COM 268: Public Relations Writing and Production

Course Syllabus

**Instructor: Dillon Maher** **Office Hours: T/Th, 2:30-3:15 p.m.**

**Office: Hovey Hall 211** **or by appointment**

**Section: 002** **Email:** [**djmaher@ilstu.edu**](mailto:djmaher@ilstu.edu)

**Meeting time: T/Th, 3:35-4:50 p.m. Classroom: 108 Fell Hall**

# What you’ll need

[2022-2024 AP Stylebook (56th edition)](https://www.amazon.com/Associated-Press-Stylebook-2022-2024/dp/1541601653), ISBN: 978-1541601659

[Smith, R. D. (2020). *Becoming a public relations writer: Strategic writing for emerging and established media* (6th ed). New York, NY: Routledge.](https://www.amazon.com/Becoming-Public-Relations-Writer-Established/dp/0367281570/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Becoming+a+public+relations+writer%3A+Strategic+writing+for+emerging+and+established+media&qid=1692385598&sr=8-1&ufe=app_do%3Aamzn1.fos.18630bbb-fcbb-42f8-9767-857e17e03685) ISBN: 978-0367281571

# How I teach

I am not here to trick you, confuse you, or to make you look foolish. I want to help you in any way possible to learn the material presented in class—and by extension, to make you more effective communicators for this semester and beyond.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions or for help. Unless there is a privacy issue, asking these questions in class is often best, since your classmates may have the same questions or concerns.

# How you’ll communicate with me

## Canvas

You can directly message me [within Canvas Inbox](https://help.illinoisstate.edu/technology/support-topics/canvas/canvas-student-resources/inbox-access-in-canvas). I’ll reply within 24 hours on a weekday, and 48 hours over the weekend. Please include a descriptive subject line (e.g., “Writing Assessment”) and detailed information about your question or concern.

## Office Hours

Come by my office hours and chat about assignments, course content, or whatever else is on your mind. I’ve set aside this time in my schedule just for you, and I’m happy to help.

# What you’ll learn

**Course catalog description:** Public relations functions, ethics, and writing of new releases, newsletters, brochures, and electronic media for organizations’ various audiences. Prerequisites: COM 111 and 161.

My goal for you this semester is to prepare you for:

* Your remaining public relations coursework
* Landing a marketing or communication internships
* Your career beyond Illinois State University

Wherever your career takes you—be it writing a press release to send to a media list or a social media post for a platform that doesn’t even exist today—these core skills will be of the utmost importance:

* Writing with your audience in mind.
* Writing in an appropriate voice and tone.
* Writing clearly and concisely.
* Writing truthfully and ethically.

# How you’ll earn your grade

You’ll be graded based upon a standard ten percentage point scale:

90-100% = A; 80%-89.9% = B; 70%-79.9% = C; 60-69.9% = D; below 60% = F

Late assignments will not be accepted and will result in a grade of zero. I will work with you if you have an excused absence (either based upon university policy or determined by me) and arrangements have been made with me prior to the class meeting. I want to help you in any way possible but will not accept less than your full effort. Like most instructors, I am more understanding *if you keep me informed*.

## Assignments

Below I have indicated the types of categories and assignments you can expect in COM 268. Actual assignments and point totals are subject to change based on the needs of the class.

Canvas is the most up-to-date reflection of class expectations. Still, you’ll note below that the vast majority of points this semester will come from practical, hands-on doing of public relations.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Type of Assignment | Estimated Points | Percent of Total Points |
| Writing Exercises | 50 | 8% |
| Writing Assignments | 400 | 53% |
| AP Style Quizzes | 100 | 13% |
| Participation and Professionalism | 100 | 13% |
| Midterm and Final Projects | 100 | 13% |
| Total | **750** | **100%** |

# My policies

## Attendance

You are expected to be in class every day. There will be frequent in-class participation points that you will not be able to make up, so skipping class will affect your grade directly in loss of participation points and indirectly in the loss of explanation of concepts that you will need to apply in assignments later.

There are three reasons for excused absences approved by Illinois State:

* University-sponsored activities—such as athletics or forensics—verified by coach or sponsor
* Bereavement (see policy below)
* Communicable diseases (such as COVID-19) by providing documentation to the Dean of Students Office, per [Policy 2.1.30](https://policy.illinoisstate.edu/students/2-1-30/)

*If you talk to me in advance* *about missing* or have an emergency that you let me know about with proper documentation as soon as possible, I will make sure that you are able to turn in assignments for full credit.

My job is to prepare students for work after college, and part of that is holding them accountable for attendance because there is no employer that will keep workers that miss work on a consistent basis. I expect the same level of professionalism from you that you would give to an employer.

Being ready to participate in class means arriving on time daily. Tardiness will impact your daily participation points. If you feel you have a legitimate reason that will keep you from being on time*, please discuss it with me* during the first week of class.

### Illinois State University Bereavement Policy

If a student experiences a death of an immediate family member or relative as defined below, the student will be excused from class for funeral leave, subsequent bereavement, and/or travel considerations. The student will provide appropriate documentation and arrange to complete missed classroom work as soon as possible according to the process outlined below.

Upon notification of the absence and proper documentation, each faculty member shall excuse the student from class according to this policy and provide an opportunity to complete missed exams, quizzes, and other required work. Ultimately, the student is responsible for all material covered in class and must work with each individual professor as soon as they return to complete any required work. Details can be found at [Policy.IllinoisState.edu/students/2-1-27](https://policy.illinoisstate.edu/students/2-1-27/).

## Electronics

Please bring a computer or smart device (e.g., phone) with you to class, as there will be several times throughout the semester when you are asked to use technology for class-related purposes. However, technology (e.g., phones, computers, headphones, etc.) must be put away when not explicitly required during class. Failure to do so will result in a loss of participation points for the day.

I understand that there is a difference between sending a quick text and scrolling on your phone. If your attention in class is distracted by your device, that is when you will be marked as absent and need to come speak to me during my office hours about how to resolve this misbehavior. If there is an extenuating circumstance, *you must come speak to me about it beforehand*.

## Cheating/Plagiarism

Students are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the *Code of Student Conduct*. All work is to be appropriately cited when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration on speech topics and/or the presentation of someone else’s work warrants plagiarism.

Students found to inadvertently commit acts of dishonesty will receive appropriate penalties specific to the assignment in question. Students found to commit intentional acts of dishonesty will receive a failing grade in the course and will be referred for appropriate disciplinary action through Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution Office.

# Special Needs

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at [StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu](https://studentaccess.illinoisstate.edu/).

# Mental Health Resources

Life at college can get very complicated. According to recent research, nearly 40% of college students are at-risk for developing generalized anxiety disorder and are less likely to seek help for it compared to other mental health issues. Students also sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience depression, and struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem.

**However, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help.** Student Counseling Services helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are free and completely confidential. Find out more at [Counseling.IllinoisState.edu](https://counseling.illinoisstate.edu/) or by calling (309) 438-3655.

# Behavioral Expectations

**Professional Courtesy**. Professional courtesy includes respecting others' opinions, not interrupting in class, being respectful to those who are speaking, and working together in a spirit of cooperation. I expect you to always demonstrate these behaviors in this class. With that in mind, sleeping, reading materials irrelevant to class purposes, texting, or disrupting the class will not be tolerated and will result in the student being considered absent for that class period.

**Behavioral Expectation Policy.** Should any student violate the expectations of appropriate classroom behavior, the instructor will schedule a meeting to discuss these expectations and develop a behavioral modification plan. If these behaviors persist, you will be at-risk for failing the course.