

## **Strategies for Integrating Communication in Forms Other than Writing into the Comm-B Course**

*(Revised March 2025. This is a work in progress and intended to provide guidance, not to set policy. We welcome your ideas for updating this document.)*

Comm-B courses must involve substantial instruction in writing and in at least one other form of communication appropriate to the discipline. Communication by means other than writing can take a wide variety of forms, some of which are listed below. Comm-B courses make interpersonal and presentational communication in written, spoken, and other forms part of the course methodology, as opposed to the subject matter of the course. In such courses, content will be central, with forms of communication appropriate to the discipline used to convey that content.

Comm-B courses should include assignments that help students prepare for presentational and interpersonal communication activities as well as regular evaluation and feedback related to those activities. Courses should give students multiple opportunities to develop, practice, receive feedback, and revise work on activities in forms of communication other than writing, such as the opportunity to develop presentations through several iterations and to revise presentations based on feedback, to develop projects collaboratively through structured interpersonal communication tasks and to receive feedback at various stages of development of these projects, and to go through similar stages of feedback and revision in other activities. Instructors must articulate guidelines for effective interpersonal and presentational communication in forms other than writing, evaluate performance with respect to those guidelines, preferably through rubrics provided to students in advance, and provide opportunities for improvement based on feedback.

Interpersonal and presentational communication activities in the Comm-B course can take many forms. The purpose of this document is to provide some examples of interpersonal and presentational communication activities in forms other than writing that can be assigned individually or as a scaffolded series to enhance communication outcomes in the Comm-B course. The list below is intended only to suggest possibilities, not to be exhaustive, nor to set policy for Comm-B courses.

### **Presentational Communication**

Live or recorded presentations and technology-mediated projects, such as podcasts or short-form video, encourage students to understand course material well enough to communicate it to others. A presentation could be in front of an audience or prepared in advance, such as in a podcast or short video. In all cases, instructors should communicate expectations to students,

evaluate presentations with respect to clearly articulated criteria, and provide multiple opportunities for practice, feedback, and improvement. Some examples of formative and summative assignments in presentational communication include:

*Course content presentations, short form:* To start a class meeting, one or two students are asked to review the theme, content, or conclusions of the previous class session. These presentations can be kept to a couple of minutes each, and they function to prepare the class for the day's class meeting.

*Course content presentations, long form:* Students, perhaps working in pairs or teams, are assigned the task of leading the class through some of the assigned material. This develops presentational communication skills, as well as interpersonal communication skills during Q&A sessions, and reduces the tension between devoting time to class content and providing opportunities for communication in forms other than writing.

*Debates:* Students typically working in groups develop arguments for opposing positions on an issue related to course content. This assignment is particularly well suited to illuminating different sides of complex issues.

*Role-playing:* Students are asked to adopt the perspective of a scholar, character, or other persona relevant to the course content and to represent that person's point of view on the topic within the class period devoted to the relevant material.

### Learning Groups

Learning group activities involve creating a context in which communication with others is integral to mastering course material, gaining new insights, and critical thinking. A discussion-focused approach to learning involves more than merely having discussion and working in groups in class. Effective use of learning groups requires clearly articulated guidelines for productive discussions, clear criteria for assessing contributions to the group and toward achievement of task and course learning objectives, and multiple opportunities for development of interpersonal communication skills. Although the most familiar form of the learning group is the full class discussion, variations on that format can enhance the educational benefits of communicating with others in groups.

*Guided class discussion with feedback:* Class discussion can take place in full-class and small-group format. Instructors are encouraged to vary the format of class discussions. Written evaluations of students' contributions, following guidelines established in advance, provide the feedback essential to the development of interpersonal communication skills. As with any formative assignment that students complete

regularly throughout the semester, evaluation should occur at regular intervals and be related to clearly articulated performance criteria. Rubrics would be an effective way to convey expectations and to assess performance in this form of communication.

*Structured small-group discussion:* Small-group discussions can provide a productive setting for developing ideas, exploring thoughts in a collaborative environment, and making progress toward accomplishment of a formative or summative task. Instructors are encouraged to have students working in small groups take on a role in the group discussion (e.g., leader, facilitator, note-taker, reporter); to vary the structure of groups and of small-group discussion tasks, as well as student roles in each small group; and to encourage participation and accountability from all members of the small group in carrying out their part of the assigned task. As a final step, individual group members could reflect on how their roles influenced their communication and their performance on the task. Rubrics would be advisable for assessing both performance and self-reflection in this form of communication.

For resources on designing discussion-based tasks, see below.

### Project Collaboration

A great deal of coursework is collaborative. Some projects require that students work together, usually outside of class, to accomplish a collective task which may culminate in some form of presentational communication. Beyond engaging in interpersonal communication to gain insight, the group also creates a product that reflects their collective expertise and effort. Collective work on projects can offer important opportunities for interpersonal communication practice. As with any communication activity, instructors must articulate guidelines and provide assessment criteria for effective group communication and should provide periodic assessments. Instructors are encouraged to have students regularly document and assess their progress and formulate goals as a group, and to reflect on their individual performance. Rubrics for assessment and reflection would be useful.

