Carnegie Mellon University
Master of
Software Engineering

17-603 Communications for Software Leaders I

Fall 2025, 3 units

Section A, Tuesdays, 9:30 am – 10:50 am, 3SC 265, IPE
Section B, Tuesdays, 12:30 pm – 1:50 pm, 3SC 265, IPE
Section C, Thursdays, 9:30 am – 10:50 am, 3SC 265, IPE
Section D, Wednesdays, 7:00 pm – 8:20 pm (Pittsburgh local time), REMOTE
Section E, Thursdays, 12:30 pm – 1:50 pm, 3SC 265, IPE

Instructor Information
Name: Dominick (Nick) Frollini
Contact Info: nfrollini@cmu.edu; 412-268-5359 (office)
Office Location: 300 S. Craig Street – Room 274
Drop-In Hours: By Appointment/To Be Annnounced

TA Information
Please see Canvas for up-to-date information on any teaching assistants assigned to support this course.

Course Description
Communications skills are fundamental to professionals in all fields, from architecture to software engineering to zoology, because they enable the exchange of ideas and the completion of organizational goals. The ability to identify an audience, to develop clear, persuasive presentations and written documents, and to handle the complex interactions that occur in the workplace make the difference between those who participate in an organization and those who lead it.

This is the first course in a two-semester sequence designed to help you build and refine your skills so that you can communicate as a leader in your professional work. Through a combination of in-class exercises, case studies, projects, presentations, and written assignments, you will assess your current skill level and build upon it.

Prior Knowledge/Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites to this course, other than a willingness to keep an open mind, to give and receive feedback, and to participate in interactive in-class discussions.

Learning Objectives
By the end of this semester, you will be able to:
1. Explain the concept of leadership communication and how it applies in the professional world;
2. Identify the target audience for a document or presentation and adapt the same for that audience;
3. Build communications strategies for a given task;
4. Create compelling and persuasive documents and presentations;
5. Give a presentation, both individually and as a member of a team, with increased confidence; and
6. Develop strategies for communicating during a crisis.

Learning Resources

We will use one **required textbook** this semester; this textbook will also be using during the spring semester for 17-604 Communications for Software Leaders II:

Leadership Communication 4th Edition
By Deborah Barrett
ISBN-13: 978-0073403205

Used copies of this edition of the textbook are also fine.

You may obtain this book from any source that you wish, but please be sure to obtain the 4th Edition as many assignments will be taken directly from the textbook. You should have this book available for all class sessions as we will refer to it from time-to-time.

Note: This course participates in Carnegie Mellon's First Day Access program. This program is designed to provide Day One access to the required textbook for all students at an affordable price (~$48, which is considerably less than it is available for from most sources). The required textbook will be delivered to you automatically by enrolling in this course unless you choose to opt-out. By participating in this program, The University Store will bill your Student Billing account, and you will see a charge appear under this Term along with Tuition and Fees after the Add/Drop period for the term. Opting out is available through Canvas in your course where you access your book. If you choose to procure your material using another format and do not want to be charged for this material, you MUST opt out via Canvas before the Add/Drop date.

Additionally, the following **book** is *optional* for this semester:

The Art of the Start 2.0: The Time-Tested, Battle-Hardened Guide for Anyone Starting Anything
By Guy Kawasaki
ISBN-13: 978-1591847847

It will not be used directly but provides excellent background material on the art of effective presentations. It may also be obtained online or from the campus bookstore. Used copies of this book are fine.

We will use the following **required materials** this semester:

Domino's Pizza
Richard Ivey School of Business Foundation

Better Safe Than Sorry: Why Organizations in Crisis Should Never Hesitate to Steal Thunder
Business Horizons

The following **supplementary material** is *optional* for this semester, but may be helpful if you are new to giving and receiving feedback:

Harvard ManageMentor: Feedback Essentials
Harvard Business Publishing

Any or all of these materials may be purchased in a package from Harvard Business Publishing (HBP) at the following URL:

https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1311697

You will need to create an account with HBP to purchase these materials.

Note: The *"Better Safe Than Sorry"* article may also be accessed, free of charge, here (institutional login required):
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681317300034

We will maintain an active course website on Canvas where you may access various materials and submit assignments.

