

CBA Written Communication References

This document contains ideas for content to cover in CBA courses for student learning objectives (SLOs) in written communication based on the College's assessment rubric. It addresses the major dimensions of the rubric: organization, content, style, proofreading, format, citations, and plagiarism.

The ideas here are drawn from educational services such as Coursera, Khan Academy, and edX, which offer online courses and certificates for various specializations. Coursera offers each course approximately once a month. Some edX courses provide a certification for a fee, and others can even be used to earn course credit. Khan Academy lessons are usually free and more informal.

Some components of these courses are relevant for the criteria used in the CBA assessment rubrics. Miscellaneous online resources and/or videos are also provided that discuss the more specific criteria.

It should be noted that not all criteria may be covered by the resources listed here. This document may serve as a starting point for developing instructional content based on what other educational services tend to offer.

Organization

1. <https://chipcast.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=d2d08b42-fd3e-473f-810a-a85e0142da65>

A video lecture created by CMU faculty for the **OABC** framework, which applies to presentations and written communication projects. The steps as they apply to writing are:

- Have a logical **opening** that grabs the reader's attention and provides context for the topic of the paper.
- Present the **agenda**, which gives a preview of what the paper will cover (when in doubt, present the coverage by sections of the paper).
- The **body** of the paper is where the topic is laid out in great detail, with data and research; if more than one issue is covered, the body should be logically organized to flow smoothly from one topic to the next.
- The **conclusion** should briefly reiterate what has been covered in the body of the paper. In the conclusion, the main goals and findings of the paper are summarized, and recommendations can be made based on the findings presented. It is also a place to discuss any obstacles that the writer ran into, or any issues found in the field to which the topic belongs.

2. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/transitions/>

The University of North Carolina's Writing Center webpage provides a table that classifies transition words by purpose (e.g., sequence, time, cause and effect). It also explains how one can recognize that one's paper suffers from a lack of transitions. This page can be a great resource for making students aware of the need for transitions in their written projects.

3. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/2/2/60/>

Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides advice for writing the Conclusion section of a paper. This section should achieve three things:

- a. Restate the main idea of the essay or thesis statement
- b. Summarize the major subtopics of the essay
- c. Leave the reader with an interesting final impression

4. <https://classroom.synonym.com/stay-topic-writing-essay-30818.html>

This website gives advice on how to stay on topic in the body of the paper. Here are some of the major tips from the site:

- Write out your main **topic sentences**.
- As you write the section for each major topic, keep the topic sentence somewhere at the top of the page or nearby so you can refer to it; this will help to keep the content of the section **relevant** to the main point.
- For the main idea in each paragraph, ask yourself, "**How do I know this is true?**" The answer to this question should help to organize your argument for the idea. If you answer this question with an opinion, this can help to identify any gaps in your arguments that need more factual information to support the main idea.

Content

1. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/evidence/>
The University of North Carolina's Writing Center website teaches students how to choose evidence to support one's arguments. Types of evidence are described (e.g., surveys, interviews, print/electronic sources), as well as ways of incorporating it into the paper. Once supporting evidence is chosen, the student should make sure that this evidence is relevant, logical, and meaningful. Some questions to ask oneself:
 - Why is this evidence interesting? Why should anyone care?
 - What does this information *imply* about the argument I'm making or about the state of affairs?
 - How is this idea related to my main point? What is the connection?
 - Can I give an example to illustrate this point?
2. <http://essayheaven.blogspot.com/2009/11/using-evidence-to-support-argument.html>
Psychologist Charles Fernyhough gives 9 tips for ensuring that the evidence given in the student paper is strong, accurate, and well-presented. Students often find great information to incorporate into their paper, but have trouble doing so in a seamless manner that gives the paper flow and makes it well-rounded. Some example tips are:
 - *Learn to hate quotations*: Students should learn to paraphrase other people's ideas to show that they understand the information. Quotes should be reserved for thoughts that were put in a particularly elegant or powerful way by the author.
 - *Consider evidence to the contrary*: Play devil's advocate and try to counterargue your own evidence. This helps to strengthen your argument and to preemptively address the reader's potential concerns.
3. <https://www.edx.org/course/writing-process-uc-berkeleyx-buswri1x>
A 4-week edX course from the University of California-Berkeley that teaches how to:
 - Apply organization and logic to business writing
 - Get one's point across early
 - Write appropriately for the intended audience
 - Edit and revise one's own work
 - Write with confidence

Style

1. <https://www.coursera.org/learn/business-writing>
This Coursera introductory lesson to business writing from the University of California-Irvine includes grammar and sentence structure, types of business documents, as well as the content of the document itself. Section 1 covers the audience of the paper, the message itself, and word choice, which address the appropriate style for intended audience and purpose criterion from the CBA written communication assessment rubric.
2. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/608/01/>
The landing page for *Appropriate Language* in Purdue OWL outlines five aspects to consider in a professional paper: level of formality, in-group jargon, slang and idioms, deceitful language or euphemisms, and biased language. Each of these is in turn addressed on a separate page. This page addresses the criteria of using an appropriate tone, appropriate language for the intended audience, and avoiding clichés or slang.
3. <https://writingcommons.org/open-text/genres/academic-writing/use-academic-language/617-using-first-person-in-an-academic-essay-when-is-it-okay>
Short article on the use of “I” and other self-referring pronouns in academic writing. Students have been taught since high school to avoid these pronouns. However, college writing calls for use of “I” and “we” in some situations. The article gives examples of appropriate situations (for instance, it is better to say “I did...” than to use passive voice).
4. <https://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/1a.html>
The University of Wollongong (Australia) provides a website called *Uni Learning* that focuses on academic writing, reading, notetaking, and critical thinking. The link above is the introductory page for academic writing in particular, from which one can navigate to brief text lessons for appropriate language use, academic conventions, passive voice, use of evidence, references, etc. These lessons usually have examples of proper usage and things to avoid.

