

EIGHTH EDITION

Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques



DENNIS L. WILCOX

BRYAN H. REBER

Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques

EIGHTH EDITION

Dennis L. Wilcox

San Jose State University

Bryan H. Reber

University of Georgia

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Preface

The new edition of *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques* continues its reputation as the most comprehensive “how-to” text on the market. It will give you a complete tool kit for writing and creating a full range of public relations materials for distribution through traditional media (print, radio, television) and the Internet, including social media.

Past editions, and this one is no exception, get high marks from professors and students as an extremely good, user-friendly text written in plain English. It offers common sense advice to students and practitioners about how public relations is practiced in the “real world,” and contains clear, step-by-step guidelines illustrated by multiple examples from actual award-winning public relations programs conducted by many well-known organizations.

In addition, it’s the only major PR writing text that provides entire chapters on how to plan meetings and events, compose publicity photos, effectively use infographics, write news features and op-eds, give a presentation, plan an entire public relations program or campaign, and measure the success of a campaign. As one reviewer stated, “Wilcox and Reber are about the best authors out there.”

Although the emphasis is on the “nuts and bolts” of effective public relations writing and techniques, the text also provides the conceptual framework and broader context of how the tactics of public relations fit into the entire public relations process—research, planning, communication, and evaluation. The idea is to ensure that you not only know how to write public relations materials, but also understand why they are written from the standpoint of furthering organizational objectives.

The many updates, revisions, and additions to this new edition reflect today’s work in public relations. Perhaps the most significant changes in this edition concern the rise of tablets, smartphones, and social media platforms that have significantly changed how public relations writers think and work. Blogs and other social media, such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and YouTube, have challenged and created new opportunities for public relations practitioners.

This edition, more than any other public relations writing text, tells you how to work in the rapidly changing digital environment. It’s more than a textbook; it’s a handy reference book that students will constantly use on their first job and current practitioners will use as an expert resource. As one professor told their students, “This is the one book you should keep. Don’t sell it at the end of the semester.” In sum, this edition is the book that will

become your standard reference source for college and the first years of your career.

New to the Edition

The increasing array of available media platforms and channels is a bonanza for public relations specialists but also presents two challenges to today’s students and current practitioners. One challenge is to constantly keep up with the latest developments in mobile devices or new social networking platforms. The second challenge is to understand how all these new communication platforms and channels can be applied in public relations to more effectively communicate with increasingly segmented audiences, across a variety of earned, owned, and paid media.

This edition offers new and expanded treatment of numerous topics. Some examples include:

- An updated and revised chapter on websites, blogs, and podcasts that includes additional information on the role of online newsrooms on organizational websites (Chapter 10)
- A completely new chapter on social media and apps that thoroughly explores how organizations can effectively use social media to increase consumer engagement and brand loyalty (Chapter 11)
- Expanded information on how to work with influential bloggers (Chapter 4)
- Completely updated stats on the reach and influence of social media (Chapter 11)
- Case studies on how major organizations have integrated traditional media and social media in various public relations programs and campaigns (all chapters)
- The use of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in the writing and formatting of news releases (Chapter 5)
- The increased use and popularity of infographics to convey a variety of information that is easily digestible to the public (Chapter 8)
- How to measure the effectiveness of social media campaigns (Chapter 19)
- The considerations for designing an attractive and interactive website (Chapter 10)
- How to prepare and tailor content for distribution in earned, owned, and paid media (all chapters)
- The concept of brand journalism and content marketing as a trend in public relations and marketing (Chapter 7)

- The components and structure of a multimedia news release and the effectiveness of adding visuals to any news release (Chapters 5, 8)
- The elements of a good online newsletter and how to produce a brochure (Chapter 12)

REVEL™

Educational technology designed for the way today’s students read, think, and learn

When students are engaged deeply, they learn more effectively and perform better in their courses. This simple fact inspired the creation of REVEL: an immersive learning experience designed for the way today’s students read, think, and learn. Built in collaboration with educators and students nationwide, REVEL is the newest, fully digital way to deliver respected Pearson content.

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Learn more about REVEL

How-To Checklists for the Aspiring Writer

This edition has almost 100 Tips for Success features that offer students checklists on how to prepare various materials and conduct basic media relations techniques. Such checklists provide step-by-step directions and help readers grasp basic concepts that are discussed and elaborated upon in the chapter. The following are a sampling of new and revised Tips for Success, including many that relate to social media, which are part of the new edition:

- Websites for Public Relations Organizations (Chapter 1)
- Useful Websites for Public Relations Writers (Chapter 1)
- Celebrate! It’s National Footwear Care Month (Chapter 3)
- The Process of Creating Ideas for a Client (Chapter 3)
- How to Make Journalists and Bloggers Happy (Chapter 4)
- A Media Relations Checklist (Chapter 4)
- The Six Elements of a Pitch (Chapter 6)
- Two Services Match Reporter Queries with PR Sources (Chapter 6)
- Maximizing Your Feature Content (Chapter 7)
- Guidelines for Creating an Infographic (Chapter 8)
- Getting Your PSA on the Air (Chapter 9)

