
COMM 375
Business and Professional Communication
Fall 2010 – syllabus will be revised slightly for Spring 2011

Instructor:	Jillian Pierson, Ph.D.	jilliank@usc.edu
Office:	ASC 333	
Office Hours:	Tues/Thurs 9-9:25 Thursdays 12:30 – 1:30	If my office hours are not convenient for you, we can try to set a meeting for a different time or we can meet by phone.
Office Phone:	(213) - [Tues/Thurs til 2 only]	Please use my home phone for messages. I cannot retrieve messages on the office line.
Home Phone:	(323)xxx-xxxx [9am-9pm]	I want you to feel free to call me at home. Since my availability on campus is limited, I do welcome your calls at home.

Course Goals

The overall goal of this course is to develop your professional communication skills and knowledge. While we will cover some theory to enhance your understanding of the business world, the bulk of our time will be spent focusing on your applied skills. I would like you to walk out of this class confident that you can deliver excellent presentations; feel comfortable and be successful in interviews; write first-rate cover letters and resumes; and produce effective, clear and correct business writing. You should also have increased awareness of and ability to manage business issues that will affect your work life.

Required Course Materials

Heath, C. & Heath, D. (2007). *Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*.
NY: Random House.

Toogood, G. (1996). *The articulate executive: Learn to look, act, and sound like a leader*.
NY: McGraw-Hill.

Additional readings will be required, mostly available on our Blackboard site.
Please check Blackboard frequently for postings and updates.

Suggested Material

Keep a writing reference book on your desk and consult it frequently (or bookmark similar reference sites online). I can recommend Danziger's *Get to the Point*, Strunk & White's *Elements of Style*, or O'Connor's *Woe Is I* but there are many such titles available.

Course Standards

This course will be as action-packed as you should expect your professional life to be. The requirements of consistent attendance, punctuality and participation are essential to your success. Missing class more than once or twice in the short time we have together is no more acceptable than it would be to miss important workdays at any company. When you have a deadline for an assignment, reading, or a presentation, you must have the work prepared at the very beginning of class. These deadlines will come up often: don't allow yourself to fall behind!

Here's the fine print. Read it. Any student who misses more than four classes may fail the course. If you turn in an assignment late, it will be downgraded by one-third of a letter grade for every day it is late. Missing a presentation assignment or an exam will result in a failing grade unless you have physical proof of some serious emergency that prohibited your presence (e.g., a bill from the paramedics). *You must complete all assignments to pass the course.*

Course Policies

Late Papers/Assignments: Please do not ask me for an extension. If your assignment is late, it will be marked down by one third of a letter grade for every day it is late, regardless of the reason. Also, please be aware that if you end up handing a paper in late (thus accepting the automatic deduction), it falls to the bottom of my stack of things to do and will most likely not be returned to you in a very timely manner.

Missed exams or presentations: You better have a serious medical emergency with a verifiable written excuse (such as a bill from the paramedics) if you miss an exam or presentation. Contact me immediately if such an emergency arises (i.e., have a friend call me while they're wheeling you away on the stretcher).

Classroom environment: Please turn your cell phones OFF when you enter our classroom. If you have a phone in "silent" mode that vibrates when it rings, it is not *silent*! I completely understand the temptation to multi-task but I ask that you forgo texting, instant messaging, internet surfing and gaming during our time together. If you have a laptop with you, it should be closed during student presentations and group activities.

Participation/Attendance: Our class sessions combine lecture, discussion and activities. Participation (including attendance, promptness, courtesy, involvement in classroom activities, and discussion that clearly demonstrates you have kept up with the course material) may affect your grade by up to one third of a grade.

When you do happen to miss a regular class meeting (with no assignment due or exam), I do not need to hear from you about why you were absent. You should consult with other students to find out what you missed; please do not ask *me*. Once you've spoken with your peers, you're welcome to come to me with questions.

Grading: To achieve a "C" or better on papers, you must write at a level appropriate for a university student, i.e., with correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. If you have specific difficulties with either writing or oral communication, please let me know before you turn in your first assignment.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Business briefing	10%
Area of study response	5%
Informative presentation	10%
Job package	10%
Mock interview	5%
Informational interview report	15%
Persuasive presentation	15%
Group Presentation	10%
Final Exam	10%

I believe a “B” represents really good work. An “A” represents excellent work. If you are disappointed by a grade, I would be happy to discuss your work with you and help you improve for the next assignment.

