

SYLLABUS
PSYCHOLOGY 4SC6: SCIENCE COMMUNICATION
 Department of Psychology, Neuroscience, and Behaviour
 McMaster University
 2015-2016

Course Meeting Information:

Term 1. Mondays 2:30-4:20pm in ETB 237 (Class); Fridays 2:30-4:20pm in MUMC 1J8 (Tutorial)

Term 2. Mondays 2:30-4:20pm in BSB 136 (Class); Fridays 2:30-4:20pm in MDCL 3017 (Tutorial)

Attendance is mandatory.

Professors

Dr. A. Khan

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Office hours: By appointment via <https://doodle.com/ayeshakhan>

Dr. J. M. Ostovich

Email: jmostovich@mcmaster.ca for all course-related email; do **not** use the *Avenue* system.

Phone: *It is pointless to phone me.*

Office: PC-415A

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Teaching Assistants

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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.

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 by describing a public lecture you attended at the McMaster University. 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: 15 points (tutorial); 15 points (class)
 Learning Portfolio: 20 points
 ESL Seminar: 10 pts
 TOTAL: 190 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>.

Avenue to Learn: Check *Avenue* 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

	CLASS	TUTORIAL
Week 1	September 14th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction to Science Communication ▪ Learning Portfolios 	September 18th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning Portfolio (LP) Workshop
Week 2	September 21st <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Science Communication Pitfalls 1: Poor understanding of research methods leads to poor communication of research. 	September 25th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tutorial exercise: How to avoid the pitfalls discussed on the 21st. ▪ Grammar/Punctuation (<i>GP</i>) Workshops: organization and topic selection.
Week 3	September 28th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guest Speaker Erica Balch on Effective Communication. ▪ Elements of a Effective News Brief. 	October 2nd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tutorial exercise: Assessing the effectiveness of news briefs. ▪ <i>GP</i> workshop example plus Q&A. ▪ LP Assignment 1 Due
Week 4	October 5th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Science Communication Pitfalls 2: Why do so many people choose not to believe what scientists say? Click here for required reading. ▪ The importance of reflection in a pedagogical setting. Click here for required video. 	October 9th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>GP</i> workshop presentations (part 1). ▪ First News Brief Due
Week 5	October 12th - FALL RECESS	October 16th - FALL RECESS
Week 6	October 19th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elements of an Effective Longer News Article. Read contents of Module 1 “Full Length News 	October 23rd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>GP</i> workshop presentations (part 2).

Articles" folder before class.

Week 7	October 26th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How to effectively communicate with different types of readers. Click here for required reading. 	October 30th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ News Brief Grammar/Punctuation Re-Write Due ▪ Presentations: <i>Re-Write of a News Brief: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly!</i>
Week 8	November 2nd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elements of a successful podcast. 	November 6th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs. ▪ News Brief 2 Due ▪ LP Assignment 2 Due
Week 9	November 9th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning Portfolio Presentations and Feedback. 	November 13st <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer Editing Workshop (News Brief 2) ▪ News Article Due
Week 10	November 16th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs. 	November 20th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.
Week 11	November 23rd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Podcast 1 Presentations and Peer Evaluations. ▪ Podcast 1 Due Before Class 	November 27th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.
Week 12	November 30th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Podcast 2 Presentations and Peer Evaluations. ▪ Podcast 2 Due Before Class 	December 4th (No Tutorial)
Week 13	December 7th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Semester Wrap Up. ▪ Look Ahead to Term 2. 	December 11th (No Tutorial) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LP Assignment 3 Due

WINTER TERM

Week 1	January 7th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elements of a good public lecture. 	January 9th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tutorial exercise: Choosing your winter term topic.
Week 2	January 14th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elements of an Effective Public Lecture. Required preparation TBA. 	January 16th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tutorial exercise: Discussion and analysis of public lectures. Come up with public lecture timeline.
Week 3	January 21st <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs. 	January 23rd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.

Week 4	January 28th ▪ Practice lectures.	January 30th ▪ Practice lectures.
Week 5	February 4th ▪ Public Lecture Presentations	February 6th ▪ Public Lecture Presentations
Week 6	February 11th ▪ Public Lecture Presentations	February 13th (No Tutorial) ▪ LP Assignment 4 Due
Week 7	February 18th – <i>READING WEEK</i>	February 20th - <i>READING WEEK</i>
Week 8	February 25th ▪ Elements of a good <i>Scientific American</i> article.	February 27th ▪ Tutorial exercise: Discussion of sample <i>SciAm</i> articles. Come up with <i>SciAm</i> article timeline.
Week 9	March 4th ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.	March 6th ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.
Week 10	March 11th ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.	March 13th ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.
Week 11	March 18th ▪ Elements of effective memes.	March 20th ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.
Week 12	March 25th ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.	March 27th ▪ Drop-In Consultation with Instructors and TAs.
Week 13	April 1st (Last Meeting) ▪ In-class meme presentations.	April 3rd (No Tutorial) ▪ LP Assignment 5 Due