



MGV-268V Articulation and Critical Thinking

Course Description

Imagine yourself as an impressive speaker and a competent writer, if it's not the case already. Think of yourself as an excellent critical thinker as well, adept at analyses and strategies. This course helps you to become that person in the business world. Commit yourself to MGV 268V and you will:

- Think more efficiently and critically
- Write well, at a level expected of an MBA graduate
- Present effectively, in a variety of formats

This class is meant to be practical, and it is. Students can immediately apply what they are learning in the workplace and the classroom. Graduates can use what they learn here throughout their careers.

Let's delve into the three subject areas raised above.

Critical Thinking

MGV 268V concentrates on *how* to think, rather than *what* to think. You'll notice *how* you build arguments, identify biases, and much more. You'll realize how your initial thoughts and feelings can be a hindrance. You'll train these skills by analyzing real-world examples and working through scenarios—you'll be able to spot critical thinking flaws in others and avoid making them yourself.

Writing

Writing skills vary greatly among MBA students. Whatever your skill level at the start of class, six editing techniques will enable you to quickly enhance your business writing. You'll also learn to evaluate C-level leadership writing from top companies in technology, finance, and other fields. What's good about this corporate announcement, supervisor's memo, or e-mail from a manager? What isn't? Your discerning eye will help you shape good business communications of your own.

Presentations

A competent public speaker displays eight basic skills. Students begin MGV 268V with strength in some of these skills, but a need to learn others. For instance, some students speak too quickly (and know it) because they're nervous. That can readily be fixed. You'll acquire all eight skills, with opportunities to develop a commanding presence, incorporate PowerPoint presentations effectively, and learn other more advanced skills.

Course Materials

A downloadable **TEXTPAK** at Study.net and a course pack at Harvard Business School Publishing are individually necessary. ***There is no textbook for this course.***

Note that the **TEXTPAK** consists of chapters from two books: Daniel Kahneman's ***Thinking, Fast and Slow***, and Malcolm Gladwell's ***Blink***. You can purchase these two books instead of the **TEXTPAK** if you're interested in reading more of them.

[Link to purchase the course pack can be found on the course wall.](#)

Optional Materials

While it isn't a class requirement, reading all of Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (mentioned above) would really enhance your critical thinking.

If you're eager for more, the following books are also on point. Most are readily available in paperback: *Predictably Irrational* (Dan Ariely), *The Paradox of Choice* (Barry Schwartz), *Freakonomics* (Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner), *Outliers* and *Blink* (Malcolm Gladwell), and *Everyday Bias* (Howard J. Ross).

[The Purdue Owl](#) is an excellent reference tool on grammar to place on your toolbar. For ESL students, you'll find special material and exercises devoted to verb tenses, the use of articles, and punctuation, which are often problematic.

Course Assessments

This course consists of four (4) graded presentations, four (4) graded writing assignments, a participation grade, and a final writing assignment. The maximum points for the course are 240 and a breakdown of the point allocation across assignments can be found in the table below.

Critical thinking, speaking, and writing figure equally into your grade. Weekly writing and speaking assignments will be graded. These grades are based on speaking and writing skills, as well as the critical thinking applied to the structure/strategy. Finally, your participation grade will reflect, but not be limited to, active participation in class to move discussion and the quality of your participation in your discussion group.

Assignment/Assessment	Points	Points Toward Final Grade
Writing Assignments (4 total)	20/each	80
Presentations (4 total)	20/each	80
Final Writing Assignment	40	40
Participation	40	40
Total Points		240

Assignment and Assessment Information

Writing Assignments (20 points each; 80 total)

In each writing assignment, you will be graded on the quality of your writing. Specifically, how well you incorporate the skills you've learned from the Writing Staircase. Beyond that, each assignment presents a scenario that requires deft and nuance to achieve your goals. Your grade also depends on the critical thinking behind your strategy, as well as your ability to execute it. **Each Writing Assignment is due prior to the start of the associated Live Session the week the assignment is due.**

McGregor's Department Store—20 points

You will write a memo announcing a new employee discount policy. Some employees will benefit, others may be unhappy—they're losing perks. These different points of view each result from reading the same memo. Nuanced tone and phrasing are required. You will be graded on your strategy and how well you

execute it with your writing skills. Details follow.

