Public Relations WRITING

STRATEGIES & STRUCTURES

ELEVENTH EDITION

Doug Newsom | Jim Haynes

Public Relations WRITING

STRATEGIES & STRUCTURES

General Mass Communication

Biagi, *Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media*, Twelves Edition
Fellow, *American Media History,* Third Edition
Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, Fourth Edition
Lester, *Visual Communication: Images with Messages*, Sixth Edition
Overbeck, *Major Principles of Media Law,* 2015 Edition
Straubhaar/LaRose/Davenport, *Media Now: Understanding Media, Culture, and Technology*, Ninth Edition
Zelezny, *Cases in Communications Law*, Sixth Edition
Zelezny, *Communications Law: Liberties, Restraints, and the Modern Media*, Sixth Edition

Journalism

Bowles/Borden, *Creative Editing*, Sixth Edition
Davis/Davis, *Think Like an Editor: 50 Strategies for the Print and Digital World,* Second Edition
Hilliard, *Writing for Television, Radio, and New Media*, Eleventh Edition
Kessler/McDonald, *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style*, Eighth Edition
Kessler/McDonald, *Cengage Advantage Books: When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style + Exercise Book,* Eighth Edition
Rich, *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method*, Eighth Edition

Public Relations and Advertising

Diggs-Brown, *Strategic Public Relations: Audience Focused Approach*
Diggs-Brown, *The PR Styleguide: Formats for Public Relations Practice*, Third Edition
Drewniany/Jewler, *Creative Strategy in Advertising*, Eleventh Edition
Hendrix, *Public Relations Cases*, Ninth Edition
Newsom/Turk/Kruckeberg, *Cengage Advantage Books: This is PR: The Realities of Public Relations*, Eleventh Edition
Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising,* Second Edition

Research and Theory

Baran/Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*, Seventh Edition
Sparks, *Media Effects Research: A Basic Overview*, Fifth Edition
Wimmer/Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*, Tenth Edition

ELEVENTH EDITION

Public Relations WRITING

STRATEGIES & STRUCTURES

Doug Newsom
Professor Emeritus, Texas Christian University

Jim Haynes
Southern Methodist University

CENGAGE Learning®

Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

CENGAGE Learning®

***Public Relations Writing: Strategies & Structures*, Eleventh Edition**
Doug Newsom, Jim Haynes

Product Director: Monica Eckman

Product Manager: Kelli Strieby

Content Developer: Jeffrey L. Hahn, JLHCG

Associate Content Developer: Rachel Schowalter

Product Assistant: Alexis Mackintosh-Zebrowski

Marketing Manager: Sarah Seymour

IP Analyst: Ann Hoffman

IP Project Manager: Farah Fard

Manufacturing Planner: Doug Bertke

Art and Design Direction, Production Management, and Composition: Lumina Datamatics, Inc.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015947424

ISBN-13: 978-1-305-50000-6

Cengage Learning
20 Channel Center Street
Boston, MA 02210
USA

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with employees residing in nearly 40 different countries and sales in more than 125 countries around the world. Find your local representative at **www.cengage.com**.

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by Nelson Education, Ltd.

To learn more about Cengage Learning Solutions, visit **www.cengage.com**.

Purchase any of our products at your local college store or at our preferred online store **www.cengagebrain.com**.

Printed in the United States of America
Print Number: 01 Print Year: 2015

Dedicated to all public relations practitioners, educators and students who care about communicating clearly and effectively.

Brief Contents

Contents

Preface

Welcome to this 11th edition of Public Relations Writing. The authors are the same, Doug Newsom and Jim Haynes, PRSA Fellows with years of practice, university teaching and many workshops at home and abroad. What is different is a slight change in the book's subtitle to Strategies and Structures.

Inside you'll find many changes in the chapters, since the field is constantly in flux. We welcomed a new colleague to handle the social media chapter for us: Steve Lee, whose business has been digital communication since its inception in 1998 and thus the focus of his teaching experience as an adjunct and workshop presenter. The Internet and social media have affected the way all of us communicate, professionally and personally. To quote Lee, "Social media has become such a vital tool for public relations practitioners that the majority of public relations and communications managers believe that understanding how to use and manage social media channels is essential to success."

