

# environmental communication

syllabus &  
sample project  
instructions

*oral*  
print  
digital

→ (communications)

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Communication Program  
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three-prong: written texts, digital audio-visual presentations, and oral presentations, with writing being our primary focus.

This course is not steeped in political ideology and will not digress into a semester-long diatribe bemoaning the state of the environment and exalting the benefits of recycling (though your instructor does encourage you to recycle refuse and ideas whenever possible).

## Texts

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- *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2006*, Houghton Mifflin, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, ISBN: 061872222X
- Articles provided throughout the semester
- Other texts may be required



## Course Policies

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**Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity violations include fraud and plagiarism. Fraud includes submitting substantially similar assignments to fulfill a requirement in more than one course, regardless of term, unless the student has been granted permission. Plagiarizing means to steal or pass off someone else's words, images, or ideas as one's own. Papers may be submitted to Turnitin.com. Sanctions for academic integrity violations may include a failing grade for the assignment or course. The incident may be reported to the Dean of Students for additional action, including suspension or dismissal from the university.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend each class. Four to five absences will negatively affect your professionalism grade. Students who have missed six classes will fail the course. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you are considered absent. If you are absent from class, you must still submit assignments when they are due by sending them with a classmate or delivering them to me before class.

**Late Work:** No late work is accepted. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Assignments are not accepted by email without prior approval. If you require extra time to finish an assignment, please discuss this with me before the due date.

## Grades

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People are not given a letter-grade for their work on-the-job. Generally, a workplace project is considered unacceptable, acceptable, or superior. We will use this system for evaluation of assignments. Some assignments may receive a mid-range point value. General evaluation criteria are as follows:

- ♦ **Superior (✓+)** - A superior rating designates the kind of project that might lead to a promotion in the workplace. It is professional and reflects the author's careful consideration of audience and purpose. It demonstrates strict adherence to the assignment instructions. It is complete, presented in an appropriate and engaging style, arranged logically, memorable, and visually appealing. It is visually cohesive and balanced. It introduces and credits sources properly. It avoids visual or textual clichés. It contains no superfluous material - every element has a defensible rhetorical purpose. It reflects a relatively sophisticated assimilation of class discussions and readings. Text contains few mechanical errors and no run-on sentences or fragments. A superior reading quiz demonstrates complete answers to all questions and a thorough understanding of the material.
- ♦ **Acceptable (✓)** - An acceptable rating designates a project that satisfies most or all of the requirements but may contain a small number of minor errors that can be easily corrected. It would be considered acceptable in the workplace. It too is professional and reflects consideration of audience and purpose. It may contain some gratuitous visual or textual elements but still conveys a unified message overall. It reflects assimilation of class discussion and readings. An acceptable reading quiz demonstrates an understanding of the material, but may contain an incomplete response or minor errors/omissions in interpreting the text.

- ♦ **Unacceptable (0)** - An unacceptable project would be returned for extensive revision in the workplace. It fails to meet the criteria of the assignment, either in terms of the project parameters or quality of work. It may be inappropriate for its intended audience, contain excessively gratuitous visual elements, employ an inappropriate style, or lack an identifiable message. A consistent pattern of this level of production would probably get a person reprimanded or fired in the workplace. An unacceptable reading quiz fails to demonstrate a useful understanding of the text or is unacceptable in terms of legibility, errors, or professionalism.

Your final grade will consist of the following. You must receive “Acceptable” on each major project to pass the course. *Detailed instructions for each assignment will be provided in class and/or posted on Blackboard:*

ACTIVITY	POINT VALUE
Professionalism	40
Reading responses	40
Group presentation	40
Digital presentation	40
Final article	40
	200

We will have in class activities, reading quizzes, and other work throughout the semester. You will receive feedback on many of these activities, though they are not individually graded. They do, however, count heavily toward your professionalism grade. The point scale for your final course grade is:

GRADE	POINTS
A	168-200
B	134-167
C	100-133
D	51-99
F	50 or below

Your audience for each project is an educated group, but lacking in any substantial scientific or technological expertise. Your job is to communicate information and ideas about complex topics and help your audience make meaningful connections with that material. Why is understanding the importance of the autopsy procedure important to me, for example? (See Dobbs’ article, “Buried Answers,” p. 55-66 for an explanation.)

