MGP 268: Articulation And Critical Thinking

Syllabus: Fall Quarter, 2012

MGP 268
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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

Let’s delve into these three assertions.

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, however, is to teach how to think, not what to think.
Writing
English writing skills vary greatly within a GSM class. A special package about grammar, punctuation and other basics will be available online to all students by September 10: this must be reviewed, with self-testing, prior to the first day of class. (See further explanation later in the syllabus.) Students will see immediate improvement in their writing skills when they apply techniques designed over the years especially for the needs of GSM writers. The required Munter textbook will be a useful reference as well.

Presentations
A competent speaker has eight basic skills that come to bear 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
The downloadable TEXTPAK, which contains a chapter from the popular book Blink, by Malcolm Gladwell, and a chapter from a textbook on logic, Thought & Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking, by Diane F. Halpern.


Strongly Recommended
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 three things have occurred:**

- You have personal copies of the required print publications.
- You have ready access to the Textpak (some course reading materials) and SmartSite (where assignments will be posted).
- You have worked through the materials in the pre-requisite **Self-Tutorial Writing Packet**, in a folder of that name within the Resources section of SmartSite for #268. Start a week or two before class. Have your personal summary of self-identified writing challenges ready for class 1.

**Your owner’s manual for #268**

- **All writing assignments** should be sent to the professor’s UCD email address (rcbiggs@ucdavis.edu), and **NEVER** to SmartSite, which will not be checked for assignment submissions. The **subject line** 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 some to the professor as necessary. Write simple expressions like “**Question**” or “**Must Miss Class**” in the subject line, so it stands out. Often there are waves of assignments that come to the site for future grading, and your email obviously warrants immediate notice.
- **Grades** will be posted on SmartSite, 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 each week in SmartSite. Usually this is done a week or two in advance; adjustments are sometimes required because of how the class is progressing. The assignment posted in SmartSite is the final version of any assignment.
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 of 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 eminent 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: 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**: 10 points total: 4 for written assignment (graded individually); 4 for oral presentation quality (graded individually); up to 2 points for PPT quality and its integration with the talk (same grade for both students).

**Class 9**: 10 points for your critical analysis of Friedman Doctrine.

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

**Take-Home Final**: 30 points

**IN ADDITION....**

Up to **20 Points may be deducted**, at the professor’s discretion, for significant shortcomings in participation. This class is an interactive workshop. Sometimes the professor has occasion to adjust a grade for lack of participation. Shortcomings could include a serious failure to contribute; unpreparedness for the reading assignments; “multi-tasking” on a laptop or smart phone in class. Please notify the TA when unable to attend a class, and cite a reason; the TA makes note and always passes these on to the professor.

Missing more than one class would be significant and a matter for discussion, **which should be initiated by the student through the TA**. It’s understood that students do at times have unavoidable conflicts. Do everything possible to schedule travel,
interviews, and other matters around class requirements. Physical presence and active engagement matter a lot in this type of class.