Objectives

The main objective is to make you a more confident and capable communicator. By the end of this course, you will:

- Recognize the importance of situational analysis, planning, and revision
- Improve your ability to:
  - Write documents that are clear and concise, that achieve your goals and meet the needs of your readers, and that conform to conventions for format and correctness
  - Give oral presentations that are interesting and clear, and that achieve your goals and those of your audience
  - Collaborate with a team to produce high-quality presentations, documents, and other work products
  - Apply the principles of effective communication to improve your own writing and presentations and to give helpful feedback to your peers

How the course works

To accomplish the course objectives, we will focus on the following major themes:

- Foundations of communication
- Public speaking
- Communicating technical information
- Interpersonal and team communication
Figure 1: Major themes and general class topics

Readings, classroom activities, and assignments will align with one or more of these themes; often they will apply to more than one theme.

Class sessions are a mix of mini-lectures, discussions, and workshop activities. With your input, we will adjust the class to meet your needs. Thus, we keep the seminar flexible. The schedule in this syllabus is subject to change depending on students' needs.

In addition, each student will be part of a small team that learns about a particular topic and teaches it to the class (student-directed learning).

At least once during the academic year, an expert in software engineering will join us. Each team may be required to present its elevator pitch and answer questions from the guest expert. The guest expert will discuss his or her views. The remainder of the time will be devoted to informal discussion. After each visit, you will reflect on the guest's visit in writing.

Occasionally, we’ll ask you to write or speak during class with little advance warning, giving you experience in performing under pressure. We might give some short quizzes to encourage you to read the homework.

Required textbook


You can purchase a copy (used or new) from Amazon or ask if any of the 4th semesters are willing to part with theirs. We recommend getting one per team; it’s not necessary for everyone to own a copy.

Grading

Grading is pass/fail. To pass, you must average at least a satisfactory grade for all your work.
### What counts toward your grade?

- Homework and assignments
- Class attendance and participation (maximum 5 points for this to allow for broad spectrum of participation across the semester)
- Class work, including presentations, writing exercises, and quizzes
- When a reading is assigned and class discussion or activities are planned around that reading, you will be graded on your preparedness and your participation for that specific class period

### What grades can you receive?

- √+ (3 points): exceptionally high quality
- √ (2 points): expected quality
- √- (1 point): unacceptable quality *(this must be redone within one week to address review comments from instructor)*
- 0 – You did not submit the assignment *(this can be made up only at the discretion of the instructors)*

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### Homework and assignments

Homework and assignments are meant to help you improve your writing and presenting skills. They can vary based on the specific needs you have in your other MSE courses this semester. Homework and assignments include readings, writing exercises, presentations, and longer papers. **We will distribute (via email and/or on Blackboard) detailed information about each assignment as the semester progresses.**

#### Handing in homework and assignments

- Upload your homework or assignment to the corresponding Blackboard assignment. If you have multiple files to submit, zip them first and then submit the zip file. *(Please do not use the Digital Drop box or email.)* If you need help, let me know and we can cover it in class.
- Name your files *yourLastName_AssignmentName* (for example, Ciroli_writingAnalysis.doc or Ciroli_September6Homework.zip).
- Late submissions will receive a 0, though we can provide feedback if you’d like.
  1. Your grade will drop one level if there are careless errors (see below).
Proofreading
Get into the habit of proofreading carefully so that your documents make a good impression on readers. If we find a typo, missing word, or other indication that you didn’t spell check and proofread, we will lower your grade regardless of the quality of the content. This is especially true in the second semester.

Re-doing an assignment
If you receive anything between a .25 and a 1.75 on an assignment, you must redo it within one week of the graded assignment being returned; you can potentially earn up to 1 additional point. Your revised assignment must be submitted via Blackboard as a separate/new attempt, and it must address instructor and/or peer feedback. Failure to redo an assignment and receive extra points can result in a score too low to pass the class.

Academic Integrity
Other than while participating in group projects, you are expected to complete your own writing. For additional information, see Carnegie Mellon’s Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism at http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html.

Bottom line: don’t cheat, plagiarize, or otherwise copy the work of others! If you have questions on whether you can use a specific phrase, term, figure, or anything else — please contact us prior to turning in your assignment.

Class attendance and participation
This class is most effective when you actively participate in discussions, group work, and class exercises. In order to participate, you must attend class.

If you must miss a class, contact Jennifer and Peter (in advance if possible). Absentees cannot make up in-class activities or get credit for class participation.

When we calculate your final grade, we will take into account your attendance and participation.

Spring 2016 topics

The schedule (separate file) reflects the general topics we’ll cover in each class, and summarizes the readings and assignments for each class. We reserve the right to update this schedule and the assignments as the course progresses; you will always be notified of updates.