

**PRO1010**

## **Introducing Academic Communication**



**Period 6**  
**2017/2018**



## **General Information**

## Description of the course

### *General overview of the introduction to academic skills courses*

The transition from secondary school to tertiary education is often experienced as a rather challenging one for students, especially considering the expectations at university with regard to students' academic skills such as essay writing, critical and analytical thinking, and argumentation. It is therefore imperative to support and train students from the start to take on a professional ethos with regard to their university studies and their personal (academic) development.

In this course, you will be encouraged and expected to take their academic development into your own hands. Tutorial groups and practical sessions will focus on acquainting you with the core academic skills necessary to be successful at university. Moreover, the sessions are set up in such a way that you will be able to put your new skills into practice in the regular courses that run parallel to this skills training. Through continuous reflection on your personal learning process in combination with periodical assessment of this process, you will be able to conclude this course with a clear overview of your competencies with regards to general academic skills as well as specific skills such as academic study skills, literature research skills, analytical and critical thinking skills, academic writing skills, management and organizational skills.

This course is part of a semester long programme spanning three periods. All three courses will be interactive and will support your work in the courses that run parallel to this skills training. In this third part of the programme, we will focus on integrating the writing skills you acquired during the first semester in the form of a group paper.

### *Objectives of the course*

The goal of PRO1010 Introduction Academic Communication: A Writing Project is twofold: on the one hand, it seeks to integrate the skills learnt during the semester in the form of an extensive research paper; on the other hand, it introduces students into the practice of interdisciplinary research. Students write an interdisciplinary research paper (group assignment) and they engage in a series of activities (debates, lectures) about the meaning of liberal arts and sciences and the value of interdisciplinarity, culminating in a reflective essay (individual assignment) on what it means to be a liberal arts and sciences student.

### *Structure of the Course*

This course is set up in such a way that the tutorials and seminars are interactive and focus particularly on practicing the specific academic skills through individual or group exercises, assignments, discussions and group projects. It will also include a PBL task revolving around the topic of UCM and the value of liberal arts and sciences.

## Useful Reading Material

You do not have to purchase a book; we will provide you with reading material on StudentPortal. We recommend using the Little, Brown Handbook. This can be found in the Reading Room.

Fowler, H. R., & Aaron, J. E. (2011). *The Little, Brown Handbook* (12th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman. (other editions can also be used)

The UCM Style Guide (all students will receive a copy of the guide during their first tutorial of SKI1008).

## Attendance requirements

The attendance requirement for **all lectures and tutorial meetings is 100% (except Session 5, which is optional)**. If you miss a meeting, you will have to apply for an additional assignment (request forms are available online via StudentPortal). In order to qualify for an additional assignment you have to have valid reasons for all missed sessions. If you do not meet the attendance requirement, you are not eligible for a resit.

## Assessment

The assessment for this course consists of two pass/fail group assignments (outline of the paper, first paper draft), two graded group assignments (feedback report, final paper) and one graded individual assignment (essay about liberal arts and sciences).

The deadlines for this course are as follows:

### Group assignments (pass/fail)

- Outline Project Paper
  - Due in class second tutorial week 1 (two hard copies in class)
- First Draft Paper
  - Monday June 25 before **noon** via file exchange on the Student Portal

**Commented [LME(1)]:** Originally it was midnight, but since Teun's lecture is at 13 I thought maybe it's better to have them submit the draft first and go to the lecture with a "clear" mind?

### Group assignments (graded)

- Feedback Report Draft (10%)
  - Due in class in week 3 (via email to your tutor and one hard copy in class)
- Final Paper (70%)
  - Friday July 6 at 16.00 hrs. (via Safe Assignment & OSA)

### Individual assignment (graded)

- Motivation letter (20%)
  - Wednesday July 4 at 16 hrs. (via Safe Assignment & OSA)

### Handing in assignments via SafeAssign

Your assignment needs to be uploaded as a **Word** document. Save and name your assignment as follows:

Your name – Course – Tutorial Group number – Assignment  
(e.g.: Sam Smith – PRO1010 – 04 – Final Paper)

Submitting the soft copy or the hard copy late can result in the deduction of points from the assignment grade. Not submitting a paper results in No Grade.

*Resit Policy*

Students who initially fail the course, but who have complied with the compulsory attendance requirement and took part in all of the assessment during the course are eligible for one resit.

The overall grade for this course consists of a grade for the Final Paper (70%), the Feedback Report (10%) and the Motivation Letter (20%). The resit serves the purpose of lifting your overall grade to sufficient/above 5.5. It does not replace the overall grade. Hence, the resit can be either on one of the two graded assignments. In case of a resit, you will have to redo that part of the assessment for which you received the lowest grade. You can either rewrite the assignment for which you received the lowest grade, incorporating the feedback you received, or receive a new assignment from the course coordinator.

In order to receive a grade for the assignments you will have to do a serious attempt at passing the assignments. If it is not deemed a serious attempt, you will not receive a grade and you will not qualify for a resit.

## Course overview: Sessions and deadlines

Please note that all **lectures** and **tutorial sessions** (except Session 5) are **100 % mandatory attendance**.

June 2018				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
11	12	13	14	15
Opening Lecture	Session 1		Session 2	Session 2
			Deadline outline (in class)	Deadline outline (in class)
18	19	20	21	22
Lecture: History of Liberal Arts	Session 3		Session 4	Session 4
25	26	27	28	29
Lecture: Teun Dekker	Session 5 (optional)		Session 6	Session 6
Deadline draft (upload on file exchange)			Deadline feedback report (in class and via email to tutor)	Deadline feedback report (in class and via email to tutor)
2	3	4	5	6
		Deadline LAS essay (hard and soft copy)		Deadline Final Draft (hard and soft copy)

## Contact information

For any questions, remarks or problems contact your tutor and/or the course coordinators, either in class or via email.

