

**Spring 2026 Module 4  
STRATEGIC WRITING  
MBA 60400 | MSA 60400**

*The Eugene D. Fanning Center for Business Communication  
Mendoza College of Business  
University of Notre Dame*

**CLASS MEETING DATES AND TIMES**

Tuesday/Thursday, 1:00 PM-2:50 PM

Stayer 210

<http://canvas.nd.edu>

**INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION**

Amanda G. McKendree, Ph.D.

Teaching Professor of Management & Organization

Arthur F. & Mary J. O'Neil Director

233 Mendoza College of Business

Office Hours: Monday (10:00 AM-Noon), Thursday (11:00 AM-Noon), and by appointment (best arranged by email)

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**COURSE LEARNING GOALS**

- Describe the importance of effective communication and its impact in business and society.
- Explain how strategic writing and the management messages it conveys results from a process that begins with critical thinking.
- Strengthen students' writing skills, including language use, style, tone, organization, grammar, and punctuation.
- Integrate communication skills with an understanding of theory and strategy.
- Evaluate the criteria used to make decisions about document preparation, including format, layout, and design.
- Evaluate and apply ethical considerations in strategic writing.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Textbooks**

Alred, G.J., Brusaw, C.T., & Oliu, W.E. (2017). *The Business Writer's Companion* (8th Ed.). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. ISBN-13: 978-0-319-04476-3

O'Rourke, J.S. (2013/2023). *Management Communication: A Case-Analysis Approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. ISBN-13: 978-0-13-267140-8 (Select chapters posted on Canvas)

Additional case studies, reports, and white papers posted on Canvas.

## **Assignments**

This is a performance course designed to diagnose your current writing abilities, to provide you with a clear sense of writing standards in the North American marketplace, and to assist you in improving your skills of written expression. To achieve the student learning objectives, you will read (and we will discuss) three kinds of texts: textbook chapters about managerial communication processes, technical chapters on the nuts and bolts of managerial writing (which should also serve as a useful resource for you for the future), and case studies about communication problems faced by actual managers.

In addition, you will gain practice with managerial writing through a variety of in-class exercises. Indeed, an important part of the learning process involves your willingness to discuss your writing as well as your reaction to and understanding of the managerial problems presented as writing opportunities during classroom discussion of the case studies. As such, your participation in discussion and in-class activities will be assessed. (For more on this, please read the “Attendance” and “Classroom Decorum” section in the Policies section of the syllabus.)

Outside of class, you will also produce written responses to the communication challenges presented in the cases we will be discussing. (For more on these assignments, please read pages 7-9 of the syllabus and refer to our course Canvas site.) Finally, to achieve the goal of identifying and articulating principles of good writing (beyond simply applying them), you will be quizzed on the more technical aspects of our readings.

**Assignment #1: Internal Strategy Memo (15%)**

**Assignment #2: Bad News Writing (15%)**

**Assignment #3: Thought Leadership Article with Images (15%)**

**Assignment #4: Collaborative White Paper (25%)**

**Mid-Mod Quiz: Part I (on readings up to date of the quiz); Part II (letter) (15%)**

**Classroom Discussion & Participation (15%)**

## **Writing Center Resources**

If you have any concerns about your writing skills, bring those concerns to the professor’s attention early in the course. In addition, please check out the ND Writing Center, which has two locations: Coleman-Morse and the Hesburgh Library (<http://www.nd.edu/~writing/>). The center’s hours are flexible and the tutors can provide you with valuable assistance. However, you usually need to schedule an appointment. Please visit the website or call 574.631.5390 to schedule an appointment.

International students have a special opportunity to use the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Program in the Center for the Study of Languages and Cultures (CSLC) located in 334 Bond Hall. Students can attend courses, workshops, and tutoring appointments that suit their needs. More information can be found at [www.cslc.nd.edu/eap](http://www.cslc.nd.edu/eap).

## **GRADING**

Grades are important, of course, for all degree-seeking students. Grades are somewhat less important, however, than learning outcomes. Your careful attention to classroom discussion

and written assignments is of considerably greater importance than whether you earned an A, an A-, or, perhaps, a B+ in a 2.0 credit-hour course. We are sensitive to your interest in doing well and will do all that we can to help you.