- Guidelines for Designing a Website (Chapter 10)
- How to Increase Website Visitors (Chapter 10)
- The 10 Commandments for Writing Web Content (Chapter 10)
- How Visitors “Read” a Website (Chapter 10)
- The Components of an Online Newsroom (Chapter 10)
- The Perfect Blog Post by the Numbers (Chapter 10)
- How to Do a Podcast (Chapter 10)
- How to Post an Effective Message on Facebook (Chapter 11)
- How to Improve Your Tweets (Chapter 11)
- How to Use Instagram in Your Organization (Chapter 11)
- How to Increase Your Organization’s YouTube Views (Chapter 11)
- How to Create Content for Pinterest (Chapter 11)
- How to Create and Promote an App (Chapter 11)
- Lessons in Good Intranet Design (Chapter 12)
- Story Ideas for Employee Periodicals (Chapter 12)
- How to Work with Graphic Designers (Chapter 12)
- How to Manage Your Email (Chapter 13)
- How to Write a Professional Email (Chapter 13)
- Wording a Speech (Chapter 14)
- Ways to Manage Speech Content (Chapter 14)
- Timing Your Speech (Chapter 14)
- Avoiding Bad PowerPoint Presentations (Chapter 14)
- Profile of an Event Planner (Chapter 15)
- Ten Tips for Tweeting @Conferences (Chapter 15)
- How to Do Media Relations at a Trade Show (Chapter 15)
- Free Online Tools for Analyzing Your Social Media Success (Chapter 19)

New PR Casebooks to Stimulate Interest and Insight

Students can better grasp a concept if it is illustrated with a practical example from the “real world.” The extensive use of examples is a highlight of this text in two ways.

First, every concept throughout the book is followed by a practical example. Second, a more in-depth summary of a particular campaign is given in a “PR Casebook” that helps students understand how the various techniques of using earned, owned, and paid content complement each other in a campaign. Some new cases include the following:

- The Ice Bucket Challenge Raises \$100 Million (Chapter 3)
- The Wall Street Journal Previews a New Hotel (Chapter 4)

- Boston Marathon Bombing Makes Hospital a Crisis Center (Chapter 4)
- Two Successful Pitches (Chapter 6)
- An Airport Food Operator Uses a B-Roll to Announce a New Service (Chapter 9)
- Pitching the Airport Food Operator’s B-Roll (Chapter 9)
- A Video PSA Warns About the Use of Decorative Contact Lenses (Chapter 9)
- Coca-Cola Website Sets the Standard for Brand Journalism (Chapter 10)
- Seattle Police Blog About Marijuana (Chapter 10)
- An Oscar Selfie Generates Three Million Retweets (Chapter 11)
- Social Media Fuels a Solar Decathlon (Chapter 11)
- The RFP Process with Caribou Coffee and Skinnygirl Cocktails (Chapter 13)
- Festivals Celebrate Everything from Garlic to Beer (Chapter 15)
- U.S. Census Bureau Targets Millennials (Chapter 16)
- Legal and Regulatory Bodies Continue to Define Social Media Rules (Chapter 17)
- A Frito-Lay Campaign Meets Its Objectives (Chapter 19)

Quotes from Leading Professionals

New quotes from leading professionals are highlighted throughout. These short, pithy statements give the essence of a professional’s insights and wisdom on a particular concept or technique. This approach is much more readable than the short narrative or Q&A with a professional featured in some texts.

Organization of the Book

The text is written and organized so instructors can easily mix and match chapters that suit their students’ needs. It’s also adaptable for either a semester or quarter course and can even be divided for two courses.

Chapter 1 reviews the basic concepts of good writing, errors to avoid, and what resources are needed. Chapter 2 continues with the components of persuasive writing, provides a brief overview of major communication theories, and ends with the ethical responsibilities of the public relations writer.

Chapter 3 helps students think strategically and creatively about what makes news. Traditional journalistic values are emphasized, but students are also told how to brainstorm ideas to generate news through special events, contests, and even stunts. Chapter 4 is about how to work with journalists and bloggers to ensure effective media relations. How to communicate during a crisis also is covered.

Chapter 5 thoroughly details the structure and format of the news release. Attention is given to writing and formatting digital news releases, including multimedia releases, that are distributed via email, websites, and electronic services. Chapter 6 continues the process by detailing how to prepare fact sheets, media advisories, and media kits. Particularly valuable is a detailed section on how to “pitch” a story idea to a journalist or a blogger.

Chapter 7 focuses on the writing of feature stories, such as personality profiles and product-application stories. The writing of opinion pieces, such as op-eds and letters to the editor, are also discussed. Chapter 8 examines the elements of good publicity photos and infographics, which often make a story more attractive to editors. It also offers suggestions on how to work with photographers, write photo captions, and use infographics to distribute information in a highly attractive visual format. Chapter 9 is about preparing content for radio, television, and online video. The mechanics of video news releases (VNRs) and B-roll packages are explained, as well as how to book guests on talk shows, conduct satellite media tours, and create video stories for YouTube and organizational websites.

