

Rowan University

## Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

9-16-2011

### An evaluation of the writing abilities of entry-level public relations practitioners and the industry demand to effectively write for new media

Diana Gervasi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Gervasi, Diana, "An evaluation of the writing abilities of entry-level public relations practitioners and the industry demand to effectively write for new media" (2011). *Theses and Dissertations*. 119.

<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/119>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [graduateresearch@rowan.edu](mailto:graduateresearch@rowan.edu).

**AN EVALUATION OF THE WRITING ABILITIES OF ENTRY-LEVEL  
PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS AND THE INDUSTRY  
DEMAND TO EFFECTIVELY WRITE FOR NEW MEDIA**

by  
Diana M. Gervasi

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Public Relations  
College of Communication  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts  
at  
Rowan University  
September 6, 2011

Thesis Chair: Joseph Basso, J.D., Ph.D., APR

© 2011 Diana M. Gervasi

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all the special people in my life who have always supported me and believed in my ability to overcome complex challenges — especially in times of my own self-doubt. I feel fortunate and blessed to have such amazing supporters in my life and will be forever grateful to them.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research project would not have been possible without the support of many people. First and foremost I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Joseph Basso, whose encouragement, guidance, and support enabled me to develop a thorough understanding of the subject. Dr. Basso's contributions were crucial in every phase of this project; from helping me take the first step of narrowing the topic through completing the final edits to finally cross the finish line.

In addition, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the people whose participation made completing this thesis possible, including my professors, my classmates, and all of the original research participants.

## **Abstract**

Diana Gervasi

### **AN EVALUATION OF THE WRITING ABILITIES OF ENTRY-LEVEL PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS AND THE INDUSTRY DEMAND TO EFFECTIVELY WRITE FOR NEW MEDIA**

2010/11

Joseph Basso, J.D., Ph.D., APR  
Master of Arts in Public Relations

The purposes of this exploratory investigation were to (a) evaluate the current writing abilities of entry-level public relations practitioners (b) determine the industry's demand to effectively write for new media and (c) identify educator's perceptions of entry-level public relations practitioners' writing abilities and current curriculum changes as well as future industry projections. The researcher conducted Web-based surveys of management-level public relations practitioners who were all members of PRSA and telephone interviews with educators in college and university public relations programs across the country. The data collected from Web-based surveys showed a slight improvement in the perception of entry-level practitioners' writing abilities. Overall, Web-based survey respondents reported that entry-level public relations practitioners generally possess a sufficient, or average, level of expertise in writing. The majority of educators who participated in the telephone interviews reported that writing abilities in public relations students are of concern and that most students entering the programs lack basic writing abilities. In addition, all participants reported new or recent curriculum developments in response to new media as communication tools. The study also revealed current industry trends in strategy, planning and measurement.

## Table of Contents

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Abstract  | v    |
| List of Figures   | viii |
| List of Tables  | x    |
| Chapter 1: Introduction   | 1    |
| 1.1 Statement of Problem  | 2    |
| 1.2 Delimitations   | 3    |
| 1.3 Purpose of the Study  | 4    |
| 1.4 Hypothesis  | 4    |
| 1.5 Procedure   | 5    |
| 1.6 Assumptions   | 6    |
| 1.7 Definition of Terms   | 6    |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review  | 8    |
| 2.1 Introduction  | 8    |
| 2.2 Deficient Writing Abilities in Entry-level Public Relations Practitioners | 11   |
| 2.3 Writing in Public Relations Education                                     | 17   |
| 2.4 Industry Changes and the Demand for New Media                             | 21   |
| Chapter 3: Methodology  | 25   |
| 3.1 Research Design   | 25   |
| 3.2 Source of Data  | 25   |
| 3.3 Method of Acquiring Data  | 26   |
| 3.4 Method of Analyzing Data  | 28   |

## Table of Contents Continued

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Chapter 4: Findings                                  | 29 |
| 4.1 Web-based Survey Results                         | 29 |
| 4.2 Telephone Interview Results                      | 48 |
| Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations | 71 |
| 5.1 Summary  | 71 |
| 5.2 Conclusions                                      | 72 |
| 5.3 Recommendations                                  | 77 |
| List of References                                   | 79 |



## List of Figures

| Figure  | Page |
|---|------|
| Figure 1: Current age (in years)  | 30   |
| Figure 2: Gender  | 30   |
| Figure 3: Highest Level of Education Completed  | 31   |
| Figure 4: Degree in Communications or Public Relations  | 31   |
| Figure 5: Years of Professional Experience in the Field of Public Relations   | 33   |
| Figure 6: Organizations Currently Using New Media   | 35   |
| Figure 7: New Media Tools Used  | 36   |
| Figure 8: Entry-level Practitioners Generally Possess Sufficient Level<br>of Expertise in Writing (Overall)         | 37   |
| Figure 8.1: Entry-level Practitioners Generally Possess Sufficient Level<br>of Expertise in Writing (Details)       | 38   |
| Figure 9: Entry-level Practitioners Possess Necessary Level<br>of Writing Skills to Write for New Media (Overall)   | 39   |
| Figure 9.1: Entry-level Practitioners Possess Necessary Level<br>of Writing Skills to Write for New Media (Details) | 40   |
| Figure 10: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities<br>in Specific Areas (Overall)                    | 41   |
| Figure 10.1: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities<br>in Grammar and Punctuation (Details)         | 42   |

## List of Figures Continued

| Figure   | Page |
|--|------|
| Figure 10.2: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities<br>in Sentence Structure and Paragraph Structure (Details) | 43   |
| Figure 10.3: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities<br>in Proofing and Editing (Details)                       | 44   |
| Figure 10.4: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities<br>in Persuasive Writing (Details)                         | 45   |
| Figure 10.5: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities<br>in Traditional Media Writing (Details)                  | 46   |
| Figure 10.6: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners Writing Abilities<br>in New Media Writing (Details)                           | 47   |
| Figure 11: Gender  | 65   |
| Figure 12: Highest Level of Education Completed  | 66   |
| Figure 13: Years of Experience as an Educator (Overall)  | 67   |
| Figure 13.1: Years of Experience as an Educator (Details)  | 67   |
| Figure 14: Years of Experience as a Practitioner (Overall)   | 68   |
| Figure 14.1: Years of Experience as a Practitioner (Details)   | 68   |
| Figure 16: Accredited in Public Relations  | 69   |

## List of Tables

| Table                         | Page |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Table 1: Other Degrees Listed | 32   |
| Table 2: Current Job Title    | 34   |

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Public Relations Society of America's Official Statement on Public Relations states that "In order to define and implement policy, the public relations practitioner uses a variety of professional communication skills and plays an integrative role both within the organization and between the organization and the external environment" (PRSA National Assembly, 1982).

Public relations professionals must possess essential communication skills to have success in the profession. Colleges and universities that offer public relations programs set goals to educate students about the profession and prepare students with the skills necessary to achieve success. Upon entering the workforce, entry-level practitioners must be skilled in public speaking, interpersonal and group communication, writing, research methodologies, and planning.

Writing, perhaps the most marketable skill, is essential in the practice. Yet, current studies indicate that inattention to writing in public relations programs provides entry-level practitioners with insufficient skills (Hardin and Pompper, 2004).

Deficiency in student writing skills, a topic that educators express concern with in developing their curriculums, creates a major focus for educators. However, limited classroom time, deficient writing abilities among students entering college, and an increasing industry demand for knowledge of other skills, creates a void for faculty who often struggle with preparing students with the writing demands necessary for success in the industry (Basso and Hines, 2008).

The public relations profession now demands the integration of new media as a tool for success. Today, researchers focus on exploring how new media changes the way organizations' communicate with their publics. Writing for new media, as a tool for communication, has dramatically changed the practice of public relations.

New media has significantly impacted the practice of public relations by changing the communication landscape. The use of new media enables organizations to empower a wide variety of strategic publics to communicate with them. Organizations can strategically communicate with employees, customers, stockholders, communities, governments, and other stakeholders (Wright and Hinson, 2010).

A study conducted by Wright and Hinson (2010) found that “those who practice public relations consider the social networking site Facebook to be the most important new communications medium for public relations messages in 2010” (p.19). As the use of new media continues to develop, and proves to be an effective communication tool in the practice of public relations, industry demand for skilled writers will grow.

### **1.1 Statement of Problem**

The ability to write well is an essential skill in the practice of public relations. However, college graduates frequently get criticized for their declining writing skills. Over the last two decades, writing deficiencies among entry-level practitioners has been reported mainly in anecdotal articles or opinion pieces with limited scholarly works (Cole, Corner & Hembroff, 2009). Studies have reported that entry-level practitioners have a lack of understanding of grammar, punctuation, and paragraph structure. They also lack the ability to be versatile. The emergence of new media has changed the way organizations

communicate to internal and external audiences. Communication has become more instantaneous and, in effect, causes the medium to require a different approach (Wright & Hinson, 2008).

The documented deficiencies in entry-level public relations practitioners writing skills, combined with the integration of new media in the profession, suggest that public relations students need to both improve their writing abilities and expand their knowledge of communication channels. Therefore, the researcher conducted a nationwide survey of PRSA members who hold management-level positions to gain specific details concerning management's perception about the current writing abilities of entry-level public relations practitioners. The research yielded information to help educators determine what specific writing skills entry-level professionals need to successfully write for new media. In addition, the researcher conducted a nationwide assessment of college and university public relations programs to evaluate the educators' view of student writing abilities and trends the institution may or may not be responding to through curriculum offerings.

## **1.2 Delimitations**

The author surveyed only public relations practitioners who are current members of PRSA. The author only sent surveys to selected PRSA members in management-level positions. Also, the author omitted colleges and universities that do not offer public relations programs. The author did not analyze college and university websites or course offerings, and only gathered information about course curriculums from a public relations professor at each selected college and university.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

While writing skills remain an essential component for successful public relations professionals, the arrival of new media has created a demand for more specialized writing skills. Changing industry demands, compiled with a need for practitioners to perform their jobs at high-levels has greatly impacted the profession. Through two-way communication, it is critical that practitioners and educators inform each other of issues of concern to effectively maintain the flow of information.

Through in-depth analysis, the researcher sought to grasp how management level practitioners assess the current writing abilities of entry-level practitioners, and to identify specific skills that may be needed for writing for new media.

### **1.4 Hypothesis**

- H1 – The majority of public relations practitioners at the management-level will express a high degree of concern with the writing abilities of entry-level practitioners.
- H2 – The majority of public relations practitioners at the management-level require entry-level practitioners to have specialized writing skills in new media.
- H3 – The majority of educators are aware of the dissatisfaction among practitioners with respect to entry-level practitioners' writing abilities.
- H4 – The majority of colleges and universities offer a limited number of writing courses.
- H5 – The majority of colleges and universities are beginning to adapt public relations curriculums to include writing courses focused on new media.

## **1.5 Procedure**

The researcher conducted a Web-based survey sent to 200 PRSA members who hold management-level positions to evaluate the current skill level of entry-level public relations practitioners' writing abilities. The researcher selected the management-level practitioners from the PRSA chapters' directory. Two PRSA chapters were selected from each of the four regions in the country for a total of eight chapters. The researcher selected the first 25 members listed alphabetically in each directory who listed a management-level job title. The researcher asked respondents to indicate specific deficiencies in writing abilities and to provide information concerning writing for new media.

The researcher also conducted eight telephone interviews with professors in public relations programs at colleges and universities across the U.S. to determine if the program curriculums foster development of the writing skills currently demanded in the profession. The colleges or universities were selected from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) list of accredited institutions. Two colleges and universities with programs in public relations were selected from each of the four regions in the country for a total of eight institutions. Stratifying the country allowed the researcher to report any regional differences that may have been found among various educators throughout the country.



## **1.6 Assumptions**

- The author assumes each PRSA member respondent will be the person identified during sample selection.
- The author assumes that the professors in public relations at the colleges or universities selected will provide accurate and truthful information concerning students' writing abilities and program curriculum.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

Entry-level – For purposes of this study the author defines entry-level as recent college graduates with less than three years experience in the professional field.

Management-level – For purposes of this study the author defines management-level as an experienced professional with more than five years experience and who oversees less experienced public relations staff.

Educators – For purposes of this study the author defines educators as deans, department heads or chairs, professors or instructors in a public relations or communication program.

Two-way communication – Communication that is used to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its public(s).

New media – Media that has an interactive relationship with the media consumer. It includes websites, blogs and social networks.

Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

(ACEJMC) – The agency responsible for the evaluation of professional journalism and mass communication programs in colleges and universities.

Public Relations Society of America – (PRSA) the world's largest organization for public relations professionals. The organization has more than 21,000 members, including professionals from public relations agencies, corporations, government, health care institutions, military, professional services firms, associations, nonprofit organizations, and academia.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Overview

Public relations professionals must possess essential communication skills to have success in the profession. Colleges and universities that offer public relations programs set goals to educate students about the profession and prepare them with the skills they will need to achieve success in the field. Upon entering the workforce, entry-level practitioners must have abilities in public speaking, interpersonal and group communication, writing, research methodologies, and planning.

In *Managing Public Relations* (1984), James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt formally define the characteristics of the four models of public relations communication. These models demonstrate the function of communication that public relations practitioners manage between an organization and its publics. Each model represents the development stages of public relations through history and are perhaps the most relevant communication models in current public relations practice. Today, public relations practitioners use these models as a foundation for developing communication techniques. The ability to write well is essential for effective communication across all four models (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

Grunig and Hunt's first model, the press agent/publicity model, developed in the period from 1850 to 1900. In this model, public relations serves a propaganda function. Practitioners spread the messages of the organization they represent. However, the information in the messages is often incomplete and not often based on truth. The

historical figure most often associated with the press agent model is Phineas T. Barnum. Barnum made his name promoting show attractions by sending out messages that staged extravagant events such as, *The Bearded Lady*. The press agent/publicity model is based on one-way communication that aims to promote a message through manipulation and subjective information (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The second model, the public information model, began around 1900 and continued until the 1920s. During this time in America the development of big business had drastically increased the wealth of the country and effectively changed the government. Some of these organizations began operating in excess and mistreating employees and, as a result, public perception of big businesses became overwhelmingly negative. Businesses needed a new kind of public relations to respond to the muckraking journalism fighting them. Ivy Ledbetter Lee, a journalist, recognized this need and became one of the first public relations practitioners to use the public information model. The public information model disseminates information by communicating the truth about the organization's actions. Furthermore, if the organization's actions were damaging then change the behavior of the organization so the truth could be disseminated. This model initiated the rise of journalists becoming public relations practitioners. The journalists' ability to write effectively helped to form the role of public relations practitioners as skilled writers in the organization (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The third model, the two-way asymmetric model, developed in the 1920s, is based on scientific persuasion. Edward Bernays, the leading historical figure associated with this model, believed that mass persuasion was possible and that public relations needed to be rooted in the social sciences. In this model, communication is used to

persuade or manipulate publics to accept an organization's point of view. The communication is referred to as imbalanced because it does not use research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organization. During the time this model developed many people believed publics could be persuaded in the direction propagandist wanted, but Bernays knew that publics could only be persuaded to do what they feel is in their best interest. Bernays also recognized that public relations practitioners must persuade management to act in the public's best interest before they would be able to persuade the public to support the organization (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The fourth model, the two-way symmetric model, was developed in the 1960s by Bernays, educators, and professional leaders. This model uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its publics. In the process of conducting two-way symmetric communication, public relations practitioners conduct evaluative research and measure attitudes and behavior before and after the communication effort to determine the effect of the communication. Then, practitioners use the research to adjust their organization's practices or messages to form a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the public (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

In each of these four models, communication skills are essential to a public relations practitioners' ability to effectively communicate with an organization and its publics. No matter which model of communication is practiced, writing is a skill that is threaded throughout. The ability to write well must be included in today's practitioners skill sets to ensure that messages are received and accurately interpreted by the organization's publics.

## **2.2 Deficient Writing Abilities in Entry-level Public Relations Practitioners**

Writing, perhaps the most marketable skill for entry-level professionals, is essential in the practice. Yet, current studies indicate that inattention to writing in public relations programs provides entry-level practitioners with insufficient skills (Hardin and Pompper, 2004).

Current studies report deficiencies in the writing abilities of entry-level practitioners. However, this concern has existed for many years. In a 1975 article in *Public Relations Quarterly*, author Philip Lesly discussed the use of language to convey information and its dependence upon the ability to use language with precision and skills. He states that during that time the need for masterful writing skills, and not just competence, was imperative with the changes and demands in the industry. According to Lesly, at that time even competent writers were hard to find. Furthermore, he recommended that every communication team should have at least one master of the English language, who would write major materials, screen and edit the work of colleagues, and critique the organization's communication ideas and expression of them (Lesly, 1975).