### **Minimum Standards**

The following minimum standards for student work align with what would be expected of employees in an actual business setting. Texts should be:

- **Clean.** Appearance and format should count toward the grade. The proper use of headings, white space, margins, and other visual devices all contribute to readability and accessibility of information. Handling them skillfully is extremely important.
- **Error-free.** Simple mechanical and grammatical accuracy is absolutely necessary. Nothing destroys an author's credibility faster than spelling or grammatical errors or typos.
- **Audience-appropriate.** Readability, a style and tone chosen for clarity of expression and suitable to the target audience, should also play a significant role in determining the grade on an assignment.
- **Purposeful and well supported.** Whether you set out to explain, analyze, or persuade, your documents should have a clear purpose that is supported by appropriate facts and details. Research should be properly documented in the formal report.

### **Quality**

When your instructor assesses the quality of your work beyond these minimum standards with a letter grade, it might be helpful to consider how a letter grade would translate to an actual quality evaluation – and consequences – in the workplace:

- **A:** An employer would be impressed with the professionalism and clear understanding of purpose, audience, content, expression, organization, style, and mechanics. This document would make your boss proud and you could deliver it on her/his behalf.
- **A-:** An employer would be pleased with aspects of the professionalism and understanding of purpose, audience, content, expression, organization, style, and mechanics; however, this document needs improvements in a few of these aspects of clear writing to be truly polished. Your boss would ask you to pay attention to – and to address – certain details before submitting.
- **B+/B:** The document is geared toward an audience and contains some good points. However, it is not well organized, its content could be more specific, there are stylistic problems, and/or the logic is faulty. In other words, it needs some important substantive revisions. Your boss would not want this to be sent out without restructuring and cleaning up the document.
- **B- or lower:** There is a deficiency in content, arrangement, concept of audience, mechanics, and style (or an assignment is late without valid reason). In other words, this work might embarrass your boss and may make him or her question your competence. The employer has to correct the work and send it back to you for revision, and then factor these new delays into the schedule.

If you have a concern about a grade you received on an assignment, I generally ask you to observe the 24/7 rule: That is, please wait 24 hours after receiving an assignment back to give yourself time to read and reflect on my written comments, and to set up a time to meet with me to discuss your concerns (this protects your privacy). However, do be sure to meet with me within 7 days after that. I generally do not reopen discussion of assignment grades beyond one week after returning the graded assignment to the class.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

This course adheres to the following policies for communication courses in the Fanning Center for Business Communication in the Department of Management and Organization. Please seek help as soon and as often as you need. Do not wait until it is too late for us to help you. We are here to assist you with the task of learning and improving your writing.

### ***Attendance***

Attendance is mandatory for each class period, and you must arrive on time. Your professor will take roll at the beginning of each session. I generally do not get into the habit of adjudicating “excused” and “unexcused” absences for graduate students. If you know you will not be in class, you must let me know about it ahead of time, and you must be proactive to make up what you missed.

### ***Class Participation***

Your physical presence in class forms the basis for your participation grade: it is “necessary but not sufficient” for a good participation grade. You must participate fully and actively in our classroom discussions and writing/critique sessions. You cannot earn credit if you are not present, but your participation grade will suffer a worse fate if you fail to acknowledge your responsibility to attend class (i.e., by not contacting me ahead of time).

### ***Classroom Decorum***

Just as in the workplace, respect for your instructor and fellow classmates is important in the classroom. Please do not use your laptops in class, text message, listen to music or use handheld devices in any manner. Such actions are distractions to both your classmates and instructor and will diminish your learning experience and will ultimately result in a low participation grade. **One exception will be the use of laptops during the writing exercise portion of the class only.** I will cue you to open and close your laptops during those moments if you choose to use one.

### ***Assignment Due Dates***

You must complete four assignments and submit them to your instructor for review and grading on the dates listed in the syllabus.

### ***Deadlines***

There are no automatic extensions, make-ups, or incompletes. You will be graded down for failing to meet deadlines. If you believe you cannot meet your responsibilities in the course, contact your instructor well in advance of deadlines. Advance contact with me and

documentation (in some cases) will be required for me to make any exceptions. Also, technology breaks, servers go down, transfers time out, files become corrupt, etc. These are not considered emergencies – they are risks embedded in the normal production process. You bear these risks, and just as in the workplace, a problem with technology is generally no excuse for late work. So please be proactive and protect yourself by managing your time well and by backing up your work.

