

Interpersonal Communication

COMM 3230 | M/W/R 10:35–11:40am | Prof. Cowan

Where: Graduate School of Business 125

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Office Hours: after class & by appointment

"All real living is meeting."

— Martin Buber

Each of us engages in some form of interpersonal communication every day, & the relationships that emerge through & out of those interactions form the lifeblood of who we are. Whether the activity involves getting to know a new roommate, writing a note to your future self, raising money for a preferred cause, asking your boss for a raise, or putting an end to an unhappy coupling, we are always communicating with others in order to achieve our goals. Accordingly, this course is an introduction to research & theories in the field of interpersonal communication. The primary goal is to learn about the process of interpersonal communication & apply what you learn to your own interpersonal relationships. In addition, this course is designated as a "writing-intensive seminar," & so we will set out to develop our capacity & confidence as writers through numerous prompts during the semester, following a pedagogical strategy known as the Learning Record to track & reflect on our progress.

Learning Aims/Course Strands

- *Research:* Understand theories & concepts of interpersonal communication, differentiating them from other related terms & domains of communication.
- *Analysis:* Discuss, differentiate, & apply the major theories of relational development & maintenance, in both face-to-face & mediated contexts.
- *Relevance:* Recognize the changing nature of communication in relationships brought on by the emergence of new media & technologies.
- *Composition:* Showcase in-depth understanding of concepts & theories in interpersonal communication through a diverse & cumulative writing portfolio.
- Explore the utility of various media, venues, language, & tone in writing about abstract issues, personal experience, & real-world action.

Schedule

Date	Topic	Homework
M 1/9	Introductions	// // // // // // // // // // // // // //
W 1/11	The Learning Record	Review Syllabus
Th 1/12	Communicating Relationships	Textbook Ch. 1
M 1/16	// // // // // // // // // // // MLK DAY // // // // // // // // // // //	
W 1/18	"Why I Write"	Orwell Didion
Th 1/19	Interview Overview	→ Due: First Learning Record
M 1/23	Coming Together & Apart	Textbook Ch. 2
W 1/25	On What Writing Is	King Chs. 2 & 4 (§1-4)
Th 1/26	Writing Down The Bones	→ Due: Authursday Exercise
M 1/30	Interpersonal Needs	Textbook Ch. 3
W 2/1	Taking Care	Lamott §II.1-4 & §IV.1-3
Th 2/2	From Me To You	→ Due: <i>Une Lettre Arrive Toujours</i>
M 2/6	Environmental Factors	Textbook Ch. 4
W 2/8	Taking Off	Lamott §I.1-4
Th 2/9	Talking Pictures	→ Due: Silver Screen Reflection 1
M 2/13	Setting the Stage	Textbook Ch. 5
W 2/15	Taking Advice	Lamott §III.1-6
Th 2/16	Love Loves to Love Love	→ Due: Wedding Toast
M 2/20	// // // // // // // // // // // PRESIDENTS' DAY // // // // // // // // // // //	
W 2/22	Gal Pals	Friedman
Th 2/23	Fleeing Phallogocentrism	Cixous

Schedule (cont.)

Date	Topic	Homework
M 2/27	Rules & Rituals	Textbook Ch. 6
W 3/1	Toolbox, Stoolbox	King Ch. 3
Th 3/2	The Term Is Mid	→ Due: Midterm Learning Record
3/6-10	// // // // // // // // // // SPRING BREAK // // // // // // // // // //	
M 3/13	Words Of Love	Textbook Ch. 7
W 3/15	Further Words On Words	Hale §I.1-5
Th 3/16	Jaw w/ Jake	<i>One-on-One Online Conferences</i>
M 3/20	Routine Maintenance	Textbook Ch. 8
W 3/22	Home Economics	Hale §I.6-8
Th 3/23	Catechism	→ Due: Authursday Exercise
M 3/27	Pillow Talk	Textbook Ch. 9
W 3/29	Sentence Sentience	Hale §II.9-10
Th 3/30	"Houston, We Have A Problem"	→ Due: <i>Moon People</i> Rewrite
M 4/3	Breaking Down Breaking Up	Textbook Ch. 10
W 4/5	Life & Death Sentences	Hale §II.11-12
Th 4/6	Talking Pictures: Take Two	→ Due: Silver Screen Reflection 2
M 4/10	Pattern Recognition	Textbook Ch. 11
W 4/12	Jouissance & Lalangue	Hale §III.13-16
Th 4/13	Dear Prudence	→ Due: AITA Response
M 4/17	Missive Accomplished	Textbook Ch. 12
W 4/19	And In The End...	// // // // // // // // // // // // //
M 4/24	// // // Finals Week // // //	→ Due: Final Learning Record