Assessments

Your final course grade will be calculated using the following categories:

7 small assignments [S] @ 5.5% each		38.5%
2 medium assignments [M] @ 12.25% each		24.5%
2 large assignments [L] @ 16.0% each		32.0%
participation/attendance		5.0%
	Total	**100%**

A specific list of assignments can be found in the course schedule, below.

Assignments will be scored on the following four-point scale:

Score	Description	% Translation	Grade Translation
0	Unacceptable	0%	R
1.5	Needs Improvement	50%	C+
2	Proficient	66%	B
3	Advanced	100%	A+

Fractional scores are possible.

In general terms, these scores mean:

0 – Unacceptable – The work submitted does not meet the basic goals of the assignment and does not demonstrate that the student has attempted to master the learning objectives involved. In a "real world" context, this is roughly equivalent of submitting a report that is incomplete to a supervisor in a manner that demonstrates it was done at the last minute and with no effort.

1.5 – Needs Improvement – The work submitted meets some of the basic goals of the assignment and, while the student has not yet mastered the learning objectives involved, has begun to internalize them. In a "real world" context, this is roughly equivalent to submitting a report to a supervisor that is complete, but fundamentally lacking or flawed in one or more areas.

2 – Proficient – The work submitted meets the basic goals of the assignment and demonstrates that the student has internalized the learning objectives involved. In a "real world" context, this is roughly equivalent to submitting a report to a supervisor that is complete and lacking in any significant flaws.

3 – Advanced – The work submitted exceeds the basic goals of the assignment and demonstrates that the student has mastered the learning objectives involved to a very high degree of proficiency. In a "real world" context, this is roughly equivalent to submitting a report to a supervisor that is complete, exceptionally structured, and which is noted in your annual performance appraisal as exceeding all reasonable expectations.

Most assignments will be accompanied by a grading rubric to help you understand the expectations of the assignment and the manner in which you will be graded.

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You will be assigned the following final letter grades, based on calculations coming from the course assessments as scored above:

Score	Letter Grade
33 or below	R
34 - 41	C-
42 - 49	C
50 - 57	C+
58 - 65	B-
66 - 73	B
74 - 81	B+
82 - 89	A-
90 - 97	A
98 - 100	A+

Grading Policies

- **Late-work policy:** Deadlines in the professional world are often inflexible; failure to complete a project on-time can result in serious consequences for employees and their organizations. Accordingly, the expectation is that you will turn in your work by the stated deadline for the assignment, in the absence of extenuating circumstances (e.g., a medical emergency). However, we realize that life happens and you may turn in one assignment late during the semester without a documented reason – this assignment will be penalized by one point (that is, if it would've received a score of "3", it will receive a score of "2"). Unexcused assignments after the first will receive a score of "0".

- **Make-up work policy:** If you become ill during the semester (as documented by either an external medical professional or University Health Services), you will be permitted to make up any work that you have missed and to turn in assignments late without the normal penalty. Please endeavor to inform me at least 24-hours prior to the due date of any given assignment if at all possible.

- **Re-grade policy:** If you believe that your score on any assignment is incorrect, you may ask me to review the work for a possible re-grade. You should submit this request, in writing, within three business days of the score being given to you. Please note that (1) you may submit no more than one such request during the semester, and (2) a request for a review of your work does not guarantee that the score will increase. Your score will *never* decrease as a result of a re-grade request.

- **"Redemption" policy:** We recognize that sometimes assignments do not go as planned, for many reasons. While the real world rarely has an "undo" feature, in the interest of allowing you to build your skills we will allow you to re-attempt one (and only one) individual assignment during the semester on which you initially achieve a score less than 2. (Group assignments, in-class simulations, and similar types of work may not be re-attempted). You must contact the instructor within 24 hours of your grade being posted to request a re-attempt. You will then have 72 hours to complete and submit a new version of the assignment in question. The maximum score you can achieve on this resubmission is the lesser of 2.0 or twice your initial score. For the avoidance of doubt, this means that if your initial score on the assignment was a 1.5, the maximum you can obtain with the re-attempt is 2.0; and that if your initial score on the assignment was a 0.7, the maximum that you can obtain with the re-attempt is 1.4.