Use the text as a home base to alert you to "learning/teaching" examples you encounter daily. Practitioners and professors always are sensitive to incidents in all media that create learning opportunities. Public relations practitioners—especially those in firms and agencies—discover, discuss and critique incidents daily to help guide their practices. For professors, such incidents are the next presentation for their classes, and the examples are always at your fingertips to show, talk and tell.

We, as authors, cannot update any textbook fast enough to keep up, but we welcome your inquiries, ideas and initiatives. You can find us at doug.n@att.net and jhaynes1102@sbcglobal.net.

Doug Newsom and Jim Haynes

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to colleagues, practitioners and students who offered informal comments on the book and to more formal directions from reviewers who recommended changes and offered guidance and suggestions for this edition.

We also are very grateful for the many who signed permissions for us to use materials that appear in the illustrations.

We'd also like to thank the dedicated team at Cengage Learning for their support, mainly Kelli Strieby, Product Manager, and Jeffrey Hahn, Content Developer. Thanks also to Jyotsna Ojha, Project Manager at Lumina Datamatics.

PART 1

PR Writing: Role and Responsibility

Finding facts, communicating effectively in all media, knowing the law and being ethical—all are essential for the PR writer.

CHAPTER ONE

Public Relations and the Writer

What an exciting time to be a writer. Your message can be crafted for any medium you can imagine, from an electronic app to moving billboard to a tweet, a blog, a newspaper or magazine piece, a video feature, a television story or a serious white paper for research and policy recommendations.

The key words are *story* and *purpose.* The audience is a given.

In a world of instant communication, all messages are simultaneously local and global.

You will be telling an organization's story whatever you write.

The story must be told concisely with clarity, accuracy and memorability.

Writing coach Paula LaRocque in a twist of the idea that all one learns about living is absorbed in kindergarten says to think of nursery rhymes.

"[W]hen approaching a story, we'll do well to remember that old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard to fetch her poor dog a bone. And that the cow jumped over the moon, And that the owl and the pussycat went to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat.

"Actor, action, acted upon: the clearest and most logical syntax English can devise. No wonder the bright beginnings of nursery rhymes have pleased readers for centuries."[1]

Good advice for engaging attention is being clear and memorable.

Your pattern for development of every piece of writing, regardless of medium, will be:

Purpose—telling an organization's story in terms of what it is, what it does and why it matters.

Building relationships—tying the organization to those exposed to the communication, however, wherever and whoever these might be.

Writing strategically—delivering a message effectively to get the desired response.

Communication is wasted if it fails in any of these three.

You should be able to state the purpose in a single declarative sentence, keeping in mind the expected reaction or response so your message will bring the intended results. You also want to know if there are unintended reactions or responses, so you need to keep in mind how to monitor messages to produce prompt, thoughtful reactions.

How Strategic Public Relations Writing Is Different

You may be thinking that you have been writing this way all along. You have sent text messages, posted and responded to Facebook comments, sent Instagrams, shared videos and such. The difference is that these were your creations for your own purposes or reasons. When you write for an organization either as an internal public relations writer or for a client in an agency or a firm, your message is to achieve a business goal for that organization, whether it is nonprofit or for profit.

Public relations is the strategic management function that helps an organization achieve its goals and objectives through building and maintaining goodwill with its various stakeholders/publics. Effective public relations writers are critical to that success. Your writing is purposeful, persuasive and principled. Principled? Absolutely. You didn't see "spinning" in that sentence, did you? Clients and employers may not understand this, but it is imperative that you do, as a writer. What PR writers do, the legal and ethical responsibilities involved and what they accomplish for their employers, institutions or clients, is the topic of this first section.

As more public relations units identify their titles as "strategic communication," that often indicates an integrated communications practice involving both advertising and public relations. Technological changes have already blurred the lines anyway in presentation, format and the interactivity of users with a medium. Additionally, 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.

Because PR writers are responsible for tailoring all types of messages for any medium and a variety of individuals, writing for public relations takes many forms, as you will realize as you go through these chapters. The more you know about different media and diverse publics, the more facile you are with all writing assignments, the better off you will be in the kaleidoscopic job market.

Always and remaining critical talents for public relations people are the ability to recognize potential stories and anticipating how these might be received by global audiences. Choosing words and illustrations requires a keen understanding of the complex, and often conflicting, values held among diverse publics. The demands on today's writers are for more versatility, greater understanding of the repercussions of convergence among traditional media and the impact and connectivity of social media and the requirements of different media as well as increased competence in using visuals and sounds to help convey a message.