James McGregor asks you to draft a written one-page notice for all employees about his new policy. (You are often his unofficial ghost writer.) The policy change will surprise everyone, but that's his style. He doesn't consult much. Do it as a memo from him to all employees.

He tells you to e-mail your draft to him tonight; no further discussion is possible with McGregor. You know he's absolutely committed to his three-tiered discount plan. However, he leaves it to you to think through the implementation dates to obtain the best results. He will release the memo right away, but he wants you to insert when it should be implemented and how. He mentions Lee's input (Lee is a minor character in the case) but doesn't indicate approval or disapproval.

There are many positives to be realized, but potential negatives must be minimized. The language has to be very diplomatic. You know McGregor expects a personal, thoughtful, and caring tone in the memo, invoking tradition and team.

McGregor's is a retail operation, with many shifts and part-timers, so all of the company's employees will be reading this at various times, not simultaneously.

Draft the announcement for his signature. You must include the new discount plan on this single-page Word document (choose a reasonable font and point size). Will your announcement be good enough for McGregor's signature?

Each student **MUST also put a brief (under 50 words) separate paragraph atop the McGregor announcement** about your tactics. This is solely for the instructor's information before reading your memo. Explain your announcement strategy: why you mentioned certain things and not others, style of language, and steps you're taking to maximize the good results and minimize negatives.

Naturally, you'll discuss strategies, what to include, etc., in your group, but there should not be specific discussion of how the announcement should be crafted. The writing assignment is to be done on your own, without review by others.

Tech Addiction—20 points

This paper addresses the issue of "tech addiction": people glued to their phones and companies designing apps to keep it that way. Who should bear the responsibility of addressing this? You should present a convincing argument, anticipating the opposing positions' counterarguments. This is written for a higher-level audience, so clear and articulate writing is required.

As the demands to counter the "addiction" to mobile phones and tablets get louder, the industry has been addressing the issue but not satisfying everyone. Let's say that an upcoming symposium will bring together different players to discuss how best to proceed: government officials, academia, industry, and articulate consumers.

People from varied backgrounds have been asked to share their insights. You are one of them. Your insights will be provided at the conference to familiarize attendees with the relevant arguments from different viewpoints.

You have been asked to write a paper (~300 words) addressing who should be responsible for initiating change in this arena... or perhaps you think there should be no change from the current free-market behavior aimed to maximize eyeballs, growth, and profits. Expect other submissions to have opposing viewpoints. Know that in this environment you will be judged inferior if your arguments and facts do not stand up to critical analysis. However, that does not mean you shouldn't use powerful anecdotes, comparisons, and the like.

In Search of a Second Act—20 points

You will assume the role of Steph, the founder of a company that had a successful product. Sales are declining and the board wants to know your plan for the company's next step. You need to be confident and convincing to keep them on board. You will consider the following scenario and the details of the case to draft a report.

Still uncertain about what to say to Rob, Steph enters his office suite, only to learn that Rob rushed to the airport 30 minutes ago. He'd gotten a call that a dear but distant relative was suddenly on her deathbed. The assistant said she had just begun to rearrange Rob's calendar, and apologized for not notifying Steph to cancel their meeting. The assistant said Rob planned to send Steph an e-mail during his flight.

Steph receives the following e-mail several hours later:

"Steph, I apologize for having to leave so suddenly. I'm sure you learned the reason from my assistant. I expect we'll be able to reschedule for a week from now. More from me in a day or two. I'm reminded again that we live just once, and we have to remember that.

"In lieu of today's meeting, please send me a concise report on what you intended to say. I may opt to share this confidentially with select board members. What is your strategy for the future? There's still some patience at the board level, although we all know that cash flow is an ever-increasing problem. Be clear whether you've locked in on a plan you were going to share today, or if you're a step short of that. The vision is more important than trying to project numbers, which can come later."

Length: 150 to 300 words.

Thomas Green—20 points

In another Harvard Business School case, you are a young employee who recently got an impressive promotion. The problem is that you're clashing with your boss. You have different styles—and different opinions on the quality of your performance. The issues have come to a head, and you need to respond to his complaint. You may try to resolve the issues, or just buy time to look for another job. Either way, you need to convince the higher-ups that you can succeed. How much do you defend yourself, and how much are you willing to adjust in the new role? You've read the Thomas Green case in the course pack and discussed it in your group. Your writing assignment has **three components**.

