SYLLABUS
PSYCHOLOGY 4SC6: SCIENCE COMMUNICATION
Department of Psychology, Neuroscience, and Behaviour
McMaster University
2014-2015

Course Meeting Information: Wednesdays 4:30-6:30pm in PC316 (class); Fridays 2:30-4:30pm in PC237 (tutorial).
Attendance is mandatory.

Professors
Dr. A. Khan
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Teaching Assistants
Julie Conder: conderj@mcmaster.ca
Marta Maslej: maslejmm@mcmaster.ca

More About Your TAs
Your TAs will mentor you through all aspects of the science communication process, and will be your first port of call if you have questions or problems of any kind. TA bios are available on the course website under “content”.

Course Description. This course has been designed to teach you the art of science communication. Psychology is one of many fields that suffer from inaccurate dissemination efforts: lay audiences are bombarded by headlines that falsely represent our science through exaggeration, inappropriate generalization, the reporting of associations as causal relationships, and by numerous other errors that diminish our science in their eyes. This year, we will work on accurately reporting psychological science to a variety of audiences, beginning with newspaper audiences, moving on to web audiences, and ending with Scientific American audiences. By the end of the year, you will have produced a portfolio containing accurate and (one hopes) exciting reports describing, in varying levels of sophistication, aspects of psychological science that interest you.

Readings. We have posted (and will continue to post) several readings and links on our Avenue website. Aside from these readings, you will read Eats Shoots and Leaves by Lynn Truss (this is a fun punctuation primer, and will play a large role in your tutorials).

If you are not a good writer (odds are that you are not, since the school system no longer teaches grammar or punctuation), then, aside from Eats Shoots and Leaves, you might want to pick up Elements of Style by Strunk & White, or Making Sense in Psychology: A Student’s Guide to Research and Writing by Northey & Timney (more specific to psych than the other two books, but also more relevant to writing research articles than to science dissemination), or any other writing book you are drawn to.
What We’ll Be Doing

Introduction to Science Communication. Our first several classes will involve a discussion of why it’s important that we communicate our science clearly, accurately, and effectively to lay audiences. We’ll also discuss the main ways in which our science is inaccurately portrayed in various media, and how those inaccuracies can be prevented.

Module 1: Writing Newspaper Reports. Your first task involves learning to write brief reports about short empirical articles, talks, and/or posters. The purpose of this assignment is to learn how to accurately report on complex science in a way that is interesting to people who have little to no interest in consulting the original article, and who are therefore dependent on the accurate dissemination of its content. You will produce three reports of your own, and will also provide feedback on one of your peers’ reports.

- **Report 1**: Write a 500 word news brief on an empirical article provided in class, at the grade 6 reading level (this is the level used by most local newspapers, e.g., the Hamilton Spec).
- **Report 2**: Write a 500 word news brief for the Mac Daily News describing a poster you attended at the McMaster Institute for Music and the Mind (MIMM) conference. After having handed in your initial draft, you will comment on a peer’s draft discussing the same topic. Take similar feedback provided to you to polish your initial draft, and hand that in.
- **Report 3**: Write a 1000 word *New York Times* style (less hook, more content) news article discussing two related empirical articles. Use the brevity and accuracy skills you learned in Reports 1 and 2, but add in some analysis.

Module 2: Producing Podcasts for Web Audiences. Lay audiences get a large amount of science information from web sources. These audiences are often looking for a quick snapshot, rather than a detailed discussion. You will write and record three brief podcasts, building on the brevity and accuracy skills you developed in Module 1.

This module will further refine your communication skills by requiring you to write and record three timed podcasts. The purpose of this assignment is to gain practice in generating high-quality content that instantly grabs the attention of others. Select a topic of interest in psychology, and identify your audience (i.e., who will listen to the podcast?). Remember, we are constantly bombarded with bits of information online. How will you ensure the topic is enticing and valuable enough to capture the interest of your audience? Using two to four references, create a captivating title followed by an engaging story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Module 3: Giving a Public Lecture. Write, make slides for, and give a 15 minute lecture on a topic of your choice. This lecture will give your audience background information on some idea or theory in psychology. Choose your topic wisely: you will continue to discuss this topic for the rest of the course.

