
Outlier

Professional Communication *COMMRC 0050* *3 Credits*

Instructors

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Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to professional communication with an emphasis on public speaking in real-world contexts. Centered around the student and their story, the course focuses on authentic oral communication through self-exploration and storytelling. This course will arm students with confidence and communication skills for their professional journey. Students will prepare and deliver four speeches across the term, focusing on impromptu, extemporaneous, informative, and persuasive speaking framed as career-building and on-the-job scenarios. The course also places a significant emphasis on relationship-building in the workplace, imparting skills that students can leverage to speak clearly, effectively, respectfully, and impactfully across cultural contexts.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Analyze the importance of storytelling and communication at every stage of career development
- Define core values and personal messages to form the basis of an authentic approach to professional communication
- Gain proficiency in impromptu and extemporaneous communication to be better prepared in employment interviews
- Learn communication strategies to build confidence and flexibility and practice them in live and written forms of communication
- Plan and deliver informative and persuasive presentations based on carefully conducted research and resource evaluation, organized and iterative outlines, and effective audience analysis

Outlier

- Utilize basic graphic design principles to create visually engaging presentation materials that reinforce key claims and clearly present data and information
- Lay the foundation for strong relationships by rehearsing and strengthening the central tenets of interpersonal communication and active listening
- Deploy leadership and management principles to:
 - enhance team interaction
 - give and receive effective feedback on presentations
 - avoid and manage conflict
 - navigate collaboration with others across cultural contexts

Course Materials

This is an online course. All course materials (including lecture videos, interactive textbook, and practice exercises) are provided by Outlier.org through its course website, professionalcommunication.ext.outlier.org. Additional tools will be made available, incorporated into, or linked to from Outlier.org.

Class Policies

1. **Attendance & Attention to Course Materials** – As an online course, attendance is asynchronous and is tracked by students viewing the required lectures, engaging with interactive online materials, and completing assignments. Each student will also have the option to spend as much time as needed learning and practicing with additional materials and practice questions; the level of their understanding will be demonstrated by their performance on a set of mastery assessments in the form of quizzes, writing assignments, and oral presentations.
2. **Access to Online Course Platform** – All course materials will be accessed through the course website professionalcommunication.ext.outlier.org. Course progress, lectures, active learning, practice exercises, and quizzes will be tracked and saved once you log in. The Course Homepage allows students to view graded assignments and course progress.
3. **Assessment Completion & Late Work** – This course's assessments include quizzes, writing assignments, and oral presentations. Writing assignments and oral presentations must be completed by their due date within their scheduled windows (as indicated on Outlier.org). Extensions must be requested via your school's Outlier facilitator. Without an approved extension, late work will not be accepted. Failure to complete an assessment by the indicated due date will result in a grade of 0 for that assessment.
4. **Quizzes** – Some chapters provide multiple opportunities to complete quizzes. Only the highest grade of any completed instance of that quiz will count towards the student's final

Outlier

grade. Students may not use any kind of notes, websites, books, or any other type of aid on course quizzes. Unlike other assessments, quizzes can be completed at any time once their corresponding chapter has been unlocked. Make sure to complete at least one quiz per chapter before the final exam.

5. **Unit-End Summative Assessments** - The exam-equivalent assignments in this course are three video presentations that students give to a live audience. These presentations will require students to assemble an audience of at least six classmates and/or adults (defined as a person who is at least 18 years of age) to virtually attend their presentation live via a video-conferencing app. Each of these audience members will have to verify their age and consent to being screen recorded during the presentation.
6. **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism** – Students in this course will be expected to agree to and comply with the [Outlier.org Academic Integrity Policy](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process as outlined in the [Outlier.org Academic Integrity Policy](#).
7. **Content Questions & Requesting Assistance** – Your learning will happen within the Outlier course. Use the button in the bottom right corner to submit feedback or if you have a question(s) about any of the content in the lectures, active learning, or practice exercises. You can also reach a Support Specialist through the [Student Success request form](#) or by engaging in the academic discussion community. One of our subject matter experts will review your question and provide a response. You can expect a response within 2 to 3 hours during Outlier.org business hours.
8. **Course Participation** – You will join Outlier’s academic discussion community and participate in weekly conversations with the course facilitators and your peers to earn the participation portion of your grade. Course participation could include responding to the discussion questions posed by facilitators, sharing an interesting article you read that pertains to the chapters you’re working on, or asking a question of your fellow classmates to try to solve a difficult problem. You can also answer your peers’ questions by starting a thread under their posts. Derogatory and sarcastic comments and jokes that marginalize anyone are fundamentally unacceptable, especially in the classroom. Offensive language—or language that could be construed as offensive—should be avoided (see the [Outlier.org Academic Integrity Policy](#)). Academic discussion community participation points accrue throughout the course duration until the scheduled course end date
9. **Administrative Drops** – Students who do not meaningfully participate by the eleventh week of the term will be administratively dropped from the course. Meaningful course

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participation includes regularly logging into the course, completing quizzes, engaging in the academic discussion community, and responding to Student Success outreach.