For examples of collectively prepared projects, see the Writing Across the Curriculum Sourcebook. Some additional examples of project collaboration could include:

*Research projects:* Students working in groups collaboratively prepare a research paper or case analysis, which could culminate in a group presentation or poster presentation. The assignment should be sufficiently complex that students take on portions of the project and share responsibility for the final product. Periodic self-evaluation and assessment of each group member's performance with respect to interpersonal

communication and the group work process is essential to keep research groups on track.

*Task-forces:* Students working in groups design and implement a plan to accomplish some goal. One example is CA 368: Theory and Practice of Persuasion, in which student groups mount persuasion campaigns to accomplish an influence goal that relates to the theme selected by the class as a whole (e.g., promoting healthy behavior). This task ideally involves a combination of written communication and communication in forms other than writing.

*Creative projects:* Students work in groups to design and create an artistic product such as a film, poster, mural, short story, one-act play, documentary, or a game. Through collaboration and collective problem-solving, students work together toward a common goal with interdependent activities and individual accountability. The end product is presented to the class, who participate both as audience members and in providing feedback.

### Pair Activities

Two students can work together to convey information, explore and develop ideas, or accomplish a goal. As in the above activities, instructors should provide clear guidelines and assessment criteria for pair activities, preferably in the form of a rubric. Some examples of pair activities include:

*Role-playing in dyads:* Students working in pairs are assigned to particular roles and conduct a simulation relevant to class material. The activity might involve simulating an employee-employer interaction, a clinical interview, a job interview, a conflict resolution episode, etc. In this way, the role-play provides opportunities both to apply course material and to practice interpersonal communication skills.

*Interviews:* Students working in pairs interview each other on some topic related to class material. This might involve quizzing each other on course content or seeking information about each other relevant to the topic of the day. As a final step, dyads should reflect on the effectiveness of interviewing techniques for both gaining information and establishing rapport. Interviews within class could also serve as a step in preparation for conducting interviews as part of a project outside of class.

*Pair or small-group learning:* Students working in pairs or small groups spend class time sharing their points of view on a topic and/or identifying unresolved issues. This venue gives students an opportunity to develop their thinking and practice expressing their ideas without the pressure of the full class audience. Used in combination with class discussion, learning dyads or small-group learning can help students formulate ideas that they can then more easily express to the class.

## **Varieties of Feedback**

Feedback for interpersonal and presentational communication tasks can take various forms, such as instructor feedback, peer feedback on drafts or practice presentations, and audience feedback on whole-class presentations, creative projects, or other products. For example, students could create and administer quizzes after their presentations to see if their peers understood what they were trying to communicate.

## **Resources**

We recommend consulting the following resources in designing activities and tasks for communication in forms other than writing:

The [Writing Across the Curriculum Sourcebook](#) provides examples of communication activities in forms other than writing, as well as rubrics for feedback, including on discussion activities. See, for example, the chapter on [Designing Multimodal Writing Assignments](#) and [Teaching Communications-B Courses](#).

The Sourcebook contains a link to the [Design Lab](#), which offers free one-on-one assistance in the design of digital projects.

[The Discussion Project](#), a free professional learning course on discussion pedagogy free to any UW-Madison instructor, offers activities to build skills in designing, implementing, and facilitating small and large group discussion. The course also helps instructors understand the complexities of assessing student participation in discussion.

## **Sample Activities**

Below are some examples of activities that engage students in interpersonal and presentational forms of communication in combination with and in addition to writing, to complement or integrate with those described above. This list is not intended to be comprehensive; many other activities to develop student communication skills are possible, and the UGEC invites instructors to submit ideas for other activities.

## **Presentational communication tasks and products (some mentioned above)**

Formal presentations

Poster sessions presenting research findings

Elevator pitches

Panel presentations

Debates

Student-led lecture sessions

Infographic creation and presentation

Podcasts

Vlogs

Video production: films, documentary films, short-form video, video game, etc.

Comics

Theater-based activities: one-act play, reader's theater, improvisation, role-plays

## **Interpersonal communication tasks (some mentioned above)**

Moderated panel discussions

Mock press conference

Debates

In-class presentation Q&A

Student-led lecture sessions with Q&A

Student-led whole-class discussion

Pair and small-group discussion

Peer review of work in progress in pairs and small groups

Poster sessions presenting research findings

Work on video production: films, documentary films, short-form video, etc.

Podcasts

Vlogs

Group preparation of presentational projects listed above

Theater-based activities: reader's theater, improvisation, role-plays

Interviews (for research and information-gathering)

Mock interviews (for example, in preparation for professional activities)