Chapter 10 is a detailed examination of how to organize and format content for websites, blogs, and podcasts. The chapter ends with a detailed discussion about best practices for organizing and posting content on an organization’s online newsroom. Chapter 11 is about effectively using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Pinterest to post content that engages consumers and builds brand loyalty. It ends with a discussion of how today’s messages must be mobile-enabled to accommodate the rising tide of smartphone users, and how apps are now a major factor in the distribution of service-oriented information.

Chapter 12 offers information on how to prepare print and online newsletters, write and design a brochure, and use employee intranets to distribute content. The complex job of writing and organizing an organization’s annual report is also discussed. Chapter 13 offers students tips on email etiquette, how to write a business letter, and how to respond to an organization’s Request for Proposal (RFP) seeking the services of a public relations or consulting firm.

Chapter 14 is about how to write and give speeches and presentations. Detailed guidelines for preparing PowerPoint slides are provided. Chapter 15 is about planning meetings and events. Detailed steps are given for organizing a banquet, planning a convention, setting up a trade show, and selecting a celebrity for a promotional event. Chapter 16 is about preparing direct mail pieces, primarily for non-profit organizations, and the key elements of public relations advertising. Other media such as billboards, transit panels, and event T-shirts are discussed.

Chapter 17 provides a legal framework for preparing materials. Attention is given to libel, privacy, copyright, trademarks, and governmental regulatory agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Attention is also given to the legal or career-damaging consequences of posting inappropriate information on organizational or personal social media pages.

Chapter 18 presents the essential elements of a public relations campaign, providing the information needed to integrate various strategies and tactics into an effective campaign. The steps for how to write a public relations plan are given. Chapter 19 explores the various ways that the success of a campaign can be measured. A key section of the chapter discusses how social media effectiveness is measured from the standpoint of reach, share of conversation, audience engagement, and how much messages are shared.

Available Instructor Resources

The following resources are available for instructors. These can be downloaded at <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc>. Login required.

- **PowerPoint**—provides a core template of the content covered throughout the text. Can easily be added to customize for your classroom.
- **Instructor’s Manual**—includes a description, in-class discussion questions, and a research assignment for each chapter.
- **Test Bank**—includes additional questions beyond the REVEL in multiple choice and open-ended—short and essay response—formats.
- **MyTest**—an electronic format of the Test Bank to customize in-class tests or quizzes. Visit: <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/mytest>.

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About the Authors



Dennis L. Wilcox

Dr. Wilcox is professor emeritus of public relations at San Jose State University and former director of the School of Journalism & Mass Communications. He is also the lead author of two other popular textbooks, *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics* and *THINK Public Relations*. He is an accredited (APR) member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and is also in the organization's College of Fellows, recognizing his lifelong contributions to the profession. Wilcox is a former chair of the PRSA Educator's Academy and the public relations division of the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communications (AEJMC). Among his many awards is PRSA's "Educator of the Year," the Xifra-Heras Award from the University of Girona (Spain), an award of excellence from the Public Relations Society of India, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Bucharest for his many contributions to global public relations education and to advancing the profession.

Wilcox is currently active in the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) and is a member of the Arthur W. Page Society, an organization of senior public relations executives. He now travels extensively as a speaker and consultant in Europe, South America, and Asia. His philosophy, to quote St. Augustine, is "The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page." He can be reached at dennis.wilcox@sjsu.edu.

Dr. Wilcox is professor emeritus of public relations at San Jose State University and former director of the School of Journalism & Mass Communications. He is also the lead author of two other popular textbooks, *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics* and *THINK Public Relations*.

He is an accredited (APR) member of the



Bryan H. Reber

Dr. Reber is C. Richard Yarbrough Professor in Crisis Communication Leadership at the University of Georgia, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. He teaches introduction to public relations, management, crisis communication, and writing. On the graduate level, Reber teaches management, persuasion, campaign research, and public opinion.

Reber's research focuses on public relations theory, practice, pedagogy, and crisis and health communication and has been published in the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Health Communication*, *Public Relations Review*, and *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, among others.

Reber regularly presents his research at national and international academic conferences. He is the co-author of *Gaining Influence in Public Relations*, *Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics*, 11th ed., and *THINK Public Relations*. Reber serves on the board of the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations and is a member of the Arthur W. Page Society. He worked for 15 years in public relations at Bethel College, Kansas. He can be reached at reber@uga.edu.

