Writing for Strategic Communication Industries

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About the Author

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I

Chapter 1: Defining Strategic Communication

What is strategic communication?

"Strategic Planning" by Stefano Senise from Thinkstock is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Scholars and communication professionals have adopted strategic communication as an umbrella term meant to include a variety of communication-related professions, such as public relations, brand communication, advertising, and more. Although the term is not new, scholars have only recently examined it as a cohesive paradigm. Hallahan et al. (2007) defines strategic communication as "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission" (p. 3). It is multidisciplinary in that it draws from a variety of methods and subject areas.

According to Paul (2011), creating clear goals and understanding "how a certain set of audience attitudes, behaviors, or perceptions will support those objectives" is what makes communication strategic (p. 5). In strategic communication, message development, or the process of creating key points or ideas, requires high levels of planning and research. These messages are targeted, or created with a specific audience in mind, and help to position an organization's communication goals with its structural goals. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected through new forms of communication, the role of strategic communications is to help organizations understand how to effectively deliver their message to key audiences.

Five tenets of strategic communication

Although the tactics of strategic communication methods may vary, the purpose and the general characteristics of strategic communication are similar across related industries (Hallahan et al., 2007). In 2008, the U.S. Department of Defense's Strategic Communication Education Summit considered these similarities and created a list of principles (Hastings, 2008). The following tenets of strategic communication are informed by these principles as well as arguments from Paul (2011).

Intentional message design

Strategic communication involves a great deal of thought, planning, and analysis. It does not mean simply designing a clever advertisement or sending a tweet without thinking about its implications. To create an intentional message, you must begin with a realistic communication goal for what you're trying to achieve. This reinforces Paul's (2011) argument about what constitutes strategic communication. Do you want to cultivate positive associations with the organization's brand? Raise awareness of a new product? Connect with key stakeholders in a meaningful manner? Whatever your goal, you must begin with a well-defined purpose and continue to keep it at the forefront throughout the process of creation and implementation.

Additionally, you must be sure that the communication goal goes hand-in-hand with the organization's goal. Let's say that an organization wants to create and maintain a socially responsible image. You might achieve that by developing a philanthropic communication strategy, such as teaming up with a local nonprofit organization for a benefit concert or publicizing a promotion to help a popular charity.

The correct platform(s)

There's a saying in public relations, marketing, and even journalism: go where your audience is. A large part of this involves choosing the right platform to communicate to your key publics or audiences. This can be challenging. Gone are the days when only a few major news stations, magazines, and radio stations controlled the message content for the masses. Today's audiences have plenty of choices when it comes to media, making it even more difficult for your message to be seen or heard.

If you can determine the audience's general media consumption preferences, you can more effectively place your message. Let's say you are trying to increase the brand visibility of a new vegan restaurant among men who strongly support healthy living. In this case, if the targeted audience frequently reads a local, health-centered magazine, you might place a feature article in the magazine to raise awareness of the new restaurant.

Calculated timing

All of your planning, analysis, and creative efforts may be wasted if your message is not communicated at the right moment. In 2014, Malaysia Airlines launched a marketing/public relations campaign with a variety of prizes, including free airline tickets for potential customers in Australia and New Zealand. The problem? The campaign, titled "My Ultimate Bucket List," invited people to talk about places they would like to go and activities they would like to do before dying (Barber, 2014).

The timing of the campaign was imprudent. Earlier that year, two Malaysia Airlines flights had crashed, resulting in more than 500 deaths. Although the goal of the campaign was to recreate a positive brand image after the tragedies, the use of the term "bucket list," given its association with death, proved to be inappropriate. Airline executives faced a backlash from audiences, many of whom claimed that the message was insensitive. The executives admitted their error and soon ended the campaign.

As this example shows, the success of any strategic message is highly predicated on when the audience will be most likely to receive it and when the interference of external factors, such as a major crisis, is at a minimum.

Audience selection and analysis

Some audiences are more important to a message's goal than others. Audiences for internal communication messages include employees, investors, and managers. Audiences for external communication messages include customers, influencers, and the news media.

It is important to always keep the message goal in mind so that you can choose the correct audiences that will help you meet the goal. Taking a broad approach and targeting everyone is not the best way to succeed. Practice audience segmentation, that is, the division of a large group into subcategories based upon attitudes, demographics, and media use.
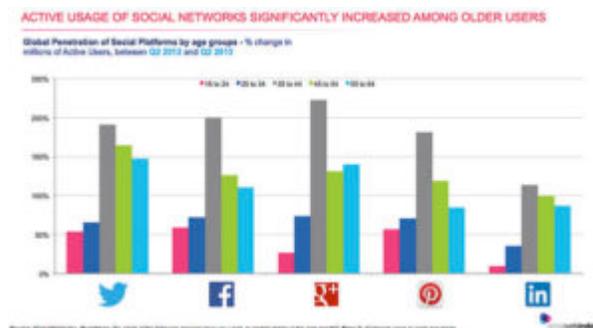
"2014 Social Media Age Demographics Stats" by
Automotive Social is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Once you've selected your main audience, analyze it. This involves deep examination of attitudes, values, and beliefs toward the message topic, with the goal of giving the audience what they want and need. Generally speaking, people are inclined to pay attention to a message that is relevant to them. It increases their level of involvement and engagement with the message (Wang, 2006; Cacioppo et al., 1986).

Desired impact

During the planning stage of a message, clearly define what a successful campaign will look like to the organization. How will the strategic communication team measure success? Are you hoping to increase sales? Are you aiming to increase attendance at promotional events? Are you trying to minimize negative media coverage about your client or company?

In 2015, shortly after a series of racially tense incidents across the country, the coffee chain Starbucks launched an initiative called "Race Together" that encouraged customers and employees to have conversations about race relations. The company's CEO, Howard Schultz, told the Huffington Post: "Our intent is to try to elevate the national conversation" (Baertlein & Rigby, 2015).

However, the initiative provoked a huge backlash on social media. Many people thought the campaign's goal was unrealistic—why would Starbucks coffee shops be appropriate venues to begin healing the country's racial wounds? Others said the campaign was hypocritical, pointing out that the company's leadership team is predominantly white and/or male. Some baristas reported feeling uncomfortable with initiating conversations (Sanders, 2015; Baertlein & Rigby, 2015).

Twitter reaction to Starbucks's "Race Together" campaign.

The failure of "Race Together" shows how communication executives neglected to carefully consider how they planned to define success and how important it is to select the correct platform and spokespersons in order to achieve the desired effects.

Together, the five tenets of strategic communication help to create effective messages. Be mindful of these tenets as you're writing for various audiences.

Skills needed in the strategic communication profession

Many students who are interested in pursuing a career in strategic communication ask, "What can I do in order to be successful in my internship?" or "What skills do I need by the time I graduate?" The answers often depend on the specific role. However, employers expect job-seekers to demonstrate several general transferable skills:

- ***Writing ability:*** Writing is at the center of what many strategic communication professionals do. They might be required to write a press release, develop marketing copy, create an annual report, or manage a Twitter account. Regardless of the specific task, writing clear, concise, and relatable messages is a vital skill in any communication-related role. To quote from an interview with Carol Merry, senior vice president of corporate communication at Fahlgren Mortine, one of the nation's largest independent marketing and communications agencies:

> "Writing has defined my career. Being able to write well has led to opportunities and provided hard-to-achieve credibility with executive management, clients, legal partners, and others. Today's corporate communications practitioners need to be able to sift through material to develop clear, crisp communications. The written word has not been abandoned in the business world." (C. Merry, personal communication, May 27, 2016).

- ***Oral communication/presentation skills:*** Oral communication or skill in public speaking is critical to achieving success in a strategic communication career. You may have to deliver a presentation to pitch new business to a potential client or discuss campaign ideas and results with a current client. Successful presentations demonstrate a solid understanding of how to connect with the audience in a compelling and persuasive manner.

- ***Analytic ability:*** Strategic communicators use analytic skills to examine industry trends, audiences, and message design. They also use these skills to manage organizational needs, solve complex problems, conduct research, come up with creative ideas and communication tactics, and conceptualize realistic and effective messaging goals. They also may use metric-driven programs such as Google Analytics or Kissmetrics.

- ***Ability to work under pressure:*** Strategic communication often involves working against tight deadlines and being expected to deliver results under pressure. In the event of a crisis or a stressful organizational situation, you want to be able to craft an effective response and shape the narrative going forward. In a less negative situation, such as promoting the grand opening of a store, you will still need to create messages quickly in order to get them out to audiences.

- ***Proactive mindset:*** Many people think that strategic communication is reactive because they associate it with crisis communication. But many areas of strategic communication are proactive; that is, they involve finding unique opportunities to communicate with key audiences before competitors do. Having a proactive mindset will help you distinguish your messages from the thousands of others that your audiences encounter daily.

- ***Adaptability:*** Work schedules sometimes may change abruptly in order to meet the needs of an organization. You might be called on to be part of a project at the last minute. Having an open mind and being ready to help when needed will set you apart from others who are not as flexible.

- ***Diverse talents:*** Being able to perform diverse tasks will make you more marketable as a communication professional, whether you're asked to develop an infographic for a brochure, create a video for a marketing campaign, deliver a presentation to a client, or conduct a focus group for market research. Instead of pigeonholing your professional growth, learn as much as possible to leverage your personal brand, and then develop a specialty in something that interests you.

Further Reading

- 10 essential skills for the future of PR
- 5 skills for better strategic communications
- *Strategic Writing: Multimedia writing for public relations, advertising, and more.* Charles Marsh, David W. Guth, and Bonnie Poovey Short.
- *Writing that works: How to communicate effectively in business.* Kenneth Roman and Joel Raphaelson.

Jobs in strategic communication

A degree in strategic communication or a related subject—such as marketing, communication studies, and public relations—can equip you to fill a variety of roles.

Below is a list of jobs in strategic communication as well as links to descriptions of each:

- Community relations specialist
- Communication specialist
- Brand journalist
- Press secretary
- Copywriter
- Public relations specialist
- Social media manager
- Event planner
- Marketing manager
- Media buyer
- Speechwriter

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II

Chapter 2: Media Writing--Conventions, Culture, and Style

The role of media in American society

The function of media in society has evolved in recent years, especially due to the digitization of messages. Audiences in the past had to rely heavily on mainstream messages that were generated, sent, and controlled by institutions such as corporations and large media outlets. These institutions determined which issues and stories were newsworthy, thus influencing the public's perception of what was important.

"Camera crews at the joint press conference given by Congress and the ODIHR" by Kober (talk) is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

The emergence of social media has affected communication patterns in that audiences are now message creators. They also play a more active role in determining which issues are important to cover from a news perspective. However, the basic function of mass media remains the same: to provide audiences with information they need and want to know, for both informative and entertainment purposes.

Communication professionals still rely on the media to distribute their company's news to large audiences. Unlike marketing or promotional messages sent directly from an organization, information from news media can have a "third-party endorsement" effect, which enhances its perceived credibility. The media also influence our attitudes, how we think, and even our behaviors.

As a strategic communication professional, be aware that you hold great responsibility when writing material that will land in the media. More than ever, strategic communicators are influencing public discourse and shaping conversation. You must seize opportunities to positively integrate your organization or client into media coverage or risk being excluded from the dialogue.

Watch the video below of Chris Davey, assistant vice president for media and public relations for The Ohio State University. He discusses the function of media in society and writing for the media.

[Understanding the Media Environment with Chris Davey](#)

Media culture and work environment

It's important to be aware of the culture and work environment of media organizations and content publishers. Understanding the expectations of those who have a tremendous influence on the coverage of your organization can better inform your media strategy. The following points elaborate on the work environment and culture of media outlets.

Fast-paced environment

Corporate media organizations compete with one another to break stories or report on events. Being the first to deliver a story brings a media outlet prestige and credibility. Furthermore, being the first to publish often results in a higher search engine ranking, which results in more clicks and stronger viewership.

The onset of cable television in the 1980s changed the media landscape. One of the most notable results is what we refer to as the 24-hour news cycle. Audiences in the past had to wait until specific broadcast times—usually at noon and in the early and late evening—to hear the latest about current events.