- **Professionalism** – You are expected to demonstrate professionalism in class, as you would in a workplace environment. This includes the following behaviors:
  - Being on time and prepared for class
  - Completing all class activities
  - Having appropriate class-related material for lab time during each class
  - Avoiding excessive absences
  - Actively participating in class discussions
  - Using proper grammar and spelling when communicating with the instructor by email
  - Not using cell phones, laptops, email, text messaging, or music players during class
  - Not using lab computers during lecture or class discussion
  - Using appropriate language and avoiding jokes or disparaging remarks based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation
  - Being respectful of others
  - Being awake and alert

- **Reading responses** – For each reading assignment, you are to write a short response, around 300 words. (This section on reading responses contains 318 words.) There will be 10 reading responses. These responses are informal and do not require additional sources. Submit to me a paper copy, double-spaced. Please use a specific format that includes:

- An appropriate and meaningful title. Do not italicize, underline, or use quotation marks around the title
- A one-sentence summary of text, referring to the title and author. Please do not include any additional summary information or recapitulate the article. The idea is to *interpret* and *analyze*, not *summarize*
- A focused thesis about either 1) what you see as the agenda of the writer, 2) how the text communicates something about the environment, though its main topic might not ostensibly fit into what we traditionally define as an “environmental” issue, or 3) a disparate connection between the text and an idea or theme in one of your other classes
- Quotations and paraphrasing from the text, where relevant, to support your points

*You will receive a Superior grade* if your paper follows the required format, contains few mechanical errors, no sentence fragments or comma splices, and reflects an original idea. *You will receive an Acceptable grade* if your paper falls short of the above criteria in terms of form and content, but still reflects a basic understanding of the text. *You will receive an Unacceptable* if your paper contains mostly summary of the text or excessive mechanical errors (or if you fail to submit a reading response). Some weeks, the reading response may be replaced by another activity. For example, you might be asked to find an example of a digital presentation online or write notes about a field trip. In the latter case, your participation in a field trip would be reflected in both your reading response and professionalism grades.

- **Group presentation** – With one partner, you will research and present a topic related to environmental studies. Your group’s objective is to take a sophisticated topic of a scientific or technological nature, synthesize material from at least three credible sources, and teach this material to a lay audience. You will sign up for a specific date at the beginning of the semester. Here’s how this project will work:
  - Two weeks prior to your scheduled presentation, your group will draft a paper handout for the class that describes three topic ideas. The outline should be in bullet format and describe each topic in two or three sentences. You and your partner will make a five minute presentation explaining the choices to the class and answering questions. The class will then vote on which topic that they find most worthwhile. The entire process should take approximately 15 minutes.
  - Your group will do an oral presentation of the chosen topic, accompanied by a digital presentation and a paper handout for each student that supplements but does not duplicate the oral and digital presentation. Your presentation will include an activity that generates directed class discussion about your topic. Your group’s job is to elicit discussion and keep that discussion on track. Each student in the group must participate equally in the oral presentation. The entire presentation and discussion should take approximately 45 minutes.
- **Digital presentation** – Individually, you will present a digital audio-visual presentation on a topic related to environmental studies. The presentation should stand alone – in other words, it should not require explanation or accompany an oral presentation. It should not be the same topic that you use for your group presentation. If in doubt about the topic, see me for approval. The presentation should contain multiple images (photography, diagrams, graphs, and/or video) and audio and last between five and seven minutes. Be creative, be artistic. Avoid bullet point presentations. Have this presentation available on CD or DVD by the due date.
- **Final article** – You will submit a final article (or essay) on a topic related to environmental studies. The article should be between 2,500 and 3,000 words and make some connection between science and the humanities. It should contain references to at least three credible sources and introduce those sources properly. You should “humanize” science to some extent. (Read the text “Introduction,” p. xix, for an explanation.) This topic can be the same as your individual digital presentation, but not the same as your group presentation. You should use a consistent style for citation. You may refer to Krajick’s “The Mummy Doctor” (p. 125) as a model for your article in terms of style, organization, introduction of sources, and the use of character to “humanize” a scientific issue.

## Field Work – **Visual Storytelling** – Focus on the Environment

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Tell a **story** in and about the outside environment with five original photographs.