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Chapter 1

Getting Organized for Writing



Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Recognize the public relations framework in which writing plays a role
- 1.2 Express the objectives, audiences, and the channels used by the public relations writer
- 1.3 Describe some of the necessary tools that a public relations writer needs access to
- 1.4 Report how the professional writer can use industry resources to keep up with developments in the field
- 1.5 Express the different forms of research and how online resources can assist with public relations writing tasks
- 1.6 Illustrate the guidelines for public relations writing
- 1.7 Analyze the common errors made by the PR writer and ways to avoid them

1.1: The Framework of Public Relations Writing

1.1 Recognize the public relations framework in which writing plays a role

The focus of this course is on the most visible aspect of public relations—the writing and distribution of messages in a variety of formats to multiple media channels and platforms. To the uninitiated, this activity is the sum and substance of public relations. For them, PR stands for “**press release**,” which has historically been the most common publicity technique. Because of this, it’s necessary to first establish the framework in which public relations writing takes place.



1.1.1: Writing Is Only One Component

It’s important to realize that the preparation and distribution of messages is only one part of the public relations process. Public relations work is actually composed of four core components: *research*, *planning*, *communication*, and *evaluation*. Public relations writing is part of the communication component, which only occurs after research has been conducted and extensive planning to formulate the goals and objectives of a campaign has taken place. Planning also involves the selection of audiences to be reached, the key messages to be distributed, and the strategies that should be used to ensure the overall success of the program or campaign.

It’s also important to know the difference between strategies and tactics.

⊗ Strategies

Strategies are statements of direction. A strategy, for example, might be to use multiple media outlets to reach women between the ages of 18 to 30 to make them aware of a new cosmetic on the market. In a public relations campaign, each strategy is made operational through a list of tactics.

⊗ Tactics

A tactic might entail the writing and placement of feature articles and “new product” reviews in appropriate women’s magazines. Such a tactic might even specify how many product news releases and features would be written and what “angle” would be used in each one. Other tactics might include placing a celebrity spokesperson on a television show that reaches women in the target audience, posting a YouTube video, creating a Facebook page, and setting up a Twitter feed.

1.1.2: Writers as Communication Technicians

Public relations writers and media placement specialists are responsible for implementing all of the tactics in a campaign or program. They, by definition, fulfill a “technician” or “tactical” role. They are the “production” staff who write the news releases, formulate the feature stories, produce videos for online distribution, and contact the television show producer to make a “pitch” for the company’s spokesperson to appear as a guest to talk about the organization or the product.

It is important to note that a public relations writer usually prepares material for possible use in the news columns of newspapers or on broadcast news and magazine programs. Such placement is called **earned media** because, unlike advertising that is purchased, public relations materials are only used if journalists and editors decide the information is newsworthy.

The role of writer and technician is the standard entry-level position in public relations, but some in the public relations field have been writers and media relations experts for most of their careers. This is because most positions in public relations at corporations or public relations firms are at the technician or tactical level. A speechwriter or an editor of an employee newsletter, for example, may be a skilled technician by definition, but he or she is also a highly prized professional who receives a good salary because of his or her expertise.

There is a distinction, however, between the duties performed by a technician and those of a public relations manager. Professor David Dozier of San Diego State University, who has done considerable research on roles in public relations, says, “Managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations outcomes,” whereas “technicians carry out the low-level mechanics of generating communication products that implement policy decisions made by others.”

This is not to say that professional practitioners don’t fulfill both manager and technician roles. A professional may primarily be a manager but also be deeply involved in preparing a **media kit** or arranging a special event. By the same token, a public relations writer in an organization with limited staffing may primarily be a technician but also be involved in the planning of an entire campaign. The following *Tips for Success* box outlines additional skills that a public relations writer should possess.

Tips for Success

Writing Is One of Six Skills

The ability to write is one of the six essential skills for a successful career in public relations. Dennis L. Wilcox, Glen T. Cameron, and Bryan H. Reber summarize the essential skills in the 11th edition of their textbook, *Public Relations Strategies & Tactics*.

✘ Close

The ability to put information and ideas on paper clearly and concisely is essential. Good grammar and spelling are vital. Misspelled words and sloppy sentence structure are unacceptable.

✘ Close

Arguments for causes and products must have factual support instead of platitudes. A person must have the persistence and ability to gather information from a variety of sources, as well as to conduct original research by designing and implementing opinion polls or audits. Researching audience needs and perceptions is important.

✘ Close

A public relations program involves multiple communication tools and activities. You need to be a good planner to coordinate everything and keep on budget.

✘ Close

Innovative ideas and fresh approaches are needed to solve complex problems or to make a public relations program unique and memorable.

✘ Close

A public relations person must understand business and the economics of the “bottom line.” He or she must understand that all communications activity must support the business objectives of the organization.

✘ Close

Understanding traditional media is still important, but today’s practitioners must also have social media savvy. They need to know how to use podcasting, search engine optimization, email outreach, Web content management, and social media such as Twitter and Facebook to advance organizational objectives.

As you can see, the total framework of public relations is much more than just “press releases.” Such materials are important, but they are only one highly visible manifestation of the entire public relations process. With this framework in mind, we begin our discussion about public relations writing and media techniques.

1.2: The Public Relations Writer

1.2 Express the objectives, audiences, and the channels used by the public relations writer

Although the public relations writer and the journalist share a number of common characteristics in their approach to writing, the public relations writer differs in objectives, audiences, and channels.