Proofreading

1. <https://www.edx.org/course/academic-and-business-writing>
This 6-week edX course from the University of California-Berkeley in partnership with the U.S. Department of State focuses on academic and business writing. The lessons include teaching skills for proofreading, self-editing and revisions, tone, and choice of vocabulary.
2. <https://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/get-assistance/writing/grammar-style/improving-your-sentence-structure>
This page describes types of sentences and provides examples, lists common problems with sentences (e.g., sentence fragments, run-ons, choppy sentences, and so on) with examples, and suggests for how to fix these problems. This resource is particularly useful for regulating the length and content of one's sentences.
3. <https://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/get-assistance/writing/grammar-style/improving-your-punctuation>
This page focuses on use of punctuation marks. For each punctuation mark, several purposes are listed with examples of correct usage (and for some, also examples of what *not* to do). The last section briefly covers dashes, use of parentheses, square brackets, and quotation marks. This can be especially helpful for those students whose voice is lost in the writing due to grammatical mistakes.
4. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar?t=practice>
Khan Academy is another online learning platform like Coursera or edX. These free courses on grammar and punctuation provide easy-to-use and accessible tools for learning the proper usage of punctuation points. Each lesson in the module consists of a learning component, a practice component, and there is a quiz for the whole module.

Format

1. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides succinct yet comprehensive coverage of the major academic writing formats: APA, MLA, AMA, and Chicago style. The link above is a landing page with links to each format. Covered aspects include proper formatting of cover pages, in-text citations and references, headings and subheadings, appearance of tables and figures, and examples of each. This resource is updated regularly to keep up with the latest versions of each format as issued in the manuals.

2. <http://digitalwriting101.net/content/how-to-format-papers-in-standard-academic-format-using-microsoft-word/>

Proper page and paragraph formatting is covered here for APA and MLA formats, with screenshots of settings in Microsoft Word. The last section also covers how to create blockquotes, which are used when a quote is longer than four lines.

Citations

1. <https://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/scholarly-vs-popular-sources>

Students often do not differentiate between popular and scholarly sources, and early academic writing particularly suffers from use of opinion pieces and press articles as sources of evidence. Yale University's Center for Teaching and Learning explains the difference between scholarly and popular sources and describes several kinds of scholarly sources (books, articles in peer-reviewed journals, etc.).

2. <https://search.proquest.com/advanced?accountid=10181>

CMU students have access to 31 databases on ProQuest through the library, but are often unaware of this great resource. The link above is the landing page for searching sources by title, author name(s), keywords, etc., using Boolean terms AND, OR, and NOT. To exclude popular sources from search results, students can check the "Peer reviewed" box. Searches can be narrowed by selecting only relevant databases. Students are automatically logged in to ProQuest when using CMU Wi-Fi and can use ProQuest off campus by clicking the link above and using their global ID to log in.

Findings can be filtered by:

- **Source type** (e.g., scholarly journals, dissertations & theses, magazines, books, reports, conference papers, etc.).
- **Publication dates** a). before or after a specific date or year, within a date range, last X days/months/years, if specified before searching; b). by inclusive decades, if filtered after searching.
- **Publication title** (for scholarly articles, choose which journals to include/exclude in search results); this is especially useful when assignment instructions specify which journals should be used for quality references.
- Other criteria as needed (e.g., language, full text available).

Users can request articles by clicking "Find it @ CMU Libraries."

- This will open a page on which students can click "Get this for me" and request a photocopy of the source through ILLiad, an interlibrary loan partner site. Interested users will need to create a login.
- **Tip:** the ILLiad request page sets the "not wanted after" date a month from today's date. If you want your photocopy faster, change this date. Turnaround for requests can be as fast as 2 days for short notice.

Other useful features:

- Students can create a ProQuest account in under 3 minutes, after which they can save documents they find and organize them into folders, as well as save their searches (with applied filters, databases, search terms, and add any notes about the search). This can be particularly beneficial for long-term class projects.

Plagiarism

1. <https://www.cmich.edu/AcademicSenate/secure/Documents/Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20-%20Editorially%20revised%20--2-08-17.pdf>

CMU's Academic Integrity policy can be found in this document. Section B defines plagiarism and lists types of outside information that must be acknowledged by proper citations, footnotes, or other references. It may be useful to include the link to this document in the course syllabus or to summarize the definition of plagiarism and what is included in this category (especially unintentional lack of citations) so students have a clear understanding of their academic responsibilities.

2. <http://en.writecheck.com/ways-to-avoid-plagiarism>

This website lists 6 easy ways of avoiding plagiarism by referencing sources. For example, tip #5 states that writers must cite their own previous works as well to avoid self-plagiarism. Although this usually applies to professional authors who may refer to their prior published works, on rare occasions this may apply to college students as well.

3. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>

Purdue OWL covers ways to properly cite works in the paper and to organize the Works Cited/References section at the end of the paper. Students who plan to pursue a profession after graduation may benefit from purchasing a style manual for the format which their professional field uses most often. Purdue OWL uses information directly from the manuals, but the handbooks are far more comprehensive. For upper-division CBA courses in particular, it may be useful to include the latest format manual information in the syllabus for interested students.