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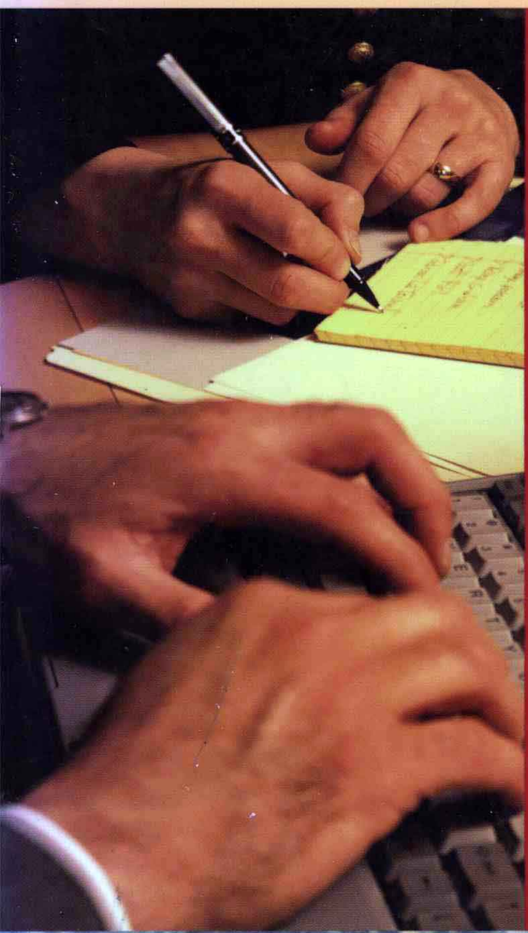

PUBLIC RELATIONS

WRITING AND MEDIA TECHNIQUES

DENNIS L. WILCOX

Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques

FOURTH EDITION

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FOREWORD

Writing is a thought-recovery process. We have thoughts in response to some mental or visual stimulus. We capture them at a keyboard or on the back of an envelope. This book teaches how to capture sound thinking in persuasive writing.

What makes this text so valuable is that it goes beyond telling *how* to write to examine the reasons *why* we write. The driving force in effective public relations practice is to see beyond what we do (the process) in order to focus on why (the expected outcomes). Most valuable are the up-to-date examples that illustrate this point. By analytically teaching why we write, and the strategy and planning that go into persuasive writing, this book helps us think better. The first step to better writing is better thinking—and the combination leads to better public relations practice.

This fourth edition is particularly useful because it presents important material on the everyday forms that, in the aggregate, constitute the majority of public relations writing—news releases, pitch letters, radio and television copy, media alerts, letters, memos, direct mail, brochures, newsletters, and even preparing materials for the Internet. The fourth edition also lives up to its reputation by presenting up-to-the-minute information about media techniques and trends in today's modern public relations practice.

Writing and media, of course, are only part of public relations. The text recognizes this by also illuminating such subjects as events, conferences, meetings of various kinds, presentations, ethics, and, most important, *planning*. Still, a public relations practitioner without a thorough understanding of persuasive writing and efficient media networks would be like a doctor without a basic grounding in anatomy or physiology.

Dennis Wilcox, a knowledgeable, questing, and contributing scholar of the field, is a spokesman not only for what public relations is but also for what it can and should be.

If one book can help us learn to write, to think, to plan, and to use various media and methods, it is a superior text. A person who knows and can apply what's in this book is ready for a successful career in public relations.

Patrick Jackson, Fellow PRSA
Senior Counsel, Jackson, Jackson & Wagner
Editor, PR Reporter

PREFACE

The fourth edition of *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques,* like the previous editions, is designed to be a comprehensive, highly readable text. It emphasizes how public relations specialists gather information, produce copy, and distribute material through a variety of media channels, including cyberspace.

Consequently, there is expanded and new material showing public relations writers how to use the new technologies of electronic wire services-mail, satellite media tours, computer graphics, CD-ROM, the Internet, and the World Wide Web.

