

## Student Engagement Activities for Business Communications



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Welcome to *Student Engagement Activities for Business Communications!*

As business communications instructors at the post-secondary level, we recognize the importance of student engagement and practical application to promote learning. This book is a compilation of activities that we have developed and use in our teaching practice.

Designed for new and experienced instructors, the book is divided by topic, and we have indicated a suggested course level (lower-level or upper-level undergraduate) for each activity. Some activities have handouts attached, or links to external websites.

Please email [arley.cruthers@kpu.ca](mailto:arley.cruthers@kpu.ca) if there are problems with any external links.

This is a work in progress and will be added to going forward.

**KPU Applied Communications Department Open Education Working Group members:**

2019: Melissa Ashman, Arley Cruthers, Sarah Duncan, Karen Inkster Vance, and Panteli Tritchew

2020: Melissa Ashman, Arley Cruthers, John Grant, and Karen Inkster Vance

# How to Cite Activities in This Book

To cite activities in this book, please use the following template.

**APA 7 Citation Style:**

Last name, Initial of chapter author (2019). Title of chapter. In M. Ashman, A. Cruthers, S. Duncan, K. Inkster Vance, & P. Tritchew, *Student engagement activities for business communications*. Kwantlen Polytechnic University. <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/businesscomms>

*In text citation:* ... (chapter author last name, 2019)

*Note:* if quoting also include the specific part of the chapter such as heading, section, paragraph, table, etc

*Example:* ... (chapter author last name, 2019, Activity instructions)

PART I  
ICEBREAKERS AND WRAP-UPS



# I. Course syllabus scavenger hunt

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Both upper and lower level undergraduate courses

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will identify important information in the course syllabus.

### **Materials Required**

- Scavenger hunt handout
- Small prizes

## Activity Instructions

1. Go through your course presentation and identify 7 – 10 things that you want to highlight (how to contact you, late assignment policy, etc).
2. Turn these into questions and put them on a handout. (Example: What's my late policy? What should I do if I'm going to miss a class?) I make sure to have at least one question about mental health resources or resources for students who are food/housing insecure in order to reduce the stigma around these topics.
3. Then, break students into groups of 5, give each one a handout and send them on a "scavenger hunt" through the course presentation to find the answers to the questions. You can also have them use the course learning management system to answer a question. (I like to hide an "Easter egg" on the front page of our class' Moodle site).
4. The winning team will win a small prize. The first team to get all questions right is the winner, but make sure to carry the activity on until all groups have finished.
5. I like to suggest that teams who are finished should help those who haven't found the answers yet. After the activity is over, go through the answers and then discuss the rest of the course presentation.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- Ask me 5 questions about the course presentation.
- Based on the course presentation, let's identify the top 5 things students can do to be successful in the course.

## Activity Variations

- After the scavenger hunt is over, have students stay in their groups and go through the rest of the course presentation to come up with 3 unanswered questions.

**Tags:** first day of class, ice breaker, scavenger hunt, course presentation, syllabus

## 2. Dear Future Me

ARLEY CRUTHERS

### Activity Guidelines

#### **Suggested Course Level**

Both upper and lower level undergraduate courses

#### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will reflect on their work over the course of the semester and set writing goals for the remainder of the semester.

#### **Materials Required**

- Pen
- Paper

### Activity Instructions

1. On the last day of class, ask students to write a letter to themselves that begins Dear Future Me.
2. In this letter, they will list some points about writing/ their own writing that they want to remember in the future, since they will need to use the skills we learned in this class throughout their school life and careers. They could choose to remember specific lessons (analyzing an audience, using plain language) or something they've learned about their writing process. I often ask students to list the thing that they're most proud of accomplishing this semester.
3. During the final exam, I give them back their letter, along with a note of encouragement.

### Activity Variations

1. Instead of having students write a letter to themselves, have them write a letter to next semester's students. Ask students to specify if they want to share their letter with next year's students, then compile a document of all of the letters that you've received permission to share. I ask students on the first day of class to find one piece of advice from previous students that resonated with them and (if they feel comfortable) share why they liked that advice.

**Tags:** semester wrap-up, reflection, individual, self-reflection, study help, year-end reflection

# 3. Captain Communicator Personas

JOHN GRANT

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate courses

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will reflect on how they define the attributes required of a professional communicator

### **Materials Required**

- Captain Communicator silhouette handout
- Colourful markers or pencils

## Activity Instructions

1. Divide the class into groups of five students.
2. Provide each group with one copy of the Captain Communicator silhouette handout, as well as handful of colourful markers/pencils.
3. Ask the students to identify words that they feel describe what makes for a great communicator, and then to try to visually capture those on the silhouette. For example, students may say that a good communicator needs to be a great listener; students have thus drawn big ears on the silhouette or some have added an antenna to capture sounds from distant places.
4. Encourage students to be creative and not to be true to life with their visualizations. The more bizarre, the more engaging.
5. Try to prevent groups from 'peeking' at other creations in the class. It generally helps to walk around and monitor progress. Sometimes students need some prompting questions to get their ideas flowing. It may even just help for them to write words on the page if they aren't creatively inclined, and then to help guide them through how to visualize some of their words.

## Debrief Questions/Activities

- Once each group is finished have them stand up (or at least one representative) to "introduce" their Captain Communicator superhero to the class.



- Ask them to describe why they chose certain characteristics/attributes.
- Once all groups have shared then as an instructor you can draw out common themes or differences.
- The activity can then be followed by a lesson on the attributes that make for a great professional communicator (e.g. timeliness, professional tone, ability to engage with multiple audiences, etc.), with a particular focus on any elements that may not have been raised through the activity.
- You may also collect the works of art, scan them, and publish them into your LMS or incorporate them somehow into future lectures (with permission).

## Activity Variations

- This activity can also be done online. In your LMS, create a discussion forum and post the silhouette for students to download. Some sample text: Here is a Captain Communicator outline that you can download. Use this template to draw what you think a professional communicator might look like. For example, in my past classes, people have drawn big ears on this person because they need to be a good listener. Others have drawn a watch as they need to be timely and punctual with their messages.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Captain Communicator Silhouette-WORD](#)
- [Captain Communicator Silhouette-PDF](#)

**Tags:** discussion, hands-on, small group, whole class, professional communication attributes, professional communicator characteristics, defining professional communication, icebreaker



PART II  
AUDIENCE ANALYSIS



# 4. Context Hunt

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Both lower-level and upper-level undergraduate courses.

### Activity Purpose

- Students will reflect on the university as a context and begin to think critically about all of the spoken and unspoken assumptions surrounding the university.
- Students will also practice their research/ analysis skills.

### Materials Required

- Handout
- Chalkboard / whiteboard

## Activity Instructions

1. Come up with a list of questions about the university. You could also have students generate these. A good question is one that students can find some answers to in 10-15 minutes. The ones I use are:
  - Whose land are we on? Can you find examples of Indigenous knowledge around campus?
  - Take a short walk around campus and see how many technologies you can list. How many were you specifically taught to use when you came to the university?
  - How is a teacher expected to act?
  - How is a student expected to act?
  - What kind of nature do you see on campus? Why is it there? Who maintains it?
  - Does the university have “school spirit?” What are people who are part of the university community expected to be proud of? If you take a short walk around campus, are there any signs/posters celebrating something?
  - What is the history of the university?
  - Who is included at the university? Who is left out?
  - Look at the university’s policies. How can you get into trouble here? What are you not supposed to do?
2. Write one question on the top of a page and leave the rest of the page for student notes.
3. Break students into groups of 2 or 3. Give them each a question and ask them to spend 10 minutes trying to answer it.
4. On half of the whiteboard/ chalkboard write “Unspoken,” then on the other half write “Spoken.”

5. When students return, ask them to sort their findings into “spoken” (things about the university that someone specifically told us) and “unspoken” (things that no one talks about or that we had to figure out for ourselves) and write them on the chalkboard.
6. Use the debrief questions to reflect on the context of the university. How much is unspoken? What values/beliefs/assumptions does the university have? How do students learn about the context? What misunderstandings did you have about the context of this particular university?

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was your most surprising finding?
- How much of what you found was spoken vs. unspoken?
- What sort of things are spoken?
- What sort of things are unspoken?
- What does this say about what the university values?
- How do new students learn the context of the university? How did you learn?

**Tags:** audience analysis / context analysis, research and documentation, critical thinking, discussion, hands-on, small group, self-reflection

# 5. Guess the Audience

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate.

### Activity Purpose

- Students will analyze how an audience influences a communicator's choices.
- Students will realize how many audience analysis skills they already have.
- Students will analyze how unconscious bias and assumptions shape our messages and sometimes cause misunderstandings.
- Students will reflect on how their decisions as communicators change based on how much knowledge they have about their audience.

### Materials Required

- Sheet A and B
- Envelopes

## Activity Instructions

1. Cut up Sheet A, fold up slips of paper, and place them into a cup or hat. This sheet contains different audiences. Do the same to Sheet B and place in a different cup or hat. This sheet contains different messages.
2. Get students into groups of 4 or 5. Each group will select a slip of paper from both the 'audiences' cup and the 'messages' cup.
3. Ask the groups to craft one or two sentences that deliver the message to the audience. Tell the group that they are not allowed to state the audience in their response.
4. After the groups are done, ask the groups to select a new audience by selecting a new slip of paper from the audience cup. Groups must repeat the challenge for the new audience. Note that if they had to choose a movie/product/song, they must keep it the same in both messages. For example, if they explained the plot of Finding Nemo to kindergarten kids, they must explain the same movie to a CEO.
5. Groups will read their messages out loud. The rest of the class will try to guess the audience.
6. Debrief the activity using some of the questions below.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- How did you craft your messages? Where did you start? How did you select words and details?
- Did each group member interpret the audience in the same way? What disagreements did your group have? How did you resolve them? (Often, students will disagree about the 'grandparents' question because they come from different cultures or have grandparents of very different ages/lifestyles).
- How were you able to guess the audience? What context clues did you look for?
- What was the hardest audience to write for? Why?  
What assumptions did you make about your audience? (Every time I've done this activity, the group has made the CEO male, for example).
- If you didn't know much about your audience, what did you do?
- Ask the class if anyone knows construction workers/ tech bros etc. If someone has experience with these groups, ask how successful the message would be to that audience? (Often, the group that gets 'construction workers' will assume they are low-tech meatheads, but people who know construction workers will say that this is a myth).

