

PR 499 Special Topics: The Power of the Pitch – Big Asks and Public Speaking for a Better Future

4 Units

Spring 2025 – Thursdays – 9 a.m.-12:20 p.m.
Section: 21454R
Location: ANN L101

Course Description

We make asks all the time—whether it’s a high-stakes “take me seriously” job interview or just an attempt to persuade friends to order Thai instead of pizza. But what’s really going on below the surface of that very human exchange and how do we harness it to get more yeses? This course answers those questions and develops students’ public speaking and leadership skills along the way, focusing on: permission, purpose, and becoming the new sound of power.

Much of the class will be experiential, encouraging students to explore both our culture’s traditional stories of what authority figures are supposed to sound like *and* their own narratives—why they speak the way they do. Through the semester, students will develop the bravery and skills to speak in public like they own the place—and put it into practice by the end of the class, persuasively pitching an idea that’s close to their heart.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Practice telling a story for impact
- Develop successful messaging to position their idea for greatest stick
- Connect to their audience, facilitating any room they pitch in
- Practice settling their nervous system and centering themselves while communicating
- Present with authenticity and charisma, online and in person
- Pitch with a sense of playfulness and ease

Description of Assignments

Since this class is about the how, not just the what, of speaking you will be assessed on how you show up. That means: completing all required reading and homework before each class session; attending class and actively participating—contributing questions and comments based on reading/viewing the material assigned as well as on processing it through your own unique lens; listening to understand in dialogue with other students (rather than listening to respond); and presenting as bravely as possible, which in this case means, presenting while embodying the lessons in this course no matter how new it may feel.

Classes begin promptly, so please arrive on time. If you are unable to attend class for any reason, please notify the instructor as soon as possible, and assume personal responsibility for gathering notes from other classmates. Zoom will not be available for students who are not physically present for in-classroom learning.

At the end of the semester, points will be allocated to students based upon:

- Consistent attendance in class in order to participate in and contribute to class discussions
- Consistent demonstration that they have read the material for scheduled class discussion
- Contribution to class discussion; answering questions, asking relevant questions
- Completing the homework assignments including all COL's
- Demonstrating respect for fellow classmates, guest speakers, and instructor, including appropriate use of personal technologies during classroom time

Grading

a. Grading Breakdown

Description of assessments and corresponding points and percentage of grade.

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Class Participation (includes completing reading on time)	150	15%
Class Presentations	150	15%
Mission Statement	100	10%
Homework assignments (obsession list, practice, TED talk analysis, etc.)	200	20%
COL's (includes journaling and video submissions)	100	10%
Big Pitch (presentation, deck, and whether component parts were used)	300	30%
TOTAL	1000	100%

b. Course Grading Scale

Letter grades and corresponding point value ranges.

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range		
95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B- (B minus)	67% to 69%: D+ (D plus)
90% to 94%: A- (A minus)	77% to 79%: C+ (C plus)	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+ (B plus)	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D- (D minus)
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C- (C minus)	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

Big Asks and Public Speaking

"A" projects will demonstrate creativity, courage and the willingness to experiment. Assignments should be well written with compelling visuals and deep personal insights.

"B" projects will demonstrate thoughtfulness and creativity. Assignments should be well written with strong design elements.

"C" projects will demonstrate less creativity and an average level of passion and experimentation. Assignments will demonstrate average writing and design.

"D" projects will demonstrate a lack of interest in the topic and poor execution of the written and visual aspects.

"F" projects will be based on lack of participation in the assignments and/or the weekly discussions.

Public Relations

“A” projects have writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited material. All required elements included (catchy headline, solid lead, varied vocabulary; supporting facts/figures; quotes as required). Excellent organization and flow; original thinking. Showed creativity in packaging/distribution method. High end of scale: publishable today as is.

“B” projects have two to five spelling, grammar or AP Style mistakes. One or more required elements missing or poorly displayed (i.e., boring headline; confusing lead, etc.). Shows potential as a good writer. Adhered to inverted pyramid. High end of scale will have at least one extraordinary element such as astonishing lead or little-known facts or pithy quote. Some creativity shown. Publishable with medium editing.

“C” projects have more than five errors (spelling, grammar, AP style). Poorly edited and/or proofread. May have adhered to inverted pyramid but strayed at beginning or end. Hackneyed elements such as trite headline or uninteresting lead. Little or no facts/figures included. Passive rather than active verbs become the norm. Little or no creativity shown. Publishable with major editing.

“D” projects have more than 10 errors (spelling, grammar). Needs to be completely rewritten. Poorly organized with little or no understanding of journalistic style/standards. Needs to work with writing coach.

“F” projects are not rewritable, late or not turned in. A grade of F also will be assigned for any plagiarized and/or fabricated material that is submitted.