1.2.1: Objectives

A journalist is usually employed by a news organization to gather, process, and synthesize information for the primary purpose of providing news to the organization's subscribers, viewers, or listeners. A hallmark of professional reporting is to present information in a fair and balanced manner.

The public relations writer, in contrast, is usually employed by an organization that wants to communicate with a variety of audiences, either through the news media or through other channels of communication. These organizations may include corporations, government agencies, environmental groups, labor unions, trade associations, or public relations firms that provide information on behalf of clients.

The writer's purpose is advocacy, not objectivity. The goal is not only to accurately inform but also to persuade and motivate. Edward M. Stanton, former chairman of the Manning, Selvage & Lee public relations firm, once described public relations activity in *Public Relations Quarterly* as "working with clients on strategy and messages, and then delivering these messages to target audiences in order to persuade them to do something that is beneficial to the client."

"The use of fact and emotion in a story is critical—particularly in public relations. In a world cluttered with messages competing for audience time and attention, our messages and stories require both elements to be effective."

— Kevin Dugan, founder of the Bad Pitch Blog

Professor Robert Heath, co-author of *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*, points out that the role of advocate is a time-honored one. It goes back 2,000 years to Aristotle, who conceptualized the term *rhetoric*—the ability to determine what needs to be said and how it should be said to achieve desired outcomes. Heath writes that rhetoric "entails the ability and obligation to demonstrate to an audience facts and arguments available to bring insight into an important issue."

Hence, all public relations writing should begin with the question, "How does this help the organization achieve its objectives?" For example, "Does the news release contain the

key messages about the product and how it can benefit customers?" In the case of a newsletter for an organization, there might be several objectives. Akron Children's Hospital, for example, started *Inside Children* as a way of reaching single-family households with children and family incomes of \$30,000 or more within its 17-county service area. The objectives of the newsletter, published three times a year, were:

1. To generate business by building awareness for various departments and programs.
2. To recruit participants for various pediatric drug and clinical trials.
3. To generate requests for more information from the hospital's referral telephone line and the website.
4. To distribute various parenting and child health materials to interested parents.

1.2.2: Audiences

The traditional journalist writes for one audience—readers, listeners, or viewers of the medium for which he or she works. Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television are usually defined as "mass media," because the audience is very broad and its members have little in common. An extension of the mass media, of course, is online news sites such as the *Huffington Post* that also serve a broad spectrum of the public.

The public relations writer, however, may write for numerous, specialized audiences—employees, community leaders, customers, teenagers, seniors, women, various ethnic and racial groups, travelers, governmental regulatory agencies, investors, farmers, and many others. Effective public relations writing requires careful definition of the audience and its composition so that information can be tailored to its interests and concerns. A public relations writer performs research constantly to determine the audience's needs, concerns, and interests. Armed with this information, the public relations writer can write a more persuasive message.

1.2.3: Channels

Journalists, by nature of their employment, primarily reach their audiences through one channel: the medium that publishes, broadcasts, or posts their work on a news website. The public relations writer, in contrast, is not restricted to any one **media platform** but will use many channels and media platforms to effectively reach well-defined audiences.

Indeed, today's public relations writer sits at the junction of multiple media platforms that are broadly classified as *earned*, *owned*, and *paid media*. *Earned media* are defined as stories in the traditional mass media that are selected by gatekeepers such as editors, broadcast producers, and bloggers. The coverage may be based on a news release, a news conference, or an event by an organization, but journalists and editors make the decision whether the information is "newsworthy" and write or produce the actual

story. Thus, this is considered “earned” media because the organization receives publicity without paying for it.

Owned media, on the other hand, are **media channels** owned by the organization. This may include the organization’s website, its Facebook and YouTube page, newsletters, brochures, pamphlets, direct mail, posters, email distribution, podcasts, blogs, and even the organization’s intranet for employees and vendors. Organizations, through their public relations, corporate communications, and marketing departments, not only “own” these channels but also control all content without the filter of traditional media gatekeepers.

Paid media are primarily ads in traditional media and on such sites as Google and Facebook. Organizations pay for space on these platforms to distribute their messages about their products and services. Although public relations writers rarely get involved in producing ads, they increasingly are involved in another form of paid media under the rubric of “sponsorship.”

In this situation, public relations writers produce feature stories in a journalistic format that are then placed in publications and online news sites after paying a fee to the publisher. In many cases, the publication’s staff will actually write the “sponsored” story. Online news sites such as the *Atlantic*, *Buzzfeed*, and the *Huffington Post* now have a “sponsored” section that supplements their advertising revenue.

In most cases, a combination of earned, owned, and paid media is selected to achieve maximum message penetration and understanding. This important concept is illustrated throughout this course by showing how public relations professionals use multiple media platforms for a single project or campaign.

WRITING PROMPT

There are several differences in how public relations writers and journalists do their jobs in terms of objectives, audiences, and channels. What do you think is the major difference between a public relations writer and a journalist?

