

PSCI 4950: Writing, Communication, and Advocacy

Fall 2022, MWF 9:00 – 9:50, 117 Wooten Hall

Dr. Wendy Watson
Contact: via Canvas Inbox

Office Location: 153 Wooten Hall
Office Hours: Thursdays, 1 – 4, and by appointment

Course Communication

Please contact your instructor through Canvas inbox. Messages through Canvas inbox will go directly to your instructor's UNT email account, but they will be marked with your course information; they will be indexed in our course environment; and I can be sure that my communication in response is secure.

Course Description:

No matter where life takes you, the ability to communicate well will give you an advantage. In this class, we will focus specifically on the types of writing used by policy makers and others in the public sphere (press releases, memoranda, executive summaries, etc.). However, the building blocks of good writing transfer to a wide variety of contexts, and we will spend a lot of time on those building blocks.

This is first and foremost a practical class. That means we will spend most of our time in the classroom doing things: working in groups, practicing editing, giving and receiving feedback, and more. You should emerge from this class with improved teamwork skills and with several writing samples that are appropriate for your LinkedIn page.

Course Objectives:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to

- (1) Identify the audience for a specific type of communication and adjust their message to that audience
- (2) Distinguish between persuasive and informative writing styles
- (3) Identify quality resources
- (4) Use and manipulate conventions of style to communicate more effectively
- (5) Evaluate and critique the writing of colleagues
- (6) Contribute to a group project as both a leader and a peer

A Note About Our Classroom:

Our classroom is a neuroinclusive environment, a safe and comfortable environment for people with all types of neurodifferences including sensory processing disorders. Please honor that by

silencing phones, muting laptop speakers, arriving on time, and avoiding unnecessary sensory stimulation (shuffling papers, dropping book bags, scraping chairs across the floor, eating loud or smelly foods, wearing perfume, etc.). You do not need to be silent, but loud, persistent, or unexpected noises cause your instructor and fellow students a lot of distress. Similarly, if you need to leave the classroom or if you have a physical or neurological circumstance that makes it more comfortable for you to occasionally get up, walk around, stretch, etc., you are welcome to do that; please just be as quiet as you can be while also taking care of your own needs.

If there are further modifications that would make the classroom more comfortable for you, please don't hesitate to let me know. I don't need you to provide me with a diagnosis or medical information; just tell me what you need and I will try to accommodate you.

Course Materials

There are two required texts for this course:

Smith, Catherine. *Writing Public Policy: A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process, 3rd Edition*. Oxford University Press.

Strunk, William, and Michele Poff. *Elements of Style Workbook: Writing Strategies with Grammar Book*. Tip Top Publishing.

These books have been ordered by the UNT bookstore, but you are also free to purchase them from any retail establishment. All other readings will be available through Canvas.

Grades

Grades will be assessed on the following scale:

A - 100 – 90%	B – 89.9 – 80%	C – 79.9 – 70%
D – 69.9 – 60%	F - < 60%	

I use standard mathematical rounding, but I will not otherwise adjust grades. Please do not ask. It will be awkward for us both.

Grade Components

In-Class Grammar Exercises	15%
Practice Critiques	10%
Peer Review	15%
Client-Based Team Project	
Communication Strategy	10%
Critique of Class Group	15%
Team Project	25%
Reflection	10%

Course Structure

This course is a fully face-to-face course. Because this course is project-based and applied, it is imperative that you attend class. This is not just for your sake but for the sake of your team (see below). If you don't know what's happening, you cannot fully assist your team in class activities. As a result, attendance and timeliness are expected. Obviously, things happen. Accordingly, you get a total of three amnesty days during the semester. After that, you will lose 2 percentage points for each class day you miss. If you have extenuating circumstances, it is your responsibility to contact me and the members of your team in advance.

Summary of Major Grade Components

In-Class Grammar Exercises

We will be completing the exercises in *The Elements of Style Workbook* during class meetings. These will be small group exercises. You should take them seriously, however, as they constitute 15% of your total grade.

Practice Critiques

Our Canvas course includes a number of examples of communication from “the real world,” all of which were submitted by UNT alumni and/or colleagues of your instructor. You will be responsible for reading two of these samples (each from a different author) and completing a worksheet to critique the samples. This assignment will help you to see what a difference good communication skills can make, and it will help you identify what constitutes good/effective communication. It will also help you flex those critique muscles, which are very important to build.

Peer Review

You will have two teams in this class. One team is your “in-class exercises” team, and the other is your client-based project team. You will complete a peer review for each team. The peer review is a relatively short survey that asks for a numerical evaluation, a strength for each member, and an area where each member could improve. Your peer review scores will be out of 25 points. Twenty of those points are awarded based on your teammates' review of you; five of those points are based on your completion of the peer review survey.

Client-Based Team Project

During the second and third week of classes, you will have an opportunity to choose a client. All clients are non-profit organizations that could use help with their communication with decision-makers and the public. The precise nature of those needs varies between clients. However, every team project should include:

- the original communication strategy laying out your plan;
- a briefing memo or white paper prepared for the staff of the non-profit;
- a press release suitable for submission to one or more media outlets;
- a document or product suitable for release to the public (an ad, a brochure, an infographic, a series of memes, etc.); and
- a document prepared for a government decision-maker (a grant proposal, a white paper, testimony, public comment on a legislative proposal, etc.)