Similarly in 1982, an article in *Journalism Educator* reported survey results of 60 leading industrial/packaged goods companies, which found that young public relations executives often did not have crisp, professional writing skills in comparison to senior practitioners. The article attributes the difference in skill level to the fact that senior practitioners would have most likely developed their writing skills early in their career, perhaps writing for a newspaper. As educational institutions developed public relations programs it became more common for emerging practitioners to have degrees in public

relations as opposed to journalism. The article notes that despite deficiencies in entry-level writing skills, younger practitioners offered a more professional perspective to their departments, with a stronger emphasis on public issues, research and preventive communication programs (Journalism Educator, 1982).

Today, the dissatisfaction with entry-level public relations practitioners' writing abilities continues to be frequently reported, and is a major concern for both senior practitioners in the industry as well as educators. In a 2009 study, Richard T. Cole, Andrew D. Corner and Larry A. Hembroff surveyed 848 public relations members of the nation's largest public relations membership organization, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Overall, respondents found a negative response in both categories of public relations writing and business writing. When asked to rank their writing abilities by type, public relations supervisors responded that entry-level practitioners are least capable of effective persuasive writing. Entry-level practitioners received the highest ratings in writing for conversational e-mail, blogs and social media (Cole, Corner and Hembroff, 2009).

In an effort to determine the strengths of entry-level practitioners writing abilities, Cole, Corner and Hembroff asked supervisors to rate skill levels in four different categories: proper grammar, correct spelling/punctuation, ability to organize ideas, and the use of Associated Press (AP) or other style guidelines. Out of a possible 5-point scale, supervisors rated entry-level practitioners highest in correct spelling/punctuation, but only gave them a 2.01 average score. Across all four categories, entry-level practitioners surveyed ranked themselves higher than their supervisors ranked them. The most significant concern the researchers' addressed was the degree to which practitioners

expressed their frustration with the declining writing skills among entry-level practitioners. In fact, nearly half of the respondents agree that they have reduced their expectations of the overall writing skills of entry-level practitioners (Cole, Corner and Hembroff, 2009).

Joseph Basso and Randy Hines, both college professors of public relations and communication, conducted a study in 2008 that examined issues concerning writing competency in communication students. The researchers surveyed senior-level communication professionals on entry-level practitioners' fundamental knowledge and abilities in grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. Overall, the researchers found that a significant number of communication professionals reported low scores in rating entry-level employees. Their research indicated that the senior-level communication professionals' perception of higher education is that colleges and universities inadequately prepare their students for careers that require a substantial amount of writing. The researchers also found their data supported the idea that accredited members of either the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) or the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) had higher writing expectations than non-accredited communication professionals (Basso and Hines, 2008).

Specifically, the researchers asked respondents to list the forms of writing that are most frequently assigned to entry-level professionals. The top three responses were e-mail and internal reports, news releases and business letters. When the researchers asked senior-level communication professionals the most frequent problems in entry-level professionals' writing abilities they indicated problems in the overuse of passive voice, spelling, pronoun-antecedent agreement, punctuation, and sentence length. With a serious



concern for these declining perceptions of entry-level professionals' abilities to write well, Basso and Hines (2008) suggest that "Further study is recommended in this area that will enable communication educators to better prepare students for success in writing-intensive careers in this age of media convergence" (p. 306).

An earlier study, conducted by Ashley Brown and Lisa T. Fall in 2005, looked at public relations students' writing abilities through the eyes of internship managers. The researchers identified the need for educators to understand the current demands the public relations industry expects from students seeking employment opportunities. Brown and Fall's study examined industry demands according to internship supervisors using the *Port of Entry*, a national study conducted by the Commission on Public Relations Education and the National Communication Association, as a framework. The researchers used an online survey sent to site managers who had employed undergraduate public relations interns attending a large Carnegie Research I university located in the southeast. Of the 200 surveys sent out, the researchers received 109 surveys, providing a 55 percent response rate (Brown and Fall, 2005).

Overall, the internship managers reported that writing, speaking, and organizational skills were most necessary for interns to perform their responsibilities. The researchers reported that non-profit organizations value writing skills higher than for-profit organizations. The internship managers were asked open-ended questions on how public relations faculty can improve their current programs. Respondents revealed two major themes, which included the need for students to have better writing skills, as well as a higher degree of professionalism. In discussing the affects this study might have on public relations educators, Brown and Fall stated that "On its face, these results supply

little enrichment to what public relations educators already know. However, since these comments represent what seems to be reoccurring themes reported by public relations practitioners across the country, we need to continue addressing these needs in our curriculums” (Brown and Fall, 2005).

A study conducted in 2005 by Kurt Wise, at the time a professor in the Department of Communication at DePaul University, investigated the opinions of public relations professionals in agency settings concerning the writing skills of entry-level practitioners. After an analysis of scholarly journal articles, Wise identified writing as an essential skill for public relations practitioners. He stated that regular evaluation of these skills is necessary to develop writing curricula that reflects the demands of the industry. Wise conducted a series of focus groups with professionals, employed by public relations agencies in Chicago, to gather qualitative data. Participants were asked to discuss their opinions on eight topics of writing skills: writing abilities of entry-level practitioners, objective versus persuasive writing, writing for the web, design of public relations writing courses, evaluation of public relations writing courses taken in college, differentiation between a good writer and an average writer and the writing needs of agencies versus corporate and non-profit organizations (Wise, 2005).

Wise reported that, concerning writing abilities, the professionals commonly used the words *bad* and *poor*. The most common complaint reported by professionals was poor grammar skills. They also indicated that run-on sentences and paragraph structures were areas that needed improvement. In discussions concerning objective versus persuasive writing, Wise reported that the group had no strong agreement on which approach entry-level practitioners were more skilled at. The topic that drew the most uniformity of

responses was, writing for the web. The participants agreed that it is a different style of writing that needs to be shorter, more concise, and consider the relation to visuals (Wise, 2005).

When asked to critique the design of public relations writing courses, the focus group's participants agreed that there was too much emphasis on writing news releases and that writing courses did not spend enough time teaching writing for other mediums. The participants also discussed the importance of writing for clients. Participants felt that the majority of their writing is for clients and that in general writing curriculum focused too much on teaching students to write for media. In determining what the differences are between a good writer and an average writer, participants said versatility. The participants felt that good writers should be able to make adjustments and change their writing style frequently to consider both the medium and the client. The data provided substantial information about the writing skills organizations seek in entry-level employees (Wise, 2005).

Similarly, Marie C. Hardin and Donnalyn Pompper conducted a research study that examined practitioners' perceptions of the deficient writing abilities of entry-level professionals and related their data to the need to assess writing in public relations education. The researchers conducted telephone surveys of 193 public relations practitioners from the PRSA membership directory. The survey respondents had an average of 12 years of experience in public relations and were asked to recall writing courses they took in college, as well as assess the importance of writing in the profession. The research revealed that 57 percent of respondents indicated that writing made up 71 percent of their public relations work. Furthermore, when asked to rate the importance of public relations

professionals on a 1-5 Lichert scale, all respondents ranked it as important or extremely important (Hardin and Pompper, 2004).

### **2.3 Writing in Public Relations Education**

Vicki Todd (2009), an assistant professor of public relations at Quinnipiac University, conducted a study to assess the Public Relations Student Society of America's (PRSSA) faculty and professional advisors' perceptions of public relations curriculum, assessment of students' learning, as well as faculty performance. Todd uses the results from the 2006 Commission on Public Relations Education as a framework for the study. The 2006 commission reported on data from educators and practitioners regarding public relations education and their results were reported in *The Professional Bond: Public Relations Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Todd's research instrument was a 23 question survey that was sent to both faculty advisors and professional advisors who were members of PRSSA (Todd, 2009).

Todd's research revealed that faculty advisors and professional advisors seem to disagree in four areas with the 2006 commission report regarding the knowledge and skills public relations educators and professionals expect students to acquire in order to succeed in the public relations industry. These areas are new media, student internship, capstone course projects and portfolios, and the students' ability to write proficiently. The PRSSA professional advisors express discontent for graduates' writing proficiency. However, the 2006 commission reported that fundamental writing skills are the central component of public relations education but should not detract time from teaching students other more significant knowledge areas such as problem solving, strategic

thinking and management skills. Contrarily, some of the educators suggested that it would be beneficial to add more writing-intensive course requirements to the curriculum (Todd, 2009).

Basso and Hines' 2008 study that addressed issues of writing deficiencies in communication students also discussed the position of the educator. The researchers acknowledged that while teaching writing skills is a major focus of many university curriculums, educators are limited by credit hours and the increasing demand for other skills including research techniques, organizational management theory and new communication technologies. Basso and Hines (2008) state that "Communication educators often find themselves forced to review fundamental writing rules quickly. Limited classroom instruction time, coupled with the need to introduce students to written communication in a variety of media, causes faculty to dilute training in class" (p. 294).

In a 2007 article for *Public Relations Tactics*, John Guiniven, an associate professor of public relations at Elon University in North Carolina, discusses issues concerning the writing skills of younger people, specifically public relations students. Guiniven suggests that public relations educators can lead the effort to restore principles of good writing in students and benefit from their efforts. He reported that public relations practitioners are looking to hire entry-level professionals who can communicate with their own generation and also write persuasively for audiences that are outside of their mindset. Guiniven claims that there are opportunities for public relations departments in this writing crisis. Often, other departments' deficiencies in student writing are significantly worse than public relations departments. Guiniven suggests that if public relations departments can lead the effort to improve public relations students' writing abilities they

can serve as an example for other departments and lead training within the organization (Guiniven, 2007).

In addition to evaluating practitioners' perceptions of the deficient writing abilities of entry-level professionals, Hardin and Pompper's 2004 study also assessed writing requirements among ACEJMC-accredited public relations programs. The researchers acknowledged that as public relations practitioners spend significant resources to bring new hires' writing abilities up to speed that as a result, they blame education institutions for failing to teach students writing skills. However, they claim that educators express that there is a lack of public relations teaching materials. With public relations textbooks giving vague recommendations on preferred writing styles and sending mixed messages about journalistic writing, educators face many challenges. The researchers suggest that basic writing skills may have been unintentionally overshadowed by expanded public relations curricula, which may include more business and marketing courses (Hardin and Pompper, 2004).

Hardin and Pompper evaluated 152 academic programs to determine the number and types of writing courses required of public relations students. The researchers evaluated websites of schools offering public relations sequences, emphases, or majors to assess the number and types of writing courses required of students. They specifically looked for requirements in news writing and public relations writing courses. In addition, the researchers assessed the number of required writing classes in the curriculum. Hardin and Pompper's research revealed that among the 152 accredited public relations programs evaluated, 57 percent required a news writing course and 51 percent required a writing course. In examining the number of required writing classes, the researchers found that

just 1.74 writing-intensive courses were required for public relations students. While many programs offered writing course electives, many of the programs required just one writing course, which introduced the students to writing for print, broadcast, advertising and public relations (Hardin and Pompper, 2004).

Hardin and Pompper suggest that greater attention to writing courses in public relations curriculums could benefit students. In addition, they provide recommendations that could help link education and the professional practice. First, they suggest that, since practitioners consistently rank writing as a top priority and report that students need more focus on writing skills, public relations programs should add more writing-focused courses. Second, they suggest that public relations programs require news writing and public relations writing courses. They recommend that an ideal writing course requirement for students might include one course in each of media writing, news writing and public relations writing. The third recommendation the researchers made is for public relations programs to encourage students to work with campus media. Since a majority of the practitioners' surveyed endorsed experience in journalism this would be beneficial when students seek internships, enter the job market and perform media related functions (Hardin and Pompper, 2004).

Likewise, Cynthia M. King (2001), an assistant professor in the communication department at California State University, provides recommendations to develop and improve writing courses in the public relations curriculum. King's article provides guidance to instructors who are looking to refine basic or introductory public relations writing courses. The author based her recommendations on the Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education, which listed public relations writing among topics that

were essential to a strong undergraduate education in public relations. Guided by research that listed writing skills as one of the highest-ranked skills for entry-level professionals, King's research also listed writing skills as one of the highest-ranked hiring problems (King, 2001).

In outlining recommendations to develop writing course curriculums, King acknowledges that public relations students must master a range of writing styles including objective journalistic styles and indirect and direct persuasive styles. According to King, students must learn to master a range of styles to serve multiple purposes and to communicate with multiple audiences. King (2001) states that “the overall goal of a public relations writing course is for students to understand the nature and the scope of public relations writing” (p. 28) King provides suggestion that include basic writing and journalistic style, grammar exercises and stylebooks, rewrites, peer grading, isolation of key problems, sample objective: basic writing, theory and persuasion (King 2001).

#### **2.4 Industry Changes and the Demand for New Media**

New communication media have brought dramatic changes to the field of public relations. A 2010 study by Donald K. Wright and Michelle Drifka Hinson examined these changes and the effect they have had on the practice of public relations. Wright and Hinson state, “Social and other new communications media deliver web-based information created by people with the intention of facilitating communication. These new communications media now represent one of the world’s major sources of social interaction as people share stories and experiences with each other” (p. 4).



Wright and Hinson's study includes research on several key tools that represent new media including blogs, electronic internet forums or message boards and social media. With a number of research studies on the impact of new media communication, this study focuses on the impact new media has on the practice of public relations. Wright and Hinson conducted a two-year trend study examining how public relations practitioners are implementing new media in the practice. The researchers sampled two different large groups of public relations practitioners from various parts of the world and conducted a longitudinal trend study analysis survey from 2009 through 2010. The researchers surveyed members of PRSA, the Arthur W. Page Society and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) as well as membership lists from the Institute for Public Relations (IPR). Wright and Hinson's study included questionnaires from more than a thousand respondents (Wright and Hinson, 2010).

In both the 2009 and 2010 study, respondents were asked to rank the degree of importance of new media in the overall communication and public relations efforts. The new media included blogs, electronic forums or message boards, podcasts, search engine marketing, social networks, micro-blogging sites and video sharing. The research revealed that out of the seven options, search engine was considered to be the most important in 2009. However, in 2010 social networks, such as Facebook, were listed by respondents as the most important. The research also revealed that in 2009, 28 percent of practitioners ranked Facebook as a medium that should be very important to their overall communication or public relations program. In 2010 that number showed drastic increase jumping from 28 to 45 percent (Wright and Hinson, 2010).

Overall, Wright and Hinson's two year longitudinal analysis trend study showed that new media continue to have a huge impact on the practice of public relations. They concluded that practitioners have been able to significantly empower a wide variety of publics by communicating with them through these new communication vehicles. According to the researchers, new media, particularly blogs and social media networks, are "changing the way organizations communicate with strategic publics such as employees, customers, stockholders, communities, governments and other stakeholders" (p. 19).

Shearlean Duke (2009), an associate professor in the department of journalism at Western Washington University, conducted a Delphi study to assess how public relations experts feel blogs are changing the practice of public relations and how they think educators can prepare students for these changes. Duke identified the significance of blogs in the use of direct two-way communication, and the ways in which organizations use blogs to communicate with customers, as well as employees, to monitor blogs in an effort to manage an organization's online image, to provide stories for journalists who are increasingly going to blogs for story ideas in traditional media, to access bloggers who have become public influencers, and to use blogs to provide an immediate and effective way to handle crisis communication (Duke, 2009).

Duke administered a series of questionnaires, seeking the opinions, feedback and future projections of a panel of public relations experts. The panel, comprised of 17 experts that included top executives, middle management and junior level practitioners, was chosen for their expertise in new media. Respondents agreed that blogs are a powerful new medium that create new audiences for public relations practitioners. Duke

reported that blogs have expanded the practice of public relations because practitioners' efforts do not just target the mainstream news media, but consider the citizen as a journalist. Respondents agreed that traditional public relations communication is changing because the use of blogs are forcing practitioners to adjust their timing and they way they announce news and whom they announce it to (Duke, 2009).

In discussing changes in the approach to communication, Duke (2009) reported that "Panelists agreed that the shift from a controlled communications approach to one that is more open and dynamic has created both opportunities and challenges. For example, as one panelist explained it, the 'push' method of public relations was more a one directional monologue, and 'target audiences' did not have the opportunities to respond and participate. Blogs have empowered those audiences to participate in a dialogue" (p.323).

Duke also asked panelists to address issues concerning educating future practitioners in the use of blogs as a communication medium. Respondents agreed that it is important to teach future practitioners the importance of blogs in order for them to be able to conduct the skills required of them in the profession. The respondents suggested that students experience blogging first hand to learn the environment and develop skills in direct communication. When reporting on the practitioners' responses to the need for students to develop online conversational writing skills for blogs, Duke (2009) stated that "For the future PR practitioner 'online conversational skills' may become just as important as the ability to write a news release, panelists agreed" (p.325).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study attempted to identify the perceptions of the writing abilities of entry-level public relations practitioners from both the practitioner's and the educator's point-of-view.

Deficiencies in entry-level public relations professionals writing abilities have been well documented over many years. This study evaluated the current perceptions of entry-level practitioners' writing abilities and determined what the current viewpoint is in the professional and educational settings. Furthermore, as technology advances and the public relations industry uses that technology to communicate with its publics, it is essential that both practitioners and educators understand this new medium. This study sought to determine if educators are incorporating writing for new media skills into their curriculums and if they are using them to prepare students for success in the industry.

