

Mock Press Release (worth 10%)

Arts 140, Says Who? Data, Truth, Lies

Professor: Nicholas Ray

Due Date: **February 5**

The Assignment:

A press release is an official statement (written or recorded) that is sent to news agencies regarding something that is purportedly newsworthy. Newspapers, television news stations, online news organizations, and even prominent blogs/vlogs get press releases on a number of topics. Much of the news that comes to us starts off this way.

For the purposes of this assignment, you are working as a public relations representative, contracted by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to handle negative press regarding a trip that Justin Trudeau and his family took over the Christmas holidays, 2016, to a private island in the Bahamas with the Aga Khan. Mary Dawson, the now former Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner of Canada, published a report. The report claims that Trudeau broke ethics rules by accepting the trip as a gift from the Aga Khan. The report can be found here:

<http://ciec-ccie.parl.gc.ca/Documents/English/Public%20Reports/Examination%20Reports/The%20Trudeau%20Report.pdf>

The Prime Minister is meeting with negative press, and criticisms from the opposition Conservatives. Here are some examples of recent stories from some major news outlets:

<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/01/10/trudeaus-aga-khan-dealings-presented-multiple-ethics-troubles-dawson-says.html>

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ethics-commissioner-trudeau-aga-khan-1.4480718>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/3955793/trudeau-asked-first-pm-to-commit-crime-town-hall/>

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/trudeaus-aga-khan-dealings-were-going-to-be-a-problem-ex-ethics-watchdog-testifies/article37570003/>

(If these hyperlinks don't open, then please copy and paste it into your browser.)

Assuming that Trudeau does not want to alienate possible voters, it is your job to "spin" the story. You CANNOT deny that he took the trip to the Aga Khan's private island, nor can you deny that the probe came back stating he had violated ethics rules. In other words, you cannot lie against the public record. But, you can justify the action, or talk about how the PM and PMO think the probe's report makes mistakes, and you can certainly try to change the agenda. How would you, as PR representative, spin this story? Do you think some kind of apology is required? OR: can you think of a way to get Trudeau out of hot water with the public in some other way.

Here is what you have to do (in a carefully worded press release):

- a) Acknowledge the original trip (December 2016), and the ethics probe (published Dec. 20, 2017), and characterise both in ways that make them seem less troubling to a large block of voters.
- b) Pivot away from the story, and change the focus of the current news cycle.
- c) Find a positive way of spinning the trip and the probe's findings consistent with the facts. Maybe there is some innocent mistake, or maybe there is room within the ethics code that allows for such gifts. Explore these and other possibilities.

If you are not familiar with press releases, then read some! A simple Google search will give you some ideas of how they are crafted. Most are very short—at most a page, and usually shorter. That means you can read a bunch of them to get acquainted with how they work, and it won't take you very long. You can even find one of many templates available on the web for press releases. And, yes: ***your Mock Press Release must be formatted like a real press release... it has to look the part!*** The most important thing to remember is that you are trying to improve the public image of your client, Justin Trudeau, and maybe even get in a dig at his political opponents while you are at it.

Format:

The piece must look like a real press release, and must be single-spaced. Ideally, it will fit on a single sheet of paper (including contact information, proposed headline, logos for the PMO office, photos, etc.).

Here is an online aid to help you craft your press release:

<http://www.canadaone.com/promote/newsrelease1.html>

(Again: please just cut and paste the link if it doesn't open.)

Submission:

Your Mock Press Release must be submitted by 11:59pm to the Dropbox on LEARN on February 5. All late submissions will be penalized 10% of the assignment value per day, so please submit on time.

Please submit using a common file type: doc, docx, pdf, rtf are best. Do not submit in .pages, and no Google Docs files.

Assessment:

Your grade will be based on the following criteria:

- a) Do you speak to a clearly defined audience who needs this information?
- b) Do you communicate effectively in a way that benefits your client (Justin Trudeau)?
- c) Is the Mock Press Release structurally and stylistically sound? Press releases must be perfectly written. Grammatical errors, typos, poor word choice (diction), and stylistic and formatting errors will not be tolerated. (YOU MUST THOROUGHLY EDIT YOUR WORK!)

Purpose of the Assignment:

- a) To give you the chance to see how public communication can function within the bounds of the facts, but still be used for personal gain—to see how one can “massage the message”.
- b) To craft a maximally concise and clear piece of writing.
- c) To introduce you to a new way of thinking about public communication, typical of this course.
- d) To give you an idea of how your work in this class will be assessed, especially the Term Paper. (My demands for perfect writing are higher here than they will be on any other writing assignment, so this is really a trial by fire; if you write clearly here, you ought to do well on the other assignments.)