

Course description

This course introduces you to knowledge and skills needed to design and implement research projects. You will learn to form appropriate research questions and answer such questions by collecting and interpreting data. After completion of this course, you will be equipped to move beyond being passive observers of research and be discriminating consumers and competent practitioners.

As professionals you need to be able to solve problems. Although solving problems successfully requires many resources (e.g., interpersonal and political skills), a fundamental ability is being able (1) to understand problems conceptually – to break problems down into their important parts and have a sense of how the parts relate to one another and to the whole; and (2) to obtain and analyze relevant data. Conceptualizing problems, and obtaining and analyzing data are two core skills you learn in research methods. The skills you learn in this course will allow you to stand out in your profession as a creative thinker, with the additional ability to design and implement good assessment practices.

A secondary aim of the course is to impart somewhat vicariously a set of skills that will be useful in your professional careers. In your careers, you will undoubtedly have to make decisions and act under uncertain or confusing conditions. Under such conditions, the important skills are about dealing with information: knowing where to look for information, how to judge the quality of information, and how to make sense out of information. Dealing with information is a core part of doing research, and so you will have many opportunities to practice those skills.

Module 1: Writing

- Using the Library
- Writing Well
- Ethics
- How to Avoid Plagiarism

Module 2: Statistics

- Theory and Concepts
- Case Analysis

Module 3: Focus Groups

- Theory
- Case Analysis

Module 4: Survey

- Theory
- Case Analysis

Module 5: Content Analysis

- Theory

- Case Analysis

Module 6: Experiment

- Theory
- Case Analysis

Learning objectives

- Apply Focus Group methodology to a situation.
- Construct a problem then design Survey research to address it.
- Apply Content Analysis methodology to a provided situation.
- Construct a problem then design Experiment research to address it.
- Execute a research project and final paper using scientific communication skills by:
 - writing in a concise style
 - being accurate in your writing
 - always supporting your claims with citations
 - removing 1st person
- Identify common errors in existing research.
- Recognize through the creation of four mini papers that one method of research is not going to provide a comprehensive analysis to any given situation.
- Recognize that by engaging in research you are a representative of yourself and your institution.
- Use the statistical software SPSS.
- Use Qualtrics to collect real world data.
- Retrieve citations that support research claims.
- Understand and avoid plagiarism by:
 - Using APA citations.
 - Quoting appropriately.
 - Paraphrasing correctly.

Textbooks and materials

- **Books:**
 - American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th edition)*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. ISBN-10:9781433805615
 *NOTE: This reference guide is used throughout the program, so is not assigned as specific reading within this course.
 - Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2014). *They say / I say: The moves that matter in academic writing*. New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Company. ISBN-10: 0393935841
- **Articles:**
 - (Please see weekly reading list at the end of this syllabus)
- **Other Materials:**
 - Annenberg currently offers the software program SPSS for free to enrolled students. Download instructions will be provided upon the start of the semester.
 - You will engage in two data collection tasks in the second half of the semester (Survey module and Experiment module) which will cost money. Each task will cost you about \$10 so around \$20 total. More details on this are provided in the course pages.

Sessions and days of the week

The course is divided into six modules. Due dates for assignments and discussions are stated in day numbers. Day 1 is Wednesday, the first day of the beginning of each weekly session.

Day 1	Wednesday
Day 2	Thursday
Day 3	Friday
Day 4	Saturday
Day 5	Sunday
Day 6	Monday
Day 7	Tuesday

Assignments are due no later than **11:55 p.m. in the Pacific time zone** on the day that is stated in the assignment.

Grading policy

Course components

Component	Percentage of Final Grade
Mini Research Papers (one for each of the four topic modules, Survey, Focus Groups, Content Analysis, and Experiment)	40% (4 times 10%)
Introductory Paper	10%
SPSS Application Assignment	10%
Final Paper	10%
Participation	10% (2 times 5%)
Discussion Boards	5%
Overall Participation	5%
Quizzes (Avoiding Plagiarism, APA Style, Writing)	6% (3 times 2%)
Other Assignments	14% (7 times 2%)
Total Percentage	100%

Mini-Research Projects (40%)

The research projects are your chance to investigate something of interest to you. What would be useful for you to know more about? Each module will supply you with the skills needed to define your

problem and design a plan to research your question. You are the person who decides what it is your research. You will complete four mini-research projects utilizing the four main methods of the course (focus group, survey, content analysis, experiment).