Module 4: Writing for *Scientific American*. Throughout this course, you have developed skills important to disseminating information to people who may not have any specialized education in psychology or science in general. Your final task in this course involves writing an advanced report for an “informed lay audience”. This audience is usually comprised of university graduates (and students) who seek out advanced information on topics that interest them, for the sake of learning something new and using their brains.

Module 5: Creating a Web Meme. Create a meme that illustrates some aspect of the topic you discussed in Modules 3 and 4.

Tutorials. Tutorials are mainly designed to support what you are learning in lectures. However, they will also include grammar workshops, designed and presented by you, based on the Truss book, *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*, and/or on web links explaining common word-use errors, such as “effect/affect”. We expect these workshops to be creative, and to include exercises for your peers to work through.
See schedule, below, for due-dates. Due-dates not specified in the schedule will be arranged as we go.

Assessment Scheme.

We will be using a points scheme (to be converted to a percentage) to determine your final mark in this course, as follows.

Module 1: 25 points
Module 2: 20 points
Module 3: 30 points
Module 4: 40 points
Module 5: 10 points
Participation: 20 points
Learning Portfolio: 20 points
ESL Seminar: (10 pts) 5 points teaching staff + 5 points from peers (avg)
TOTAL: 175 points

NB: Our tasks and assessment scheme are subject to change. You will be notified of any changes in class and on Avenue.

Missed Work. If you miss a deadline for some legitimate reason (e.g., bad illness, death of a family member), get in touch with us immediately; do not wait more than 24 hours to be in touch, or you could get a zero on the assignment in question. You must also submit an MSAF or visit your Associate Dean’s office to document the reason for your missed deadline; if we deem your excuse to be acceptable, then we will give you extra time to complete the assignment.

But your best bet is to keep on top of the work. Never do anything at the last minute, and you will be fine!

Academic Integrity: In a course with a lot of writing, you might be tempted to use others’ work and pass it off as your own. This is plagiarism, and you must never engage in it! Copying and pasting from websites, copying from articles, paraphrasing from these sources without citation, copying from a friend’s or even your own work from another class or project, and “working together” with a friend to produce work that was meant to be independent (as all work in this course is meant to be) are all examples of plagiarism. Sometimes, people do some of these things by accident: if they do, that’s still plagiarism! Do not even come close to plagiarising in this course! If you do, you will be prosecuted for academic dishonesty … a very unpleasant process! (see academic integrity statement, below).

One way to avoid plagiarism is to take notes in your own words (not paraphrased – new sentences created by you), and to create outlines, reports, and articles without looking at the original source material (but instead at your notes, which are, again, in your own words). If you never use others’ words in any step of the process between reading and writing, then you will probably not plagiarize!

You will be handing in all assignments through Avenue to Learn. Avenue uses the turnitin.com tool to check written work for evidence of plagiarism. Your work will get checked against just about everything available on the web, including other assignments that turnitin has seen. Avenue will let you know if it thinks you have engaged in plagiarism, and hence will give you a chance to correct anything that made the program suspicious. Avenue will also let us know whether it thinks you have engaged in plagiarism, and will give us a very detailed report of what made it suspicious. Please note that the point of using turnitin is not to suggest that we believe you to be dishonest, but instead to make life less stressful for all involved.
**McMaster University Academic Integrity Statement:** You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g., a grade of zero (0) on an assignment, loss of course credit with a notation on the transcript (“grade F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, at [http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

**Avenue to Learn:** You are expected to check our course website regularly for announcements, updates, discussion board postings, class times, and other valuable information. It is your responsibility to keep up with the information provided on this site.

