public without charge but also without control unless the employer or client owns the medium. Information supplied as publicity can appear in any form, and whether it appears at all is at the discretion of the medium.
- Publics self-identify themselves in terms of their relationship to organizations, making it necessary for writers to do research to determine what these might be.
- With most communication electronic, "publics" include some "stakeholders," people who identify with an issue, action or event, though they may have no investment in the organization its products or services.
- Publics are people tied together by some common factor(s).
- Factors binding people together as audiences may be uncovered through demographics (statistics such as age, sex and geography) and psychographics (interests and attitudes).
- Priority publics or target audiences are public relations publics selected for special attention and specific messages.
- Channels of communication may be specialized media or mass media.
- Traditional media generally are referred to as legacy media.
- Interactive media, such as Facebook, enable online conversations to develop into relationships with specific members of a public. Like any relationship, these can be time-consuming, but appropriate responses are important.
- A public relations writer's role is to know about the institution for which that writer is working, the audiences or publics of that institution and the channels of communication through which to reach them.
- Public relations writers must be effective, efficient writers in all media.
- To be effective they have to know the business/institution involved, what it does, where it is, who it serves, regulations affecting it and criticisms of the institution's policies, actions or consequences of how it conducts itself.

Exercise

This suggested writing experience for the students forces them to the point of the chapter, “know your audience,” by having them create and prioritize a complete list of publics.

Congratulations! You have been hired by Quicksilver Interactive Group.

- You have been assigned to work on the account of a watercraft sales company (boats, skis, jet skis, etc.)
- List, in order of importance, the six main constituencies that you believe are most important to the watercraft sales company.
 - Explain why you believe each is important
- For each constituency:
 - Explain what the people in the group have in common and why that is important in your public relations efforts to reach them
 - Describe the information on each public that you need to develop a complete public relations plan
 - Describe the channels of communication and activities that you will recommend
 - Explain why you are recommending each
 - Explain what you will persuade each one to do
 - Write a sentence or paragraph containing the basic message you want to communicate to that group of people

Notes

Chapter 2

Ethical and Legal Responsibilities of the PR Writer

Learning Objectives

1. To learn that the legal boundaries of permissible behavior are not the actual boundaries. These are set by ethical standards.
2. Ethical standards vary with different publics who have different levels of tolerance based on particular sets of values.
3. Values are embedded by culture, and some global legal systems are tied to a culture, tradition or religion. In a global society with instant digital presence in another country, it is imperative to be aware of what is legal wherever your communication may be accessed.
4. Although there are professional standards of behavior set by various organizations, at the core of ethical behavior is the individual. One should not compromise one's values in the workplace. No one benefits, least of all the individual.

Ethical and Moral Climates

The ethical and moral climate of an organization often is set by top management. It's difficult to be honest in a corrupt environment. Public relations practitioners run the risk of ruining their credibility by trying to function in such an environment. If persuasion won't work to convince people to behave in an ethical and socially responsible way, it's best to leave. Sometimes calling management's attention to professional standards helps affect the climate in a positive way, as does creating

"scenarios" to show what is likely to happen in the arena of public opinion, if ethical and moral compromises are made. We suggest that you use the model shown in Example 4 as a take-off for discussion.

Examine different value systems that exist in the U.S. and then explore value systems in other parts of the world. Much of the material public relations writers produce is likely to get global exposure. How do you accommodate different value systems?

One way to talk about this is to discuss International Public Relations Association's codes (www.IPRA.org) and that of the Public Relations Society of America (www.PRSA.org). Also, see *Public Relations Ethics: Some Foundations* by Hugh Culbertson and Ni Chen with Linzhi Shi, *The Ohio Journalism Monographs Series*, No. 7, January 2003. Also see Charles J. Glasser, Jr., Editor, "Understanding Media Law in the Global Context" *International Libel & Privacy Handbook*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Bloomberg Press)

Legal Responsibilities

We suggest that you focus your discussion on the personal responsibilities of the public relations writer. Sometimes students don't appreciate the realities of the workplace. Individuals cause legal problems. They also sometimes get fired and must bear the responsibility for their own legal defense, even if they may have been told to do whatever it was that caused the problems.

Often there is a corporate loss of memory in such situations that leaves employees exposed, especially those at lower levels. Students need to know enough to recognize risks, call attention to them and then to refuse to be a part of such activities.

Be sure to discuss the red flag words that can cause legal problems and the test for defamation. Students often don't realize that not only are laws different in various statutes in the U.S., but that laws change. There are laws established by statute and then interpreted by cases.

Cases constantly change the nuances of laws. Privacy cases provide a good example. Students should also know that there are two basic legal codes, British Common Law, on which the U.S.'s legal system is based, and the Napoleonic Code, on which the law of many other countries is based (and one U.S. state: Louisiana).

Furthermore, some nations also have a legal system directed by their religious faith. Public relations materials cross many legal borders, and the public relations writer needs to know enough to stay out of trouble, at least by knowing when to call on legal counsel for help.