Introductory Paper (10%)

To make people listen to your ideas and findings you have to make them care. The introduction to any work is where you frame an issue to appeal to your target audience. You cannot assume the reader knows or cares about your work. You have to make them know and care about your work. This will use the [Paper Grading Criteria](#).

Computing Lab (SPSS) Assignment (10%)

Research generates data. Lots of data. Statistical skills are needed to interpret the data you gather. You will receive instruction on statistical concepts but perhaps the most effective way to learn statistics is via 'hands-on' use of statistical programs.

Final Paper (10%)

You will take your Introductory Paper and expand this into a Final Paper. This Final Paper extends and builds upon your Introductory Paper. Given you need feedback on the Introductory Paper for your Final Paper we do not accept late Introductory papers if they are submitted less than two weeks before the due date for the Final Paper. This is an exception to the late policy stated later in the syllabus. Your Final Paper will also address the feedback provided on your Introductory Paper. As with the Introductory Paper this Final Paper will also use the [Paper Grading Criteria](#).

Participation (10%)

This consists of the discussion board postings and overall participation. Contribute professionally to class discussions, group work, and peer review. You should strive to participate thoughtfully in your discussion boards postings. You will not score well by merely posting quick responses or being disengaged or disrespectful.

Your overall participation is informed by the peer evaluation form at the end of the course as well as your submission of work before deadlines.

Quizzes (6%)

Plagiarism is a serious infraction in this course. We will devote significant energy to understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to not commit it. After the lesson on plagiarism, to anchor the learning, you will be tested.

There is also a quiz on writing and a quiz on APA style.

Other Assignments (14%)

You will have various other assignments throughout this course. These are as follows,

1. Reference and research
2. Ethics
3. Lying graphs
4. Bag of tricks (group assignment)
5. Moderator guide
6. Moderator reflection

7. Elevator pitch

Each assignment is worth 2%.

Other grading policies

Writing Quality

The course project demands much in terms of writing. The quality of your writing will significantly influence how your work is evaluated.

Our experience with this course has shown many students judge themselves to be good writers. This judgment is often over-optimistic. The writing demands in this course are very high, complex, and constant. Even competent writers will be challenged. Hence, be prepared to expend much effort in improving your writing. The instructors encourage you to be open and receptive to feedback for improving.

The effort to improve must come from you. The instructors will highlight where your writing needs to improve, and point you to resources. Then, it is your responsibility to use these resources to improve.

How will writing quality be evaluated? One basic component is writing mechanics. Good mechanics refer to careful attention to spelling, punctuation, and grammar; good grammar includes subject-verb agreement, appropriate use of parallel structures, absence of sentence fragments, and so on.

Another component of writing quality is organization. In a well-organized paper, the arguments flow smoothly; the transitions from one idea to another are well written, i.e., the reader knows when different arguments are being presented and can grasp the important and subtle distinctions. A well-organized paper respects the reader's cognitive burden and shepherds the reader's attention carefully. Two good resources to assist you with this are

- The first is the article "The Science of Scientific Writing," available on Moodle.
- The second is the required text *They Say / I Say*, especially Chapter 8.

Consult these resources, become familiar with their guidance, and implement their advice in your writing.

The basic criterion is to communicate well to your readers (your instructors and your peers). If your readers cannot understand your writing due to flaws in grammar, vocabulary or organization, then the quality of your thinking cannot be appreciated. The instructors cannot spend minutes to decipher a sentence you wrote. You cannot ask instructors to ignore poor writing in order to focus on content.

A paper with good ideas but bad writing will earn a poor grade, as specified in the Paper Grading Criteria. The demands are especially stringent. If your writing performs poorly in the quality requirement (i.e., scoring on the lowest category), it represents unsatisfactory performance. The instructors will require you to attend to those areas and revise before proceeding. For example, upon detecting the 8th error in vocabulary, expression, spelling, punctuation, typography or other mechanics in your draft, the instructors may impose a score of "0" in that category, and may stop reading and return your paper. You then have to revise and resubmit within 7 days.