What is traditionally called "social media" have joined the list of media for any organizational message. You may be tweeting or posting on an organization's Facebook page or

posting videos as part of a media mix you are using. However, you also will be responding to comments that come in to the organization from its electronic sites.

Social media content for clients and organizations provides needed feedback. Interactive websites and blogs are well within the PR writer's job description, and although some organizations hire social media specialists for Facebook and YouTube channels, PR writers may be the ones hired just for this aspect. Appropriate responses in online communication are critical to an organization's credibility. Remember, most social media postings are user-generated, unedited content with instant and global distribution.

As the demand for versatility in PR writing grows, there is more emphasis on accountability—evidence that the messages work. Employers want measured proof of results from communication efforts. There is no open budget line for communication. Yet there is no need to despair. The writer who is genuinely good at the task of researching information, learning its meaning and communicating that effectively is and always will be needed. You must understand what makes public relations writing different, although, from literary writing, news writing or selling, although you may be drawing techniques from all three. The major focus for public relations writing is persuasion.

Public relations writers prepare messages for any medium that can convey information. Furthermore, most of the time, these messages—words, images and sound—are conveyed electronically. Potentially these messages can be received anywhere in the world.

The difference for strategic writing lies in the power and responsibility of the public relations person who is in the position of brokering goodwill between an institution and its publics. There are two aspects to this responsibility. Strategically, public relations practice involves the ways an organization's operations and policies affect people—the face-to-face interaction of employees with customers or clients and the organization's participation in the affairs of the community. Tactically speaking, though, good policies and good performance are worth little if people don't understand the policies and don't know about the performance. The heart of public relations practice remains in communication, particularly writing.

Good public relations requires communication skills, expertise in dealing with all media, the dynamics of public opinion and the principles of persuasion. Further, the communicator must know when and what to communicate. This involves analysis, judgment, counseling and planning—in addition to and prior to communicating. In this chapter, we'll try to clarify the nature of this complex task and the writer's role in it.

Job Descriptions Vary

Because practitioners have different backgrounds and experiences in different parts of the world and that experience is affected by the social, political and economic environment, the demands on writers vary. Some ingredients to look for are "ethical," "socially responsible," "trusting relationships," "reliable communication," "anticipation of consequences," "counsel to client/organization" and "evaluator of outcomes."

Analyzing, Predicting and Counseling

The main roles of the professional are "analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders." These roles fall into the management context, in which personnel help to frame, implement, adjust and communicate the policies that govern how an institution interacts with its publics. It is through public relations that an organization acts with responsibility and responsiveness—in policy and information—to the best interests of the institution and its publics.[2]

The management of communication is now seen by many public information writers as the key to the corner office. According to *The Wall Street Journal,* "Today most CIOs (chief information officers) have a more expansive role—and a set of aspirations to match. Now that the CIO manages the ever more complex information flow that drives a company's internal decisions as well as its links to customers globally, the job has the look of a corporate stepping stone to higher ground." Topics such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, as well as management and economics, were part of the second annual meeting of a network of CIOs from around the world in San Diego, California, in February 2014, hosted by *The Wall Street Journal.* Most of the attendees report directly to the corporate executive officer (CEO), and most were women. A wide and diverse collection of industries was represented. The information officers said they wanted to be seen "as an essential and versatile player, able to represent the company and participate in the big decisions. And to lead."[3]

What is important to remember is that these CIOs are senior employees. It is the staff writers on whom the weight of writing falls on. That is what you can expect and must be prepared for to climb that ladder. Doing this job well requires a broad educational background, expertise in many areas and, most of all, good judgment. Unlike the corporate attorney or accountant, the public relations practitioner cannot refer to a body of laws or procedures that prescribe behavior under given circumstances. Instead, the public relations person must know human behavior and combine that knowledge with specific information about people within the institution and people outside whom the institution deals with. For example, the PR director for a bank must consider the views of bank officers and bank employees as well as those of customers, the community, legislators and government regulatory agencies. The public relations person for the local school district must be aware of the feelings of students, parents, voters and the regional accrediting agency. Any institution has many publics, and the public relations director must be able to advise management about the possible impact on those publics of various plans, policies and actions.

In addition to analyzing publics and counseling management on the effects of policy, the PR person must be alert for signs of change. The right policy today will not necessarily be the right policy tomorrow. People's attitudes and opinions evolve, and the composition of the public changes. The capable PR person notes trends in public opinion and predicts the consequences of such trends for the institution.

