

PSYCHOLOGY 4SC6: SCIENCE COMMUNICATION
Department of Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour
McMaster University
2017-2018

Course Meetings

Term 1

Mondays 5:30 – 6:20PM in BSB 136

Tuesdays 2:30 – 3:20PM in BSB 137

Thursdays 5:30 – 6:20PM in BSB 136

Term 2

Mondays 5:30 – 6:20PM in BSB 136

Tuesdays 2:30 – 3:20PM in BSB 137

Thursdays 5:30 – 6:20PM in BSB 137

Class and tutorial attendance is mandatory.

Instructor

Dr. Ayesha Khan

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Office: PC-107

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

Writing Mentors. Your writing mentors will support 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.

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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 an online portfolio containing accurate and (one hopes) exciting reports describing, in varying levels of sophistication, aspects of psychological science that interest you.

Readings. We will post readings and other links on Avenue to Learn (Avenue) on a weekly basis. 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), *The Sense of Style* by Steven Pinker, 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 will also discuss the main ways in which our science is inaccurately portrayed in various media, and how those inaccuracies may 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 these assignments 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 your peers' reports.

- **Report 1:** Write a 500 word news brief on an empirical paper in psychology, neuroscience, and/or behaviour that has been recently published and interesting and noteworthy. Your news brief must be written at the grade 6 reading level (this is the level used by most local newspapers, e.g., the Hamilton Spec) and must be interesting enough for the general reader.
- **Report 2:** Write a 500-word news brief for the Mac Daily News by describing a conference poster you attended at the 12th Annual NeuroMusic Conference at McMaster University (on Saturday, November 18th 2017).
- **Report 3:** Write a 1000 word *New York Times* style (less hook, more content) news article discussing a lecture by a prominent scientist and two related empirical articles. It is highly recommended that you attend a public lecture on McMaster campus. You may attend a public lecture at another university or use an online lecture for your report. When in doubt, please speak with your writing mentor before starting this assignment. For the purpose of this news article, TED Talks are not allowed. 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 a brief podcast; 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 a timed podcast. 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 academic references, create a captivating title followed by an engaging story with a beginning, middle, and end. Choose your topic wisely: you will continue to discuss this topic for the rest of the course.

Module 3: Giving a Public Lecture. Write, make slides for, and give a PechaKucha format presentation on a topic selected in module 2. Each presentation will contain no more than 20 slides that may be shown for no more than 20 seconds each (20 images x 20 seconds). In total, each presentation should not exceed six and a half minutes.

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 but in detail.

Module 5: Create an infographic for *Scientific American*. A well-designed and visually engaging infographic can create interest and provide clarity to a complex idea. Create an infographic that illustrates some/all aspect(s) of the topic you discussed in Modules 2, 3, and 4.

Science Writing Portfolio and Monthly Blog Posts. Each module will result in a series of items that represent your accomplishments in this course. You will document your work on an ePortfolio (known as the Learning Portfolio at McMaster University). You will continue to have access to this Portfolio after you have completed the course and also your undergraduate degree.

Portfolios have long been required from art students. They serve as a means for artists to showcase their works to a broader audience and to provide a narrative from the start to the end of a project. You will create an online portfolio that will be uniquely curated for this course containing regular blog posts and other course items to demonstrate your growth as a science writer.

Grammar Workshop. Each student will deliver an interactive grammar workshop 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, available on Avenue, for due-dates. Some due-dates may not be specified in the schedule and 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: 30 points

Module 2: 15 points

Module 3: 30 points

Module 4: 30 points

Module 5: 15 points

Participation: 35 points

Science Writing Portfolio: 30 points

Grammar Workshop: 15 pts

TOTAL: 200 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 a [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 done independently 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 submitting a **copy** of all submissions to the relevant dropbox folder on Avenue.

We will use 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.

Specific information related to classes and tutorials is posted on Avenue. It will be updated on a weekly basis. Please check Avenue regularly to understand class and tutorial expectations.

Other Information. The Assessment Ban is intended to enable students to continue to attend classes and start preparing for examinations held during the official University examination period.

There is a university-wide ban on examinations and tests in the final week of classes: see below for exemptions. Each year the dates will be listed in the SESSIONAL DATES section of the *Undergraduate Calendar*. The ban covers the last five days of classes plus the day or days between the end of classes and the beginning of exams.

Assignments worth more than 10% of the final course grade that are assigned at the beginning of term and noted on the course outline **can** be due during the Assessment Ban period.

If you have questions, please refer to: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/UGCourseMgmt.pdf>