#### **3.2 Source of Data**

The researcher selected PRSA members who currently hold management-level positions. The members came from a directory listing provided by PRSA to its registered members. Two PRSA chapters were selected from each of four stratified regions in the country for a total of eight chapters. From each of the eight chapter directories, the first 25

members listed alphabetically who listed a management-level job title were selected to draw the sample of 200. The researcher contacted each of the selected members through e-mail address.

Further, the researcher selected colleges and universities from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) list of accredited institutions. Two ACEJMC colleges or universities with public relations programs were selected from four stratified regions in the country for a total of eight institutions. The researcher contacted the public relations departments' chair, head or professor at each college or university.

### **3.3 Method of Acquiring Data**

The data was acquired by conducting Web-based surveys and telephone interviews. Specifically, both the Web-based surveys and telephone interviews were conducted on two groups within the public relations field including professional practitioners and educators. By conducting Web-based surveys and telephone interviews the researcher acquired both quantitative and qualitative data to provide external validity.

*Advertising and Public Relations Research* defines quantitative research as research that measures and counts the number of responses. One of the most popular forms of collecting quantitative data is through the implementation of surveys that collect respondents' answers to questions. Web-based surveys are one form of electronic surveys that use database technology and an HTML interface to store survey responses. The Web-based surveys are sent to the respondents' e-mail address wherein the message displays a

request for participation and a link to the electronic survey. These types of surveys allow the researcher to quickly and efficiently send surveys to respondents and accurately store data results (Jugenheimer, Bradley, Kelley, and Hudson, 2010).

*Advertising and Public Relations Research* defines qualitative research as research that observes what a person says or does. While quantitative research measures and counts the number of responses, qualitative research delves into concepts, ideas, definitions, characteristics, meanings and symbols. Telephone interviews serve as one of several qualitative research methods. Telephone interviews are an effective approach to gathering a person's reflections such as beliefs, values and opinions. These types of interviews allow for the researcher to probe the respondent with follow-up questions and uncover complex information that may not be able to be attained through quantitative methods (Jugenheimer, Bradley, Kelley, and Hudson, 2010).

In this study the researcher used the quantitative data acquired through the Web-based surveys to shape the topics and questions asked in the qualitative telephone interviews. By using both quantitative and qualitative research methods the measuring instruments provide greater external validity. External validity is the validity of generalized statements based on limited research studies. In both the Web-based surveys and telephone interviews the sample selection was drawn from four stratified regions of the country providing a sample that is not limited to one geographic location. As a result, the data results can be projected to a larger external population (Jugenheimer, Bradley, Kelley, and Hudson, 2010).

The researcher conducted Web-based surveys sent to 200 PRSA members who hold management-level positions to evaluate the current skill level of entry-level public relations practitioners' writing abilities. The management-level practitioners selected came from the PRSA chapters' directory. By using a non-scientific sample selection, the researcher was able to target respondents in a timely, efficient manner. However, because the sample selection was non-probability, non-random, the results cannot be generalized.

The researcher also conducted eight telephone interviews with chairs, heads or professors in the public relations programs at colleges and universities across the U.S. to determine if the program's curriculum fosters development of the writing skills currently demanded in the profession. The educators selected came from a list of colleges or universities accredited by the ACEJMC. By using a non-scientific sample selection, the researcher was able to target respondents in a timely, efficient manner. However, because the sample selection was non-probability non-random, the results cannot be generalized.

### **3.4 Method of Analyzing Data**

The researcher codified the Web-based surveys then used the quantitative and qualitative data to identify current perceptions of the writing abilities of entry-level practitioners as well as identify if practitioners demand entry-level practitioners to have writing skill sets that are specific to new media.

The researcher codified the telephone interviews then used the qualitative data to identify the institutions' position concerning the writing abilities of students and the inclusion of changing industry demands — specifically new media as a communication tool — into their curriculums.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **4.1 Web-based Survey Results**

The researcher conducted a Web-based survey sent to 200 PRSA members who hold management-level positions to evaluate the current skill level of entry-level public relations practitioners' writing abilities. The researcher selected the management-level practitioners from the PRSA chapters' directory. Two PRSA chapters were selected from each of the four regions in the country for a total of eight chapters. The researcher selected the first 25 members listed alphabetically in each directory who listed a management-level job title.

The researcher e-mailed a brief explanatory message about the survey and a link to participate in the survey through the online survey tool Constant Contact. The survey asked respondents to indicate specific deficiencies in writing abilities and to provide information concerning writing for new media. Selected participants were sent four subsequent e-mails reminding them to participate in the survey. Out of the 200 PRSA members contacted the survey results yielded 40 respondents ( $n = 40$ ) resulting in a 20 percent response rate.



For responses to preliminary demographic questions, the results showed:

Figure 1: Current age (in years)

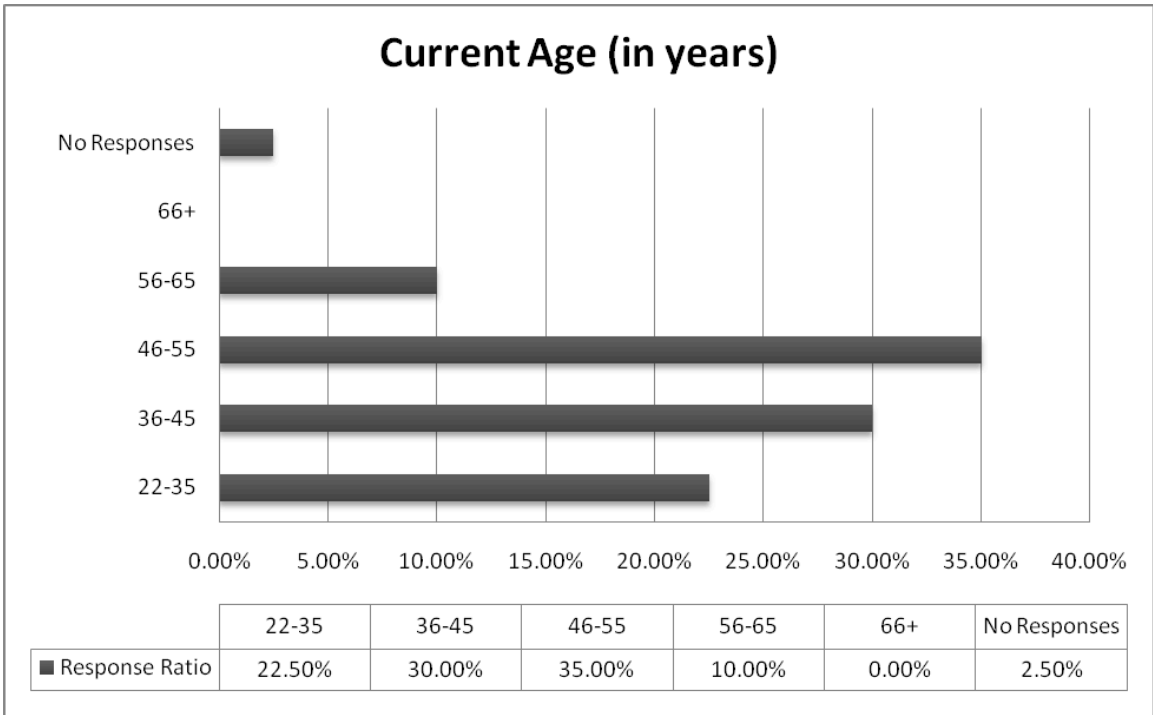


Figure 2: Gender

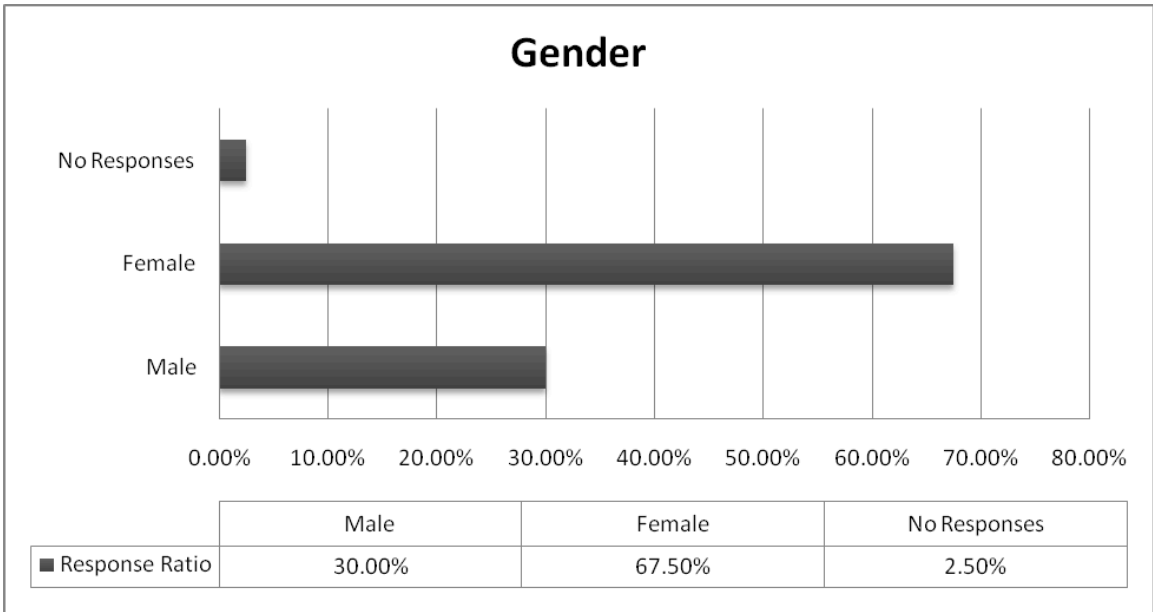


Figure 3: Highest Level of Education Completed

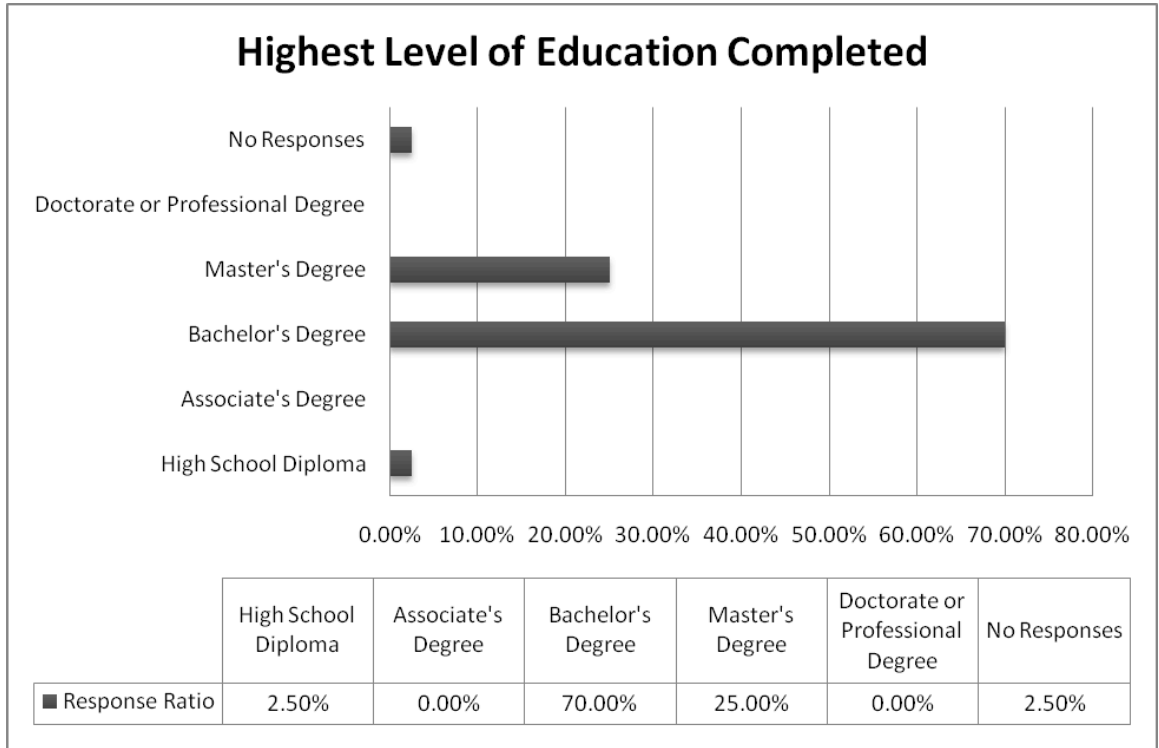
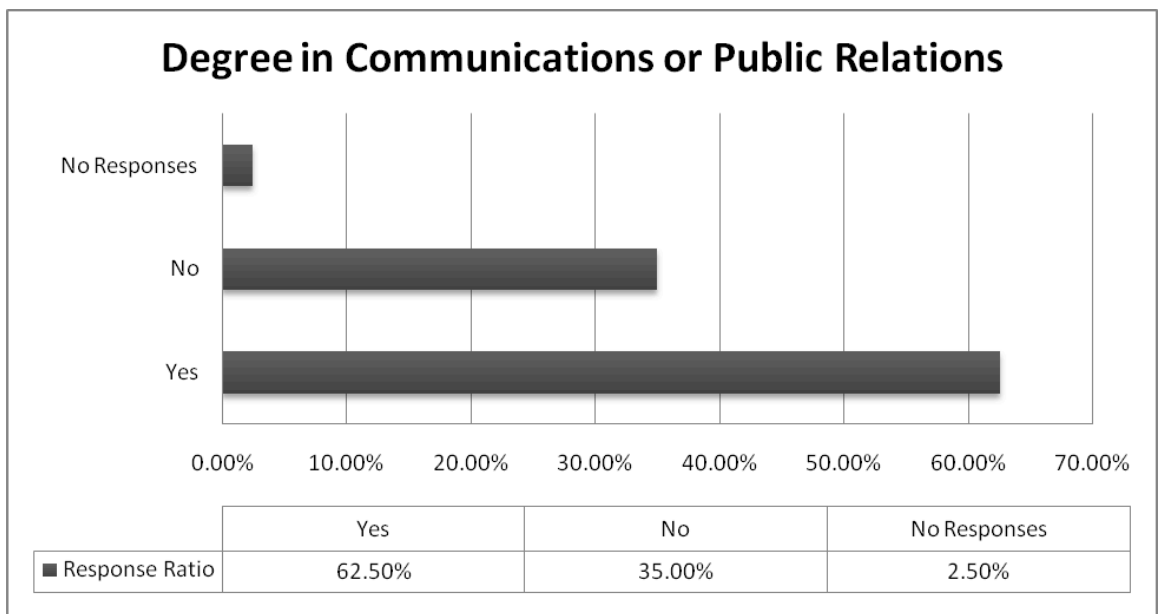


Figure 4: Degree in Communications or Public Relations



*Table 1: Other Degrees Listed*

| <b>Other Degrees Listed</b> |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Respondent</b>           | <b>Response</b>                                |
| # 1                         | English/Writing and Editing, Advertising Track |
| # 2                         | Journalism                                     |
| # 3                         | Broadcast Journalism and Political Science     |
| # 4                         | Journalism                                     |
| # 5                         | B.S. Biology                                   |
| # 6                         | Journalism                                     |
| # 7                         | Political Science                              |
| # 8                         | Theatre  |
| # 9                         | Theater and English                            |
| # 10                        | B.A. English                                   |
| # 11                        | Finance and Economics                          |
| # 12                        | History and French                             |
| # 13                        | Psychology and Social Work                     |
| # 14                        | Marketing and Advertising                      |