## Activity Variations

- Give all groups the same message.
- Allow groups to use visuals.
- Give all groups the same message but have groups select both an 'audience' and a 'medium/genre.' I have included genres like 'comic strip,' 'interpretive dance,' 'poem,' 'memo' and 'charades.' This shifts the focus to how the constraints of a genre and audience shape a message. While it may seem silly, it really exaggerates what decisions communicators have to make, which makes them easier to discuss (and it ends up being a good icebreaker).
- Have students come up with the audiences and messages.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Guess The Audience Activity Sheet PDF](#)
- [Guess The Audience Activity Sheet Word Document](#)

**Tags:** audience analysis / context analysis, persuasive messages, writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, communication models, discussion, hands-on, small group, creating a product or document, persuasion, Rogerian analysis, reflection



# 6. Audience-Centered Messages Discussion

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will discuss what elements contribute to making an email message audience-centred.

### Materials Required

- A copy of the email message projected on screen (Available at <https://technical.ly/philly/2017/01/30/sap-bill-mcdermott-muslim-ban-trump/>)

## Activity Instructions

1. Project the email message on the screen.
2. Read the message aloud to students.
3. Ask students to discuss in pairs what works well in the message and why and how the message keeps the audience in the forefront.
4. Debrief the activity with students.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What works well in the email and why?
- How does this message keep the audience in the forefront? (Things to highlight/note: use of you attitude, warm and friendly tone, inclusive language, validates the emotions/feelings/needs of the audience, etc)

**Tags:** audience analysis / context analysis, audience-centred messages, emails, think-pair-share, discussion, small group, whole class



PART III  
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION



# 7. Intercultural Communication Terminology Discussion

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will be able to define commonly used (and often-confused) terms in intercultural communication.

### Materials Required

- Chalk board
- White board
- Projector and screen

## Activity Instructions

1. Divide students into pairs.
2. Display the following terms on screen or write them on the board: multicultural, intercultural, culture, and diversity.
3. Ask students to discuss these terms with their partner. What do these terms mean? How are they similar? How are they different? What is an example of each?
4. After a few minutes, ask each pair to join another group to compare/contrast their responses and ideas.
5. After a few more minutes, debrief the activity with the class.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- Go through each term in turn. Solicit as many responses from groups as possible.
- What is your definition?
- What is an example of this term?
- How were your conclusions with your partner the same or different from the group you joined?

- (NOTE: Many students realize they don't know the differences between these terms and cannot provide examples. After reviewing the class responses to these terms, define each term and provide an example.)

**Tags:** discussion, small group, diversity, intercultural, multicultural, culture, think-pair-square-share

PART IV  
WRITING SKILLS AND PROCESS





# 8. What Would the Teacher Say

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Upper and lower level undergraduate courses

### Activity Purpose

- Students will help each other ensure that their assignment meets the criteria in the rubric and learn how to read a rubric.
- Students will also practice giving constructive criticism that is concrete and specific.

### Materials Required

- Drafts of student assignments
- Copies of the assignment rubric

## Activity Instructions

1. This assignment is designed to help students become more concrete and specific in their peer workshopping and develop a better understanding of how to read an assignment prompt. Often, students feel tempted to say “this assignment is great!” instead of offering feedback during a workshop, or they don’t feel confident enough in their own writing to give their thoughts. Many students are also from cultures where saving face is important and they do not want to offend their partner. Instead, this activity positions the student workshopper as a partner who’s speaking on behalf of the teacher.
2. To begin, have students work in small groups to look at the rubric and come up with the 3 most important features of the assignment based on the rubric. (“When I am grading your assignment, what are the 3 most important things that I’m looking for?”)
3. Write each group’s answers on the board and, as a class, come up with 3 outcomes to focus on during the workshop.
4. Turn these outcomes into questions and see if the class can make them even more specific. For example, if they’ve identified source use as important, the question might become “How has the writer used sources? Underline every time they’ve used a source, and put a star around places where the writer hasn’t cited yet.”
5. Then, break students into partners or groups of 3 and have them exchange drafts.
6. Each student will read their partner’s draft and answer the 3 questions the class came up with.
7. They will then write a short paragraph on topic “What would the teacher say about this draft?” and share that with the writer. I always add the question “What would the teacher admire about this draft?”
8. After students have shared their findings with each other, they will do a short freewrite on the topic “What

changes do I want to make to my draft and why?”

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was the experience of giving feedback like for you?
- What was the experience of receiving feedback like for you?
- What remaining questions do you have about the assignment?

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communication, audience analysis / context analysis, negative news messages, writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, research and documentation, critical thinking, discussion, hands-on, small group, self-reflection, peer workshop, revision

# 9. Paragraph Sort

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will learn to identify different paragraph types.

### **Materials Required**

- Paragraph handout
- Paragraph activity sheet cut into strips (one for each group)

## Activity Instructions

1. This activity can either follow a lesson about different types of paragraphs, or it can be used reflect on readings students did about paragraphs.
2. Print off one copy of the paragraph activity sheet for each group, then cut it along the lines.
3. Put the cut-up pieces into an envelope.
4. Give each student a handout about the paragraph types.
5. Then, break them into groups of 4 – 5.
6. Give each group an envelope and ask them to match the paragraph to the paragraph type.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- After the activity, I ask students what the hardest paragraphs to figure out were, then go over these again.
- Next, students examine their own writing to find different paragraph types or identify places where they could use a paragraph type to fix a disorganized paragraph.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Activity Sheet PDF](#)
- [Activity Sheet Word Document](#)
- [Paragraph Style Handout PDF](#)
- [Paragraph Style Handout in Word](#)

**Tags:** document formatting, hands-on, small group, paragraphs, organization

# 10. The Writer's Eye

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will move from general observations to more specific, nuanced ones.
- Students will see the power of details in persuasion.

### **Materials Required**

- Pen and paper

## Activity Instructions

1. Set a timer for 1 minute.
2. Ask students to list as many things as possible around the room.
3. Then, have each student read out their list. If someone else has said an item on their list, they should cross it off their list and not read it. By the end, many students will have nothing on their list.
4. Ask students now to do this again for another minute (I sometimes give them 2 minutes), but this time try to see something that no one else sees.
5. Repeat the process of having students read out their lists, again leaving out anything that's already been said.
6. Use the debrief questions to highlight how, in the second round, students become much more specific (seeing that the hem of someone's pants are salt-stained, versus noticing a chair). You can connect this to their analysis of their research (how can you look at your research again? What small details are you missing? What new insights can you find by looking again?).

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What differences do you see between the first and second round?
- What strategy did you use to come up with something that no one else would see?
- This activity is about the importance of looking at data again. How could you apply this to your research report?

**Tags:** writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, critical thinking, analysis, discussion, hands-on, whole class, details

# II. Bulwer Lytton Competition

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will explore common style and tone or grammar mistakes in a fun, low-stakes manner.
- Students will also give themselves permission to write badly.

### Materials Required

- Small prizes
- Pen and paper

## Activity Instructions

1. The Bulwer Lytton competition, (named after the author who wrote the line “It was a dark and stormy night..”), asks participants to intentionally write the worst first line of a novel.
2. First, design a lesson that showcases common style and tone issues, such as wordiness, passive voice, weak verbs, negative emphasis, slang, clichés, etc.
3. Ask students to make a list of the style and tone issues you discussed (or create a handout with these listed).
4. Then, explain that we are going to have a Bulwer Lytton competition and there will be a prize for the person who can write the worst possible sentence. Go to <https://www.bulwer-lytton.com/> to find past winners to show students an example.
5. Give students 5 – 8 minutes to write their sentence. Encourage them to edit their sentence to make it even worse and see if they can include all of the issues we discussed. To encourage students to share, you should write a sentence as well.
6. Offer a prize to the first student who volunteers to read their sentence. I sometimes bring small chocolates to give everyone who shares something.
7. You can vote in a couple of ways. Either, you can tape the submissions up on the wall/board and give students a sticker and ask them to put the sticker on the sentence they want to vote for, or you can ask students to write down the name of the person they want to vote for on a piece of paper and hand it in to you.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- How did it feel to write badly?
- How did you compose your sentence?
- Did you edit it?
- What was the hardest part of this activity?

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- <https://www.bulwer-lytton.com/>

**Tags:** writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, individual, whole class, self-reflection, game



# 12. Word Connotation

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Either lower level or upper level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will learn how connotations can be context or audience-dependent and sometimes lead to miscommunication.
- Students will get to know each other and see how the experience/values impact how they interpret words.

### Materials Required

- Handout
- Scissors
- Envelopes

## Activity Instructions

1. Print off the handout and cut the table into columns, then cut up each word. This will create five piles of 12 different words.
2. Put each pile into an envelope.
3. Break the class into five groups.
4. Ask them to take the words out of the envelope then sort them from most to least casual.
5. Do not give them any further instructions. You can decide whether students are allowed to use their phones to look up words they don't know.
6. When each group has agreed on the order of the words, get one student from each group to write the order of their words on the board.
7. Ask students to identify trends: what words groups agreed on and what words have wildly different orders. Usually, every group will come up with a different ranking: often because they interpreted the word "casual" differently (a casual relationship versus a casual word).

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- How did your group decide how to rank the words?
- Was there any disagreement in the group?
- Did the words mean the same to everyone?
- Why do you think different groups came up with different answers?
- If you didn't understand a word, what did you do?
- How did you interpret the meaning of the word casual?
- What do you think this exercise tells us about miscommunication?