### ***Last Drop Date***

Your last opportunity to drop MBA-60400|MSA-60400 will expire at the close of business on **Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026**. After that date, you will no longer be able to voluntarily disenroll from the course.

### ***Health and Safety Protocols***

In this class, as elsewhere on campus, students must comply with all University health and safety protocols. We are part of a community of learning in which compassionate care for one another is part of our spiritual and social charter. Consequently, compliance with these protocols is an expectation for everyone enrolled in this course. If a student refuses to comply with the University's health and safety protocols, the student must leave the classroom and will earn an unexcused absence for the class period and any associated assignments/assessments for the day. Persistent deviation from expected health and safety guidelines may be considered a violation of the University's "[Standards of Conduct](#)," as articulated in [du Lac: A Guide for Student Life](#), and will be referred accordingly.

### ***Grading Philosophy***

Your grade for any particular assignment in this course is a reflection of your professor's judgment of the quality of your work. We can grade only on the basis of what you give us, not on what you had sincerely intended to do. Submit your work on time, follow the assignment directions, do your own work and you'll have little trouble achieving the learning objectives for the course.

Your instructor is seeking to assess your abilities as measured against the standards of the marketplace. Those standards have been developed over a period of more than 30 years, dealing with business, government, industry, the press and the public. We are asking you to do what your employers will ask of you: prompt, competent, quality work. Your grade in this course will be based on your performance as evaluated by your professor. Please be aware, however, that the University of Notre Dame Grading Guidelines call for a grade point average between 3.2 and 3.6 for each graduate section. As a result, this course will be challenging and your instructor will work hard to discriminate among subpar, good, and truly superior work.

Once a grade has been assigned and recorded, it cannot and will not be changed unless evidence is provided that your professor has made an error. A difference of opinion between you and your professor about the quality of your work is not evidence of error.

### ***The Notre Dame MBA Honor Code***

The *Mendoza College of Business Graduate Academic Code of Honor* applies to this course. Please read it and be familiar with its contents to understand the standards to which you are being held. Two points will be highlighted here.

**Exams:** Students shall not give or receive aid on exams – whether paper or online. This includes, but is not limited to, viewing the exams of others, sharing answers with others, texting, calling, e-mailing, surfing the Internet, and using books or notes while taking the exam.

**Writing:** Considering that much of the educational process in Mendoza College of Business involves group discussion and collaborative activities, neither the College nor the Fanning Center for Business Communication wish to hinder the learning that can and often does take place in that environment. Fairness, however, requires that certain limits be observed in the actual production of assignments.

In the communication curriculum (including Strategic Writing), all writing and speaking tasks are to be accomplished by each student working independently, unless you are specifically advised to work in collaboration on a particular assignment. No student should copy another student's work or represent work done by someone else as if it were his or her own. Evidence of plagiarism is cause for serious disciplinary action by the College. *Please, do your own work.*

### ***AI Policy***

Learning to use AI is an emerging skill that we will explore during our course. Be thoughtful about when this tool is useful for our Strategic Writing assignments and in-class exercises. Please include a paragraph at the end of any assignment that uses AI explaining what you used the AI for and what prompts you used to obtain the results. You may also include a direct link to the relevant chat(s) or conversation(s). The link should clearly show how the tool was used to support your work (e.g., brainstorming, drafting, revising). Failure to do so violates our academic code of honor policies (*statement adapted from the University of Pennsylvania*).

### ***Incompletes***

As a rule, we just do not award incompletes. In unusual cases, though, such as hospitalization or genuine emergency, an incomplete "I" grade will be assigned. The student must complete all class assignments during the following semester or the Registrar will assign a grade of "F" unless an extension is approved by both the instructor and the Dean, and we notify the Registrar.

### ***Appeals***

Your first course of appeal for any grade, assignment requirement, due date or other course-related decision is your instructor. If you either do not understand or cannot accept your instructor's decision, you may appeal in writing to the course director. Subsequent appeals may be directed to the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Programs and, from there, to the Dean of the College. Keep in mind that most administrators will be reluctant to overrule routine, course-related decisions of their faculty.

## **THE ETHICS OF MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION**

Language, as you know, has great power. It can convey impressions, communicate knowledge and information. It can transmit feelings and emotion, as well. Language, depending on how it is used, can inspire, enrage, inform, persuade, entertain, assure, or offend.

