

Business and Professional Speaking
COMM 1113.05, Fall 2025
Northeastern University

1:35 pm – 2:40 pm, Mondays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays
Cahners Hall 002

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Office hours: Wednesday 3-4pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Effective communication is one of the most important skills employers seek in potential employees. Modern professions and leadership positions typically require advanced public speaking abilities and strong presentation skills. The overall goal of this course is to help you develop professional communication skills and knowledge. While we will examine some theoretical foundations, most class sessions will be hands-on, focusing on applied practice. Regardless of your field of study or career path, you will benefit from being able to express yourself effectively and understand others.

This course provides training in the fundamentals of confident communication in business and professional contexts. You will gain a solid understanding of audience analysis, speech objectives and structure, and effective delivery techniques. You will practice various styles of presentations that mirror real-world business tasks. By the end of the course, you will be prepared to deliver informative and persuasive presentations, succeed in interviews, write resumes and cover letters, and produce clear and effective business writing. Overall, the course equips you with strategies to thrive in professional environments.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Improve your fluency and technical competency in speech.
- Reduce speech anxiety and project greater confidence as a speaker.
- Analyze an audience's knowledge, background, and attitudes when constructing messages for business and professional settings.
- Organize, construct, and deliver both prepared and impromptu presentations.
- Develop a well-structured resume and practice interviewing/interviewer skills.
- Strengthen group collaboration and decision-making skills.
- Demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal delivery in professional contexts.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

1. **Preparation:** Do not wait until the last minute to prepare your speech. If you need assistance, please visit during office hours or email me in advance to set up a time.
2. **Attendance, Participation, and Punctuality:** Arrive on time and prepared. Your grade will reflect both the quality and quantity of your participation in discussions, speeches, and group activities.
3. **Communication with Instructor:** Email is the best way to reach me. If you cannot attend class, notify me in advance with a professional email.
4. **Email Policy:** I will communicate with you regularly via email, and I expect you to do the same. While I check email daily, please allow up to 24 hours for a reply on weekdays and up to 48 hours on weekends.
5. **Academic Integrity:** All work must be your own. Violations of academic integrity will be handled according to Department and University policies.

Please note: Course information in the syllabus may be subject to change with advance notice at the professor's discretion.

ASSIGNMENTS

Speeches

There will be four main speech presentations throughout the semester: **Introduction, Informative, Persuasive, and Group**. All speeches (except the Introduction) require typewritten, full-sentence outlines. Outlines must be submitted electronically on Canvas at least one hour before your scheduled speech. To receive full credit, speeches should advance or enhance the audience's knowledge.

1. **Introduction Speech (50 points)**
In this 2-minute "elevator pitch," you will introduce yourself to your classmates (imagine them as potential employers or mentors). Describe your current role or responsibilities, and highlight the unique traits and qualities that have helped you succeed in personal, academic, or professional contexts.
2. **Informative Speech (100 points)**
This 4–5 minute speech aims to **inform, teach, or describe** a specific topic related to your job, organization, field of study, or the broader business world. Choose a topic that interests you, research it thoroughly, and present it clearly. Examples include: explaining a new workplace policy, describing the skills of a successful manager, discussing leadership styles, analyzing the history of a brand, or sharing strategies for workplace communication. A visual aid is encouraged but not required.
3. **Persuasive Speech (150 points)**
In this 4-minute speech, you will **persuade your audience** to adopt, reject, or reconsider an attitude, position, or practice related to the workplace. You will "pitch" a new idea or stance on a workplace issue. Possible topics include:
 - Should internships be paid?
 - Should organizations allow unlimited vacation?
 - Should companies incentivize employee wellness?

- Should tipping be required in restaurants?
- Should student loans be forgiven?
- Should employers be required to provide paid parental leave?

Be creative: think about real-world challenges organizations face. A visual aid is required.

4. **Group Speech (150 points)**

(10–12 minutes, plus Q&A) Working in groups of 3–4, you will identify a current organizational problem and propose a strategic initiative to address it. Your speech should be evidence-based, well-researched, and supported with visuals. Search the organization’s mission, vision, and strategic plan to guide your analysis. *Topic approval is required before you begin.*

5. **Final Project (150 points)**

For your final project, you will create a **blog or digital portfolio** aimed at fellow students preparing to enter the workforce or start a co-op. The project should showcase course concepts and your reflections.

Your portfolio should include:

- **Introduction:** A thesis and preview of what you learned in this class. Your thesis should answer: *What is the secret to effective business & professional speaking (in five words or less)?*
- **Five Skills:** Identify at least five skills or principles covered in class (e.g., communication, teamwork, networking, interviewing, resume/cover letter writing). For each skill:
 1. Describe the skill and provide an example.
 2. Explain how it applies in the workplace or in your co-op/class experience.
 3. Provide concrete tips to improve it.
- **Conclusion:** Highlight one key takeaway you will apply to your own future communication.