Your personal improvement is highly valued in this class. Even if you already possess superior skills, you should incorporate feedback and make improvements from one assignment to the next. Demonstrations of improvement can positively affect your grade.

School of Communication Academic Integrity Policy

The School of Communication is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical support. It endorses and acts on the SCampus policies and procedures detailed in the section titled: "University Student Conduct Code." See especially Appendix A: "Academic Dishonesty Sanction Guidelines." The policies, procedures, and guidelines will be assiduously upheld. They protect your rights, as well as those of the faculty.

It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, fabricating data for a project, submitting a paper to more than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone but yourself. If you have doubts about any of these practices, confer with a faculty member or the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

ADA Compliance Statement

Any student requesting academic accommodation based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is 213-740-0776.

Tentative Course Schedule, *Subject to Change:*

Readings should be completed prior to class the day they are scheduled.

	Date	Topic	Assignment Due	Readings
1	Aug 24 Aug 26	Course Introduction Presentation Boot Camp Part I		
2	Aug 31 Sept 2	Presentation Boot Camp Part II Presentation Boot Camp Part III		Toogood
3	Sept 7	Document Design	Three design examples	
	Sept 9	Killer Cover Letters & Resumes		Bb
4	Sept 14 Sept 16	Business Briefings Advanced Slideware & Infographics	Business Briefing	Bb Bb
5	Sept 21	Resume Clinic	Draft of job package— bring <i>two</i> hard copies of both cover letter and resume	
	Sept 23	Working in teams <i>groups assigned</i>		
6	Sept 28	Business Briefing Redux	Business Briefing with slides	Bb
	Sept 30	Writing for Business	Informative topic ideas	Bb
7	Oct 5 Oct 7	Writing for Business (cont.) Interviewing Intelligence & Career Choices	Informative topic finalized	
8	Oct 12	Practice Mock Interviews <i>Meet in the ELC ASC Rm 223</i>	Area of Study Response	Bb
	Oct 14	Mock Interviews <i>Meet in ASC ELC ASC Rm 223</i>	Job Package	Bb
9	Oct 19 Oct 21	Informative Presentations Informative Presentations	Presentation and outline	
10	Oct 26	Decision Making Strategies <i>Meet in the ELC ASC Rm 223</i>	Three possible persuasive presentation topics	xxx
	Oct 28	Group I Report Verbal and Nonverbal Comm	Group I Report	xx
11	Nov 2	Group II Report Work conflicts/difficult people	Group II Report	xx
	Nov 4	Group III Report Diversity & Globalization	Group III Report	Bb
12	Nov 9 Nov 11	Persuasion & effective listening (cont.)	Final persuasive topic	xxx xxx

13	Nov 16	Proposal Presentations	Persuasive Presentations
	Nov 18	Proposal Presentations	
14	Nov 23	Proposal Presentations	
	Nov 25	* * * <i>Enjoy Thanksgiving</i> * * *	
15	Nov 30	Sexual Harassment	xxx
	Dec 2	Career Paths	Informational Interview report
	Dec 14	Final Exam 8 – 10 a.m.	

ASSIGNMENTS

I try to provide as much information as possible in the syllabus about your assignments. Please read all of my directions carefully and always feel free to ask questions.

Outlining

For all presentations, you will be turning in a full-sentence outline and reference page. Please look at the handouts on BlackBoard for examples and remember these important rules:

- Write only *one* sentence per number or letter. If you go beyond a sentence, consider whether the subsequent sentences should be sub-points or just eliminated from the outline. You can say things that aren't in the outline because the outline is not supposed to be a script, but a guide!
- Show within the body of your outline (just as you would in a paper) where the different pieces of information came from. Every claim or fact should be cited in the document. While you do not need to give all the citations orally, sources should be clearly noted throughout the outline.

Business Briefing (1-3 minutes)

For this first introductory presentation, I will provide you with a topic from the world of workplace news. You need to find a minimum of three sources on the topic.

You will write a full sentence outline but you will speak extemporaneously, using a key word outline if you find that helpful. You'll turn in your outlines to me; the full sentence outline should have a reference page attached. As a guideline, for such a short presentation, your outline will probably not be much longer than one half of a page.

You will give your business briefing for a second time, this time accompanying your presentation with PowerPoint slides. Please bring your slides to class on a data device *and* email a copy of your slides to me.

