

Communication and Presentation Skills for Business Economists and Analysts: Using Federal Economic Data (ECON 8001)

Spring 2025
University of Missouri

Dr. Shana M. McDermott
Zoom Office Hours: By appointment
Email: smmvt@missouri.edu

(Note: All times used in this syllabus are US Central Time (CST). Daylight saving time in 2024 ends at 2:00am on Sunday, November 3rd.)

Course Description

Effective communication is critical for economists and analysts in today's competitive business environment. This course emphasizes the skills necessary to present insights clearly and compellingly, both in writing and verbally, to influence decisions and drive action. Students will explore core communication principles, learning to simplify complex technical information and tailor their messages to resonate with diverse audiences. Through hands-on exercises, students will craft persuasive presentations and produce cohesive, precisely written reports that reflect real-world professional standards.

The course also introduces students to key U.S. economic indicators, such as GDP, CPI, and employment data, providing a foundational understanding of how these statistics are constructed, interpreted, and applied. By examining the strengths and limitations of federal economic data, students will develop the skills to analyze and communicate data effectively in business, economic modeling, and policy debates.

By integrating communication strategies with data interpretation, this course bridges the gap between technical expertise and impactful delivery. Students will gain tools to tailor their writing and speaking for colleagues, clients, and policymakers, using appropriate jargon, analogies, and visual aids to maximize understanding.

Course Goals

This class will cover some of the essential topics and concepts required to complete the [NABE Certified Business Economist](#) material, ensuring students are well-prepared for the professional certification. After completing the entire course, students should be able to:

- Convey thoughts concisely, clearly, and cohesively
- Systematically organize material to maximize readability and retention
- Alter your communication approach for different end users
- Present complex technical information in an accessible way
- Determine the best writing style for your office, agency, or firm
- Avoid common writing mistakes made by economists and analysts
- Effectively use jargon, analogies, and visual aids to reinforce your message
- Understand the construction and significance of key economic data, recognizing that a firm grasp of how data are constructed is essential for accurate interpretation, analysis,

and effective communication in business decisions, economic modeling, and policy debates.

Required Textbook Materials

There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings, including notes, articles, and videos, will be provided through Canvas.

Online Course Access

You may access the course via <https://courses.missouri.edu>. Under course login, select Canvas and enter your username. If you have difficulty logging in to the course or you do not see the course listed, please contact the Mizzou IT Help Desk at (573)882-5000.

Online Course Materials

All online contents of this class are copyrighted and are not to be shared or used outside of this class.

Technical Skills Required

This class is a semester based online course. You are expected to have minimal technical skills such as using Canvas, scanning and uploading documents. Having reliable access to the Internet is necessary.

Zoom Office Hours & Discussion Board Questions

Since this is an online class and everyone has different schedules, I will hold Zoom office by appointment as needed. While I generally respond quickly to emails, please allow 24 – 48 hours for a reply. For general questions (i.e., not specific to you personally), you are encouraged to reply to the Weekly email announcement or post in the General Questions discussion board on our course Canvas site. I will monitor it throughout the week and respond to general questions there.

Dates and Deadlines

- All homework assignments and tests must be submitted in Canvas by the deadline. Please note that once the due date and time have passed (even by 1 second), the link to submit disappears and you can no longer submit your answers.
- There are weekly homework assignments that you need to complete. Each assignment will be due by Sunday night by 11:59pm CST time in the week when the respective topic(s) are covered. **I drop your lowest homework grade.**
- We will have weekly discussion board prompts. You are required to submit one initial post by Thursday at 11:59 PM and respond to two of your classmates' posts by Sunday at 11:59 PM. **I drop your lowest discussion grade.**

Late Work Policy

No late homework assignments and tests will be accepted without University and Instructor approved documentation. If you have circumstances that affect your ability to complete an assignment or test, please contact the instructor at least 2 days in advance of the due date. Unfortunately, this does not include discussion posts. Given the timely nature of discussion posts, no late posts will be accepted/allowed.