Course Policies

- **Attendance and participation policy:** You will be expected to attend all class sessions (unless otherwise discussed with the instructor); the instructor or TA will record attendance. Additionally, you will be expected to participate fully in all in-class discussions, exercises, and case studies. This may initially be uncomfortable or challenging, but part of becoming a more effective communicator is learning how to

participate in group meeting; our class sessions are excellent practice for your future professional interactions. However, you should not feel obligated to speak during every class session (unless we are doing a simulation or case study). Make meaningful contributions when and where you can. We will discuss this in more detail at our initial session. Please note that I expect that you will abide by all behaviors indicated in The Word, including any timely updates based on current conditions.

- **Academic integrity and collaboration:** Honesty and transparency are important to good scholarship. Plagiarism and cheating, however, are serious academic offenses with serious consequences. If you are discovered engaging in either behavior in this course, you will earn a failing grade on the assignment in question (via the assessment of negative points on said assignment), a referral will be made to the Office of Community Responsibility, and further disciplinary action may be taken.

  Regarding generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools: Tools that make use of artificial intelligence (AI), large language models (LLMs), and similar technological advancements are becoming increasingly commonplace. While they are powerful assistants for research, ideation, and organization, I believe that they are still unreliable for producing clear and effective communication. Moreover, unless we have an intuitive understanding of effective communication gained through study and practice, we will be unable to determine if the output produced by one of these tools is an effective artifact or an ineffective hallucination. While you are welcome to use these kinds of tools to help you understand the material we cover in the classroom, to generate images to use in presentations and documents, and for research purposes, you are *expressly prohibited* from using such tools to create or edit any other content that you submit in this course. For example, you may use a tool such as ChatGPT to help you understand an assignment or to generate images to use as part of that assignment, but you may not ask the tool to generate other content for you, to edit work you have produced, or otherwise modify your original work. Use of these kinds of tools in an unauthorized manner will be treated as noted above, that is, you will earn a failing grade on the assignment in question (via the assessment of negative points on said assignment), a referral will be made to the Office of Community Responsibility, and further disciplinary action may be taken. The above explanation of permitted and prohibited uses of these kinds of tools is not intended to be comprehensive; please contact me with questions if and when they arise.

  Please note that a second academic integrity violation of any kind in this course will result in an automatic penalty of course failure in addition to the other penalties noted above.

  For a clear description of what counts as plagiarism, cheating, and/or the use of unauthorized sources, please see the University's Policy on Academic Integrity here: https://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/academic-integrity.html.

  If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, cheating, or the use of generative AI tools, please ask me as soon as possible to avoid any misunderstandings. For more information about Carnegie Mellon's standards with respect to academic integrity, you can also check out the Office of Community Standards & Integrity website: https://www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/ocsi/students/avoiding/index.html.

- **Use of translation software and tools:** While this course is taught in English, I understand that many of my students may be nonnative speakers of English. I believe that immersion is one of the best ways to improve language mastery and, as such, I encourage nonnative speakers to write in English as much as possible. Nevertheless, I know that nonnative speakers can have varying levels of proficiency in speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Towards that end, while I do not encourage the use of translation software, students are permitted to use such tools to enable them to prepare written assignments in the language that they are most comfortable with.

  If you choose to use such tools, you must not enable any artificial intelligence (AI) features. Additionally, when you submit a written assignment prepared with such tools, you must also:

  o Upload into Canvas your original version of the assignment written in your preferred language;
  o Upload into Canvas the raw output from the translation tool, even if it differs only slightly from the final, edited version that you submitted; and
  o Provide, as either an additional upload or a comment on Canvas, information on the tool or tools that you used.

Failure to document the use of these tools will be treated as an academic integrity violation and handled pursuant to the course policy on academic integrity and collaboration.

- **Use of mobile devices:** You will be expected to engage fully during our class sessions as you would in the professional world during a meeting; this means that mobile devices should not be utilized (except for viewing notes during a presentation) in class. For any sections conducted online, this means that you should not be using a secondary device during class (i.e., you should not be using your cell phone to play a round of "Diablo Immortal" while we are discussing a case or listening to a presentation). Be kind to and considerate of your fellow students.