Area of Study Response

When you interview for your first job after graduation, it is practically guaranteed that you'll be asked certain questions. This assignment gives you an opportunity to think through one of these questions and be prepared to reply in a focused way. Write up an argument in 1-2 double-spaced pages that answers the question, "What did you get out of majoring in communication?" You'll want to address:

- what advantages a student who majored in communication* has in the professional world
- what *specific* knowledge and skills the major uniquely provides

By skills I definitely do *not* mean that you learned "how to communicate" or how to give presentations. Give the question of what you've gotten from your major some serious thought and then write a concise and specific response that would be persuasive to a future employer. Remember to use *details*, not generalizations.

Your "reader" is an educated person who is unfamiliar with the communication major. Do not write as if you're writing to me, your instructor.

- * If you are not a communication major, write the essay about your own major. If you are undeclared, pick a major you're considering. Writing this essay should help you decide. Double majors may write about both majors, extending to three pages if necessary.

Informative Presentation (5-7 minutes)

This informative presentation topic is restricted to something applicable to work life. That gives you a very broad range of possibilities. You should spend time researching something interesting to you that will likely benefit the class as well. Learning more about current business events or "hot topics" in the workplace will help you make conversation at job interviews and networking opportunities.

We want to listen to topics that truly are *informative*, so please look for substantive topics.

You will accompany your presentation with PowerPoint slides that enhance the audience's experience.

Please check with me for topic approval *at least* one week prior to your assigned presentation date. Topics are first come, first served with no repeats.

I'll be looking for the following elements, among others: an appropriately narrowed topic, clear organization, a variety of supporting materials, use of details, an attention-grabbing introduction and a conclusion that leaves an impact. I'll also expect you to be confident, make strong eye contact with the entire audience, speak fluently, and show interest and enthusiasm.

Please turn in a full-sentence outline that includes a minimum of six references.

Job Package

Your job package will include the following:

- The ad: Find an advertisement for a job you would like to get—and could qualify for—now or in the near future. This should be a career oriented position or internship.
- Cover letter: This should be tailored to the specific ad you chose. Address the letter to the person who posted the ad and if there was no name listed, see if you can contact the company to find the name of the appropriate person. The content should not repeat what is contained in the resume—it should identify the specific job for which you are applying, highlight the qualifications that make you a good candidate for the position, and contain a request for an opportunity to be interviewed.
- Resumé: Your resume is a very personal sales piece. You'll see a variety of sample resumes in class and should play around with your own until it looks sharp and reads well. The resume should be no longer than one page—two pages are recommended only if you already have extensive professional experience in the field of your choice.
- References: Identify three individuals who would provide positive recommendations for you. Include their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and relationship to you. This is separate from your resume, but should be printed on the same paper, in the same font and style, and with the same headings or letterhead. You would not actually mail this to a potential employer unless they requested references.

During our “resume clinic” you will have the opportunity to get feedback on your resume and cover letter from your peers. Remember that a resume is always a work-in-progress and your cover letters should always be tailored to the ad. By the time you hand in your final package, I do expect your resume and cover letter to be completely free of typos and grammatical errors, just as they must be when you send them to a prospective employer.

Group Report

Our class will be divided into several groups, each of which will be responsible for giving a team presentation on a course topic. The topics will be based on our book chapters, but the team members will do outside research to supplement the presentation. The presentation will include PowerPoint slides, an activity that involves the audience, and an informative handout you prepare for your classmates.

Informational Interview

Interview a person who currently holds a job that you would like to hold within about three to five years after graduation. (Maybe you'd like to be the CEO of Disney, but I'm talking about a job you could reasonably expect to hold within that time frame.) The interview should last around 45 minutes. The objectives of this assignment are: (1) to give you insight into the position; (2) to develop your interviewing and self-presentation skills; and (3) to gain experience writing an executive summary. This is *not* an employment interview; so do not ask for a job. Present yourself as a student conducting research regarding future career possibilities.