Course Format

On account of our reduced class size, the nature of interpersonal communication as our subject material, & our intensive focus on the granularity of composition, we will forgo a typical undergraduate top-down lecture structure for a more conversational & rhizomatic seminar-style dynamic. Every week (or nearly so) will follow a similar pattern, with Mondays dedicated to interrogating a chapter from our textbook on interpersonal communication, Wednesdays given over to discussing a passage of writerly advice, & Thursdays spent reading through & revising together brief writing exercises based on prompts provided at the start of the week. By downplaying the conventional hierarchy of instruction, this piecemeal & nonlinear format will allow (& require) students to direct class discussions at their own pace & according to their own interests, necessitating active participation & regular attendance in class while keeping up with all texts (to read & to write) at home; this final requirement includes bringing to class for two to three exploratory questions for each reading.

The Learning Record

(adapted from learningrecord.org)

With decades of successful implementation & roots stretching from Lev Vygotsky to Peg Syverson, the Learning Record is a holistic, evidence-based, portfolio-style system of assessment in which you & the instructor together reflect on your learning. With greater emphasis placed on the process rather than the product of composition, this model replaces traditional grading with ongoing observation—that is, you don't receive grades on individual assignments, though you still get full instructor feedback & will still be assigned a letter grade at the end of the course. The difference between this & traditional methods, essentially, is that you get to argue persuasively for whatever grade you believe you deserve at the term's end.

How do you convince your instructor that you deserve a particular grade? Partly through reflective self-assessment (journal-style), partly through evidence gathered in learning artifacts (assignments), & partly in rhetorically sound argumentation (persuasive writing). The principle reflection & argumentation opportunities occur at the beginning, middle, & end of the semester. Addressing these three key prompts, the Learning Record will help you make progress across six Dimensions of Learning: 1) confidence & independence; 2) skills & strategies; 3) knowledge & understanding; 4) prior & emerging experience; 5) critical reflection; 6) originality & creativity. Your task, & that of the instructor, is to assess how you advance throughout the semester by applying these six Dimensions of Learning to the course Learning Aims.

Dimensions of Learning

Theorists like Vygotsky & Sylvereson have argued that learning & development are not like an assembly line which can be broken down into discrete steps occurring with machine-time precision, but an organic process that unfolds in complex ways according to its own pace & rhythm. The joint processes of teaching & learning occur in complex ecosystems, dynamic environments where teachers, students, materials, texts, technologies, concepts, & social structures, are interdependently related & interactive. Using the Learning Record, teacher & student are actively searching for, & documenting, positive evidence of development across six pedagogic dimensions: 1) confidence & independence; 2) skills & strategies; 3) knowledge & understanding; 4) prior & emerging experience; 5) critical reflection; 6) creativity & originality. None of the dimensions can be simply "separated out" & treated individually; rather, they are dynamically interwoven & occur in untimely spurts.

Confidence & Independence

We see growth & development when learners' confidence & independence become congruent with their actual abilities & skills, content knowledge, use of experience, & reflectiveness about their own learning. It is not a simple case of "more (confidence & independence) is better." In a science class, for example, an overconfident student who has relied on faulty or underdeveloped skills & strategies learns to seek help when facing an obstacle; or a shy student begins to trust her own abilities, & to insist on presenting her own point of view in discussion.