Figure 5: Years of Professional Experience in the Field of Public Relations

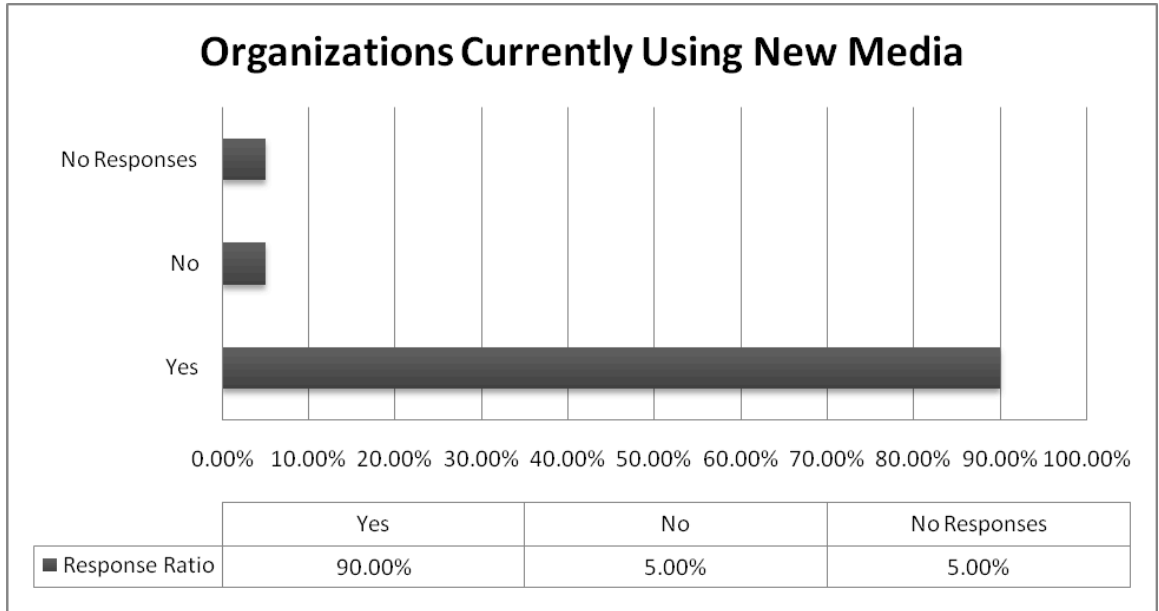


Table 2: Current Job Title

| <b>Current Job Title</b> |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Respondent</b>        | <b>Response</b>                                 |
| # 1                      | Vice President, Communications & Engagement     |
| # 2                      | PR Manager                                      |
| # 3                      | Director of Communications                      |
| # 4                      | Public Information Office Director              |
| # 5                      | Senior Director, Media Relations                |
| # 6                      | Owner, Principal                                |
| # 7                      | Owner, President                                |
| # 8                      | Director  |
| # 9                      | Director of Communications                      |
| # 10                     | Director of Communications                      |
| # 11                     | Chief Communications Officer                    |
| # 12                     | VP, Corporate Communications                    |
| # 13                     | Marketing Writer/Editor                         |
| # 14                     | Vice President Fund Development/Marketing - CDO |
| # 15                     | Public Relations Manager                        |
| # 16                     | Director, Communications                        |
| # 17                     | President and CEO                               |
| # 18                     | CEO   |
| # 19                     | President, CEO                                  |
| # 20                     | Senior Manager, Communications                  |
| # 21                     | Communications Manager                          |
| # 22                     | Adjunct Professor                               |
| # 23                     | Social Media Manager                            |
| # 24                     | President                                       |
| # 25                     | Owner, Public Relations Director                |
| # 26                     | Account Director                                |
| # 27                     | Vice President of Public Relations              |
| # 28                     | Senior Associate Director of Communications     |
| # 29                     | External Relations Officer                      |
| # 30                     | Director, Corporate Communications              |
| # 31                     | Director, Corporate Communications              |
| # 32                     | Director of Marketing and Communications        |
| # 33                     | President                                       |
| # 34                     | Director of Communications                      |
| # 35                     | Director of Public and Professional Relations   |
| # 36                     | Manager, Public Relations                       |
| # 37                     | Vice President, Corporate Communications        |
| # 38                     | President                                       |
| # 39                     | Director of Strategic Communications            |
| # 40                     | No Response                                     |

For responses to those currently using new media at the organization they are currently in a management-level position at, the results showed the following.

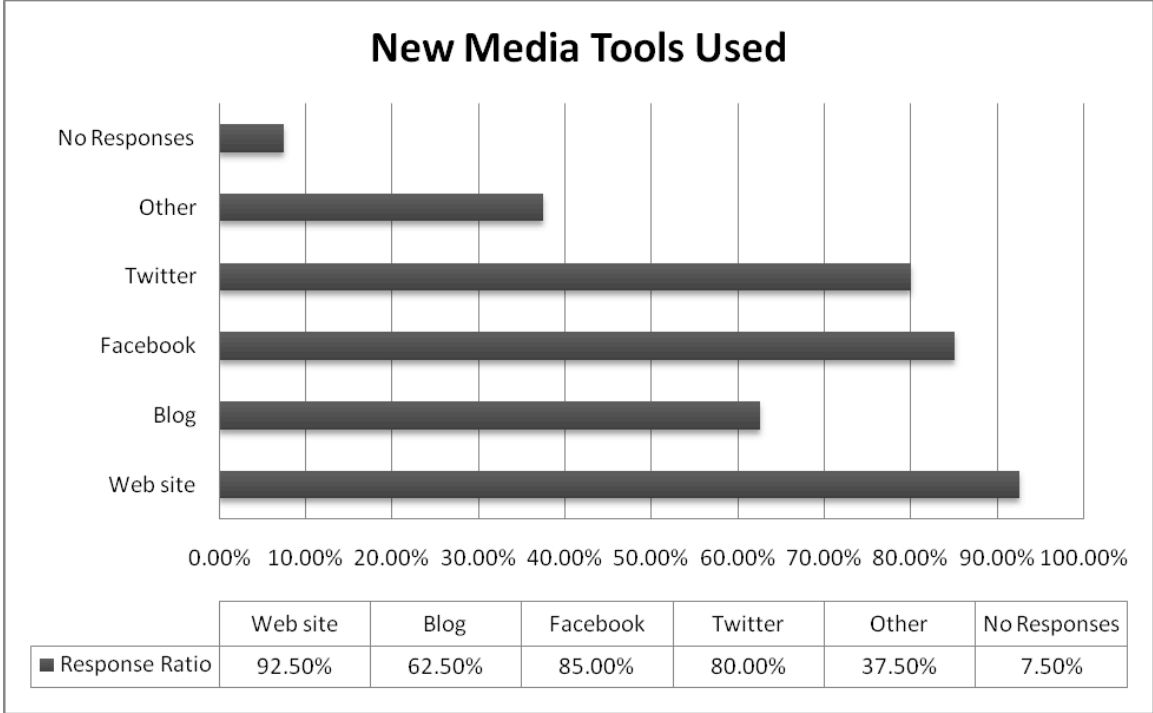
*Figure 6: Organizations Currently Using New Media*



Respondents reported that out of 40 survey respondents (n = 40), 90 percent currently use new media tools to communicate with their publics.

For responses to specific new media tools respondents currently use as communication tools at their organization, the results showed the following.

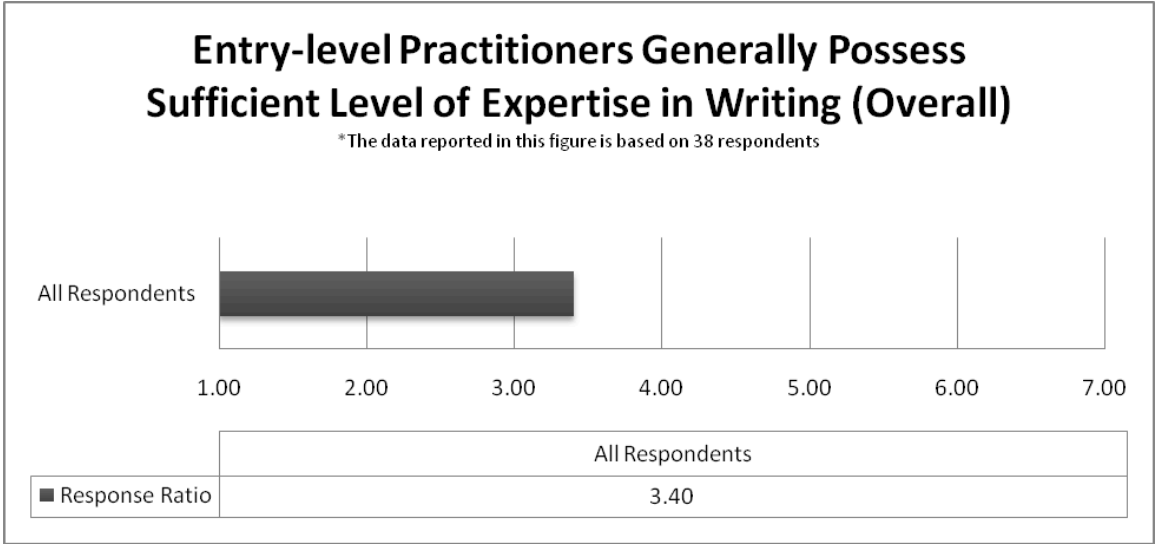
Figure 7: New Media Tools Used



The results showed that 92.5 percent of the respondents surveyed use the organization’s Web site as a communication tool. Furthermore, the results showed a significant number of organizations using social networking sites. 85 percent of respondents use Facebook and 80 percent use Twitter. The results also indicate a significant number of respondents, 37.5 percent use other new media tools.

The following data resulted from a statement provided to respondents with the opportunity to rank it on a scale from one to seven. The number one represented “Strongly Disagree” and the number seven represented “Strongly Agree.” In response to the statement that entry-level practitioners generally possess a sufficient level of expertise in writing, the results showed the following.

*Figure 8: Entry-level Practitioners Generally Possess Sufficient Level of Expertise in Writing (Overall)*

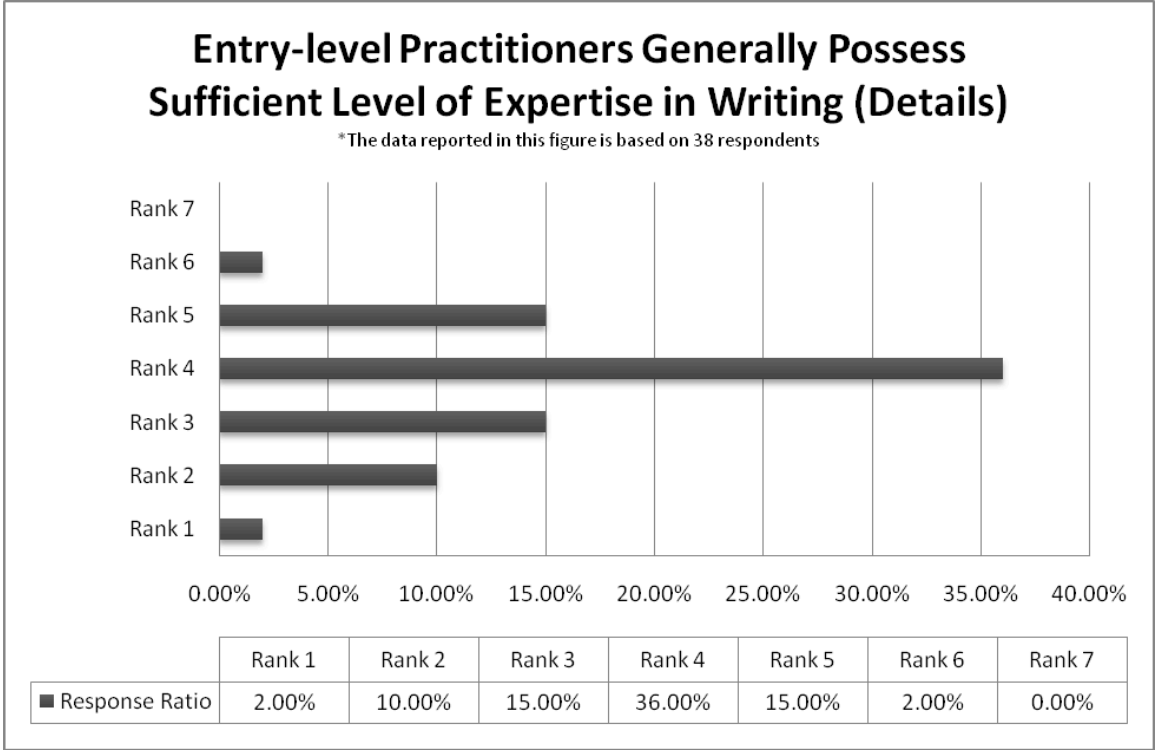


In response to the statement that entry-level practitioners generally possess a sufficient level of expertise in writing, respondents reported an average score of 3.4 out of a possible seven.



In response to the statement that entry-level practitioners generally possess a sufficient level of expertise in writing, the detailed results reported the following.

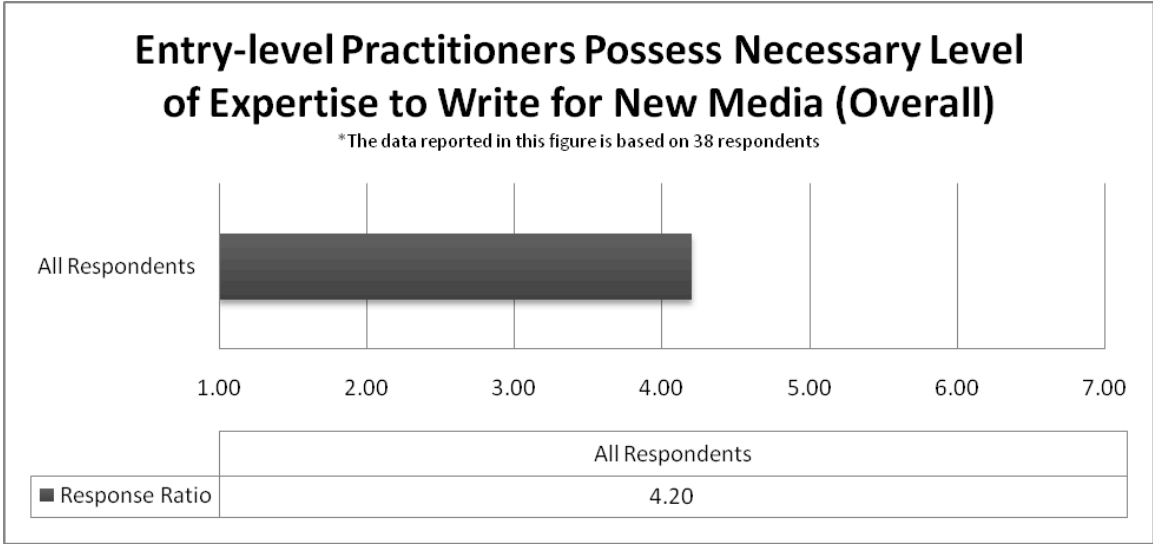
*Figure 8.1: Entry-level Practitioners Generally Possess Sufficient Level of Expertise in Writing (Details)*



The results showed that zero percent of respondents “strongly agree” with the statement that entry-level practitioners generally possess a sufficient level of expertise in writing. Rank 4 drew the most responses with 36 percent of respondents.

The following data resulted from a statement provided to respondents with the opportunity to rank it on a scale from one to seven. The number one represented “Strongly Disagree” and the number seven represented “Strongly Agree.” In response to the statement that entry-level practitioners possess a necessary level of writing skills to write for new media, the results showed the following.

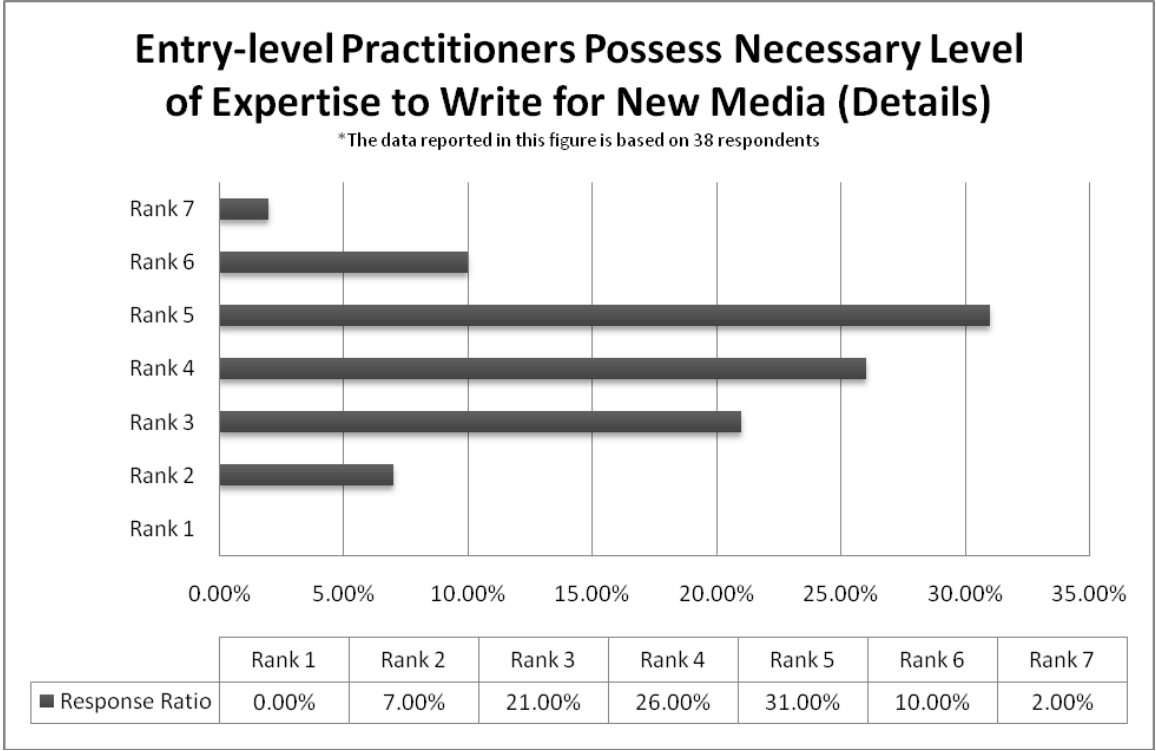
*Figure 9: Entry-level Practitioners Possess Necessary Level of Writing Skills to Write for New Media (Overall)*



On a scale of one to seven, respondents ranked the statement that entry-level practitioners possess a necessary level of expertise to write for new media at an average 4.2.