Alice Wellum, MA, MSc – *corresponding coordinator*

UCM Zwingelput 4, Room 1.034

[alice.wellum@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:alice.wellum@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

Lonneke Bevers, PhD

UCM Zwingelput 4, Room 1.030

[lonneke.bevers@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:lonneke.bevers@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

Eduard Lezcano Margarit, MSc

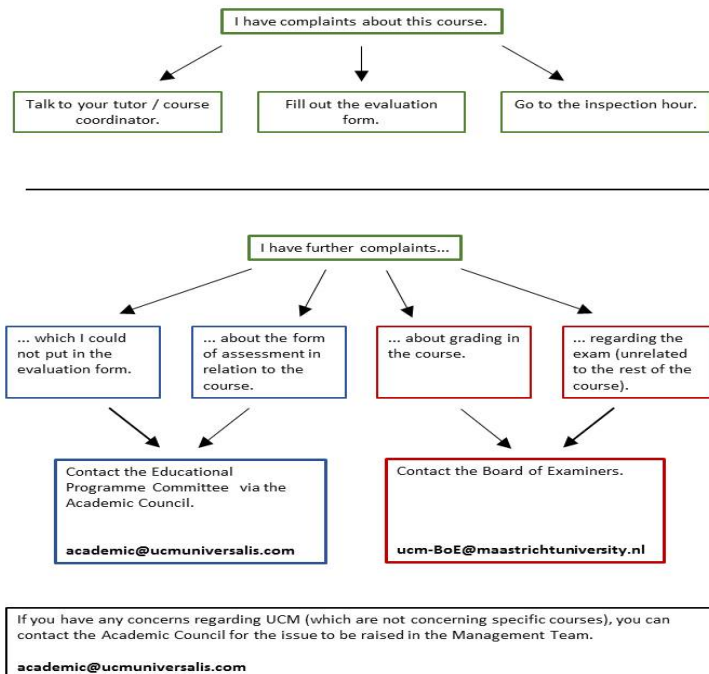
UCM Zwingelput 4, Room 2.046

[e.lezcanomargarit@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:e.lezcanomargarit@maastrichtuniversity.nl)



## The Educational Programme Committee

The Educational Programme Committee is an advisory body at UCM. Its role is to ensure quality of education at UCM. There are four staff members and four students present in the Committee. The four students are representing the UCM student body in the Committee and are all simultaneously members of the Academic Council of Universalis. If you have any complaints or questions about a course or assessment, you are always welcome to send them an e-mail to [academic@ucmuniversalis.com](mailto:academic@ucmuniversalis.com) or to contact them via their Facebook page 'Universalis Academic Council'.



## UCM Student Counsellor

The main role of the Student Counsellor is to offer a listening ear and support in times of trouble. In addition to offering support, together with the Office of Academic Advising, the Student Counsellor proactively monitors students' study progress. It is always a good idea to go see the Student Counsellor in case you are struggling with personal (psychological or social), family or situational issues, or if you would like to discuss study related matters. For curriculum-related matters, students should always contact your Academic Advisor or the Office of Academic Advising.

How to contact the Student Counsellor?

- via the contact form on MyUCM
- via email: [ucm-studentcounselor@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:ucm-studentcounselor@maastrichtuniversity.nl)
- during the Open Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10.00 am to 11.00 am in room 1.042.

For more information, please visit the Support page on MyUCM.

### Emergency or crisis?

**During office hours:** contact your General Practitioner (Family Doctor or 'Huisarts'). If you do not have a Family Doctor yet, you can find and choose one on this website: <http://www.hapmaastricht.nl/en/affiliated-GPs/>

**Outside regular office hours:** call the GP station (Huisartsenpost) +31 43 387 77 77 (in case of emergency) <http://www.hapmaastricht.nl/en/home-en/>

Mon - Fri 5.00 PM - 8.00 AM; Weekends from 5:00 PM on Friday to 8:00 AM on Monday; Holidays: Open 24 hours

Chat via [www.113online.nl/113online-english-version](http://www.113online.nl/113online-english-version)

Call: 0900-0113 (5ct/min)

You can also find health-related information via:

<http://mymaastricht.nl/>: the information portal for international students

<http://www.hapmaastricht.nl/en/student-and-expat-information/>

## UCM Writing Centre

UCM's very own Writing Centre provides one-to-one feedback moments and tutorials on academic writing. The Writing Centre can give you feedback on a draft or a completed paper and show you simple ways to improve it. Our sessions are free of charge and usually take around 30 minutes, although you can book as many sessions as you want. Please note we are a writing *coaching* centre – we will give you extensive feedback on your academic writing, but we do not proofread papers. We are, however, happy to brainstorm topics, help you understand and implement feedback from your tutor, check your APA referencing, and lots more!

While many students arrive shortly before the deadline with an (almost) completed paper, we have seen great results with students who come at the beginning of a period, without the pressure of a looming deadline. This is usually when we do a writing analysis – an examination of your writing based on previous papers. You are then welcome to come back and work with us to improve your writing in follow-up sessions, or you can leave with a personal checklist of items to watch out for in their future papers.

We see ourselves as learners too and as such, our sessions usually take place in a relaxed atmosphere. No student has the same question, and because of this, we can deal with a large variety of topics. To schedule an appointment, go to:

[https://fhs.maastrichtuniversity.nl/web/m\\_edit\\_entry\\_gui\\_wc.php](https://fhs.maastrichtuniversity.nl/web/m_edit_entry_gui_wc.php)