Skills & Strategies

Skills & strategies represent the "know-how" aspect of learning. When we speak of "performance" or "mastery," we generally mean that learners have developed skills & strategies to function successfully in certain situations. Skills & strategies are not only specific to particular disciplines, but often cross disciplinary boundaries. In a writing-intensive class, for example, students develop many skills & strategies required for composing & communicating effectively, from research to concept development to organization to polishing grammar & correctness, & often including technological skills for computer communication.

Knowledge & Understanding

Knowledge & understanding refers to the "content" knowledge gained in particular subject areas. Knowledge & understanding is the most familiar dimension, focusing on the "know-what" aspect of learning. In a psychology class, knowledge & understanding might answer a wide range of questions such as, *What is Freud's concept of ego? Who was Carl Jung? What is "behaviorism"?* These are typical content

questions. Knowledge & understanding in such classes includes what students are learning about the topics; research methods; the theories, concepts, & practices of a discipline; the methods of organizing & presenting our ideas to others, & so on.

Prior & Emerging Experience

The use of prior & emerging experience involves learners' abilities to draw on their experience & connect it to their work. A crucial but often unrecognized dimension of learning is the capacity to make use of prior experience as well as emerging experience in new situations. It is necessary to observe learners over a period of time while they engage in a variety of activities in order to account for the development of this important capability, which is at the heart of creative thinking & its application. With traditional methods of evaluating learning, we cannot discover just how a learner's prior experience might be brought to bear to scaffold new understandings, or how ongoing experience shapes the content knowledge or skills & strategies that the learner is developing.

Critical Reflection

Reflection refers to the developing awareness of the learner's own learning process, as well as more analytical approaches to the subject being studied. When we speak of reflection as a crucial component of learning, we are not using the term in its commonsense meaning of reverie or abstract introspection. We are referring to the development of the learner's ability to step back & consider a situation critically & with insight into their learning processes, a kind of metacognition. It provides the "big picture" for the specific details. For example, students in a history class examining fragmentary documents & researching an event use reflection to discover patterns in the evidence & construct a historical narrative. Learners need to develop this capability in order to use what they are learning in other contexts, to recognize the limitations or obstacles confronting them in a given situation, to take advantage of their prior knowledge & experience, & to strengthen their own performance.

Creativity & Originality

As learners develop the previous five dimensions, they generally become more playful & experimental, more creative in the expression of that learning. This is true not only in "creative" fields such as the arts, but in nearly every domain: research, argumentation, history, psychology, mathematics, &c. In all fields the primary contributions at the highest levels are the result of creative or imaginative work. Even in the early stages of learning in a discipline, exploration & experimentation, taking new or unexpected perspectives, & playfulness should be recognized & encouraged as a natural part of the learning process. Among other things, an emphasis on this dimension recognizes the value of creative experimentation even when the final

result of a work may not succeed as the student may hope. If we hope to foster this quality in students' thinking & development, it is important to encourage creativity, to document originality, & to explicitly make imagination a value.

Grade Breakdown

★★★★★	A	94–100	<i>exceeds expectations; creative approach; flawless execution; grasps purpose beyond just the prompt</i>
★★★★☆	A-	90–93	
★★★★	B+	87–89	<i>meets most to all expectations; minimal mechanical mistakes; demonstrates grasp of assignment nuances; practical albeit unoriginal approach to the prompt; factually & philosophically accurate</i>
★★★☆☆	B	84–86	
★★★	B-	80–83	
★★★☆☆	C+	77–79	<i>meets many to most expectations; sloppy usage & mechanical errors mar understanding or fluidity; factually or philosophically off the mark; fails to demonstrate grasp of assignment aim or detail</i>
★★★	C	74–76	
★★☆☆	C-	70–73	
★★	D	65–69	
★☆☆	D-	60–64	<i>merely rote attempt to complete assignment</i>
★	F	0–59	<i>little to no attempt at meeting basic expectations</i>

