

Writing about Public Relations and Media

A Review Compiled from *AP Stylebook* and Other Sources



Kirk Hallahan, Journalism and Media Communication

Public Relations

The term should be lower case in all editorial uses: *public relations*. Not: *Public Relations agencies are* Capitalize the "P" only when the term begins a sentence. (Might be initial caps in headlines of brochures or Web materials—but only if all comparable terms follow the same format.)

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.

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."

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

Media References

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.*

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.

TV is acceptable as an abbreviation in most uses. *Cable* refers to a category of TV networks. *Broadband* is now the preferred term for coaxial cables that bring telecommunications into homes and offices.

Write: *Channel 7, KCNC-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.

Creative Works

In documents that must adhere to AP style, the title of books should be shown using quotation marks. AP style calls for the titles of newspapers, magazines and reference works to be left alone--without italics or underlining. In other documents, these creative works can be styled with italics—but be consistent. Italics are not necessary when terms are highlighted with a hyperlink. 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 Simpsons." 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 four words or fewer, but the first and last words in a title are usually capitalized.

Web and Internet Terms

Capitalize and punctuate frequently used words as follows: World Wide Web, URL (universal record locator), HTML, HTTP, PowerPoint (one word). Use lower case for the net, the web, the internet, email (no hyphen), browser, online, website (one word), home page (two words).

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

Web addresses (URLs) should not be italicized or preceded by the *http://* browser command: *www.colostate.edu*. Capitalize web and e-mail addresses as they appear, even if in all lower case. Do not insert a hyphen to break up URLs or e-mail addresses between lines. Omit hyperlinks in text that will not be published electronically.

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

Other Media Terms

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

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.

Avoid gender-specific references to people.
Wrong: ad man, PR woman (*especially* PR

girl), newsman, etc. Use generic terms: camera operator, editor, executive, news anchor, newscaster, reporter, radio announcer, etc.

Abbreviations: Follow the AP guidelines. Avoid using acronyms for organizations unless universally known. 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*. *PRSA* might be used occasionally for variety. Also use acronyms if several organizations are mentioned, and as an adjective. Examples: *IABC and PRSA joined forces...*; *PRSA members...*

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" clearly refers to a person, use the appropriate personal noun: *her* image.