Today, many media outlets disseminate news constantly, every hour of the day. This immediacy of news coverage seeks to meet the audience's demand to have essential information quickly. Furthermore, media outlets compete not only against each other but against the Internet. In this fast-paced environment, media professionals are expected to provide quality news stories to the masses even as they find it more difficult to gather and report facts accurately and responsibly.

Strict deadlines

The 24-hour news cycle places high demands on journalists and news media professionals to work against tight deadlines while being the first to break news. Strict deadlines are not isolated to the newsroom; public relations professionals also are expected to produce under pressure. For example, if your organization has an unanticipated product recall, audiences will expect some type of official announcement quickly. Furthermore, you often get only one chance to create the right message, one that has its intended effect.

Internal competition

The internal culture of the media has become more competitive over the years. Given the pressure to be the first to break a story, journalists increasingly feel the need to market themselves as trustworthy news sources. Those who work for the same media outlet may compete with one another. Journalists are expected to create a likeable personal

brand. They are rated not only on viewership, but on social media likes, shares, personal appearances, and so on.

Journalists can no longer hide behind their byline; they must put their best face forward and work to increase followers. It is important for you to realize this when pitching a news story to a journalist. These topics will be covered in depth later in the book.

The role of writing in strategic communication

Writing is a fundamental business skill that can greatly affect the credibility and success of an organization. A recent survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2015) found that 70 percent of employers look for evidence of strong writing skills in recent college graduates.

Styles of writing vary with the medium, the type of message being communicated, and the audience.

Media writing as discussed here differs from academic writing, which most higher education audiences are accustomed to using. Media writing is clear, straightforward, accurate, and appealing to the target audience. It is active and dynamic, and it allows an organization to engage with its key audiences and clearly communicate ideas and goals. It should also influence the target audience's perceptions and/or behaviors. Word choice, tone, and message packaging are some of the techniques you will need to master in order to be a strong communicator.

As with any skill, you have to consistently practice writing and be open to suggestions in order to improve. Because there is a perceived—if sometimes unjustified—association between intelligence and writing ability, you may misinterpret constructive feedback as criticism. However, one of the best ways to learn whether you're clearly communicating through your writing is to get a third-party audience to read and react honestly to it.

In this video, Carol Merry, senior vice president with Fahlgren Mortine, discusses the importance of strong writing skills in the workplace and provides practical tips to improve your writing.

Writing in the Workplace with Carol Merry

Media writing skills and characteristics

Writing for the media can be difficult, especially for beginners. Practicing the following skills will help you improve the quality of your work.

Knowledge of AP Style

Most media outlets use AP style—the style established and constantly updated by the Associated Press—as the foundation for basic news and media writing. AP style provides consistency in writing across media outlets and publications. You should purchase the latest edition of the AP stylebook and familiarize yourself with it because you will be required to write in this manner for messages intended for media outlets. The stylebook is available both online and in hard copy. In general, AP style has evolved to ensure that media writing is accurate, impartial, and clear to the audience.

Knowledge of grammar and punctuation

Audiences hold media and strategic communication professionals to a high standard when it comes to knowledge of grammar and punctuation. To assist you in learning how to write for the media, here are a few basic grammar and punctuation rules:

- Use simple sentences that follow the subject, verb, object order (example: Maria attended the press conference).

- Use active, not passive voice. Active voice helps with clarity and concise writing. (Passive voice: The press release was completed by Brian. Active voice: Brian completed the press release.)

- Understand word choice and meaning:
    - affect, effect
    - its, it's
    - they're, their, there
    - accept, except

- Be aware of comma uses:
    - *Set off modifiers (words or clauses that provide further description)*
      The publicist, who works for Ogilvy, arrived late to the meeting.

- *Separate an introductory phrase or word*
  While studying, I listened to music.
- *Before a conjunction*
  I want to go, but I have to study.
- *When writing a series of items (three or more)*
  She bought shoes, food, and a movie.

Watch the video below of Jenny Patton, senior lecturer in the English department at The Ohio State University. She discusses common grammatical errors and tips to improve your writing.

<p align="center">Grammatical Errors with Jenny Patton</p>

Ability to simplify information

As a media or strategic communication professional, you will need to synthesize and make sense of a great deal of information for your audience, often under a strict deadline. This takes strategy, good storytelling skills, and the ability to focus on the essential information. Audiences respond better to information that is presented in a logical order that supports the overall narrative.

Focus on accuracy and details

When you write for the media, you represent not only your personal brand but also the broader organization for which you're producing content. Precise writing and transparency give newsrooms credibility; misinformation can severely diminish the integrity of the media outlet. Selecting appropriate sources and verifying information obtained from those sources, referred to as fact checking, can help minimize inaccurate writing. Accuracy also means using proper grammar and language appropriate to the audience.

Ensuring accurate reporting and writing can be challenging. Fast-paced media environments make it tremendously difficult to thoroughly gather information and fact check it in a short amount of time. For example, in 2013, during coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings, reports of five additional explosives found in the area were later found to be false. In addition, the *New York Post* ran a photo on its front page of two men that it alleged were the suspects that federal investigators were searching for at the time. The men were innocent, and while the *Post* apologized for the error, the men later sued the media outlet for defamation (Wemple, 2014).

Outstanding attention to detail is necessary in order to catch errors in content, grammar, and punctuation. Taking the time to slowly review your message will save you from the consequences of misinformation or careless errors. Similarly, a big part of the writing process involves editing and revising your work, either by you or by an editor. Few writers can produce material that cannot be improved or does not need to be altered for style or content reasons.

Objectivity

Objectivity is one of the principles of journalism, according to the code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (2014). Media writing should provide well-rounded analyses and stories that include all major perspectives. If you present one organization's point of view, you should also quote one of its competitors or discuss the contrarian perspective for balance. With the exception of opinion columns and blogs, writers should not express their personal opinions on a story or event. Instead, they should write objectively, presenting the facts and leaving it up the audience to decide how to feel about the information.

Some professionals believe that objective journalism does not exist because humans are innately biased creatures (Hare, 2013). It is true that a writer's biases can become apparent in his or her writing. However, media professionals should aspire to absolute objectivity. To achieve this, it helps to have a third party read your article or message to minimize biased writing.

Clarity

Media professionals generally write for a large, mainstream audience. Clear and concise writing makes it easier for a wide variety of groups to understand the core message. Complex sentence structures and jargon that you might find in traditional academic writing are not appropriate for diverse populations. Use simple sentences to get your point across.

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III

Chapter 3: Strategic Communication Ethics

Ethics case study

The issue of ethics is important in the strategic communication profession. Creators of content should heavily rely on a code of ethics when carrying out various tasks. Using ethical reasoning, whether you're designing a campaign or writing a newspaper article, demonstrates basic understanding of the influence of messages on audiences. Ethical communication also helps an organization avoid dilemmas and compromising situations.

Several cases covered in the press highlight the ramifications of failure to use ethical and honest standards in communication efforts. The case study below demonstrates this.

Case study: Ryan Holiday, media manipulation, and the rise of the Tucker Max brand

Media strategist Ryan Holiday made a career of controlling the media to achieve public relations goals. A few years ago, he became a PR specialist for Tucker Max, a controversial blogger and author who garnered attention for his lewd writing and explicit discussions of his sexual adventures with countless women. Holiday played an essential role in a campaign for Max's book *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell*. Pretending to be someone who hated Max's writings, Holiday contacted influencers, bloggers, and television stations about the social controversy caused by the brand. Soon Max's book received widespread attention from national media outlets and writers all over the blogosphere (Ariely & Melamede, 2015).

Filmmakers later created a movie based on the book. Holiday used some of the same tactics to promote the film. He emailed college organizations across the country, again pretending to be someone who was disgusted with the Tucker Max brand. He included photos of fake advertisements that were offensive to women (which Holiday himself had created), and said that the advertisements were used to promote the film (Ariely & Melamede, 2015). He told campus leaders, bloggers, and other influencers to urge people not to see the film.

Holiday was intentionally trying to create protests to generate media coverage and public awareness about the film and the Tucker Max brand in general (Ariely & Melamede, 2015). He used deceptive measures and some aspects of controversy—strong opinions on a topic, social backlash, and a hated public figure—as leverage. And he was very successful: organized groups across the country held protests against the film, furthering the widespread attention on Tucker Max. In this situation, the saying "any press is good press" worked to his advantage.

Cases such as this raise several concerns related to the field of strategic communication. Most important, the Tucker Max situation calls into question the ethics Holiday used to control the media. How far should one go to promote an organization or brand?

*"Photo of author Ryan Holiday" is licensed under
CC BY-SA 2.0*

The perception exists that strategic communication professionals, specifically those in public relations, are expert spin doctors and media manipulators; because of this, the profession's credibility has been damaged. In order to reclaim the trustworthiness of the field, strategic communication professionals must abide by strong ethics in their decision-making processes.

The majority of strategic communication professionals promote their client or organization in an honest and straightforward manner. One case study that demonstrates this comes from a Columbus-based public relations agency, Geben Communication. In 2014, the agency helped promote a small catering business, Two Caterers. It used a targeted media relations strategy and pitched to several local publications and news stations (Geben Communication, 2016) in order to enhance brand awareness. The pitches contained factual information, and those working on the account did not use manipulative tactics to achieve their goal.

Geben Communication's promotional effort had positive results. Local publications wrote several articles on Two Caterers, and a television station invited the small business to do a cooking demonstration for a morning segment. Furthermore, Two Caterers received accolades and recognition from small business associations and magazines.

Code of ethics

Ethics is a moral code that serves as a compass for individual or societal behavior. Engaging in unethical behavior or messaging can be particularly damaging for business brands. Countless businesses have been involved in scandals and crises stemming from unethical behavior and judgment. Recovering from these instances is difficult, and the effects are sometimes irreversible.

Most subfields related to the broader strategic industry have what is called a code of ethics or a collection of rules and values that play a foundational role in conduct and the decision-making process. The links below explain the code of ethics for public relations, journalism, and advertising:

- Public relations
- Journalism
- Advertising

Defamation

Compromising the code of ethics may have legal consequences, depending upon the situation. One of the most common ethical problems that occur in court cases is defamation. Defamation is intentional damage done to one party's reputation by another party. Although it is not a crime, it is considered a civil suit in a court of law. Individuals or organizations with particularly high stakes attached to their reputation (for example, celebrities, public figures, renowned educators, or popular businesses) are more inclined to sue for defamation.

A recent example is the defamation cases filed by comedian Bill Cosby. In 2015, Cosby faced allegations of sexual assault from more than 50 women, resulting in civil lawsuits and criminal investigations against him. The tremendously negative effect on his reputation resulted in the rescinding of several honorary degrees he had received as well as the cancellation of reruns of his popular TV program from the 1980s and early '90s, *The Cosby Show.* In response to the damages, Cosby sued some of the women for defamation, but the cases were later dismissed. The allegations continue to have an impact on Cosby's image and legacy.

Slander and Libel

There are two categories of defamation: slander and libel. Slander is the spoken version of defamation, when something is said verbally that harms another party's reputation. Libel is the written version of defamation, when something is published that damages a party's reputation. Because this textbook focuses on writing, libel will be discussed in greater detail.

Libel includes both print and online publications; even social media posts can be grounds for a libel suit. In 2011, lawyer Rhonda Holmes sued her former client, punk rocker Courtney Love, over a disparaging tweet Love had sent in reference to Holmes's work ethic. Love was the first person in history to stand trial for social media defamation; prior to her case, there was no record of someone being sued for defamation because of something posted on Twitter (Chow, 2014). Popular media dubbed the case "Twibel." A jury acquitted Love of all charges. Click here for more information on the case and its implication.

Winning a libel suit is difficult. Five elements have to exist in order to render a statement as libelous (Harrower, 2012):

1. The statement was published.
2. The statement is conveyed as a fact, not an opinion.

3. The statement is false.
4. The statement is identifiable with or made about the plaintiff.
5. The statement was published with intentional negligence or malice.

The last element is particularly challenging to prove. Many libel suits are dismissed because the plaintiff fails to provide evidence for the existence of each element.

The possibility of defamation is of great concern to every strategic communication professional. Careful information gathering and rigorous fact checking are vital in order to avoid defamatory communication. Double-checking quotes and sources helps minimize the risk of publishing libelous statements.

Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest is "a clash between a person's self-interest and professional interest or public interest" (Business Dictionary, 2016). Communication professionals should try to eliminate any action that may compromise their impartiality or the interests of their organization. That includes separating personal interests from the organization's goals.

The definition seems straightforward, but real-life situations can be murky. As a professional working at an advertising agency, should you take on two clients who are competitors? Most within the industry would say that you should inform both parties of the situation and let them decide if they want to proceed. However, let's say your agency takes on a client who has a history of using unethical labor practices, something that you staunchly oppose. How do you remain impartial in this situation? How do you write material that benefits your client when your personal opinions may affect the content? Or, should you, as a journalist, accept a small gift from a source (for example, a five-dollar Starbucks gift card) before or after an interview? Most journalists would say no, because accepting a gift from a source, no matter how small, could affect your feelings toward the individual, which could be reflected in your writing.

There are several ways to avoid a conflict of interest. Gather as much information as you can about the potential conflict in order to make an objective decision (or as objective as possible). Firms should have formal rules, and conflicts should be disclosed to supervisors. To safeguard your career and reputation, it's important to always uphold high ethical standards and conduct yourself in a manner above reproach. You may want to ask colleagues or supervisors for advice. Also, be as upfront as possible with the parties involved.

Learn more about conflict of interest.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an issue in both academic and professional situations. The term refers to using another person's work without proper credit or attribution. Plagiarism is a very serious offense in the strategic communication field, and is particularly egregious in journalism. In 2011, a *Washington Post* journalist, Sari Horwitz, was accused of directly copying content from the *Arizona Republic* while covering the shooting of congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. The *Post* issued an apology and suspended Horwitz for three months (Memmott, 2011). Horwitz also expressed her remorse and released a statement as reported by NPR:

> "I am deeply sorry. To our readers, my friends and colleagues, my editors, and to the paper I love, I want to apologize. ... Under the pressure of tight deadlines, I did something I have never done in my entire career. I used another newspaper's work as if it were my own. It was wrong. It was inexcusable. And it is one of the cardinal sins in journalism" (Memmott, 2011, para. 2).

Plagiarism is not committed primarily by students or those new to the field. Horwitz was an experienced journalist who had received the Pulitzer Prize three times.

A more recent and highly publicized case of plagiarism involved a speech given at the 2016 Republican National Convention by Melania Trump, wife of the party's presidential nominee, Donald Trump. Soon after she delivered the speech, some took to social media to point out similarities to a speech given by Michelle Obama at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. News media outlets later reported that parts of the speech were lifted directly from Obama's speech (Horowitz, 2016). Meredith McIver, Melania's speechwriter and an employee of the Trump organization, took responsibility for the incident and stated that it was a mistake (Horowitz, 2016). McIver was not fired, and many outraged observers questioned the integrity of the Trump campaign.

Lack of transparency

Most crisis communication experts agree that transparency is key to maintaining or regaining the public's trust. Lack of transparency can have devastating effects that sometimes leave a permanent stain on a company or brand's image. Brands cannot thrive without the public's trust.

A recent case that demonstrates the negative outcomes of failing to be transparent is the emissions scandal at Volkswagen. In 2015, news outlets reported that the German car company used a "defeat device" in many of its cars as far back as 2009 to cheat on several emissions tests conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency. These devices were able to detect when tests were being conducted and help reduce toxic emissions during the procedures. In reality, the vehicle emissions were well above the levels permitted by the EPA.

The Volkswagen Scandal (Source: The Verge)

Soon after the public received the news, Volkswagen sales plummeted and a social backlash against the company ensued. As a result, the CEO resigned and the company lost the public's trust. The organization is still going through damage control and court settlement procedures.

Compromising transparency to benefit a company's bottom line may seem like a good idea in the moment, but the long-term damages can be significant.

Misleading advertisements

Similar to public relations agencies, advertising firms often have a reputation for using manipulative tactics at the expense of the consumer. This is largely due to consumers' experiences with misleading advertisements, or promotions that exaggerate claims or misinform audiences. The goal of an advertisement is to emphasize the benefits of a product or service over any drawbacks or shortcomings.

However, agencies should not create deceptive advertisements at the expense of consumers, or those that "raise health and safety concerns … and those that cause economic injury" (Federal Trade Commission, "Division of Advertising Practices," 2016, para. 1). By law, claims in advertisements have to be truthful and supported by evidence. Going back to the Volkswagen emissions scandal, the company also faced legal troubles for falsely advertising that its cars had low emissions. The Federal Trade Commission filed a complaint against Volkswagen in federal court, arguing that the company deceived its consumers through unsubstantiated claims and corrupt evidence.

Learn more about false advertising scandals.

FTC consumer protection laws vary from state to state. These laws ensure that consumers are not misled and that agencies provide fair communication to their target audiences. The FTC can determine whether an advertisement is deceptive. The criteria for deception are as follows:

- The advertisement should have a high probability to mislead the average, reasonable consumer; and

- Advertisement claims should cause the consumer to buy the product or service based on misinformation.

If consumers report an advertisement to the FTC, the organization then goes through a series of steps to decide whether the ad is truly deceptive. You can find a list of the steps here.

Corporate social responsibility

"Close up of a keyboard with a Volunteer concept" by Duncan_Andison from Thinkstock is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Numerous companies are taking measures to create an ethical brand image. One strategy is through corporate social responsibility, which is a business model or practice that seeks to benefit the greater society. More and more consumers support businesses that create initiatives to help communities. Corporate social responsibility can take a variety of forms, from making charitable donations to local causes to underwriting beneficial projects in developing countries. For example, firms including Amazon, Whole Foods, Eddie Bauer, and Kroger have high-profile programs that allow consumers to direct a portion of their money spent to a charity of their choice (50+ companies that donate, 2016). Apple has been a leader in   making large investments in environmentally friendly practices such as using renewable power and recycling in its offices.

There are several benefits to demonstrating and promoting corporate social responsibility. Organizations that do so tend to have a better public image. Furthermore, studies show that consumers are willing to spend more on a product if they know that their purchase benefits a charitable cause or addresses a social or environmental need (Matching gift statistics, 2016). Strategic communication professionals play a key role in branding businesses as socially conscious through message design and brand management. Their efforts help to spread awareness of these initiatives and make them a part of the organization's brand identity and core values.

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Chapter 4: News Value

News value and the strategic communication professional

While watching or listening to a major media network, you may occasionally find yourself thinking, "Why is this story considered news?" Audiences assume that the role of the media is to provide them with the most important information about issues and events happening locally, nationally, and worldwide. Therefore, media outlets send an indirect message to audiences about a story's perceived importance through selection and how much time and exposure they give the story.

A story's newsworthiness is largely determined by its news value, a standard that determines whether an event or situation is worth media attention. News value is referred to as "criteria used by media outlets to determine whether or not to cover a story and how much resources it should receive" (Kraft, 2015). Journalists and reporters are likely to spend their limited time and resources on a story that has many news values.

Strategic communication professionals who understand what constitutes newsworthy content will increase their chances of gaining media coverage for their brand or organization. In fact, there is a saying that "the most successful public relations professionals are those who think and act like reporters" (Caruso, 2011, para. 1). Because journalists are more interested in stories that will appeal to their readers or listeners, understanding the news value of your messages will help to enhance your company's media relations and general coverage.

News value types (Part 1)

In the 1960s, researchers Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge examined news stories worldwide to determine their similarities (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Their seminal study created the first news value list, which is still referred to today by journalists and strategic communication professionals. (See the University of Oxford's paper on Galtung and Ruge's research for more information.) News values have evolved over time, and there is much debate over whether journalists should consider other criteria to select newsworthy content. (See Dr. Meredith Clark's article on considering a new set of news values.) Currently, eight values are used to determine a story's newsworthiness (Kraft, 2015). Some of the values' names may differ slightly in other sources, but their meaning is the same.

Immediacy/Timeliness

Events or stories that have recently taken place or will happen in the immediate future have immediacy or timeliness. Breaking news stories or stories about unexpected events that are developing are good examples. Media gatekeepers deem these stories so important that they often interrupt regular television schedules to immediately give audiences the information. Recent happenings typically carry more news value than less timely events.

Timeliness also takes into consideration factors such as seasonal events, commemorations, and holidays. A strategic communication professional may pitch an activity that connects with this type of timeliness—for example, a fundraiser that distributes toys to low-income children during the holiday season.

Proximity

Proximity considers the location of the event in relation to the target audience of the media outlet. Audiences are more likely to pay attention to stories that take place in their local communities. For example, a news station in Ohio usually wouldn't cover day-to-day events at the Indiana State Fair. However, happenings at the annual Ohio State Fair always get daily coverage in central Ohio news outlets.

Human interest

Stories that are emotionally compelling capture the audience's attention and appeal to their attitudes and beliefs. Feature articles often are good examples of human interest stories when they depict a person, organization, or community in a way that triggers an emotional connection between the audience and the characters. Other examples are

a behind-the-scenes look at the life of an athlete or the story of a person struggling to overcome an obstacle.

An example of a human interest story that contains strong emotional elements is that of Leah Still, daughter of National Football League player Devon Still. Leah captured the hearts of many when news outlets began to cover her battle with cancer in 2015, when she was four years old. Many people admired Leah's positive attitude and determination to beat her illness. Now cancer-free, Leah continues to be an inspiration to thousands of people. For more information about this story and its human interest elements, take a look at this video:

Leah and Devon Still's story (Source: ABC's Good Morning America)

Currency

Topics that are trending in news media and other media, such as Twitter and Facebook, are considered newsworthy. "Hot topics of the day" or stories that are in the general public discourse are other examples. In 2015, many media outlets covered a story about a meme featuring a dress that appeared blue and black to some people and white and gold to others. The phenomenon was dubbed "dressgate" and went viral on social media. Since many people discussed and debated the color of the dress, some news outlets decided to cover the story. However, topics that have currency value generally have a short life span in the news cycle because they are discussed only briefly by the public. Click here for more information on the "dressgate" discussion.

News value types (Part 2)

Prominence

Stories that feature well-known individuals or public figures such as politicians and entertainers carry news value. News outlets covered the story when model Tyra Banks completed a management program at Harvard's School of Business in 2012. Banks's celebrity profile raised the news value of a story that would have received little or no attention had it involved just about anyone else.

Impact

The United Kingdom's vote to exit the European Union in June 2016 had global implications, and many media outlets in the U.S. and abroad reported the story. However, British news stations such as BBC News and Sky News covered the event more extensively than American media did because the decision impacts Britain's economy and citizens much more so than Americans. Generally, people are more likely to care about stories that directly affect their lives; therefore, media gatekeepers often devote more time and resources to stories that have implications for their respective audiences.

Novelty

Stories that are odd, unusual, shocking, or surprising have novelty value. An example would be a story about an unusual animal friendship, such as that between a dog and a deer. Because such a friendship is not a normal occurrence, it sparks the curiosity of audiences. In 2015, CNN covered a story about a weatherman who was able to correctly pronounce the extremely long name of a Welsh village. Take a look at this clip of the story:
Weatherman pronounces long village name (Source: CNN)

Conflict

Strife or power struggles between individuals or ethnic groups or organizations contain a conflict value and often grab the attention of audiences. For example, stories about war, crime, and social discord are newsworthy because their conflict narrative spurs interest. The continuous coverage by U.S. media outlets of worldwide terrorism is another example. Stories about major sports competitions, such as the National Basketball Association finals or the Super Bowl, also contain a conflict element because teams are vying for a prestigious title.

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V

Chapter 5: News Writing Basics

News story objective

While the structure of news stories has changed over time, the overall purpose remains the same. News writing informs and entertains readers and listeners. News stories give citizens information about events happening both in their communities and around the world and therefore play an essential role in shaping their viewpoints and general ideas. We can know what is happening in a foreign country without traveling there, or develop an opinion about a public figure without meeting the person.

Strategic communication writers produce material that they hope will find its way into the news stream. They provide information that helps explain their clients' facts, framing of a controversy, or opinions. Producing the material in a format that makes it easier for journalists to adapt to their own purposes is very important. Alissa Widman Neese, a *Columbus Dispatch* reporter, discusses the nature of news writing in the video below.