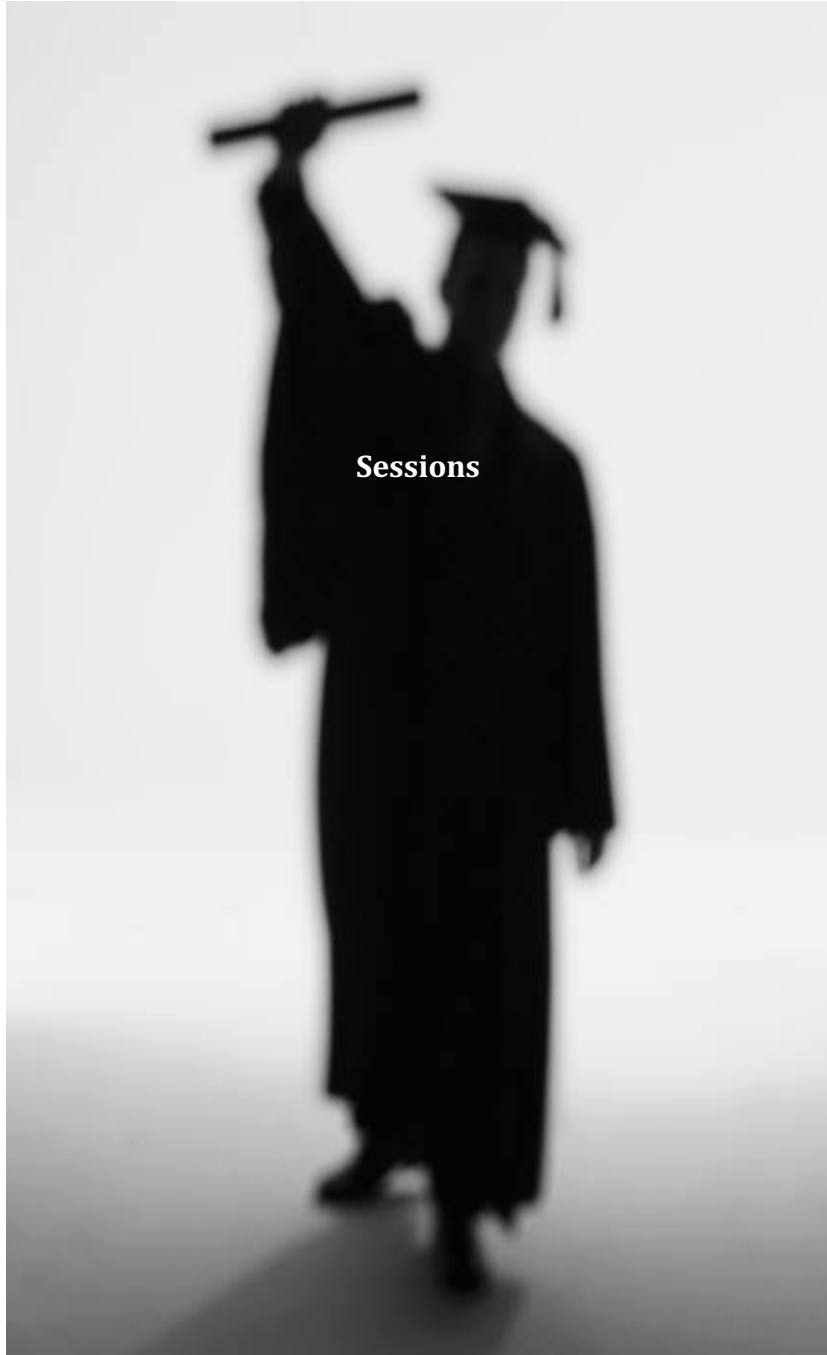
Note: you can only make one appointment at a time.

We also have a weekly walk-in hour and support hours specifically for Capstone students. Check our Facebook webpage for more information!

<https://www.facebook.com/ucmwritingcentre/>

We are looking forward to welcoming you in the Writing Centre!

Alice Wellum, Hannah Stewart, Lea Ferguson, Angus Foster and Veronica Lifrieri



## Week 1. Session 1: Critical reading & Pre-discussion

**Preparation:** Bring **two main sources** (per group member) for your paper. We will analyse your sources in class. This means that you need to bring two texts (articles, books, book chapters) that are essential for your paper. **Make sure you have read these carefully before class.**

### Reading Sources

To improve the analytical quality of your writing, it is important that you do not just repeat or use indiscriminately what other scholars say or write. In order to avoid this, you need to apply the same rigour to analysing source materials as you would to your own writing. For example, when you cite a source of evidence for your own arguments, you will need to be sure that the evidence really does support your point, and is accurate and reliable. In order to critically assess your own sources, you need to:

- Evaluate whether the (type of) sources are appropriate and up-to-date.
- Evaluate how far the evidence or examples used in materials really support the point that the author claims.
- Weigh up opinions, arguments, or solutions against appropriate criteria.
- Assess the quality of the arguments, and whether they lead up to the conclusion logically.
- Scrutinise the source closely to check for bias or hidden assumptions.

In the first half of today's tutorial, you will critically analyse the main sources which you have selected for your project paper.

The second half of today's tutorial will be about the purpose of liberal arts and sciences (see next page).

### **The UCM Board of Admissions has a difficult job**

The UCM Board of Admissions has a difficult job: it must select which students are a good match for a Liberal Arts and Sciences college like UCM. Unfortunately, not all applicants can be admitted, and so it has to make tough choices. In doing so, it relies heavily on the motivation letters applicants write. In these letters, applicants explain (1) what they think higher education is about, (2) how they would use the open curriculum to design their ideal course of studies, (3) why they want to do courses in several disciplines and (4) why problem-based learning is a good method of education for them.

Here are excerpts from letters written by four applicants. Unfortunately, there's only 1 or 2 places left.

#### **Applicant 1**

I am attracted to studying Liberal Arts and Sciences at UCM because of its excellent ranking and the international recognition of its degrees. In particular, I look forward to learning from its outstanding professors, who will be able to teach me the knowledge and the unquestionable facts I will need to know to be successful in the global labour market. Because UCM's PBL system offers tutorials in small groups, I will be able to interact directly with my teachers, and memorize their every word. As experts with PhD's, they will let me know when I say something that is wrong and correct me by telling me what I should have said. Through reading many big and important books and attending lectures by renowned scholars and visiting dignitaries, I will learn about the results of cutting-edge research done at universities all over the world, particularly in the intersection between the disciplines of law and economics, my intended area of focus. I am fascinated by how economic analysis of law can lead to more efficient regulation of polluting activities. If I were to study a law program, I would not be able to do much economics, but would rather have to waste time on subjects like criminal law, philosophy of law, or family law. If I were to study economics, I would not be able to do any law, and have to spend valuable time on subjects that do not relate to my interest. By having an open curriculum, UCM would allow me to do only the courses I need to come to an interdisciplinary understanding of the issue I am singularly passionate about.