While you should work in a collaborative way with your team and have a hand in every document, you should take the lead on at least one document.

Communication Strategy: Your first task will be to develop and present a communication strategy for your client. What is it that your client needs and how best can you assist them? There is a module in Canvas about communication strategies along with a worksheet to guide this process.

Critique: After working in class for a number of weeks, each team will submit a draft of their work product. Another team will be responsible for providing a critique and feedback of that draft. You will have a full week in class to work with your team to develop the critique of the other team.

Team Projects: After the critique process, each team has another two weeks to revise their work product. They will need to turn in their work product and present it to the class during the last week of classes.

Reflection: The final step in the team process is to conduct an individual reflection on the process. What did you learn about teamwork? What did you learn about working with a client? What did you learn about your own communication strengths and weaknesses? What would you do differently if you could go back and start at the beginning? This short reflection paper will be due during finals week.

Course and University Policies

Late Work

Due dates and times for all work are available on the course schedule below. Please remember that you are representing UNT and the Department of Political Science when you interact with your “real world” clients. Being on time is an important part of making a good impression. Accordingly, all work for the client-based project must be turned in on time; it will not be accepted late. All other assignments will be docked 10% for each day or portion of a day they are late.

Course Environment

This class is a place of learning. The policies articulated below are meant to facilitate learning (they are not intended to be punitive). I would like to “double down” on that policy. I will not

tolerate any sort of behavior that marginalizes members of this class or compromises their ability to learn. If something is interfering with your learning experience, please find a way to address it or come see me: UNT has programs to help with legal issues, food insecurity, intimate violence, emotional and mental health issues, and more. I can point you in the direction of the people who can give you the support to help you learn.

[Americans with Disabilities Act Statement](#)

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>.

[Academic Misconduct](#)

Academic Integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity. Any suspected case of Academic Dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of “F” in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. For policy and procedures: <http://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity> .

For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, please visit: <http://abacus.bates.edu/cbb/>

[Emergency Notification & Procedures](#)

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify you with critical information in an event of emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). The system sends voice messages (and text messages upon permission) to the phones of all active faculty staff, and students. Please make certain to update your phone numbers at my.unt.edu. Some helpful emergency preparedness actions include: 1) ensuring you know the evacuation routes and severe weather shelter areas, determining how you will contact family and friends if phones are temporarily unavailable, and identifying where you will go if you need to evacuate the Denton area suddenly. In the event of a university closure, your instructor will communicate with you through Blackboard regarding assignments, exams, field trips, and other items that may be impacted by the closure.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr . In short, please be considerate of others.

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment & Assault

UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

UNT's Dean of Students' website offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their needs: <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/sexual-misconduct/reporting-sexual-misconduct#4> . Contact via e-mail SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by phone 940-565-2648.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings and Activities
1	Introduction: Policy Making and Communication	Read: Smith, Chapters 1 and 2 In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet your exercise team • Critique round robin
2	Basics of Grammar	Monday, 9/5 is a holiday In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of Style Workbook, Sections 1 – 7 Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client preference survey • Due Friday, 9/7, by 10 AM (end of class)
3	What Is a Communication Strategy?	Read: Communication Strategy PDF on Canvas In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet your clients Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workbook Sections 1 – 7 • Due Monday, 9/12, by 9 AM (start of class) • Practice Critiques • Due Friday, 9/16, by 10 AM (end of class)
4	Framing a Policy Problem	Read: Smith, Chapter 3 In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of Style Workbook, Sections 8 – 11 • Frame your clients' problems
5	Position Papers	Read: Smith, Chapter 5 In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of Style Workbook, Sections 12 – 15 Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workbook Sections 8 – 11 • Due Monday, 9/26, by 9 AM (start of class)
6	Request Action	Read: Smith, Chapter 6 In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit from Professor William Salmon Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workbook Section 12 – 15 • Due Monday, 10/3, by 9 AM (start of class) • Your Client's Communication Strategy • Due Friday, 10/7, by 10 AM (end of class)
7	Project Progress	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present your strategy to the class • Revise your strategy for submission to the client

Week	Topic	Readings and Activities
8	Briefing Memos and White Papers	Read: Smith, Chapter 7 In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of Style Workbook, Sections 16 – 20 Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised Communication Strategy • Due Monday, 10/17, by 9 AM (start of class)
9	Testimony, Written Comments, and Press Releases	Read: Smith, Chapters 8 and 9, and reading on Canvas Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workbook Exercises 16 – 20 • Due Monday, 10/24, by 9 AM (start of class) • Peer review of exercise teams • Due Friday, 10/28, by 10 AM (end of class)
10	Client Work	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with your teams on your client documents
11	Client Work	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with your teams on your client documents Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafts of all client documents • Due on Friday, 11/11, at 10 AM (end of class)
12	Group Critique	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with your team to critique the submissions of another team Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critiques of another team's documents • Due on Friday, 11/18, at 10 AM (end of class)
13	Thanksgiving	No class this week. Use Monday to review the critiques you received.
14	Revisions	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise documents for client Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisions of all documents • Due on Friday, 12/2, at 10 AM (end of class)
15	Presentations	In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present your work with your client Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All work for the client should be submitted to the client
Finals		Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer review of client teams • Reflection paper • Both due on Wednesday, 12/14, at 10 AM (end of the final exam period for this course)