



**Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)**

**Topic Guide**

**DCM 330 – Professional Communication in the Workplace**

**Adapted from SUNY – Empire State College**



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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide will help you complete a course match Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) project for DCM 330: Professional Communication in the Workplace.

First, this guide will provide a summary of course topics and theoretical models in the **Professional Communication Overview**. This section also contains a series of generative questions you may ask yourself to brainstorm while composing your PLA project.

Next, the guide will introduce you to the **Professional Communication Learning Outcomes** for the class. Learning outcomes are goals set by the instructor that all students demonstrate while taking the course. Your PLA project will need to show the assessor that you have met these goals already, and thus should receive credit through a course match PLA.

After reviewing the field of professional communication broadly and sharing the required learning outcomes, the guide shares the **PLA Project Requirements**. You will have two options for completing this project: a report or an annotated portfolio. This section describes the expectations for each type of project, including length, formatting, and style.

The **PLA Assessment Rubric** is also provided within this document for easy review. When you submit your PLA project, the assessor will review your submission according to these criteria. The **Examples of General PLA Topics and Levels of Learning** section provides a few examples of prior learning assessment topics and learning objectives at a variety of levels, from those that do not qualify as a college-level experience to those that qualify as introductory college-level or advanced college-level experiences.

Finally, the **Additional Resources** section provides links to DePaul University resources that may support your completion of a PLA project in professional communication.

If you have any questions about this guide, please email [SCPSPLA@depaul.edu](mailto:SCPSPLA@depaul.edu) for clarification and guidance.

## PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION OVERVIEW

Professional communication is the sharing of information between individuals and groups in an organizational setting.

Professional communication may be:

- written or oral, or a combination of the two
- print-based or digital, or a combination of the two
- synchronous (live, in real time) or asynchronous (completed without supervision, for review by the recipient without supervision)
- individual or collaborative
- for an internal audience (leaders, supervisors, peers, direct reports, etc.) or external audiences (existing or potential customers/clients)

**Conventions** of professional communication may include grammar, punctuation, style, document formatting, practices of different media.

Professional communication **processes** may include audience considerations, role identification, medium, formatting, teamwork, and evaluation of communication effectiveness.

### Examples of Professional Communication

Here are some examples of different types of professional communication to help you brainstorm examples of communication you may address in your PLA project.

Written	Spoken
Emails	Meeting management
Memos	Asking generative questions
Letters (e.g. complaint letters, thank you letters)	Listening skills
Reports (e.g. status report, summary report, research summary)	Demonstrating empathy
Proposals	Non-verbal communication
Blog posts	
Websites	
Application materials	<b>Both Written and Spoken</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resume</li><li>• Cover letter or letter of interest</li><li>• Letter of recommendation</li></ul>	Presentations and slideshows
Meeting agendas and notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sales presentations</li><li>• Project pitches</li></ul>
Press release or news release	Videos
Progress report or update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instructional video</li><li>• Social media</li><li>• Marketing</li></ul>
Performance reviews or appraisals	Podcasts
Technical documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instructional</li><li>• Human resources</li><li>• Social media</li><li>• Marketing</li></ul>
Instructions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Directions</li><li>• Guides</li></ul>	

## **Generative Questions**

Some questions you may ask yourself when composing your PLA project are:

- What were/are the positions that you have held which relate to this PLA? These positions could be professional, volunteer, or personal.
- How have my professional communication responsibilities and skills evolved over time?
- What genres of professional communication do I feel confident using? Which would I still like to learn?
- What kinds of professional communication are unique to my industry?
- What professional communication skills do I have that may be transferrable to other workplace contexts?
- How has my professional communication planning or drafting approach changed over time?
- Think of specific examples of successful professional communication you have created.
  - How did you gather requirements/understand expectations for the piece?
  - What was the process of creating them like? What decisions did you make that impacted the content or form of the communication?
  - Was it individual or collaborative?
  - How were you able to gauge the success of your communication?
  - What insights did you gain from this experience? What skills did you gain?
  - How did your professional communication account for diversity, equity, and inclusion or intercultural communication?
  - If you had the opportunity to redo this communication with the knowledge you have now, how would you change it?

## PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

When students take DCM 330: Professional Communication in the Workplace, they are expected to demonstrate these learning objectives by completing the assessments in the course.

Your PLA project—whether you choose the report option or the annotated portfolio option—should address each of these learning objectives individually.

Course-Level Learning Objective	Explanation	PLA Project Expectations
<b>Analyze</b> rhetorical roles of purpose, audience, context, and style in written and oral professional communication genres and forms.	<p>In the course, students encounter many examples of professional communication, from formal styles like presentations, reports, and letters to informal correspondence such as emails and instant messages.</p> <p>Students will learn how to identify the purpose, audience, context, and style of an example of professional communication. This is an important skill to learn in the context of the next learning objective, where students must use this analysis to create a work of professional communication of their own.</p>	<p>In your PLA project, you should be able to describe your thought process when you encounter a new example of professional communication.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was it created? Does it solve a problem or work toward a goal?</li> <li>• For whom was it created? What did the author do to customize it for this specific audience?</li> <li>• Where is this work situated? For example, it may be meant for use in a specific industry or at a specific point in time.</li> <li>• What stylistic choices have been made? What visual design decisions have been made in terms of branding and information sharing (tables, charts, etc.)?</li> </ul>
<b>Make informed decisions</b> about the appropriate rhetorical tools to use in a specific professional communication situation.	<p>In the course, students are prompted with case studies that ask them to review a scenario and then create a piece of professional communication. They should take into account much of the above in creating their work, taking audience, situation, and context into consideration. These aspects will influence decision-making about content and form as well as style and aesthetics.</p>	<p>In your PLA project, you should be able to describe your decision-making process when composing a work of professional communication. How did you take audience, situation, and context into account?</p>

<b>Communicate effectively</b> through writing, designing, and speaking in a <b>variety of professional genres and forms</b> .	In this course, students are expected to create a variety of different kinds of professional communications. We do not focus strictly on one type of deliverable (emails, reports, presentations, etc.).	<p>In your PLA project, you should be able to demonstrate that you have professional communication experience in a variety of genres and forms.</p> <p>Additionally, you should provide evidence that the communication was effective. After it was distributed, how was it received by the audience? Did it result in the desired action or change?</p>
<b>Develop an individual writing process</b> for use a professional setting.	In this course, students reflect on the process of composition, making changes to their individual writing processes in order to develop effective communication in an efficient way.	In your PLA project, you should describe <i>how</i> you develop professional communications, addressing topics such as collecting requirements, outlining, drafting, receiving feedback, and making revisions.
<b>Collaborate</b> on professional communication projects.	In this course, students work together to develop a professional communication project in small groups. In order to do so, they must develop strong virtual collaboration skills, often including document exchange, version control, asynchronous communication, synchronous meetings, and equitable distribution of tasks.	<p>In your PLA project, you should describe how you collaborate on professional communication projects with peers, colleagues, supervisors, and stakeholders. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving effective feedback</li> <li>• Revising work based on stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• Deciding whether to meet synchronously or complete tasks asynchronously</li> <li>• Deciding how to keep track of changes as they are made</li> <li>• Deciding how to document/acknowledge the contributions of individuals within a group</li> </ul>

## **PLA PROJECT REQUIREMENTS**

### **Number of Credits**

DCM 330 – Professional Writing the Workplace is a 4-credit course. Students who have their PLA Course Match Projects for this course accepted will receive 4 credits.

### **Level of Learning**

As a 300-level class, DCM 330 – Professional Writing for Business should be treated as an advanced college-level course.

### **Project Options**

You have two options for completing your PLA project in professional communication, a formal report and an annotated portfolio.

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#### **Option 1 – Report**

Create a formal report that informs the reader, an expert in professional communication, of your background in the field, describing your experiences in detail, displaying research in your topic area, and connecting your experiences with that research. You should address each of the course learning objectives (above) at least once, articulating how you have met them.