10. **Withdrawals** – If a student decides to exit from a course AFTER the drop deadline and BEFORE the withdrawal deadline, it is defined as a withdrawal. This is different from having dropped the course, as a grade of W will appear on your transcript. Withdrawals do not affect your GPA and do not count toward the number of credits attempted. Students will still have access to the lectures and active learning, but progress in the course will not be saved. Students who Withdraw are not eligible for a refund.
11. **Disability Accommodations** – Requests for reasonable disability accommodations must be made through your school's Outlier facilitator. Please include specifics regarding the accommodation you are seeking along with relevant documentation from your school, doctor, or healthcare provider. Outlier is committed to ensuring that learners with accessibility needs have equal opportunity to succeed in our courses and will work with your school's Outlier facilitator to provide reasonable accommodations.
12. **Religious observances** – Outlier will make a reasonable attempt to accommodate student needs in the case of serious incompatibility between a student's religious creed and a scheduled test or examination. Requests for accommodations must be requested via your school's Outlier facilitator during the first two weeks of an academic term.
13. **Transfer Credit** – University of Pittsburgh grades and credits earned in this course appear on an official University of Pittsburgh transcript, and the course credits are likely to be eligible for transfer to other colleges and universities. College credit is earned with a passing grade (59.5 or higher). Individual colleges and universities may have additional policies regarding grade requirements for transfer credits. Students are encouraged to contact potential colleges and universities in advance to ensure their credits would be accepted. If students decide to attend any University of Pittsburgh campus, the University of Pittsburgh grade earned in the course will count toward the student grade point average at the University, and the earned credits will count towards the overall credits required for graduation. At the University of Pittsburgh, the grade from this course supersedes any equivalent AP credit.

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Grading Criteria

A student's grade in this course will be comprised of the following elements:

- 7% Chapter Quizzes (9 quizzes, ~0.8% each)
- 15% Participation in academic discussion community
- 23% Unit 1 Assignments
 - **Speech 1: Elevator Pitch (5%)**
 - **Speech 2: Tell Me About Yourself Presentation and Mock Interview (18%)**
 - Speech-prep: Interview Research and Prep (3%)
 - Skills-based: Resume/Cover Letter (5%)
 - Unit 1 Assessment: Tell Me About Yourself Speech (10%)
- 23% Unit 2 Assignments
 - **Speech 4: Informative Presentation (15%)**
 - Speech-prep: Informative Presentation Outline (5%)
 - Speech-prep: Design Sample Slides (3%)
 - Unit 2 Assessment: Informative Speech (15%)
- 32% Unit 3 Assignments
 - Skills-based: Active Listening Activity + Reflection (3%)
 - Skills-based: Nonverbal Communication Activity (3%)
 - **Speech 4: Persuasive Presentation (26%)**
 - Speech-prep: Persuasive Topic Pitch (3%)
 - Speech-prep: Persuasive Presentation Outline (5%)
 - Unit 3 Assessment: Persuasive Speech (18%)

At the end of each chapter that has a quiz (chapters 1, 2, and 3 in unit 1, 6 and 7 in unit 2, and 10, 11, 12, and 13 in unit 3), each student is required to complete the quiz designed to assess their mastery of the material covered in that chapter. Each student will be able to attempt three (3) versions of each chapter's quiz. All three versions will be made available to the student at the end of each chapter.

Each student is required to attempt and complete at least one version of each quiz. Failing to do so will result in a grade of 0% for that chapter. If a student completes more than one quiz for a particular chapter, only the highest grade achieved will be counted for that chapter. As such, the student is encouraged to use these multiple quiz attempts as opportunities to identify areas that are in need of further practice. This diligent effort will allow the student to improve their understanding, mastery of the material, and grade in the course.

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Grades

An official grade will appear on the University of Pittsburgh transcript for any student who continues their enrollment beyond the official drop date for the course. Outlier.org will publicize the official drop date for each semester.

