COMM 286S: 
Business & Professional Communication

Course Syllabus | Fall 2014

Instructor: Katherine M. Castle
Email kcastle4@unl.edu
Office Hours-See BlackBoard

Course Description and Objectives

Employers often identify “good communication skills” as a requirement in job descriptions and help wanted ads. But what does it really mean to have good communication skills? In this class, you will develop and refine communication skills that you will be able to apply in your workplace interactions. But achieving “good communication” in organizational contexts depends upon far more than organizational members' possession and execution of these not-as-simple-as-they-seem skills. Therefore, as you develop your basic communication skills set in this course, we will examine communication issues that are important to contemporary organizations, as well as the communication-based problems with which they grapple. You will have the opportunity to excel beyond simple awareness of communicative skills and strategies to become communicatively competent, a real advantage in any business environment.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- Use theories and concepts to analyze communication in the workplace
- Plan and productively participate in effective team meetings
- Develop teamwork skills and specific strategies to work effectively in teams
- Plan and conduct information-gathering interviews
- Research, organize, and deliver professional oral presentations
- Attend more closely to your own verbal messages (both formal and informal), and make conscientious efforts to improve your oral communication skills
- Understand and intelligently discuss communication issues and problems that affect contemporary organizations

Required Reading:


Communicating at work

The required text for this course is a customized e-textbook package hosted by McGraw Hill Connect Plus. This code provides access to BOTH the required e-book AND the Connect Public Speaking platform that is required for your online speech deliveries. The access code can be purchased EITHER directly through McGraw-Hill at the link provided in your BlackBoard course shell OR it can be purchased at the University Book Store.
The required text for this course is a custom package found only through the University Bookstore on campus or directly from McGraw-Hill online. In addition to the text chapters that have been drawn from multiple texts, the faculty have included content in the textbook package necessary for success in this course. Further, the faculty have worked directly with the publisher to provide a cost-effective package to UNL students in the e-book format. Students taking this course are expected to utilize the components of the package available in the bookstore or online.

**Additional Required Resources:**

In addition to your Connect Plus customized e-book code package, you will need to have access to high speed wireless internet, a webcam or other digital camera, a microphone and the willingness and ability to submit fully visible and audible speeches. Further, you will need the willingness and ability to work with your team virtually.

**Assignments & Tests**

Your final grade will be determined based on your performance on the following. Full details for each assignment will be posted on Blackboard.

*Scavenger Hunt* (10 points). You will complete tasks and answer questions in order to help you become familiar with the online learning environment.

*Case Analysis Paper* (75 points). In this assignment you will write a paper in which you evaluate a professional case study in which you apply the concepts from your reading and lecture to analyze the organization’s culture and make recommendations based on what you are learning.

*Oral Self-Critique* (75 points). You will carefully critique your verbal communication patterns and reflect on conscientious efforts to improve disfluencies and other communicative tendencies that distract from your professionalism.

*Interview Protocol* (25 points). You will work as a team to create an effective interview protocol for each team members’ use in interviewing a member of the organization your team chooses to analyze for the final project. This protocol will be created by the team, and is your first team project for this class. It will require that your team meet and you will be provided with access to a synchronous, virtual team meeting room for your use for this project and throughout the semester. You are welcome to use this or other resources to help facilitate your team’s collaboration.

*Outline of Informative Speech* (50 points). You will conceptualize, develop, research and organize an outline for an informative presentation. Your delivery of this presentation will be graded separately.

*Delivery of Informative Presentation* (100 points). You will research, organize, and deliver professional oral presentations that focus on business-related issues. These must be extemporaneous nature rather than manuscript or memorized. These will be audio and video recorded speeches.
**Interview Summary Speech** (150 points—50 points for the outline, 100 points for the delivery). You will conduct your own professional interview as a part of your preparation for this assignment. Your interviewee will be a member of the organization that your team decides to analyze for the final project. You will complete your interview alone and will summarize the interview in a formal speech for this assignment. You will conduct an interview, develop a full sentence outline AND deliver your speech to complete this assignment.

**Team Organizational Analysis Paper** (100 points). With your teammates, you will research, organize, develop, write a 10-12 page paper that analyzes a specific organization’s culture based on your research and individual interviews of specific members of that organization.

**Learning Unit Essay Questions** (60 total points). In this class, you will be responding to an essay question provided by your instructor for each learning unit. This is your opportunity to demonstrate that you have read, watched, and understood all the assigned material as you identify and define relevant concepts. You will be asked to connect concepts from the assigned lecture to concepts from the reading as you respond to the essay question prompt provided by your instructor for each learning unit. You will be required to submit a well thought out, fully developed response to these questions for each of the learning units. You will be given the opportunity to drop one of these questions in your total score.

**Expectations**

**Academic Honesty.** Just as ethics are important in business, they also are important in educational settings. Academic honesty and integrity are expected in this course. Any student who is found to have engaged in an act of academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating, plagiarism, complicity, misrepresenting excuses for missing class for turning in late work) will automatically fail the assignment. Additionally, he or she may fail the course and/or be reported to his or her academic advisor and Dean for further action. Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse for academic dishonesty. See Section 4.2 of the Student Code of Conduct (http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml) for definitions of what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please note: It is possible to plagiarize yourself. You may not submit work that you completed in a prior semester (for this or any other class) for a grade in the current semester. Doing this constitutes self-plagiarism. If you have questions about this, please talk with your instructor.

