MGB #268, Section 1: Articulation And Critical Thinking

Syllabus: Fall Quarter, 2012

MGT #268, Section 1
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Introduction to ACT #268

Imagine yourself as an impressive speaker and a competent writer, if it’s not the case already. Think of yourself as an excellent critical thinker as well, adept at analyses and strategies. This course will help you to become that person. Through a big commitment to ACT #268 on your part, you will...

- think more efficiently and critically
- become a competent speaker in front of groups
- write well, at a level expected of an MBA graduate

WP students regularly say, during the quarter, that they find immediate workplace applications for what they’re learning. This class is meant to be practical, and is. The skills you will be acquiring are designed to stay with you for life. For example, students called upon to give an oral presentation a year after graduation will report back that skills learned in this class, including how to rehearse, came right back into play.

Let’s delve into the three subjects raised above.

Critical Thinking

In a 2010 survey conducted by the GSM, those who hire GSM graduates said better critical thinking skills are of the utmost importance. In a related survey, GSM alumni echoed that sentiment.

What is critical thinking, this skill so valued by employers these days? One could say it is the ability to take on any subject matter, consider all the issues and information, and reach a rational, defensible decision. Often business situations are not at all cut and dried; they require clear-headed analysis. Think, for example, of product launch
decisions, acquisition opportunities, legal actions, financing, HR problems and so much more.
The goal of #268 is to teach how to think, not what to think, so that you can tackle diverse and often complex situations.

**Writing**

English writing skills vary greatly within a GSM class. A special self-tutorial writing packet measuring grammar, punctuation and other basic skills will be available online to all students by September 10. This must be completed prior to the third class, when we’ll focus on writing in earnest. (See further explanation later in the syllabus.)

During the quarter, certain self-editing techniques chosen specifically for the needs of GSM students will be brought to bear to enhance your business writing. The required Munter textbook will be an important reference.

**Presentations**

A competent speaker has eight basic skills that show up in public presentations. Students come into the class with strength in some skills, but others need to be learned. For instance, some students speak too quickly (and know it) because they’re nervous. That can readily be undone, using a positive technique called cognitive restructuring, which is the foundation for the coaching. Beyond basic competence, students will also learn how to have a commanding presence and other more advanced skills.

**Required Materials**

A downloadable **TEXTPAK**, which contains a chapter from the popular book **Blink**, by Malcolm Gladwell, and a chapter from **Thought & Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking**, by Diane F. Halpern.


**Interesting Recommendations**

**The Business Writer’s Handbook (10th edition, Bedford/St. Martin’s)** is an excellent, well-indexed spiral-bound book. It suits many purposes, and even has guidance directed at ESL students.
Students who need to excel in creating charts for presentations would do well to have **The Say It With Charts Complete Toolkit**. Gene Zelazny, McGraw Hill, 2007.

Students who want to do outstanding PowerPoint presentations should acquire **Presentation Zen** by Garr Reynolds (New Riders, a division of Pearson Education), 2008, or **slide:ology** by Nancy Duarte, O’Reilly, 2008.

Students who expect to be active with start-ups or pitching for capital should consider **Presenting To Win**. Jerry Weissman, FT Press, 2008.

**Before you arrive at the first class, be sure these two things have occurred:**

- You have personal copies of the required print publications.
- You have ready access to the Textpak (some course reading materials) and UCD SmartSite (where assignments, grades, and resources will be posted).
- You know the basic of navigating on SmartSite, where resources, assignments and other material for #268 will be found. (However, as noted below, your writing assignments will be submitted directly to the professor, not SmartSite, because he can more readily do in-depth editing. See below.)

**Your owner’s manual for #268**

- **All writing assignments** should be sent to the professor’s UCD email address (dnykennedy@ucdavis.edu), and **NEVER** to SmartSite, which will not be checked for assignment submissions. **Your email subject line when submitting assignments** should contain three elements: your name, section number, and a key word or phrase from the assignment—for example, “McKay, 2, leadership”
- **Questions about assignments** should go to the TA, who can readily answer most. The TA will forward questions to the professor if necessary. If your subject line has the word **QUESTION**, it will stand out and is more apt to receive prompt attention.
- **Grades** will be posted on SmartSite by the TA, available to you in an ongoing manner. Final grades are curved; see **Grading** section of this syllabus.
- **Attendance** issues should be directed to the TA via email, including last-minute notice that you cannot attend class and why. (Again, see **Grading** at the end of syllabus regarding absences.)
- **The weekly assignments** will be spelled out completely in SmartSite as we go through the quarter. Usually the assignment is posted a week or two in advance. (All the assignments are not posted at the outset because adjustments are sometimes needed, based on the class experience.)
1st Class—You’ll have a first look at how your skills will develop in critical analysis, writing and giving presentations. Critical thinking will receive special attention. What does it mean, and why is it so important in business?

