MGB 268
Articulation And Critical Thinking

Syllabus: Summer Quarter, 2013

MGB 268
Brian Kennedy, lecturer
(cell) 619-807-7448
bkennedy@ucdavis.edu
Office hours: by request

Introduction to MGB 268 Articulation And Critical Thinking

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

ACT 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 oral presentations 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. Additionally, it's sometimes the ability to think big, beyond the obvious problem at hand, and to take into account the “human factor,” i.e., the irrational behaviors that may come into play.
The goal of #268 is to teach how to think as well as 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 fostering grammar, punctuation and other basic skills will be available online. 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.

**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 needing to learn others. 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, incorporate PowerPoint effectively, and other more advanced skills.

**Required Materials**
A downloadable TEXTPAK, with cases, Harvard Business School readings, and excerpts from Blink by Malcolm Gladwell and Thinking Fast And Slow by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman.


**Interesting Recommendation**
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.

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

- You have a personal copy of the required print publication.
You have ready access to the **Textpak** and UCD SmartSite, where assignments, grades, and resources will be posted. (However, as noted below, your writing assignments will be submitted via email directly to the professor, not to 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 (bkennedy@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, program, and a key word or phrase from the assignment—for example, “McKay, MGB, 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 and available to you in an ongoing manner on SmartSite. 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 the syllabus regarding absences.)
- **The weekly assignments** will be spelled out completely in SmartSite as we go through the quarter. (All the assignments are not posted at the outset because adjustments are sometimes needed, based on the class experience.)
- **Discussion Groups**: Students will participate in ongoing discussion groups to analyze cases and other materials prior to each class. The instructor will form the ongoing groups in the first class. Participation in the group discussions and in class discussion will factor into a “participation” element of the grading.

**There will be a written assignment and a talk to be given on each of the five Fridays when this class meets.**

**1st Class**—You’ll have a first look at how your skills will develop in critical analysis, writing and giving presentations. What does critical thinking mean, and why is it so important in business? We’ll apply these skills in our first case: “How Much Is Sweat Equity Worth,” a valuation challenge facing two entrepreneurs launching an artisanal vodka company.

**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—CEO Marissa Mayer recently created a controversy when she announced Yahoo would no longer have remote employees. In the case “McGregor Ltd. Department Store,” a CEO faces a similar controversy with a policy change he must announce. This class will also introduce some editing techniques that can immediately improve your business writing. Then we’ll shift to analytical tools for good decision-making.

4th Class—You will present speeches once again. For this second speech, you will be taking a stance on a current event. Use your critical analysis skills to debunk the logic of an opposing position, point out the shortcomings and fallacies, and state your view on the matter.

5th Class—“Livestrong: Cycling Around Lance Armstrong” is a case involving the real-time future of the cancer-fighting non-profit foundation, which is independent of the cyclist. What should its strategy be? Also, you will be challenged with two simulated management problems that involve ethically challenging situations.

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—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; its influence is strong today.

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—Two cases are under the microscope. In “Thomas Green: Power and Office Politics,” he must write a very diplomatic self-assessment for his superiors to retain his position. The second case, “In Search of a Second Act,” is an actual challenge that faced an entrepreneur whose first product had been a hit, but the company desperately needs another innovation.

10th Class—This final oral presentation of the quarter calls for 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
**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. In addition, a 200-point basis will be used for grading to allow greater discretion for individual assignments.

**Critical thinking** is a grading factor for the speaking assignments and especially for the writing assignments, which rise from group analysis.

**Speaking**
The first two presentations are not graded.
Third presentation (healthcare): 20 points
Fourth presentation (PowerPoint talk with partner): 25 points
Fifth presentation (persuasive): 20 points

**Writing**
The first writing assignment is not graded.
McGregor: 20 points
Livestrong: 20 points
Friedman Doctrine: 20 points
Thomas Green: 20 points

**Participation**
15 points, based on class discussion and peer reviews contribution levels to the group. May vary significantly.

**Final Exam**
40 points

**In Addition....**

This class is an interactive workshop. Missing one of our five WP sessions (two classes) would be significant and a matter for discussion, which should be initiated by the student. It’s understood that students do at times have unavoidable conflicts. Do everything possible to schedule travel, interviews, and other matters around class requirements. Inasmuch as there are only five class sessions, an absence would equate to missing 20% of the in-class activity—not so bad for a lecture/textbook class, but a considerable and worrisome amount for one that is primarily a
workshop. Put simply, physical presence and active engagement matter a lot—to you and to students who will be receiving your contributions in class.