When evaluating your writing, the instructors may correct the first few language errors. Thereafter, the instructor may only indicate that flaws are present. In such instances, you must take the initiative to identify and correct those flaws, rather than expect the instructors to perform that task.

Grade ranges

There is no rounding. Plus/minus grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

Grade	Range
A	93.0% or higher
A-	90.0%-92.9%
B+	87.0%-89.9%
B	83.0%-86.9%
B-	80.0%-82.9%
C+	77.0%-79.9%
C	73.0%-76.9%
C-	70.0%-72.9%
D	60.0%-69.9%
F	59.9% or lower

Some students think that putting effort into a course automatically equals an “A” grade regardless of the level of mastery of the course material. In other words, some students mistakenly equate effort with mastery, which is not true. For example, a runner can put a lot of effort into a race, but if the runner has not mastered the effective techniques of running, then the running performance will not be excellent.

Grade Disputes

When you receive a grade and feedback on your papers and SPSS assignment there is a 24-hour cooling off period. This means that you should not reply to your grading instructor until at least 24-hours have passed. After that time you may reply with your questions or concerns. Failure to abide by this rule may result in a point deduction. Also, you have ten days to dispute a grade. The exception to this ten-day rule is for the Final paper and Experiment paper as we need to finalize grades.

Paper guidelines

- All documents should be in Microsoft Word format.
- Papers must be type-written or word-processed, double-spaced, with 12-point font.
- Make sure you keep a copy of all submitted papers. Please ensure that each paper is written in APA style. Refer to the APA manual. (6th Edition)
- Finally, typos and spelling errors are unforgivable at this level and reflect poorly on you.
- All page length requirements are for double-spaced pages, with 1-inch margins, in 12-point Times New Roman font

Lateness

Assignments

We realize that working professionals occasionally must submit an assignment late. To encourage everyone to hand in assignments, we will accept late work. However, in fairness to those who do turn things in on time there will be a price to pay for late work. We will grade all late assignments and then deduct percentage points. Work less than 24 hours late will be deducted 10%, work more than 24

hours late but under a week late will be deducted 25%. Work more than one week late will incur a 50% deduction.

An exception to this rule is at the end of the semester. Any late work must be submitted before the last day of class unless approved by the instructor. After the last class we are finalizing grades and grading final papers. For this reason we typically cannot accept late work. Also, if you want feedback on the Introductory Paper to use as you write the Final Paper you must submit your Introductory Paper two weeks before the Final Paper is due.

If you are going to be late turning in an assignment, email your instructor to notify them of this, and then **email them again** to alert them when you have submitted the assignment.

If you miss a live session and require an alternate assignment, the due date for this assignment will always be 1 week after the missed session.

Discussions

In order to have a full discussion that enables all students to fully participate, it is important that your original posts are submitted on time.

Live Sessions

The specific dates and times for the required and optional live sessions are listed in the course overview page.

This course has two required Live Sessions.

- For the **Focus Groups Module** (Weeks 05 and 06) you are required to attend a **Live Session** with your group members to conduct and participate in video focus groups. Please begin to coordinate this as soon as you can, using the group discussion board in the General section of the course and affiliated sign-up survey to do so. You will also need a working webcam for these video sessions, and further, per typical focus groups, you will be asked to double-record this using a free screen-capture application such as [screencastomatic](#). *NOTE: If you cannot attend any of these sessions, please contact your instructor immediately via email to request an alternate assignment. The due date for any alternate assignment is 1 week after the missed session.*
- For the final **Experiments Module**, there is a **Live Session** in which the class will conduct an experiment together. *NOTE: If you cannot attend this session, there is an alternate assignment (please see Assignment 01: Candy Experiment in the Experiment module), but attendance is highly encouraged. The due date for any alternate assignment is 1 week after the missed session.*

Optional Live Sessions

There are seven optional live sessions within the class. These are as follows:

1. Week 02: Introductory paper discussion
2. Week 04: Informal office hours
3. Week 05: Chimene's live library session
4. Week 05: Review of SPSS assignment
5. Week 09: Q & A on survey paper

6. Week 11: Q & A on content analysis paper
7. Week 13: Q & A on experiment paper
 - o All of the optional live sessions will be recorded. This course was intentionally designed to be asynchronous as much as possible which allows you the opportunity to work on course materials when it is convenient for you.