Grading Policy and Course Requirements:

All work will be assigned a percentile score based upon the following criteria:

Letter Grade	Symbol Interpretation	Scale (%)
A	Excellent	93-100
A-		90-92
B+	Good	87-89
B		83-86
B-		80-82
C+	Average	77-79
C		73-76
C-		70-72
D+	Below Average	67-69
D		60-66
F	Fail	0-59

The final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Task	Percentage of Final Grade (%)
Homework	50%
Discussion Board Posts	50%

Expectations

- What to expect from a technology-enhanced Course
 - This course is designed to meet virtually. Each week of the course will have a corresponding instructional topic that includes readings, video lecture(s) and homework assignments. It is essential that you access the course site throughout the week for course announcements, watch lectures, find required reading, participate in class discussions, submit homework assignments, etc.
 - What the instructors and your peers expect from you— All general class correspondence should be submitted to the relevant Discussion Board forum; only personal or confidential matters should be directed to the instructor in e-mail. This will require a team effort, with respect and help for each other, as we build a community of learners. We also expect that you will have a foundational understanding of Internet terms and functions.
 - What to expect from the instructor – I will monitor and facilitate class discussions, respond to private questions within 24 to 48 hours, provide timely feedback on general discussion board questions, and help to build a learning community.

Advice (How to be Successful)

We will explore various topics related to economic communication and measurement, focusing on interpreting and effectively communicating key economic data. To succeed in this course, I suggest you:

- *Engage with course materials:* Watch the lecture videos and/or read the lecture notes thoroughly.
- *Explore the supplementary material:* Review any articles, datasets, or resources provided on Canvas to enhance your understanding of the economic indicators and communication techniques.
- *Practice critical analysis:* Work through the examples and exercises in the materials, focusing on interpreting data, crafting clear narratives, and designing effective visuals. Mastering these skills means you can apply them in diverse real-world contexts.
- *Start homework & discussion posts early:* All homework assignments are due at **11:59 PM CST on Sunday**. Do not wait until the last day to begin—if you have questions, I may not be available at the last minute to help.
- *Submit assignments on time:* Once the due date and time have passed (even by 1 second), the submission link will close. Please plan ahead to avoid late submissions.

Staying on top of these tasks will ensure you gain the most from this course and build confidence in interpreting and communicating economic insights effectively.

Online Class Netiquette

Your instructor and fellow students wish to foster a safe on-line learning environment. All opinions and experiences, no matter how different or controversial they may be perceived, must be respected in the tolerant spirit of academic discourse. You are encouraged to comment, question, or critique an idea but you are not to attack an individual.

Our differences, some of which are outlined in the University's nondiscrimination statement below, will add richness to this learning experience. Please consider that sarcasm and humor can be misconstrued in online interactions and generate unintended disruptions. Working as a community of learners, we can build a polite and respectful course ambience.

Weekly Schedule & Assignments

Below is what you can expect during a typical week so you have time to coordinate your semester. Please plan accordingly.

1. New weekly content opens Sunday at 12:00pm CST (unfortunately, you cannot access the material earlier)
2. Read weekly Canvas description/notes (Monday – Wednesday).
3. If applicable, watch economic measurement lecture video(s) (Monday – Wednesday).
4. If applicable, read articles provided in Canvas (Monday – Thursday).
5. Post an initial discussion board post by Thursday at 11:59pm CST.
6. Respond to two of your classmates initial posts by Sunday at 11:59pm CST.
7. Homework due by Sunday at 11:59pm CST.

Week	Weekly Content
1: Jan 21 – Jan 26	Introduction to Economic Communication
2: Jan 27 – Feb 2	Audience Analysis and Purpose
3: Feb 3 – Feb 9	The Writing Process/ Economic Statistics
4: Feb 10 – Feb 16	Essentials of Technical Writing/Measuring Employment
5: Feb 17 – Feb 23	Fundamentals of Public Speaking
6: Feb 24 – Mar 2	Visual Communication/GDP & National Accounts
7: Mar 3 – Mar 9	Communicating with Diplomacy and Style/International Transactions
8: Mar 10 – Mar 16	Presentation Skills in Action/Financial Accounts
9: Mar 17 – Mar 23	Peer Review and Constructive Feedback
March 24 – March 30 SPRING BREAK	
10: Mar 31 – Apr 6	Handling Difficult Questions and Situations/Measuring Inflation
11: Apr 7 – Apr 13	Advancing Visual Storytelling/Productivity
12: Apr 14 – Apr 20	Case Studies in Communication/Corporate Profits
13: Apr 21 – Apr 27	Cover letter Preparation
14: Apr 28 – May 4	Job Interview Preparation
15: May 5 – May 15	Reflection and Future Growth

Important Dates:

Last day to drop from course	Monday, May 5 th
Reading day	Friday, May 9 th
Final exams	May 12 th – 16 th

Accessibility:

If disability related accommodations are necessary (for example, a note taker, extended time on exams, captioning), please register with the Office of Disability Services (<http://disabilityservices.missouri.edu>), S5 Memorial Union, 573- 882-4696, and then notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For other MU resources for students with disabilities, click on "Disability Resources" on the MU homepage.