1. First, you must stand in Thomas's shoes for this writing assignment. Decide at the outset on one of only two strategies: either your purpose is to credibly appease and buy time, with some improvements on your part, while you discreetly seek another job (you need the continuing paycheck!); or you want to make a genuine effort to succeed at the company long term, which will obviously include some deft handling of your key relationships. For the learning purposes of the exercise, *you must choose one of these two strategies*. It is not an option to quit outright, threaten legal action, seek a transfer to another department, or pursue other strategies.

Write Thomas Green's response as a Word document, which would be an attachment to a polite line or two in an e-mail response to McDonald (don't bother writing the polite line or two). This is what she's requesting, so you should write your response as she expects. (Remember, it is almost surely intended to go into a personnel file.) You get to decide the appropriate length.

2. Atop your response as Thomas Green, just for the instructor's eyes, **explain your strategy** in 50 words or so. Indicate which strategy you are pursuing—making a sincere effort or merely buying time while you look elsewhere for employment. Explain briefly why you will include certain things and leave out others in your response.

3) Below your response, in up to 100 words, just for the instructor, explain how **ethics** came into play within your decisions and response. After all, there's a question of honesty on your part, self-preservation, gamesmanship (or not), and to what extent managers and their employees may be other than truthful.

Presentations (20 points each; 80 total)

The presentation grades are based largely on how well you incorporate the steps in the Ladder to Great Presentations. Additionally, you should have strong openings and closings. The content of your presentation is also graded: each assignment has a unique structural component and goal.

Contrarian Viewpoint Presentation (Authoritative Talk)—20 points

You will debunk an argument for a commonly held position or belief. The structure of your talk is important. How convincing is your argument, and how effectively do you address potential counterarguments? You may use notes for this presentation. If so, how seamlessly—or not—you incorporate them will affect your grade.

PowerPoint Presentation (PowerPoint Talk With Partner)—20 points

(Three Parts: Slide Deck, Executive Summary, and In-Class Presentation)

With a partner, you will give a PowerPoint presentation on the subject of money. You will be graded on three components:

- Your presentation skills (10 points)
- The quality and effectiveness of your slides (5 points)
- A written executive summary of your presentation (5 points)

Business Development Presentation (Persuasive Speech)—20 points

Your goal is to persuade the audience to purchase or invest in what you're pitching. You will be graded on how effectively you accomplish this. You should distinguish the features and benefits. Most important is an effect "ask", typically at the end of the talk. This call to action should be structured well and delivered convincingly.

Data Visualization Presentation (Data Visualization)—20 points

For the last talk, you will revisit an earlier presentation. This time you'll add visuals. Your grade depends on how these visuals enhance your presentation, and how well you incorporate them into your talk.

A representation of the second or third presentations (i.e., health care or contrarian viewpoint) but with infographics and a visual presentation. For this assignment, please consider the following:

- Refining
- Revising
- Adding other elements to engage audience visually

Final Writing Assignment (40 points)

Your discussion group will critically analyze a current topic. (Your specific topic for this quarter will be provided ahead of Class 9.) You will then individually write an in-depth business communication about a challenging matter, deploying your knowledge, critical analysis, and writing skills. The paper will be approximately 600 words. You will be given a prompt that describes the scenario and goals of the writing task.

Participation (40 points)

Forum Participation: Critical Thinking Fails in the Real World (20 points)

Much of our discussion of critical thinking focuses on the biases and errors that interfere with our analytical decision-making. Starting in Week 4, we identify and discuss real-world examples of these mistakes. We use the forum “Critical Thinking Fails in the Real World.” Each week, specific students are called upon to find and post examples of the various biases and fallacies we learn about in this class.

When it's your turn:

- Provide a link (if applicable) to the article or video discussing or containing the fail.
- Provide a short analysis of the issue, including what the error is and how it could be corrected.

General Participation (20 points)

The majority of the live sessions involve discussions among the class: analyzing case studies, providing feedback on your classmates' presentations, etc. The more you contribute and the more insightful your contributions, the more rewarding these discussions will be. Part of your participation grade is based on the quality of your contributions in this area.