Usually, the public relations director also serves as a spokesperson for the organization and overseer of the entire public relations program. The PR person at the top of the department spends little time on basic public relations techniques such as writing.

Frank Wylie, a former president of the Public Relations Society of America, described the division of public relations labor in this way: Senior-level public relations people are likely to spend 10 percent of their time with techniques, 40 percent with administration and 50 percent with analysis and judgment; at entry level, it's 50 percent techniques, 4 percent judgment and 45 percent "running like hell."[4]

Competence in Convergence

Message delivery is in its second decade of mixing Internet and related personal electronic devices with printed materials and traditional media such as television, radio and news magazines and papers. The decline of staff in traditional media opened opportunities for writers of all kinds, from citizen journalists and freelancers to organizational writers. Traditional media put much of their content online and developed their own Twitter and Facebook pages as well as using websites, email and actual online subscriptions to keep audiences.

In addition to becoming familiar with all avenues of communication, a writer has to develop competence in using them to craft messages for the most effective delivery. One key in talking about media choices is understanding different references to media access. Think of the acronym POSE that represents your control over the writing: paid, owned, sponsored or earned.

Paid seems clear. It includes advertising in all media from pop-ups on your computer when you get email to paid programing on various television channels, and most familiar are those in print media including special sections.

You buy the time or space and have a contract that allows you to control the content, including the design and time of presentation. The only exception to control content would be restrictions cited in the contract you sign. Paid can also include something where your organization has made a contribution so its logo can be used. Think of tee-shirts for special events that have all sorts of logos on the back representing organizations that made donations and allow for their logos to be used.

Owned obviously means that your organization owns the medium, which might be a newsletter or magazine—print or electronic. These are often referred to as "house ads" because they promote something the publication is doing or offering. When you see something on television or hear it on radio that is called a promo. It calls your attention to an offer or event on that station or something that station is sponsoring such as a collection of toys for children.

Sponsored means that a publication or program has been paid for by an organization, often a trade or professional group, whose members have articles about their organization displayed in the publicity. The organization itself controls the representation, words, pictures and such, but doesn't have to pay for the exposure. Videos and films are often paid for by a trade group or association or even a company to tell its story in the public interest, and these sponsored programs are offered free of charge not only to public media but also for educational use in schools.

Earned indicates that the information is considered valuable enough to a medium's publics, that the medium uses the material, but not always as sent. The medium controls the presentation.

Reactions and Responses

What management expects from exposure, regardless of the medium, is a report of what happened as a result. An investment has been made, and the organization making it expects a report.

How did various publics respond? How was that demonstrated? Did reactions indicate any preferences? How might that affect methods of reaching various publics in the future? Did some reactions indicate unfamiliarity with the organization, misunderstandings about its activities, suggest policy modifications or more?

Communication is not a one-way street. Going one way, the PR person analyzes public opinion and the needs of the community, and opens channels of communication that allow such information to flow into the institution. Using this information, the PR person advises management on the policies that are likely to be of mutual benefit to the institution and the public—or at least acceptable, if not beneficial, to the public.

Then—going the other way on the street—the PR person opens channels of communication that reach out from the institution to the public. The viability of channels may be shown in using various types of media to interpret the institution's policies and actions to its various audiences. Social media specialist, Lida Citroen (www.lida360.com), has a formula: Values + Action = Credibility. With values clearly posted on websites, anyone can compare what is said with what is done. If facts or perceptions don't show a valid equation, then credibility is lost and reputation jeopardized. Communication in this direction is largely the responsibility of the PR writer. Exactly what is it then, that PR writers do?

The variety of publics is so vast that PR people often find it useful to divide the publics they deal with into two broad classes: internal and external. *Internal publics* are groups within the organization (such as employees or the board of directors). *External publics* are groups outside the organization (such as the media, your company's customers or the state legislature). The distinction between the two is not always clear-cut; stockholders, for example, though essentially an external public, can have close ties to the institution. One definition of internal publics is "all those who share the institution's identity."

Stakeholders/Publics, Channels and the Role of the Writer

It is a simple thing to say that the task of public relations writers is to communicate with the public. But in practice, there is nothing simple about it. 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. Something is posted on the Internet that they like or don't like or that conflicts with their values, threatens them or maybe is something that they want to support. Furthermore, there is no homogeneity to any group, even if they have a name. It's not as though there were one single "public" to write for. Rarely is a public relations message important to everybody in the "public."