#### **Applicant 2**

It is hard growing up nowadays. You have to make choices all the time, about what you want to do with your life, and what you want to study. Unfortunately, I haven't found my passion yet, and so deciding which university program to apply for was very hard. Then I learned about the Liberal Arts program at UCM, and I immediately knew it was for me. Because UCM offers an open curriculum, I can simply try out a wide range of courses, without having to make any irreversible choices. This will enable me to discover which subject suits me best, and then I can focus on that, do a masters in that discipline and get a job in that field. I also think PBL would be a great way of learning for me, because it would allow me to hear the opinions of other students on a wide range of topics. It's always so interesting to hear different perspectives; they're all so different and all so valuable, I never know what to think and which one is true. But maybe nobody does, because you can never know for sure. After all, in life it's all about how well you sell your ideas. If you just talk with enough conviction and passion, you can convince people of anything. And UCM's exciting skills program, with courses like presentation skills, will teach me the art of persuasion.

#### **Applicant 3**

To me, even a simple object can raise a million questions. It's actually quite a handicap. I was looking at my mother's silk scarf. It's a brightly colored thing, with an Oriental-looking pattern woven into the fabric, but it says it was made in France by some exclusive brand, and apparently cost a lot of money. And my mind exploded: what chemical substances are in all the bright dyes they must have used to color the silk thread with? Chroma is ancient Greek for color, so maybe it's chromium. If so, I hope they aren't getting it from Africa. Apparently the rare metals trade keeps all kinds of nasty conflicts going. What's going on there? And also, why is there a Chinese pattern on a French scarf? It's weird. There must be a historical explanation for that. But it's a complicated pattern, so they must have used a really complex loom to weave it, and some sort of programming system to run it. Which means, I guess that there is some sort of mathematical way of describing it. I wonder how that works. Regardless, it's a really expensive scarf. I wonder why people buy these things? Is it the marketing? There just has to be some psychological theory about that. Maybe people buy these things to show that they belong to a higher class. But then what exactly is class, and how does it structure our society? Oh, it goes on and on. And that's why I want to come to UCM, I want to learn the answers to all these questions, and to do that, I need to take courses in many different academic fields. The open curriculum means I can do it all. And it will make the PBL-sessions so interesting; I will be able to explain in my programming class how the discovery of China led to a craze among European aristocrats for silk fabric (on which they spent so much money that the people staged the French Revolution), which the French tried to copy using looms that could make really complicated patterns, that were controlled by machines with lots of little gears and wheels, that Alan Turing used to break the Nazi's secret spy-code (thereby winning the Second World War), that a company that made typewriters, called International Business Machines, used to develop mainframe computers, which run the Internet. So maybe those aristocrats weren't so bad after all.

#### **Applicant 4**

More and more, I realize that there are different sides to every problem. A sociologist looks at inequality one way, a philosopher looks at it another way, and an economist has yet another take. Each of these disciplines teaches us something different and recommends different actions. At the same time, we have to make choices and live our lives. I hope to attend UCM because it will teach me what these different disciplines can reveal about all kinds of problems, but above all which of many different solutions is the one I truly believe in. That is why I look forward to working with problem-based learning; I hope it will give me the opportunity to explore different ways of looking at issues, drawing on all kinds of readings and the contributions from fellow-students from different cultures and who have taken all kinds of different courses. Together, we will consider the pros and cons of different solutions and decide where we come down. By doing this consistently, I will learn what I think is meaningful for me and how I think about the world and my role in it. This model of the world may incorporate different disciplines and traditions, but it will be something different and unique. Others may not agree with it, and that's fine. If they have suggestions, I will listen and think about them. But in the end, it will be me, I will take the consequences. And I will be proud of it.

Notes:



### Requirements Outline Project Paper

*Deadline: in class during the second tutorial session in week 1*

- The outline is an elaboration on the research plan, which was written during *Introduction to Academic Skills II*. The outline should demonstrate the progress that the groups have made during the first week of the project. The more progress the better.
- The outline should be refined and the reference list should have been expanded upon through a systematic literature search (see Search Planner Form on StudentPortal to help you with this).
- Elements from the Research Plan which are no longer relevant should be removed from the outline. The introduction should be rewritten so that it fits the paper: so the outline does not need to contain schedules and/or deadlines anymore; it should really be a step towards your research paper.
- The outline should clearly state the research question **and** the thesis statement of the paper. You should also explain why it is relevant to investigate your topic.
- The outline should include indications of the amount of words required per section.
- The use of bullet points is allowed in the outline, provided that the content is made understandable (so not only keywords). Keep the scope of the paper in mind here and do not include too many (superficial) elements.
- The outline should be informative. It should not merely state the elements which will be included. For instance, instead of writing 'there will be an argument', you need to indicate what the argument will entail and how it relates to your thesis statement.
- You should plan how you could advance the logic of your argument and how you would use evidence to support the argument. Make sure to clearly explain how the elements of your arguments support/relate to your thesis statement.
- The outline should be supported with references. At the very least, the main sources which you build your argument on should be incorporated in the outline. Make sure to reference according to APA guidelines.
- In your conclusion, you should provide a preliminary answer to your research question. Evidently, this answer is subject to change as your investigation progresses. You can also think

## Week 1. Session 2: Peer feedback (Outline) & Argumentation

**Preparation:** Bring two hard copies of your updated outline.

### Introduction to Feedback: working with Structure

Giving and receiving feedback is regular practice at UCM. Not only your teachers will help you to become a better student (and a better academic), but your fellow students also can and should play a crucial role in your academic development.

Reading and listening to each other's work can be very valuable. However, when you think that something is not very good you cannot simply say "*That's very bad!*". There are several ways in which you can communicate with each other about your work.