McMaster University requires that we include the following warning in our syllabi: Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

### Schedule of Events

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Tutorial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>September 10th</strong></td>
<td>Topic 1. Introduction to Science Communication</td>
<td><strong>September 12th</strong></td>
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<td><strong>September 12th</strong></td>
<td>Topic 2. Learning Portfolios</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Tutorial</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>September 17th</strong></td>
<td>Science Communication Pitfalls 1: Poor understanding of research methods leads to poor communication of research.</td>
<td><strong>September 19th</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Eats, Shoots, &amp; Leaves (ESL) organization and topic selection.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Tutorial</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>September 23rd</strong></td>
<td>Topic 1. Guest Speaker Erica Balch on Effective Communication.</td>
<td><strong>September 26th</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Topic 2. Elements of a Effective News Brief.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LP Reflection 1 Due</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Tutorial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>October 1st</strong></td>
<td>Topic 1. Science Communication Pitfalls 2: Why do so many people choose not to believe what scientists say? Click <a href="#">here</a> for required reading.</td>
<td><strong>October 3rd</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Topic 2. The importance of reflection in a pedagogical setting. Click <a href="#">here</a> for required video.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Tutorial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>October 8th</strong></td>
<td>Elements of an Effective Longer News Article. Read contents of Module 1 “Full Length News Articles” folder before class.</td>
<td><strong>October 10th</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Week 6 | **October 15th**  
How to effectively communicate with different types of readers. Click [here](#) for required reading.  
**News Brief 2 Feedback Due** | **October 17th**  
Grammar (ESL) Workshop Presentations.  
**News Brief 2 Final Version Due** |
|---|---|---|
| Week 7 | **October 22nd**  
Elements of a successful podcast. | **October 24th**  
Tutorial exercise: Technical aspects of putting together your podcast.  
**News Article Due**  
**LP Reflection 2 Due** |
| Week 8 | **October 29th**  
Learning Portfolio Presentations and Feedback. | **October 31st**  
(No Tutorial)  
**Fall Recess.** |
| Week 9 | **November 5th**  
Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs. | **November 7th**  
Groups doing ESL workshop on 14th meet with TAs (day off for other students).  
**First Podcast Due** |
| Week 10 | **November 12th**  
Why Communicating Science Matters. | **November 14th**  
Grammar (ESL) Workshop Presentations.  
**Second Podcast Due** |
| Week 11 | **November 19th**  
Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs. | **November 21st**  
Groups doing ESL workshop on 28th meet with TAs (day off for other students).  
**Third Podcast Due** |
| Week 12 | **November 26th**  
In-class podcast presentations. | **November 28th**  
Grammar (ESL) Workshop Presentations. |
| Week 13 | **December 2nd**  
Semester Wrap Up.  
Look Ahead to Term 2. | **December 4th**  
(No Tutorial)  
**BONUS News Brief Due**  
**LP Reflection 3 Due** |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th><strong>WINTER TERM</strong></th>
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| Week 1 | **January 7th**  
Elements of a good public lecture. | **January 9th**  
Tutorial exercise: Choosing your winter term topic. |
| Week 2 | **January 14th**  
Elements of an Effective Public Lecture. Required preparation TBA. | **January 16th**  
Tutorial exercise: Discussion and analysis of public lectures. Come up with public lecture timeline. |
| Week 3 | **January 21st**  
Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs. | **January 23rd**  
Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs. |
<p>| Week 4 | <strong>January 28th</strong> | <strong>January 30th</strong> |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
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<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>February 4th</td>
<td>Public Lecture Presentations</td>
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<td>February 6th</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>February 11th</td>
<td>Public Lecture Presentations</td>
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<td>February 13th</td>
<td>(No Tutorial) LP Reflection 4 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>February 18th</td>
<td>(No Class) Reading Week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February 20th</td>
<td>(No Tutorial) Reading Week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>February 25th</td>
<td>Elements of a good <em>Scientific American</em> article.</td>
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<td>February 27th</td>
<td>Tutorial exercise: Discussion of sample <em>SciAm</em> articles. Come up with <em>SciAm</em> article timeline.</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>March 4th</td>
<td>Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.</td>
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<td>March 6th</td>
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<td>March 27th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>April 1st (Last Meeting)</td>
<td>In-class meme presentations.</td>
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