Discussion on News Writing with Alissa Widman Neese

As you pursue a career in strategic communication, consider the responsibility you will have in influencing the opinions and attitudes of large numbers of people. Strategic communication professionals have the power to affect public opinion, whether through a press release, a feature article, or a website. Therefore, basic understanding of techniques and styles related to news writing is key to effectively using the media to shape the image of your organization, company, or client.

Types of news stories

Straight news/Hard news

Stories that report only the most essential information in a concise and impartial manner are referred to as straight or hard news stories. This type of story typically follows the inverted pyramid style, which organizes information by descending order of importance or places the most newsworthy information at the beginning of the article. This style will be discussed in more detail below. Examples of hard news stories include those about political topics and crime.

"Newspapers B&W" by Jon S is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Features

The primary difference between a feature story and a straight news story is the style. A feature article is more in-depth than a traditional hard news article and uses the types of storytelling devices and details that you might find in novels. Feature stories are considered soft news and do not focus merely on the basic facts.

Writers typically have more flexibility to use a wider range of formats, provide rich descriptions, and include scene-setting anecdotes. Features often are given more space on the page and are accompanied by pictures, illustrations, graphics, maps, and other visual components. A profile of an athlete or a political figure is an example of a feature article. The characteristics of feature writing will be explained further in the next chapter.

Editorial

Although journalistic ethical standards call for general news writing to be objective in content and tone, newswriters also have the opportunity to communicate personal points of view about current events and topics. The editorial is a type of news story used to develop an argument about an issue and even sway readers' opinions. The essay also represents the official view of an editorial board that determines what views to share after some kind of deliberative process.

Click here for an example of an editorial.

Inverted pyramid style

In general, news stories are organized using the inverted pyramid style, in which information is presented in descending order of importance. This allows the audience to read the most crucial details quickly so they can decide whether to continue or stop reading the story. From an editing perspective, using the inverted pyramid style makes it easier to cut a story from the bottom, if necessary. Invented more than a century ago, the inverted pyramid style remains the basic formula for news writing (Scanlan, 2003).
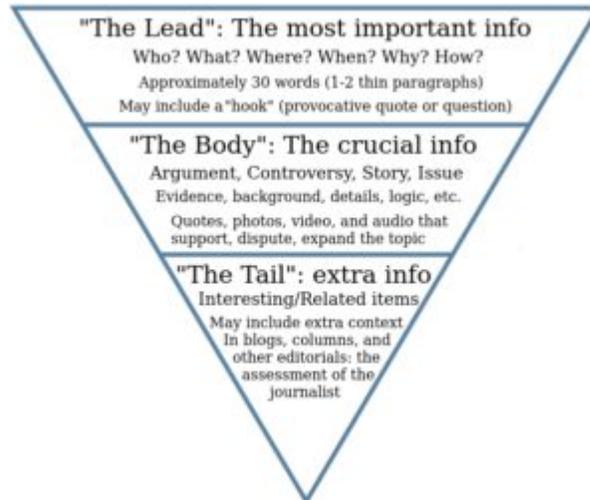
"Inverted pyramid in comprehensive form" by Christopher Schwartz is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

It is important to note that some news stories do not strictly follow the inverted pyramid style, although the lead for a hard news piece always does. Furthermore, not everyone in the journalism field embraces the style; some detractors believe it is an unnatural way to engage in storytelling and present news to the public. Yet, proponents believe it is an efficient way to organize and share information in a fast-paced society (Scanlan, 2003). Therefore, it's important for students to learn the style; one good way to do so is to regularly read hard news stories and pay attention to how the leads are structured. The lead (also known as the summary lead) and the body of the inverted pyramid style are discussed in the next sections.

Summary lead

A summary lead concisely tells the reader the main idea of the story or conveys its news value. Most journalists and editors believe that the lead should come in the first sentence or first few sentences of a hard news article. Reporters use the term "burying the lead" or "delayed lead" to describe one placed later in an article. A buried lead may give the impression that the writer wasn't able to determine what the real newsworthy material was, and can therefore reflect poorly on his or her journalistic judgment. In features or other soft news stories that use more dramatic storytelling techniques, the lead sometimes is buried in order to increase suspense or add an element of surprise.

A summary lead should address the following questions:

- ***Who*** *is the story about?* or***Who*** *is involved?*

- ***What*** *is the story about?* or ***What*** *happened?*

- ***When*** *did the event take place?*

- ***Where*** *did the event take place?*

- ***Why*** *did the event take place?*

- ***How*** *did the event happen?*

Keeping the 5Ws and H in mind when writing a news story will help you organize the content and find a focus for the article. News judgment consists of figuring out the organization of these aspects of the content and prioritizing them in terms of their importance. It's not necessary to cram the 5Ws and H into one sentence for the lead; however, the lead usually should contain information about the Who and What.

Take a look at the lead in this article from the *Washington Post.*

Now, let's answer the 5Ws and H for the lead:

- **Who?** Female undergrads

- **What?** Claims of unwanted sexual advances

- **When?** 2015

- **Where?** Universities

- **Why?**

- **How?** Large study

In this case, the Why of the story is not addressed in the summary lead, perhaps because of the complexity of the issue. Still, the reader can easily understand the main idea of the article. When you're practicing writing summary leads, remember to keep the sentence(s) relatively concise, with no more than 30 words.

Body of the article

Once you've created the lead, give the reader more information in the body of the article. This is your opportunity to elaborate on what else you know about the story. In keeping with the inverted pyramid style, present the information in decreasing order of importance, not necessarily in chronological order. The least important details should appear at the end of the article, where they could be omitted by an editor if necessary.

Use direct and indirect quotes from sources to tell the reader the origin of the information (there is more about this below), and remember to maintain an objective tone. Use the third person; avoid pronouns such as I, me, you, or us that are more suited to opinion pieces. Use short, simple sentences and organize them into paragraphs of no more than three or four sentences.

Attribution

Indicate the source(s) of the information presented in the article through attribution, which typically takes the form of paraphrases as well as direct and indirect quotes. Attribution is very important in media writing, as it helps to establish an objective tone and adds credibility to an article (Harrower, 2012). Attribution also explains how the writer retrieved the information and why a particular source was quoted. Most of a story's major information should be attributed, through phrases such as "she said" or "according to a recent report."

Attribution can be placed at the beginning of a sentence to introduce information or added after a statement. Pay close attention to verb tense and choice when attributing sources. For example, the most common verbs used for attributing human sources are "said," "stated," and "asked." For records or documents, use "reported," "claimed," and "stated." Direct quotes should be surrounded by quotation marks and include the source's exact words. Paraphrased statements and indirect quotes should not be placed in quotation marks.

Here are examples of attributed statements:

- "The libraries are usually crowded and filled with students around this time in the semester," said Laura Sykler, a sophomore at The Ohio State University.

- A heavy cloud of smog hung over the city Wednesday, National Weather Service officials said.

- According to a statement from the White House, the president will announce his pick for the vacant Supreme Court seat on Monday.

When initially referencing a human source, include the person's full name. Use only the last name for subsequent references. Click on this CNN article for an example.

Include important qualifiers with the first reference to demonstrate that the source has expertise on the topic. For example:

- "Using Twitter in the classroom actually enhances student engagement," Jasmine Roberts, strategic communication lecturer at The Ohio State University, said.

Notice that the direct quote with attribution uses the qualifier "strategic communication lecturer at The Ohio State University" to indicate the source's credibility.

Qualifiers are also used to explain a source's relevance to the topic. The following example might be used in a news article reporting on a crime.

- "It was just complete chaos in the store. The police were trying very hard to catch the shoplifter," eyewitness Angela Nelson said.

The qualifier "eyewitness" helps to establish Nelson's relevance to the narrative.

Finally, attribution should flow well within the story. Avoid using long qualifiers or awkward phrases.

Headlines

A headline concisely states the main idea of the story and is further elaborated on in the lead. It should clearly convey a complete thought. Headlines have become increasingly important in today's society; people tend to look only at headlines rather reading complete stories, especially online. An effective headline encourages the reader to take the time to read the article.

Print versus web headlines

Print headlines tend to be concise (using fewer than six or seven words) and straightforward. Online headlines tend to be longer and use catchy language. Images, captions, and subheadlines are more common with print headlines than web headlines (Davis & Davis, 2009).

Web headlines usually appear as links that lead the reader to the actual article. Given the acceleration of media consumption, many readers simply want to know the basic information about an event. The headlines used with web publications give readers enough information to understand what is happening without reading the story.

How to create a headline

Writing headlines take practice. You need to select words carefully and use strong writing in order to entice the audience to read the article.

Create the headline after you finish writing the article so that you have complete understanding of the story. Focus on how you can communicate the main idea in a manner that will capture the reader's attention. Also focus on key words and do not include articles such as a, an, and the. Use present-tense verbs for headlines about events in the past or present. For events in the future, use the infinitive form of the verb: for example, "Local store to open new location."

This print news headline includes a subheadline and an image that provides context, and uses an attention-grabbing phrase. "The Globe and Mail, Toronto, ON Canada" by Cliff is licensed under CC BY 2.0

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Chapter 6: Feature Writing

The purpose of feature writing

In the previous chapter, we touched on using the news media as an informational tool to achieve your organization's communication goals. One useful writing material is a feature article. Features are more in-depth than traditional news stories and go beyond providing the most important facts. The purpose of these stories is to provide a detailed description of a place, person, idea, or organization.

Although reporters and editors classify features as news stories, they are not necessarily structured using the inverted pyramid style. Instead, features use storytelling devices to help the reader connect with the overall narrative and its central characters. Features are particularly common in magazine writing, although they frequently appear in other mediums.

Profiles or personality features that give insight into a person's role, experience, or background are one type of feature. Among the most common subjects of profiles are celebrities, athletes, individuals who overcome challenges, and high-profile executives.

Click here for more information on the different types of features.

It is important to understand the circumstances that warrant a feature piece from a strategic communication perspective. Communication professionals write feature articles to provide in-depth exposure for their client or organization. A feature can increase a client or company's visibility and even help find new key audiences.

If you need to quickly get information about your client or organization to the media, a feature article may not be the best tool because it typically is longer than a traditional news story. However, you could write a feature article on, for example, your company's new CEO to provide more background information to key audiences. Feature stories are also used in an organization's internal communications, such as newsletters and magazines.

Overall, feature articles use an informative tone while incorporating creative and descriptive devices in order to increase audience appeal. Here is an example of a feature article from the *New York Times.*

Feature writing versus traditional news writing

There are several important differences between feature articles and traditional news stories. Features typically are longer. Also, while traditional stories use a summary lead, feature stories use delayed leads or begin with an anecdote. The writing style is different. Traditional news articles tend to paraphrase information rather than state it verbatim, while feature articles use many quotes and emotional cues, focusing more on showing the reader what's going on instead of telling. In this video, Chris Davey, assistant vice president for media and public relations at The Ohio State University, summarizes some of the differences between traditional news stories and feature stories and provides general tips for news writing.

Discussion on News Writing with Chris Davey

Feature leads

Unlike the traditional summary lead, feature leads can be several sentences long, and the writer may not immediately reveal the story's main idea. The most common types used in feature articles are anecdotal leads and descriptive leads. An anecdotal lead unfolds slowly. It lures the reader in with a descriptive narrative that focuses on a specific minor aspect of the story that leads to the overall topic. The following is an example of an anecdotal lead:

> **"** *Sharon Jackson was sitting at the table reading an old magazine when the phone rang. It was a reporter asking to set up an interview to discuss a social media controversy involving Jackson and another young woman."Sorry," she said. "I've already spoken to several reporters about the incident and do not wish to make any further comments."*

Notice that the lead unfolds more slowly than a traditional lead and centers on a particular aspect of the larger story. The nut graph, or a paragraph that reveals the importance of the minor story and how it fits into the broader story, would come after the lead. There will be more on the nut graph later in this chapter.

Descriptive leads begin the article by describing a person, place, or event in vivid detail. They focus on setting the scene for the piece and use language that taps into the five senses in order to paint a picture for the reader. This type of lead can be used for both traditional news and feature stories. The following is an example of a descriptive lead:

> **"** *Thousands dressed in scarlet and gray T-shirts eagerly shuffled into the football stadium as the university fight song blared.*

For each article below, identify whether it uses a descriptive or anecdotal lead:

- A thin line of defense
- Pediatric patient
- Inside Jay Z's Roc Nation

Feature article organization

The content in a feature article isn't necessarily presented as an inverted pyramid; instead, the organization may depend on the writer's style and the story angle. Nevertheless, all of the information in a feature article should be presented in a logical and coherent fashion that allows the reader to easily follow the narrative.