In response to the statement that entry-level practitioners possess a necessary level of expertise to write for new media, the detailed results showed the following.

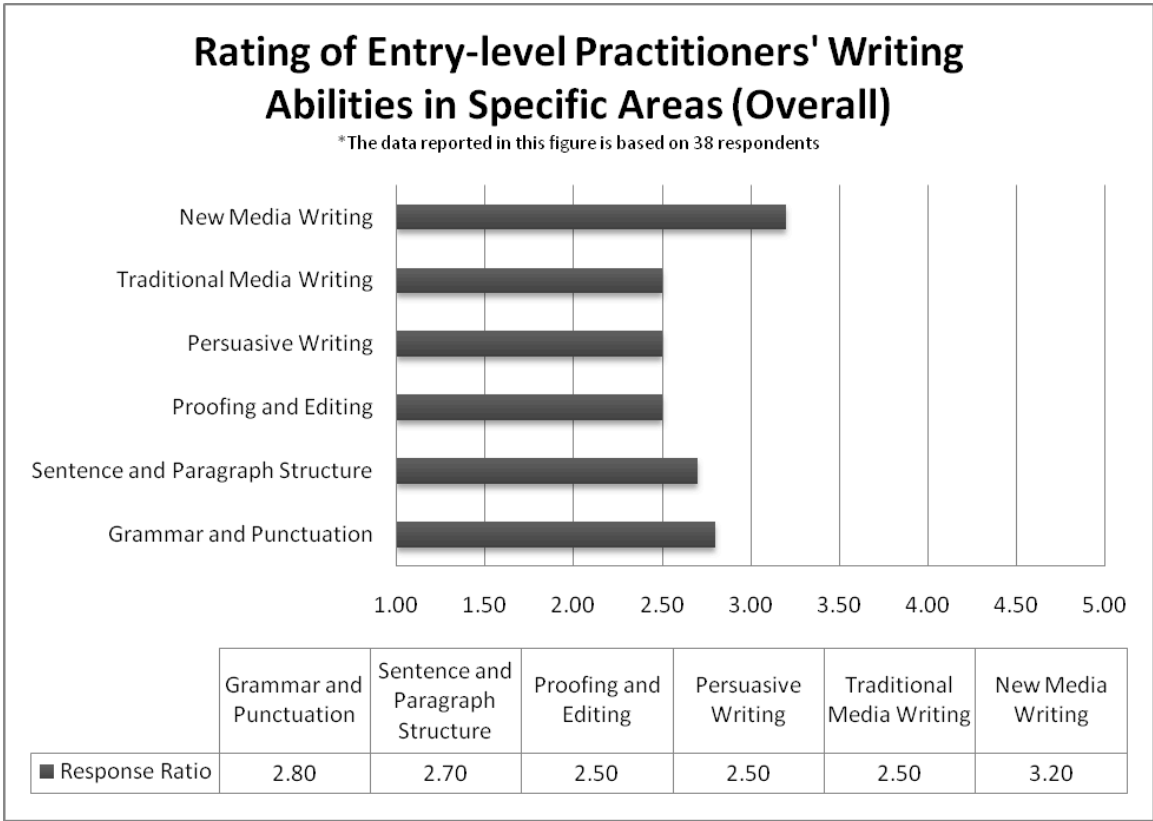
*Figure 9.1: Entry-level Practitioners Possess Necessary Level of Writing Skills to Write for New Media (Details)*



Respondents reported that 0 percent “strongly disagreed” with the statement that entry-level practitioners possess a necessary level of expertise to write for new media. Rank 4 and rank 5 drew the most responses with 26 percent and 31 percent of respondents.

Respondents were asked to rank on a scale of one to five, the writing abilities of entry-level practitioners in specific areas with 1 as “Poor,” 2 as “Below Average,” 3 as “Average,” 4 as “Above Average,” and 5 as “Strong.” Overall, the results showed the following.

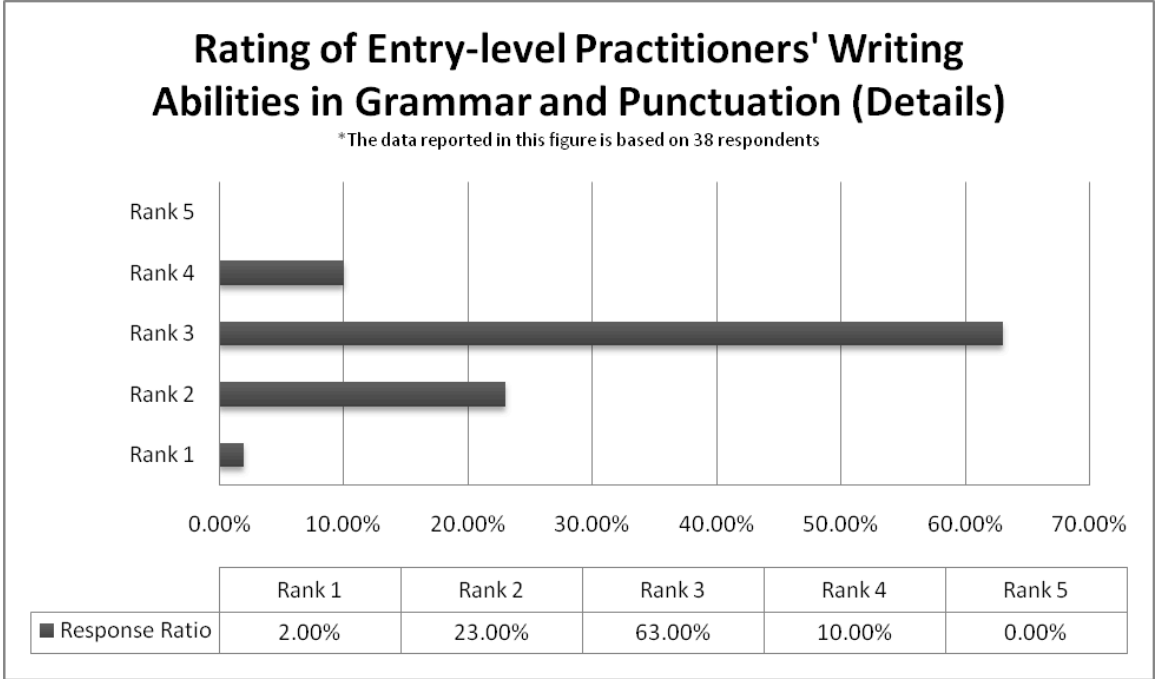
*Figure 10: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners’ Writing Abilities in Specific Areas (Overall)*



Respondents rated the writing abilities of entry-level practitioners the highest overall score in new media writing at 3.2. In traditional media writing, persuasive writing, and proofing and editing respondents rated entry-level practitioners’ abilities at an average of 2.5 “Between Average” and “Below Average.” Overall, the respondents did not rate entry-level practitioners as “Above Average” in any of the five areas.

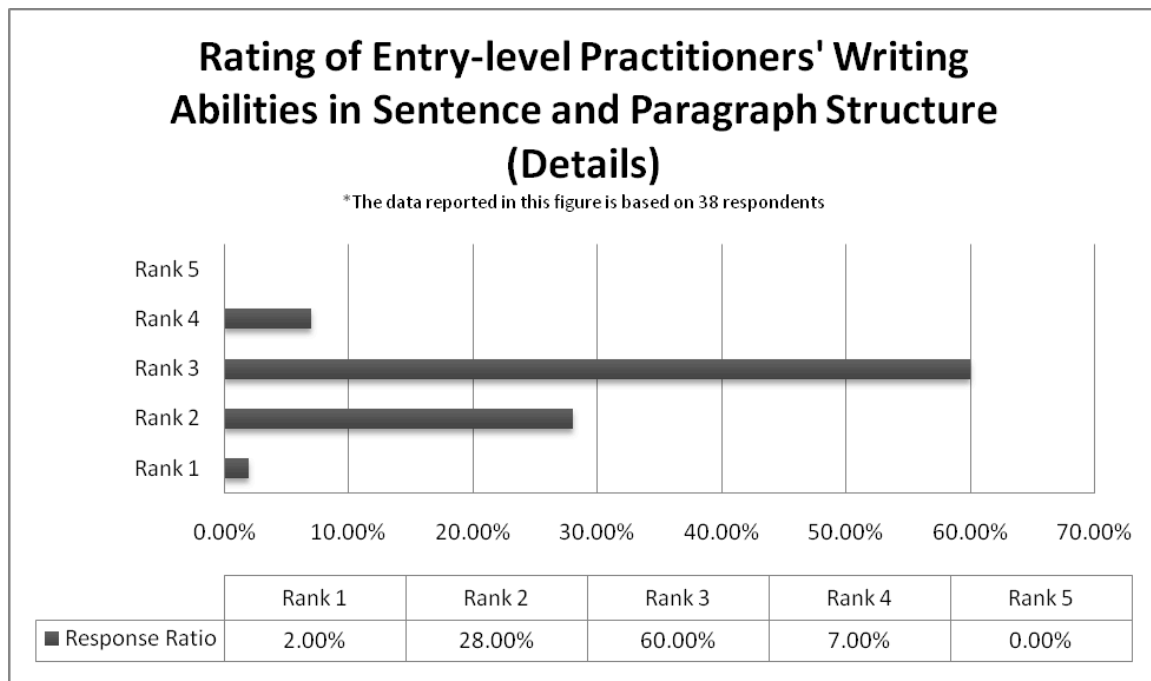
In response to entry-level practitioners' writing abilities in grammar and punctuation, the results showed the following.

*Figure 10.1: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities in Grammar and Punctuation (Details)*



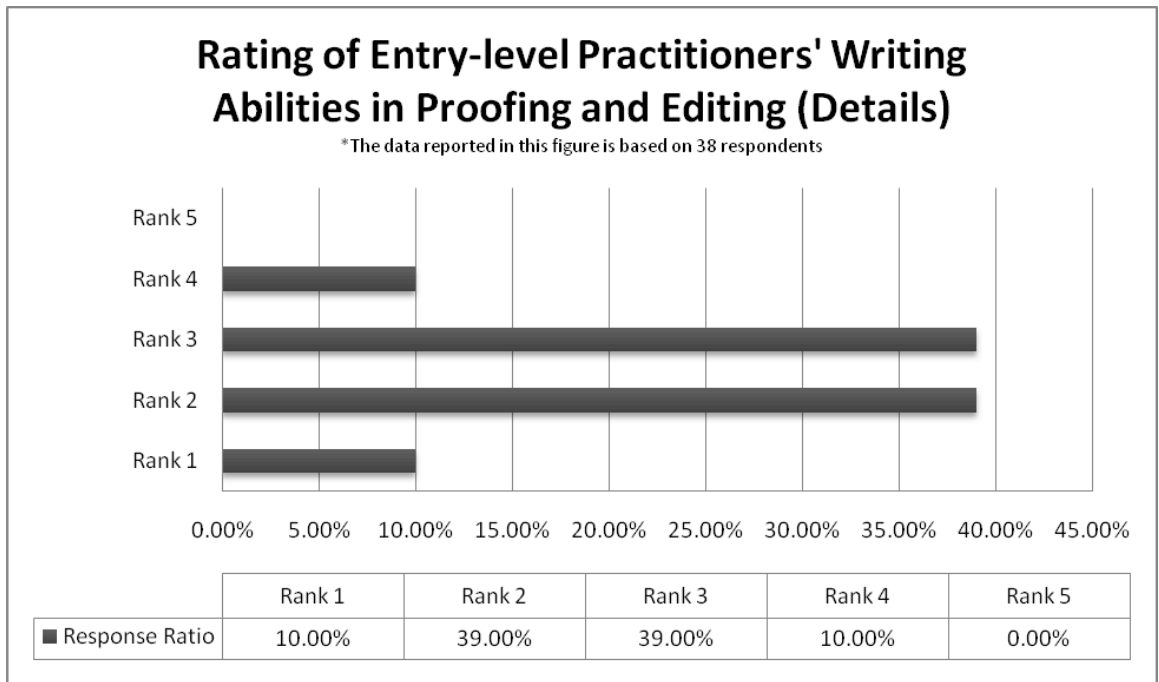
Rank 3 “Average” drew the most respondents with 63 percent. No respondents selected rank 5 “Above Average.”

Figure 10.2: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities in Sentence and Paragraph Structure (Details)



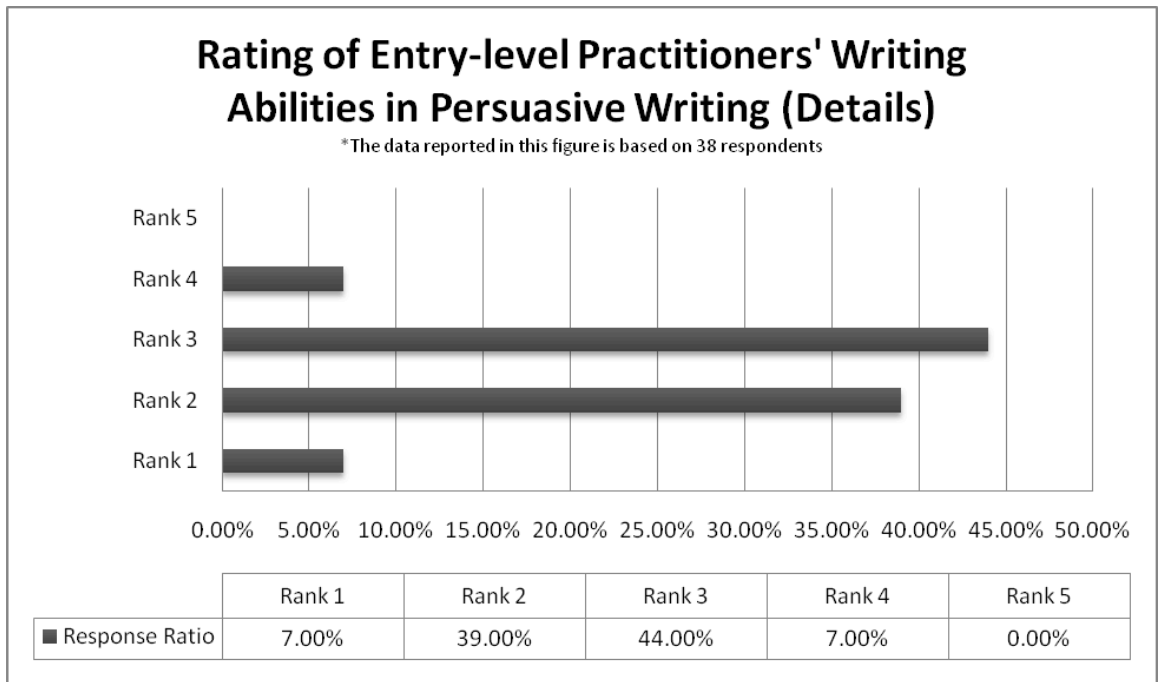
Rank 3 “Average” drew the most respondents with 60 percent. No respondents selected rank 5 “Above Average.”

Figure 10.3: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities in Proofing and Editing  
(Details)



Ranks 2 and 3 “Below Average” and “Average” drew the most respondents with 39 percent each. No respondents selected rank 5 “Above Average.”

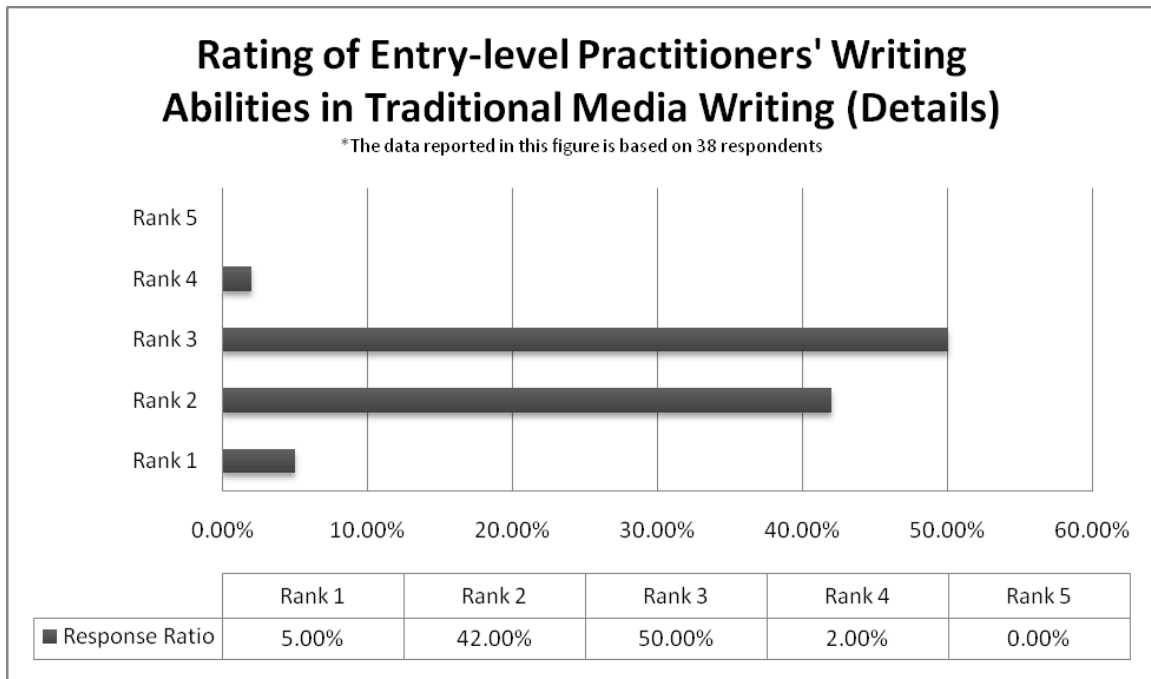
Figure 10.4: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities in Persuasive Writing  
(Details)



Rank 3 “Average” drew the most respondents with 44 percent. Rank 1 “Poor” and rank 4 “Above Average” showed an equal 7 percent. No respondents selected rank 5 “Above Average.”