For example, news that a theme park is creating a new thrill ride is important information to youngsters who enjoy such entertainment, but what they want to know about it is quite different from what businesses and residents near the theme park want to know. Concerns of businesses and residents are about increased traffic to the area and more noise. What that group is concerned with is different from what the city's safety engineers and the theme park's insurance people want to know. These groups' needs are all different from what the local and state tourism departments want to know. The tourism departments' needs for information are different from those of investors in the theme park, and even those are not the same. If the theme park belongs to a publicly held company, its stock is traded on the open market, so securities analysts are another public. Publicly held companies are also responsible to the Securities and Exchange Commission. If the theme park is your client or your employer, you have to prepare information to reach all of these publics, and the information for each has a different focus. This focus is not a "spin." It is a responsible communication to satisfy the information needs and interests of particular publics.

A *public* is any group of people tied together by some common factor. And as public relations writers soon discover, there are many, many such groups. The *public* in public relations should really be *publics.* Even then, how do you analyze them? The easiest way is statistically, by gender, education, income, etc. That can be an indicator, but won't tell you as much as if you have the *psychographics.* Psychographics classify people by what they think, how they behave and what they think about—their special interests, such as gardening, cooking and hiking. Psychographic information is not merely helpful to the PR writer; it is often necessary. Consider the public relations director responsible for a university's alumni association magazine, who admitted with some dismay that she didn't know how to appeal both to an 80-year-old graduate of the engineering school and a 22-year-old sociologist. She did a research study that revealed a psychographic pattern binding all the alumni to the institution. This information suggested the sorts of articles that would interest alumni. The public relations director was then able to make informed decisions—and she now felt a great deal more confident in her choices.

Setting Priorities and Selecting Channels

What a writer must do is engage an organization's publics. That is necessary to attract them to the story you want to tell. The story has to be honest and contribute to the organization's transparency. This becomes easier to do when you analyze the possible publics and set priorities.

Select the publics that are most important for the communication effort. They may include the group that a new policy will affect the most or the groups whose opinions are especially important. (See Table 1.1 for a formula to prioritize publics.)

The next step is to select channels for the message that have the most significance to the priority public and to which they have easy access. Channels may be individuals

TABLE 1.1 *Discovering and Prioritizing Publics* Prioritizing publics may be done in a number of ways. One informal method is called the PVI: *P*, the Potential to influence a public, plus *V*, the Vulnerability of the organization to that public (which may change over time and in different situations), equals *I*, the Impact of that public on the organization. Here is a tabular form for "computing" a PVI index.

	P	**+**	***V***	**=**	***I***
Audience or Public	Potential for Organization to Influence (Scale 1–10)		Vulnerability of Organization to Be Affected (Scale 1–10)		Importance of Audience to Organization
_____	_____		_____		_____
_____	_____		_____		_____
_____	_____		_____		_____

Source: Jim Haynes, *Instructor's Guide for This Is PR,* 3rd ed. Doug Newsom and Alan Scott (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1985), p. 63.

or media and may be mass media or specialized media and print or electronic or both. Each medium has characteristics that make it suitable for sending a particular message to a particular audience at a particular time.

Specialized Media These media offer an opportunity to control the message and its delivery. Since they are designed for a particular audience they are called specialized to distinguish them from media accessible by any audience. Specialized media include the internal publications or intranets that institutions produce to communicate with employees, staff, management and others close to the institution, such as directors and stockholders. Also included in specialized media are an organization's computerized message boards and audiovisuals intended for internal use only. Among these specialized media are electronic information networks of personal computer users.

Accessible Media Such media include any channel that is relatively unrestricted by ownership or government. In most democracies, government sends public information through its organizational channels, such as the Food and Drug Administration. When an organization posts messages in accessible media, these are likely to be seen by unintended audiences. Because neither the circulation nor the audience of such media is controlled by the organization that sends the information, such media are mostly for communication with external publics. Public relations writers using such media to reach large audiences must remember that these media are seen by internal publics as well. For example, a leading metropolitan daily newspaper's female employees objected to a promotional campaign that displayed women as sex objects. French police did not like billboards portraying them as "helpful" rather than as crime fighters facing danger.