Permission for the use of copyrighted material, individuals' names or images, is an area in which public relations writers can get into enormous legal problems. It's also an area in which many practitioners are ignorant, so there may not be any backup in the workplace. You should present different situations in which permissions are needed and how students go about getting them.

PR Writing Questions

1. Discuss how one's personal ethics are likely to affect personal job behavior, such as cheating on exams (means to an end) and lying to news media (also means to an end).
2. Define moral principles and explain how these affect public opinion, which often set standards for behavior, for better or for worse. (Some societies condemn certain practices that others tolerate.)
3. Explain the difference between normative and comparative ethics.
4. Discuss the types of contracts a public relations writer may need to make to produce public relations materials.
5. Discuss the types of permissions a public relations writer should consider in producing public relations materials.
6. List at least ten words that should cause a public relations writer to pause and consider whether or not using them might result in defamation.

Chapter 2 Conclusions

- What people know affects their expectations. When there is a lack of transparency, and consequences of practices not disclosed become public, a crisis is likely to occur and not just for the organization involved.
- Many of the global crises are blamed on a lack of transparency.
- You have to be genuinely sensitive to the feelings and needs of others, and you must treat others as you want to be treated.
- Public relations writers often initiate or implement practices that draw criticism of public relations.
- Some public relations writing practices are legally prescribed; others are set by moral principles.
- Moral principles consist of a set of beliefs and values that reflect a group's sense of what is *right* or *wrong*, regardless of how these terms are defined in formal rules, regulations or laws.
- *Formal conditions* call for moral guidelines or rules that are regarded as universal and prescriptive. *Material conditions* represent considerations that deal with the welfare of society as a whole and emphasize basic human good or purpose.
- The public view of an organization's ethics is likely to be based less on a definition of morality than on the consequences of what the organization says and does, which will be seen as either moral or not moral by each and all of its publics. This sense of rightness is what creates public opinion.
- If you write, say or do something that violates society's sense of "rightness," you may be undercutting your constitutional right to free speech.
- One way to understand your responsibilities is to look carefully at the interplay of several levels of influence on your personal and professional behavior.
- Society's expectations and judgments about what is right or wrong are notoriously capricious, so it's your responsibility to be sensitive to changes and even to anticipate them.
- The study of ethics falls into two broad categories: comparative ethics and normative ethics. Normative ethics are studied by theologians and philosophers. Comparative ethics—sometimes called descriptive ethics—are studied by social scientists, who look at the ways different cultures practice ethical behavior.

- Remember that ethics are culture-bound. This can create controversies in ethnically diverse societies like the USA and provoke problems in other countries where values are different.
- Because your own ethical standards are at the core of your behavior, you have to decide what to do when your standards conflict with those of the organization. You have four strategy options: (1) educate the organization and persuade them to accept your standards; (2) refuse the task; (3) ask that you be given another task; or (4) take the assignment.
- Publics work with perceptions of facts, and these perceptions become the “facts” on which opinions are based.
- When you go to work for an organization, you may be given formal training in the corporate culture or value system, or you may pick it up informally by watching and interacting with new associates.
- Your real worth to an organization consists of your ability to be in tune with relevant publics. When you know these publics well, you can construct messages that are valued and accepted by them.
- Professional associations of public relations practitioners have standards with which you must comply in order to be accepted.
- Credibility with publics is essential for the success of an organization, and this quality depends on accuracy, honesty, truth and fairness.
- False and misleading information destroys credibility, and truth has a way of emerging. Besides, in some cases, giving out false information is against the law.
- This is a litigious society, and you need to bulletproof your writing as much as possible.
- Most laws are negative, defining things you cannot do. In addition to the laws themselves, there is a body of case law consisting of judicial decisions interpreting these laws. Because case law is in flux, you have to keep up with the changes.
- Watch for changes in the laws, especially those governing materials available in cyberspace.
- Contracts can keep you out of a lot of legal difficulty, but you must know what you need to specify in contracts and what is bound by contract.
- Commenting on a situation that is under litigation can earn you a contempt of court charge.
- Libel laws and privacy considerations can cause you legal problems if you don’t understand them thoroughly, even when you are dealing with public figures.
- Copyrights protect your creative works but not your ideas. You need to be sure that you observe the copyrights of others. The trademarks and such of an organization are protected

by law, but legal protections are sometimes difficult to enforce. You need to get permission when using materials protected by such registry. Plagiarism is a violation of copyright.

- Federal government regulators that figure most prominently in public relations writing are the U.S. Postal Service, the SEC, the Federal Trade Commission, the Internal Revenue Service and the Food and Drug Administration.
- When in doubt, consult a good attorney who is a specialist in communication law.
- Relationships with publics can be considered at three different levels: developmental, sometimes called the cultivation stage, the maintenance level and the quality level or strength of the connection of an individual to the organization.
- To have a strong connection to the organization, people need to feel they have easy access, are being listened to in a positive way and are responded to honestly and fairly.
- The underlying consideration is trust in the organization and the credibility of its communications, both created by transparency.
- Transparency is an expectation of openness and disclosure of information that significantly affects all publics.