## Activity Variations

- Instead of using a word that relates to relationships, pick a job that has many different titles and ask students to sort them by which are the highest paying to lowest paying. For example, students often say that a secretary is lower-paid than an administrative assistant, which leads to some interesting discussions about the impact of gendered language.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Cruthers, Arley Word Connotations Handout Word](#)
- [Cruthers, Arley Word Connotations Handout PDF](#)

**Tags:** negative news messages, writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, hands-on, small group, self-reflection, connotations, ice breaker, getting to know you, positive emphasis

# 13. Writing Process

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate course

### Activity Purpose

- Students will become familiar with their own writing process and will recognize stumbling blocks in their own writing process.
- By examining the writing process of famous writers, students will see that writing processes are unique, varied and complex.

### Materials Required

- Handout
- Quotes from famous writers
- Paper
- Markers

## Activity Instructions

1. Find quotes from 4-5 famous writers about their writing process. This website contains many of them: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-daily-routines-of-12\\_b\\_8510996](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-daily-routines-of-12_b_8510996).
2. Add the quotes into the attached handout.
3. Ask students to read the quotes and identify the different parts of the writing process, then estimate how much time was spent on each.
4. Then, ask students to use this information to create a map of the writer's process. Students can use different marker colours to represent different parts of the writing process.
5. Put the completed maps up on the wall, then have students observe the differences.
6. Ask each group to briefly discuss their author's writing process.
7. For the next stage, ask students to think of the last major writing project they created, then draw a map of their writing process.
8. Ask students to label major events, including how they felt (a sample image is attached).

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What surprised you about the author's writing process?
- What did your author spend the majority of their time on?
- What conditions did the author need to write successfully?
- What can you apply from your author's writing process to your own writing process?
- What did you learn from drawing your writing process?
- Is the writing process you drew typical, or do you vary it?
- If you identified a barrier or a negative emotion, what part of the writing process was it in?
- How do you think you can remove that stumbling block?
- Is there anything you would like to try to change about your writing process?

## Activity Variations

- Just do the first part of the activity or just have students draw their writing process.
- If you have time, ask students to "edit" their writing process or write a new writing process that they'd like to try.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Cruthers, Arley WritingProcessActivity Handout PDF](#)
- [Cruthers, Arley WritingProcessActivity Handout WORD](#)

**Tags:** writing process, individual, small group, creating a product or document, self-reflection

# 14. Style and Tone Field Trip

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower or upper level undergraduate course

### Activity Purpose

- Students will explore how specific style, tone and emphasis choices can dramatically change the reaction in the reader.

### Materials Required

- Pen
- Paper

## Activity Instructions

1. Print off the list of moods and cut them up into pieces so that a single mood is written on each scrap of paper.
2. Begin by asking students what they would notice in the room if they were bored (example: beige walls, annoying fluorescent lights, ticking clock etc).
3. Then, ask them what they would notice if they were happy (example: brightly coloured clothing, eager students, coffee).
4. Tell students that they will be going on a “field trip.” They will each choose a slip of paper with a mood on it.
5. Then, they will go outside and stand in the same location. (At KPU Surrey, for example, I use the courtyard.)
6. They will make a list of 10 details that convey their mood.
7. Then, they will come back to class and write a paragraph that conveys the mood without saying it.
8. Tell students that they can use details, their sentence rhythm, word choices, etc.
9. I use the details we came up with in the classroom to orally compose a short example. (“OMG! Everyone is here ready to learn, drinking delicious coffee. I love Harmanjot’s bright shirt and the Powerpoint slide has such a funny cartoon on it” vs “The clock is ticking out the seconds as I slowly slide into my desk. Even coffee can’t wake me up. It’s all beige walls, beige desks, and they can’t even fix the buzzing fluorescent light.”)
10. I always write my own paragraph and then read it first to encourage students to read their own. Each student will read their paragraph, then the class will try to guess the mood.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- How were we able to guess the mood without the author telling us?
- How did you choose details?
- What strategies did you use to help us guess the mood?
- What was the hardest part of this activity?
- What was the most surprising part of this activity?
- How can we connect this activity to what we just learned about positive emphasis/tone/connotation?

## Activity Variations

- Allow students to select their own mood.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Moods PDF](#)
- [Moods WORD](#)

**Tags:** negative news messages, persuasive messages, writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, hands-on, individual, creating a product or document, creative writing, positive emphasis, connotation, sentences

# 15. Question of the Day

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Upper and lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will develop their writing skills and writing voice through low-stakes writing practice.

### Materials Required

- Learning management system

## Activity Instructions

1. Question of the Day is part activity, part assignment and part classroom culture strategy. It's designed to encourage students to play with language and connect with each other through low-stakes writing.
2. Every day from Monday to Friday, post a question on the Learning Management System. I do this by creating a forum called 'Question of the Day' each week, then setting up posts to be released at midnight from Monday to Friday.
3. Students respond to the questions by Sunday night.
4. If they respond to a question, they get 1 point. To get 100%, they must answer 40 questions per semester. In a 13-week semester, this works out to just over 3 a week. Here are some sample questions:
  - Do you believe in ghosts? Why or why not?
  - What's something that's happened to you that you believe hasn't happened to anyone else in the class?
  - Take a walk through your neighbourhood and write about something interesting that you saw.
  - Tell me about a time you overcame something difficult.
5. I answer every question, which tends to increase the response rate.
6. I make Question of the Day worth 5% of their grade, which means that students can choose not to do it without too much penalty.
7. The key to Question of the Day is to allow students to talk about their own lives in a safe way. The questions do not require any research or prior knowledge. They should also be fun. Because they don't have to answer every question, students can avoid answering questions that make them uncomfortable. At the end of the week, I reply to a few responses on each thread.

## Activity Variations

- If Question of the Day is too much, you can have a Question of the Week.

**Tags:** routine messages, writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, writing process, discussion, individual, small group, creating a product or document, self-reflection, low-stakes writing, classroom building, online communication



# 16. Writing Audience-Centered Messages

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will practice editing and revising a letter.

### **Materials Required**

- Enough copies of the letter for the entire class (multiple copies per page, cut apart)
- A document camera

## Activity Instructions

1. Distribute the copies of the letter to students.
2. Ask them to revise/edit the letter/message to make it more concise, less repetitive, to use the you attitude, and to use an appropriate style and tone for the context.
3. Tell students this will be an anonymous activity and they should not write their name on the paper. They can write their revised letter on the same page or on another sheet of paper.
4. Tell students you will collect their writing and will sort through them and select a couple of examples to review with the class.
5. As students finish writing the letter, collect them and begin sorting through them to select 2-3 to review with the class using the document camera.
6. Take each example and put it under the document camera. Ask the class to provide feedback on what works well and what could be improved. (Always starts with what works well and always highlight what works well in each and every example.)
7. Repeat with as many examples as necessary.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- When placing the examples under the document camera, ask the class what works well and what could be improved for each one.

- Volunteer an initial response, if students are reluctant to draw attention to what could be improved.

## Activity Variations

- Students could discuss each example under the document camera for a minute with the person beside them before contributing to the class discussion.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Ashman,Melissa\\_RewritingALetter-Concision-YouAttitude\\_Handout\\_PDF](#)
- [Ashman,Melissa\\_RewritingALetter-Concision-YouAttitude\\_Handout Word](#)

**Tags:** writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, you attitude, hands-on, individual, creating a product or document

PART V  
DOCUMENT FORMATTING



# 17. Gestalt Theory Scavenger Hunt

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will explore Gestalt Theory by finding real-world examples of Gestalt Theory principles in action.

### Materials Required

- Scavenger hunt handout
- Pens
- Small prizes
- Cell phones

## Activity Instructions

1. Either deliver a lecture on Gestalt Theory or have students do a reading on it.
2. Then, explain the rules of the Great Gestalt Scavenger Hunt.
3. Break students into groups of 4 or 5 and give them one handout per group.
4. Students will be given 15 minutes to go around campus and find good and bad examples of Gestalt Theory principles. Most students will use posters/signs, but architecture also counts.
5. When they find an example, they must take a photo with a cellphone.
6. Tell students that they should use the scavenger hunt sheet to note what example represents what principle, since it's easy to forget. For example, if they wanted to use a poster advertising an English class on Shakespeare to represent a good example of Figure-Ground Segregation, they would write "Shakespeare English poster" under that category on the sheet.
7. They must find a unique example for each principle. (For example, you couldn't use the same poster to represent both Figure-Ground Segregation and Closure.)
8. Students will get a bonus for finding something that showcases all of the principles we discussed.
9. Make sure to remind students to be respectful of other classrooms going on when they are moving through the hallways.
10. When a group is done, they will return to the class and you will look at their examples and score them.
11. The first team to find all good and bad examples of Gestalt Theory principles gets a small prize.
12. You may also choose to have an additional prize for the team that finds something that represents all principles.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was the hardest principle to find?
- How can you apply what you just learned to your resume/report/other upcoming assignment?
- How did your group work together?

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Cruthers, Arley Gestalt Theory Scavenger Hunt Handout PDF](#)
- [Cruthers, Arley Gestalt Theory Scavenger Hunt Handout WORD](#)

**Tags:** document formatting, visual communication, communication models, small group, game, Gestalt Theory, scavenger hunt, communication theory

PART VI  
RESEARCH, INFORMATION LITERACY, AND  
DOCUMENTATION





# 18. Information Literacy Hunt

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will learn to evaluate the trustworthiness of sources.

### **Materials Required**

- Internet connection

## Activity Instructions

1. Put students in groups of 4 or 5.
2. Ask students to look on their social media feeds or websites they routinely visit for content that they think might not be trustworthy. This could be a meme, an ad or an article. Those who don't use social media can work with a partner.
3. Ask students to share their piece of untrustworthy content within their groups and reflect on what made them think the piece of content might not be trustworthy.
4. Each group will then choose one piece of content to research. (This activity works for the CRAAP test, but it also works for other information literacy frameworks).
5. You have two options for how to arrange the activity from here:
  - Ask the group to try to prove that the piece of content they've selected is untrustworthy.
  - Give them a bit more structure by giving each group member a different question such as, "Why was this piece of content put online?" "How does the author of this content make money?" "How is the author trying to convince you of their point? Are their claims accurate?" "How does the author use visuals?"
6. At the end of the activity, each group will present their findings and/or write a short memo explaining what they discovered. If you have extra time, you can also have the groups exchange memos, then double-check each others' work.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- Why do you think this piece of content was not believable? Why do you think someone wanted to believe it?
- What surprised you the most about this activity?
- What research strategy was most helpful in proving/disproving your piece of content?