You will be assigned a discussion group of four people for the class. Some weeks your group will meet ahead of the live session to analyze a scenario or case study. You will submit a summary of your group's discussion, via the Assignments Unit, to the instructor for use in the live session discussion. The designated discussions are “Attention Merchants” and “Second Act”. The level of analysis and your contributions to your group are part of your participation grade.

Course Schedule

Please complete the readings prior to beginning the week's asynchronous content for the indicated week. In many weeks, the asynchronous content asks you to answer questions, or post a response on a forum. Please complete these 48 hours prior to the live session.

Week 1 – Introduction to Writing and Critical Thinking

We introduce necessary writing skills for a business leader. Also, critical thinking is introduced. What is it, and why is it important?

Deliverables:

- Have your completed Writing Staircase worksheets with you for the live session.
- Read “The Characters of the Story,” a chapter from Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. The chapter is available in the course pack.

Week 2 – Key Skills for Effective Communication

To establish baseline presentation skills, half the class will give 90-second talks. More writing skills are introduced. We also apply critical thinking to the case study “How Much Is Sweat Equity Worth?”

Deliverables:

- Have your completed Writing Staircase worksheets with you for the live session.
- Be prepared to present your first talk in the live session.
- Submit the first writing assignment (ungraded) prior to the live session.
- Read the brief “How to Quickly Improve a Speaking Skill,” available in the Toolbox via the Readings and Resources page.
- Read the “Sweat Equity” case, available through the library VPN. Be prepared to discuss the case in the live session.

Week 3 – Communicating With Multiple Points of View

Yahoo’s former CEO Marissa Mayer famously introduced a controversial policy change several years ago that disallowed working remotely for all employees. Similarly, in the classic case “McGregor Ltd. Department Store,” its CEO causes disruption by changing the employee discount plan. The class critically analyzes the options in McGregor with an emphasis on communicating with multiple points of view, and writes a tactful announcement.

Deliverables:

- Remaining students present 90-second baseline talks.
- Read the four real-world business memos provided in this week’s async content.
- Read the “McGregor’s LTD Department Store” HBS Case, available in the course pack. Be prepared to discuss the case in the live session.
- Group Discussion Summary: McGregor’s LTD.
- Submit the McGregor writing assignment prior to the live session.

Week 4 – Critical Thinking Errors

Everyone gives a second talk, one that begins with a personal anecdote to pull in the audience. The topic is a health care policy or medical practice, that in your eyes warrants change. We also delve into common biases and logical fallacies.

Deliverables:

- Be prepared to present your Health Care talk in the live session.
- Read the chapter “Anchors” from *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (available in the course pack).
- Complete the reading on logical fallacies provided in this week’s async content.

Week 5 – Ethics

Everyone assumes an authoritative style in the third talk. Using data wisely, you expose a misguided common viewpoint or policy (your choice) that has a logical fallacy or misleading bias within. Afterward, we analyze a real-world ethical dilemma of a type that frontline managers often face.

Deliverables:

- Be prepared to present your Contrarian Viewpoint talk in the live session.
- Read the Metal Rules in this week’s async content.

- Read Ethical Puzzler 1, available in the Toolbox.

Week 6 – **Attention Merchants**

We apply our critical thinking skills to our current national debate about privacy concerns and monetizing customer data. Also, we look at Malcolm Gladwell's model of "thin slicing," and how it applies critical decision-making when veteran expertise is in play.

Deliverables:

- Read "The Theory of Thin Slices," a chapter from *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell, which can be found in the course pack.
- Read "Inside H-P's Missed Chance to Avoid a Disastrous Deal," available in the Toolbox via the Readings and Resources page.
- Group Discussion Summary: Attention Merchants.

Week 7 – **Creating and Delivering Effective Presentations**

Student pairs give engaging presentations of several minutes, using a minimum of six PowerPoint slides. The teams of two choose topics that entertain and inform under the umbrella subject of "money."

Deliverables:

- Be prepared to present your Money PowerPoint presentation in the live session.
- Submit the Tech Addiction writing assignment prior to the live session.

