STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION WRITING

1:30 PM - 3:20 PM Mondays Wednesdays at W332 AJB

About the Instructor

Frank Durham, Ph.D.
Campus address: E330 Adler Journalism Building
Phone: 319-335-3362
Office Hours: Thursday—9-noon (or by appointment)
E-mail: frank-durham@uiowa.edu

Academic Course Home

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences—School of Journalism and Mass Communication
http://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/
Department Chair: David Ryfe
E-mail: david-ryfe@uiowa.edu
Phone: 319-384-3383

Course Goal and Objectives

This studio writing course will stress the communication fundamentals of clarity, concision, and cohesion. You will learn to target your readers, sharpen your messaging, and structure your writing for maximum impact. While refreshing your knowledge of mechanics (grammar, punctuation), you will progress through a series of more ambitious assignments that you will be able to apply to various communication platforms in various public relations-related professions. You will also hone your editing skills.

Learning objectives

Students who take this course will learn to understand that clear, concise, correct writing is at the heart of strategic communication, and that effective writing requires a knowledge and achievement of the highest, professionally-accepted standards in all work.

Learning Objective 1. Students will demonstrate the ability to gather factual story elements, and to evaluate and express them in logical, narrative forms for multiple media and audiences.

Learning Objective 2. Students will display the ability to access and analyze data, report facts accurately, research and edit information responsibly and in a manner commensurate with professional standards.

Learning Objective 3. Students will demonstrate the ability to apply above concepts in a manner that is sensitive to audiences across all media.
Learning Objective 4: Students will learn to write persuasive documents that project evaluable communications outcomes.

For more information about the SJMC assessment plan, see: https://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/undergraduate-programs/sjmc-assessment-plan

Required Textbook/Media
The following book has been ordered through IOWA BOOK, 8 S. Clinton St, Iowa City, IA 52240 • (319) 337-4188. They are also available on-line:


Course Structure
In our twice weekly meetings, we will review basic principles of grammar, while learning to write fact sheets, biographical sketches, news releases, media pitches, speeches, cover letters, multimedia presentations, public service announcements, letters to the editor, and op-eds. To assess these skills in a real-world context, the final writing exercise will be based on a professional agency entrance test.

Course Policies

• Attendance is essential, because all work will be completed during our scheduled class time.
• No make-up assignments except in documented or pre-arranged cases.
• Reading responses are due in the appropriate Canvas dropbox (“assignment”) folder before class. These one-page, double-spaced, bulleted summaries of the assigned readings should conclude with two questions you want answered in class. They will be graded on a pass-fail basis.
• **Missed classes or late work.** In-class exercises and quizzes cannot be made up. Extensions for longer work are possible only under genuinely extenuating circumstances, which must be documented. In the event of an extension, late assignments will be marked down by one letter grade per day below the assigned grade. None will be accepted late unless you have notified the instructor in advance with an explanation. Except for truly extraordinary circumstances, no assignments will be accepted at all more than one week after the original due date.
Coursework

- **Writing Assignments**  
  Because this is a workshop, our writing assignments will be completed in class. The eight graded assignments are labeled (below.) We will complete other exercises for practice and review.

- **Reading Responses (weekly):**  
  These one-page, bulleted summaries of the assigned readings will be due before class in the ICON dropbox I have set up for each of the reading responses that are marked in the syllabus. Beneath your summaries each time, please write two questions you would like to discuss during class.

- **Final exercise: Agency writing**  
  This is not a test, but a timed exercise. Most professional strategic communication agencies administer a multi-part writing exercise to job applicants. In our last class meeting, you will write a news release.

### Grading Criteria

Final course grades will be assessed based on the student’s performance in the following items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of final grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graded writing assignments</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exercise: Agency writing</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total:</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of final grade</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>86-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-85%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>80-82%</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>76-79%</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>73-75%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-72%</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69%</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 60%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Email is the official method of communication for this course. Students can expect to receive weekly communications from the instructor (via email) introducing assigned course-work. You are expected to check your uiowa.edu university email account frequently.

The course structure described above assumes that students have basic computer skills and are knowledgeable about the various programs and hardware they will need to use during this session (e.g. Microsoft Word). For information and computer support geared toward distance education students, access:

- the Technical Support page - [http://distance.uiowa.edu/article/technical-support](http://distance.uiowa.edu/article/technical-support)
- the Student Guide to ICON - [https://icon.uiowa.edu/help/students/](https://icon.uiowa.edu/help/students/)
Course Calendar

Each week:
- **Join** virtual class meeting.
- **Upload** reading response before and completed in-class assignment at the end of class to ICON Dropboxes.

Aug. 22 — First day of class

Aug. 24  

In-class exercise: Case 5: Alcohol Awareness Month (Part A), pp. 57-58.