## Activity Variations

- Find your own pieces of false information. I often do this activity with health memes (such as David Avocado Wolfe) and explicitly tell students that the information is false.

**Tags:** persuasive messages, research and documentation, information literacy, discussion, small group, self-reflection, social media

# 19. Practicing Paraphrasing and Direct Quoting

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will practice reading a source document and then writing an appropriate paraphrase and an appropriate direct quote with correct APA formatting.

### Materials Required

- Enough photocopies of a page from a source document (such as a textbook) for everyone in the class, along with information on the source of the material.

## Activity Instructions

1. Distribute the photocopy of the source document to all students.
2. Partner students (or they can work individually).
3. Ask each pair to read the source material and then write down a paraphrase of an idea of their choosing from that page, including the APA in-text citation.
4. Circulate around the room to review student work and provide feedback. (This activity often takes a while for students to complete because of having to read the material, synthesize it, and then discuss/reach agreement with their partner about how to paraphrase and cite.)
5. Ask each pair to read the source material and then write down a direct quote of their choosing from that page, including the APA in-text citation.
6. Circulate around the room again to review student work and provide feedback.
7. Note the common errors that are seen. During the debrief, list/show these errors and explain the corrections.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What information do we include in the in-text citation for a paraphrase? For a direct quote?
- What are some differences between a direct quote and a paraphrase?
- Debrief the common errors and list/show the corrections.

## Activity Variations

- Students can work individually or in partners.

**Tags:** research and documentation, hands-on, individual, small group, creating a product or document, reading, paraphrasing, direct quoting, APA format, reference list, in-text citations

# 20. Citation Highlighting

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will apply their citation knowledge to their own writing and see the balance between their own voice and the voices of their sources.

### Materials Required

- Highlighters
- Markers or coloured pens
- Student draft

## Activity Instructions

1. Ask students to bring a draft of an assignment that requires source use.
2. Give them each 3 markers (you can also put students in groups of 3, give them each a marker, and tell them to pass their marker to their left after each round).
3. In the first round, ask students to use one coloured pen to underline or highlight sections of their work that contain direct quotes from their sources.
4. In the second round, ask students to use a different colour to underline or highlight sections of their work that contain paraphrasing or summarizing from a source. (The ideas of the source, not the words.)
5. In the third round, ask students to underline or highlight sections of the work that contain their own ideas or analysis.
6. Then, ask the debrief questions. As you do, tell students to put a star around any place where they've realized they need to make a change (add a citation, turn a quotation into paraphrasing, adding some analysis etc). You might also give students time to revise in class so that you can help them.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- In your work, who's voice is most important right now: the sources or yours?

- What percentage of the work contains citation? Paraphrasing? Summary? Your own ideas? Does this balance feel right to you?
- We've learned that you should quote because the words of the author is important, and that you should usually do some kind of analysis to the quote. Can you find a quote in your piece that doesn't have any analysis or that could be paraphrased or summarized instead?
- We've learned that when you paraphrase, you should not look directly at the source material and instead explain the quote as if you were talking to a friend. Can you find any paraphrasing in your piece that is too similar to the original quote?
- Have you noticed any place where your voice disappears from the piece? How could you make your voice more present in that section?
- Have you found a section where you're not sure if you've paraphrased, cited or used your own ideas?
- Are all of your paraphrased or summarized sections properly cited?
- Based on this activity, can you think of 3 changes you'd like to make to this draft?
- What questions do you have about citation after doing this exercise?

## Activity Variations

- Have students discuss their results with a partner and come up with a revision plan.
- Have students work on revision for the remainder of the class.
- Hand out note cards so that students can write down their remaining questions and ask them anonymously.

**Tags:** research and documentation, individual, self-reflection, citation, paraphrasing, source use, research, peer review, revision

# 21. Dear Abby

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will pick research topics.
- Students will see how looking “sideways” at something can produce a more interesting set of questions than approaching something from the most obvious point of view.
- **Note:** I did this activity more often when I taught composition, but it can definitely be used when students have some leeway in what to write their research reports on and often reach for the most obvious topics.

### Materials Required

- Class set of advice columns. (I like Dear Prudence, but any advice column will do. I often print 5 copies of 5 different columns for a class of 25.)

## Activity Instructions

1. Have students read the advice column then write for 5 minutes in the voice of someone other than the letter writer or the columnist. They can write in first or third person. For example, if the letter involves a father asking for advice on dealing with his teenage daughter who’s using drugs, a student might write from the perspective of the daughter, the mother, or even someone outside of the disagreement like the neighbour or the daughter’s boyfriend.
2. After 5 minutes, have students pick a new perspective then write for another 5 minutes.
3. Have a class discussion about how the new perspective changed the way they looked at the conflict. What questions did each new perspective bring up? What questions did each perspective ignore?
4. Link the activity to research topics by putting a common topic such as “Parking at Kwantlen” on the board. Using a word map, ask students to come up with different perspectives you could approach this topic from. Students will usually start with the obvious (students) but as you ask them to shift perspectives, they begin asking more interesting questions such as “Why is it so difficult to get students to use public transit?” “What are the challenges with KPU being a ‘commuter campus?’” “Why was KPU Surrey built here?”

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What questions did each new perspective bring up?
- What questions did each perspective ignore?
- How did your understanding of the conflict shift with each new perspective?
- How can we tie this back to choosing our report topics?

**Tags:** research and documentation, individual, creating a product or document, self-reflection, choosing report topics, perspectives, identifying research gaps



PART VII  
PERSUASIVE MESSAGES



# 22. Storytelling

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Upper level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will explore how advertisements both use and subvert storytelling techniques.
- Students will apply these techniques into their own persuasive messages.

### Materials Required

- Handout
- Projector with video
- Small prizes

## Activity Instructions

1. I use this activity when teaching storytelling as part of a unit on oral presentations. I first discuss different narrative structures and talk about the Walter Fischer Narrative Paradigm.
2. To begin the activity, choose 5 advertisements that contain strong or interesting storytelling. Ones that I have used successfully are: the “Thanks Mom” Olympic commercials, the Coleman Sweeney “Even an Asshole Can Save a Life” ad, the “Ghost Chips” drinking and driving ad, the Google ad about Partition in India etc. I’ve also asked students to submit ads with interesting storytelling.
3. Watch the ads in class, then break students into groups of 4 or 5 and assign them one of the ads.
4. Have them analyze the storytelling elements (conflict, desire, change, etc) and draw a diagram of the ad’s narrative. (See attached handout) Each group will share their responses with the class.
5. Then, ask students to take what they’ve learned and create the script for a short ad that uses storytelling to persuade the audience of a message. You can either assign students a message, or you can base it on an assignment they’re working on. For example, if students are writing recommendation reports, they can create ads that persuade an audience to accept one of the recommendations.
6. Encourage students to use music and props. I sometimes bring small prizes to be the CMNS 3000 Oscars and give awards for best use of stories, etc.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Storytelling Activity Handout PDF](#)
- [Storytelling Activity Handout in Word](#)

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communications, audience analysis / context analysis, persuasive messages, discussion, hands-on, small group, creating a product or document, corporate storytelling, advertising, narrative paradigm

# 23. Deductive Reasoning Murder Mystery

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Upper level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will understand deductive reasoning and how to build a syllogism.
- Students will use this to analyze their research data to come up with recommendations for a recommendation report.

### Materials Required

- Murder mystery game. There are lots of free 30-minute murder mystery games online. Though the price has gone up dramatically since I bought the game, I used the website *Playing With Murder* to buy a murder mystery tailored to classroom use. You can also find these very cheaply at thrift stores.
- I also bring a small prize for each of the “actors” and sometimes given a CMNS 3000 Academy Award to the student who gets into their role the most (the class decides).

## Activity Instructions

1. Print off the murder mystery game.
2. Begin the lesson by discussing inductive and deductive reasoning, and identifying when you would use each type.
3. Ask for volunteers to play the different roles in the murder mystery. The one that I use is played in 3 short rounds. I encourage students to get into the roles by giving a CMNS 3000 Academy Award to the actor who gave their all to the role (students vote).
4. Sit students in a circle and ask them to take notes on what the characters reveal.
5. Explain the rules of the murder mystery. Audience members can ask questions after each round.
6. At the end of the activity, ask students to write a deductive reasoning syllogism identifying the murderer. For example, a student might write “If the murderer had a key to the house and only family members had house keys and Bob is the only family member without an alibi, then Bob is the murderer.”
7. Students can hand in their proof for participation marks. Stress that it’s not just about identifying the murderer,

but laying out the syllogism.

8. After the game is over, ask students to create a syllogism using their research data.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- How did the syllogism help you solve the murder?
- What was the hardest part of the activity?
- How did the syllogism help you test your theory?
- How can you use a syllogism in analyzing your research?

**Tags:** research and documentation, analysis, hands-on, whole class, game, deductive reasoning, logic, syllogism, ice breaker

# 24. Can You Tell? Goodwill vs. Disguised Promotion

JOHN GRANT

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate.

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will identify the differences between an authentic goodwill message or a promotional message.

### **Materials Required**

- Goodwill messages handout
- Pens/pencils

## Activity Instructions

1. Conduct a brief lesson on what defines a goodwill message, including their intent and general components.
2. Then, position students in small groups (five is ideal).
3. Provide each student with a copy of the goodwill vs. disguised promotion handout (its important for each student to have a copy – not just one per group – so they can each take notes).
4. Ask students to review the scenarios on their own and to determine if each is either a goodwill message or a disguised promotion.
5. They should then share their responses with each other in their group and ultimately come up with general consensus for each scenario.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- Once each group has completed the activity, host a discussion with the class to determine if each group responded similarly or differently, and why.
- Ask about what specific factors contributed to group members making their decisions and refer back to the components that define a goodwill message to verify that those qualities are indicative (or not) within the examples provided.