Week 8 – **Critical Thinking and Persuasive Writing in the Face of Change**

Students individually respond to a fast-moving challenge in a Harvard single-player simulation called "Judgment in a Crisis." The company, Matterhorn Health, has high expectations for its new product, a blood glucose monitor, but the launch goes awry. The class also analyzes the traditional business case "In Search of a Second Act."

Deliverables:

- Submit the Second Act writing assignment prior to the live session.
- Complete the simulation "Judgment in a Crisis" 48 hours prior to the live session.
- Read "**In Search of a Second Act**," an HBSP case (accessible via the library VPN), and the **Leapfrog** (in the Toolbox Readings and Resources page).
- Group Discussion Summary: Second Act.

Week 9 – **Business Development Presentations**

This week's presentation calls for a business development or sales presentation closing with a strong "ask" of listeners. We also study a hypothetical scenario, in which we struggle with a conscientious CEO who needs to cut off a supplier when that company might not survive.

Deliverables:

- Be prepared to present your Business Development talk in the live session.
- Read Ethical Puzzler 2, available in the Toolbox.

Week 10 – **Data Visualization Presentations**

Students revisit talks from earlier in the quarter. You each present the material again, in a different format, incorporating visuals. Also, the class tackles “Thomas Green: Power and Office Politics.” Green, a talented but brash young renegade, must write a diplomatic self-assessment to his superiors to save his job.

Deliverables:

- Be prepared to present your Data Visualization talk in the live session.
- Read Thomas Green: Power, Office Politics, and a Career in Crisis, a case in the course pack.
- Group Discussion Summary: Thomas Green.
- Submit the Thomas Green writing assignment prior to the live session.

Week 11 – Final Writing Assignment

Final Writing Assignment due.

Attendance Policy

This is an interactive class; much of the important learning occurs in the live session. Notify the Instructor) when unable to attend a class. Missing more than one class would be significant and a matter for discussion.

Program Mission

The mission of the UC Davis Graduate School of Management is to be a global leader in management research and education. As part of the world’s premier public university system, we pursue significance, excellence and scholarly rigor in our research, teaching and service to the people of California. We emphasize curiosity, creativity and high standards in the generation and transmission of theoretical and practical knowledge relevant for business.

Honor Code and Academic Integrity

Academic integrity exists when students and faculty seek knowledge honestly, fairly, with mutual respect and trust, and accept responsibility for their actions and the consequences of those actions. Without academic integrity, there can be no trust or reliance on the effectiveness, accuracy, or value of a University’s teaching, learning, research, or public service activities. It is therefore key that we understand what academic integrity is, why it is important, and how to help it flourish on college campuses.

1. It is expected that all class members will treat each other with respect and dignity.
2. It is not acceptable behavior to insult, harass, or demean any member of the class.
3. Professional business behavior should be modeled in the classroom, including the use of appropriate language, jokes, or stories.

In general, students should adhere to the [UC Davis Principles of Community](#), copied below.

The University of California, Davis, is first and foremost an institution of learning and teaching, committed to serving the needs of society. Our campus community reflects and is a part of a society comprising all races, creeds and social circumstances. The successful conduct of the university’s affairs requires that every member of the university community acknowledge and practice the following basic principles:

We affirm the inherent dignity in all of us, and we strive to maintain a climate of justice marked by respect for each other. We acknowledge that our society carries within it historical and deep-rooted misunderstandings and biases, and therefore we will endeavor to foster mutual understanding among the many parts of our whole.

We affirm the right of freedom of expression within our community and affirm our commitment to the highest standards of civility and decency towards all. We recognize the right of every individual to think and speak as dictated by personal belief, to express any idea, and to disagree with or counter another's point of view, limited only by university regulations governing time, place and manner. We promote open expression of our individuality and our diversity within the bounds of courtesy, sensitivity and respect.

We confront and reject all manifestations of discrimination, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, status within or outside the university, or any of the other differences among people which have been excuses for misunderstanding, dissension or hatred. We recognize and cherish the richness contributed to our lives by our diversity. We take pride in our various achievements, and we celebrate our differences.

We recognize that each of us has an obligation to the community of which we have chosen to be a part. We will strive to build a true community of spirit and purpose based on mutual respect and caring.

For more information, please review the Academic Conduct Booklet:

https://gsm.ucdavis.edu/sites/default/files/2020-10/code_of_conduct_booklet_2020.pdf