In groups of up to four students, you will create a story using five photographs with the only text being a title. Choose any subject, as long as the story occurs outside in a relatively **natural** environment. Be prepared to present your stories to the class using PowerPoint, Movie Maker, or other visual presentation application. You need only create a **simple** presentation, though you may choose to exceed these guidelines.

A story typically has characters, a plot, and a setting, along with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

*Audio option:* You may add music, but no narration.

Natural = Go outside

Have this presentation available at the beginning of class on **Friday, February 23**. If you use PowerPoint, make sure that your audio files, if any, are properly saved. (PowerPoint does not automatically save these files with your presentation.) The project is worth one reading response - 20 points. Your presentation will be evaluated on whether it:

- **Adheres** to these instructions and includes all of the criteria indicated above;
- **Demonstrates** relevance to the objectives listed above;
- **Contains** visuals and a title that are relevant and appropriate for the project;
- **Shows** a fresh perspective and original thought; and
- **Expresses** a level of professionalism appropriate for the audience and project criteria.

You will have class time to work on this project and cameras are being made available to you by the Media Center located in the library. If you have your own camera, you may choose to work independently.

## [Slightly Revised] Instructions for Digital Presentation

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Individually, you will develop and present in class a digital, audio/visual *environmental autobiography*. This project offers ample opportunity for creativity and personal expression. An environmental autobiography tells a story about your life, emphasizing your physical environment and how it has influenced your ethics, values about the environment, and personal development overall. This story highlights the context of your life. Context gives us meaning. How have *places* affected who you are? This project asks that you evaluate your history of environmental spaces and represent them in a presentation that includes **text**, **images**, and **audio**.

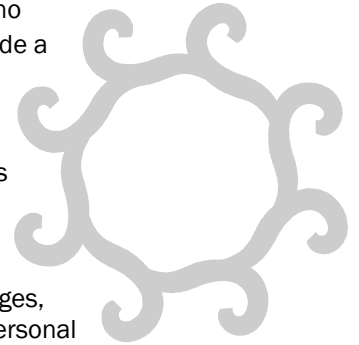
### Objectives –

- To **increase** your awareness of how physical environments affect our personal development and the overall relevance of the environment in our daily lives;
- To **develop** an understanding of using narrative in a digital, audio/visual medium;
- To **build** skills required for technical presentations; and
- To **cultivate** a personal style of expression.

The presentation should stand alone – in other words, it should not require explanation or accompany an oral presentation. You could use Microsoft Movie Maker, PowerPoint, iMovie, or many other video/presentation software applications. The presentation should contain multiple images (photography, digital art, graphics, and/or video) and audio (music and/or narration) and last between five and seven minutes. Be **creative**, be artistic. No bullet point presentations.

Tell a story using personal photographs and video, representative images of places relevant to your story, textual quotations from literature or elsewhere, movie clips, music, and/or narration. You are under no obligation to tell a **linear** story (though, for many of you, linear would work out well). Include a title for your **story** and a works cited page at the end that gives credit to all sources.

To begin this project, you might write out a timeline of your life and then notate significant events and places, and then consider how *place* mattered. Draft a plan on paper that outlines your project before you look for visuals and audio. Then, pull together the multimedia files that you need to create your presentation. Consider a theme or motif for your story that would help tie it together. For example, maybe you find yourself most comfortable at the beach or in the swimming pool and have a **passion** for water. You might use relevant images, literary quotations, and music that incorporate the idea of water and its importance in your personal growth throughout the story.



You may choose to **narrate** the story. Include music that adds meaning to your story. You could use music from the time period that you are representing. You should also consider the mood of the music and how that affects the story. For example, you might have had an **idyllic** childhood and **tumultuous** teenage years; if so, the music should be representative of those feelings.

**Exceptionally important** – Test your presentation on a computer other than the one on which you created it. Technical difficulties on the date of the presentation (that could have been avoided) may affect your grade.

Have this presentation available on CD or DVD at the beginning of class on **Monday, March 12**. If you use PowerPoint, make sure that your audio and video files are properly saved. (PowerPoint does not automatically save these files with your presentation.) The project is worth 200 *points*. Your presentation will be evaluated on whether it:

- **Adheres** to these instructions and includes all of the criteria indicated above;
- **Demonstrates** relevance to the objectives listed above;
- **Contains** visuals, text, and audio that are relevant and appropriate for the project;
- **Shows** a fresh perspective and original thought; and
- **Expresses** a level of professionalism appropriate for the audience and project criteria.