Aug. 29  
**Reading response 1 (Handbook)**

- Grammar exercise
- In-class discussion: Exercises on p. 60.
Aug. 31 — Drafting short-form persuasion documents: Fact sheets and bio sketches

Fact Sheets: Drafting a fact sheet from your resume' for a bio sketch. (Bring your resume’ to class.)

- Exercise: Formatting the fact sheet (draft a one-page fact sheet for your professional bio-sketch.)

- Reading response 2: Handbook, pp. 75-81. (Write this as a separate reading response.)

Sept. 5 — Labor Day

Sept. 7

- Exercise: Writing the bio sketch—(Graded exercise 1)
  - Write a 200-word bio sketch.

Sept. 12   Leads and News Releases

- Grammar exercise
- Leads:
  - The inverted pyramid revisited: organizing your story
    - Writing a list
    - The semantic map
  - Writing the summary lead

Sept. 14 — News Releases (cont.)

Appointment release—(Graded exercise 2): Revise your bio sketch as an appointment release

Sept. 19 — News Releases (cont.)

- Grammar exercise
- Exercise: Product release

Sept. 21 — News Releases (cont.)

- Grammar exercise

Sept. 26 News Releases (cont.)

- Grammar exercise.
- Exercise: Lifestyle, trend and survey releases (Handbook, pp. 25-26)
- Lifestyle release—**graded exercise 3**.

Sept. 28 News releases (cont.)

- Grammar exercise.
- Exercise: The trend release

Oct. 3 Writing the resume'. (Bring your resume' to class on a thumb drive.)

- Grammar exercise.

Oct. 5 Writing the cover letter.

- Grammar exercise.
Oct. 10  Grammar exercise.

Clip Search Exercise: Identifying reporters, sources and frames (in syllabus)

Oct. 12  Assessing media relations: PR Newswire discussion exercise

**IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT:** Analysis of <prnewswire.com>. Visit the Web site.

- On the home page what are the top “stories?”
- See the “News by Sector and Topic” tab.
- What kinds of releases are displayed there? What kinds of releases are shown under “Most Viewed?”
- Identify one release as an example to describe.
  - Is the lead a “summary” lead?
  - Or is it delayed in a feature style?
  - How are links used in the text?
  - How long is the release? (Copy and paste the text into a Word file for the word count.”
  - Where in the release is there an “About Us” section?
  - What catches your attention most about the resources offered by this professional Web site?

Oct. 17  Writing the pitch

- Grammar exercise
- **Reading response 4:** Handbook, chapter 3, pp. 49-64.
- Exercise: Writing a persuasive pitch (**graded exercise 4**)

Oct. 24 — Guest speaker: Rachael Howitz, formerly of Twitter and FaceBook

Oct. 26 — Writing and Presenting Speeches (Graded exercise 5)
  o Grammar exercise
  o Reading response 5: Handbook, chapter five: pp. 85-106

Oct. 31 — Speeches (cont.)
  o Grammar exercise

Nov. 2 — Speeches (cont.)
  o Grammar exercise

Nov. 7 — Writing and formatting the Powerpoint presentation (Graded exercise 6)
  o Grammar exercise

Nov. 9 — PPT (cont.)

Nov. 14 — Writing for broadcast: Public Service Announcements (Graded exercise 7)
  o Grammar exercise
  o Reading response 7: Handbook, pp. 134-139.

Nov. 16 — PSAs (cont.)
  o Grammar exercise

Nov. 21 & 23 — Thanksgiving break
Nov. 28 — Writing for the Internet

  o Grammar exercise
  o **Reading response 8:** Handbook, pp. 225-248.
  o “On-line Writing and Communications.” *See Icon for pdf.*

Nov. 30 — Writing for the Internet (cont.)

Dec. 5 — Responsive Writing — The letter to the editor (100 words)

  o **graded exercise 8.**
  o Grammar exercise
  o **Reading response 9:** Handbook, pp. 243-262.

Dec. 7 — Last class meeting. Agency exercise and final essay.
# Grading Rubric — Public relations writing

## I. Structure and Content

| Behavioral framework applied correctly | 30 |
| Format (based on example)             | 30 |
| Research                              | 20 |
| Effectiveness                         | 20 |
| **Total**                             | 100 |

## II. Errors to avoid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error</th>
<th>Points (per error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax or word choice</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact error</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlimited
Policies & Resources

Administrative Home

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Academic Honesty

All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College’s Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies

The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final
exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student’s responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

**Making a Suggestion or a Complaint**

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident ([CLAS Academic Policies Handbook](https://example.com/)).

**Understanding Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI [Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment](https://example.com/) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.