▶ The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Submit

1.3: The Writer’s Basic Tool Kit

1.3 Describe some of the necessary tools that a public relations writer needs access to

It is essential for the public relations writer to have a workspace that includes a computer and a printer, Internet access, and a reference library.



1.3.1: Computer and Printer

Public relations professionals spend much of their working day in front of a computer. One survey of independent public relations practitioners, many of whom work from home, found that they spend about 70 to 80 percent of their day on the computer doing word processing, surfing the Internet, and sending or responding to emails. A good multifunctional printer is also a necessity because it allows you to print out hard copies of your work for detailed editing, process photos on SD cards, scan documents, and even send faxes.

A computer is your single most important piece of equipment as a public relations writer. It enables you to use sophisticated word processing software programs such as Microsoft Office that permit maximum flexibility to write, edit, format, insert artwork, and merge information into a complete document. Other software packages such as Adobe’s Creative Suite enable you to professionally edit photos, create entire brochures, and edit video that can then be posted to the Internet and other social media sites.

The type of computer and printer you use depends on your work environment. Public relations writers who are in the same office on a daily basis often use a desktop PC or Mac. Practitioners say there are three primary reasons for using a desktop:

1. Computers and printers in an office are often networked so it’s easier to share software and files and to tap into the organization’s database, which often contains proprietary information.
2. They are more cost effective in terms of having more memory and hard disk space than laptops or tablets.
3. Large monitors and standard keyboards are better suited for writing and editing.

Others, particularly students and professionals who travel frequently, prefer laptops with standard-sized keyboards because of their portability and flexibility. In

many cases, professionals have it both ways. They have a laptop that serves as the CPU (central processing unit) that can go on the road with them, but they also use the laptop in the office, connecting it to a standard keyboard and a larger monitor. Standard tablets that offer just virtual keyboards, however, can't fully replace a laptop or desktop for most professionals. They are getting more writer-friendly but are still unsatisfactory for writing long documents and editing.

"Laptops still win for intensive work like creating long documents, or doing anything that requires precision and benefits from a physical keyboard. They also are more compatible with printers and external disks."

— Walter Mossberg, technology editor of *The Wall Street Journal*

Figure 1.1

Today's laptops remain the most versatile tool for public relations writers because they are portable, have good memory and storage capacity, good-sized monitors and keyboards, several USB ports, Wi-Fi, and webcams.



Working professionals, recognizing the rapid pace at which new computers and software products come to market, recommend that you buy the most advanced computer and collateral equipment you can possibly afford.

1.3.2: Dictionary

The most common reference book is an up-to-date dictionary, and many writers keep a paperback version handy for a fast check instead of going online or bringing up a software version. The best-known dictionary is *Merriam-Webster's* collegiate edition that is updated every year with new words reflecting contemporary word usage and popular culture. In its 2014 edition, for example, new words included *selfie*, *hashtag*, *crowdfunding*, *paywall*, *big data*, *fangirl*, *fracking*, *baby bump*, *cap and trade*, *gamification*, *tweep*, *spoiler alert*, *unfriend*, *digital divide*, *e-waste*, and even *catfish* (a person who sets up a false personal profile on a social networking site for deceptive purposes). Merriam-Webster also offers free use of its general dictionary online.

Another popular choice is the *Oxford Pocket Dictionary and Thesaurus*, which includes other references such as a handy list of countries and their capital cities. Public relations writers and journalists also like *Webster's New College Dictionary*, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, and the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. According to Ragan.com, a publisher of public relations newsletters, the first two "... not only define, but they also provide an array of useful information: geographic and biographic entries, abbreviations, a list of colleges and universities, measurement conversion tables, foreign words and phrases, forms of address, etc." The National Geographic's *Compact Atlas of the World* is another handy reference book that provides maps as well as the correct spelling of major cities and geographical sites around the world.

Some specialized online dictionaries include *Wordnik*, which shows definitions from multiple sources so you can see as many meanings as possible. *The Free Dictionary* also offers an "Idioms and phrases" tool. Enter a word and you get a list of common phrases in which the word appears. It's useful for writing headlines or developing a play on words.

A number of online resources can help you find the perfect word. The *Collins English Dictionary*, for example, is a free website that includes a thesaurus with more than 1 million synonyms and antonyms with quotations and translations to other languages. *Thrsr* is a shorter online thesaurus that allows you to enter long words and receive shorter synonyms. As one writer notes, "It's especially useful if you want to simplify your writing or shorten a message for Twitter." *WordHippo* is unusual because it enables you to search for words under categories such as "rhymes with" and "sentences with," "adverb for," and "past tense of." Another good source, although only available in paperback, is *Synonym Finder* by J. I. Rodale. It contains more than a million synonyms.

1.3.3: Encyclopedia

The world's largest and most popular general reference source is Wikipedia, which is regularly among the top five visited sites on the Internet with editions in 287 languages and about 500 million visitors a month. The site has 18 million articles, including 4.4 million articles in English.

