

IS (International Scholars) 501: Introduction to Communications in Academia

Instructor: Ruth Mendel

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Class Time: Thursday, 12:00-2:00

Class Location: 955,

Weiser Hall

September 12 – November 14

Welcome to IS 501: *Introduction to Communications in Academia!*

This course is intended to help visiting scholars improve both academic and informal speaking and listening skills, and academic reading and writing skills. I place great emphasis on providing helpful and thorough individualized feedback to you on both writing and speaking. In addition, if anything I write or say is unclear, please ask me to explain it more.

Students will give two to three short presentations of one to two minutes. These mini-presentations are purposefully designed to be extremely short in order to target very specific areas, minimize stress for students presenting, and not take up too much class time listening to many presentations. The class will address presentation skills and suggest strategies to improve comfort and competence presenting. Students will also practice speaking about topics discussed in class. There will be two brief (one page) writing assignments. The first will be a purposefully informal essay about yourself as a reader. The focus of the second one will be either a process description or an NPR (National Public Radio) story that you will select yourself about your field or any topic of interest. In addition to writing about your NPR story, you will also discuss it in class with classmates and the class. Self-evaluation and instructor feedback will be given for presentations to improve accuracy, fluency, flow and delivery style. There will also be ample time addressing

language in more open and informal conversations, including such topics as phrasal verbs and tag questions.

The class will be a blend of academic and more informal English. Topics discussed in academic writing include data commentary (how we talk about data), process descriptions, overviews, writing about causation, writing emails, and hedging. Topics in conversational English include phrasal verbs, communication skills in daily tasks, talking about travel, and humor. The aim throughout is to provide a class atmosphere that is stimulating, yet also low-key and stress-free. I hope you will all view mistakes only as opportunities to learn.

The content of one of the ten classes and part of another class will be determined based on student choices. The class will select preferences on a list of topics and also indicate whether they are more interested in improving academic or conversational English.

Although this class is not a grammar or writing class specifically, I can provide supplementary materials for any areas you would like more work on. Just ask me and I can email or bring in to you such materials.

So that this class can be as concretely helpful to you as possible, I offer the following options as well for any work you are doing outside of this particular class:

- ❖ If you are giving a presentation this term in your department, I can meet with you individually if you want to practice it or practice it over skype.
- ❖ If you are writing an article or report this term, I can work on a few pages of it with you and explain changes. (I can't read a full academic journal article, for instance, but I could read a section of it).

- ❖ If you are writing an email to someone in your department and would like to double-check its accuracy, I am happy to look at one or two emails .

Week 1

September 12: *Definitions and Questions*

In-class

- Introduction to Course
- Pair-Activity: Definitions: Defining a term in your field for classmate to explain
- Michigan questions
- Some Types of Questions: Rhetorical Questions, Clarification Questions, Tag Questions, Wh-questions and wh-embedding.

Assignments:

- ❖ Writing: *Describe yourself as a reader:* submit as email attachment by **September 23**

Week 2

September 19 : *Presentation Skills , Writing about Causation*

In-class:

- Considerations in presentations (handout)
- Cause-effect writing: in-class writing
- Phrasal Verbs

Assignments:

- ❖ Prepare presentation on your specific research or field of study. (1-2 minutes)
Practice presentation and fill out self-evaluation
Presentations to be given: **September 26**

Week 3

September 26

In-class:

Individual presentations on research field
What-if (what to ask or say in specific contexts)
Assignments: No assignment

Week 4

October 3: Data Commentary

In-class:

- Introduction to Data Commentary and Class Data Commentary Activity
- Reading to inform writing: *Primary Sources : Happiness is...*

Assignments:

- ❖ Presentation: Explaining Visual Information (data or other visual content)
Select a graph or illustration to explain to the class (about 1 minute)
Practice presentation a couple of times before class with self-evaluation
Presentations to be given **October 10** and **October 17**

Week 5

October 12

In-class:

Data Commentary Presentations : (Half the class)
Linguistic Focus: TBA (student input)

Assignments: No new assignments

Week 6

October 19

In-class

Data Commentary Presentations, Cont'd. (Half the class)
Around the World Trip (small group activity)

Assignments: No new assignments

Week 7

October 24

In-class:

Cartoons: (Small group activity)
Process Descriptions: Linguistic Aspects

NPR Assignment: Explanation of the Assignment (Handout)

Assignments:

1) Select an NPR story and send the citation to RuMendel@aol.com by **October 31**

(I am happy to help select one for you if you tell me the area of interest)

2) Write a Process Description of a process in your field using some of the linguistic elements discussed in class

OR

write a summary of your NPR story and your thoughts about it. . Submit as .doc or .docx attachment to RuMendel@aol.com by **November 5**

Week 8

October 31

TBA (Based on Student-Selected Topics)

Week 9

November 7

In-class:

Presentation of NPR stories and Small group Discussion about them

Linguistic Focus: TBA

Week 10

November 14

In-class:

When You're Stuck: Writing Suggestions (handout)

Improving English Outside of the Classroom (handout)

Catch-up and Class questions

Adverbs Game

Additional Game or Music and Lyrics!