Grading Timeline

Unless otherwise stated, all assignments will be graded within one week. Exceptions might apply.

Assignment Rubrics

Individual grading rubrics for particular course elements will be detailed when the assignment is posted.

Assignment Submission Policy

- A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will receive a full grade deduction for each day they are late.
- B. Assignments must be uploaded to Brightspace before beginning of class on the day the assignment is due in a pdf, Word or PowerPoint format. They should also be emailed to the instructor at XXX@usc.edu
- C. All papers must be APA format with notes in bibliography page.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Permission to Speak, How to Change What Power Sounds like, Starting with You

by Samara Bay

Feb 07, 2023 | ISBN 9780593238684

Short selection from **The Art of Gathering**

By Priya Parker

Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [Annenberg Digital Lounge](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001

TBD

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

A weekly schedule of the topics, readings, and deliverables for the course.

Important note to students: Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

Week	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due By Next Class
Week 1 Thurs., Jan. 16	Welcome & the New Sound of Power	Read Chapter 1	
Week 2 Thurs., Jan. 23	"The Public"	Read Chapter 2 and 3, with notes. Obsession list.	Obsession list
Week 3 Thurs., Jan. 30	Claiming Your Weird	Read Chapter 4, COL #1	Submit 1-min video on COL, be ready to share
Week 4 Thurs. Feb. 6	Owning Your Voice Story	Read Chapter 5, COL #2	Submit 1-min video on COL, be ready to share
Week 5 Thurs., Feb. 13	Strength and Warmth	Read Chapter 6, choose 2 aspects of your voice story	Be ready to present 2 aspects of your voice story
Week 6 Thurs., Feb. 20	Share Your Voice Story	Read Chapter 7, pick TED talk, watch and report	1-page report on TED Talker you picked
Week 7 Thurs., Feb. 27	Storytelling Secrets	Read Chapter 8, same TED talk, different analysis	1-page report on TED Talker you picked from new angle
Week 8 Thurs., Mar. 6	Telling Your Own Stories	COL #3	Submit 1-min video on COL
Week 9 Thurs., Mar. 13	How to Pitch	Brainstorm your big pitch idea	Have a few ideas ready to try out with peers
Spring Break Thurs., Mar. 20	No Class		
Week 10 Thurs., Mar. 27	Working Your Pitch	Read selection from The Art of Gathering, pick pitch topic and sketch out aha/story	Be ready to present your pitch opening
Week 11 Thurs., Apr. 3	Your What and Aha	Sketch out why and who, COL #4 = pitching your idea and taking notes on response	Submit 1-min video on COL

Week 12 Thurs., Apr. 10	Putting it Together	Build your deck, including all 7 components of a good pitch	Be ready to present your rough pitch to a classmate
Week 13 Thurs., Apr. 17	Practice Pitch!	COL #5 (last one),	Submit 1-min video on COL
Week 14 Thurs., Apr. 24	Final Presentations	Final preparation for pitch presentation	Be prepared to present your final pitch and facilitate
Week 15 Thurs., May 1	Final Presentations	Final preparation for pitch presentation	Be prepared to present your final pitch and facilitate
Final Exam Period Tues., May 13, 8-10 a.m.	Summative Experience		

Communication

The students are encouraged to contact the instructor outside of class to ask questions or schedule office hours (please include in the email the nature of the conversation you wish to have). It is the instructor's intention to reply to any student emails within 48 hours.

Classroom Norms

- You are welcome to move your body when you want as long as it's not super distracting to others' learning. You're in charge of your body.
- You have permission to speak, but permission to speak is not the same as permission to blah blah blah.
- Listen well.
- If your intuition says you've got something of use for someone else, feel free to offer it. This usually works best framed as "I wonder if..." or "For me..."
- What's shared in the group stays in the group.
- This is an accountable space. An accountable space (sometimes called a brave or safe space) places the onus equally on all present to behave equitably and inclusively to foster a deeper understanding of diverse lived experience in real time. Intent and impact both matter. Please speak, feel free to disagree, but please do so with kindness and care. Psychologically safe spaces are made and maintained by the choices of all present.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Internships

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one public relations or advertising class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

The USC Student Handbook (https://policy.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/USC_StudentCode_August2022.pdf)

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

https://catalogue.usc.edu/preview_entity.php?catoid=16&ent_oid=3459

"Since its founding, the School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an "F" on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism."

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

Generative AI Policy

The USC Annenberg Public Relations and Advertising program views generative AI as an addition to USC's digital literacy tools that students are encouraged to experiment with and use inside and outside the classroom. Students may use generative AI tools such as Chat GPT to help complete their class assignments but must disclose such use in the bibliography or notes section. Students are solely responsible for the quality and the accuracy of their submissions, regardless of whether they were completed with the aid of generative AI.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. **This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive.** More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

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

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.