As previously stated, the nut graph follows the lead. This paragraph connects the lead to the overall story and conveys the story's significance to the readers (Scanlan, 2003).

The nut graph comes from a commonly used formula for writing features, known as the *Wall Street Journal* (*WSJ*) formula (International Center for Journalists, 2016). The formula was named after the well-known and respected publication, which created the term "nut graph" and mastered feature news writing (Rich, 2016).

The formula consists of beginning the story with feature-style leads to grab the reader's attention, followed by the nut graph (Scanlan, 2003). After this comes a longer body of the story that provides the usual background, facts, quotes, and so on. The formula then specifies a return to the opening focus at the end of the story using another descriptive passage or anecdote, also known as the "circle kicker" (Rich, 2016). This could be, for example, an update on what eventually happened to the main character or how the event or issue turned out. This blog post provides a detailed example of the *WSJ* formula.

Feature writing devices

Literary Devices

Feature writers use a particular style of writing to convey the story's message. The use of literary devices helps in this task. These devices include similes and metaphors, onomatopoeia (use of words that mimic a sound), imagery (figurative language), climax, and more. Here are a few examples of onomatopoeia and imagery:

Onomatopoeia: The tires screeched against the concrete as she hit the pedal.

Imagery (example modified from Butte College, 2016): The apartment smelled of old cooking odors, cabbage, and mildew; . . . a haze of dusty sunlight peeked from the one cobwebbed, gritty window.

Click here for more information on literary devices, including specific examples.

Descriptive Writing

A good feature writer uses plot devices and dialogues that help move the story forward, while focusing on the central theme and providing supporting information through descriptive language and specific examples. You want to show readers what's happening, not simply tell them. They should be able to visualize the characters, places, and events highlighted in the feature piece.

Show versus tell

Tell: Friends describe Amariah as a generous and vibrant person who was involved in several nonprofit organizations.

Show: Tracey proudly recalls her friend's generosity. "Amariah is usually the first person to arrive at a volunteer event, and the last to leave. She spends four hours every Saturday morning volunteering at the mentoring center. It's rare to not catch her laughing, flashing her perfect smile. She's just a burst of positive energy."

It's often tempting to end a feature piece with a summary conclusion. Instead, use an anecdote, passage, or compelling quote that will leave a lasting impression on your readers.

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Chapter 7: Public Relations Industry

What is public relations?

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines public relations as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (2016, para. 4). Simply put, public relations helps to influence an audience's perceptions by building relationships and shaping public conversations about a client or company. These public conversations often take place through mass media and social media, which is why public relations professionals need to understand how to work with and write effective messages for the media. Click here for more information on what you can expect in a public relations career.

Public relations professionals are in charge of a wide range of communication activities that may include increasing brand visibility and awareness, planning events, and creating content. Some of them also deal with crisis communication and help to salvage a brand's integrity and reputation during a negative event. This video from Kate Finley, chief executive officer of Belle Communications, explains what it is like to work at a public relations agency.

What to Expect from a PR Agency with Kate Finley

Four models of public relations

Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed four models of public relations that describe the field's various management and organizational practices. These models serve as guidelines to create programs, strategies, and tactics.

In the **press agent/publicity model**, communications professionals use persuasion to shape the thoughts and opinions of key audiences. In this model, accuracy is not important and organizations do not seek audience feedback or conduct audience analysis research. It is a one-way form of communication. One example is propagandist techniques created by news media outlets in North Korea.

The **public information model** moves away from the manipulative tactics used in the press agent model and presents more accurate information. However, the communication pattern is still one-way. Practitioners do not conduct audience analysis research to guide their strategies and tactics. Some press releases and newsletters are created based on this model, when audiences are not necessarily targeted or researched beforehand.

The **two-way asymmetrical model** presents a more "scientifically persuasive" way of communicating with key audiences. Here, content creators conduct research to better understand the audience's attitudes and behaviors, which in turn informs the message strategy and creation. Still, persuasive communication is used in this model to benefit the organization more so than audiences; therefore, it is considered asymmetrical or imbalanced. The model is particularly popular in advertising and consumer marketing, fields that are specifically interested in increasing an organization's profits.

Finally, the **two-way symmetrical model** argues that the public relations practitioner should serve as a liaison between the organization and key publics, rather than as a persuader. Here, practitioners are negotiators and use communication to ensure that all involved parties benefit, not just the organization that employs them. The term "symmetrical" is used because the model attempts to create a mutually beneficial situation. The two-way symmetrical model is deemed the most ethical model, one that professionals should aspire to use in their everyday tactics and strategies (Simpson, 2014).

Some experts think of public relations more broadly. For instance, they may argue that political lobbying is a form of public relations because lobbyists engage in communication activities and client advocacy in order to shape the attitudes of Congress (Berg, 2009). However, this book focuses on a public relations approach based particularly on writing for the media. Furthermore, the goal is to disseminate communication based on the two-way symmetrical model presented by Grunig and Hunt (1984).
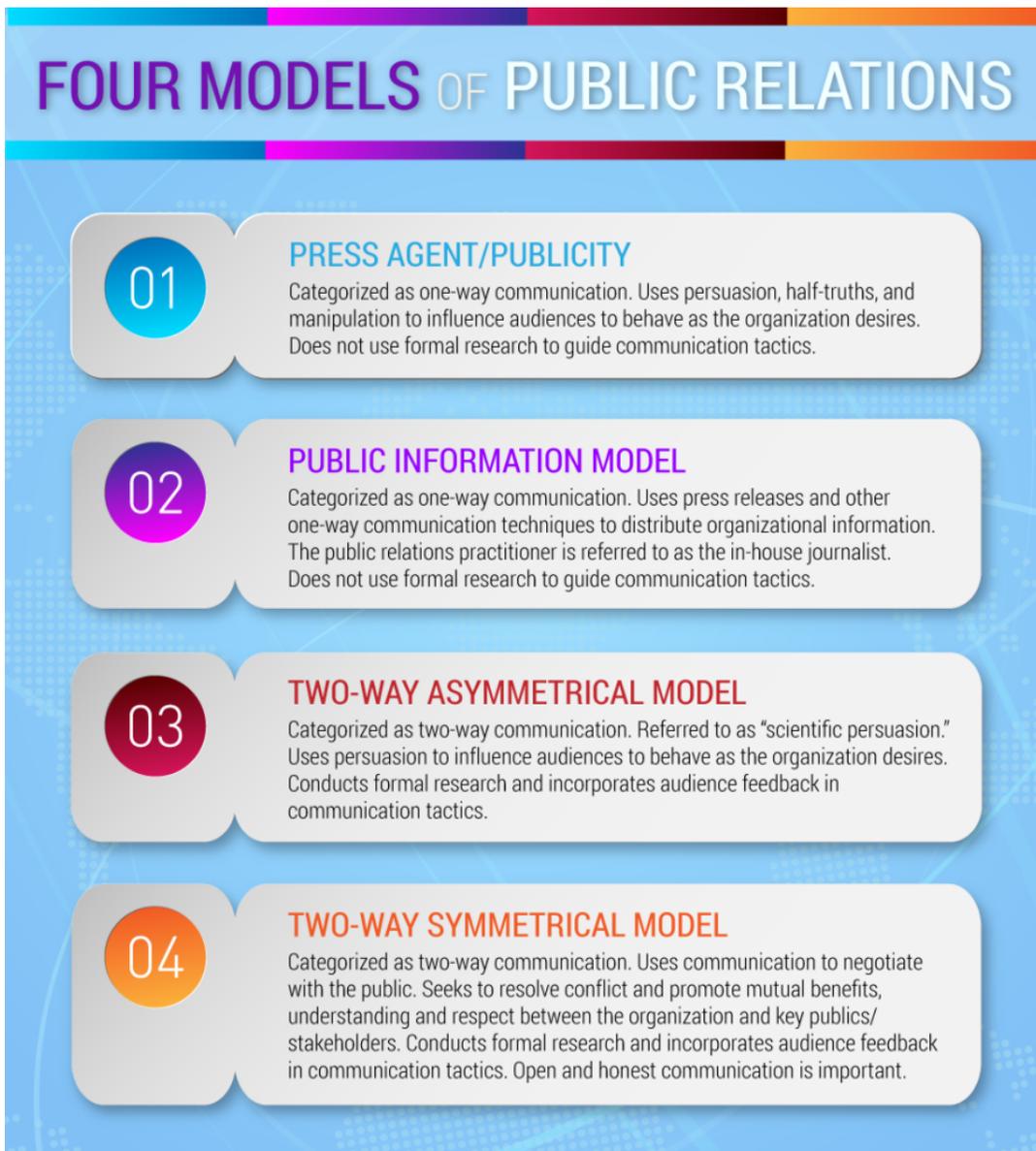
"Four Models of PR" by Michael Shiflet and Jasmine Roberts is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Discussion Point

Do you think the two-way symmetrical model is plausible? Consider this example from Dr. William Sledzik, associate professor of journalism and mass communication at Kent State University:

"Can we realistically serve multiple stakeholders whose needs conflict? For

example, can we represent the interests of loyal employee groups while our shareholders demand layoffs in favor of low-cost offshore suppliers?"

Why do companies need public relations?

There was a time when many companies did not see the value of public relations, unless a crisis happened. Even now, some public relations professionals face challenges in convincing key executives of their value to the function of the company.

With the abundance of information readily available to audiences worldwide, companies are more vulnerable than ever to misinformation about their brand. An audience's attitudes and beliefs about a company can greatly influence its success. Therefore, the public relations professional helps to monitor and control conversations about a company or client and manage its reputation in the marketplace. Viewing public relations as a key management function of a business or an essential strategy to manage one's individual reputation will help accomplish important goals such as establishing trust among key publics, increasing news media and social media presence, and maintaining a consistent voice across communication platforms.

For more on the impact of reputation on business success, take a look at this article from *The Entrepreneur.*

Public relations versus marketing versus advertising

Many people confuse public relations with marketing and advertising. Although there are similarities, there also are key differences.

Probably the most important difference between marketing, public relations, and advertising is the primary focus. Public relations emphasizes cultivating relationships between an organization or individual and key publics for the purpose of managing the client's image. Marketing emphasizes the promotion of products and services for revenue purposes. Advertising is a communication tool used by marketers in order to get customers to act. The image below outlines other differences.

For more information on the differences between marketing, public relations, and advertising, read the following articles:

- Marketing versus PR: Five ways to tell the difference
- The real difference between public relations and advertising

"The difference between marketing, public relations, and advertising" by Jasmine Roberts and Michael Shiflet is licensed under CC By 2.0.

General roles in public relations

According to Smith (2013), public relations practitioners can be placed in two groups based on responsibilities: communication managers and communication technicians. Communication managers assist in the strategic planning of an organization's communication efforts. The broad term "communication manager" includes several similar public relations positions: expert consultant, problem-solving facilitator, and communication liaison. Expert consultants develop a specific communication plan to help achieve organizational goals. Problem-solving facilitators provide crisis management to an organization during an obstacle. Liaisons speak on behalf of the brand and facilitate communication between the organization and its key publics.

Before entering a managerial role, most public relation practitioners begin their career as a communication technician. This can refer to a variety of entry-level positions, including public relations specialist, communication assistant, and junior account executive. Communication technicians write press releases, pitches, feature articles, and other communication materials and assist in event planning. Together, communication managers and technicians play a vital role in relationship building and the management of a brand.

This article from PRSA provides tips to those beginning a career in public relations.

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VIII

Chapter 8: Media Relations

What is media relations?

"News Reporters and a TV Cameraman" by Digital Vision is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

A large part of the public relations profession involves working with the media. Public relations seeks to garner publicity that benefits a client. Mass media is the preferred channel for reaching out to the public because audiences view media coverage as more credible than traditional advertising or promotional efforts. Therefore, learning how to develop and manage relationships with reporters and editors is critical to your outreach strategy.