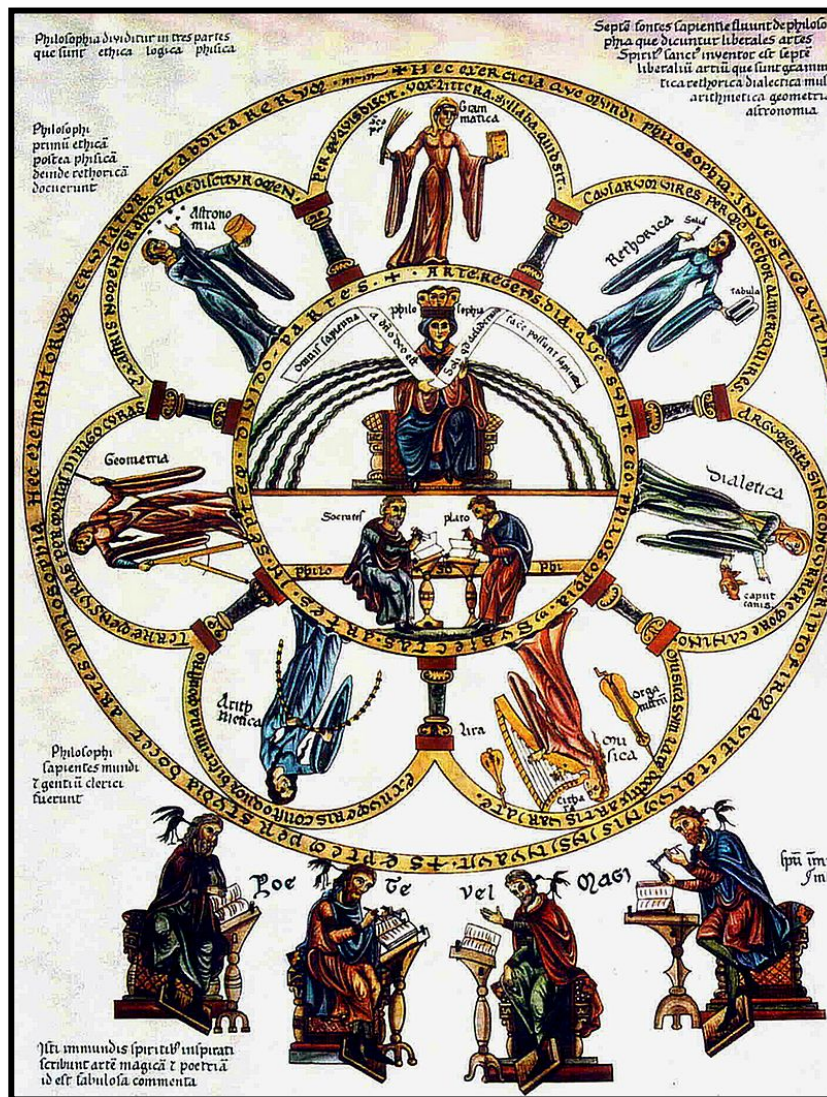
During this session you will have to give feedback to the outline of another group of students. Before you do so, however, we will briefly discuss the do's and don'ts of providing feedback.

### Argumentation: from premises to conclusions

A sound argumentation is one of the most important aspects of a paper. Your tutor will guide you through an exercise regarding this.

## Week 2. Lecture 2: The history of liberal arts and sciences

Professor Jeroen Bons from University College Utrecht will give a lecture on the history of liberal arts and sciences. This lecture is part of the mandatory material for the task "The UCM Board of admissions has a difficult job?"

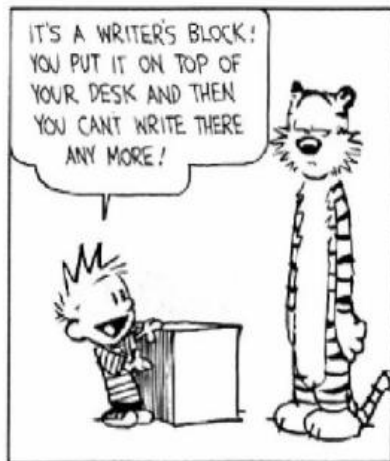


## Week 2. Session 3: Presentation of argumentation structure

**Preparation:** A schematic representation of your argument. You will have to draw it on the board when you present your argument.

During this tutorial you will present the overall argument of your project paper to the tutorial group. You have 5-10 minutes to present the core of your argument in a clear and concise manner. You should focus on the structure of the argument, instead of the content, so that the group can provide feedback on potential gaps or leaps in the argumentation. In order to do this, simplify sentences so that they are immediately clear to the reader.

Furthermore, we will discuss the specific requirements for the draft and the feedback report that you have to work on this week. You will start preparing the draft and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions you still have regarding any of the assignments.



**Requirements First Draft:**

*Deadline: Monday June 25 before noon. Upload your draft to file exchange on the Student Portal (no hardcopy required). Only one copy per group needs to be uploaded.*

- The first draft should be an update of the outline. It should be more specific and more detailed.
- There should no longer be *any* bullet points in the draft. All sentences should be written out in full.
- The draft should show that the review of literature is completed. It should incorporate sources, which should be referenced according to APA requirements.
- The draft should have at least half of the required word count of the final project paper (i.e. 3000 words for groups of 4 students, 2500 words for groups of 3 students or 2000 words for groups of two students).

Once the drafts have been uploaded to the group pages on the Student Portal, you should meet up with the members of your group and download and print out the first draft of the subgroup you have been allocated to give feedback to. Assess the first draft in detail and write up a feedback report. The feedback report will be graded and counts towards 10% of your final grade. Use the feedback guidelines in the appendix of the course manual as a basis for your feedback report.

**Requirements Feedback Report:**

*Deadline: in class in week 3, Session 6.*

In your feedback report, you should carry out the following tasks for the three main sections (the introduction, the body and the conclusion) of the draft:

- Describe those aspects of the draft that you think are done well.
- Describe those aspects of the draft that you think are not done well.
- Give recommendations to your peers on how their paper may be improved.

Make sure that your feedback is detailed and constructive. Try to be specific by referring to parts of the paper directly.

- **Send the report to your tutor via email before the tutorial.**
- **Bring one hard copy of your feedback report to class (week 3, session 1).**

### Week 3. Session 4: Post-discussion

**Preparation:** In preparation for this session, you should 1) attend the lecture about the history of liberal arts and sciences by Professor Bons and 2) read the materials listed under the task description “The UCM Board of Admissions has a difficult job”.