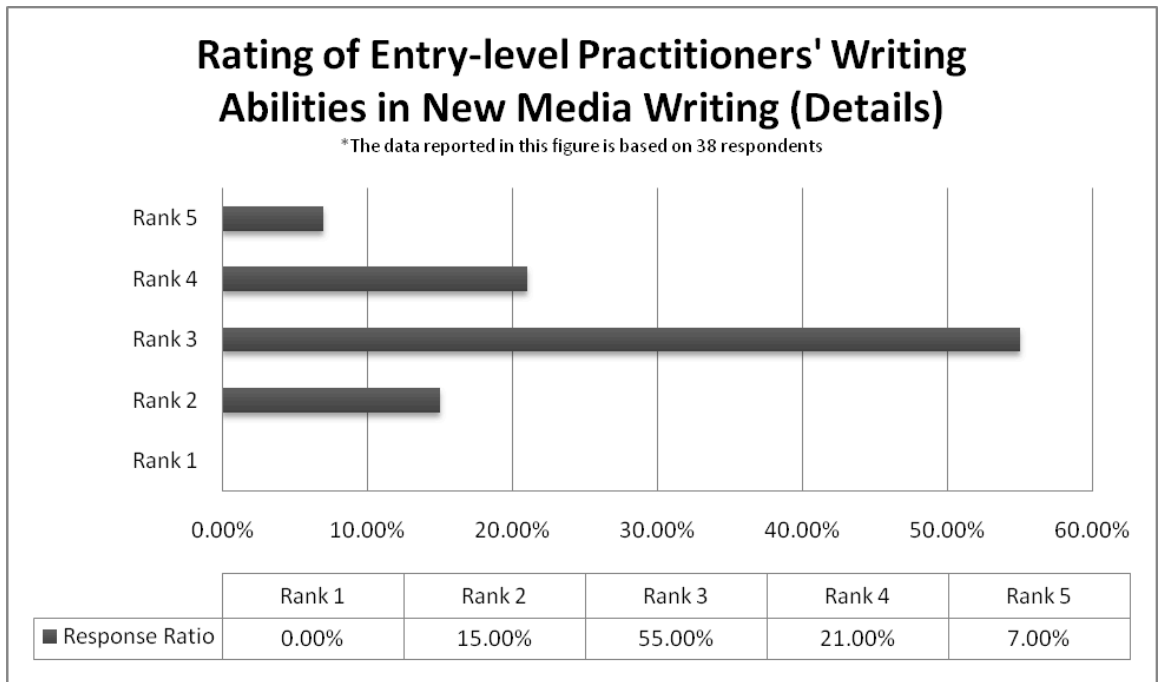


Figure 10.5: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners' Writing Abilities in Traditional Media Writing (Details)



Rank 3 “Average” drew the most respondents with 50 percent. Rank 2 “Below Average” reported 42 percent of respondents. No respondents selected rank 5 “Above Average.”

Figure 10.6: Rating of Entry-level Practitioners Writing Abilities in New Media Writing  
(Details)



Rank 3 “Average” drew the most respondents with 55 percent. Rank 5 “Strong” showed 7 percent of respondents and rank 4 “Above Average” showed 21 percent. No respondents selected rank 1 “Poor” and only 15 percent of respondents selected rank 2 “Below Average.”

## 4.2 Telephone Interview Results

The researcher conducted eight telephone interviews with professors in public relations programs at colleges and universities across the U.S. to ascertain if their program curriculums foster development of the writing skills currently demanded in the profession. The colleges or universities were selected from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) list of accredited institutions. Two colleges and universities with programs in public relations were selected from each of the four regions in the country for a total of eight institutions. The respondents were asked questions specific to their program and perspective in six general areas including: (1) preparing students to be successful writers in the profession, (2) faculty involvement in the industry, (3) curriculum developments in response to new media, (4) perception of students' writing abilities and limitations faculty face, (5) other industry demands currently affecting the program, and (6) future projections for the public relations field.

### *Preparing Students to be Successful Writers in the Profession*

Concerning the topic of preparation, respondents were asked how the program prepares its students for success in the profession, specifically regarding the development of writing skills.

Participant one reported the program's public relations program option as writing intensive. One course focused on writing is called public relations writing and design. All of the other courses provide writing experience. The program also requires basic writing courses in mass media before students enter the writing intensive option. The respondent reported that at least 50 percent of the curriculum emphasizes writing abilities.

Participant two reported that the program requires students to take four core communication courses before being accepted to the program. According to respondent, one of these four courses is media writing, where students are introduced to public relations and journalism writing for one year. After completing the core courses, the first course students take is not designated as writing intensive, but the projects are based on writing for service learning. As students move on they must take another course for 15 weeks, which requires them to complete writing projects with the constraints of tight deadline. Finally, respondent reported that all majors take a capstone course that is writing intensive and nearly all students complete an internship.

"We try to give our students a real world hands-on experience so that they end up with a strong portfolio. We offer several other public relations and advertising courses, some of which are writing intensive, but all have a writing component," said participant two.

Participant three reported that in order to prepare students for success the institution keeps a steady interaction with field professionals to maintain a constant understanding of the demands. According to the respondent, the need for good writing has not and will not go away. Social media, if anything, enhances the need for good writing. Recently, the respondent reported the program had its writing curriculum reviewed and revised by field professionals. Students have to take many courses that require them to write. Participant three reported that the program also requires public relations students to spend a semester writing for the school's newspaper.

Participant four reported that the program's entry-level courses as requiring a lot of writing. According to the respondent, during the previous semester the program revamped a course focused on writing for advertising and public relations. The program also offers other courses that focus on writing proposals and teaching new multimedia skills. Overall, the writing courses incorporate all platforms.

Participant five reported that writing is a hallmark of the institution's program and it is a key part of every class. The program requires students to complete three writing courses. One course has recently changed to include multimedia, the second is in reporting, and the third is focused on public relations writing. The program also attempts to address persuasive writing skills well beyond media relations.

Participant six reported that the program is currently making a special effort to incorporate more writing fundamentals in each of the public relations courses. The major at this institution requires a journalism-heavy writing pre-requisite course before students enter the program. Each of the public relations courses increasingly includes writing fundamentals in the syllabus.

Participant seven reported that all public relations majors in the program must take several journalism writing courses. All the public relations students are trained in Associated Press (AP) style at this institution. In addition to journalism writing, students must take a public relations writing course that focuses on traditional writing. At the same time or after, students are introduced to writing for electronic mediums through an emerging media course where they are required to launch and maintain social networking sites and blogs.

Participant eight reported that the public relations program offers a lot of writing courses. In total, the program requires students to take five core courses, three of which are heavy in writing.

### *Faculty Involvement in the Industry*

On the topic of programs' faculty involvement in the public relations industry, respondents were asked to describe the faculty's current involvement in the field and how faculty members stay current with new trends in the industry.

Participant one reported that the program's faculty is very involved in the public relations field. They serve leadership roles in PRSA, PRSSA and ACEJMC. The respondent described the faculty as having significant years of experience in the professional field in addition to currently being involved in several academic organizations.

Participant two reported that personally the participant and other faculty members served on the national board of PRSA. To keep current with the industry demands the program requires on-going meetings with professionals in an effort to establish senior portfolio writing. The majority of the faculty professors are part-time adjuncts, most of which currently work full-time in the field, with the exception of a few full-time professors who may still consult on the side.

Participant three reported having several adjunct professors who are currently working in the field. All the program's full-time professors have extensive professional backgrounds and significant credentials, according to the respondent.

Participant four reported that the program's faculty consists of mostly full-time professors that came out of the private sector and bring with them significant industry experience. To stay current the faculty has affiliations with PRSA and other professional associations. Participant four also reported that the faculty also does a significant amount of reading, including professional, scholarly and trade journals. In addition, faculty members serve as an advisory council in a PRSA sequence.

Participant five reported that the program's faculty is a combination of full-time and adjunct professors currently working in the field. The respondent reported that the program has ten full-time faculty members who have a strong blend of professional and academic backgrounds. The faculty is heavily involved research and has a small group of adjunct professors who are currently involved in the field. To stay current with industry trends participant five reported that the faculty attends several academic meetings, professional advancement meetings, and other seminars. In addition, the program brings in public relations professionals to participate in advisory councils.

Participant six reported having four full-time faculty members for 225 students. In addition, the program has several adjunct professors who are all working professionals in the field. The respondent reported that the full-time faculty regularly contracts freelance consulting positions. The faculty frequently attends conferences to stay current with industry trends. The program also brings in people from the outside professional world into its classrooms to stage various work-related workshops and programs.

“We make it our business to bring in industry professionals to take a look at our curriculum and advise us in determining the needs of the business community,” said participant six.

Participant seven reported the institution's program consists of all full-time professors with the exception of one adjunct professor who maintains ownership of a public relations consulting firm. The full-time faculty members participate in occasional freelance consulting work. Technically, respondent reported the institution has 2.5 faculty members devoted to the public relations program. The faculty stays current with new trends in the industry by actively engaging in research. Participant seven described researchers as becoming part of trend by understanding the trend, defining the trend and setting the trend. The faculty works on civic engagement projects with students to provide public relations help to non-profit organizations within the community. They are also active in state and PRSA professional organizations to maintain sharp skills.

Participant eight reported the program having three professors, including the participant, who are dedicated to the public relations program. The respondent is currently consulting in the field; one professor does not consult or work in the field at all; and the third associate professor remains current by actively running a small consulting firm. All the professors keep up with new industry trends by reading articles and attending conferences, such as PRSA's annual conference. However, the respondent reported having to deal with significant budget issues. In the future, the respondent is uncertain whether or not the program will be able to afford the cost of annual conferences.



### *Curriculum Developments in Response to New Media*

In response to the topic related to curriculum changes as a result of the demand for skills in new media, respondents were asked if the program has adapted to include courses in new media and if so, how the program's curriculum has been changed.

Participant one reported that the program's curriculum has been recently updated to work with new media. According to respondent, the program offers several special topics, which offer 1-credit/1-hour courses devoted to new media and social media writing. No matter what the medium, good writing is good writing respondent stated. But, instruction must happen to familiarize students with the platform. The respondent reported that the program's goal is to prepare students to have basic writing skills that they can effectively apply across all mediums.

Participant two reported that in the last academic year the program revised a course that was an elective to a course that includes writing for the Web. Several communication courses the program offers now include writing projects for social media. Participant two described the program's plan to add more ways to incorporate social media in to writing assignments in other courses. In one of the courses, students work with a non-profit client where they are involved in writing for social media as part of their communication plan.

In spite of these developments, participant two described the use of new media by saying, "We absolutely understand the importance of new media social networks, but, it is a tactic, and tactics change over time. Students must understand that this tactic will change over time and our program emphasizes that students understand the strategy behind the tactics."

Participant three reported changes in the program's curriculum to include the use of new media tools. However, the program's faculty recognizes that the skills that do not change or go away, such as research, planning and strategy, are the fundamentals of effective public relations. Participant three reported that research, planning and strategy have become even more important with the addition of new media. The program's overall approach is to build students' writing abilities on several fronts. Across the board, many of the courses focus heavily on the development of general writing skills.

Participant four reported that the program's entire curriculum is helpful in developing writing skills. The respondent reported courses always focus on writing skills and presentation skills no matter what the area of study. The respondent reported changing industry demands have a significant effect on the program. Social media is now a big part of the faculty's vocabulary and as a result of the demand, the curriculum offers a selection of courses designed in social media and persuasion.

Participant five reported the program is currently in the process of a full undergraduate program review. Recently, the department made revisions to the curriculum in response to new media. Furthermore, all students will now be taking a 1-credit add on course to reporting, which focuses on multimedia reporting. Also, all students must adhere to university-wide technology requirement, which help to them to develop and generate content across different mediums. "We haven't developed any new courses but have weaved social media into various public relations module courses and writing courses," said participant five."

Participant six responded to the topic of the program's curriculum by reporting that only a limited amount of the curriculum is focused on developing students' writing abilities. However, according to participant six, the faculty does not overlook bad writing. They incorporate writing fundamentals across all of the courses and take the time to go over common mistakes and address basic problems. In response to new media, participant six described the program's current curriculum changes that incorporate new media tools. This fall the program is offering a new course called *PR Tools*, which teaches various communication tactics.

"Today, public relations practitioners need to be their own publishers across various mediums. They need to be able to handle desktop publishing, web design, social media tools, photos, video and audio. Many students have learned how to use social media for their own personal use but they need to understand how to use these tools for professional use," said participant six.

Participant seven reported that new media has not caused the program to make any recent changes to the curriculum. The program has offered a new media course since the beginning of its development in the industry. The respondent reported the program's goal is to emphasize essential skills. Identifying writing as an essential skill that applies across all mediums, practitioners' ability to write effectively is absolutely critical.

Participant eight reported having a new media course that all students are required to take. However, the respondent indicated that they find students to be pretty savvy about the technology. In addition, the program requires all students to do electronic portfolios rather than hand-held.

### *Perception of Students' Writing Abilities and Limitations Faculty Face*

Concerning the perception of students' writing abilities, respondents were asked to identify areas of deficiency and to address limitations that faculty face in developing addressing these writing issues.

Participant one reported that students entering the program have fair writing abilities. The faculty would love for them to have better writing skills, but often that is not the case. Overall, respondents felt students lack the basic understanding of grammar rules, as well as sentence and paragraph structure. The main challenge faculty face in developing students' writing abilities is time. According to participant one, writing takes time to teach and time to practice. The respondent reported that sometimes there are 30 students in each class and the professor must find time to address the individual writing problems. The faculty must cover writing and other areas of study as well. There needs to a balance in the curriculum between writing emphasis and emphasis on other areas.

Participant two reported that the perception of students' writing skills coming in to the program as unknown stating that the skill level tends to vary. Participant two reports that problem areas across the board include errors in spelling and punctuation. Many students are missing basic understandings of singular and possessive forms, as well as basic grammar rules, participant two said. However, language usage and larger errors do not seem to be as problematic. According to participant two, the program is looking into screening applicants but has not done that yet. Over the past 8 years students' writing abilities have not gotten worse. The challenges faculty face is lack of time and lack of faculty. The program continually faces difficult budget constraints, but mostly has to deal with a lack of time. Once the students get into the program the time the faculty has to

address problems is limited according to participant two. In classes where content evaluation is important, the time available to correct simple mistakes, such as spelling, takes away from the courses' productivity.

“Freshmen composition courses are not sufficient in preparing students for our program requirements. This fall we are implementing a freshmen composition course that is geared toward communication majors to address elementary mistakes. We are hoping that this course will provide writing help to students across all communication majors,” said participant two.

Participant three reported that across the board students entering the program lack an understanding of writing fundamentals but are familiar with writing for public relations. Prior to acceptance, the program requires students to take a public relations case study course and a news writing course. The challenges faculty face in developing students' writing skills are a balance of time for professors to devote to one-on-one mentorship said participant three. The respondent reported that the best writing comes from one-on-one sessions between the professor and the student to address individual concerns.

Participant four reported that the perceptions of students' writing skills upon entering the program are poor. Students are missing a lot of basic and persuasive writing skills. Because the program is in an accredited institution, the skills of students entering the school are frequently measured said participant four. Students are required to pass a test in order to be accepted in to the program. The respondent reported that during the first round, usually only around 40 percent pass the entrance exam. Students can take it up to

three times and the program provides training and remediation to students who must retake it.