## Activity Variations

- This activity can also be done online. In your LMS, create a different discussion forum for each scenario that is presented. Divide the class into groups and ask each group to address one scenario. Then, have one representative from the group post a summary of the group's individual choice in a central discussion forum that addresses all presented scenarios.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Handout – Goodwill or disguised promotion-WORD](#)
- [Handout – Goodwill or disguised promotion-PDF](#)

**Tags:** goodwill messages, persuasive messages, disguised promotion messages, discussion, hands-on, small group



PART VIII

# ROUTINE AND NEGATIVE NEWS MESSAGES



# 25. Negative News Messages

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will discuss a scenario where a negative news message would need to be delivered.
- Students will select and justify an approach (direct or indirect).
- Students will select and justify a channel to deliver the message.
- Students will develop/write a negative news message.
- Students will analyze and provide feedback on messages prepared by peers.

### Materials Required

- Activity instruction sheet
- Negative news scenarios
- Justification document
- Message document
- Blank pages (for peer feedback)
- Markers
- Tape

## Activity Instructions

1. Divide class into 5 groups.
2. Distribute materials to students.
3. State that each group will read and discuss the scenario they've been provided. As a group, they must decide on an approach to use to delivery their negative news message and a channel. They must write down their decisions on the "justification" page, along with their reasons for why they chose that channel and approach.
4. They must then write their message on the "message" page.
5. They will then tape their scenario, message, justification page, and a blank sheet of paper (11" x 17" paper works best) to the wall.
6. Students will then move around the room on their own or with their group to discuss the other scenarios, messages, and justifications, with an eye to provide feedback on what works well, what could be improved, or questions they might have.
7. After providing feedback on all the scenarios, students then reconvene back at their original station and review the

feedback they've received.

8. Debrief this activity with each group one-on-one or as a class.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- You can debrief this activity one-on-one with each group, reviewing the feedback they've received and the work they've completed.
- You can debrief this activity with the entire class.
- You can debrief one or two messages only with the entire class.
- The approach to take and the questions to ask will depend on the messages developed and the feedback each student has received.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Scenarios](#)
- [Ashman,Melissa\\_NegativeNewsMessages\\_ScenariosForWallHandout PDF](#)
- [Ashman,Melissa\\_NegativeNewsMessages\\_ScenariosForWallHandout WORD](#)

**Tags:** negative news messages, discussion, hands-on, small group, creating a product or document, giving and receiving feedback

# 26. Good and Bad News Pre-Activity

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will become aware of how their own background influences how they break good and bad news.

### Materials Required

- None

## Activity Instructions

1. Begin by asking students to stand up (if they are comfortable doing so).
2. Their task is to speak to 5 people and break one piece of good news and one piece of bad news to each person.
3. Tell students to make up the bad news, which should be something low-stakes (example: we're having a pop quiz). The good news can be a compliment or a made-up piece of good news (example: everyone got an A on the test).
4. Ask students to pay attention to how they delivered each message and what it felt like to deliver each message.
5. It often helps to acknowledge that this exercise is awkward and somewhat artificial, but it's going to help us see how we naturally give good and bad news. It also helps if you participate in the activity and work with students who are shy or hesitant to get involved. I never force anyone to participate in this activity.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was harder to give: good news or bad news? (Some students will express feeling nervous about giving compliments.) What was harder to receive: good or bad news? (Some students struggle accepting compliments.)
- How did you deliver the good news?
- How did you deliver the bad news?
- What happened to your body language as you broke the good and bad news?
- How did your audience react?
- Did everyone deliver the news in the same way?

- Which ways did you prefer?
- How do you give bad news in your culture or family?

## Activity Variations

- You can write down different low-stakes bad news or good news scenarios and have students pick them out of a cup/hat.

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communications, routine messages, negative news messages, whole class, self-reflection, good news, bad news, intercultural communication, ice breaker

# 27. Customer Complaint Response Rewrites

KAREN INKSTER VANCE

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will identify issues with a real-life customer complaint response and rewrite the message using effective negative news writing strategies for online audiences.

### Materials Required

- Example of an online written customer complaint response that needs improvement

## Activity Instructions

1. Find an online negative customer review that has an accompanying problematic corporate response. (There are articles linked below with several examples or you can find your own.)
2. Provide each student with a copy of this exchange.
3. Once they have read through the situation, ask the class: What do you think is problematic with this complaint response? (Consider: tone, audience, impact on future customers).
4. Using negative news writing strategies, have each student rewrite a more appropriate response and/or apology.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- Ask a few students to share their rewrites with the class.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- Links to review sites:
  - <https://uk.business.trustpilot.com/reviews/4-of-the-worst-ways-to-respond-to-negative-feedback>

- <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/how-not-to-respond-to-negative-reviews-online-aka-how-to-make-people-hate-your-brand/59903/>
- <https://www.reviewtrackers.com/vengeance-business-owners-worth-fighting-negative-reviewers/>

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communications, audience analysis / context analysis, negative news messages, writing online, discussion, individual, creating a product or document, customer complaints, apologies, social media



PART IX  
REPORTS



# 28. Open-Ended Question Bingo

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate courses

### Activity Purpose

- Students will practice asking open-ended questions, as a way to ask useful primary research questions.
- Students will practice their interpersonal communication skills and networking skills.

### Materials Required

- Bingo sheets
- Pens
- Blank paper/ cue cards
- Stickers (depending on the variation)

## Activity Instructions

1. Before the activity starts, get students to come up with one interesting thing about themselves that they think no other student in the class shares. (This could be “I have a twin” or “I’ve been skydiving” or as mundane as “I hate peanut butter.”) I usually have students generate these in an earlier class. If my class has a long break, I’ve also done this at the beginning of class, then printed the Bingo cards off during the break.
2. Insert the interesting facts into the Bingo template and print it off.
3. Give each student a Bingo sheet. Tell them that their goal is to talk to students in the class to find out who owns each interesting fact.
4. In their conversation, they must only use open-ended questions. For example, if one Bingo square said “Is afraid of kittens,” students could ask “What are you afraid of?” but not “Are you afraid of kittens?” They also can’t ask “What’s your interesting fact?”
5. Every time they find out someone’s interesting fact, they can cross off that box.
6. The first one to get a line is the winner.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was your strategy for the game?
- What was it like avoiding closed questions?

## Activity Variations

- Give students a few stickers. Every time they catch a classmate asking a closed question, they put a sticker on that person's paper. If the student gets 3 stickers, they have to sit out of the game for 2 minutes.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Open-Ended Question Bingo Handout PDF](#)
- [Open-Ended Question Bingo Handout in Word](#)

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communication, research and documentation, whole class, self-reflection, game, asking questions, interpersonal communication, networking, getting to know you, ice breaker

# 29. Primary or Secondary

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will think through a research question, identify sub-questions, and explore whether these are primary or secondary sources.

### Materials Required

- Laptop
- Google Doc (or another shared editable document)

## Activity Instructions

1. Come up with a research question or have students work together to come up with one.
2. Create a Google Doc and set the shareable link to “can edit.” Post a link to the Google Doc on the learning management system.
3. Students can choose to work individually, in pairs or in small groups.
4. Ask them to open the Google Doc and list as many questions as possible that they’ll need to answer in order to fully answer the research question. For example, if the research question was “How can KPU better support international students?” a sub-question might be “What does KPU currently do for international students?” or “What challenges do international students at KPU currently face?”
5. Challenge the class to come up with 50 original questions.
6. After students have come up with their questions, go through the questions and identify any that are not neutrally phrased. For example, a question like “Are KPU students angry about textbook costs?” isn’t neutrally phrased, so you would change it to “How do KPU students feel about textbook costs?”
7. Next, ask students to again work alone, in pairs, or in groups to identify whether the questions can be answered by primary sources or secondary sources.
8. If the question can be answered by primary sources, turn it pink.
9. If it can be answered by secondary sources, turn it blue.
10. If it can be answered by both (or the student isn’t sure) keep it black.
11. From here, you can help students to create a source plan for their research either alone or in groups.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- Which of these questions will be the hardest to answer? Why?
- Pick out a few questions and ask what sources the students would use to answer this question.
- What sources would you try to find first?
- Who can help you find sources?

**Tags:** research and documentation, discussion, hands-on, whole class, creating a product or document, narrowing research questions, primary sources, secondary sources, brainstorming

# 30. Creation of Multi-Level Outlines

PANTELI TRITCHEW

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will learn how to develop and organize ideas with structured outlines.
- The basic premise is that a structured outline is an effective idea management tool that is used to group information into logical organizational patterns. The key skills required to develop an effective outline are pattern and hierarchy identification. Skilled and experienced writers can plan as they write, but most of us need to develop an outline when we wish to convey complex information.
- Because this is a small group activity, students will also learn basics of brainstorming and consensus building.

### Materials Required

- One sheet of paper or a personal device to record the group solution

## Activity Instructions

### THE SET-UP

1. Divide class into small groups of 3-5 students.
2. Students pretend that they are working for the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education.
3. They have been assigned the task of writing a brochure to help students in British Columbia choose the right college or university. The working title for the brochure is Choosing the Right Post-Secondary Institution In B.C.
4. Their primary audience consists of high-school students in Grade 12 who are trying to choose between different post-secondary institutions.

### STAGE ONE: BRAINSTORMING

1. Generate words and phrases that come to mind when you think of criteria for choosing a college. What kinds of factors should high-school students consider? Avoid single-word concepts, such as cost; rather, use phrases such as cost of education.
2. Brainstorm at least 18 potential factors. Note that brainstorming implies random order.

## **STAGE TWO: CLASSIFYING**

1. Scan through your brainstormed list and identify common elements/clusters/categories.
2. Identify four-five categories (headings) under which the rest of the brainstormed ideas will logically fit. These will be level-one main headings.

## **STAGE THREE: SORTING**

1. Review the two sets of data that you generated in stage one and stage two, and using the principle of subordination, sort the phrases from stage one under the appropriate categories that you defined in stage two.

## **STAGE FOUR: REVISING FOR PARALLEL STRUCTURE**

1. Revise all of your level-one main headings so that they are parallel with each other.
2. Revise each cluster of level-two sub-headings under each of the level-one main headings so that each level-two sub-heading cluster has parallel structure.