Your report should include these components:

- Cover page
- Table of Contents
- Executive Summary
- Context
- 3-6 short narratives describing professional communication experiences in your workplace
  - Describe your experiences in detail
  - Connect your experiences to the research you have conducted
- Conclusion
- References

Your report should be roughly 2400 words in length.

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#### **Option 2 – Annotated Portfolio**

Create an annotated portfolio that showcases 3-6 examples of your professional communication and annotates them in detail. Your annotations should describe your thought process and decision-making in detail, display research in your topic area, and connect your example with that research. In addition to your examples and annotations, you should provide a contextual



introduction and reflective conclusion. You should address each of the course learning objectives (above) at least once, articulating how you have met them.

Your annotated portfolio should include these components:

- Cover page
- Table of contents
- Introduction
- 3-6 examples of your professional communication work, with annotations
  - Each example should have its own heading
  - For each example, address audience, situation, and context – What was your decision-making process like?
  - Each example should make connections to your research
- Conclusion
- References

Your annotated portfolio should be roughly 2400 words in length. Your artifacts should not contribute to the word count.

## PLA ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

The content expert who will assess your project will whether you have demonstrated mastery of the learning outcomes for the class with the following rubric.

Score	Result	Meaning
9-7 Points	Accept	Student is awarded credit for PLA project.
6-5 Points	Revise and Resubmit	Student has 2 weeks to revise PLA project based on content expert feedback.
4 – 0 Points	Not Accepted	Student is not awarded credit for PLA project.

	<b>Accomplished College-Level Learning</b>	<b>Developing College-level Learning</b>	<b>Beginning College-level Learning</b>	<b>Not College- level Learning</b>
	<b>3 points</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>1 point</b>	<b>0 points</b>
<b>EXPERIENCE:</b>  Effectively communicates relevant explanation of personal and/or professional experience(s) related to learning outcome(s).	Explanation of experience(s) is comprehensive and detailed. The context and background of experience(s) are described with specific details. There is a clear relationship between the description of the experience(s) and learning outcome(s). Provides specific evidence that learning occurred.	Explanation of experience(s) and the context and background of experience(s) are generally present though with some gaps. There is a general relationship between the description of experience(s) and the learning outcomes(s). Provides general evidence that learning occurred.	Explanation of experience is simplistic and/or incomplete. Minimal context or background of experience(s) was provided. Explanation of relationship between experience(s) and learning outcome(s) is linked but superficial, and is assumed but not explicit. Provides minimal evidence that learning occurred.	Explanation and description of the experience(s) is unclear and/or non-specific. No context or background of the experience was provided. The relationship between experience(s) and the learning outcome(s) is non-existent or scholarly investigation irrelevant. Provides no evidence that learning occurred. Experience is conflated with learning (i.e., length of time

				is equivalent to mastery).
<b>KNOWLEDGE AND/OR PRACTICE:</b>  Effectively communicates relevant theories and/or best practices related to learning outcome(s).	Explanation describes relevant concepts and/or practices and provides analysis (compares/contrasts) with other relevant ideas. Explanation demonstrates critique of strengths/weaknesses of ideas. Secondary sources are appropriate for scholarly or professional discourse.	Explanation generally describes relevant concepts and/or practice, and references other relevant ideas. Explanation may demonstrate adequate description of key idea(s) but there may be gaps in relating it to others. Secondary sources are generally appropriate for scholarly or professional discourse but may exclude key disciplinary concepts and/or be out-of-date.	Explanation superficially describes concepts and/or practice. Conceptual focus may be misdirected or ancillary. Explanation is mainly factual with limited analytical engagement. Secondary sources are included but markedly exclude key disciplinary concepts, are misused, and/or are inappropriate for scholarly or professional discourse.	Lack of evidence or understanding of relevant concepts and/or best practices. Lack of appropriate secondary sources and understanding of knowledge related to learning outcome(s).