Academic Integrity Policy

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor or the [Office of Academic Integrity](#).

Students are expected to adhere to this honor pledge on all graded work whether or not they are explicitly asked in advance to do so: "I strive to uphold the University values of respect, responsibility, discovery, and excellence. On my honor, I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this work."

AI Policy

In this course, AI software is permitted exclusively for brainstorming, idea generation, and assistance with mathematical concepts. Students may use AI tools to explore creative concepts, develop outlines, and generate initial ideas for writing assignments (such as initial discussion board posts). However, the actual writing, drafting, and editing processes must be completed independently, without AI assistance, to ensure that the final product accurately reflects each student's skills and understanding. Additionally, AI is strictly prohibited during exams, so it is crucial to complete your homework without relying on AI.

Restrictions on Disclosure and Distribution

In this class, students may not make audio or video recordings of course activity, except students permitted to record as an accommodation under section 240.040 of the Collected Rules. Students who violate this policy are subject to discipline in accordance with provisions of [section 200.020](#) of the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri pertaining to student conduct matters.

Nondiscrimination Policy

The University of Missouri does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex* (including gender), pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, protected veteran status, and any other status protected by applicable state or federal law. Discrimination includes any form of unequal treatment such as denial of opportunities, harassment, and violence. *Sex discrimination includes rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, unwanted touching, stalking, dating/domestic violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation. Retaliation for making or supporting a report of discrimination or harassment is also prohibited.

If you experience discrimination or sexual violence, you are encouraged (but not required) to report the incident to the MU Office for Civil Rights & Title IX. Learn more about your rights and options at civilrights.missouri.edu or call 573-882-3880. You also may make an anonymous report online.

If you are a survivor, or someone concerned about a survivor, and need immediate information on what to do, see RSVP Resources page. Both the Office for Civil Rights & Title IX and the RSVP Center can provide assistance to students who need help with academics, housing, or other issues.

In the event that you choose to write or speak about having experienced any of these forms of prohibited discrimination or harassment, Mizzou policies require that, as your instructor, I share this information with the MU Office for Civil Rights & Title IX. They will contact you to offer information about resources, as well as your rights and options as a member of our campus community.

Mental Health

The University of Missouri is committed to supporting student well-being through an integrated network of care, with a wide range of services to help students succeed. The MU Counseling

Center offers professional mental health care and can help you find the best approach to treatment based on your needs. Call to make an appointment at 573-882-6601. Any student in crisis may call or go to the MU Counseling Center between 8:00 – 5:00 M-F. After hours phone support is available at 573-882-6601. Visit their website at <https://wellbeing.missouri.edu> to take an online mental health screening, find out about workshops and resources that can help you thrive, or learn how to support a friend. Download [Sanvello](#), a phone app that teaches skills and strategies to help you maintain good mental health. Log in with your Mizzou e-mail to unlock all the tools available through Sanvello at no cost to you.

Religious Holidays & Accommodations

Many religious faiths are represented in the student body. The University of Missouri does not restrict student free exercise of religion, unless 1) the restriction is in the form of a rule of general applicability, and does not discriminate against religion or among religions; and 2) it can be demonstrated that the application of the restriction is essential to furthering a compelling university interest, and is not unduly restrictive considering the relevant circumstance. The policy of the University attempts to strike a reasonable balance between accommodating the religious practice of students and meeting academic needs and standard.

Consult IDE's [Guide to Religions](#) for the form that can be used to notify an instructor of an absence associated with religious practice. Students are expected to notify their instructor(s) by completing and submitting this form in a manner that is consistent with the procedure outlined in the university's policy on student religious accommodation. Providing false information regarding sincerely held religious practice is a violation of the university's Standard of Conduct and will not be tolerated.

FERPA

FERPA The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of educational records; to establish the rights of students to inspect and review their education records; and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate and misleading data through informal and formal hearings. The law applies to any individual who is or has been in attendance at an institution and regarding whom the institution maintains educational records. Once students have matriculated to the University of Missouri, i.e. enrolled in course work, FERPA rights transfer to the student, regardless of the student's age.

Students can enable certain individuals to have access to their education records by signing a FERPA waiver. The consent must specify records to be disclosed, state the purpose of the disclosure and identify the party or class of parties to whom the disclosure must be made.

Grievance Policy

Information concerning student grade appeal procedures and non-academic grievances and appeals may be found in the Student Handbook.

Disclaimer

The instructor reserves the right to change any part of the syllabus. Should such instances arise, students will be notified in advance. Please follow Canvas for up-to-date weekly readings.