Be creative: integrate written text, images, videos, or digital media. Build your portfolio consistently throughout the semester rather than leaving it to the end. You will share your project in a final class presentation.

Outlines

Full-sentence outlines (not essays or keyword drafts) are required for the **Informative, Persuasive, and Group Speeches**. Outlines must:

- Be typed and follow APA format (including a reference list).
- Be submitted to Canvas before the start of class on your speech day.
- Be printed and placed in your folder with notecards (keywords only).

Failure to follow format guidelines will result in point deductions. Note cards will be graded as part of delivery.

Journal Entries (100 points)

Reflection is essential for improving communication skills. Throughout the semester, you will keep at least **10 journal entries** (minimum 300 words each). Three must focus on your speeches (Informative, Persuasive, Group). You may use a physical notebook or a digital format (blog, vlog, creative media), but each entry must include a written component. Journals should capture your progress, concepts learned, goals, and workplace-related insights. These entries will help build your final project.

Class Activities & Participation (50 points)

You are expected to actively participate in discussions, activities, and group work. Providing **constructive feedback** on classmates' speeches is a key part of participation. Some activities will be graded.

Cover Letter (50 points)

Find a real job posting and write a **one-page cover letter** tailored to it. Attach the posting (saved as PDF) and clearly reference it in your letter. Persuade potential employers that you are the right candidate, highlighting your skills and experience.

Resume (50 points)

Create a one-page resume tailored to a specific job description. Include education, internships, jobs, and relevant skills. Sample resumes will be shared in class.

Mock Job Interviews (50 points)

In pairs, you will prepare and participate in **mock job interviews**. Each student selects a job posting and prepares a tailored resume. Partners exchange resumes a week in advance, then conduct 10-minute interviews in class, alternating as interviewer and interviewee. You will be evaluated in both roles. This activity helps prepare you for professional interviews.

Audience Analysis Report (50 points)

For your Group Speech, your group will design a short **audience survey** to gather demographic and attitudinal data. Based on the results, you will prepare a short report (with visuals) explaining how you adapted your speech to audience needs. The analysis must be cited as one of your sources for the Group Speech.

Accessibility & Accommodations

Northeastern University is committed to making learning accessible. If you anticipate or experience barriers due to disability, contact me immediately so we can discuss accommodations. You may also work with the Disability Resource Center to establish support.

Library & Research Assistance

The library is an excellent resource for research. Librarians are available in person and online:
<https://library.northeastern.edu/>

CLASS PROTOCOL

Attendance

Regular attendance and full participation are strongly encouraged. Being present will help your performance and your grade. After all, there is little point in giving a speech if no one is there to listen! As a student, you have responsibility both as an engaged audience member and as a speaker. If you miss class, you will lose participation points; no make-up points will be offered.

If you arrive late, do not interrupt a speech. Wait until the speaker finishes before entering the classroom.

Grades

Speeches

- Introduction Speech – 50 points
- Informative Speech – 100 points
- Persuasive Speech – 150 points
- Group Speech – 150 points
- Final Project – 150 points

Assignments & Participation

- Resume – 50 points
- Cover Letter – 50 points
- Mock Job Interview – 50 points
- Individual Report on Group Speech – 50 points
- Audience Analysis Report – 50 points
- Journal Entries (10 × 10 points) – 100 points
- In-Class Participation – 50 points

Total: 1000 points

Grade Distribution

- A: 1000–940
- A-: 939–900
- B+: 899–870
- B: 869–830
- B-: 829–800
- C+: 799–770
- C: 769–730
- C-: 729–700

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- D+: 699–670
- D: 669–630
- D-: 629–600
- F: 599–0

Note: I do not “give” grades; grades are earned through your performance and participation.

Late Work

Late assignments will receive a **20% deduction**. Work will not be accepted more than one week past the deadline without documented emergency circumstances. In such cases, I will try to accommodate you, but make-up time cannot be guaranteed.

If you cannot attend class on your scheduled speech day, you may arrange to trade time slots with another student in advance.

Dress Code: “Dress for Success”

Professional presentation involves nonverbal communication. **Business casual dress** is expected for all presentations. Avoid hats and present yourself in a neat, respectful manner.

Classroom Etiquette

Use phones and laptops responsibly during class. Technology should support—not distract from—our learning environment.