But "gee-whiz" advances in technology are not the only focus of this book. It also builds a framework in Part 1 that helps students understand the laws and regulations that affect public relations practice, the ethics of persuasion, what constitutes news, and how to generate news.

Above all, the text is a "how-to" manual for effective public relations writing. Writing is an essential skill for all public relations work. The chapters in Part 2 emphasize the writing of news releases and features for print, broadcast, and the Internet. It also covers the techniques of taking publicity photos, writing pitch letters, preparing media advisories, compiling press kits, writing op-ed articles, efficient distribution methods, and effective media relations. Part 3 emphasizes writing for a variety of controlled media—newsletters, brochures, advertising, speeches, letters and reports, PowerPoint™ presentations, and organization Web sites.

Finally, Part 4 puts it all together by explaining the basics of effective event management, how to write a comprehensive program plan, and how to do a "bottom-line" evaluation of all your efforts.

The major strengths of this new edition, are:

- An entirely new chapter on the World Wide Web (Chapter 13).
- Expanded material on Webcasting and producing E-Zines.
- Expanded material on preparing materials for radio and television.
- Excellent case studies and illustrations from actual public relations campaigns that show students how to produce and distribute quality materials.
- New and updated "Professional Tips" that provide easy-to-read checklists on today's public relations practice.
- High readability, clear presentation of ideas, and excellent writing style.
- Summaries and expanded exercises at the end of every chapter.
- Lists of additional readings and resources at the end of every chapter.

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- A new chapter on how to prepare materials for posting on an organization's Web site.
- A list of "Additional Resources" at the end of every chapter.
- An expanded glossary of key terms and words at the end of the book.
- The ability to mix and match chapters, depending on the course and the time available.

An Instructor's Manual with test questions, written by David Ritchey of the University of Akron, is available for this edition. Please contact your local Allyn & Bacon / Longman sales representative.

I am grateful to the following reviewers for comments and suggestions. Second edition: William Baxter, Marquette University; E. W. Brody, Memphis State University; Cathy Morton, Texas Tech University; Susan Pendleton, Mansfield University; Bruce Renfro, Southwest Texas State University; Ed Romanoff, University of Pittsburgh; and Susanne A. Roschwalb, American University. Third edition: Janice Barrett, Boston University; Lena Chau, California State University at Los Angeles; Jan Elliott, University of North Carolina; Terry Rentner, Bowling Green State University; Susanne A. Roschwalb, American University; and Joseph Zappala, Utica College.

And a special thanks to the following educators who provided input for the fourth edition: Douglas P. Starr, Texas A&M University; Shelly A. Wright, SUNY-New Paltz; Leo J. McKenzie, Marist College; Dean Kruckeberg, University of Northern Iowa; David Dollar, Southwest Missouri State Uiversity; and Michael E. Bishop, Baylor University.

Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques is for students who want to learn how to write, prepare, and distribute public relations materials. It is for professors who want a comprehensive, up-to-date text that accurately reflects public relations practice in the "real world."

Dennis L. Wilcox, Ph.D.
Fellow PRSA

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PART ONE

The Basics of Public Relations Writing

Public relations writing has four basic building blocks: (1) the proper use of the English language, (2) a basic understanding of the communication process and how to get the attention of readers and viewers, (3) creative problem solving, and (4) adherence to legal and ethical standards for shaping messages.

- *Chapter 1, "Preparing for Writing,"* discusses the purpose of public relations writing, the equipment needed, basic references, online retrieval services and networks, surfing the Internet, and some basic guidelines for good writing.
- *Chapter 2, "Persuasive Writing,"* explores writing to change opinions and attitudes, appealing to self-interest, communication theories, basic persuasion concepts, and message design.
- *Chapter 3, "Finding and Generating News,"* describes basic news values, the competition for space, where to find stories, ideas for making news, brainstorming, and creativity.
- *Chapter 4, "Legal and Ethical Guidelines,"* covers potential liability, libel, invasion of privacy, regulatory agencies, copyright, trademarks, and professional standards.

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