Business writers, as well as those who speak on public occasions, occupy a special position of power. Their words can influence others, urging them to action, or restraining them from acting. Their words can be a source of inspiration and motivation to others. Because of this, writers and speakers must choose their topics, organizational patterns, evidence, and words with great care.

Three basic principles guide our discussion of ethics in this course. First, we contend that all parties in the communication process have ethical responsibilities. Second, ethical writers, readers, speakers, and listeners possess attitudes and standards that pervade their character and guide their actions before, during, and after their speaking and writing. Third, management communication is not value-neutral. What you say, what you write, and how you choose to speak and write will have consequences for your audience. Your obligation is to speak and write for the betterment and benefit of your audience. To do otherwise is a serious ethical lapse for a management communicator.

Public communication is held to a higher standard of responsibility than private communication. To speak or write freely and privately among friends with no expectation that your words will become public is one thing. To speak in public or to write for publication with the expectation that your words will receive widespread attention is quite another. Please understand that public communication is a serious matter, particularly if you occupy a position of responsibility. And please know that if words have the power to injure or harm others, they can inflict harm on the sender, as well.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### ***Assignment #1: Internal Strategy Memo***

For the internal strategy memo assignment, you will analyze Case Study 17-01 (A), *Apple Inc.: European Commission Fines for Tax Evasion*. You are an Apple, Inc. senior manager who has been asked to provide advice to Mr. Tim Cook regarding the issues he and his company are facing. You must prepare a strategy memo addressed to Tim Cook, Chairman and CEO, Apple, Inc., that summarizes the details of the case, rank orders the critical issues, discusses their implications (what they mean and why they matter), offers specific recommendations for action (assigning ownership and suspense dates for each), and shows how to communicate the solution to all who are affected by the recommendations.

Your strategy memo should contain the following elements (See Sample Strategy Memo):

- A summary paragraph disclosing the key recommendations offered in your analysis of the issues in the case.
- A background section providing details essential to a reader's understanding of what happened, including the basic facts of the case.

- A discussion section addressing the implications of the facts and assessing both critical issues and stakeholder interests. This should be the largest section of your memorandum.
- A recommendations section listing actions recommended in response to the case and specific, by-name or by-department ownership of those actions. Suspense dates for completion of the actions may be included, as well.

This assignment is due on **Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>**.

***Assignment #2: Bad News Writing***

You will be supplied the facts of the situation and the suggested solution to the problem. Your job is to convey this information to the appropriate audience. The correspondence should be sensitive to their position, while attempting to meet your goal. It should be clearly organized and expressed, appropriate in tone, and in proper format. This assignment is due on **Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup>**.

***Assignment #3: Thought Leadership Article with Images***

For this assignment, you will be contributing thought leadership to the Notre Dame Deloitte Center for Ethical Leadership. Your intellectual challenge is to inform a business practitioner audience on ethical leadership and its implications for business in practice. Your contribution should bring the best of academic research into informing and inspiring business in practice. Additional background information on the Notre Dame Deloitte Center is available at <https://ethicalleadership.nd.edu/about/>. This assignment is due on **Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>**.

***Assignment #4: Collaborative White Paper***

You will collaborate with one other person from this section of Strategic Writing to produce a document that identifies an emerging issue, examines a current strategy, or forecasts future trends in business communication. This assignment is due on **Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup>**.

You may select one other person in this section with whom to work on this assignment. If you think there is enough work in your topic selection for three people, please give your instructor a one-page (or single screen) outline of your ideas and explain why you think it will take three people to get it done. We're open to any reasonable argument. No groups of one, however, and no groups of four.

*Paper Format, Length, and Appearance*

This is a formal, collaborative document. Your paper should be no less than 5 pages and no more than 7 pages in length, single-spaced within paragraphs and double-spaced between paragraphs. If you need an exception to this general guideline, please speak with your instructor. Each paper should have:

- A cover sheet with your paper title, author names, course and section numbers;
- A table of contents with page reference numbers;
- An executive summary;
- Page numbers;

- One-inch margins throughout;
- Proper endnote documentation of all paper-based, telephone or online research;
- A single staple affixed to the upper left-hand corner of the paper.

### *Topic Selection*

Now is the time to begin thinking about your writing partner and your topic selection. The goal is for you to investigate and learn about a subject that will be useful and productive for you, both personally and professionally. Here is a brief list of topics that might prove interesting and worthwhile, but other innovative suggestions are welcome. Think about it, talk it over with your teammate, and see your instructor if you would like to use a different topic.