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

You are encouraged to share ideas and discuss course materials openly, but all graded work must reflect your **independent effort** unless otherwise instructed. Submitting your own prior work for credit is not permitted.

Northeastern’s Code of Academic Integrity applies in this course. Written assignments (including outlines) will be submitted through plagiarism detection software. Enrollment in this course indicates agreement to this requirement. Questionable work may be investigated using additional searches or verification methods.

Guidelines on Generative AI

AI tools such as ChatGPT are increasingly common. While I encourage you to focus on the productive struggle of learning, we will approach these tools as resources, not substitutes for your own work.

1. **Permitted Use:** You may use AI programs to brainstorm or generate ideas. Keep in mind that AI-generated content may be inaccurate, incomplete, or unoriginal, and overuse may hinder your creativity.

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2. **Prohibited Use:** You may not submit AI-generated material as your own work. Doing so constitutes a violation of academic integrity and will be reported.
3. **Citing AI:** If you use AI-generated material, you must cite it like any other source, with appropriate consideration of its quality.

Ultimately, you are responsible for understanding the rules of academic honesty. Ignorance is not a defense. When in doubt; ask me.

Tentative Course Schedule – Fall 2025

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignments Due</u>
1	Introduction		
	9/3	Syllabus and Intro Day	Read and understand the Syllabus
	9/4	Effective Listening	Submit your expectations for this course by the end of class
2		Getting Started	
	9/8	Dealing with nervousness & speech apprehension	
	9/10	Audience Analysis	
	9/11	In-class workday	Prepare for Introductory Speeches next week
3		Introductory Speeches/Elevator Pitch	
	9/15	Librarian visit	In this 2 minute “elevator pitch”, you will introduce yourself to your classmates (see them as potential employers and or mentors in your field) describe your current role/responsibility in your organization and highlight some of the unique traits and qualities that help(ed) you succeed in the workplace.
	9/17	Speech #1: Intro Speech (2 minutes)	
	9/18	Speech #1: Intro Speech (2 minutes)	
4		Speech Organization and Outlining	
	9/22	Selecting a Topic: Speech purpose and thesis statement	
	9/24	In-class workday	

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	9/25	Principles of Outlining & Organizational Patterns	Speech Preparation and Delivery
5		Informative Speeches	
	9/29	In-class workday	4-5 min. presentation (with slides) on a topic you have expertise
	10/1	Speech #2: Informative Speech	
	10/2	Speech #2: Informative Speech	
6		Persuasive Speeches	
	10/6	Persuasive Speeches	
	10/8	Developing Arguments – Logos, Ethos and Pathos	
	10/9	In-class workday	
7		<u>Persuasive Speech/Product Pitch</u>	
	10/13	NO CLASS TODAY Indigenous Peoples' Day	4 min to demonstrate your persuasive skills to convince the audience to maintain (or change) their attitude or position on a particular social, environmental, or organizational issue related to the workplace.
	10/15	Speech #3 - Persuasive Speech	
	10/16	Speech #3 - Persuasive Speech	
8.		Applying for Jobs	
	10/20	Resume & Cover Letter	Bring your resume and cover letter to class
	10/22	Classroom Activities (Job Application Process) Business Writing Activity	
	10/23	Review group speech assignment	First 5 Journal Entries due tonight by 11:59pm Assign students to groups
9.		Week of Recovery	
	10/27 10/29 10/30	Mid Semester Check In Workshop Day & Individual Consultations	

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10.		<u>Preparing for the Job Interview</u>	
	11/3	Practice Interview Questions with Pair - NO CLASS TODAY	Exchange your reworked resume with your assigned pair
	11/5	Crafting and Answering Interview Questions: The STAR method	
	11/6	Review mock job interviews	Review group speech assignment
11.		Mock Job Interviews	
	11/10	Practical (mock) job interviews	Resume, cover letter and job description due on Monday at 11:59pm
	11/12	Practical (mock) job interviews	
	11/13	Practical (mock) job interviews	
12.		Small Groups, Teamwork, & Decision making	
	11/17	Working in groups	
	11/19	In-class workday: Review AA results Develop report for audience analysis Incorporate in your speech & adjust outline Review guidelines for final project	Review final project
	11/20	Speech #4 - Group Speech	
13.		Week of Independence	
	11/24 11/26 11/27	No Class This Week Travel + Thanksgiving	Submit individual evaluation of group speech Audience Analysis Report due by the end of the week
14.		<u>Review & Reflection; Final Project</u>	
	12/1	Work on final project	
	12/3	End of Term Evaluation Work on final project Last meeting	Last 5 Journal Entries due tonight by 11:59pm
	12/4	No Class Today – Finals Week	Turn in Final Project on Canvas by 11:59pm