

Review of *Writing like a PR pro: Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world*

Christopher Ortega

Assistant Professor

SUNY Cortland

christopher.ortega@cortland.edu

Sterenberg, M. (2017). *Writing like a PR pro: Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world*. The Ohio State University.

Write Like a PR Pro: Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world by Mary Sterenberg is an open educational resource (OER) textbook on writing in the field of public relations. The text is separated into five sections and each of the 13 chapters uses real world examples. The engaging examples that allow students to understand how the material corresponds to the real world is a major strength of this textbook. I have taught writing courses for over 10 years and in the past few years have explored the use of OER materials. I therefore have used this text for two semesters in a junior-level intermediate writing for public relations course.

Part one of the text is *PR Writing and Planning Basics* which is made up of three chapters. The text establishes the importance of writing as the foundation of public relations. Basics of writing for public relations are also covered such as associated press (AP) style and identifying target audiences. PR professional advice helps students understand how writing will be a part of their future careers. Part two, a single chapter focused on *Writing for Owned Media* where blogging in public relations is explained using real-world examples. Part three of the text is *Writing for Social Media* and consists of five chapters. This is an area many students are interested in, and the text goes in depth in different aspects while providing engaging examples.

In the section, “How the PR Pros Do It: Retailer Jumps on Holiday Hashtags to Increase Engagement,” an example of how social media can be used by established brands to grow engagement was detailed nicely. Part four is *Writing for Video and Visuals* consists of two chapter, another area important for aspiring public relations professionals. The final section, *Writing for Earned Media*, two chapters, explores news values and how to successfully create releases that will lead to media coverage in two chapters. Brand journalism is covered giving students perspective on how brands are creating their own stories in the crowded media environment.

I have now used this text for two semesters. Student response has been extremely positive. Students found the shorter chapters to be easily accessible. The focus on real-world examples was also viewed as helpful and engaging. Engagement with the course and topics was increased compared to when I taught the course prior semesters. The ability to get the text at the beginning of the semester at no cost was extremely appealing to my students and they continued the engagement throughout the entire semester.

The biggest strength of the text is the real-world examples. The excerpt on Travel Nevada excellently lays out how a brand (in this case a state) must account for preconceived notions when deciding on a marketing plan. This example demonstrates how Nevada must work to get visitors to think of the state as more than just Las Vegas and casinos. This type of practical exemplar is useful to illustrate valuable aspects of public relations writing. The biggest weakness of the text is that it does not delve into the nuts and bolts of public relations writing. Therefore, this text should be supplemented with additional writing-focused materials if it is used in a skills-based public relations course.

This text is useful as either a primary or supplemental textbook. Any public relations course could benefit from using the sections on the public relations planning process to bolster other materials used in the course. The text also includes a YouTube page containing interviews with PR professionals which are highlighted in the chapters. Since the chapters vary in length and depth it is possible to use specific chapters as they fit topics in other courses. Given that writing is an essential skill across all aspects of the curriculum this text is a useful resource for many courses related to new media and the converged media landscape.