Today we will meet for a post-discussion about the task about liberal arts and sciences. We will try to answer the learning goals with the help of the texts that you have read and the lecture about the history of liberal arts and sciences. Next week you will have the chance to discuss these issues again with Teun.

Notes:



### Week 3. Session 5: Open office hours

**Preparation:** Prepare questions that you want to ask your tutor. This session is not about your tutor giving you feedback on your draft. Rather, it is about resolving the questions that you might still have about your paper.

The third session this week is not mandatory. You can use the scheduled tutorial meeting time to discuss your draft with your tutor. Your tutor will explain in class how the set-up of this session will work.

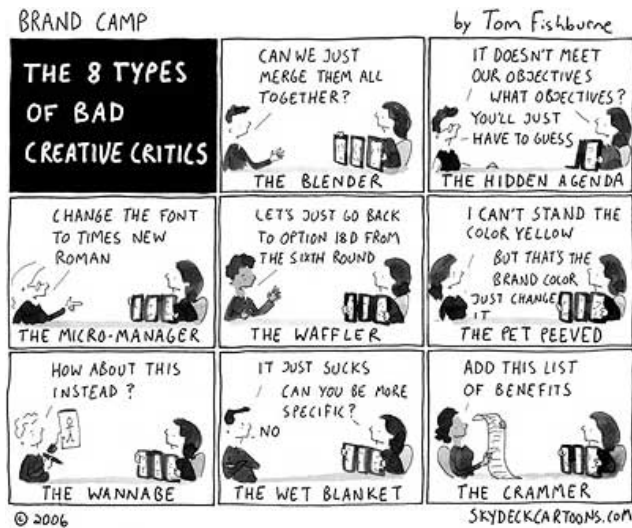




### Week 3. Session 6: Peer feedback session (Draft)

**Preparation:** Bring one hard copy of your feedback report. Email the feedback report to your tutor before class.

In this session we will discuss the feedback from the groups on the drafts. Do not forget to send the feedback report to your tutor via email before class and bring one hard copy of the feedback reports to class. Make sure to be well prepared to give constructive feedback to your peers.



#### Course evaluation

The last 10-15 minutes of this class will be used to evaluate the course. What did you especially appreciate? What could be improved? Please, provide constructive feedback. Teaching and developing educational modules is a continuous process. We will use your input to further develop our course.

#### Week 4 – No class

Hand in your **motivation letter** on **Wednesday July 4 at 16:00 hrs**. You are required to hand in a softcopy (through SafeAssignment) as well as a hardcopy (through OSA). Please use the official UCM cover page for your hardcopy.

Hand in the **final version of your project paper** on **Friday July 6 at 16:00 hrs**. You are required to hand in a softcopy (through SafeAssignment) as well as a hardcopy (through OSA). You only need to hand in/upload one copy per group. Please use the official UCM cover page for your hardcopy.

Don't Miss the  
**DEADLINE!**

## **Appendices**

## Appendix A. Writing Review Tools

### The parametric method

1. Circle the prepositions (of, in, about, for, onto, into).
2. Draw a box around the "is" verb forms.
3. Ask, "Where's the action?"
4. Change the "action" into a simple verb.
5. Move the doer into the subject (Who's kicking whom).
6. Eliminate any unnecessary slow wind-ups.
7. Eliminate any redundancies.

Example:

Ⓙ this paragraph is a demonstration ~~of~~ the use ~~of~~ good style ~~in~~ the writing ~~of~~ a report.

↙ Action in sentence; eliminate slow wind-ups

*Revision*  
This paragraph demonstrates good style in reports (or) ...good style in report writing.

↙ The doer is in the subject

### The reverse outline

1. First, number all the paragraphs in your paper.
2. On a blank sheet of paper, write the research question or thesis statement at the top. Next, divide the paper into three columns. In the first column, write as many numbers as you have paragraphs going down from the top left corner to the bottom left corner. Leave at least 2 lines of space between each number (you'll probably have to continue on to the next page).
3. Thirdly, in the *middle* column, write down the topic of each paragraph. Try to use as few words as possible. If you find this tricky, go back to your paragraph and underline the key-words used in topic sentence of the paragraph; this usually determines what the paragraph is about.
4. In the *right-hand* column, write down how the paragraph topic advances the overall argument of the text. Again, be brief.
5. Evaluate your paper's structure. Step 3 will tell you if your paragraph is not focused and clear, for example if it contains too many key-words or too many concepts. Step 4 will tell you if each paragraph fits in the overall organization of your paper. You may also notice that some paragraphs should be changed or moved to another place after completing this step.

Adapted from <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/689/1/>



## Appendix B. Brainstorming tools

### How to find your research question and thesis statement<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes it's difficult to decide on a research question. Assuming that you already have a rough idea about the topic of your paper, the following steps will help you to define an initial research question to start your research.

1. Ask yourself: **What do I know about the topic?** If you have already discussed the topic in class, then you will already have some background in it. If you haven't, take a look at the suggested literature that is relevant to your topic. In addition, spend some time looking up extra information on the topic.

2. Write down at least **5 facts, keywords and concepts** that are relevant to your topic:

Keywords, facts, concepts:

3. What are you interested in researching for your project? What is your **general topic**? Look at the key concepts in the box above and narrow it down.

General topic:

4. Ask yourself **who or what is impacted** by your topic.

- a. People
- b. Animals
- c. The environment
- d. Existing theories
- e. ...

5. **What aspect** of your topic are you interested in? Is there a theme or category that you'd like to focus on? The causes? The effects or implications? The solutions?

Aspect of your topic that you are interested in:

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Research Question Generator of the University of Michigan:  
<https://umich.instructure.com/courses/824/modules/items/79077>

6. Ask yourself **when**. Are you interested in the current situation? In the past? Are you interested in a specific event? Looking to the future?

When:

7. Ask yourself **where**. Consider countries, regions, states, types of places like workplace, schools, online, urban, rural, etc.

Where:

8. Fill out the table below with the answers from steps 3 to 8.

Key words	
Topic	
Who or what is affected?	
What aspect? (cause, effect, solution)	
When?	
Where?	

