

COGS 260 / NEU221 | Communicating Science

Meeting: Winter 2026, Mon 2:00p-3:50p (all times Pacific)

Location: CSB 180

Instructor: Professor Bradley Voytek (<https://voyteklab.com>)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Why should anyone care about your research? When so many people are struggling in so many ways, why should anyone give over their hard-earned money so that we can study whatever thing it is that we spend all our time doing in our ivory towers?

In this course, we're going to challenge ourselves to make our research relevant, interesting, and worthwhile. To do this, we'll think about what makes *us* care about our own work and hopefully rediscover our own joy for what we do. From there, we can build toward inspiring others' curiosity, wonder, and trust.

But we also must be pragmatic: while it would be nice for the joy of science to be sufficient, we also must be able to convince the world that our work *matters* and that we have a product that is worthy of their investment. To that end, we will practice translating complex ideas into clear, compelling stories for audiences ranging from children to policy makers, grounding our research in the motivations – health, happiness, discovery – that make science matter. Through supportive critique and creative exercises, we'll learn to communicate not just data, but purpose. We will refine our slides and language and build confidence by crafting narratives that connect research to real lives. By the end of the quarter, each of us should be ready to speak about our science with authenticity and a sense of why our ideas are worth anything.

TENTATIVE Course Schedule:

Week	Topic
1	Social Responsibility
2	Basics of Public Speaking
3	NO CLASS (MLK Day)
4	Communicating Science to Grade-school Students
5	Communicating Science to College/Grad School Students
6	Communicating Science to Grant Reviewers
7	NO CLASS (President's Day)
8	Communicating Science to Politicians
9	Communicating Science to the Public
10	NO CLASS (CNS)

TENTATIVE Assignments:

- **Week 1:** Ten-One Hundred Challenge
- **Week 2:** Record yourself giving a short speech and take note of your bad habits.
- **Week 3:** NO CLASS
- **Week 4:** Write a short summary of an interesting article you read this week that can be understood by a grade schooler. You may be graded by a grade school student on clarity and how well they can understand your summary.
- **Week 5:** Before class, write a list of the qualities you've appreciated the most in your professors that you can reference when you teach.
- **Week 6:** Before class, re-read a review paper that really stood out at you as well written and helpful. Make a list of the qualities that made it better than other review papers you've read.
- **Week 7:** NO CLASS
- **Week 8:** Write an NIH grant-style, one-aim abstract for a research proposal. The experiments proposed should be something new that you're not currently planning.
- **Week 9:** Build up your slide deck: hurdles, inspirations, etc.
- **Week 10:** Give a two-minute "elevator speech" about your research to the class that can be understood by the public.

COURSE MATERIALS

- There is no textbook
- All necessary materials will be provided to you

GRADING & ATTENDANCE

There is no Final Exam

This is (almost) an entirely new class! This means that it's an experiment in progress. What this means for *you* is that the amount of work you need to do will be less in this quarter than in future iterations of this course as I try to get a sense for what a reasonable and useful workload will be. There will be a few readings and exercises that you must do, including a several career development plans.

Lecture Attendance

Attendance is *mandatory*.

If you are sick, or have a planned absence, let the professor know right away! If the absence is valid, you will be excused, and your attendance grade will not be impacted.

Assignments

Assignments will focus on your professional speaking and communication.
