

Newsom, D., Turk, J.V., & Kruckeberg, D. (2004). *This is PR: The realities of public relations* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Reviewed by: Susanne Taylor

Published originally in 1976, this text is currently in its eighth edition, which gives some indication of the longevity and broad appeal of *This is PR* as a comprehensive primer for students and young practitioners.

The preface carefully sets out to establish the new content that distinguishes this text from preceding editions. The format has been tweaked and the book is easy to use with good cross referencing and the addition of new boxed material, and there is one new final chapter on the social, political, cultural and economic factors affecting the practice of public relations.

Despite the authors claims that this is a new edition throughout, we find ourselves in familiar territory with the usual chapters on history, ethics, theory, research, and practical advice on managing public relations programs. The authors have obviously tried to keep the student perspective in mind and refer to student expectations for the text; *they wanted us to highlight what they absolutely must know, separating it from that which is useful to know and that which is good to know* (authors' emphasis). However, on closer reading there appears to be a paucity of original material.

The book is structured around a common textbook approach; starting with origins and history, graduating to theory, ethics and laws, and research, concluding with public relations skills and practice approaches. The basics are comprehensively covered with a useful highlight on the ethical, practical, global, and theoretical considerations related to chapter content. Each chapter is introduced using a narrative scenario, which is useful for students to gain insight into common practical, everyday issues. Despite the claims that the text is applicable to different national perspectives, most of the examples and scenarios are American, which grates a little, especially as a key theme running through the text is the rise of cross-cultural communication as a key challenge for public relations practitioners. The final chapter on Public Relations Practice and a Worldview illustrates the weaknesses of this American-centric approach. The theories presented approach cross-cultural relationships from a normative perspective and skirt the more complex issues of cultural imperialism that surely should accompany this discussion. For example, it would be useful to incorporate a fuller discussion on critical cultural theories to balance this section. For this chapter, the claim that practitioners will be called on to ensure that people who may be different from one another are able to live with each other may be a little far-fetched.

Perhaps inevitably, the textbook format requires the authors to skim a variety of subjects in order to cover the terrain, rather than delving into the detail. However, the Campaigns section is very short (13 pages in total) and this section in particular would benefit from greater detail on the range of communication programs that occupy the practitioner. The focus is broad; characteristics of successful campaigns, common planning techniques, goals, budgets, theme, media and contingency planning, and so on, when more case studies on campaigns in different settings; issues management, crisis management, community relations for example, would help to produce greater understanding about the sheer diversity of public relations practice and the array of communication programming. I found this section frustrating, given that the purpose of this type of textbook is to prepare students for a career in a complex and shifting profession which requires solid programming skills in a variety of environments.

However, having pointed out some of the difficulties I felt were apparent in the text, there is a need for comprehensive textbooks which provide a good, clear instructive approach to public relations, and its theories and main practice elements. The break-out text, scenarios, and discussion sections all make this a useful primer, written in an easy style. My advice would be to use this textbook as a basic reader, but delve deeper into the complexities of programming and tactics in different public relations disciplines and cultural contexts and read more widely in the critical theories and cultural discourse to provide a more balanced approach to the American worldview presented in this text.

**Purchase information:** This book is available from all good booksellers, or can be purchased direct from Thomson Learning at [http://www.newtexts.com/newtexts/book.cfm?book\\_id=2603](http://www.newtexts.com/newtexts/book.cfm?book_id=2603)

**About the reviewer:** *Susanne Taylor recently finished her Masters in Communication at Bond University and has held positions as an Adjunct Lecturer at both Bond and Griffith Universities on the Gold Coast. Originally from the UK, she has worked primarily in the area of issues management and public affairs in London, Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, and is currently establishing a community consultation practice on the Gold Coast. Her areas of interest lie in community relations and issues management, and she has won National and State Awards for her work. She is a member of the PRIA and Issues Management Council in the US.*