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Mar31

[Mike](#)

[The first rule of public relations](#)

One afternoon last fall, I stood before my Public Relations Writing students a couple days after we had a guest speaker and I offered a confession that went something like this:

“In case you were wondering, I inform our guest speakers beforehand of the broad topic, but I *never* tell them what to say. And, believe me, that has led to some anxious moments for me in the back of the room.”

You see, after introducing a guest speaker, I always sat in the back of the room (much to the chagrin, no doubt, of those who had hoped to spend the entire class IMing their friends). And on more than one occasion, a guest speaker proceeded to ask the class something along the lines of, “What’s the most important thing you need to know before writing a news release?”

. . . which led to my Maalox moment. (As in comic strips, bubbles—like these $\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}$ —represent my thoughts.)

$\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}$ Oh, \$#@%! I hope she doesn’t contradict what I taught them in a previous class! $\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}$

Fortunately, that never happened. The response sought by each guest speaker—and that which, without fail, my students were able to provide (I taught them well :~)—was this:

Know your target audience.

In fact, one of my guest speakers, Karen Black, director of media relations for NTID, asked my students for the first *three* rules of public relations. They got the first one and, with some prodding, the other two, as well:

Know your target audience.

Know your target audience.

Know your target audience.

I don’t know if Karen ever sold real estate (location, location, location) . . . but, yes, knowing your target audience *IS* that important.

Back to me in the back of the room:

$\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}$ Phew! $\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}$

As public relations professionals, my colleagues and I—who spend a lot of time writing press releases and news stories—are well acquainted with this axiom. So why am I presenting it here, as a PR tip for faculty and others who deal with the news media? After all, faculty don’t write news releases, publicists (another name for us) do.

The answer: 193 nanometer liquid immersion nanolithography

You: $\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}$ Huh? $\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}\hat{\text{A}}^{\circ}$

What, you don’t know what the heck I’m talking about? My point precisely.

More [next time](#).

1. [Justin Thorp](#) Apr05

Right on Mike! Knowing your audience is HUGE. I run into it all the time with people wanting to have an online presence or to write something for the web. They don't understand who their audience is and how to best serve their needs. Would #2 rule of PR be to have a purpose for your writing? When your writing, you have to have something to say. Their has to be some type of end goal for writing what your writing and by the time the user has finished reading what you wrote they should understand your motive. If there is no point to what your writing, people won't want to read what you write because it will be a waste of their time. That is even more important with the web. People don't actually read on the web. They skim. Its EXTRA important to write in a way that allows people to skim your writing and get right down to the meat. Inverted-pyramid writing, right?

2. [Mike Saffran](#) Apr05

You zero in on another excellent rule, Justin. Knowing your target audience and having purpose really go hand-in-hand. Another way of putting it (and it applies to all writing): Your writing must be *compelling* to provide readers with a *reason*

for reading. Pretty basic stuff, but so critical. I advised my PR Writing students to place themselves in the minds of their readers, who might ask of themselves: "Why do I care?" or "Why should I continue reading this?" In newswriting, if we fail the test these questions offer (particularly in the headline and lead), our news releases will end up in the digital trash bin. On the Web, as you correctly suggest, readers simply won't continue reading because they don't want to waste their time. And, yes, the venerable inverted-pyramid style is one form of solid newswriting that could apply here, as well. (Your newsman dad taught you well :~)

3. [The Tiger Beat](#)

Apr14

The first rule of public relations, part 2 You now know the first rule of public relations. (For those needing a refresher, see [The first rule of public relations](#).) But why does a professor need to know this? After all, don't those of us working in media relations...

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