Grading Scale

A: 92.5 -100%
A-: 89.5 – 92.49%
B+: 86.5-89.49%
B: 82.5 – 86.49%
B-: 79.5 – 82.49%
C+: 76.5 – 79.49%
C: 72.5 – 76.49%
C-: 69.5 – 72.49%
D: 59.5 – 69.49%
F: 0 – 59.49%

Course Materials & Assessments

Chapter assignments and assessments subject to change and will be announced through Outlier.org as applicable within a reasonable time frame. Please note that the course is divided into three units. Deadlines for assignments and unit-end assessments are detailed below. Academic discussion community participation points accrue throughout the course duration until the scheduled course end date. Students should aim to keep up with weekly responses to prompts and comments on classmates' posts. Quizzes may be completed at any time during the course duration once their corresponding chapter has been unlocked. All active learning, practice terms, and lectures are provided for students' learning and practice and are not time-sensitive or graded but should be completed within each week if possible.

Week	Chapter	Sections	Complete all Activities, Assignments, and Assessments
Week 1 (9/18- 9/20)	Chapter 1: Lead With Your Story	1.1 Introduction to Professional Communication 1.2 Why Communication Matters	

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Week	Chapter	Sections	Complete all Activities, Assignments, and Assessments
Week 2 (9/23-9/27)		1.3 How to tell a Story 1.4 Learn to Communicate Authentically	Chapter 1 Quiz
Week 3 (9/30 - 10/4)	Chapter 2: Communication and Storytelling	2.1 Principles of Communication 2.2 Why Storytelling? 2.3 Story Structure and Function	
Week 4 (10/7 - 10/11)		2.4 Attention, Memory, and Recall in Storytelling Work on assignment: Elevator Pitch	Chapter 2 Quiz Assignment Due Tuesday, 10/15 at 12pm (noon) ET: Elevator Pitch
Week 5 (10/14- 10/18)	Chapter 3: The Job Search, Part 1	3.1 Public Speaking in the Real World 3.2 Kicking Off the Job Search 3.3 Types of Common Interview Formats	
Week 6 (10/21- 10/25)		3.4 Preparing for an Interview 3.5 Workshop: Introducing the Job Interview Work on assignment: Interview Research and Prep	Chapter 3 Quiz Assignment Due Monday, 10/28 at 12pm (noon) ET: Interview Research and Prep
Week 7 (10/28- 11/1)	Chapter 4: The Job Search, Part 2	4.1 Cultivating Professionalism in Writing 4.2 Resumes & Cover Letters	
Week 8 (11/4- 11/8)		4.3 Nailing the Interview 4.4 Video vs. In-Person Interview Etiquette	

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Week	Chapter	Sections	Complete all Activities, Assignments, and Assessments
Week 9 (11/11-11/15)		Work on assignment: Resume/Cover Letter	Assignment Due Monday, 11/18 at 12pm (noon) ET: Resume/Cover Letter
Week 10 (11/18-11/22)		Work on assignment: Tell Me About Yourself Speech and Mock Interview	Unit 1 Assessment Due Monday, 12/2 at 12pm (noon) ET: Tell Me About Yourself Speech and Mock Interview Retake Ch 1 - 3 quizzes as needed
Week 11 (11/25-11/29)	Thanksgiving Break		Discussion community participation point earning period 1 ends Monday, 11/25 at 11:59PM ET
Week 12 (12/2 - 12/6)	Chapter 5: Communicate with Confidence	5.1 Identifying and Overcoming Anxieties 5.2 Confident Cross-Cultural Communication	
Week 13 (12/9 - 12/13)		5.3 Communicating Confidence in Nonverbally 5.4 Coping with the Unexpected	
Week 14 (12/16-12/20)	Chapter 6: Building Your Presentation	6.1 Choosing a Topic 6.2 Research and Citation 6.3 Revisiting Storytelling	
Week 15 (12/23-12/27)	Winter Break		

Outlier

Week	Chapter	Sections	Complete all Activities, Assignments, and Assessments
Week 16 (12/30-1/3)	<i>Winter Break</i>		
Week 17 (1/6-1/10)	Chapter 6: Building Your Presentation (cont.)	6.4 Organization and Structure 6.5 Workshop: Dissecting Sample Presentations Work on assignment: Working Outline for the Informative Presentation	Chapter 6 Quiz Assignment Due Monday, 1/13 at 12pm (noon) ET: Working Outline for the Informative Presentation
Week 18 (1/13-1/17)	Chapter 7: Verbal and Visual Support in Presentations	7.1 Deliver Your Presentation 7.2 Transitions	
Week 19 (1/20-1/24)		7.3 Presentation Aids 7.4 Designing Slides	Chapter 7 Quiz
Week 20 (1/27-1/31)		Work on assignment: Design Sample Slides	Assignment Due Monday, 2/3 at 12pm (noon) ET: Design Sample Slides
Week 21 (2/3-2/7)	Chapter 8: Informative Presentations	8.1 What is Informative Speaking? 8.2 Types of Informative Speeches	Discussion community participation point earning period 2 ends Monday, 2/3 at 11:59PM ET
Week 22 (2/10-2/14)		8.3 Audience Analysis 8.4 Advanced Presentation Delivery	Retake Ch 6 + 7 quizzes as needed
Week 23 (2/17-2/21)	<i>February Break</i>		