Group work

You will work within a group throughout the course to complete the course assignments.

- These groups are **randomly** assigned
- This group will change at **Week 10**.
- You can find both groups by clicking on the '**Roster**' link in the right bar of the main course page. Your first group will be a USC-themed name starting with the letter "T" such as "Trojan" or "Tirebiter", while your second group will be a general USC-themed name such as "Cardinal" or "Gold."
- You will see "**checkpoints**" for your group work within the course. These are not graded even though some may have a submission component, but instead are necessary steps that must be performed in advance of ensuing graded assignments
- You and your group members will complete a **Peer Feedback Survey** which counts towards your overall participation grade.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

<https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Tab for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Moodle, Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Library access

As a USC student, you have access to all the library resources and the Annenberg Librarian, Chimene Tucker (cetucker@usc.edu), is available to assist you with any inquiry you may have. http://www.usc.edu/libraries/services/remote_user_services/

Course Director Information

Mathew Curtis received his Ph.D. in social psychology from USC. He teaches a wide range of courses at the graduate level from research methods to persuasion and influence and has been the recipient of both teaching and mentoring awards at USC.

Mathew's primary research examines emotion and the role of comparison; how individuals and groups compare themselves to others in order to understand their role in work and social settings as well the behavioral and emotional responses to these comparisons. Mathew has also completed extensive research in relation to linguistics; most recently examining the effects of language contained in jury instructions on the jury's deliberation and outcomes.

Before teaching at USC, Mathew worked as a business consultant in England, examining the consumer decision process and how to successfully market products. Mathew also has background in teaching statistics and has served as a statistical consultant for researchers and business entrepreneurs.

Technical Support and Technical Requirements

A full description of the technical requirements for this course can be found on our [technical support page](#).

Assistance to resolve technical problems is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. This service is provided by Pearson Education, and it is restricted primarily to problems associated with the functionality of the course delivery platform.

Pearson Education Group's Help Desk staff provides assistance to resolve problems you believe are not associated with the computer hardware and software you have purchased from a vendor.

Examples of problems that fall within this category are:

- Unable to view multimedia files.
- Unable to view responses to comments you have posted in the Discussion area.

If you are not sure whether the problem is due to your computer system, contact Pearson's Help Desk for guidance; otherwise, contact the vendor.

To talk to a live technical support agent, please call the following number:

Toll-free	877-646-1885
Support Center	http://usc.echelp.org

Weekly Readings	
Week 00	Graff, G., & Birckstein, C. (2014). <i>They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing</i> . New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. NOTE: Although this reading is assigned for this week you have until the end of week 4 to complete the reading. The book is a short and easy read so it is recommended you complete it this week if possible.
Week 01	Gopen, G. & Swan, J. (1990). Science of scientific writing. <i>American Scientist</i> , 78, 550-558. Levy, Y., & Ellis, T. J. (2006). A systems approach to conduct an effective literature review in support of information systems research. <i>Information Systems Journal</i> , 9, 181-212.
Week 02	Park, J. T., & John, D. R. (2010). Got to get you into my life: Do brand personalities rub off on consumers? <i>The Journal of</i>