See “Grades” in syllabus for additional grading criteria.

## Final Article – Extended Instructions

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**You** will submit a final article about an environmental crisis (but not the same topic as your group presentation). You are writing for an educated, general audience, such as you might imagine a reader for our textbook this semester. The article is to:

- “Humanize” science to some extent (read the text “Introduction,” p. xix, for an explanation)
- Contain references to at least three credible, scholarly sources and introduce those sources properly (check out Proquest)
- Use a consistent style for in text citation and a works cited page
- Contain at least one meaningful, original visual (meaning that you created it), such as a graph, chart, table, diagram, or pictogram
- Show attention to the design of the document – take into account font, page numbering, title pages, images (if applicable), and visual elements
- Be between 2,500 and 3,000 words

You may refer to Krajick’s “The Mummy Doctor” (p. 125) as a model for your article in terms of writing style, organization, introduction of sources, and the use of character to “humanize” a scientific issue.

Bring a complete draft of your article, with Works Cited page and visual, to class for an editing workshop on **Monday, April 16** (10 points). Bring two copies of your revised draft to class for peer review on **Wednesday, April 18** (10 points). Submit your final article on the last day of class: **Wednesday, April 25** (200 possible points).

### From the Syllabus – Grades

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General grading criteria is as follows:

- **100 – 90%.** An A project is exceptional. This is the kind of document, project, or presentation that might lead to a promotion in the workplace. It is professional and reflects the writer's careful consideration of audience and purpose. It contains all necessary information and original material, is presented in an appropriate and engaging style, is arranged in a logical manner, is memorable, and is visually appealing. It introduces and credits sources properly. It avoids visual or textual clichés. It contains no superfluous material. It contains few minor mechanical errors and no comma splices, run on sentences, or sentence fragments.
- **89 – 80%.** A B project is strong. It would be considered acceptable in the workplace. It too is professional and reflects consideration of audience and purpose. It is generally above average in terms of the criteria mentioned above, but falls short of excellence in one or more category. It contains few mechanical errors.
- **79 – 70%.** A C project is competent. It would probably be returned for revision in the workplace. It is generally average in terms of the major criteria listed above. It may have some mechanical errors.
- **69 – 60%.** D work is weak. It would probably get the writer into a bad situation in the workplace. It falls below average in terms of one or more of the major criteria.
- **59% or below.** F work fails in terms of one or more of these criteria. A consistent pattern of these texts would probably get a writer fired in the workplace.

# Article Editing Checklist

Use the following checklist to guide your revision and editing process. Check off each item for the article you are reviewing. For each item that the report fails to meet or address, write suggestions either on this sheet or directly on the report.

## Format

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### Front matter

- The report contains all required parts. According to the instructions, it should:
  - "Humanize" science to some extent (read the text "Introduction," p. xix, for an explanation)
  - Contain references to at least three credible, scholarly sources and introduce those sources properly
  - Use a consistent style for in text citation and a works cited page
  - Contain at least one meaningful, original visual (meaning that you created it), such as a graph, chart, table, diagram, or pictogram
  - Show attention to the design of the document – take into account font, page numbering, title pages, images (if applicable), and visual elements
  - Be a minimum of 2,000 words
- The title page contains a "clear and limiting" title that accurately reflects the content of your report; all other necessary information is included and properly balanced on the page.
- All front matter has appropriate headings in consistent fonts and type size; margins are correct for bound (1.5 inches) or unbound (left 1 inch) pages; pages are numbered.
- The text is double-spaced throughout.

### Visuals

- The report contains at least one original visual, properly labeled.
- Additional visuals from outside sources are properly documented.
- The report text contains a helpful reference to each visual, and visuals are placed as closely following the reference to them as possible.
- Visuals are not merely "decorative"; they aid the reader's understanding.
- Visuals are neat and clear in appearance, easy to read, and properly balanced on the page; size is appropriate, in proportion.
- Information related to visuals (titles, captions, etc.) is typed, not handwritten.
- Visuals are properly labeled as "Figures" or "Tables," are numbered, and have descriptive titles that match the titles on the List of Figures.
- Full-page visuals that run the long way on the paper are positioned with the bottom parallel to the right-hand edge of the paper; the visual and its title fit within all the outside margins on the page.