Participant five reported that students' writing skills are varied. The program has some good writers and some with more advanced skills. The poor writers are missing basic mechanics like grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. Spelling is also a problem said participant five. The respondent reported that students do not understand basic communication tactics. The faculty faces challenges of working with various students with different levels of abilities. Also, some of the class sizes are quite large with around 20 students per class. This limits the time the faculty has to individually address each student. Furthermore, participant five reported that with various different new tactics to teach the amount of content to address in a course exceeds class time.

Participant six reported that the specific problems students lack are an understating of basic writing fundamentals such as punctuation and grammar. Participant six said the program sees a fair percentage of students who cannot seem to grasp basic rules. Simple sentence structure is another problem. Students do not know how to craft a basic sentence and tend to write run on sentences. They also mismatch past and present tense. However, respondent reported that it is not most students that have these problems. "I would guess its maybe only 20 percent that have severe problems and are in need of tremendous writing help. At least half of our students are good writers," said participant six.

Furthermore, the respondent reported that for the program's faculty, time is the biggest limitation to address writing concerns. The basic fundamentals should have been tackled years before the students ever got to college. The program has a significant amount of content to get through and cannot spend more than 10 percent of classroom time on writing.

Participant seven reported the perception of students' writing abilities is pretty good. According to participant seven, the program is by application only and requires an essay that is weighed heavily in the selection process. Essentially, if an applicant writes a poor essay they will not be accepted in to the program. However, participant seven said that across the board faculty members see problems in students' abilities in basic grammar rules, agreement issues, brevity and simple paragraph structure. One challenge faculty faces is getting students to overcome the bad habits students seem to develop through casual writing, such as text messaging. The students are not making the transition from that casual interaction to a more professional interaction.

Participant eight reported that professors' perception of writing abilities of students entering the program is terrible. The program's professors emphasize to students the importance of editing, AP style, actually reading their work and not to rely on spell check. The respondent reported that previously the school accepted the majority of students who apply. Grades K-12 education is where students should learn the fundamentals of writing but often that is not the case. Now, the school has increased its requirements for acceptance and as a result the respondent indicated that students have better writing skills. The respondent identified students' constant texting and communication on Facebook has greatly impacted their abilities to write formally.

### *Other Industry Demands Currently Affecting the Program*

In addition to industry demands for skills in new media, participants were asked to identify other industry demands that may have an effect on the program's curriculum.

Participant one described the program's need to keep the curriculum current to reflect and keep current with skills the industry requires. The program's faculty tries to stay aware of what the world of public relations demands of entry-level practitioners to best prepare them to be successful and competitive. In response to industry demands participant one said the program is currently developing the curriculum to equip students with good design skills. The respondent reported that students must understand that effective written messages must include a comprehensive understanding of good design.

Participant two reported that in response to other industry demands the program's curriculum continues to emphasize strategy. "The industry has shown an increasing emphasis on the bottom line. You cannot do that through tactics. We're pushing our program toward more strategy, evaluation and measurement for accountability," said participant two.

Participant three reported that the program continues to keep a strong focus on writing because the industry demands it.

Participant four reported that other demands in the industry that the program is focusing on is getting students to become comfortable with working in a business setting. The faculty spends a significant amount of time in the curriculum developing their abilities in production according to participant four. Also, the program focuses time on developing students' interview skills to prepare them for the professional world.



Participant five reported other demands in the industry that consistently come up that the program is attempting to address are trends in globalization and the importance of ethics and professional responsibility. Three common themes that run across program's curriculum are technology, globalization and ethics. These are priorities in the profession that the program tries to emphasize to students in every course reports participant five.

Participant six reported that all aspects of the Internet have changed public relations. The development of the Internet requires public relations practitioners to be skilled in many mediums.

Participant seven reported the ability to think faster is a trend that is currently becoming required of practitioners. In an electronic world, things happened at a much faster rate. Rather than having a week to develop a message and execute a tactic, now practitioners may only have hours said participant seven.

“The ability to think and communicate quickly is an essential skill and we must help push students to hone these skills before finishing the program. We try to make certain there are dimensions of new media that creep into other courses not just our emerging media course to help students work quickly with these communication tools,” said participant seven.

Participant eight reported that a lot of programs are still teaching traditional media even though the job market is different now. “We are trying to incorporate a good amount of new media. We are trying to prepare students for a world that is changing,” said participant eight. Also, the respondent indicated that in the program's geographic location the job market is very poor and the majority of students will have to do multiple

internships before getting an entry-level job. The respondent reported that local employers seem to be taking advantage of new graduates.

### *Future Projections for the Public Relations Field*

Participants were asked to provide their perspective on the direction they see the public relations field going in order to identify key areas that practitioners may need to adapt to.

Participant one reported that the future of public relations seems to be focused on globalization. The respondent reported that students and practitioners must understand that the field of public relations is not limited to the U.S. In response, the program is currently adapting course curriculum to expose students to the globalization and internationalization of public relations.

Participant two reported an increasing focus on measurement. According to the respondent, PRSA is currently trying to get many firms on board with measurement. The trend focuses on more evaluation and more measurement. The respondent sees it as a healthy trend for the industry and as a distinction that will set journalists aside from becoming public relations people without understanding the principles. Also, with rapid changes in the field, the public relations function is constantly being revolutionized and practitioners must respond very quickly, specifically during a crisis. The respondent also reported another future demand to recruit a more diverse group of public relations practitioners in order to more accurately reflect the U.S. population.

Participant three reported that the public relations field is currently changing towards a focus on strategic planning. The respondent also reported measurement and evaluation as becoming high demands from management executives. Today, public relations practitioners must have an understanding of the corporate culture, said participant three.

Participant four reported that the field of public relations has recently undergone significant changes. The respondent identified that it used to be a larger component of the corporate structure but now it seems to be more part of the marketing function. Furthermore, large corporations seem to contract public relations work out rather than have an internal team handle it, added participant four.

Participant five reported that the field of public relations has a lot greater demand for digital communication, social media, and technology. There is also an increasing need for research and strategic planning. The respondent added that future practitioners must have the ability to demonstrate effective techniques of strategic communication. Now, with globalization at the forefront there is much more demand to engage with a wider demand of stakeholders. Also, there is a greater need for practitioners to counsel management personnel on a wide-range of issues, said participant five.

Participant six reported that the industry has a need for more and more sole practitioners to work on contractual basis. Moving forward we will see more small organizations using freelancers who can provide public relations services on a very low budget, said participant six. Corporations, small businesses and non-profit organizations have limited budgets but they recognize the need for public relations services. Also,

practitioners are having less specialization, as more skills are demanded from them, the respondent added.

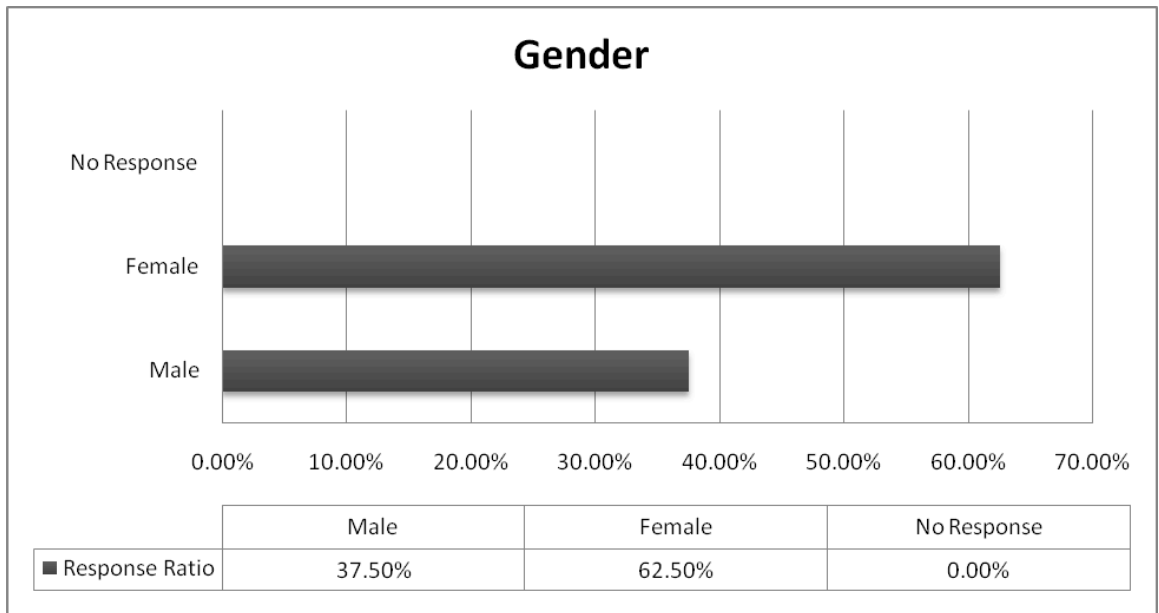
Participant seven reported that looking toward the future of the profession, there is an added level of excitement and challenge. According to participant seven, strategy is taking a bigger part of center stage in public relations. It is not just tactics but more importantly the strategy behind the tactic. A poorly strategized tactic can be beautifully executed but will be ineffective and a waste of time.

Participant eight did not elaborate on the future of the profession but reported that the field is quickly moving toward new media. The respondent reported that traditional media is not dead but now, there are many more ways to reach people and to reach audiences.

*Demographics*

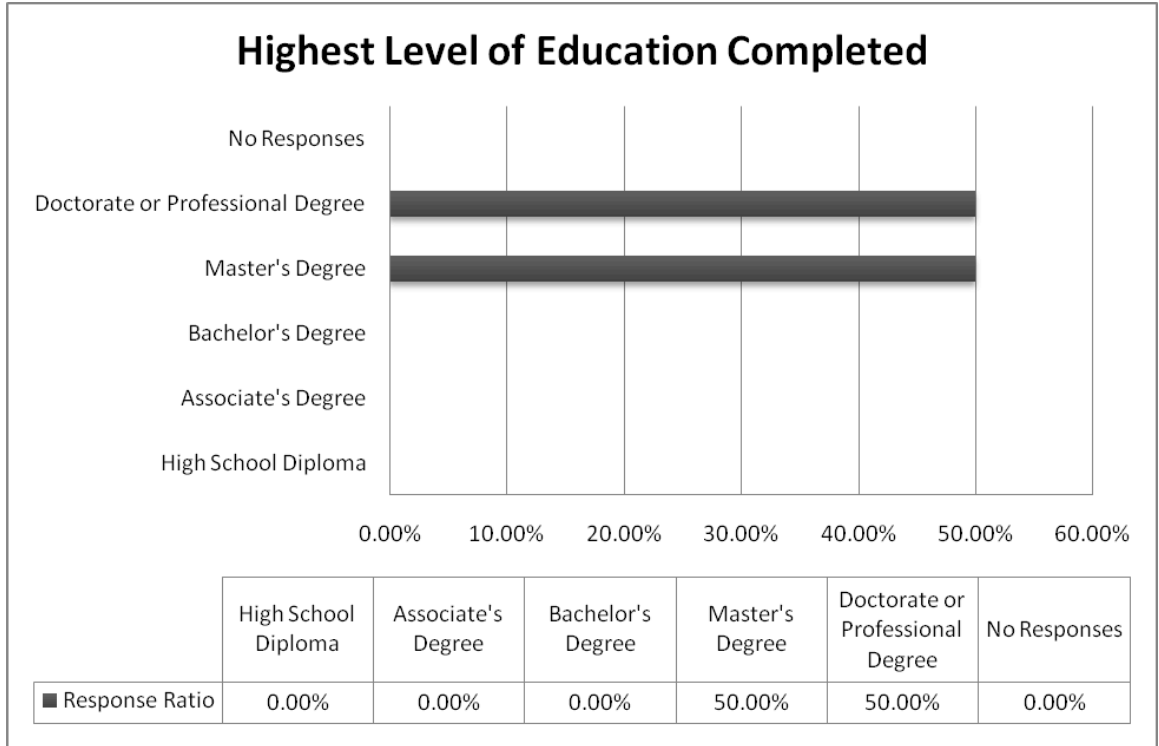
After the interviews were concluded the respondents were asked a series of demographic questions reported in the following data.

*Figure 11: Gender*



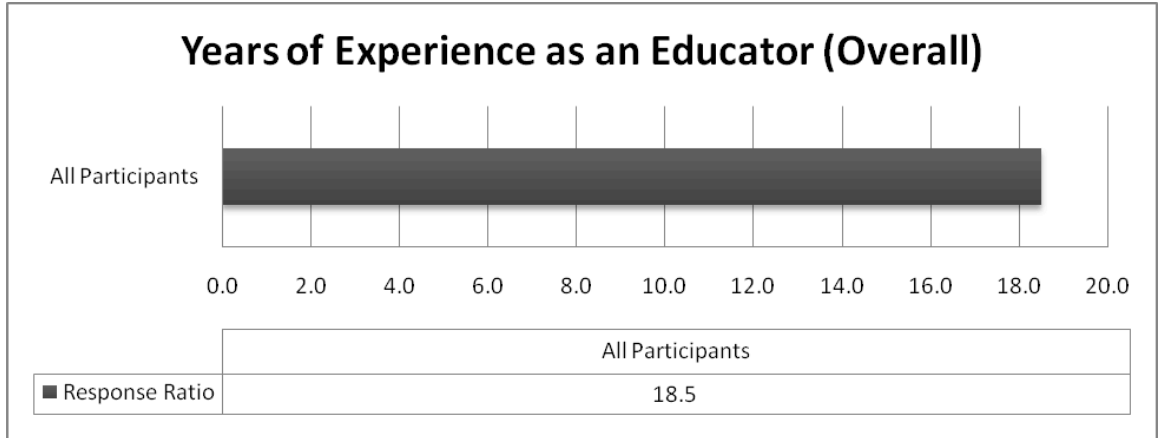
Female respondents reported greater numbers than male respondents with 62.5 percent female and 37.5 percent male.

Figure 12: Highest Level of Education Completed



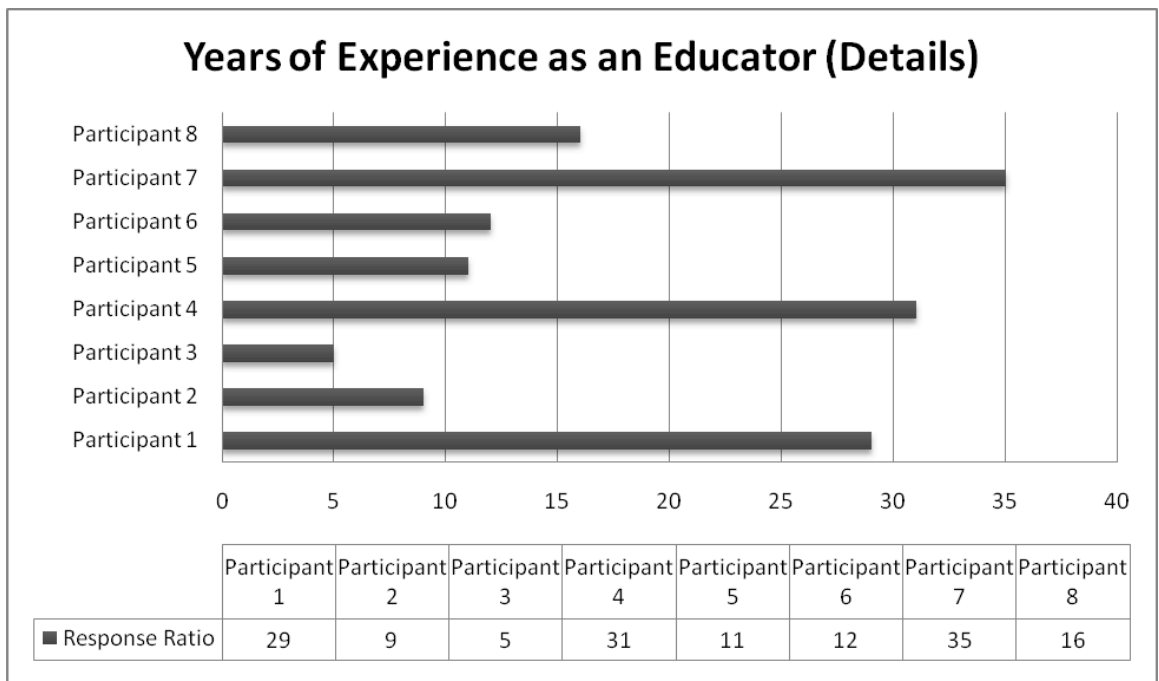
Out of eight respondents, four have earned master’s degrees and four have earned doctorate or professional degrees resulting in an equal percentage.