- **Accommodations for students with disabilities**: If you have a disability and require accommodations, please contact Catherine Getchell, Director of Disability Resources, 412-268-6121, getchell@cmu.edu. If you have an accommodations letter from the Disability Resources office, I encourage you to discuss your accommodations and needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at access@andrew.cmu.edu.

- **Statement on student wellness**: As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. CMU services are available, and treatment does work. You can learn more about confidential mental health services available on campus at: http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/. Support is always available (24/7) from Counseling and Psychological Services: 412-268-2922. Make sure to move regularly, eat well, and reach out to your support system or me if you need to. We can call benefit from support in times of stress, and this is semester is no exception.

- **Statement on respect for diversity:** We must treat every individual with respect. We are diverse in many ways, and this diversity is fundamental to building and maintaining an equitable and inclusive campus community. Diversity can refer to multiple ways that we identify ourselves, including but not limited to race, color, national origin, language, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, ancestry, belief, veteran status, or genetic information. Each of these diverse identities, along with many others not mentioned here, shape the perspectives our students, faculty, and staff bring to our campus. We, at CMU, will work to promote diversity, equity and inclusion not only because diversity fuels excellence and innovation, but because we want to pursue justice. We acknowledge our imperfections while we also fully commit to the work, inside and outside of our classrooms, of building and sustaining a campus community that increasingly embraces these core values. Each of us is responsible for creating a safer, more inclusive environment. Unfortunately, incidents of bias or discrimination do occur, whether intentional or unintentional. They contribute to creating an unwelcoming environment for individuals and groups at the university. Therefore, the university encourages anyone who experiences or observes unfair or hostile treatment on the basis of identity to speak out for justice and support, within the moment of the incident or after the incident has passed. Anyone can share these experiences using the following resources:
  - Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion: csdi@andrew.cmu.edu, (412) 268-2150
  - Ethics Reporting Hotline: Students, faculty, and staff can anonymously file a report by calling (844) 587-0793 or visiting cmu.ethicspoint.com.
  - All reports will be documented and deliberated to determine if there should be any following actions. Regardless of incident type, the university will use all shared experiences to transform our campus climate to be more equitable and just.

- **CMU's Student Academic Success Center (SASC):** The SASC has a number of resources available to provide you with support that you may need to achieve your highest level of performance at Carnegie Mellon, including Communication Support as well as Language and Cross-Cultural Support programs. Learn more at https://www.cmu.edu/student-success/index.html.

- **Food Insecurity:** If you are worried about affording food or feeling insecure about food, there are resources on campus that can help. Any undergraduate or graduate student can visit the CMU Pantry and receive food for free. Follow the directions on the [CMU Pantry website](#) to schedule your visit.

For Section D: Use of Zoom in the Class

In the remote section of this course, we will be using Zoom. The link is available on Canvas. Please make sure that your Internet connection and equipment are set up to use Zoom and that you are able to share audio and video during class meetings. Let me know if there is a gap in your technology set-up via email as soon as possible, and we can see about finding solutions.

Students who are in a location that makes attending class during the scheduled time challenging should review their situation with me as soon as is possible so that arrangements can be made to accommodate their needs. Please note that while Zoom sessions will be recorded, recordings will generally only be made available via special request or to accommodate students who cannot attend due to location issues. Please note that you are not allowed to share these recordings when they are made available. This is to protect your FERPA rights and those of your fellow students.

Based on the nature of the course, being able to see one another will facilitate a better learning environment, promote more engaging discussions, and allow you to practice your own communications skills. Accordingly, our default expectation is that you will have your camera on during lectures and discussions.

During our class meetings, please keep your microphone muted unless you are sharing with the class or your breakout group. If you have a question or want to answer a question, please use the "raise hand" feature (available when the participant list is pulled up), unless otherwise directed. The TA and I will monitor this channel and will call on students to participate.

For In-Person Sections: Transferring to Fully Remote During the Semester

If the class needs to go fully remote, you will receive an email from me and an announcement will be published on our course website on Canvas.

