

POLM 5007 B
Writing in a Political Context

I. Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the art and craft of effective political writing. We will examine what separates passable prose from strong, purposeful writing and put those principles into practice through a series of practical, real-world assignments.

The course will focus on writing for different political audiences and purposes, with particular attention to clarity, concision, judgment, structure and persuasion. Students will learn to assess the effectiveness of political writing and adapt their approach to different professional formats, including news releases, briefing notes and speeches.

Because this is a short, intensive course, students should expect to be mindful of political news, arrive prepared, and participate actively. The emphasis, however, is on depth rather than volume. The goal is not simply to complete assignments, but to develop the habits and judgment required to become a stronger political writer.

I look forward to working with all of you and please don't ever hesitate to reach out with any questions!

II. Preclusions: None.

III. Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, you will have demonstrated an understanding of how to write professionally and effectively in a political context, and demonstrated your ability to:

- Write with a clear understanding of audience, purpose and context.
- Write clearly, concisely and effectively.
- Adapt your writing to different political purposes and formats.
- Exercise professional judgment as a political writer.
- Reflect on your professional goals and development.

IV. Texts:

Required

- The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling – 23rd edition
 - McCarten, James, and issuing body Canadian Press. *The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling*. 23rd edition, Fully revised and Updated. Edited by James McCarten. Toronto, Ontario: The Canadian Press, 2022.
 - \$27.00
- The Canadian Press Stylebook – 20th edition
 - Hamilton, Graeme, and issuing body Canadian Press. *The Canadian Press Stylebook : A Guide for Writers and Editors*. 20th edition. Edited by Graeme Hamilton. Toronto: The Canadian Press, 2026.
 - \$42.00
- Quack This Way: David Foster Wallace & Bryan A. Garner Talk Language and Writing
 - Garner, Bryan A., and David Foster Wallace. *Quack This Way : David Foster Wallace & Bryan A. Garner Talk Language and Writing*. Dallas, Texas: Rosepen Books, 2013.
 - \$27.50

These books are available to purchase through the Carleton University's Campus Store and are also available online. The prices listed above reflect the campus store's.

Additionally, these books have been placed on reserve at MacOdrum Library. Please be mindful that you will only be able to borrow them from the library for four-hour periods. You can learn more about course reserves [here](#).

Additional readings will be made available on Brightspace.

V. Course Calendar:

Week 1 – Introduction to writing in a political context

Focus: What makes political writing effective?

To read/listen

- Course outline
- Signed, sealed, delivered: why you should write yourself a letter by Jeni Armstrong in The Hill Times
- [The Axe Files with David Axelrod, Episode 507 — Cody Keenan](#)

Assignments

- Reflection letter assigned

Week 2 –How to be a better writer

Focus: How do you make a draft clearer, tighter and more effective?

To read

- Quack This Way: David Foster Wallace & Bryan A. Garner Talk Language and Writing (it's a quick read!)

Assignments

- Reflection letter due by 11:59 p.m. on Brightspace

Week 3 – Just the facts: News releases and backgrounders

Focus: How do you decide what matters and communicate it clearly to a public audience?

To read

- Writing for print section in The Canadian Press Stylebook (p. 206-213)
- News releases section in The Canadian Press Stylebook (p. 468-470)
- [How to Write a Backgrounder](#) by Allena Tapia
- In favour of simple writing in The Economist
- News release: [Prime Minister Carney announces the largest clean energy investment in North American history](#)
- Backgrounder: [Prime Minister Carney announces the largest clean energy investment in North American history](#)

Assignments

- News release assigned

Week 4 – Policy and politics: Briefing notes

Focus: How do you turn information into advice?

To read

- [Practical Guide To Writing Briefing Notes In The Government Of Canada](#) by Robert Fonberg
- [Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19](#) by the First Nations Health Authority

Assignments

- News release due by 11:59 p.m. on Brightspace
- Briefing note assigned and groups made
- Speech assigned

Week 5: No class (University closed).

Week 6 – Speechwriting

Focus: How do you persuade an audience through voice, argument and story?

To read/listen

- [“Principled and pragmatic: Canada’s path” Prime Minister Carney addresses the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting](#)
- [What Makes a Political Speech a Hit or a Flop? | The Agenda](#)

Assignments

- Briefing note due by 11:59 p.m. on Brightspace
- Speech due Oct. 23 by 11:59 p.m. on Brightspace

VI. Evaluation:

Grading

Reflection letter (15 per cent)

You will write a short letter reflecting on why you have chosen to study political management, what you hope to accomplish during the program and where your studies will take you. The assignment is intended both as a personal reflection and as an introduction to your writing.

News release (20 per cent)

You will prepare a professional news release based on a scenario provided in class. The assignment will assess your ability to identify and prioritize relevant information, write clearly and concisely for a public audience, and follow the conventions of a professional news release.

Briefing note – group assignment (25 per cent)

Working in groups, you will prepare a briefing note based on a scenario provided in class. The assignment will require you to synthesize information, identify key considerations, exercise judgment and produce clear, useful advice.

Speech (25 per cent)

You will write a political speech. The assignment will assess your ability to construct a persuasive argument, write in an appropriate and authentic voice, organize ideas effectively, and write for oral delivery.

Attendance and participation (15 per cent)

You are expected to attend and participate actively in all classes. Because this is a short course, regular attendance and participation are essential to meeting the course learning outcomes. If you're unable to attend a class, please send me an email in advance.

Note

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deadlines

I expect you to meet all assignment deadlines. Failure to submit an assignment by the assigned date and time will result in a grade of zero unless you have received an extension from me before the deadline.

This is not an arbitrary policy. It reflects the working reality of political communications, where even excellent work has little value if it arrives after it is needed.

Style and Submission

Unless otherwise stated, all assignments must be submitted on Brightspace by 11:59 p.m. on the due date and must:

- Adhere to The Canadian Press Stylebook and The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling. These texts should be treated as the primary style references for work submitted in this course.
- Cite sources properly using the Chicago style.
- Have page numbers, be double spaced, and use Times New Roman, 12-point font.

All feedback on assignments will be provided through Brightspace and your grades for each will be released there as well.

Re-using Assignments

Submitting assignments that have been previously submitted for credit in any course is not permitted.