Media relations refers to the mutually beneficial relationship between journalists and public relations professionals. One of the biggest benefits for journalists is the easy access to story ideas and sources. As previously discussed, reporters spend a large amount of time and effort gathering information in order to write a story. Working with public relations professionals cuts down on the time needed to look for sources and other information to validate an article's content. Public relations practitioners benefit from media relations because it secures free publicity and promotion for a client. By using media as a promotional tool, they are able to reach a large audience without high costs.

Working with journalists

As with any professional relationship, there are do's and don'ts to be aware of when developing relationships with journalists. Take the time to research reporters or bloggers to identify those who will help you achieve your organization's publicity goals. Once you've found an appropriate journalist or blogger, think carefully about how you plan to pitch your story to the individual. Avoid gimmicky or hyped-up press releases; they may catch the reporter's attention, but for the wrong reason. Also avoid jarring language such as "urgent," "must read," or "extremely important," even if you need to secure media coverage quickly.

In general, developing a rapport with journalists takes time, strategy, skill, and practice. For more information on what you can do to develop a good working relationship with the media, take a look at this video with Alissa Widman Neese, a journalist at the *Columbus Dispatch*. She discusses her experiences working with public relations professionals and some of the factors that made them positive.

A Journalist's Perspective on Pitching with Alissa Widman Neese

Pitching to the media

Simply contacting the media will not guarantee coverage for your client. You have to persuade the journalist that your story idea is newsworthy. Public relations professionals typically pitch to reporters, editors, bloggers, and social media influencers. Pitches can take place via email, phone calls, and increasingly through Twitter. The channel you choose for your pitch depends upon the intended individual's preference.

Pitching is a skill that requires creative thinking, persuasive communication skills, and knowing how your story idea benefits the reporter and the audience. Your pitching skills can improve with time and practice. You will feel more confident reaching out to reporters if you write pitches regularly.

Before pitching

Before you send an email pitch or call a reporter, it is important to have a solid understanding of your key audience. Carefully examine the interests, preferences, media consumption behaviors, and key demographic information associated with that group. Then you can more accurately select which media outlet will help reach the target audience.

Go where your audience is located. For example, as you conduct research about your target audience, you might learn that members read blog posts more than news articles. Therefore, reaching out to bloggers could be more beneficial than targeting news reporters. Place your message or story in media outlets that your intended audience frequently visits or reads.

One of the most common complaints from journalists about public relations pitches involves the use of mass emails. Generic pitches sent out to anyone and everyone come across to reporters and bloggers as careless and can compromise your credibility among media professionals. Remember, reporters are going to look at how your story will appeal to their specific readers; therefore, your pitch needs to be strategic. Failure to keep this in mind may result in a rejected pitch or no response at all.

Before you pitch to a particular media outlet, be sure to research which specific writer within the organization can help you target your audience. Each reporter covers a different topic, or "beat." Reading some of a reporter's previous stories will give you an indication of whether he or she is the right person to cover your story. Let's say your client is a restaurant that wants to publicize the opening of a new location. A reporter who covers food topics and brands, lifestyle topics, or the restaurant industry would be the most logical choice to write your story.

Writing the pitch

Now that you've done your homework on the audience, media outlet, and specific writer, pay close attention to how you craft your pitch message.

The subject line is especially important if you're using email. It needs to be creative enough to catch the attention of the writer; however, avoid exaggerated phrases or visual gimmicks such as all capital letters. Do not use generic headlines such as "Story Idea" or "Cool Upcoming Event." Try to create a headline similar to one the journalist might use in writing the story.

Next, address the reporter or blogger by name and begin the body of the pitch. State why you're writing, and provide some information about yourself and the company or client you represent. Next, summarize the lead of the story. Writing in this manner resonates with some reporters, as it is the style they are accustomed to. You also can start the email with a catchy line that will hook the journalist, but be careful not to overdo this. Reporters and editors do not like flowery or gimmicky language because it sounds more like a hard sales pitch than a public relations pitch. Continue with the pitch by providing important details about the story and talking about why it would be interesting to the media outlet's audience. Doing this indicates that the story has news value, which is very important in pitching. Toward the end of the email pitch, state when you would like a response, indicate when you plan to follow up if necessary, and offer specific help. Be sure to thank the reporter or blogger for his or her time.

Don't feel discouraged if the person does not respond immediately. Journalists are extremely busy, and sometimes they simply overlook emails. If necessary, send a reminder email by the follow-up date you mentioned in the first communication.

This date depends on when the story should hit the press. If you pitched a story that needs to be published relatively quickly, you may want to follow up no later than two days after sending the initial pitch. If there's more flexibility in the desired publication date, you may indicate that you will follow up within a week. If the person still does not respond to your pitch, move on to another outlet, reporter, or blogger who can help you accomplish your publicity goals. It is important to also consider timing; for example, do not make a follow-up call at 4:55 p.m. on a Friday when the journalist may be getting ready to head home for the weekend.

Grammar, punctuation, tone, and spelling are important when writing email pitches. Some journalists have admitted to not responding to a pitch that contains grammatical and spelling errors. Reread your message several times to check for errors. Here are more articles that discuss media relations, proper etiquette, and tips on gaining media exposure:

- Surprising tips to get the media's attention
- 9 pitch tips from PR News Online
- How not to pitch

When + How to Follow Up

A Quick Reference Guide

Each media member is different but below are the times we've found most successful to contact media members, ordered by outlet time. Be sure to keep time-zones in mind before picking up the phone.

TV: Before their segment, via email and usually in the morning.

Radio: Via phone, before their segment and follow up with email.

Print: After 10 a.m., email first, then call but keep print dates in mind.

Bloggers: Evenings often work well and email is best.

National media: Time varies by outlet, email works best.

How to **Piss Off** a Reporter

Journalists are people too, and just like everyone else they can have their share of bad days. Do your best to add value and positive feelings by avoiding these unfortunate mistakes.

BCC them on a mass pitch.

Be unfamiliar with their beat.

Assume they remember the pitch you sent them.

Pitch the same idea to multiple reporters.

Ask them a ton of questions or leave multiple message.

How to Bootstrap Your PR Like a BOSS: A Tactical Guide to Media Outreach   ThinkBelle.com

Source: "How to bootstrap your PR like a BOSS" by Kate Finley, CEO of Belle Communications

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Chapter 9: Public Relations Writing

The role of writing in public relations

Public relations professionals at all levels need to have solid writing skills. White (2016) says, "To succeed as a PR pro, it's vital to have a passion for writing and communication, and to be committed to excelling in both. You're bound to fail if you don't" (para. 9). Public relations professionals are responsible for developing communication materials intended to influence the attitudes and/or behaviors of key publics. Many employers require candidates for public relations positions to complete a writing test and provide a writing sample to demonstrate proficiency in this skill. Therefore, it is critical to understand how to craft effective messages through written communication.

Here are some of the many materials and messages that public relations professionals have to write:

- Press/News releases
- Fact sheets
- Feature articles
- Social media messages
- Blog posts
- Speeches
- PowerPoint presentations
- Brochures
- Media pitches
- Statements
- Website messages

News writing versus public relations writing

Effective public relations writing draws from news writing principles, because the news media is one of the preferred channels for promoting products and services. However, news writing and public relations writing differ in terms of audience, tone, and media channels. News writing should be objective in tone, with the purpose of presenting information to educate an audience about newsworthy events. On the other hand, public relations writing advocates for the client. It is informative, but it should also influence key publics' perception of the organization. Some would also argue that public relations writing is even more concise than new writing.

Reporters usually write for one audience: readers or listeners of the respective media outlet. Public relations professionals may have to write for a variety of audiences, including internal audiences (such as employees, shareholders, and distributors) and external audiences (such as the media, customers, volunteers, and bloggers). News writing uses one primary communication channel, the news outlet (which can be a newspaper or a television or radio broadcast). Although journalists are increasingly using Twitter to post their articles, this usually entails posting a link that directs the audience to the news outlet's primary website. Public relations professionals use a variety of channels to distribute their messages, including news media, social media, advertisements, blogs, press kits, and many more.

This blog post further explains some of the differences between news writing and public relations writing.

The press release

The press release or news release is one of the most common communication materials written by public relations professionals. Press releases are sent to outlets such as newspapers, broadcast stations, and magazines to deliver a strategic message from an organization that the media ideally will publish or broadcast. The primary audience for the press release is reporters and editors, although some organizations publish press releases on their own websites for audiences to view. This may be done due to shrinking newsroom staffs and insufficient resources to develop original content.

Journalists use press releases as a reporting tool, relying on them to provide essential information and therefore make it easier for them to cover a variety of events. With the increase in media channels and demand for social content, some view press releases as an uninteresting way to distribute information and connect with audiences (Galant, 2014). Others see them as a concise and straightforward way to communicate to key publics.

Although the emergence of digital media has challenged public relations professionals to think of nontraditional ways to garner publicity, the use of press releases is still widespread in the profession. Therefore, public relations practitioners should know how to write an effective press release.

Writing the press release

Traditionally, press releases use the inverted pyramid style, which makes it easy for journalists and editors to receive the most essential information first. This means the news hook should be revealed in the headline and lead of the release. Journalists will not take your press release seriously if the content is not newsworthy and it is not written in an accepted style, such as AP style. Make sure that the press release contains attributed information with proper sources and is error free.

Before writing the release, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the announcement or event newsworthy? Does it appeal to the media outlet's audience? Some announcements do not warrant a press release and can simply be posted on the company website.
- What is the key message? What should the reader take away?
- Who is the target audience for the release? Although you're writing the release for the media, you need to keep in mind the kind of readers or listeners you hope to attract.

In this video, Gina Bericchia, senior media strategist at Nationwide Children's Hospital, discusses proper press release writing.

Discussion on Press Release Writing with Gina Bericchia

This article from Ragan Communications discusses when to send a press release to the media.

Press release structure and format

The release should be written on the company letterhead, with the words "Press Release" or "News Release" at the top left corner of the page. Below this, indicate when the information is available for publication. The term "immediate release" means the information is ready to publish and can be used by journalists as soon as they receive it. Occasionally, you might want more time to gather other information, or would prefer that the journalist publish the announcement at a later date. In this case, use the term "under embargo until" followed by the embargo date, which is when you will allow the journalist to publish the information. Put the press release date below the "immediate release" or "under embargo until" statement. Always include contact information for the journalist's reference, preferably at the top right corner.

Write the body of the press release using news writing techniques and style. Be sure to include a headline; you also may include a subheadline. Provide a dateline, followed by the summary lead. Here's an example:

THE CITY OF **COLUMBUS** RECREATION AND PARKS
MICHAEL B COLEMAN MAYOR DEPARTMENT

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   **Contact**: Danika Wellington
Nov. 12, 2015   Media Liaison
                                                          614-555-5678
                                                    wellington.41@columbus.gov

Empty Bowls to feed the hungry

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The City of Columbus Recreation and Parks Department will host its 18th annual Empty Bowls event to raise much needed funds for the Mid-Ohio Foodbank.

There will be 17 Empty Bowls events starting Saturday until Dec. 10 throughout the Columbus area, which will feature unique pottery and handmade soup for a $10 donation.

Wendy Frantz, Empty Bowls coordinator at Columbus Recreation and Parks, said it is a great way to give back to the community.

"For every dollar that is raised through the Empty Bowls Project for the Mid-Ohio Foodbank, $10 worth of groceries can be given to families in need," Frantz said.

The ceramic bowls are donated by people of all ages and skill level, varying from professional potters and artisans to children. Marcy's Clayground also contributes about 200 bowls annually for the event.

Student example of a press release for a school assignment. Danika Wellington is not affiliated with The City of Columbus Recreation and Parks Department.

Be sure to use the inverted pyramid to organize the information throughout the press release. Include at least two quotes, one from the company or organization and another from a third party (example: customer, volunteer, current or former attendee at the event). After you've finished with the body, put the boilerplate at the end of the document. The boilerplate provides information about the company or organization, similar to the "About Us" section that you might find on a company website.

The press release should be as concise as possible and ideally no longer than one page. If it exceeds one page, do not split paragraphs. Instead, put the word "more" at the bottom center of the first page to indicate to the reader that there is more content on a second page. Include three pound signs (###) or "-30-" at the bottom of the press release to indicate the end.

These sample press releases contain some of the basic elements:

- The Ohio State University
- Forever 21
- St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Further Reading

- This article from Ragan's PR Daily provides suggestions to improve your public relations writing.
- An additional article from Ragan's PR Daily explains common press release mistakes.