- Artificial Intelligence in Business Communication
- Internet of Things (IoT) and Business Communication
- Business Communication in a Hybrid and Globally Connected Workplace
- Augmented and Virtual Reality in Business Communication
- The Future of Health Technology Communication
- The Future of FinTech Communication
- Social Movements, Workplace Accountability, and Business Communication

### *Collaborative Proposal*

You will submit a Collaborative Proposal on **Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>** that includes a brief discussion of your topic, an outline of key ideas, a work plan/timeline for completing the assignment, and a preliminary bibliography.

**Spring 2026 Module 4**  
**STRATEGIC WRITING**  
**MBA 60400 | MSA 60400**

*Initial* outline of topics, readings, and due dates for your own planning purposes. Specific readings are subject to change. Additional details about readings, assignments, and daily in-class activities will be posted on Canvas (<https://canvas.nd.edu>).

<b>Class Session Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup></b>	The Significance of Strategic Writing in an AI Era	O'Rourke, Chapter 1: "Management Communication in Transition"  Case 7-1: Cerner Corporation: A Stinging Office Memo Boomerangs	For next class: Practice writing an internal memo (addressed to Neal Patterson, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer) and a letter (addressed to all Cerner Corporation employees).  Assigned: Writing Assignment #1: Strategy Memo
<b>Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup></b>	The Basics of Correspondence: Memos and Letters	Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu, Chapter 1: "The Writing Process"  Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu, Chapter 3: "Correspondence," pp. 69-107  "Sample Business Letter" (on Canvas)  "Sample Strategy Memo" (on Canvas)	Assigned: Writing Assignment #2  Assigned: Writing Assignment #3  Assigned: Writing Assignment #4
<b>Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup></b>	Compact, Informal, and Organized Writing	Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu, Chapter 10: "Style and Clarity"  Appendix E: "Documentation: Acknowledging the Sources of Your Research"	<b>DUE: Writing Assignment #1: Strategy Memo</b> <i>(Submit on Canvas)</i>

<b>Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Guest Lecture: Brett Beasley, Ph.D., Communication and Ethics</b>	Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu on Ethics (see pp. 12- 14)	
<b>Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup></b>	Audience Analysis	O'Rourke, Chapter 5: "Writing"  Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu on Audience (see pp. 3- 4)  Spartan Industries, Inc. (Distributed in class)  Other: Time in class to collaborate on Writing Assignment #4	Assigned: Part II (Letter for Mid-mod Quiz)
<b>Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	Persuasive & Bad News Writing	O'Rourke, Chapter 6: "Persuasion"  Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu on Persuasion (see pp. 29-30)	<b>DUE: Collaborative Proposal for Writing Assignment #4</b> (Submit on Canvas)
<b>Tuesday, April 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Quiz and Collaboration Session</b>		Status Update for Writing Assignment #3 (Brief email to Prof. McKendree)
<b>Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Designing Impactful Communication	Select readings and resources posted on Canvas	
<b>Tuesday, April 14<sup>th</sup></b>	Inclusive Language	Select readings posted on Canvas	<b>DUE: Writing Assignment #2: Bad-News Correspondence</b> (Submit on Canvas)
<b>Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup></b>	Communication and Strategy	O'Rourke, Chapter 2: "Communication and Strategy"  O'Rourke, Case 2-1: "Starbucks"	

		Corporation: Can Customers Breastfeed in a Coffee Shop?”  Appendix A: “Analyzing a Case Study”	
<b>Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup></b>	Artificial Intelligence in Strategic Writing	O’Rourke, Chapter 7: “Technology”  Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu, Chapter 2: “Workplace Technology”  “AI is Both the Medium and the Message” (On Canvas)  Select ChatGPT readings posted on Canvas	
<b>Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	Conflict Communication	O’Rourke, Chapter 11: “Managing Conflict”	<b>DUE: Writing Assignment #3: Thought Leadership Article</b> <i>(Submit on Canvas)</i>
<b>Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup></b>	Crisis Communication	O’Rourke, Chapter 13, “Dealing with the News Media,” pp. 336-354  Appendix F: “Media Relations for Business Professionals,” pp. 399-404	

**Assignment #4 files for the course (collaborative white paper; peer feedback form) are due by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup>.** Please submit electronic files using the “Assignments” feature on Canvas.

**Please complete Course Instructor Feedback (CIFs) online before the survey closes.**