	<i>Consumer Research</i> , 37, 655-669.
Week 03	<p>Beall, A. E. (2008). The strategic-question approach to market research. In <i>Strategic market research: A guide to conducting research that drives businesses</i> (pp. 5-10). Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.</p> <p>Gelman, A. (2002). <i>Teaching Statistics: A Bag of Tricks</i>. New York: Oxford University Press. 148-156.</p> <p>Levy, Y., & Ellis, T. J. (2006, June). <i>Towards a framework of literature review process in support of information systems research</i>. Paper presented at 2006 Informing Science and IT Education Joint Conference, University of Salford, United Kingdom, 171-181.</p> <p>Muniz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T.C. (2001). Brand community. <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>, 27, 412-432.</p> <p>Percentages: http://www.calculatorsoup.com/calculators/math/percentage.php</p> <p>Significance: http://www.statsoft.com/Textbook/Elementary-Statistics-Concepts#What</p>
Week 04	(None)
Week 05	<p>Fiates, G. M. R. F., Amboni, R. D. M., & Teixeira, E. (2008). Consumer behaviour of Brazilian primary school students: Findings from focus group interviews. <i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i>, 32, 157-162.</p> <p>Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>, 22, 129-152.</p> <p>Garrison, M. E. B., Pierce, S. H., Monroe, P. A., Sasser, D. D., Shaffer, A., & Blalock, L. B. (1999). Focus group discussions: Three examples from family and consumer research. <i>Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal</i>, 27, 428-450.</p> <p>Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. (1996). Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research. <i>Journal of Communication</i>, 46, 79-98.</p>
Week 06	<p>Black, I. R., & Nevill, I. (2009). Fly-posting: An exploration of a 'controversial' medium. <i>Journal of Marketing Communications</i>, 15, 209-226</p> <p>Hampson, S. E., Martin, J. Jorgensen, J., & Barker, M. (2009). A social marketing approach to improving the nutrition of low-income women and children: An initial focus group study. <i>Public Health Nutrition</i>, 12, 1563-1568</p> <p>Vicsek, L. (2010). Issues in the analysis of focus groups: Generalisability, quantifiability, treatment of context and quotations. <i>The Qualitative Report</i>, 15, 122-141</p> <p>Waterlander, W. E., de Mull, A., Schuit, A. J., Seidell, J. C., & Steenhuis, I. H. M. (2010). Perceptions on the use of pricing strategies to stimulate healthy eating among residents of deprived neighbourhoods: A focus group study. <i>International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity</i>, 7, 44-55.</p>

Week 07	<p>Parker, R., & Chatterjee, A. (2009, July). Consumer susceptibility to credit debt: Findings from exploratory surveys. <i>Journal of Global Business Issues</i>, 3(2), 179-184.</p> <p>Stobbelaar, D. J., Casimir, G., Borghuis, J., Marks, I., Meijer, L., & Zebeda, S. (2007, July). Adolescents' attitudes towards organic food: A survey of 15- to 16-year old school children. <i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i>, 31, 349-356</p> <p>Paolacci, G., & Chandler, J. (2014). Inside the Turk: Understanding Mechanical Turk as a participant pool. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i>, 23, 184-188</p> <p>Buhrmester, M. Kwang, T. & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's Mechanical Turk: A new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data? <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i>, 6, 3–5.</p>
Week 08	(Continue Week 7 readings)
Week 09	(None)
Week 10	<p>Ball, J. G., Liang, A., & Lee, W. (2009). Representation of African Americans in direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical commercials: A content analysis with implications for health disparities. <i>Health Marketing Quarterly</i>, 26, 372-390.</p> <p>McMullan, J. L., & Miller, D. (2009). Wins, winning and winners: The commercial advertising of lottery gambling. <i>Journal of Gambling Studies</i>, 25, 273-295.</p> <p>Pantelidis, I. S. (2010). Electronic meal experience: A content analysis of online restaurant comments. <i>Cornell Hospitality Quarterly</i>, 51, 483-491.</p> <p>Pegoraro, A. L., Ayer, S. M., & O'Reilly, N. J. (2010). Consumer consumption and advertising through sport. <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>, 53, 1454-1475.</p>
Week 11	<p>Kim, H., & Kwon, Y. J. (2011, February 24). Soulmates, best friends, and casual buddies: The relationship of U.S. college students to retailer brands. <i>Clothing and Textiles Research Journal</i>, 29, 67-82.</p> <p>Tsang, A. S.L. & Prendergast, G. (2009). Does culture affect evaluation expressions? A cross-cultural analysis of Chinese and American computer game reviews. <i>European Journal of Marketing</i>, 43, 686-707.</p>
Week 12	(None)
Week 13	(None)
Week 14	<p>Aschwanden, C. (2015). Science isn't broken. FiveThirtyEight. Retrieved from http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/science-isnt-broken/</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This reading contains some strong language and will make you think. If you dislike either of these two things you are excused from reading this article.