Figure 13: Years of Experience as an Educator (Overall)



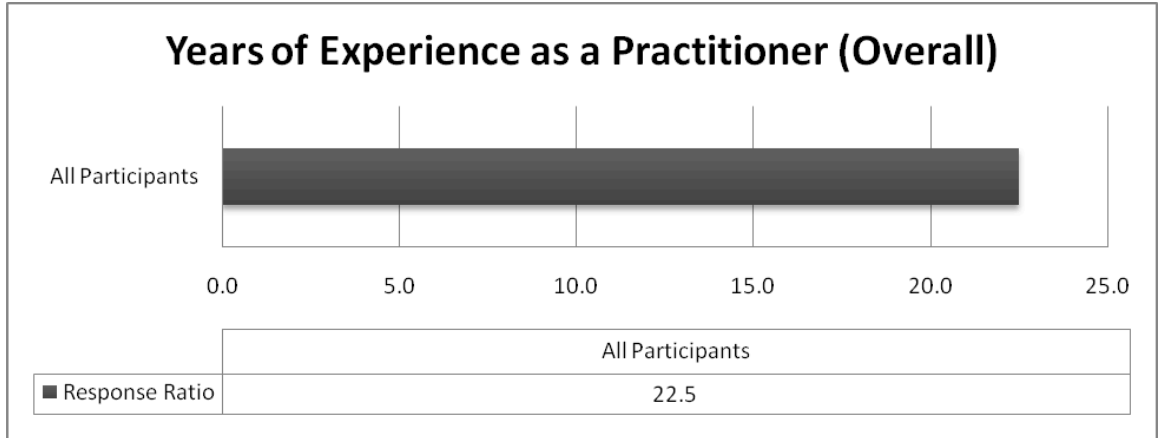
The eight respondents reported an average of 18.5 years of experience.

Figure 13.1: Years of Experience as an Educator (Details)



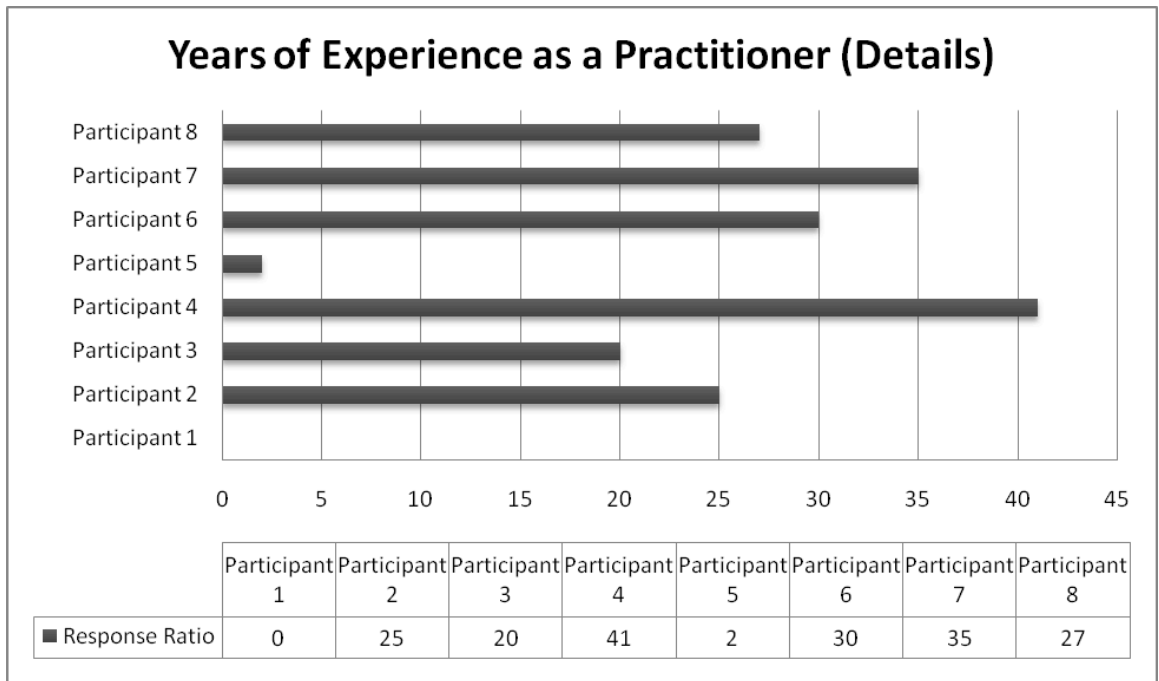
Among respondents, the greatest years of experience as an educator showed 35 years and the least years of experience as an educator showed five years.

Figure 14: Years of Experience as a Practitioner (Overall)



The eight respondents reported an average of 22.5 years of experience.

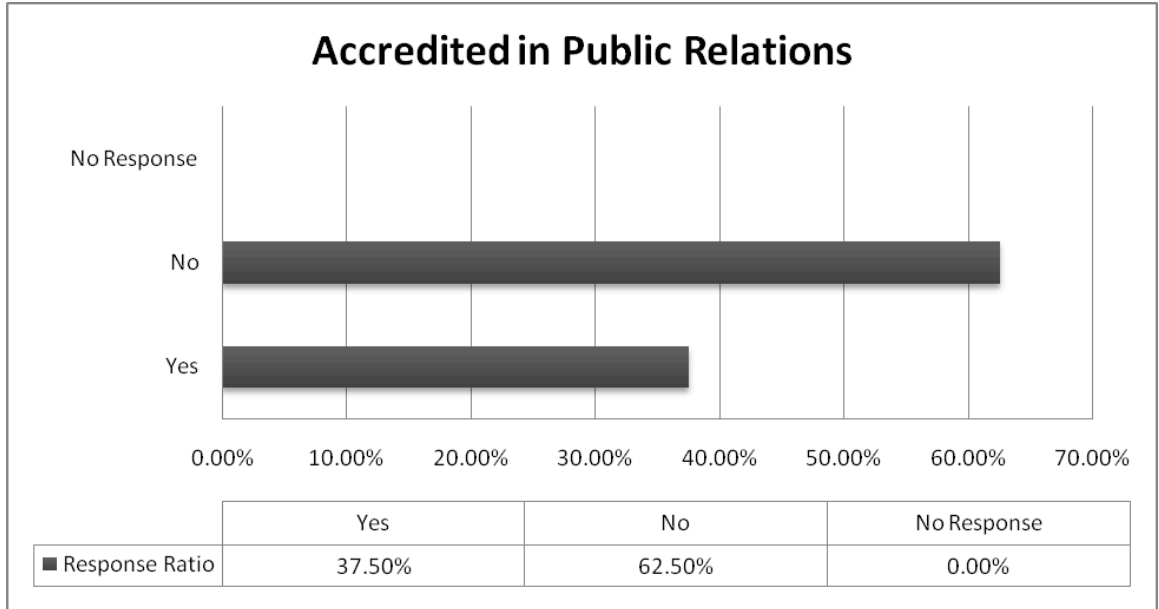
Figure 14.1: Years of Experience as a Practitioner (Details)



Among participants, the greatest years of experience as a practitioner showed 41 years and the least years of experience as an educator showed zero years.



Figure 16: Accredited in Public Relations



The number of respondents who reported being Accredited in Public Relations (APR) was 37.5 percent compared to 62.5 who reported not having accreditation status.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### **5.1 Summary**

In the practice of public relations, professionals must possess essential communication skills in order to achieve success. Colleges and universities with public relations programs aim to educate students about the profession and prepare them with the skills necessary to achieve success. Upon entering the workforce, entry-level practitioners must be skilled in public speaking, interpersonal and group communication, writing, research methodologies, and planning. Writing is one of the most marketable and required skills for public relations practitioners. However, deficiencies in entry-level practitioners have been long documented.

The recent development of new media as a communication tool has greatly impacted the practice of public relations. New media has drastically changed the communication landscape by enabling organizations to strategically communicate with employees, customers, stockholders, communities, governments, and other stakeholders. As the use of new media continues to develop, and prove new media be effective communication tools in the practice of public relations, the industry demand for skilled writers will grow.

The documented deficiencies in the writing abilities of entry-level public relations practitioners, combined with the development of new media as communication tools, prompted the author to conduct a research study evaluating current perceptions, demands, and resulting actions from both the professional's and educator's point-of-view. The

researcher conducted both quantitative and qualitative research studies to collect measurable and descriptive data. The researcher distributed 200 Web-based surveys to public relations practitioners in management-level positions who are all current members of PRSA. The Web-based survey yielded 40 respondents resulting in a 20 percent response rate. The researcher also conducted eight telephone interviews with professors in public relations programs at colleges and universities across the U.S. The colleges or universities were selected from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) list of accredited institutions, and two programs were selected from each of the four regions in the country for a total of eight institutions.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

Original research in the form of Web-based surveys showed all of those surveyed used new media technologies. The data showed 90 percent of respondents (n=40) reported that the organizations they are currently in management-level positions at are using new media as communication tools. Among the respondents using new media, 92.5 percent are using Web sites; 85 percent are using Facebook; 80 percent are using Twitter; and 7.5 percent did not respond.

Overall, Web-based survey respondents reported that entry-level public relations practitioners generally possess a sufficient, or average, level of expertise in writing. The data showed that management-level practitioners scored entry-level practitioners' level of expertise in writing at a 3.4 out of a possible seven. Respondents reported "average" rankings in grammar and punctuation, sentence and paragraph structure, persuasive

writing skills, traditional media writing skills, and new media writing skills. Abilities in proofing and editing were ranked equally at “average” and “below average.”

Across all categories, zero percent of respondents ranked entry-level practitioners at the highest rank available, with the exception of writing for new media, which showed 5 percent of respondents felt the entry-level practitioners’ abilities were “strong.” However, when asked to respond to the statement that entry-level practitioners possess the necessary level of expertise to write for new media, the average of respondents’ responses was 4.2 out of a possible seven.

Original research in the form of telephone interviews showed that the majority of educators in public relations programs nationwide are aware that writing abilities in entry-level practitioners are of concern. Also, the majority of educators interviewed reported being greatly dissatisfied with the writing abilities of students entering public relations programs. To prepare students to be successful writers in the profession, most participants reported that writing is a requirement and it is strongly emphasized in the programs. The eight participants reported that professors who teach in the program actively try to stay current with industry trends, whether it be through working or consulting in the field, attending conferences, reading current literature or conducting research studies.

All participants reported new curriculum developments in response to new media as communication tools. Most programs have already incorporated new media techniques in existing courses and some have created or are creating new courses. However, some participants reported that while they have incorporated new media in to the curriculum, they felt it is simply a tactic. These respondents reported that their focus was to teach the students the fundamentals of message crafting that they can then apply to any tactic.

Furthermore, one participant reported that while new media tools are big right now they will be very different in just a few years, and many of the current tools like Facebook and Twitter may not exist.

Participants reported students lack abilities in basic understanding of grammatical rules, sentence and paragraph structure, spelling and punctuation, understandings of singular and possessive forms, persuasive writing, editing and AP style. All interview participants reported that faculties face significant challenges and limitations. The most frequently indicated challenge and limitation was time. Educators felt that the amount of time they have with students greatly limits their ability to improve students' writing skills. Furthermore, participants felt that they must balance teaching writing abilities and teaching other required topics. Other challenges and limitations reported by participants were students with different levels of abilities, lack of one-on-one meetings with students and budget.

Data from the telephone interviews revealed new industry demands — other than new media — that educator's feel are currently important. These demands include good design skills, emphasis on strategy rather than tactics, skills in interviewing and professionalism, globalization, ethics and professional responsibility, quick thinking and decision-making as a result of technology. Furthermore, concerning the future of the public relations profession, several participants indicated the importance and demand for strategic planning, as well as measurement. Globalization was also a common topic reported by participants.

*H1 – The majority of public relations practitioners at the management-level will express a high degree of concern with the writing abilities of entry-level practitioners.*

Based on the Web-based survey data, hypothesis one is not supported. Although survey respondents did not rate the writing abilities of entry-level public relations practitioners high, respondents overall rated them as average or below average. Furthermore, respondents indicated that entry-level practitioners' abilities in writing for new media were higher than other categories such as traditional media writing and persuasive writing.

*H2 – The majority of public relations practitioners at the management-level require entry-level practitioners to have specialized writing skills in new media.*

Hypothesis two is supported by the Web-based survey data. As reported in the data, 90 percent of respondents (n=40) are currently using new media as a communication tool, with 5 percent not indicating a response. Only 5 percent of respondents indicated not using new media as a communication tool.

*H3 – The majority of educators are aware of the dissatisfaction among practitioners with respect to entry-level practitioners' writing abilities.*

Hypothesis three is supported by the data collected through telephone interviews with educators in public relations programs nationwide. Overall, the participants reported that they are aware of the documented deficiencies in entry-level practitioners' writing abilities and as a result the programs are emphasizing writing across the entire curriculum, not just in writing based courses.

*H4 – The majority of colleges and universities offer a limited number of writing courses.*

Based on the data collected from telephone interviews, hypothesis four is not supported. Overall, participants reported that most programs are requiring students to take more than a few writing-based courses. In addition, writing skills are weaved throughout non-writing public relations courses. Also, most programs offer electives that are writing-based and one participant reported adjusting a pre-requisite program for freshmen to specifically focus on communication writing.

*H5 – The majority of colleges and universities are beginning to adapt public relations curriculums to include writing courses focused on new media.*

Hypothesis five is supported by the data collected through telephone interviews with educators in public relations programs nationwide. All participants reported adjusting curriculum to include writing for new media. Participants reported including writing for new media in to existing writing courses, as well as developing new courses specifically focused on writing for new media. However, even though all participants are currently teaching students skills in new media, some participants reported that new media is a tactic and students must learn the fundamentals of writing that can be applied to any tactic.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

As discussed in Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations, communication skills are essential to a public relations practitioners' ability to effectively communicate with an organization and its publics. No matter which model of communication is practiced, writing is a skill that is threaded throughout. The ability to write well must be included in today's practitioners skill sets to ensure that messages are received and accurately interpreted by the organization's publics.

Currently, the practice of two-way communication between an organization and its publics is proving to be highly effective. Implementing two-way communication models helps the organization to understand the needs of its publics and to determine if its messages are delivered correctly. It also provides the organization's publics with channels to respond to the organization's actions and messages, effectively communicating their needs or perceptions.

Public relations practitioners must implement two-way communication in their own field to understand the current abilities of practitioners, trends and future projections and industry demands. It is essential that two-way communication between practitioners and educators be an on-going effort on both sides. Practitioners in the field must report industry demands, practitioner abilities and dissatisfactions to educators in order to keep public relations programs' curriculums current and effective. Furthermore, educators must report their initiatives, progress and research studies to practitioners in order to provide them with an understanding of program focuses and limitations, as well as valuable studies on new developing industry demands.



The author suggests that qualitative and quantitative research continue between practitioners and educators to facilitate two-way communication. The data reported in this study is based on a nation-wide assessment in order to apply to practitioners and educators across the country. The data collected from telephone interviews yielded significant information about the field and programs' current curriculums. The data collected from Web-based surveys showed a slight improvement in the perception of entry-level practitioners' writing abilities. However, even though the Web-based surveys were conducted nation-wide the response rate of 20 percent was less than desirable. As a result, the author suggests that further studies be conducted to include a larger percentage of practitioners in order to confirm the responses yielded in this study. The study also revealed current trends in strategy, planning and measurement, in which further research should be conducted to specifically analyze these topics.

## List of References

- Brown, A., & Fall, L. (2005). Using the port of entry report as a benchmark: Survey results of on-the-job training among public relations internship site managers. *Public Relations Review, 31*(2), 301-304.
- Cole, R. T., Hembroff, L. A., & Corner, A. D. (2009). National assessment of the perceived writing skills of entry-level PR practitioners. *Journalism & Mass Communication Education, 10*-26.
- Duke, S. (2009). Educating public relations students to enter the blogosphere: results of a delphi study. *Journalism & Mass Communication Education, 317*-332.
- Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). Chapter 2: Origins and contemporary structure of public relations. In *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Guiniven, J. (2007). Is pure language dead? And how much does it matter? *Public Relations Tactics, 6*.
- Hardin, M. (2004). Writing in the public relations curriculum: practitioner perceptions versus pedagogy. *Public Relations Review, 30*(3), 357-364.
- Hines, R., & Basso, J. (2008). Do communication students have the “write stuff”? practitioners evaluate writing skills of entry-level workers. *Journal of Promotion Management, 14*(3), 293-307.
- Jugenheimer, D. W. (2010). *Advertising and public relations research*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- King, C. M. (2001). The write stuff: teaching the introductory public relations writing course. *Public Relations Review, 27*, 27-46.

### List of References Continued

- Lesly, P. (1975). Righting what's wrong about writing. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 15.
- PRSA National Assembly. (1982, November 06). Public Relations Definition: PRSA Official Statement. *Public Relations Resources & PR Tools for Communications Professionals: Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)*. Retrieved November 09, 2010, from <http://www.prsa.org/aboutprsa/publicrelationsdefined/>
- Todd, V. (2009). PRSSA faculty and professional advisors' perceptions of public relations curriculums, assessment of students' learning, and faculty performance. *Journalism & Mass Communication Education*, 71-90.
- Wise, K. (2005). The importance of writing skills. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 37-48.
- Wright, D. K., & Hinson, M. D. (2010). How new communications media are being used in public relations: a longitudinal analysis. *Public Relations Journal*, 4(3).
- Younger PR pros weaker in writing. (1982). *Journalism Educator*, 13.