## **Debrief Questions / Activities**

- How did you approach brainstorming? Did you have difficulty hitting at least 18 factors in stage one?
- How much difficulty did you have on getting consensus on the 4-5 level-one headings. How did you resolve the difficulties?
- How did you deal with “outlier” factors from your stage one brainstorming that didn’t fit into any headings, or that could fit under multiple main headings?
- How did you choose which grammatical constructions to use in order to achieve parallel structure?

## **Activity Variations**

- If there are time limits, stage four can be given as an “individual” homework assignment and debriefed the next class as a primer/review for balanced and primary headings within structured outlines.

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communications, audience analysis / context analysis, creating multi-level outlines, discussion, small group, creating a product or document, outlining, brainstorming, pattern identification, classification, parallelism



# 3I. Report Treasure Hunt

KAREN INKSTER VANCE

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will become familiar with and be able to identify the required components and design formatting of a formal business report.

### **Materials Required**

- Printed copies of a formal report (1 per pair)
- Treasure Hunt Worksheet (1 per pair)

## Activity Instructions

1. Have students get into pairs and give each team a copy of a formal report and a treasure hunt worksheet.
2. Together, students must answer the questions on the worksheet by finding the answers within the formal report.
3. The first team to finish with all the answers correct is the “winner.” I use a copy of our annual university accountability report that is published online, but there are many corporations and government agencies that also post their annual reports to the public.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- Review the worksheet answers with the class and provide further explanations about components and formatting as you go along. For example: What did you notice about the page numbering? How were graphs and tables labeled and introduced in the text? How is the table of contents formatted?

## Activity Variations

- You could adapt this to an online course by using digital versions of a formal report and having students complete an online quiz.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Handout in DOC](#)
- [Handout in PDF](#)

**Tags:** document formatting, hands-on, small group, game, formal report

# 32. Report Sort

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate course

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students understand how each part of a recommendation report stands on its own.
- Students will be better prepared to write their own reports.

### **Materials Required**

- Several copies of the handout
- Scissors
- Envelopes
- Prizes (optional)

## Activity Instructions

1. Print off enough copies of the handout single-spaced so that you can put students in groups of 4-5. (Note: this report is a simple recommendation report, but depending on the level of the class and your assignment focus you could easily adapt it by adding an executive summary, abstract, etc).
2. Cut the reports up so that each paragraph/bullet point/heading is on a separate strip of paper.
3. Put each cut-up report in a large envelope and shake up the pieces. You should have one cut-up report per group.
4. After explaining the parts of the report, tell students that they will be tasked with reassembling the report. I usually allow students to use any handouts/ textbook/ slides/ notes that they want.
5. When a group is done, check their work. I usually tell them which parts are correct and which aren't. (You may want to print of an intact copy of the report to make it easy to check their work).

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was the hardest part of this activity?
- How did you decide how to arrange the report?
- Did you encounter the same information twice?

- Why do you think the author chose to repeat that information?
- I also often get students to debrief by copying the headings into a notebook and then listing one piece of information they'd include in that part in their own report.

## Activity Variations

- Give prizes to the first team to finish.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Cruthers, Arley Report Sort Handout PDF](#)
- [Cruthers, Arley Report Sort Handout WORD](#)

**Tags:** routine messages, document formatting, report writing, hands-on, small group, game, recommendation report, report parts, sorting, headings

# 33. Report Remix

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower or upper level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will analyze an audience and a context to try to come up with a message that could go viral.

### Materials Required

- Laptops
- Markers
- Paper

## Activity Instructions

1. This activity works well towards the end of the semester in a discussion of online communication, remixing or meme culture.
2. Begin by looking at some recent pieces of viral content. Ask students who the audience is and why they think the piece went viral.
3. You can also have students share viral content they've seen, which helps to illustrate different algorithm bubbles. (Students will often show content that's been seen by millions of people that you'll never come across in your own news feed.)
4. Next, students will be asked to work in groups of 4 – 5 to create a piece of viral content. You can do this one of two ways:
  - If students are working on a research project or report, ask them to try to remix their research report into an image macro or meme. The challenge here is to find something in the report that would be interesting to an audience, then find an engaging way to share that information. For example, a student writing a report on how universities can reduce failure rates might come up with an image macro that offers “one weird trick to passing your classes.”
  - Challenge students to create a piece of content that would go viral among students at the university. The challenge here is to think about the audience and come up with a creative way to reach this audience with the message.
5. Depending on the time allocated for this activity, you can have groups/students share their memes. For bonus

points, I challenge students to share their content on social media and report back about what happened (as long as the content is ethical/truthful).

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was the hardest part of this activity?
- How did you come up with your viral content?
- Why do you think your audience would share/like your content?
- How did you use humour?
- What piece of content has the greatest chance of going viral? Why?
- How did you edit your piece?
- How did you use visuals?

**Tags:** audience analysis / context analysis, routine messages, persuasive messages, writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, remix, discussion, individual, small group, creating a product or document, online communication, social media, memes, visual communication, remix culture

PART X  
ORAL COMMUNICATION





# 34. Vocal Exercises

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will practice some vocal exercises they can use prior to giving an oral presentation.

### Materials Required

- Instructions on screen

## Activity Instructions

1. Project each instruction on screen one-by-one.
2. Ask students to stand up if they are able and comfortable. Reiterate that they are all doing this together and looking at the front of the room and no one is watching them. (I tell them I have 25 people looking at me, whereas they have one person looking at them.)
3. Demonstrate each vocal exercise and then invite the class to do it with you.
  - Here are the vocal exercises:
  - Deep breaths/sighs, sing AY-EE-I-OH-OO a few times while exhaling (one vowel sound per breath and then all of them in a row)
  - Purse your lips and then exhale loudly while relaxing your lips (make a horse-like noise)
  - Practice saying a tongue twister (any tongue twister)
  - Shrug your shoulders up and then relax them down.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- How did you feel while doing these exercises?
- Do you notice any difference in how your body or your mouth feels from before or after?

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Additional exercises](#)

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communications, hands-on, whole class, vocal exercises

# 35. The Lying Game

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Upper level undergraduate courses

### Activity Purpose

- Students will become comfortable with oral presentations
- Students will practice their oral presentation skills.
- I use it to show that if students can use their oral presentation skills to help them when they know nothing about the topic, think how well they will be able to do when they have prepared or know the topic well.

### Materials Required

- Handout, cut into individual strips
- Cup or envelope
- Timer

## Activity Instructions

1. After demonstrating oral presentation techniques/strategies, introduce the game.
2. Students will be asked to speak for 1 or 2 minutes about a topic they know nothing about.
3. To begin, I always put myself in the hot seat by asking students to come up with a topic I know nothing about, then speaking for 2 minutes on the topic in front of everyone.
4. Students will pair up and choose someone to go first.
5. The first set of students will draw a slip of paper with a topic written on it from a cup/envelope.
6. Remind students that since everyone will be talking, only their partner can hear them.
7. Give students a few seconds to read their topic, invite everyone to take a deep breath, then set the timer for 1 minute (or 2 minutes) and tell students to start.
8. After, switch partners and repeat the exercise.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What was that experience like?
- How did you get through it?
- What techniques did you use?

## Activity Variations

- Have everyone go at the same time so no one can hear each other.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Cruthers, Arley The Bullshit Game Handout PDF](#)
- [Cruthers, Arley The Bullshit Game Handout WORD](#)

**Tags:** oral presentations, oral communications, hands-on, individual, small group, whole class, confidence

# 36. Giving and Receiving Feedback

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower or upper level undergraduate course

### Activity Purpose

- Students will reflect on what experiences they have had with giving and receiving feedback.

### Materials Required

- Pen
- Paper

## Activity Instructions

1. Students should create a table with three columns on a piece of paper.
2. Students should think about a time they had to give feedback to someone, and it did NOT go well. This might mean they felt uncomfortable, the person receiving the feedback got upset, or something negative happened as a result. In the left-most column, students should write down their answers to these questions: What do you think caused that to happen? What did you do? What did the other person do?
3. Give students a few minutes to think and write.
4. Students should then think about a time they gave feedback to someone and it DID go well. This might mean the person received the feedback in a positive way, they felt proud about how they handled the situation, or something else constructive happened. In the middle column, students should write down their answers to these questions: What do you think caused that to happen? What did you do? What did the other person do?
5. Give students a few minutes to think and write.
6. Students should then think about a time they received feedback. In the right-most column, students should write down their answers to these questions: Was it a constructive experience? A negative experience? What do you think caused that to happen? What did you do? What did the other person do?
7. Give students a few minutes to think and write.
8. Ask students to look at what is on their paper. Ask them to reflect on whether they see any similarities or trends or differences.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- This is a good warm-up activity for a lesson on giving and receiving feedback. Given that students may be reflecting and writing about some fairly personal experiences, it might not be appropriate to ask them to share what they wrote with the class or the instructor.
- Instead, it can be helpful to reiterate that everybody has experience giving and receiving feedback at some level. It might be positive experience. It might be negative experience. It might be a mix. Students might feel confident giving feedback. They might not.
- In the lesson that follows, students will be provided with some tools for how they can give and receive feedback in a respectful and professional manner.

**Tags:** oral communications, giving feedback, receiving feedback, self-reflection

PART XI  
EMPLOYMENT COMMUNICATIONS





# 37. Employment Skills Analysis

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested Course Level**

Lower level undergraduate

### **Activity Purpose**

- Students will practice reading and interpreting a job advertisement.
- Students will analyze which skills would be required (or essential), “nice-to-have,” and transferrable.