9. Pull the elements together to create your research question.

Research question:

10. Now that you have your question, ask yourself what your answer to the question is. Just write down what you think. This is not the final answer, just your first hypothesis. Trust your intuition.

11. Take your research question and tentative thesis statement together and answer the following questions:

- a. Does the research question allow you to **take a position** in your thesis statement?
  - i. YES/NO
  - ii. If not, then how can you improve it?
- b. Does the thesis statement require **multiple arguments** to support it? Does it allow for **counter-arguments**?
  - i. YES/NO
  - ii. If not, then how can you improve it?
- c. Does the thesis statement require you to consult **multiple sources of knowledge** in order to defend it?
  - i. YES/NO
  - ii. If not, then how can you improve it?
- d. Is the research question **narrow** enough? Can you do the research needed to defend your thesis statement within the **time and length** given for the paper?
  - i. YES/NO
  - ii. If not, then how can you improve it?
- e. Are the concepts and the relationships indicated in the research question **specific** enough?
  - i. YES/NO
  - ii. If not, then how can you improve it?

Notes:



## Creating a basic outline

Now that you have defined and fine-tuned your research question and thesis statement, you should come up with an outline of your paper. Follow the instructions to get started with a basic outline. Make sure to time yourself!

1. Write down your research question and tentative thesis statement at the top. (1 minute)
2. Write down everything you know (or all your ideas) about the topic of your paper. (3 minutes)
3. Write down everything you don't know about the topic of your paper. Formulate questions. (3 minutes)
4. Take a look at what you wrote down. Do some facts, ideas or questions belong together? If yes, group them into clusters. If some information seems irrelevant, eliminate it. (2 minutes)
5. Organize the clusters you came up with in a logical order. As yourself: what I need to figure out before I can answer my research question? What information should come first, what second? What questions do I need to answer before I can answer the research question? (3 minutes)

The order of the clusters (with their facts, ideas and questions) is the tentative overall structure of your paper. Now you know what sub-topics and sub-questions you need to research in order to answer your research question. Go on and do it.

Notes:

## Creating an advanced outline

After you've conducted the literature search for your paper, it's time to compose an advanced outline. This will help you to get a clear idea of what you want your paper to look like and it might help you to detect some blind spots in your argument that still require research. Take a blank sheet of paper and write down the answers to the following questions. Follow the steps and don't forget to time yourself!

### PART 1

1. What is your research question?
2. What is your thesis statement?
3. What background knowledge must the reader have in order to understand your research question and your thesis statement? Make a list of facts, information and ideas that you consider relevant. (2 minutes)
4. What arguments support your thesis? What argument could contradict your thesis? Make a brief list with all your arguments and counter arguments. (3 minutes)
5. How many sections will the body of your paper have? What will each section discuss? Make a list and give tentative titles that make clear what the section is about. (2 minutes)

### PART 2

On a separate piece of paper, draw 3 columns and one row for each section of your essay. Number the sections. Then fill out the following information for each section, one section at a time.

1. In the left column, write down the main claim of the section. (2 minutes)
2. In the middle column, make a list of the arguments that support the main claim of the section. (3 minutes)
3. In the right column, try to answer the following question: How does the main claim of this section support or contradict your thesis statement? (2 minutes)

### PART 3 (5 minutes)

Look at the overview of your sections and the arguments made in them. Now ask yourself: How do the claims and arguments in every section, taken together, help me to answer my research question? Write down your answer.

## Suggested Readings

Note: This list does not cover all relevant skills in academia: they are merely suggestions for readings that may help you get started on the development of your personal and academic skills. Most of these readings are available via Safe Assignment. The Little Brown Handbook is recommended as a course book. Copies are also available in the UCM reading room.

### On Academic Skills

Fowler, H. R., & Aaron, J. E. (2011). *The Little Brown Handbook* (12th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman.

- Chapter 10 on Taking Essay Exams

Lee-Davies, Linda (2007) *Developing Work and Study Skills*. London: Thomson Learning. Chapter 18 – Stress management, pp. 181 – 196.

### On Reflective Thinking and Writing

Cottrell, S. (2003). *Skills for Success: The Personal Development Planning Handbook*. London: Palgrave. Chapter 7: The Art of Reflection

### On Critical Analytical Thinking and Writing

Cottrell, S. (2003). *The Study Skills Handbook* 2nd edition. London: Palgrave MacMillan. Chapter 10: Critical Analytical Thinking, pp. 221-238.

Fowler, H. R., & Aaron, J. E. (2011). *The Little Brown Handbook* (12th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman.

- Chapter 6 on Forming a Critical Perspective
- Chapter 8 on Reading Arguments Critically

McMillan, K., & Weyers, J. (2011). *How to write essays & assignments* (2nd ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson. Chapter 7: Thinking Critically, pp. 77 – 85.

### On Academic Writing

Fowler, H. R., & Aaron, J. E. (2011). *The Little Brown Handbook* (12th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman.

- Chapter 1 on Assessing the Writing Situation
- Chapter 2 on Developing, Discovering and Shaping ideas
- Chapter 4 on Writing and Revising Paragraphs
- Chapter 7 on Writing in Academic Situations
- Chapter(s) on APA referencing

Payne, Elaine & Whittaker, Lesley (2006) *Developing Essential Study Skills* 2nd edition. London: Prentice Hall. Chapter 15 – Essay Writing. (reading room & library)

McMillan, K., & Weyers, J. (2011). *How to write essays & assignments* (2nd ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson.

- Chapter 10 on Academic Writing Style
- Chapter 12 on Improving your Grammar

## Feedback on the paper

Source: modified, "Handout feedback paper" | PR103 Portfolio Plus | June, 2004

### I. General Elements

- 1). Layout: are headings, tables, text and figures presented correctly?
- 2). Headings
  - a) Did the author make proper use of headings?
  - b) Is there a difference between levels and sublevels/sections and subsections?
- 3). Grammar, accuracy, spelling and punctuation:
  - a) Is the grammar correct?
  - b) Are expressions clear to the reader?
  - c) Are terminology and vocabulary accurate?
  - d) Is the spelling accurate?
  - e) Is the punctuation accurate?
  - f) Are style and tone appropriate to formal academic writing?
  - g) Are there any awkward sentences that make the reader wonder what is meant?
- 4) Is the first person used (the use of 'I' is uncommon in scientific papers).
- 5) Did the author insert page numbers?