Press kit materials

Press kits or media kits are packages or website pages that contain promotional materials and resources for editors and reporters. The purpose is to provide detailed information about a company in one location. Although a press kit delivers more information than a press release, the overall goal is similar: to secure publicity for a company or client.

Major events or stories that require more information than is typically included in a press release warrant a press kit. Examples include a company merger, the launch of a new product, a rebranding campaign, or a major change in organizational leadership. Press kits can be hard copy or digital. Hard-copy press kits use folders with the company logo, whereas digital press kits use a website page or are sent in a zip file via email.

The following materials are found in a press kit:

- Backgrounder
- Press release
- Fact sheet
- Publicity photos or list of photo opportunities
- Media alerts

Click here for information on how to assemble a press kit.

Backgrounder

A backgrounder contains the history of a company and biographies of key executives. The purpose is to supplement the press release and explain the company's story or event, products, services, and milestones. It is in paragraph format and relatively brief (one to two pages). Click here for a sample corporate backgrounder from GainSpan, a semiconductor company (creator: Javed Mohammed).

Fact Sheet

A fact sheet provides a summary of an event, product, service, or person by focusing only on essential information or key characteristics. It is more concise than a backgrounder and serves as a quick reference for reporters. However, the fact sheet is not meant for publication. The headings of a fact sheet vary; the creator of the document chooses how to categorize major information. The most common type of fact sheet is the organizational profile, which gives basic information about an organization. This includes descriptions of products or services, annual revenues, markets served, and number of employees.

The standard fact sheet contains a company letterhead and contact information. The

body is single-spaced, with an extra space between paragraphs and subheadings. Although the fact sheet is typically one page, put the word "-more-" at the bottom of the first page to indicate additional pages. Similar to the press release format, include three number signs or "-30-" at the bottom of the document to indicate the end. To make it easy to read, group similar information together and include bulleted items if appropriate.

Click here for an example of a fact sheet. Keep in mind that the subheadings/categories used in this example may not be used in another one. Writers have some flexibility in the categories they choose in a fact sheet.

Media Alert

There are times when announcements do not require the distribution of a press release, but rather a concise notice to the media. This is called a media alert or advisory. Media alerts are memos to reporters about an interview opportunity, press conference, or upcoming event. They use the 5Ws and H format to quickly deliver information.

The illustration below explains the key differences between a press release and a media advisory:

"News Release vs. Media Advisory" by Alyson Moses and Mary Sterenberg is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Here are some examples of media alerts:

- Economic Policy Institute
- Institute for Women's Policy Research

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0eb7ac16-f3f1-4fc5-a467-32d56b4ba7f4.aspx

Chapter 10: Social Media--Uses and Messaging

What are social media?

Social media are online communications platforms that allow people to share content. The phrase typically brings to mind sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn; however, there are many other forms of social media where people share photos, text, videos, podcasts, music, discussions, and ideas. Social media also include a range of professional communication forums, online review sites (for example, Yelp and Rotten Tomatoes), and microblogging (for example, Twitter). For more information on the different types of social media, click on this article by author and marketer Tim Grahl.

Social media have increasingly become everyday communication tools. Many brands use social media to leverage their marketing and public relations efforts. Specifically, organizations can use social media to enhance brand awareness, roll out promotions, and build website traffic. Social media also provide opportunities to develop relationships with audiences through engagement and key messaging. Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) note that "social media provide a relatively inexpensive means to communicate with, and, more importantly, to enter into a dialogue with strategic publics" (p. 11).

Social media characteristics

Several characteristics make social media a unique communication tool. First, social media users are content creators. People can create their own blogs, write a Facebook or Twitter post expressing their thoughts on an issue, or post a video blog ("vlog") about their latest travel adventures on YouTube. This enables users to be active participants in the communication process. Audiences are more engaged with brand messages because they can provide feedback to companies, creating a two-way conversation.

Another characteristic of social media is instant communication. Audiences do not have to wait until scheduled news broadcasts to receive information because reporters and media outlets can bring the news directly to social media platforms. Furthermore, people can easily share and post news content on their networks. Social media also foster a sense of interconnectedness and community by bringing people across the globe together online. Those living in the United States can easily interact with those living in Australia. Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) write that social media could not exist without their users, given that the interactivity characteristics create a community feeling. As noted by Green (2012): "Social media [provide] the means by which clusters of like-minded individuals can easily swap ideas and scrutinise data on public matters" (para. 4).

The impact of social media in strategic communication industries

The rise of social media has had significant effects on the strategic communication industry. Marketers use social media to enhance traditional efforts such as direct mail fliers and television advertisements. Social media also enable marketers to create interactive content for audiences. In the public relations field, social media give professionals easier access to journalists and news media outlets. For example, it is becoming common for public relations professionals to reach out to reporters via Twitter.

In many ways, social media have made it easier for consumers to hold organizations, public figures, and large institutions accountable (Green, 2012). Users can easily find and reveal information about a previous event involving an organization, whether it was advantageous or damaging to the brand. Users can also provide instant public feedback by voicing their opinions via social media networks. Furthermore, social media have made it challenging for many organizations to control their brand and present a consistent message across platforms. Audiences can generate information that can be damaging to a brand's reputation. Take a look at this video from Sherry Lloyd, social media and marketing manager for Vineyard Columbus, who discusses brand management and the challenges of controlling a company's identity in the social media age.

In-Depth Look at a Career in Brand Management with Sherry Lloyd

Many campaigns effectively use social media to produce beneficial effects. In 2011, KFC created a public relations campaign aimed at strengthening its relationship with young consumers and enhancing its brand reputation. The campaign launched a contest that awarded a $20,000 scholarship to an individual with the best tweet using the hashtag #KFCScholar. The contest generated more than 1,000 media placements, 2,800 applications, and a 20 percent increase in KFC's following on Twitter (Black, 2011). This example demonstrates the utility of using social media to create reputation and relationship management campaigns.
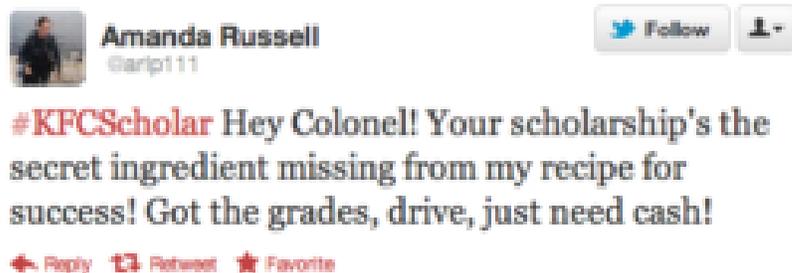
Winning tweet from KFC scholarship contest in 2011.

.

Factors to consider before posting

Identify the message goal

It is counterproductive to create social media messages that do not have a specific goal. Furthermore, social media message goals should reflect the organization's overall mission. Message goals can include increasing brand awareness, creating a favorable perception of an organization, and convincing the audience to buy a product. The goal should be clearly articulated in the content. Also, select the social media platform that would be the most effective in accomplishing the message goal. Each social media tool has specific characteristics and audiences, which will affect whether the message goals are achieved.

Identify the target audience

Similar to public relations writing, social media messages need to be targeted. After identifying the key audience, examine what they're talking about: their interests, attitudes, and beliefs. Social media content should reflect audience analysis research findings. As you tailor the content of the message to this audience, do not exaggerate attempts to be interesting or relevant. Because social media messages are audience centered, they're not necessarily grounded in what you personally think is appealing.

The lack of attention to audience analysis can have serious consequences. One example is IHOP's Twitter controversy in 2015. In an attempt to reach a young audience and produce attention-grabbing content, IHOP tweeted about its pancakes, making a provocative comment that compared them to a woman with small breasts: "Flat but has a GREAT personality." Audiences quickly reacted with outrage, causing the company to issue an apology. This mishap demonstrates the need for careful message and audience analysis. It also reinforces the point that although you may react favorably to a message, your target audience may not.

Identify the organization's social media approach

Communication choices should reflect organizational strategies. Wilson et al. (2011) identified four general ways in which companies use social media. They are determined by the "company's tolerance for uncertain outcomes and the level of results sought" (para. 2).

The "predictive practitioner" approach uses caution when sending out social media messages. Instead of launching a social media strategy that involves all departments in a company, only a specific department (example: marketing or human resources) uses its social media platforms. This allows more control of social media messaging and guarantees some level of certainty in accomplishing the stated objectives.

The "creative experimenter" approach accepts uncertainty and deploys small social

media "experiments" to learn and improve overall business functions. Sometimes, businesses will take to Facebook or Twitter to receive feedback on products or business practices from internal (example: employees) or external (example: customers) audiences. The overall goal is to listen and learn from interactions; therefore, unpredictable results are accepted.

The "social media champion" approach takes strategies to a more advanced level. A designated team is in charge of the organization's overall social media presence. The team also creates an official social media policy and guidelines for the organization. Larger social media projects typically use this strategy. Unlike the predictive practitioner strategy, this approach does not confine social media use to a particular department and considers social media messages across various functions.

The "social media transformer" strategy targets both internal and external audiences by launching large-scale projects that involve multiple departments. As with the social media champion approach, a team is devoted to planning, creating, and launching the organization's social media projects. However, these projects are usually larger and more advanced than those using the social media champion approach. This strategy specifically considers how social media can influence business strategy, brand, and culture.

Organizations can use multiple approaches when designing a social media message. What is important is that they carefully consider their approach before posting any content to social media platforms.

Creating social media messages

The goal of creating social media messages is not only to reach your audience, but also to achieve an intended effect. Proper grammar and punctuation are important in social media writing, as is accuracy. A careless error could undermine the credibility of your brand. Here are a few other factors to consider when creating social media messages.

Engagement, engagement, engagement

More than many forms of communication, social media messages need to motivate the audience to engage with the content. Several strategies can encourage engagement, such as responding quickly to feedback from audience members, creating contests, and inviting the audience to respond to a question. Including photos and videos in social media posts substantially increases engagement, as does integrating trending topics (Redsicker, 2014). This requires careful consideration and research that will pay off if the trending hashtags are chosen wisely. Hai Poke, a startup restaurant in Columbus, did this by tapping into the Pokemon Go craze in the summer of 2016. The restaurant launched a social media contest and created a fun, timely, interactive message.

Consistency

The core message needs to be articulated across all social media platforms in a consistent way that conveys a unified voice. The message also needs to reflect the brand image; in other words, it should reinforce the brand "feel" or personality. Referring back to the IHOP Twitter controversy, one reason audiences disliked the message was because its suggestive tone was inconsistent with the company's family-friendly brand personality.

Concise writing

Similar to news writing, social media writing is straightforward. Because you're competing against countless other messages in the social media sphere, you do not have much time and space to capture the audience's attention. This is especially the case with Twitter, with its current 140-character limit. You have to think carefully not only about what the message will say but how to say it in a concise manner that has the intended effect.

For more information on effective social media writing, take a look at this video with Nicholas Love, social media director at The Ohio State University.

Social Media Writing Recommendations with Nicholas Love

"Poké" social media campaign image from Hai Poké's Facebook page.

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Chapter 11: Advertising Industry

The role of advertising in society

Advertising is the paid promotion that uses strategy and messaging about the benefits of a product or service to influence a target audience's attitudes and/or behaviors. Between online, television, radio, and print platforms, the average American sees hundreds, even thousands of advertisements daily.

Although many consumers find them annoying, advertisements play a prominent role in shaping opinions about everything from products to politics. A *Forbes* article (2012) stated: "Advertising plays the same role in your media diet that vegetables play in your regular diet; most of us would prefer to skip that course and go straight to dessert. But, just like veggies, advertising plays an important role in sustaining a body; in this case, a diverse body of content" (para. 1). Advertising heavily supports many institutions, including news media outlets, the television industry, search engine companies, and social media websites. For example, advertising contributes up to 80 percent of revenue for newspapers and therefore is critical to maintaining the circulation of the press (Newspaper Association of America, 2014).

The advertising industry is also lucrative. According to eMarketer (2016), the United States spent approximately $190 billion on advertising in 2015. About a third of that figure went to television advertisements, and another third went to digital advertising. With its economic and cultural function in society, the advertising industry has an expansive reach.