"On any given day, 15% of all Internet users visit Wikipedia, amounting to 495m readers a month."

— *The Economist*, March 1, 2014

Wikipedia is unique in several ways. First, it is an online encyclopedia that is free. Second, it is crowd-sourced; thousands of volunteers post and edit entries. Traditionalists still express some concern about the accuracy of information without the benefit of qualified experts certifying the entries, but Wikipedia has gained stature and greater acceptance as a legitimate source in recent years. A more traditional, authoritative reference is the *Encyclopedia*

Britannica, which has been published for 245 years; full access to the online version, however, requires an annual subscription fee.

Some specialized websites are also encyclopedic in nature. For example, a good source for facts on the world's nations—their history, people, economy, geography, and communications—is the World Factbook compiled by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The World Factbook website also provides reference tabs that include maps, flags of the world, a political map of the world, standard time zones, and even comparative national statistics. There are also several websites that focus on fact-checking news coverage of current topics, which will be discussed shortly along with other tools for research.

1.3.4: Stylebook

Stylebooks enable you, as a public relations writer, to prepare materials in the writing style used by most publications. They cover topics such as capitalization, abbreviations, punctuation, titles, and general word usage. For example, there is a trend to combine words that were once written separately or hyphenated; hence, the proper style is now *software*, *database*, *lifestyle*, *teenager*, *spreadsheet*, *website*, and *nonprofit*.

In terms of journalistic writing, the most widely used stylebook by public relations writers and journalists is the *Associated Press Stylebook*, available in print form or online. “AP style” is the common standard for writing news releases and other content distributed to traditional media in the United States, such as weekly and daily newspapers.

The *AP Stylebook* is updated and revised on a periodic basis to reflect changes in word usage and when it's acceptable, for example, to use “CA” or “California” in the body of a news release or a news story. In 2014, the big change that created some controversy was AP's declaration that “over” was now an acceptable alternative to “more than,” which had been the standard for years. There's even an AP Stylebook Twitter feed (#APStyle) for instant updates. The following are some recent AP style updates regarding the Internet:

⊗ Recent AP Style Updates

apps: Names of apps (applications) are capitalized.

blog: Lowercase.

cellphone: Lowercase and now one word.

disc: Use this spelling if you are using a term such as *videodisc*. However, a *hard disk* is located in your computer.

e-book or e-commerce: Lowercase and use a hyphen.

email: Lowercase and one word.

FAQ: Acronym for “frequently asked questions,” a format often used to summarize information on the Internet.

high-tech: Never *hi-tech*.

home page: Two words and not capitalized.

Internet: First letter capitalized. *Net* can be used in later references.

intranet: A private network inside a company or an organization. Unlike *Internet*, it is lowercase.

IT: Acronym for *information technology*; spell it out in a story.

OK: Can use as OK'd. Do not use *okay*.

online: Lowercase and one word.

mobile phone: Lowercase but still two words.

podcast: Lowercase.

smartphone: Lowercase and now one word.

Web: Always capitalized.

website: Lowercase and one word. Names of websites are capitalized.

PowerPoint: One word with a capital P in the middle.

Twitter: Always capitalize as a trademarked name, but lowercase *tweet*.

wiki: Lowercase, but *Wikipedia* is a proper noun.

World Wide Web: The shorter term, “the Web,” is acceptable.

The New York Times Stylebook is also widely used. Writers who cover business or prepare news releases about business topics often use *The Wall Street Journal Stylebook*. Organizations also develop their own stylebooks for employee publications. You most likely will need to be familiar with several kinds of stylebooks depending on your writing assignment.

1.3.5: Media Database

A major activity of a public relations writer is contacting journalists and sending news releases to the media. It is therefore important to have lists of publications, names of editors, and addresses readily available. Local directories of media outlets are often available from the chamber of commerce, the United Way, or other civic groups. Metropolitan, state, or regional directories also exist.

professor of human resources at the University of Calgary, this book gives many useful tips for how to become more productive and overcome “writer’s block.”

Some underlying principles for writing clear and effective prose are also discussed later in Writing Guidelines, along with tips to help you steer clear of common mistakes.

WRITING PROMPT

Every public relations writer needs a “tool kit” in terms of equipment and other resources. If you were setting up a home office to be a freelance public relations writer and consultant, what “tools” would you have in your office?

▶ The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Submit

1.4: Professional Publications and Other Resources

1.4 Report how the professional writer can use industry resources to keep up with developments in the field

Your basic tool kit should be supplemented with subscriptions to professional periodicals and newsletters. It is important for the professional writer to keep up with developments in the field and to learn about new techniques that can improve the writing, production, and distribution of public relations material.



1.4.1: Magazines and Journals

PRWeek is the most widely circulated and comprehensive magazine about the public relations field. It covers the entire public relations industry in terms of trends, current issues, major campaigns, and commentary about the use of various strategies and tactics. Other magazines include *The Public Relations Strategist* and *Public Relations Tactics*, both

published by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). *Communication World*, published by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), is now only online.