Assignments at a Glance

Participation & Attendance (20%) — Both online & in-person, students are expected to fully, responsibly, & intelligently participate in discussions, & will be assessed based on their ability to demonstrate meaningful familiarity with the course readings, placing concepts & terminology within the broader thematic arc of the class. This requirement also includes, as evidence of continuous & asynchronous involvement beyond the classroom, students bringing to class for discussion two or three original & insightful questions in response to each reading during the week. *NB: This is the only portion of your final grade not contained under the Learning Record rubric.*

Elbow Grease (LR) — For a five to ten minutes at the beginning of every class period (or very nearly so), students will stretch their rhetorical tendons & discursive muscles via quick freewriting sessions. While individual exercises will go unremarked upon, at the end of the semester these *en masse* will make up part of the final LR portfolio, as evidence of continued writerly practice & progress throughout the semester.

Authursday Exercises (LR) — On Monday each week (or thereabouts), students will be given a loose prompt related to the themes of interpersonal communication under discussion & usually adapted from that Wednesday's reading. These short (no longer than a page) writing assignments will be due at the start of class on Thursday for group review & revision, collecting both versions in the final portfolio.

Silver Screen Reflections x2 (LR) — Twice during the semester, students will compose concise yet incisive research essays of about a page in length identifying themes & concepts of interpersonal communication in a film of their choosing, incorporating explanatory details from the textbook & one (or more) relevant academic articles.

Une Lettre Arrive Toujours (LR) — In his seminar on Poe's third whodunit, Lacan rather infamously & paradoxically quipped that "a letter always arrives at its destination," regardless any postal mishaps or forgotten stamps. Putting this maxim into practice, students will follow the basic instruction of the *ars dictaminis* to compose brief briefs to a friendly reader—a loved one who has passed, a historical figure, the one who got away—who will never have the opportunity to receive the message.

Love Loves To Love Love (LR) — Merriam-Webster defines a wedding as "a marriage ceremony usually with its accompanying festivities," with the latter often including speeches by friends & family. Following this common tradition, students will write (& read aloud in class) short epideictic toasts for a loved one's imagined nuptials, in part describing the nature & history of the specific interpersonal relationship in question.

Houston, We Have a Problem (LR) — "Every book you pick up has its own lessons," says Stephen King, "& quite often the bad books have more to teach than the good ones." With this instructive claim in mind, students will demonstrate their growing skill as editors & deepened familiarity with writerly mechanics by judiciously revising a chapter of Dale M. Courtney's *Moon People*—a bad book if there ever was one.

Dear Prudence (LR) — Mimicking the style of an advice columnist—e.g., the Friedman twins—students will write pithy responses to a pair of substantial AITA posts (having received prior approval by their instructor) culled from Reddit & incorporating useful interpersonal communication terminology from the textbook.

Learning Record Prompts (LR) — At three key points in the term, students will write longer reflections on their own learning. As part of the final portfolio, these will make up the body of persuasive argument for the proposed final grade. For the Midterm & Final reflections, the first section will use artifacts (class assignments, freewriting prompts, short exercises, etc.) as evidence that demonstrates a learning trajectory.

For each of these artifacts, students will write a brief explanation that addresses how that artifact shows progress in the four Learning Aims & six Dimensions of Learning. Include the explanation in the LR document itself; refer to the provided samples for formatting details & citation requirements.

Requirements

Textbooks — Throughout the semester, I will do my best to provide selected PDFs, ebooks, hyperlinks, & scans of various texts, broadly construed, with the crucial exception of the following, which I have not yet found a workable copy of online:

- Knapp, Vangelisti, & Caughlin (2020). *Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships*. (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson. ISBN-1792422490.
- Courtney, Dale M. (2008). *Moon People*. Xlibris. ISBN-9781436372138.

