

## Style Guide for Public Relations Writers -- IV

*A Review Compiled from the AP Stylebook and Other Sources*

### 9. Writing About Public Relations

**Capitalization.** Term should be lower case in all uses: *public relations*. Not: *Public Relations agencies are ....* Capitalize the "P" only when the term begins a sentence.

**Abbreviation.** Spell out *public relations* in first references. The abbreviation *PR* is acceptable as a second reference. *PR* might be used as a first reference in some situations if the meaning is clear. Use capitals, without periods or a hyphen. Not: p.r., p-r, pr, P-R.

**Always singular.** Public relations is always singular, despite computer spell-checkers that attempt to make it plural. Be careful when you spell-check.

**PR is never a verb.** Richard Nixon misspoke when he said, "We have to PR it."

**Workers.** Public relations workers are *practitioners*. Spell it correctly (note the middle *ti*). Alternatively, say *PR professionals*, *workers*, etc. Never use pejorative, except if in direct quotes. He called PR practitioners "flacks." (Note: flack, not flak.)

### 10. Writing About Media

**Singular.** The *media* are plural. A newspaper is a medium. Newspapers and magazines are media (not *medias*). But: *new media* is a singular noun that refers to a collection of new technologies and takes a singular verb: *New media is emerging as a field of study.*

**Collective references.** Avoid references to "*the media*" as institutions that operate in concert. Generalizations rarely apply to all forms of communication media (print, broadcast, the Internet). In most cases, it's better to be specific. Refer to newspapers, radio, television, etc. when referring to particular categories of media.

**Abbreviation.** Spell out *television* in first references. TV is acceptable as a shortened second reference in most uses. *Cable* refers to a category of TV networks. *Broadband* is now the preferred term for coaxial cable systems that bring telecommunications into homes and offices.

**Write:** *Channel 7, KUSA-TV Channel 9, KCSU-FM 90.5, NBC Television Network (official name), ESPN, Fox News Channel, radio station KLOX.* In second references, say the *station, the channel, the network*, etc.

### 11. Writing About Creative Works

**Titles: Italics.** Use italics to indicate the title of books and reference works: *Gone With The Wind*. Use underlining if italics are not available. AP style calls for the titles of newspapers and magazines to be left alone--without italics or underlining.

**Titles: Quotation Marks.** Use quotation marks around the titles of TV or radio shows, episodes of shows, articles, movies, plays, poems, songs, commercials, public service announcements, or other creative works: "The Sopranos." Don't use quotes (or italics) to refer to sacred works, such as the Bible or the Torah, or parts thereof. Capitalize and punctuate the titles of media works according to the work's official title. Generally, short articles, conjunctions and pronoun should be lower case. "Short" means words with four letters or less, except if the first or last word in the title).

## 12. Writing About the World Wide Web and Internet Terms

**Spellings.** Capitalize and punctuate frequently used words as follows: Web, World Wide Web, Internet, URL (universal record locator), HTML, HTTP, PowerPoint (one word). But: the net, e-mail (note hyphen), browser, online, telnet, Web site, home page (two words).

**Creative Works.** Put quotes around computer games: "Myst." But not software programs: Microsoft Word.

**Web addresses** (URLs) should be italicized and not be preceded by the *http://* browser command: *www.colostate.edu*. Capitalize URLs and e-mail addresses according to the way they are provided by the source. Usually all lower-case is preferred. Do not insert a hyphen to break up URLs or e-mail addresses between lines of text. Omit hot links (underscoring), except for e-mail and documents designed for the web.

**Avoid pointed brackets** (<>) in the text of documents that might be posted on the Internet. These marks are reserved for HTML browser commands only.

## 13. Using Related Communications Terms

**Spell** correctly: advertising, advertisement, copyright, editor-in-chief (note: editors-in-chief) usability (usable),

**One versus two words.** Spell as one word or two, as indicated: audio conference, audio tape, copywriter, copy writing, news conference (preferred for *press* conference), news release, press kit, satellite news conference, videotape, videoconferencing, video news release.

**Sexism.** Avoid gender-specific references to people. Wrong: ad man, PR woman (*especially* publicity girl), newsman, etc. Use generic terms: camera operator, editor, executive, news anchor, newscaster, reporter, radio announcer, practitioner, advertising representative, etc.

**Abbreviations:** Follow the AP guidelines. Avoid using acronyms for organizations unless universally known, or for clarity. Spell out the full name of organizations or regulatory agencies in the first reference. Use a descriptive term in subsequent references. Example: *Public Relations Society of America*, then *the society*. But: An acronym, such as *PRSA*, might be used occasionally for variety. Also use acronyms if several organizations are mentioned, or as an adjective if required. Examples: *IABC and PRSA joined forces .... PRSA members voted ....*

**Other nits:** Past tense of broadcast is *broadcast*, not *broadcasted*: *The show was broadcast across the world.*

People use media *every day* -- two words. *Everyday* is an adjective that means routine or ordinary.

**Client References:** When referring to clients or media *organizations*, avoid using the personal pronoun "their" in subsequent references:

Wrong: The client is trying to improve their image.

Right (the organization): The client is trying to improve its image.

Better: Executives are trying to improve the organization's image.

But: If "client" refers to a person, use the appropriate personal noun: *her* image

**Avoid ad-ese and market-ese.** Avoid writing copy that sounds like an advertisement or sales jargon. Particular problems include the excessive use of *free* and *new*, superlative claims (e.g. *the lowest-price*, *the most popular*), puffery (non-material claims that cannot be substantiated, e.g. *the finest*, *the best* etc.), and over-used but meaningless descriptions of a product as *state-of-the-art* or as a *business solution*