

Treadwell, D.F. & Treadwell, J.B. (2004). *Public relations writing: principles in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Reviewed by [Christopher Galloway](#)

This is the kind of public relations writing text I would like to have written. Readable and relevant both to employer requirements and to student concerns, it is an admirable exposition of practical issues with a solid grounding in appropriate theory.

Australasian teachers and classes will appreciate the fact that while this book originates from the United States, its field of vision is not limited to that country. For example, one case it discusses is a public service campaign in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Thirteen chapters are supplemented by five appendices covering: research methods for public relations writing; professional standards; laws and regulations; printing issues and grammar, usage and punctuation. Only Chapter Six, on legal issues and authorities, is strongly focused on the American context. The chapters move from scene-setting overviews through discussion of research, planning, ethics, and corporate culture, to design issues and implementing writing plans. Following chapters cover news writing for the mass media and writing for controlled media, for persuasive purposes and for a global audience. There's an interesting end chapter on writing for special events.

Public Relations Writing is more than a writing textbook. While not designed for this purpose, nor sufficient in itself as an introduction to key public relations concepts and practices, it nonetheless does a good job in introducing students to this material. For example, students of public relations campaigns would benefit from reading the discussion on planning tools included in Chapter Four, while all PR students would find value in Chapter Fives coverage of ethics and organizational culture. As a practitioner required in a previous professional life to confront both ethical and cultural issues in PR writing, I know from experience some of the dilemmas that can arise and how important it is for students to be encouraged to consider them.

In raising contextual issues such as these, the Treadwells do both teachers and students a service by moving well beyond a concentration on mere technique. Their framework is a definition of public relations writing as writing designed to initiate, develop or sustain positive attitudes and behaviour in groups of people who can affect an organisations well-being (p.22).

Chapter Two launches a valuable overview of public relations per se, the role of public relations writing, and what it takes to get a job as a public relations writer. The authors invite students to see practitioners as orchestrating a conversation between their employer/client and its publics. Practitioners write material based on input from the public in the form of, for example, public opinion surveys. Publics read the material that sets out the client or employers views, and respond perhaps with new behaviours or with some attitude change. Seen over time, public relations writing contributes to the process of negotiating common understandings between client/employer and the publics on whom it depends (p.15).

Throughout, the authors are particularly helpful where they set out to unpack some central concepts, such as research. For example, in Chapter Three, they work with Lerbingers six components of public relations in which research plays an important role (the organisations structure, its environment, and its publics, the message, the media available to and used by the organisation, and the effects of the programme on audiences/publics). This explicatory approach seems well-pitched, succeeding in being practical rather than patronizing.

Chapter Seven, Design issues for public relations, advocates collaboration between writer and designer to achieve copy and design which complement each other. Introduced by a mock newsletter cover page applying several design principles, this is the kind of guide I wish had been available to me when, as a consultant, I was grappling with questions of design for clients print material.

Practitioners, let alone students, would gain from reading Chapter Eights discussion of audience-centred thinking and the useful chart (p. 193) setting out how news interests differ when one is considering the client, the audience, or the media. Chapter Nine includes a substantial section on newswriting in a crisis. I have drawn on it for students of issues management and crisis communication: this is another example of the books wider applicability.

While Chapter Ten covers to-be-expected material on writing for controlled media, Chapter Elevens discussion of 'Writing to persuade' provides an excellent historical and theoretical context for the coverage of persuasive writing techniques. Chapter Twelve deals with both intercultural audiences and writing for the internet, while Chapter Thirteens treatment of special events encompasses writing for employer-hosted events, speechwriting, preparation of media and press kits and exhibitions.

This text has been reissued by Sage (the first edition was published by Pearson) in two new versions in rather rapid succession in recent years and therefore there is already a different edition of *Public Relations*

Writing available to the one reviewed here. The most recent edition (called 2nd edition) came out in 2005, and has an orange/brown cover as opposed to the blue cover of this edition. So there are first edition (1999), updated edition (2004, reviewed here), and second edition (2005). The major change with the second edition appears to be that it is complemented by a student workbook. I looked at this workbook and while its chapter structure was different to that of the updated edition I was reviewing, it appears comprehensive (162 pages) and helpfully encourages students to think about the client's point of view in their writing assignments. The newest (2nd) edition of the book also has a companion student website, at <http://webpages.charter.net/dtreadwell/index.htm>, which, for every chapter, offers an introduction and objectives; one or more web-based exercises that link to public relations and/or chapter-relevant sites; and a list of web resources related to the chapter, with active links. The second edition and student workbook are about to be issued by Sage as a bundle.

Purchase information: This book is available from all good booksellers, or can be purchased online from <http://www.footprint.com.au/>

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His research interests include the use of public relations techniques to advance the causes of protagonists in conflicts such as the Israel-Palestine conflict; the role of communication in organisational change; public relations in (and on behalf of) government at all levels, and public relations issues and crisis management. He is a joint editor of Public Relations Issues and Crisis Management: A Case Study Approach (Thomson Learning, 2005).