Other readings will be uploaded to Canvas at the earliest opportunity, although you may consider getting your grubby paws on your own used copies of the following:

- Hale, Constance (2013). *Sin and Syntax: How to Craft Wicked Good Prose*. NY: Three Rivers Press. ISBN-0385346891.
- King, Stephen (2010). *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. NY: Scribner. ISBN-9781439156810.
- Lamott, Anne (2019). *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. NY: Anchor Books. ISBN-0385480016.
- Strunk, William, Jr., & White, E.B. (1999). *The Elements of Style*. (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson. ISBN-9780205309023.

Technology — While students by no means need to be in advance expert users of Twitter, habitual viewers of YouTube, or chronic listeners of Chapo Trap House—nor should they be, for the sake of their mental health—a digital native's inchoate familiarity with such platforms is expected. In addition, you should be comfortable using Google Docs (& the related software suite) to compose, collaborate, & submit your work throughout the semester. Finally, you are expected to check your email inbox everyday & respond professionally to any messages within a typical timeframe (weekends excepted) of one business day. Furthermore, ensuring accessibility is a core value of this class, which means that all assignments, initiatives, & discussions aspire to fully accommodate each student beginning with the very first day of class. If any technology is challenging for you to use, no matter how large or small the issue, please communicate this however you feel comfortable & I will make every effort to ensure your success.

Policies

Late Work

All assignments, without exception, should be submitted as asked by the beginning of class the day they are due on the syllabus in order to receive credit. That said, emergencies do arise, & I am merely human, so should you message me with ample time well before the morning of class (e.g., at least by the prior midnight), we might just come to an understanding; but if you get & then forget an extension, you will not receive another after that.

Tardiness & Absences

Please show your peers & professor respect by arriving to class or (if necessary) logging into Zoom on time, at least a minute before we are set to begin, taking note of any music or other audio that is playing, which is meant to set the mood & theme for the day. If you need to miss a meeting period for whatever reason, please send a professional email to let me know just the same as if you were to miss a shift at work.

Attitude & Afterwardsness

While there are of course a number of different reasons for earning a bachelor's degree—perhaps you just want a piece of arbitrary paper to help advance your career prospects, or maybe you're unsure about your future path & merely felt social or familial pressure to attend college—many of your professors (including the one writing this) believe that academic success at a tertiary level ultimately depends on an attitude of intellectual humility, curiosity, & openness that characterizes a willingness to ask questions to which you do not already presume to know the answer. (Jacques Lacan, a thinker who, if you're lucky, you won't hear about again during the next few months, once quipped that *you can't ask a question if you already know the answer.*) The assumption of many teachers, then, is that you're taking classes in order to learn what you did not already know before, & that includes pedagogical decisions professors make about the direction, pace, style, & content of the course. If, however, you act as though you understand already what a subject should entail, then there is necessarily no reason for you to be there & you might justifiably lose participation points.

A Word of Warning

Take note now: *This class is rated NC-17 for themes of sex, drugs, & rock 'n roll.* That means you can curse an idea or embellish an expression, but you may not curse your fellow classmates. While all kinds of commendable questions & questionable comments are invited, this ultimately is not a debate class centered on back-&-forth squabbling. The readings & lectures in this course will ask you to consider radically

counterintuitive & sometimes provocative theories that may challenge many of your preconceived notions about technology, writing, or life itself, & approaching novel ideas by merely reciting talking points or repeating rigid sloganeering is less a respectable sign of someone's prior learning than a signal that they aren't presently engaging in learning whatsoever. Should anyone make the mistake of attempting to goad their peers or professor into a virulent debate at the expense of dialogue, upon a first offense I will ask them to remain silent, but thereafter removed from class, for the remainder of the semester if deemed necessary.

