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\*\*\* D R A F T \*\*\*  
COMM 375  
**Business and Professional Communication**  
Fall 2012

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Instructor:	Jillian Pierson, Ph.D.	jilliank@usc.edu
Office:	ASC 333	
Office Hours:	Tues/Thurs 12:00-1:30 and most Tues/Thurs from 9:00 to 9:25 am	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)821-1542 [Tues/Thurs only]	Please use my home phone for messages. I cannot retrieve messages on the office line.
Home Phone:	(xxx)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.

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### **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. (2010). *The new 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. Please see me immediately if you have missed that number of class meetings. *You must complete all assignments to pass the course.*

## Course Policies

**Classroom environment:** Please turn your cell phones off when you enter our classroom. I completely understand the temptation to multi-task but I ask that you forgo texting, instant messaging, internet surfing, gaming and other distractions during our time together. If you have a laptop with you, it should be closed during student presentations and group activities, and used only for note-taking.

**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).

**Participation/Attendance:** Our class sessions combine lecture, discussion and activities. Participation (including attendance, promptness, courtesy, attentiveness, 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	15%
Misc & quizzes	5%
Informative presentation	15%
Job package	10%
Group presentation	10%
Proposal presentation	15%
Informational interview report	15%
Final exam	15%

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 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*:**

Assignments are due on the days they are listed. However, the readings are generally meant to be read after the class meeting on the days they are listed.

	Date	Topic	Assignment Due	Readings
1	Aug 28 Aug 30	Course Introduction Presentation Boot Camp Part I		Toogood Part 1
2	Sept 4 Sept 6	Presentation Boot Camp Part II Presentation Boot Camp Part III		Toogood Part 2 Toogood Part 3
3	Sept 11 Sept 13	Killer Cover Letters & Resumes <b>Business Briefings</b>	<b>Business Briefing</b>	Bb Toogood Part 4
4	Sept 18	The 30 Second Pitch & Resume Clinic	<i>Draft</i> of job package— bring <i>two</i> hard copies	Bb: How to work a career fair
	Sept 20	USC Career Fair <i>In lieu of a class meeting, you are required to attend the career fair.</i>	Career Fair posting to Bb discussion	
5	Sept 25	Document Design	Toogood Quiz	
	Sept 27	<b>Business Briefing Redux</b>	<b>Business Briefing with slides</b>	MTS intro & ch 1
6	Oct 2 Oct 4	Writing for Business (continued)	Informative topic ideas	MTS Ch 2&3 Bb
7	Oct 9 Oct 11	Working in Teams Interviewing Intelligence	Informative topic finalized <b>MTS Quiz</b>	MTS Ch 4 & 5 Bb
8	Oct 13	Practice Mock Interviews <i>Meet in the ELC ASC Rm 223</i>	<b>Area of Study Response</b>	MTS Ch 6
	Oct 15	<b>Mock Interviews</b> <i>Meet in ASC ELC ASC Rm 223</i>	<b>Final Job Package</b>	Bb
9	Oct 20 Oct 22	<b>Informative Presentations</b> <b>Informative Presentations</b>	<b>Presentation and outline</b>	MTS Epilogue
10	Oct 27	Working in Teams		Bb
	Oct 29	Persuasion	Three possible persuasive presentation topics	Bb
11	Nov 6	<b>Group Presentations</b>	Final proposal topic <b>Groups 1 &amp; 2</b>	Bb
	Nov 8	<b>Group Presentations</b>	<b>Groups 3 &amp; 4</b>	Bb
12	Nov 13	Proposal Outline Review & Workplace conflicts	<b>Proposal outline draft</b>	Bb
	Nov 15	Working Across Cultures		Bb
13	Nov 20 Nov 22	Sexual Harassment <i>Enjoy your Thanksgiving holiday</i>		Bb
14	Nov 27 Nov 29	<b>Proposal Presentations</b> <b>Proposal Presentations</b>	<b>Proposal Presentations</b> <b>Proposal Presentations</b>	Bb

15	Dec 4 Dec 6	Hit the Ground Running! Career Paths	Bb
		<b>Informational Interview report</b>	
	Dec 18	<b>“Take Home” Final Exam</b>	<b>Submit final to Blackboard by 10 a.m.</b>

## 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.

### 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 modified 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 modified 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 one page.

The first time you deliver this presentation in class will not be graded. I will give you feedback on your outline and delivery. You will then give your business briefing a second time, this time accompanying your presentation with PowerPoint slides. Please bring your slides to class on a data device *and* submit them to Blackboard before class.

### Miscellaneous Homework and Quizzes

Here are some preliminary notes about homework and quizzes.

#### Quizzes

I will give at least two quizzes throughout the semester. The first two will be on the two assigned books. These are not in-depth exams; they are merely a checkpoint to make sure you've done the readings.

#### Three Design Examples

Please find three examples of graphic design to bring to class on the assigned day. These could be fliers, advertisements or newsletters.

#### Career Fair Post to Discussion on Blackboard

After attending the career fair, please tell the rest of us something about your experience by posting to our Blackboard discussion. Successes, observations, or tips are all welcome.

Area of Study Response: *persuading a skeptic*  
1-2 paragraphs

When at a job interview or networking situation someone asks about your major, what will you say? If you're majoring in communication\*, you had better be prepared to face some skeptics who think your major wasn't very substantive.

This is your opportunity to come up with a succinct, specific, impressive statement that is basically a piece of advocacy for your major. Very briefly address what skills, knowledge and experience you gained in your studies.

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. As a person unfamiliar with the field, the reader believes the communication major is not rigorous, challenging, or very substantive. Your job is to persuade that reader that your major is indeed *rigorous, challenging and substantive*. Do not write as if you're addressing me, your instructor.

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

#### Mock Interview

Sometimes an interview is just a friendly get-acquainted chat. Sometimes an interview is a grueling challenge. This exercise will help you prepare for whatever comes your way.

#### Proposal Outline Draft

On the scheduled date, bring in a draft of your outline that follows the structure presented in class and in postings on Blackboard.

#### **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 (especially stories), 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 conversationally, and show interest and enthusiasm.

Please turn in a modified 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, street and email 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 each ad or situation. 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 workshop to the class on a course topic. More details will be provided.

## **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.

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 proposal, demonstrated understanding of audience's perspective, variety of verbal support, use of specific details, raising and rebutting potential arguments, and overall persuasiveness.

Please turn in a full-sentence outline that includes a minimum of six references. Use PowerPoint slides if they will enhance your persuasiveness.

## **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 interview prospects and ask if they could give you about a half hour of their time. Do not interview someone you already know (relatives, friends and their companies are *not* acceptable for this assignment; and 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). 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.

5. 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 or scan 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."

6. 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 an annotated bibliography to the executive summary. This is like a reference page, only under each citation you'll include a couple of sentences about the information you gathered from that source.

Your total "Interview Package" will consist of:

- Executive Summary (in memo format, addressed to me)
- Copy of your thank-you note
- Annotated bibliography from your pre-interview research in proper reference format (preferably APA style).

**Electronic Submission of Assignments**

I would like to receive electronic copies of all your assignments—including your PowerPoint slides—on Blackboard.

With my deepest apologies for the environmental impact, I still need most assignments on paper as well. Plan to both upload and bring to class all assignments.

Please *keep* all returned assignments with my comments 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 midriff, your cleavage, hats or ripped clothing.

**Looking Ahead**

I look forward to working with all of you. I hope you’ll give the class your best and I’ll do the same. Together we’ll make this a very productive semester.