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Course Schedule

Class Session	Theme(s)/Topic(s)	Sections A & B	Section D	Sections C & E	In-Class Activities	Learning Objectives Addressed	Assignment(s)	Sections A & B	Section D	Sections C & E
		Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday				Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
1	Introduction to Leadership Communication	26-Aug	27-Aug	28-Aug	Overview presentation; ethics discussion	1	Read Chapter 1; Prepare and submit usage assessment and writing assessment [S]	31-Aug	TUESDAY 2-Sep	2-Sep
2	Providing Effective Feedback, Impromptu Presentations	2-Sep	3-Sep	4-Sep	Presentation on providing feedback; impromptu student presentations	3, 5	Prepare and submit Communications Development Plan [S]	7-Sep	8-Sep	9-Sep
3	Impromptu Presentations, Presentation Skills	9-Sep	10-Sep	11-Sep	Impromptu student presentations; presentation on presentation skills	3, 5	Prepare and submit Student Introductory Presentation file for in-class presentation; Read Chapter 2	21-Sep	22-Sep	23-Sep
4	Purpose, Strategy, and Structure	16-Sep*	17-Sep*	18-Sep*	Presentation and In-Class Exercise (2.1)	2, 3	Complete Application 2.3 (pg. 51) [S]; Read Chapter 3; finalize prep for in-class presentations	5-Oct	6-Oct	7-Oct
5	Student Intro Presentations	23-Sep	24-Sep	25-Sep	Student Introductory Presentations [S]	2, 3, 4 5	No assignment	-	-	-
6	Student Intro Presentations	30-Sep	1-Oct	2-Oct	Student Introductory Presentations [S]; open discussion on lessons learned	2, 3, 4 5	No assignment	-	-	-
7	Interviewing	7-Oct	8-Oct	9-Oct	Presentation and discussion	3	Complete interviewing assignment [S]	19-Oct	20-Oct	21-Oct
-	FALL BREAK - NO CLASSES	14-Oct	15-Oct	16-Oct	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	Language	21-Oct	22-Oct	23-Oct	Presentation and In-Class Exercises (3.2-3.5)	2, 3, 4	Read Chapters 4 and 5; Complete Assignment 6 on Canvas [S]	26-Oct	27-Oct	28-Oct
9	Email, Social Media, and Other Documents	28-Oct	29-Oct	30-Oct	Presentation and In-Class Exercise (4.1)	2, 3, 4	Read Chapters 6 and 7; Complete Assignment 7 on Canvas (team-based) [L]	2-Nov	3-Nov	4-Nov
10	Leadership Presentations and Graphics	4-Nov	5-Nov	6-Nov	Presentation and discussion	3, 4	Review one of the two "master class" videos; record and submit a short presentation on a topic of your choice (details to be provided) [M]	TUESDAY 11-Nov	10-Nov	11-Nov
11	Master Class: iPhone and Amazon Fire Phone Launches	11-Nov	12-Nov	13-Nov	Review and discussion	1, 2, 3, 4	Prepare Application 7.4 (team-based, pg. 197, for presentation during the final class session); review Domino's Pizza Case Study and Crisis Communications article	Domino's 18-Nov (in class)	Domino's 19-Nov (in class)	Domino's 20-Nov (in class)
12	Communications Strategy Review: Domino's Pizza	18-Nov	19-Nov	20-Nov	Discuss Case Study [M]	2, 3, 4, 5	Complete final preparation for team presentation and submit slide deck	Final Slides Due 1-Dec	Final Slides Due 2-Dec	Final Slides Due 3-Dec
-	THANKSGIVING WEEK -- NO CLASSES	25-Nov	26-Nov	27-Nov	-	-		-	-	-
13	Team Presentations	2-Dec	3-Dec	4-Dec	Team Presentations [L], group evaluation	1, 2, 3, 6	Submit interim assessment of CDP Progress [S]	7-Dec	8-Dec	9-Dec

Note: All assignments are due at 11:59 pm Pittsburgh local time on the date indicated unless otherwise announced.

Note: There will be no class on Tuesday, November 4, per the University's academic calendar. Students in Sections A and B will be asked to attend one of the other class sessions that week. The instructor will work to accommodate all students and will make additional arrangements if necessary.

Note: During Week 4, the instructor will be guest teaching at CMU-Qatar. A pre-recorded lecture will be made available covering that week's material that can be viewed at your convenience. The TA(s) will conduct office hours focused on the topics covered and the instructor will scheduled additional in-person drop-in hours to address questions prior to the assignment due date. This will be discussed during our first class session.