Because your work will be evaluated on how well you can reflect an understanding of class concepts in what you produce rather than how much you personally agree with them, or with your instructor, our aim at bottom should be to have amiable conversations instead of contentious arguments. As such, we will aspire to create a hospitable safe space for all sorts of divergent thoughts, bodies, thoughts about bodies, & bodies of thought, as freedom of expression does not include the freedom to limit another's expression. We will strive to encourage an open exchange of opinions & information without prejudging them; likewise, we will welcome honest & good-natured criticism, remaining open to new ideas. There will be no place for the spreading of willful ignorance, of malicious conspiracy, of small-hearted vitriol, or of small-minded falsehoods, & we will instead adopt the Augustinian maxim: *Dilige et quod vis fac* (or as the Fab Four put it: *All you need is love*).

The Novel Coronavirus aka COVID-19 aka the 'rona

These are strange days, indeed—as Lennon once put it—& yet during such trying times, for one reason or another, you decided to enroll in this course, perhaps in order to improve your writing & thinking in preparation for a future career, or maybe just to meet the crazy professor who tells all the bad jokes. Whatever the reason, what you certainly did not sign up for is an ongoing, never-ending, uncaring global pandemic. If you are facing extraordinary circumstances in your life at any point this semester, within or beyond this course & within or beyond covid, please reach out to me. Adjustments can always be made, & I will make every effort to be flexible. If you face a challenge, problem, or difficulty of whatever kind during the duration of this course, & if you think I can help in some way, please communicate this to me, & I will try to institute changes that work for all parties involved. Keep in mind, though, that while I will do all I can to accommodate your needs, whether due to the pandemic or some other reason like a disability, it is ultimately your responsibility to raise the issue in a timely & clear manner.

Pedagogy, Professoring, & Pedantry

Experience has taught me that the aim of a syllabus should not only be to tell you about the course you are taking (in terms of material, schedule, & methodology), but also to tell you a little something about who is taking you down that course; or, said differently, to best navigate these intellectual depths you need to not only know about the seas you are sailing but also about the steersman of the ship. With that in mind, & without making too much of a thing about it, allow me to say a word or two about my pedagogical approach & what you can expect this semester. Right out of the gate, & as this document no doubt demonstrates, recognize that my MO tends toward mixing the casual & the rigorous, a combination of low-brow humor & ivory tower references—in a word, my teaching style does not eschew the vulgar, albeit always under the etymological auspices of the Latin “vulgate.” In splitting that hair, & thus following the model of Joyce, you can also already recognize the emphasis that I place on understanding history & studying the development of ideas—for how can we know what to *do* with a concept if we don't know where we *got* that concept? Yet to historicize (& now following the model of Jameson) requires at least an attempt to see that past as it was seen & experienced by those at the time, not simply from the vantage of modernity (if such a moment—ever before, still, or ever will—can be said to exist). This commitment to thinking through, with, in, & of history means, at least in part, that I always try to (& believe you should, too) acknowledge whenever possible my sources & forebearers, whether academically or pedagogically or personally: In the first instance, by citing a library's litany of thinkers (some of whom you have read already, others whom you know only by reputation, & a few you will be sick of by the end of the semester, such as Derrida & McLuhan); in the second, by recognizing those former anonymous students, both good & bad, whose enthusiastic successes teach me what to emphasize again & whose bitter reproaches tell me what to avoid (or warn against) this go round; & in the last instance, by speaking candidly to the way these ideas & authors under discussion have impacted & play out in my own life. This final point should, finally, should indicate to you a pivotal tenet of my pedagogy in that I believe (with a nod to Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*) learning does not begin or end in our classroom, nor that a syllabus provides a complete map of the subject area in question—since no map can truly capture the bigger picture, as Borges knew. Rather, learning (& therefore teaching) happens asynchronously, in fragments & spurts—Lacan once said that “teaching is nothing other than going around in circles”—as much (if not more) when you are at home watching TV or with friends getting dinner as when you are taking notes during a lecture; so expect from the start (or, at least, this is my end) that the work asked of you in this class will call the conventional, ideological, psychical, ontological, political, & pedagogical borders separating what you learn in school & what you do in real life into question.