

# Empowering PR/PA Writing: The Management Dynamic

✘ *Don Bates, APR, Fellow PRSA*

What's wrong with this picture? Writing leads the lists of required PR and public affairs skills (see links below), but huge numbers of PR/PA practitioners remain poor writers and the crop of newbies entering the field isn't showing much promise for raising the bar. What do we do to improve the situation?

Most important, we should all, in our respective PR/PA operations, make better writing a priority goal – for our staff, ourselves, our organizations. We should evolve an annual writing education plan starting now. We should assign a “supervisor” to ensure the plan is managed. We should establish benchmarks to measure results.

Obviously, these are easier things to say than do in most organizations. Change requires concerted effort. We can't do it alone. It needs to be a team effort. Our organization needs to buy in. Our managers need to buy in. We as individual PR professionals need to buy in. But nothing will happen until someone in PR takes responsibility for helping to build the buy-in

To develop the most productive professional development programs, we need tutors, both from inside (i.e., work with talent you have, teach and train each other), and from outside as necessary (e.g., attend workshops, hire writing consultants). We also need agreement on several requirements for creating the best atmosphere for writing well. Included are open and regular dialogues about in-house writing challenges; well-defined and respectful proofreading and approval processes; preferred style guides such as Associated

Press; and library of essential writing books and reference works.

Writing well may be a given for some people, but for most of us it's a skill that evolves from our first babbles in the crib to our final words before we die. Like learning to speak articulately, it's always a work in progress. It takes years of practice before we arrive at an acceptable skill level – years of building vocabulary, grasping grammar, shaping leads, crafting headlines, fashioning quotes, mastering forms, and wrestling with the salmagundi of syntax.

As the reports below suggest, PR writing needs to be strengthened for many reasons, not the least of which is to do a better job of what our employers pay us for – to protect and improve their brand, reputation, impact and success. What better place to begin than at home – in our own organizations, our own offices, our own skins?

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**FOOTNOTES: More proof of writing's value as a PR tool.**

**Annenberg Center for Public Relations' 2016 Global Communications Report:** "Written communications is the skill ranked most important by client and agency respondents (89%),"and is "more critical than strategic planning (84%), social media expertise (76%) and multimedia content development (76%) and a long way ahead of things such as business literacy (62%), analytics (62%), research (48%), search engine optimization (41%) and behavioral science (32%)." [Media relations came in at 63%.]  
[https://annenberg.usc.edu/sites/default/files/USC\\_REPORT\\_New.p](https://annenberg.usc.edu/sites/default/files/USC_REPORT_New.p)

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**Institute for Public Relations: Report of 2015 research by Don Bates on “What PR Agencies Require of New-Hire Junior Account Executives,”** which shows that among **“preferred basic job skills,”** writer was the clear first (92.59%), media pitcher second (88.89%), and researcher third (59.26%). Researcher in this case means someone adept at finding and analyzing information, not someone who does professional opinion polls.

<https://www.instituteforpr.org/writing-skills-highest-priority-new-pr-hires/>

**2016 Executive Summary, Public Relations Society of America Strategic Plan** references five drivers of PR/PA change that agency and corporate leaders agree with: adoption of new technologies (4.1 on a scale of 1 to 5); increased demand for content (4.0); the expansion of communications channels (3.8); increasing use of data (3.5); and more demand for specialization (3.5). Content is what makes writing good or bad. Putting it in more practical terms, the plan says communication professionals need “to find innovative ways to create compelling content across new media platforms.” As to content and new media, “snackable” is the operative word. Everything we write must be brighter and tighter because few of us – regrettably – have time to read lengthy pieces.

<https://bit.ly/2gansHd>