Another magazine is the monthly *O’Dwyer’s Communications & New Media*. In addition to articles about trends and issues in the field, this magazine also carries ads for companies that specialize in services such as news release distribution, media monitoring, photography, podcasts, and video production.

The two major scholarly publications in the field are *Public Relations Review* and the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, which are published quarterly. Both contain articles, theories, and research studies by academics. A sampling of articles in a recent edition explored everything from what stakeholders like on Facebook to the state of investor relations in the United States. These two journals are available by subscription, but students can usually access them for free through online databases such as *Nexis-Lexis* or *Academic Search Premier* at the university library.

1.4.2: Newsletters and Blogs

There are a number of newsletters that cover the public relations industry. Most are available online, but a few such as *Jack O’Dwyer’s Newsletter*, *Bulldog Reporter*, *PR Reporter*, and *PR News* are also available in print. Ragan Communications publishes daily newsletters such as *PR Daily News Feeds* and *Ragan’s Daily Headlines*. Media Post Publications also has a number of newsletters dealing with public relations and marketing. An example is *Social Media Marketing Daily*. Another good newsletter, which is free, is *PRNewser* published by *Adweek*. *The Holmes Report* is also free and primarily covers international campaigns in public relations and marketing communications.

Some of the online news sites and publications mentioned above require paid subscriptions or membership in an organization, but a great deal of current information about public relations practice is also available for free through popular **blogs** such as *PR Squared* by Todd Defren, Brian Solis’ blog, *A Shel of My Former Self* by Shel Holtz, *6AM* by Richard Edelman, *PR SAY* by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and *PR Insiders* by PR News. Major public relations firms such as Ketchum, Burson Marsteller, and Ogilvy Worldwide also have blogs that provide expert commentary and information, as do vendors such as Business Wire and PRNewswire. You can subscribe to many of these blogs by going to the organization’s website.

If you’re looking for specific writing tips, Ann Wylie’s Wylie Communications website has a number of articles in her Writing Tips archive. In addition, there is *Copyblogger*

by Brian Clark, *The Well-Fed Writer Blog* by Peter Bowerman, and *Seth Godin's Blog*.

As with everything else on the Web, blogs come and go, so it's a good idea to check with some professionals in the field about current newsletters and blogs focusing on public relations and marketing communications. They can also offer insight into what forums offer the most information and value. Some examples of print and online publications that cover the public relations industry are shown below.



PRWeek. This publication is a bi-monthly in print, but also has an online daily update and an expanded weekly posting. It covers public relations firms, campaigns, trends, and issues in the industry.

1.4.3: Discussion Groups

A cheap and efficient form of professional development is available through joining a discussion group. A number of such groups are on LinkedIn, such as *Public Relations Professionals*, *Public Relations and Communication Professionals*, *Social Media Marketing*, and *PR News Group*. Members solicit feedback from others on various questions and, in many cases, post an article to be shared and discussed by the group. There are many LinkedIn groups on almost every conceivable subject, so you should take time to preview them and then sign-up for those that most interest you. PRSA members can join the organization's LinkedIn discussion group, in addition to commenting on its PRSAY blog.

A number of Twitter chats also enable public relations writers to connect and communicate with other professionals in the field. One primarily for students is *#PRStudChat*; it brings students, educators, and professionals together on a monthly basis. Other recommended Twitter groups include *#Commschat*, *#PR20Chat*, *#SoloPR*, *#Journchat*, *#MeasurePR*, *#IMCChat*, *#u30pro*, and a monthly Hispanic PR chat at *#HPRChat*.

Tips for Success

Websites for Public Relations Organizations

The websites of public relations organizations and research centers can help you to stay informed about industry news and developments, learn of training and career opportunities, and network with other professionals in the field. Some organizations make their newsletters and blogs, case studies, event calendars, and other online resources freely accessible to nonmembers as well as members.

Here are some organizations worth looking into:

Arthur W. Page Society

The Arthur W. Page Center at Pennsylvania State University

PR Council

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

Institute for Public Relations (IPR)

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)

International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA)

International Public Relations Association (IPRA)

National Investor Relations Institute (NIRI)

The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations at the University of Alabama

Public Affairs Council

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)

Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA)

Strategic Communication and Public Relations Center at the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

1.4.4: Current Events and Trends

Writing often starts with a creative idea and a good understanding of the world around you. Many public relations employers screen job applicants by administering a current events quiz to ascertain their awareness and understanding of today's news and controversial issues. Employers require outstanding writing skills, but they are also looking for a second dimension in a public relations writer: knowing what to write about. A person who reads newspapers and magazines on a regular basis often gets story ideas for his or her client or employer.

Thus, aspiring public relations writers should make it a habit to read the local daily and at least one daily with national circulation. Online dailies include *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, and *Politico*. For those who like somewhat offbeat news, *Digg* is a good choice with five or six short articles posted daily. Some examples are "Here's