This should be a face-to-face interview, preferably in your subject's workplace. If the *only* person who has your dream job is in NY, go for something comparable to your dream job. *Do not do a phone interview or an interview via computer.*

Please follow these steps for this assignment:

1. Conduct your own research regarding a job and potential companies that interest you. Gather basic information such as a job description, starting salary, level and type of education required for the position, and specific information regarding the company of interest. Use this information to formulate interview questions. Write up the information you've gathered in an annotated bibliography to be turned in to me along with your executive summary. You should use a minimum of three sources, such as newspaper articles, industry blogs, and company web sites. Do note, however, that any information from a company website counts as *one* source, regardless of how many links within it you've clicked.
2. Contact an individual in the entry-level position of your choice and ask if they could give you about 45 minutes of their time. Do not interview someone you already know (relatives, friends and their companies are *not* acceptable for this assignment; do not interview someone in a place you've already worked yourself). If your mother's best friend owns her own public relations company and you've never had the chance to ask her about it, you'll definitely want to talk with her sometime—just not for this assignment!
3. Formulate your interview questions (check Blackboard for ideas) and re-confirm your interview two days before by telephone or email.
4. During the interview, behave professionally. Dress appropriately, in business attire (as appropriate for the industry). Introduce yourself, your purpose and your goals for the interview ("My goal for this interview is to learn what it's like to work in such a position and what the requirements are to be hired in a job like yours"). Explain that you have a number of questions to ask and that you would like to take notes, if the interviewee does not object. Listen carefully, paraphrase responses, and ask for clarification when you do not understand. After finishing your questions, ask your interviewee if there is anything else they would like to tell you. Be conscious of the time you've used and do not go over, unless they indicate they wish to continue. Thank them for their time.

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5. Get the interviewee's business card before you leave the interview so you can include it when you hand in your assignment. (If the person does not have a business card, ask for an appropriate substitute, such as a piece of company letterhead.)
6. As soon after the interview as humanly possible, write a thank-you note and mail it to your interviewee. Be sure this brief letter is *grammatically correct and error free!* Before you send it off, make a photocopy to include when you turn in your assignment. This kind of note is generally neatly hand-written: *no e-mailed thank-you notes.* (Please note that for an employment interview, you would send a more formal thank-you letter printed on stationery.) In your letter, do *not* use the clichéd phrase, "Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule."
7. Write a three-page executive summary about your interview. This report is a professional document in style and content which includes summaries on the following topics:
 - description of the industry/product/service
 - description of the position
 - requirements for the position (education, experience, skills)
 - general summary of what you learned, including your own thoughts and reactions

Attach your annotated bibliography to the executive summary.

8. Be prepared to give a brief informative presentation in class regarding your interview.

Your total "Interview Package" will consist of:

- Executive Summary (in memo format, addressed to me)
- Photocopy of your thank-you note
- Photocopy of the business card of your interviewee (if they do not have a business card, please get a piece of letterhead or a brochure or at the very least, give me the person's complete contact information)
- Annotated bibliography from your pre-interview research in proper reference format (preferably APA style).

Proposal Presentation (5-7 minutes)

Your topic choice is once again very broad, as long as you choose something directly relevant to work life. You must persuade your audience to accept or adopt your proposal; they should be compelled to take action or to change in some concrete way. Your audience will be whatever group you would like, such as a board of trustees, executive committee, brand new employees, or union members. In most cases, this presentation will work best if you decide to address a top management team with decision making power.

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Make sure you choose a topic about which your audience would actually need persuading. In other words, don't propose "free lunch Fridays" to entry level employees. Also make sure your topic is researchable.

After you speak, the class (as your board, managers, union members, or whatever you've chosen) will have a chance to ask you questions while you sit in the Hot Seat. We will expect you to be knowledgeable and able to further defend your position.

Some of the elements I will be evaluating are: a clear, appropriately narrowed thesis, strength of arguments, variety of verbal support, use of specific details, raising and rebutting potential arguments, effectiveness of visual aids, and consideration of audience's perspective.

Please turn in a full-sentence outline that includes a minimum of six references. Use PowerPoint slides to enhance your presentation.

Electronic Submission of Assignments

I would like to receive electronic copies of all your assignments. When you turn in an assignment to me by email, please name your attachment with your own name as well as the type of assignment. Imagine my receiving ten attachments from different students all named "informative outline." Instead please name it something like "Tommy Trojan Informative Outline." Please *keep* all returned assignments with my notes on them until the end of the semester.

Presentation Attire

I would like to see you present in what I would call "business casual." What I mean by this is you should look presentable, but I think it's unreasonable to expect you to spend your day on campus dressed up in formal business attire. Here's what I absolutely do not want to see on your presentation days: your toes, your navel or any other part of your midriff, your cleavage, caps and hats, or ripped clothing.

Exams

The final exam will most likely be a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. It will be comprehensive, covering readings and information presented in class throughout the semester. While much of our class addresses practical skills, useful theory and information is presented in the text and in class through lecture and your own presentations. The exam will give you an opportunity to show you've absorbed this content.