2nd Class—To establish your baseline speaking skills to an audience, you will give a 90-second presentation without notes from a lectern. The topic is simple: given your work life thus far, tell the class about an instance in which your critical thinking could have been a lot better.

3rd Class—We will introduce some editing techniques that can immediately improve your business writing. Then we’ll shift to analytical tools for good decision-making. These will include deductive and inductive reasoning; the most common logical fallacies; and mistaking correlation for causality.

4th Class—With the Presidential election just days away, it’s a perfect time for a vigorous three-minute presentation in which you debunk the logic of a Presidential candidate’s views on a matter with economic implications. While the candidate’s rhetoric might have its appeal, you will point out the shortcoming(s) in the candidate’s claim and your view on the matter.

5th Class—Actual business writing will be examined to shed light on the importance of style, brevity and critical thinking to achieve your objective. We will also discuss inferences in depth, with numerous problematic examples.

6th Class—This will be an opportunity to give a compelling presentation about something you care about in the realm of healthcare. You will use story-telling and stark comparisons, based on data, to convincingly make your point.

7th Class—Managing an organization or project calls for solid critical thinking about the human element, which requires emotional intelligence and careful articulation. The Thomas Green HBR case will come under the microscope, and you will also conceive earthbound solutions to simulated management problems.
8th Class—You and a partner will share duties and the stage to give an engaging presentation of three minutes, using a minimum of six PowerPoints. You will delve into a topic of your choosing beneath the broad umbrella “money.” You will apply critical analysis to create arresting and noteworthy insights.

9th Class—You will apply your critical acumen, and the tools you’ve learned, to The Friedman Doctrine, as it is known. It is an influential op-ed column by the Nobel prize-winning economic theorist Milton Friedman, written in 1970. He criticizes the concept of corporate social responsibility.

10th Class—You will give a business development or sales presentation, requiring confidence and enthusiasm. No notes, no lectern. You might be seeking financial support for a business venture, or pursuing outright sales, as you choose. Using critical thinking, you will convert features to benefits to enhance your talk.

Final Exam (Take Home): You will submit a critical analysis, written report, and executive summary on a significant problem. It will be posed to the whole class early in the quarter. There will have been ample time for research, analysis and the necessary writing/rewriting.

**Grading**

No more than half the students in ACT #268 will receive an A- or higher, in accordance with GSM guidelines for core classes. **Important:** grades will be curved as needed at the end of the quarter to achieve this outcome. Be forewarned, then, that the running sum of your numerical grades on SmartSite may not directly convert in the traditional manner to your letter grade.

Grades will be compiled as follows. Should there be any changes, the professor will notify you in a timely manner as the course progresses.

Class 2: 10 points for written assignment about critical thinking in your work life

Class 4: 10 points for written assignment about flawed campaign claims

Class 6: 10 points for healthcare talk

Class 7: 10 points for Thomas Green written assignment

Class 8: This is a speaking assignment with two people on a team. However, grading is primarily individual, as follows, with 10 points total: 4 for written assignment (graded individually); 4 for presentation quality (graded individually); 2 points for PPT quality and its integration with the talk (same grade for both students).
**Class 9:** 10 points for your written critical analysis of Friedman Doctrine.

**Class 10:** 10 points for “call to action” oral presentation

**Take-Home Final:** 30 points

**In Addition....**

This class is a skills workshop, with frequent performance requirements, discussion, and grades. Students are required to attend each of the 10 classes. Students compelled to miss one class because of illness, mandatory business travel, or for another good reason, will not have an adjustment to their grade. However, missing a second class, regardless of reason, would result in a 5-point grade reduction. The overall deduction would rise to 12 points for 3 classes missed, and 20 points for 4 classes missed, either of which would be very damaging to your grade. Please notify the TA of any and all absences ahead of time. Do everything possible to schedule travel, interviews, and personal matters around class requirements. If you can foresee that you will have to miss a class, investigate whether that class is offered at a time that works for you in the other two sections of #268. The #268 syllabus is identical for all, and each of the 10 classes is taught on different days in the various San Ramon sections. You are welcome in other sections with prior notice—again, an email to the TA. In extreme circumstances, you might also consider taking the class on campus or in the Sacramento WP program.

Additionally, a student may receive a deduction at the instructor’s discretion for significant shortcomings in participation. This rarely happens, but warrants mention. Shortcomings on a sustained basis might include a serious failure to contribute; unpreparedness for the reading assignments; “multi-tasking” on a laptop or smart phone in class. This class is an interactive workshop. Whether it's the instructor speaking, a class discussion, or a student giving a talk from the front of the room, everyone’s engagement creates the best learning experience.