### **Materials Required**

- Copies of a fictional resume
- Copies of a sample job advertisement (to match the fictional resume, it’s best to find an advertisement for a position in office management or administrative support)

## Activity Instructions

1. With the class, discuss and define “required” or “essential” qualifications, nice-to-have qualifications, and transferable skills.
2. Distribute handouts.
3. Place students in small groups.
4. Ask students to work with their group to discuss and decide what qualifications would be considered essential, nice-to-have, and transferable and why. Remind students to be prepared to share during the debrief.
5. Debrief the activity.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- What qualifications do you think are essential and why?
- What qualifications do you think are nice-to-have and why?
- What qualifications might be transferable and why?
- What did this review, discussion, and analysis reveal to you about job advertisements and interpreting them?  
(Highlight that job advertisements often list every single qualification the company would ideally like to have, but there is often opportunity to highlight what skills you have that are transferable and might be substitutable and/or

equally valuable. This then often segues into a good discussion about and lesson on writing persuasively in employment documents.)

## Activity Variations

- This activity can be a precursor to a follow-up activity for students to write a cover letter for the fictional person in application for the provided job advertisement.

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Ashman, Melissa EmploymentSkillsAnalysis ResumeHandout PDF](#)
- [Ashman, Melissa EmploymentSkillsAnalysis ResumeHandout WORD](#)

**Tags:** employment communications, discussion, hands-on, small group, reading, job advertisement, resume, skills analysis, transferable skills

# 38. Writing a Cover Letter

MELISSA ASHMAN

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Lower level undergraduate

### Activity Purpose

- Students will practice writing a cover letter using a real job advertisement and a fictional resume.

### Materials Required

- Copies of a fictional resume
- Copies of a job advertisement (to match the provided fictional resume, it's best to find a job advertisement relating to office management or administrative support)

## Activity Instructions

1. Review the parts of a cover letter with the class.
2. Distribute sample job advertisements and resumes to students.
3. Place students in small groups. (Steps 2 and 3 can be skipped if this activity is following the employment skills analysis activity.)
4. Ask students to work with their group to write a cover letter for the person in the resume in application for the job in the advertisement. (NOTE: Try to pair students who have experience writing cover letters with those who do not.)
5. Provide feedback as you circulate around the room.
6. Debrief the parts of the cover letter, such as the salutation, introduction, skills/qualifications to highlight in the body of the letter, the conclusion, etc.

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- How did you open your letter? Why?
- What did you say in your first paragraph? Why?
- What did you say in your middle paragraphs? Why?
- What qualifications did you highlight? Why?

- What did you say in your conclusion? Why?
- What are you taking away from this activity?

## Activity Variations

- This activity can be done individually instead. If few students in the class have prior experience writing a cover letter, this activity can be done with the entire class (using the instructor as a scribe in a blank document).

## Additional Resources / Supplementary Resources

- [Fictional resume WORD](#)
- [Fictional resume PDF](#)

**Tags:** employment communications, writing mechanics, grammar, style, tone, concision, hands-on, small group, creating a product or document, writing practice, cover letter

# 39. LinkedIn Lightning Round

ARLEY CRUTHERS

## Activity Guidelines

### Suggested Course Level

Upper level undergraduate courses

### Activity Purpose

- Students will understand the context of how LinkedIn profiles are used and analyze profiles to determine what persuasive strategies are effective.
- Students will also understand how their own values/assumptions/biases influence how they evaluate people in the workplace.

### Materials Required

- Printed LinkedIn profiles
- Stickers in two colours (stars or pricing stickers for garage sales work well)
- Whiteboard/chalkboard
- Whiteboard markers or chalk
- Tape

## Activity Instructions

1. Go on LinkedIn and look for 12 – 15 LinkedIn profiles that have summaries filled out. Print them single-sided, ideally in colour. You may choose to blur the candidates' names and photos. Depending on your class size, you may have to print duplicates so that everyone has one.
2. Sit the class in a circle and give each student a LinkedIn summary (face down), 10 red stickers and 10 yellow stickers (or whatever colours you have. Avoid red/green to accommodate students with colour blindness).
3. Tell students that the average recruiter spends 3 – 5 seconds looking at a LinkedIn profile before moving on and that we will be looking at these profiles under the same conditions that recruiters do.
4. Tell students that when you say “go,” they will flip over their paper and make a quick decision about the profile. If they like it, put a yellow sticker on it. If they don't, put a red sticker on it.
5. Every 5 seconds, you will say “pass” and the student will have to pass the paper to their right.
6. When the activity starts, set a timer and yell “pass” every 5 seconds.
7. After the activity, ask the first set of debrief questions.
8. Then, sort the profiles by “greatest percentage of yellow stickers” to “greatest percentage of red stickers.”
9. Tape the profiles horizontally on a whiteboard or chalkboard so that they form a continuum of yellow to red.
10. If you printed duplicates, arrange the duplicates above each other so that students can see how the same profile

was judged by two different audiences.

11. Then, ask students to walk along the line of LinkedIn profiles and look for trends. What do the most popular profiles have in common? What do the least popular profiles have in common? Why do you think the profiles in the middle sparked different reactions among students?
12. When a student notices a trend, they will write a note above/around the profile in whiteboard marker. For example, someone might note that the well-ranked summaries have professional photos. Someone might draw an arrow from a part of a profile that's off-topic and write "irrelevant." You will likely have to model this.
13. By the end of the exercise, the whiteboard should be filled with comments. Then, move along the line of profiles, linking student observations to persuasive strategies discussed in class. For example, you will likely find examples where writers have differentiated themselves by clearly showing why they're unique, but you'll also find examples of people trying too hard to be different and ending up being off-putting.
14. This activity often reveals assumptions/biases. For example, I've done this activity where all female profiles were ranked lower than male profiles, or where profiles of white people were ranked higher than profiles of BIPOC people. This has led to some interesting discussions about whether our snap judgments are trustworthy and what biases may underline our snap judgements. I also ask students whether they think LinkedIn is ethical, given that in many places it's illegal to ask candidates to submit a photo with a job application.
15. You can also use the second set of questions to draw out any trends that students didn't identify.
16. To finish the exercise, ask students to freewrite for 5 minutes on the topic "How will you apply what you learned in this activity when you write your own LinkedIn profile?"

## Debrief Questions / Activities

- **First questions**

- How did you make a decision about the LinkedIn profiles when you had so little time?
- What did you look at first?
- What made you like a profile?
- What made you pass on a profile?
- What was the most memorable profile? (Was it memorable in a good way?)
- What was the most surprising part of this activity?
- What was the hardest part of this activity?
- How did you use your own experience when judging these profiles?

- **Second set of questions**

- What's your biggest takeaway from this activity?
- What do you think the writers of the profiles we liked least were trying to accomplish?
- What are the top 5 things you can do to make your profile effective?
- What assumptions do you think we're making about the candidates?
- Are all of these assumptions fair?
- What makes a candidate "unprofessional?"
- Given that it's illegal in many places to ask candidates to submit a photo with a job application, do you think LinkedIn is ethical?

## Activity Variations

- You can leave out the second and third steps. If students aren't writing a LinkedIn profile, you can focus the questions more towards what persuasive strategies you're discussing in class.
- You can also do this activity with cover letters or resumes, since recruiters also spend 3-5 seconds looking at those. The benefit of LinkedIn profiles, however, is that they have a visual component.
- If you don't have a whiteboard, you can have students annotate the profiles using Post-It notes.

**Tags:** persuasive messages, employment communications, hands-on, whole class, LinkedIn profile, employment, job application, persuasion





PART XII

# BUSINESS COMMUNICATION CASES/SCENARIOS



# 40. Case: Business communication ethics

**Case authors:** Jerred Flynn, James Hills, and Ravneel Prasad

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## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested course level**

Lower level undergraduate course

### **Activity purpose**

- Students will complete a case relating to conflict management

### **Materials required**

- Pen
- Paper

## Activity instructions

### Background

Enron was a multibillion-dollar energy company who, through dishonest accounting practices, was able to hide their losses till the point where their next major merger fell through. They did this with shell companies that they would off load their losses to, to make their own financials look pristine. At the point of the failed merger, they filed for bankruptcy as their liabilities were too much for them to stay afloat. This resulted in tens of thousands of people to lose millions, both in pensions and shares of the company they could not sell.

### Questions before the case

- 1) Is it alright to exaggerate anything when submitting official documents? Be it a resume, timesheet, or something else.
- 2) Back when all of this happened, the incentivization for people who came forward with information (whistleblowers) was almost non-existent. Should there be incentives beyond the social recognition of “doing the right thing” for whistleblowers?
- 3) If you are a manager, is it ever right to bend the truth so that you and those under you can keep your jobs or tell the truth and possibly lose them?

## Enron Case

### Revenue Recognition: Why Doing Something Different Isn't Always Better.

In the case of Enron, they, like most of their competition, had a system of “historical cost” principles they had to follow when they booked their revenue. Basically, they bought the natural gas they sold at a given price, and when they sold it at whatever price they could get for it, they took the costs off and reported that as profit. This was how it worked in any given year to account for fluctuations in the selling price; they had to wait until they sold the gas before they could record revenues.

However, their executives lobbied for, and got, the permission from the SEC to change the way they reported their revenues. Instead of following the “historical cost” model, they switched to a “mark-to-market” model, which allowed them to record the profits on their contracts before the contracts were fulfilled. This led to several concerning outcomes. They were booking hypothetical profits as actual profits before they had sold their natural gas, based on forecasts of what the market would do. But they were booking this profit on contracts that had 20 years to fulfil, in some cases. The first concern is what they would do if they couldn't continue signing these contracts, and revenues dropped off. The second is what would happen if they wound up having to sell the gas at lower prices than forecasted.

In short, they switched from a system of recognizing revenue after the transaction happened to a system where they recognized revenue at some value which they thought they would get for it at some time in the future. By using this “fair-value” system, it became a system that was almost entirely dependent on manager forecasting, which is almost impossible for managers to accurately calculate and even closer to impossible for anyone else to check (Benston, 2003).

### Insider Trading: Making Sure the Boss Gets His...Money, That Is

Alongside the issues Enron was beginning to face from their CEO's resignation for “personal reasons,” both internal and external sources began to realize that there were issues with the accounting processes at Enron (Healy, 2003). An Enron VP began to raise concerns about the issues with some of the reporting happening, and as such, got both internal and external auditors involved. The external auditors, Arthur Andersen LLP, had their lawyer contact Enron to “remind” them that the official action to take with old documentation was to shred it. All of this eventually led to October 2001.

