

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2019
**5-Minute Case Talk Assignment in Crisis PR
Classes: Empower Students to Explore and
Present**

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Rationale

Studying real-world crisis episodes can help students expand their ability to speculate how real-life public relations incidents and planning operate and how decisions are made within PR practices. Particularly in the digital media landscape, as crises escalate at an unprecedented speed, often going beyond crisis scenarios, it is important to expose students to a variety of crisis cases in the learning environment.

In this teaching brief, I suggest a seemingly obvious but largely undiscovered teaching idea—give each student 5 minutes to explore a specific case and present it to the class. Born and raised as “digital natives,” today’s students have developed inherent interests in crises within their own digital territories (Prensky, 2001). Thus each semester, I request each of the students in my class to bring a case of their choice and present it. If there are 30 individual students in class, the class, as a whole, will learn their course topics based on at least 30 different recent crisis cases. This simple assignment can bring an exciting and critical-learning experience to the class, ultimately leading students to articulate their own findings through collaborative in-class discussion.

This assignment can benefit not only students but also instructors. The mini-cases brought by students can become teachers' assets, helping them develop another novel and innovative teaching strategy for student engagement. The cases can be easily adopted as an interactive teaching tool through video notes and small-group discussions (Morris, 2018). If a student brings "Lady Doritos" (2018), and the teacher finds that they need more practice applying ethical standards to real-world scenarios, the teacher can plan the next class exercise about the PRSA ethical principles; if a case is about the John Schnatter/Papa John's Pizza scandal (Aulbach, 2019), plan the next in-class activities for stakeholder mapping (see Evidence of Learning Outcomes and Appendix).

Student Learning Goals

The 5-minute case talk encourages students to examine a case critically and independently so they can learn how to utilize specific knowledge and skills when handling real crisis PR cases. Students are asked to look into diverse but interrelated cases and compare all of them under one single parameter of PR practices (e.g., employee crisis). They then explore relevant information for each case until they are able to identify the best case to present. To execute this assignment successfully, it is advisable for instructors to arrange the students' presentation dates and check the appropriateness of each proposed case (e.g., two students could bring the same case), as well as the depth of student understanding regarding each case (e.g., requesting more studies about a case) ahead of time.

By setting the time limit to 5 minutes, students learn how to design a compelling presentation and condense core ideas of their cases into a short time span. Students also learn how to interact with the audience through good discussion questions and group dynamics. As the talk is usually presented for the first 5 minutes of each session, it is also the perfect opportunity to create rapport with an individual presenter, as well

as with other students in the class, which is necessary to build a positive and comfortable learning environment (Buskist & Saville, 2001).

These learning outcomes are lined up with the Program-Level Learning Outcomes: “Students will demonstrate the ability to think critically and independently; Students will communicate effectively in written and visual formats appropriate to the ISC profession with an understanding of diverse audiences” (UK, 2017).

Connection to Public Relations Theory/Practice

The incorporation of casework in student learning materials enhances their overall learning through heightened engagement and interest. This assignment also asks students (and instructors) to be more familiar with “what’s new” and “what matters” within fields by closing the gap between the classroom and the real world. Given the fact that PR is a fast-growing profession and area of study, this teaching idea can be adapted for other PR courses (e.g., PR case studies, PR ethics), even though it is specifically encouraged for the crisis PR class in this brief.

Evidence of Student Learning

Students have assessed this learning method with strong positivity in their course evaluations. The engaging learning experience provided through the 5-minute case talk has most frequently been commented on in positive course evaluations over the years (i.e., accounting for 40-42% of positive comments on courses). Listed below are selective comments about this assignment:

“I found that the most helpful parts of the course were 5-minute talks. This allowed us to take real-life scenarios and types of public relations practices and see how they were handled and learn what to do and what not to do in potential future situations.”

“It was helpful with regards to learning more about public relations. Our 5-minute talks were fun and interesting. Having plenty of examples that went with the topic we were discussing usually made the

material easier to take in.”

“The case studies were very interesting and helped me understand the topic through example and experience.”

“The presentation of actual PR cases was interesting and helpful in learning to navigate the PR field.”

Listed below are examples of the 5-minute crisis presentation slides submitted by students based on the assignment instructions:

Fyre Festival Crisis (2017):

https://drive.google.com/file/d/14TKdDb8HHK_gwBBuJot-kcUummurvZ_0/view?usp=sharing

Crock-Pot/“This is Us” Crisis (2018):

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vgiQ25z_5GBtkeAW3A7ziOe2acOt3JLr/view?usp=sharing

KFC Chicken Storage Crisis (2018):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fvnuQMQLA0i2CQ0pxtSmZbruZkBpcfAo/view?usp=sharing>

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Appendix

Assignment Instructions for

5-Minute Case Talk (Individual Assignment)

We are never going to be able to eliminate the possibility of a crisis perfectly in the workplace and in real life, but many corporate crises are likely to be caused or worsened by the failure of organizations to anticipate and plan for them ahead of time. When a crisis is neither planned for nor managed properly, even major organizations have found themselves facing PR disasters. As a PR student, it is important to be familiar with real-world examples of crisis PR—whether they were successful or failures. In this assignment, you are asked to find one of the most recent crisis PR cases (between 2017 and 2019) and present it to the class.

You begin by finding a case from various news article providers

(e.g., Google News: Business, PR Daily, PR Newswire) and PR trade publications (e.g., *PR Week*, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *MarketingSherpa*, *AdAge*). Be sure that the case you select for this assignment is “totally new.” In other words, it hasn’t been introduced in class through any course requirement (e.g., the course textbook and reading materials, in-class exercises, previous 5-minute talks). Then, study the case. When completing this part, please use multiple resources to fully understand all aspects of the case. Do not rely on Wikipedia or individually owned blogs to grasp key information. Be sure to check multiple resources for fact-checking.

While you are responsible for finding a case for your talk, feel free to discuss the appropriateness of a case and confirm it with me ahead of time. Then, you need to present your case to the class for 5 minutes using a presentation slide, either PPT or PDF.

When presenting:

- (1) Brief Summary (1 page): Summarize a case with when, what, who, how and/or why information.
- (2) Identifications of Crisis and its Significance (1 page): Define a major crisis; identify clients and audiences in crisis communication; discuss why this crisis or crisis communication matters in PR; if possible, limit your discussion to a single PR practice to specify your argument, but do not forget to make your own discoveries.
- (3) Pre-Crisis and Background (1 page): Find a proactive plan if any; identify internal and external risks or issues influenced by or influencing the crisis.
- (4) Response (1-2 page): Identify and evaluate reactive strategies and tactics (e.g., response speed, key message, spokespeople, media relations, other crises following).
- (5) Q&A (1 page): Generate two questions to activate the in-class

discussion on the case.

The talk is limited to 5 minutes. While making the presentation slide, avoid plagiarism through proper citations. Include a bibliography. The grade of this assignment is based on the following distribution: 50% for the oral presentation; 30% of the Q&A; 20% of the presentation slides.

You must upload your presentation slides directly to Canvas before 5 p.m. on the day before your presentation date. Your presentation schedule will be randomly decided by the instructor, but it is flexible. The first talk will be delivered after the first two weeks of the semester.