

Western University – School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Communicating Research to General Audiences

Course Outline:

2024

Instructor: Dr. Aaron Schneider

Office: UC 2431

Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 12:30-1:30 in-person or by Zoom (if you can't make these times, I am happy to meet with you at another time)

Email: aschnei4@uwo.ca or OWL email

Time: Wednesday, 9:30-12:30

Location: IGAB 1N05

1. Description:

Communicating Research to General Audiences develops researchers' abilities to effectively communicate complex, disciplinary specific ideas to individuals without specialist knowledge in ways that are clear, concise and captivating. Participants will refine their written and oral research communication skills to reach and engage the widest possible range of audience members.

Students will participate in a mixture of writing and presentation assignments to craft short and compelling written explanations and oral presentations of their research for a general, non-specialist audience. Written explanations are suitable as lay abstracts for theses, funding applications, personal websites, and submission to Western's Inspiring Minds Project, which seeks to broaden awareness and impact of graduate student research beyond the academic community. Oral explanations are beneficial to public outreach, building cross-sector partnerships, and/or showcasing expertise to prospective employers.

This microcredential is designed for advanced researchers who are strong academic communicators. PhD students receive priority registration.

2. Goals

By the end of this course, students will have an improved ability to distill complex concepts into clear and compelling language, allowing them to showcase their research expertise to a broad audience. These are valuable communication skills transferable to careers where researchers engage with diverse stakeholders, including community organizations, policy-making environments, business meetings, and media outlets.

3. Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Select language that effectively conveys complex concepts at a level appropriate for your audience's understanding
- Apply the principles of audience-centered communication to engage the widest possible range of audience members

- Effectively incorporate communication strategies, such as the use of metaphors, to enhance audience comprehension of complex concepts
- Articulate the broader significance of your research to connect with audiences and communicate the relevance and impact of your work

4. Topics:

The basic topics in the course will include:

- Public speaking skills to engage an audience
- Assessing the level of understanding of an audience and selecting appropriate language
- Strategies that connect your audience to your message
- Communicating succinctly
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We will cover topics in grammar as necessary.

5. Timetable:

The basic timetables:

Week 1 (May 3):

- Introduction
- Introduction exercise
- Abstracts
- Presenting

Week 2 (May 10):

- Abstracts
- Presenting
- Abstract workshop
- **Introduction Presentation (0%)**

Week 3 (May 17):

- Writing for general audiences
- Lay abstracts
- **Introduction Presentation (0%)**
- **Abstract (15%) Due**

Week 4 (May 24):

- Clarity and style
- Lay Abstract workshop
- **Project Presentation (15%)**

Week 5 (May 31):

- Presenting redux
- Inspiring Minds Project Description workshop
- **Project Presentation (15%)**
- **Lay Abstract (35%) Due**

Week 6 (June 7):

- **Elevator Pitch (15%)**

- **Inspiring Minds Project Description (20%) Due**

6. Prerequisite:

Doctoral students with a strong foundation in writing and grammar receive priority registration, subject to compliance with SGPS' regulation 9.0:

Graduate students are encouraged to participate in professional development and career-related courses, workshops, talks and events. Graduate students do NOT need the approval of their supervisors or their programs to participate in these faculty, program and university-wide events. Professional development and career-related events can be found through the Teaching Support Centre, the Student Development Centre, the Student Success Centre: Careers, Leadership and Experience, the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and individual Faculties. Participation in professional development and career offerings is expected to occur outside of TA duties, time-critical research duties, and shall not interfere with required current Graduate program courses, meetings and responsibilities.

7. Corequisite:

None

8. Antirequisite:

None

9. Instructor:

Dr. Aaron Schneider
aschnei4@uwo.ca or OWL mail

10. Contact Hours and Room:

Wednesday, 9:30-12:30, IGAB 1N05

11. Course Materials:

- Course materials available on OWL
- Purdue Writing Lab: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

12. Evaluation:

The final course mark will be determined as a Pass/Fail. There will be three presentations (2 graded) and two written assignments in the course.

Introduction Presentation (diagnostic assignment) 0%:

This is a short presentation. It is an ungraded assignment intended to introduce you to the expectations of the course. It is aimed at a professional audience.

Project Presentation 15%:

This is a 4-5 minute presentation of your research project aimed at a general academic audience.

Elevator Pitch 15%:

A 2-3 minute explanation of your project aimed at a general/professional audience whose specific purpose is to sell the audience on your work and its value.

Abstract 15%:

A 350-word academic abstract with a list of key words. It should be an abstract for your research project.

Summary for General Audience/Lay Abstract 35%:

A 350-word lay summary aimed at a general audience.

Inspiring Minds Project Description 20%:

A 150-word description of your project aimed at a general audience that is suitable for submission to Inspiring Minds, a Western initiative that seeks to broader awareness and impact of graduate student research beyond academia

13. Scholastic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.

14. Plagiarism:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

15. Accessibility:

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.