### II. Title page

- 1). Does the title page contain the required information?
  - a) Title and possible subtitle
  - b) "University College Maastricht"
  - c) Place, date
  - d) Name
  - e) ID number
  - f) Course code and title
  - g) Tutor name
  - h) Number of words
- 2) Is the title effective and do you understand it?
  - a) Is it too broad or not broad enough?
  - b) Does it reflect the content of the paper?
  - c) Does it grab your attention?
  - d) Is it in the form of a question?—you should avoid using questions w/in a title.

### III. Introduction

- 1) Did the author give sufficient background information to introduce the topic?
  - a) Is the background information relevant?
  - b) Is the significance of the topic made clear?
  - c) Is the problem clearly stated?
- 2) Is it clear what the paper will cover and the order it will be covered?
- 3) Problem statement or Research question:
  - a) Is the problem statement too broad or too vague?
  - b) Are there any unfamiliar terms in the research question? And if so, did the author explain these terms before introducing the research question?
- 4) Is there information in the introduction that you think is more appropriate in the body of the paper?

#### **IV. Body**

- 1) Does the body have a clear structure and develops in a clear direction?
- 2) Does the body provide more than one viewpoint of the problem and does the author demonstrate an awareness of the complexities of the problem?
- 3) Does the body progress effectively and logically towards the findings?
- 4) Does the body provide adequate evidence to support the findings?
- 5) Does the writer acknowledge weaknesses in any arguments that might support his or findings?  
Is she or he honest about the fact that there may be difficulties in reaching conclusive findings?
- 6) Did the author provide the reader with definitions where they are necessary?
- 7) Did you find that certain information was rather redundant and could have been left out?
- 8) Did you find that certain information was missing?
- 9) Do you think that some information would be more appropriately found in the introduction of this paper?

#### **V. Paragraphing**

- 1) Is it clear where paragraphs begin and end?
- 2) Are all paragraphs well balanced in length and content?
- 3) Are all paragraphs well structured:
  - Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?
  - Does the paragraph content follow from the topic sentence?
  - Does each paragraph end effectively?
  - Does each paragraph deal with one topic or are any a mix of different topics?
- 4) Are there any one-sentence paragraphs?
- 5) Does the writer move easily from one paragraph to the next, i.e. are transitions logical and clear?

#### **VI. Conclusion**

- 1) Does the conclusion provide a short summing up? Do you have to wait until the conclusion for an answer to the research question?
- 2) Does the writer use references here? It is uncommon to reference the conclusion.
- 3) Does it make clear why the findings of the research are important or significant?
- 4) Does the conclusion have a strong ending?
- 5) Is the conclusion a satisfying compliment to the introduction?

#### **VII. References**

- 1) Are all references correct and complete, both in the text and in the bibliography?
- 2) Are all references in the text also mentioned in the bibliography?
- 3) Are all references in the bibliography also mentioned in the text?
- 4) Are all references according to APA style?
- 5) Did the author use enough sources?
- 6) Did the writer use reliable sources?
- 7) Are the references listed in an alphabetical order?

## Useful productivity apps/websites

### *Time-management*

- [BeFocused](#)/[Just Focus](#)/[Focuskeeper](#)/[Clear Focus](#)/ – apps that use Pomodoro technique to split your working time into 25-minute intervals
- o [Tide](#) – Pomodoro technique + relaxing background sounds
- [Forest](#) – an app that visualizes your concentration by growing trees when you are working and not touching your phone
- [Cold Turkey](#) – allows you to block distractions, such as social media for a set amount of time

### *To-do lists*

- [Todoist](#) – for creating tasks and subtasks, assigning priority labels under different lists
- [Trello](#) – to-do list app that is perfect for working on multiple projects at the same time

### *Proof-reading*

- [Grammarly](#) – an app that helps you to spot some grammatical mistakes that other word processors usually ignore

### *Writing*

- [The Writefull App](#) – includes useful features such as a synonym-in-context finder, word-frequency finder (is it “number” or “amount” of people?), word-gap filler (“Researchers have \_ on issues in this paper”), and a dictionary. Contrary to what the name indicates, this is a programme to be used on PC or MAC.

### *Note-taking*

- [Microsoft One Note](#)/[EverNote](#) – good tools for those who like taking notes electronically and are tired of switching between dozens of documents

### *Calendars*

- [Google Calendar](#)/[iCalendar](#) – apps to integrate your timetable/personal and other calendars to never miss a meeting again

### *Mind maps*

- [XMind](#) - great tool for brainstorming and structuring information by mind mapping

### *Online flashcards*

- [Quizlet](#)/[Anki](#) – study information in a flashcard form by playing games and doing quizzes

#### *Meetings/team management*

- [Doodle](#) - create a list of possible dates and times, invite people to comment and choose a timeslot that works for everyone!
- [Slack](#) - whether you work on a group project or with your student organization, this app helps you to divide your conversation into channels, attach files and collaborate in a more structured way
- [Google drive/Dropbox](#) – great tools for file sharing and real-time editing
- [Canva](#) – easy graphic design software for posters, online events and reports

#### *Habit-tracking*

- [Habitica](#) - a gamified app that helps you to develop good habits or get rid of bad ones

#### *Scanning documents*

- **Scannable** – allows you to scan documents with your phone and send them to your E-mail

#### *Learning languages*

- [Duolingo](#) – learn a language for free in a fun way by practicing 10-15 minutes/day

#### *Knowledge acquisition*

- [Pocket](#) –save interesting articles and read them offline with the original formatting
- **Podcast** (IOS)/[Stitcher](#) (Android) – add podcasts on your favourite topics and listen to them when riding a bike/walking/exercising at the gym/doing dishes
- [Goodreads](#) – set yourself reading targets, see what your friends are reading and find reviews for books