<b>REFLECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT</b>  Effectively reflects upon experience and critically self-assesses abilities in relationship to relevant body of knowledge.	Reflection on experience(s) specifically connects to broader body of knowledge. Recognizes relationship and provides clear critique and/or explanation of the significance of the connection. Provides critical self-assessment including descriptions of personal strengths and weaknesses as it relates to the experience(s).	Reflection on experience(s) generally connects to broader body of knowledge. Recognizes overall relationship and provides some critique and explanation of the significance of the connection. Provides some level of self-assessment including general descriptions of personal abilities as it relates to the experience(s).	Reflection on experiences(s) minimally connects to broader body of knowledge. Recognizes that there is a relationship but is unable to critique or adequately explain the significance of the connection. Provides superficial level of self-assessment that focuses on what one accomplished rather than how well they accomplished.	Lack of reflection on how experience connects to broader body of knowledge. Lack of evidence connecting experience within body of knowledge. Lack of self-assessment on one's abilities or performance.
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## EXAMPLES OF GENERAL PLA TOPICS AND LEVELS OF LEARNING

	<b>Building</b>	<b>Project Management</b>	<b>Spanish Culture</b>	<b>Professional Communication</b>
<b>NOT college-level</b>	Know how to put up wallboard	Work to complete items on a checklist given to you	Traveled in Spain twice, for two weeks each time	Sends emails and text messages at work
<b>Beginning college-level</b>	Describe why walls are constructed a certain way	Create a timeline and supervise the completion of tasks	Describe trends and practices related to daily life, holidays, food, religion, etc.; familiar with some Spanish history related to contemporary attitudes and practices  List trends and practices related to daily life, holidays, food, religion, etc.  Describe some aspects of Spanish history	Communicates in the workplace by writing emails, instant messages and reports for a general audience
<b>Developing college-level</b>	Describe why walls are constructed a certain way  Understand how to design a building so the walls stay up  Explain why walls are constructed a certain way  List the advantages and disadvantages of different methods for building a wall	Create a timeline and supervise the completion of tasks  Work to create cooperation of all parties concerned with the project	Discuss trends and practices related to daily life, holidays, food, religion, etc.  Identify sub-groups within the overall culture  Describe some aspects of Spanish history related to contemporary attitudes and practices  .	Communicates in the workplace by writing emails, instant messages and reports for a variety of stakeholders  Identifies characteristics of different professional communication genres

<b>Accomplished college-level</b>	Make decisions to design a building so the walls stay up	Create a timeline and supervise the completion of tasks	Analyze nuances related to attitudes and practices	Analyzes professional communication genres to develop complex, diverse, and effective written and oral communication
	Explain why walls are constructed a certain way	Work to create cooperation of all parties concerned with the project	Identify sub-groups within the overall culture and analyze the sub-groups relationships with each other	Adjusts communications to mindfully consider audience, situation, context, and style
	Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of different methods for building a wall	analyze problems or issues and amend the plan; evaluate the outcome of the project	Compare Spanish history with contemporary attitudes and practices	

This topic guide was modified from [SUNY – Empire State College’s Business Communication PLA Guide](#).

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **Office of Prior Learning Assessment (OPLA)**

The Office of Prior Learning Assessment website provides guidance for students seeking to be awarded college credit for prior experience.

#### **PLA Advisor ([SCPSPLA@depaul.edu](mailto:SCPSPLA@depaul.edu))**

A Prior Learning Assessment advisor is available to help you throughout the process. They can help you understand the requirements of a PLA project and are happy to provide feedback on in-progress work.

#### **Course Match PLA Examples**

Scroll down to find a few examples of completed Course Match PLA projects.

#### **5 Tips About PLA from a Student**

Just what it sounds like—a student who has successfully completed PLA projects shares their tips for success.

**The Writing Center** – Peer writing tutors are available to help at all stages of the writing process. They can review completed work, in-progress drafts, and even assist with planning and outlining. You can meet with a tutor in-person or online!

**DCM 330: Professional Communication in the Workplace** – If you do not feel ready to complete a PLA project at this time, you may wish to enroll in DCM 330: Professional Communication in the Workplace. This online asynchronous course will afford you the opportunity to master the learning objectives described above in collaborative activities with student colleagues and work towards projects you can customize to the needs of your workplace.

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