Outlier

Week	Chapter	Sections	Complete all Activities, Assignments, and Assessments
Week 24 (2/24-2/28)		Work on Unit 2 Assessment: Informative Presentation	Unit 2 Assessment Due Monday, 3/3 at 12pm (noon) ET: Informative Presentation
Week 25 (3/3-3/7)	Chapter 9: Interpersonal and Cross-Cultural Communication	● 9.1 Understanding Your Personal Communication Style ● 9.2 Identity and Intersectionality ● 9.3 Building Cultural Awareness	
Week 26 (3/10-3/14)		● 9.4 Relational Communication ● 9.5 Communication in the Workplace	
Week 27 (3/17-3/21)	Chapter 10: Active Listening	● 10.1 Introduction to Active Listening ● 10.2 Barriers to Listening	
Week 28 (3/24-3/28)		● 10.3 Cultivating Active Listening ● 10.4 Workshop: Demonstrating Active Listening	Chapter 10 Quiz
Week 29 (3/31-4/4)		Work on assignment: Active Listening Activity with Self-Feedback Reflection	Assignment Due Monday, 4/7 at 12pm (noon) ET: Active Listening with Self-Feedback Reflection
Week 30 (4/7-4/11)	Chapter 11: Nonverbal Communication	● 11.1 Recognizing Nonverbal Communication ● 11.2 Improving Nonverbal Communication	

Outlier

Week	Chapter	Sections	Complete all Activities, Assignments, and Assessments
Week 31 (4/14-4/18)	<i>Spring Break</i>		Discussion community participation point earning period 3 ends Monday, 4/14 at 11:59PM ET
Week 32 (4/21-4/25)	Chapter 11: Nonverbal Communication (cont.)	11.3 Movement, Gestures, and Voice as a Public Speaker 11.4 Nonverbal Communication at Work Work on assignment: Nonverbal Communication in Action	Chapter 11 Quiz Assignment Due Monday, 4/28 at 12pm (noon) ET: Nonverbal Communication in Action
Week 33 (4/28-5/2)	Chapter 12: Group Communication and Teamwork	12.1 What is a Group? 12.2 Group Roles and Dynamics 12.3 Teamwork, Problem-Solving, and Decision-Making	
Week 34 (5/5-5/9)		12.4 Workshop: Team Decision-making in Action Work on assignment: Initial Research for the Persuasive Presentation	Chapter 12 Quiz Assignment Due Monday, 5/12 at 12pm (noon) ET: Initial Research for the Persuasive Presentation
Week 35 (5/12-5/16)	Chapter 13: Persuasive Presentations	13.1 Persuasion 101 13.2 Types of Persuasive Speeches 13.3 Structuring a Persuasive Presentation	
Week 36 (5/19-5/23)		13.4 Making and Supporting Arguments	Chapter 13 Quiz Assignment Due Tuesday, 5/27 at 12pm (noon) ET:

Outlier

Week	Chapter	Sections	Complete all Activities, Assignments, and Assessments
		Work on assignment: Working Outline for the Persuasive Presentation	Working Outline for the Persuasive Presentation
Week 37 (5/26-5/30)	Chapter 14: Giving and Receiving Feedback	14.1 What is Feedback? 14.2 The Art of Receiving Feedback	
Week 38 (6/2-6/6)		14.3 Giving Good Feedback 14.4 Concluding Your Story in Professional Communication	
Week 39 (6/9-6/13)	Chapters 1-14	Work on assignment: Persuasive Presentation	Retake all quizzes as needed Discussion community participation point earning period 4 ends on Monday, 6/16 at 12pm (noon) ET Unit 3 Assessment Due Monday, 6/16 at 12pm (noon) ET: Persuasive Presentation

All assignment and unit-end assessments must be completed by their due dates. Quizzes can be completed at any time once their corresponding chapter has been unlocked. All other active learning, exercises, and lectures are provided for your learning and practice and are not time-sensitive or graded.

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