

Professional Communication Book Project

This project will be conducted in many parts. In class this semester, we will read the book *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins* and discuss and analyze it. Then, you will conduct your own research into the book's genre and write a genre analysis. In parts 3 and 4, you will propose a presentation and deliverable on a book of your choice in the genre, either independently or working with a team.

The projects related to this text will be due throughout the course, and much of the work related to the project (particularly parts 3 and 4) will be conducted outside of class. You are welcome to talk with me about project ideas or progress at any time.

There are four main objectives associated with this assignment:

1. To discuss the concepts from the book, *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins*.
2. To analyze the book's ideas and recommendations within the context of how persuasion and communication are perceived and understood in professional environments.
3. To examine how the larger genre within which it exists—professional self-help—operates.
4. To propose, analyze, and present persuasive information that is useful to a specific workplace or other professional environment through your own original project.

Overview of Due Dates:

- Part 1: September 9 and 11
- Part 2: October 2
- Part 3: October 23
- Part 4: Presentations, December 2 or 4; Deliverable and Memo, December 16

PART 1: READING, DISCUSSING, RESPONDING

5%

In part 1 of this assignment, we will read together, as a class, *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins*.

For this part of the assignment, you will:

1. Read the book according to the schedule outlined in the course calendar
2. Write reflections and respond to the questions posed as assigned
3. Participate in class discussions about the text

Please keep in mind that I do not endorse (or even like) all of what the book does. So, do not come to class prepared to talk about how great it is. Your job is to read and think critically about the arguments and implications of this text and come to your own, well-argued conclusions.

Due: Discussion, quiz, and written response of the text will occur primarily on **Monday, September 9, and Wednesday, September 11.**

PART 2: RESEARCH AND GENRE ANALYSIS

5%

In part 2, you will conduct your own independent research on the professional self-help genre by researching similar popular books that offer advice about persuasion, communication, and professional guidance.

We will discuss what the parameters for this genre are in class, but other popular examples of these texts include:

- *Outliers: The Story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
- *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson
- *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* by Sheryl Sandberg
- *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip Heath
- And many, many more.

Using the resources available in the library, online, in bookstores, and other venues (such as Amazon) as appropriate, you should survey a wide range of these types of books. Then, conduct a genre analysis (according to the guidelines for genre analysis provided in class) that provides an overall description and genre analysis.

Your final analytical essay must address the following:

- What do these books look like? Are they colorful? Are there lots of visuals (pictures, graphics, flow-charts)? Or do they tend to be mostly text? Why are they designed in that way? Does that design add to the text's persuasiveness in some way?
- Who are their main audiences? What specific kinds of readers do they try to attract? What evidence is there of particular audience targeting? What sorts of workplaces do they envision their audiences work in? What existing skills—or hang-ups—do they assume readers of the book would have?
- What is their purpose? What kinds of claims do they tend to make? What types of evidence and arguments do they use (*ethos, pathos, logos*; storytelling/narrative; facts, studies, statistics)?
- What is the general organization, format, and level of information provided in books in this genre? Are these in-depth analyses? General overviews? Both? Why do you think that is?
- What do you think of the genre and the books in it? Do you find their observations and recommendations useful to their intended audiences? Do you think they are all equally as good (or bad)? Are some more effective (and some “cheesier”) than others?

To complete this analysis, you should broadly survey the breadth of texts in this genre, though you are welcome to pull representative samples from 2 or 3 texts in the course of your analysis.

Guidelines and Due Dates:

- Final analysis should be 1000-1500 words
- Proposal should conform to all Proposal Requirements above and to the formatting and submission guidelines outlined in the Syllabus.
- **Final Due: Wednesday, October 2**

In part 3, you are proposing your own project on a professional communication book. You can propose any book from the genre you like. You can critique or endorse the book's recommendations. You will then propose a plan for presenting a key concept or concepts from the book to the class. You will also propose a deliverable that communicates or demonstrates a lesson or concept from the book. You may work independently or with a group of up to 4 people.

Presentation and Deliverable Guidelines:

Think creatively—you do not have to choose a book that you think is “the best” and instruct the class on it. You could choose a book you don't like and demonstrate why its lessons are detrimental; you and a partner could act out (either live or recorded) a scene from the book and discuss how the book's lessons would help (or hurt) the situation; you could apply a concept from the book to a different kind of workplace than envisioned or described by the text (like a retail store or restaurant).

The same is true for the deliverable. For this document, you want to again think creatively about what the book has to say and find a unique way to communicate it. Some ideas are:

- Think of different audiences, purposes, and objectives that the lessons from the book could serve.
- Find a unique genre to create. You could conduct additional research and write a white paper on studies that endorse or contradict the book's findings. You could analyze an organization and write a recommendation report that suggests a change related to the book's arguments.
- Use analysis or concepts from *Whoever Tells...* to create a compare/contrast type of deliverable.

What *can't* you do? You **should not** plan to create a brochure advertising the book to a particular workplace. The deliverable content also must be unique from the presentation and for each group member. So, you cannot create a poster by copying and pasting text and visuals from your presentation.

So, think creatively, have fun, and make the presentation and deliverable useful you and your colleagues. You are encouraged to discuss the progress of the project you want to propose with me as it develops. Duplicate books cannot be presented, so you are encouraged to send in your book selection well in advance of the deadline. Books are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis.

Proposal Requirements:

1. Identify the book and discuss why you chose it.
2. Provide a brief expected plan for your presentation, answering: what concept from the book you intend to focus on, what your general purpose or objective in the presentation is, and how you will communicate that concept in the time requested.
3. Identify what the audience will learn and why that lesson is important or useful.
4. Report whether you will work alone or in a team and who those members are.
5. Outline a preliminary work plan, including group members' responsibilities and intended deliverables; also include a timeline for reading, reporting, and presentation development.

After I receive all of the proposals, I will respond to your group, providing feedback and additional guidelines based on your plan. Once your proposal is approved, I will send a confirmation email to you (or your entire group) to give you the go-ahead on your book, presentation, and deliverable.

Guidelines and Due Dates:

- Proposal should be 750-1000 words.
- Proposal should conform to all Proposal Requirements above and to the formatting and submission guidelines outlined in the Syllabus.
- **Final Proposal Due: Wednesday, October 23, by beginning of class**

PART 4: PRESENTATION, DELIVERABLE, AND MEMO**10%**

In the final phase of the project, you (or your team) will complete the book project, presentation, and deliverable you proposed. Your final deliverable will be accompanied by a memo that outlines and defends the choices you made in the design and writing of your deliverable. Additional requirements and guidelines on the presentation, deliverable, and memo will be provided after proposals are submitted and during presentation conferences.

Guidelines and Due Dates:

- Presentations Due: December 2 and 4
- Final Deliverable and Memo: December 16, during the exam period