On October 16, 2001, Enron filed their quarterly earnings statements. When they did this, it came to light that they had incurred their first (recognized) loss in four years. Also included in this figure is the write-down, or loss of income, of more than \$1 billion. Finally, one of their subsidiaries which they were using to hide debt was terminated before Enron would be called on to exercise 58 million share options, which caused Enron to have to clear another \$1.2 billion dollars from their balance sheet (Thomas, 2002). At this point, the Securities and Exchange Commission began to get involved. However, this isn't where the insider trading began.

At this point, many of the Enron employees had been compelled to use their company pensions to buy Enron stock. More importantly, many of them had wanted to: the company was doing phenomenally well up to this point, and they saw opportunities for massive returns. However, on October 17, the day after the damning earnings statements, the company announced that their pension plan administrators had changed. This meant, by law, that no trading could happen with Enron's pension plan assets for 30 days (Healy). So, in the wake of the most terrible earnings statement Enron had released, the employees had their pensions frozen and were unable to do anything about it. The worst aspect of this, however, was that the executives were still free to exercise their stock options and sell the stocks in the open market: this ban on trading only meaningfully affected the rank-and-file employees.

So, not only did Enron's employees wind up by losing their jobs when Enron filed for bankruptcy in December 2001, they also wound up by losing their entire pension as well (Healy).

## Conclusion

There were no good outcomes to the Enron saga; millions of investors lost billions of dollars, the employees wound up unemployed with their life savings wiped out, many of the executives spent years in jail, and two major corporate entities wound up bankrupted. But the conclusions to be learned are quite simple: in the absence of truthful, good faith communication, it doesn't matter how good you engineer yourself to look. If you lie, cheat, falsify, you will wind up losing everything in the end.

With this information discuss with your group how Enron's exaggeration of their financials and other unethical dealings led to their bankruptcy. Also discuss the questions posed at the beginning of the case, and if any of your perspectives have changed after reading this case.

Benston, G., Bromwich, M., & Litan, R. E. (2003). Following the money : The Enron failure and the state of corporate disclosure. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

Healy, Paul and Krishna Palepu (2003). The Fall of Enron, Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol. 17, No. 2. Retrieved from <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~kathrynd/JEP.FallofEnron.pdf>

Thomas, C. William (2002). The Rise and Fall of Enron, Journal of Accountancy. Retrieved from <https://www.journalofaccountancy.com/issues/2002/apr/theriseandfallofenron.html>

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## Supplementary resources that are available

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### Word documents

- [Accompanying teaching note](#)

### PDF documents

- [Accompanying teaching note](#)

**Tags:** business communication case, business communication scenario, business communication ethics, Enron

# 4I. Case: Conflict management

**Case authors:** Swati Bassi, Anthony Ciulla, Faris Khan, and Stone Lacroix

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## Activity Guidelines

### **Suggested course level**

Lower level undergraduate course

### **Activity purpose**

- Students will complete a case relating to business communications ethics

### **Materials required**

- Pen
- Paper

## Activity instructions

Please take some time to read and analyze the following case regarding teamwork and conflict management. In doing so, feel free to reflect on what you learned during our lecture(s) on interpersonal communications.

## Background

You are a student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and are currently taking four first-year-level classes. In one of your classes, you have a 12-week-long group project where your task is to write-up a twelve-page report and create a PowerPoint presentation on a given topic for the class. A rough draft of the written report (worth 5%) is due on week 10, the final report (worth 15%) is due on week 11, and the presentation (worth 10%) is due on week 12. In total, this project is worth 30% of your final grade. You are assigned a group consisting of 5 other students: Mathew, Seth, Sebastian, Amelia and Brian.

## Tools for ensuring fair teamwork

Peer review sheets, to be submitted to the professor, are to be completed in weeks 4, 8 and 12 to demonstrate division of work and bring to light any critical issues within your team. The professor also says at the beginning of the semester

that if someone was contributing nothing towards the group project and that if he was talked to, he may take action and remove that person from the group.

## Group dynamics

In the beginning, everything seems to be moving fine. Everyone is attending the meetings after classes and communicating effectively with one another. At the third meeting, the work is split up based on everyone's preferences. However, some small issues begin to surface after week 3. Mathew says he has other obligations to fulfill and other classes are too stressful for him leaving his portion of the project incomplete. He also states he is unclear about his given task and believes he will be of minimal help. Additionally, Seth and Sebastian are procrastinating and are following Mathew out of their commitments.

This leaves only you, Amelia and Brian to still do your respective portions of the project. Recognizing this, a separate group chat on WhatsApp is created consisting of you, Amelia and Brian to further discuss how to handle these issues. It is decided that since there is time to spare, you would simply wait this out and hope Mathew makes time for this class. In week 4, when you notice the attitudes of the three students has not changed, the three of you decide to give Mathew, Seth and Sebastian 0/5 on their peer review assessments. However, you do not give any qualitative feedback explaining why.

Week 7 is your one-week reading break. It is discussed with the entire group beforehand that everyone must do thorough research on their sections before they return to class for week 8. When the week 8 meeting arrives, you, Amelia and Brian are prepared with information on your respective parts. Seth and Sebastian come to the meeting empty-handed and Mathew informs the group last-minute that he is unable to make it to the meeting. In the peer review assessment for this week, the three of you provide the same negative feedback regarding Mathew, Seth and Sebastian as you did in week 4.

It is week 9 and you, Amelia and Brian decided to finish the rough draft on your own that is due next week. During the break of the week 10 class, an argument breaks out in front of the class which escalates to Brian lashing out at Mathew, Seth and Sebastian for failing to contribute to the project. On the same day, you, Amelia and Brian attempt to talk to the professor as a last resort option. He informs you that there is nothing he can do as it is too late in the semester to remove them from the group. He further advises you that waiting until the end of the semester to bring this issue to the professor personally was not a good idea as he would have rearranged the groups earlier in the semester. You come back to class to find Mathew, Seth and Sebastian attempting to be productive and contribute their respective parts; however, they are working on parts that have already been completed as well as presenting work that has been clearly plagiarised using unreliable sources.

## Where you are now

It is week 10 and your team has a rough draft of the report completed thus far. Unfortunately, it is apparent that the quality of the report is not up to par and has suffered tremendously in areas assigned to and neglected by Mathew, Seth and Sebastian.

## Questions to think about

- At this point, what steps can you take to ensure the best outcome for your report and presentation?

- What could you have done differently that might have mitigated the chances of internal conflict within your group?

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## Supplementary resources that are available

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### Word documents

- [An online game testing knowledge of interpersonal communications](#)
- [Conflict management case discussion questions](#)
- [Conflict management and teamwork discussion questions and worksheet](#)

### PDF documents

- [An online game testing knowledge of interpersonal communications](#)
- [Conflict management case discussion questions](#)
- [Conflict management and teamwork discussion questions and worksheet](#)

**Tags:** business communication case, business communication scenario, conflict management, teamwork, interpersonal communications



## 42. Case: Writing business emails

**Case authors:** Xinyao Fu, Rumabel Mateo, and Lynden Pagurut

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### Activity Guidelines

#### **Suggested course level**

Lower level undergraduate course

#### **Activity purpose**

- Students will complete a case relating to writing business emails

#### **Materials required**

- Pen
- Paper

## Activity instructions

### Message Types: Emails

---

To: Sprinklez Donuts

From: Sprinklez Headquarters

Date: 10 March 2020, 9:18 AM

Subject: Emergency IWB49 virus update

So, the Disease Control Administration (DCA) is closely monitoring the outbreak of the IWB49 virus that was first recognized in Mexico.

Additional cases have been identified in other locations, including Canada.

As a company, the safety and well-being of our employees and clients is our main importance.

Due to this, we advise employees that have recently visited Mexico, or are in close contact with an individual who has travelled from Mexico, to remain at home and refrain from entering their work location for the next little while following the return of the individual from Mexico.

We ask that the employees currently in this situation to contact their manager to ensure they continue to receive their regular/base pay for regularly scheduled workdays missed.

You will be asked to send HR any valid documentation necessary to claim this pay period.

Please contact HR at 123-456-7890. As always, we are here to provide support and answers to any questions or concerns you may have.

If you do not come to work during this time you will not be paid.

Also, remember that our staff Christmas party is next Tuesday.

thanks,

Sprinklez Headquarters

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This email contains errors in terms of grammar, message, purpose, structure, and tone.

1. Identify and mark any errors in this email.
  2. Rewrite this email to ensure employees of Sprinklez Donutz, Inc. are well informed of the hazardous virus outbreak.
- 

## Message Types: Emails [Answer Key]

To: Rumabel Mateo (r.mateo@sd.com), Lynden Pagurut (l.pagurut@sd.com), [180 more]

From: Olivia Fu, Human Resources Manager, Sprinklez Donutz, Inc.

Date: 10 March 2020, 9:18 AM

Subject: Please read – IWB49 Virus update

Hello all,

As you may know, the Disease Control Administration (DCA) is closely monitoring an outbreak of the IWD49 virus that was first identified in Mexico City, Mexico. As of recent, additional cases have been identified in other countries, including Canada.

As a company, the safety and well-being of our employees and customers is our main importance. Due to this incident, we advise that any employees travelling from Mexico, or who live in the same household as an individual travelling from Mexico, refrain from reporting to work 14 days following the individuals' return from Mexico.

Employees currently in this situation are asked to contact their manager to ensure they continue to receive their regular/base pay for scheduled workdays missed. You will be asked to contact human resources and attach any valid documentation to support the claim of this pay period.

As always, we are here to provide support and answers to any questions or concerns you may have.

Thank you,

Olivia Fu

Human Resources Manager, Sprinklez Donutz, Inc.

1234 Richmond St, Vancouver, BC, Canada X0X 0X0

(123) 456-7890, ext. 101

## Download this case

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## Supplementary resources that are available

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### Word documents

- [An accompanying teaching note](#)
- [A handout about business emails](#)

### PDF documents

- [An accompanying teaching note](#)
- [A handout about business emails](#)

**Tags:** business communication case, business communication scenario, email, business writing, style, tone