Job responsibilities in advertising

The Advertising Educational Foundation (2016) defines several broad categories for jobs in the industry. Account managers serve as a liaison between the client and the advertising agency. They conduct research and oversee creative aspects, production, and more. Account planners are responsible for presenting information about the consumer. They analyze audiences and figure out ways to achieve brand loyalty through advertising.

Those in the creative department are responsible for developing the advertising message and images. They also pitch the advertising plan to clients. Employees in the media department work on advertising placement strategies, media buying, and analyzing consumer media behaviors. These roles are diverse but also interdependent in that they all contribute to the advertising process.

Advertising campaign model: Social marketing

Numerous conceptual frameworks and models help to explain the design of advertising campaigns. This book will focus primarily on the social marketing model. This framework describes how to design information campaigns that focus on improving social welfare, such as health and environmental campaigns. However, Atkin and Rice (2012) state that it is appropriate to apply the social marketing model to consumer advertising campaigns because they share similarities with health and environmental campaigns. The primary difference between consumer advertising campaigns and information campaigns is the goal.

The social marketing model identifies five steps in the campaign process: planning, theory, communication analysis, implementation, and evaluation. In the **planning** stage, advertisers establish the message goals. This is a critical step in the campaign process as it informs the strategies and tactics. What kind of response do you want from the audience? What do you want them to do, or how do you want them to feel?

In the **theory** step, advertisers try to determine the best way to achieve the campaign objectives. Perloff (2010) states, "Theories suggest a host of specific campaign strategies, appeals, and ways to modify projects that aren't meeting stated objectives" (p. 332). This step is also when advertisers complete a creative brief that further outlines the overall strategy. (There will be more on this in a later section.) There are two types of strategies: product-oriented and consumer-oriented.

The product-oriented strategy focuses on highlighting specific benefits related to the product or service (Felton, 2013). One example is commercials for paper towels that compare the product's specific features, such as absorbency and strength, to those of competitors. These commercials often show side-by-side shots of people using the featured brand and the competing brand, with the featured brand as the better option. Other product-oriented strategies may focus on something that can be found only at a particular company or under a specific brand. McDonald's occasionally uses this strategy in its advertisements, reminding viewers that they can purchase America's favorite french fries only at its restaurants.

Another broad advertising strategy connects the audience's daily experience or lifestyle with the advertised product or service. This is referred to as the consumer-oriented strategy. Advertisers frequently use this strategy for branding purposes. The idea is to associate the company with a particular lifestyle, personality, or characteristic that the audience identifies with or aspires to. Car companies often use consumer-oriented strategies in their commercials. Rather than focusing on the specific features of the car, consumer-oriented commercials might simply show an attractive person driving along a winding road.

The luxury motor company Lincoln recently used this strategy in a campaign. The commercials featured actor Matthew McConaughey simply talking and driving the vehicle.

"Digital marketing concept" by Ellagrin is licensed under CC BY 2.0

There is very little mention of the product features; however, the advertisements associate McConaughey's wealth, talent, confidence, and attractive physical features with the car. In doing so, they help to shape Lincoln's brand identity and personality.

You do not have to choose one strategy over the other. Advertising essentially involves persuading people to act or feel a certain way about the message topic. Therefore, incorporating several ideas and strategies may increase the odds of accomplishing the goal.

The third step in the social marketing model is **communication analysis**. Here, advertisers conduct market research and audience analysis to test the campaign idea. This step helps the advertisers further craft their strategies. For example, if you are designing a campaign to convince the target audience to try a local cuisine, you want to examine perceptions of the food prior to launching the campaign. You can do this through focus groups or audience surveys.

The next step involves **implementing** the campaign. This is done by carefully considering the four Ps of marketing: product, placement, price, and promotion. Click on this article for more information on the four Ps.

The last step in the social marketing model is **evaluation**. This provides an opportunity for the campaign designers to see whether their efforts succeeded in accomplishing the stated goals. One way to do this is through evaluating sales after the launch of the campaign, tabulating media impressions or audience attendance at events, or conducting exit focus groups.

Creative brief

Before they begin the design process, advertising professionals work on explaining and outlining the advertising plan in a creative brief. This is a document for the creative team, the advertising director, and the client that gives a clear objective for the copy material and explains the overall concept of the campaign. The creative brief is like a game plan—without it, the advertisement may not be successful. You do not have to use a particular writing style, such as AP style, when completing the creative brief. However, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and concise writing are still important. Here are several broad categories to consider when completing the creative brief.

Key consumer insight

The key consumer insight demonstrates a clear understanding of the consumer's general behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes as they relate to the message topic. It also considers general opinions and thoughts about the subject matter. Let's say you're developing a creative brief for a cookie brand. Market research and careful audience analysis can reveal key insights into consumer behaviors, such as the fact that many consumers believe that so-called healthy cookies do not taste as good as their high-calorie, sugar-filled counterparts. This knowledge will help you as you design your advertisement.

Advertising problem

The phrase "advertising problem" does not refer to addressing a problem within the advertisement itself, or challenges in advertising to the key audience. The term refers to the product's biggest consumer-related stumbling block. In the cookie example above, the advertising problem is that consumers face a choice between buying great-tasting cookies that are loaded with calories and sugar and buying ones that are low in sugar and calories but don't taste as good. The consumer insight can inform or help you to come up with the advertising problem. The advertising strategy should address a consumer need or consumer-related problem. Without this, the advertisement will appear pointless.

Advertising objective

The advertising objective explains the intended effects of the promotion on the target audience and clearly articulates the overall goal. The goal is not simply to persuade the audience. Think about how you want the audience to feel or believe about the featured product or service. Or, what do you want them to do in response to seeing the advertisement? An example of the objective for the cookie advertisement might be to

convince cookie lovers that the featured product is a healthy option that doesn't compromise rich, fulfilling taste.

Target consumer

The target consumers are people you specifically want to communicate the message to. In order to fully understand the audience, consider their psychographics, or the analysis of their lifestyles and interests. Also include information about demographics, as this factor influences the audience's day-to-day experiences. Clarify why you've chosen this particular audience. Why would these people be attracted to the featured product or service? How would they help the organization achieve its goals? What are the benefits of targeting this particular group? Answering these questions will help justify the selection of the target audience.

Competition

In this section of the creative brief, perform a complete assessment of the competition that considers strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, examine the competitor's history, products, services, brand, and target audiences. Analyzing key competitors will help you articulate your company's or product's marketplace niche, which is very important. You need to establish how your product or company stands out from similar products or companies.

Key consumer benefit

The key consumer benefit describes what the consumer would gain from using the advertised product or service. This section also discusses how the product or service solves the advertising problem laid out earlier in the creative brief. Narratives, testimonials, and sometimes research findings can be used as support in the actual advertisement, which helps enhance its persuasiveness.

Support

The support section explains the validity of the proposed advertising plan. It makes a case for why the campaign will motivate the audience or make them believe that the claims are true. This is particularly important because in order to secure the advertising account, you need to convince your client or high-level executives that the plan will work. Include evidence from third-party sources such as external research studies or polls. Also include feedback from focus groups to persuade the client that the advertising plan is effective.

Other categories to consider

Some creative briefs might include a section called tonality. This explains the desired feel or attitude of the advertising campaign, such as "hip," "classy," "fun," "flashy," or "modern." You could also include a description of the advertisement's visual elements, or the creative mandatories. This section should provide a detailed explanation of the images,

slogan, logo, and other visual factors so that the client can imagine how the advertisement will look. The creative team usually presents a sample advertisement to the client in the pitch presentation.

Copywriting

After completing the creative brief and receiving approval from the client, it is now time to develop the advertisement. A large part of this process involves copywriting. Copywriting puts together the headlines, subheadlines, and images included in the advertisement. It uses persuasive communication to influence the target audience. It also helps to create the advertisement's call to action, logo, and slogan.

The AIDA model is a popular framework used in designing advertising copy. The acronym stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. Good advertising copy should effectively grab the audience's attention through words and/or imagery. This can be challenging. Because consumers may see thousands of advertisements daily, capturing their attention needs to be informed by strategy.

After getting the audience's attention, the copy should maintain the focus of the consumer by generating interest. This involves creating messages that are relevant to the target audience (Altstiel and Grow, 2016). The AIDA model states that the copy should provoke a desire for the advertised product or service. When the desire is instilled, the copy should then motivate the audience to act or perform the call to action in the advertisement. This could be buying the product, visiting the organization's social media page, volunteering, or attending an event. The call to action should be memorable. For further information on the AIDA model, click on this article.

In this video, Jenny Patton, senior lecturer in the English department at The Ohio State University, defines and explains the process of copywriting.

Insert video

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Chapter 12: Creating a Writing Portfolio

Why create a writing portfolio?

In today's job market, recent college graduates or those entering the strategic communication profession need to demonstrate job preparedness beyond academic achievements. Excelling in the classroom is important, but many employers are just as interested in your work experience, expertise, and job-related skills.

Demonstrating your writing skills is especially important, and creating a portfolio of samples will help you in your next job interview. Writing portfolios supplement what you've learned in the classroom. They provide an advantage in today's competitive market by illustrating and marketing your brand. Regardless of career level, strategic communication professionals should have a portfolio to showcase their work.

Online versus hardcopy portfolios

Online portfolios are increasingly common because many communication materials are digital. However, some employers may ask you to bring a hardcopy portfolio to the interview. Create an online portfolio, such as a professional website, so that the general public can see your work. Send the online portfolio to professional contacts in your network or to potential employers before the job interview so they can see your writing samples. As a precautionary measure, also print some of the writing samples and put them in a leather zip-up portfolio or a professional binder when you're preparing for the job interview.

Writing portfolio content

When considering what to include in your writing portfolio, look at relevant class assignments or work produced in a previous or current role. Save everything in a file, especially work from a class that requires you to write common communication materials such as newsletters, press releases, brochures, and news articles. If you do not have internship or work experience, try to do volunteer writing for a nonprofit organization or a small project for a startup company. What matters is that you have writing samples to show, not whether you were paid to do the work.

The first page of a hard-copy portfolio is usually a resume. Online portfolios include a description or summary of your professional background. From there, create clear sections and headings and arrange the content by article or document type. Tailor the portfolio to jobs or industries you're interested in and by chronological order, with the most recent work first or at the top of the online portfolio. For example, if you're applying for a job that requires proficiency in AP style writing, include writing samples that use this style, such as press releases or feature articles. If you're applying for a job that requires social media writing skills, include social media posts that you've created for an organization. Here's a list of some of the materials you could include in the portfolio:

- Press releases
- Website copy
- Feature articles
- Media pitches
- Social media posts that you created for an organization
- A sample RFP (request for proposal) for a campaign or a detailed public relations campaign proposal
- News media clippings of coverage you secured from pitches (it helps if you provide the original pitch that led to the media coverage)

Include brief information about each document, such as the name of the organization it was created for and the date. Be ready to discuss your writing samples during a job interview. You may explain why you created the material and the results that came from it, such as increased website traffic and Twitter followers from a news article publication. For more examples of writing portfolios, click on the following links:

- Tips and examples of writing portfolios for aspiring PR pros
- Gari Cruze, copywriter
- Brandi Uyemura, features writer

Other important points about the writing portfolio

As you work on more projects and articles, remember to include them in your portfolio. Constantly update the portfolio so that employers and professional contacts can see your most recent work. Include a minimum of two to three writing samples, although the quality of the portfolio materials matters more than the quantity (Lovering, 2016).

Some employers may not ask for a portfolio, but will require you to take a writing test. Employers use this assessment to determine your editing skills, understanding of AP style, knowledge of grammar and punctuation, and ability to write under a strict deadline. It might be a timed test or a take-home assessment. The following sentences are examples from the editing section of a writing test.

Exercise

Please edit the following sentences:

1. To kick off the days event, XX Partners Inc. will be hosting a special guest speaker, Dr. P. Richardson from 8:30 to 9:30 am in lexington Auditorium.
2. Employees that volunteered for the community service event should contact there manager for further instructions.
3. To compete effectively for full-time, entry-level talent in a highly-competitive and shrinking talent pool, we are placing a stronger emphasize on how we define a intern.

Platforms to create your online writing portfolio:

- clippings.me
- WordPress
- Wix

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