## Documentation

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- All sources--direct quotes and paraphrases--are properly documented in the report.
- Documentation of sources follows a consistent style.

- Direct quotes longer than four lines are set off ten spaces from the left margin.
- The report contains citations from at least three credible, scholarly sources.
- Sources are used in support of your ideas, not instead of your ideas; content does not consist of entire paragraphs of quoted material. Your own analysis of the data is included.
- Sources you have not directly quoted are paraphrased in your own words and style and are properly documented.
- Sources are recent and, to the best of your knowledge, reputable.
- Texts of interviews are included in an appendix at the end of your report, preceding the Works Cited page. If you have an appendix, it must be included in the Table of Contents.
- The sources list has a proper heading: WORKS CITED or REFERENCES, depending on the report's documentation style.
- The Works Cited/References page includes only those sources cited in the body of your paper-- i.e., each source listed has a corresponding parenthetical citation in the body of the report.
- Citations in the body reflect breadth of research; they do not come predominately from only one or two sources.
- Entries on the sources list contain complete information, ideally based on APA or MLA format.
- Source entries are properly formatted (double-spaced with second and subsequent lines indented 5 spaces) and punctuated, including end punctuation.

## **Technical Style**

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- Numbers and abbreviations are expressed in correct technical style.
- Any acronyms used are written out first, are followed by the acronym in parentheses, and thereafter used for conciseness.
- The report does not contain "orphan" headings or lines of text.
- The report content is written in appropriate tone: it is objective and factual rather than opinionated; and it does not use language that is emotional, judgmental, or otherwise "loaded."

## **Content**

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- The introduction clearly establishes the background or context of the problem you are addressing, clearly states the purpose of the report, clearly identifies and comments on the currency and credibility of your major sources, and clearly outlines the scope of your analysis.
- Conclusions and recommendations flow logically from the fact-based analysis in the body.
- The content contains definitions as necessary to clarify terms for the reader.
- Paragraphs are developed adequately and have clearly expressed topic sentences; section headings do not take the place of topic sentences.
- The report content does not include vague pronouns and other weak sentence openers; e.g., "this, it, there"; vague references--i.e., "this" without a noun to modify--are not used elsewhere.
- Ideas are expressed in proper relationships--i.e., cause and effect, chronology, qualification; ideas are not simply strung together with coordinating conjunctions (and, so, etc.)

## More on Content

*You must ask yourself ALL of the questions below and write any appropriate comments on the draft.*

- Read each paragraph first without making any comments.
- With every phrase, ask yourself if it relates to the other phrases. If not, circle it and write, "might not relate."
- Are the phrases remaining all "covered" by the topic sentence, which should serve like an umbrella over the paragraph? If not, what element needs to be included in the topic sentence so that it will umbrella the paragraph?
- Does the topic sentence focus on the main issue (title, character, director, etc.)? If not, make it so.
- Do the references to the sources make sense as support for the issue being discussed in this paragraph? If not, circle the questionable reference and write, "more relevant example?" Then, suggest one.
- Are examples specific rather than general? If not, how could they be more specific?
- Does ANY idea in the paragraph strike you as something that wouldn't occur to just about everyone? If not, write "dig for more insight" at the bottom.
- Are any sources used for support? If so, does the source information make sense in this context? If not, write, "doesn't seem to make sense here."
- Is the source explained for readers and/or linked directly to the topic or is it just plopped in? Write "plop" if it's plopped in. Make a suggestion for how to weave it in.
- If the paragraph does mention an opposing point of view, is this view a realistic one? If not, write, "not quite realistic." If so, is it presented respectfully? If not, make it so.
- If the paragraph does mention an opposing point of view, is it followed by a respectful refutation? If not, suggest one.

## Proofreading

- The report does not contain commonly confused words used incorrectly: i.e., its/it's, there/their, affect/effect, etc.
- The report has been proofed for spelling errors; remember that a computer spell check will not catch correctly spelled but incorrectly used words.
- The report content reflects variety of sentence construction, sentence beginnings, and concise wording.
- Ideas are expressed in active rather than passive voice.
- The report has been edited for errors in punctuation, sentence construction--comma splices, fragments, run-ones—and major grammatical errors--s/v agreements, pronoun-antecedent agreement, parallelism, etc.