**Responsibility for Personal Learning.** This course is being taught online. You will be required to stay on task and take responsibility for your own learning as you work through the course. Please note that this also plays into your group work. Please remain communicative with your group members, and be sure to ask questions if you are not clear on anything within the course.

**Recorded Presentations.** You will be required to record yourself delivering your speech (video and audio) in front of an audience of at least 5 people (you may select and gather them on your own). You will need to first span the audience so I can see your audience and count the number of people present. Then, you will record your speech, making certain that I can clearly see you and evaluate your nonverbals and speaker presence. Then, you must span your audience again so I can count the number of people present. This will be uploaded to
Speech Connect for my review. I also must be able to clearly hear your presentation in order to grade it effectively. Please test these things out before you post your final speech by the deadline to ensure that your recording is visually clear and is clearly audible. **It is your responsibility to ensure you have posted a compatible, accessible video recording that can be clearly heard and viewed so it is accessible for grading before the due date.**

**Team Collaboration.** You are required to collaborate online with a team to complete required projects. You are expected to be a responsible and ethical team member. This includes fulfilling agreed upon tasks, being flexible with your schedule, and being respectful in all interactions. Since we never meet in person for class, you will need to develop a set of expectations within your group for the timely completion of your group work, demonstrating a clear respect for each group members’ need to complete the work within a specific timeframe. Communication among group members is essential! Be certain that you are responsive to your group members to avoid the development of frustration within your group.

**Assignment Turn In.** All assignments must be submitted through BlackBoard as explained in each assignment description. Assignments will not be accepted via email or any other format. It is your responsibility to use BlackBoard effectively to turn in your assignments and to ensure that your assignment is properly submitted before the assignment due date according to course specifications. PLEASE NOTE: Your assignments MUST be Microsoft Word documents. If you are saving your assignments on your MAC, you must add the .doc or .docx file extension to your document in order for it to be accepted.

**Deadlines.** Meeting deadlines is very important and a mark of professionalism. All assignments are due on the assigned day, no later than 12 midnight. **Please pay attention to due dates and make sure that you complete all tasks due for each Learning Unit by the specified due date. It is your responsibility to make sure your assignment has been successfully turned in according to class expectations before the due date.** You will want to be sure to check BlackBoard to be sure your assignment was successfully submitted before the due date has passed. You have flexibility in posting your assignments at any time during the learning unit that is assigned. I encourage you to post your work early when possible, and check to be sure it was properly posted. This will help you avoid issues that can result due to unexpected illness or personal emergencies that could result in late work. Waiting until the last minute leaves room for you to turn in late work due to unexpected situations that might arise, such as illness.

**Late Work.** If you do miss a deadline, a late penalty will be applied to your work. If you miss the assignment deadline, you may submit your assignment within 2 days of the due date (up to 48 hours late) for a 25% deduction, within 3-4 days (48-96 hours late) for a 50% deduction, and within 5-6 days (96-144 hours late) for a 75% deduction. An assignment posted more than 6 days late will not be accepted for credit. The late policy also applies to assignments that were not submitted properly according to course expectations before the due date.

**Turning Work in Early.** You are welcome to turn your work in early. However, please note that your written assignments will not be graded until the assigned due date.
Written Work. The work you turn in should reflect your professionalism. All written assignments must be typed and proofread for errors. Your work should be written as you would write any formal document, free of “text speak” and other commonly used shortcuts in electronic communication.

The Human Connection

Although you are taking this course in an online format, I want you to remember that your computer is only the channel of your instruction, not your instructor. I am a real person on the other end of your Internet connection who cares about your learning experience and is willing and able to assist you. As your instructor, I will be responsible for giving you feedback on your assignments, responding to your questions, and monitoring online activities. Please email me, meet with me via Skype, or schedule a face-to-face meeting in my office to discuss any concerns you have.

Communication Speech Lab

The Communication Speech Lab (330 Burnett Hall) offers a variety of assistance for COMM 286 students: outlining help, delivery tips, managing communication apprehension, research strategies, etc. If you would like additional help in the course, please review the information located in the Student Resources Section of your classroom regarding the Speech Lab.

Statement on Special Needs Accommodation

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate fully in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, (402) 472-3787 voice or TTY.

ACE Credit

COMM 286 satisfies ACE Outcome 2A: communication competence in making oral presentations with supporting materials. As such, public speaking is a focus area of this course. Approximately half of the course is dedicated to teaching principles of effective oral presentations (including research, organization of material, delivery, visual aids) and giving you opportunities to practice your oral presentation skills with personalized feedback.

Mission Statement

The mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies is to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, technology, and culture. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages ranging from face-to-face to digital media contexts.

The department’s research and teaching devote particular attention to scholarly initiatives aimed at understanding and explaining the role of communication in (a) facilitating civic
engagement, mediating public controversies, and organizing for social change, (b) constituting individual and family health, promoting healthy behaviors, and helping persons navigate relational challenges, and (c) creating, maintaining, and challenging personal, social, and community identity in a complex and diverse world.
**My Grades**
(* = Group Grade)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
<th>Possible</th>
<th>My Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Unit Essay Responses</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scavenger Hunt</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Analysis Paper</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Self Critique</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Field Interview Protocol</em></td>
<td><em>25</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline Communication in Workplace Presentation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery Communication in Workplace Presentation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Summary Outline and Delivery Presentation</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Team Organizational Analysis Paper</em></td>
<td><em>100</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL POINTS**

| 645 |

**Course Grading Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93%+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>