INTRODUCTION

Writing and content development are perhaps the most important skills in today’s competitive business environment. Particularly critical for communications professionals, writing is a career-building tool. This document offers success strategies for classes, internships and entry level careers.

Just as writers form dialogues with readers, students must create an ongoing dialogue with professors regarding ways to improve writing skills or meet class standards in pursuit of respectable grades. Each writing project is different; this is a guide. Students must be proactive about improving writing skills, if necessary.

Whether you’re an outstanding, competent or merely decent writer, you can always improve. While everyone may not reach the ranks of Dominican-American writer Junot Diaz, you can always work to strengthen your research, comprehension and English composition skills. Diaz won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, celebrating the immigrant experience.

EXPECTATIONS

Professors understand students are at different levels of writing development. Make it a point to upgrade your writing expertise throughout your college career. For some, English may not be your first language. That’s not a problem because you’ll find students who grew up in the US may struggle with similar writing challenges! CCNY has a wide range of skill builders to help all students do well. It’s your responsibility as an MCA major to take advantage of ALL available resources. Broadly, do your best to adhere to these standards:

MCA Document Formatting

Unless otherwise instructed by your professor, all documents submitted in any MCA course should be formatted as follows:

- **HEADING**: Name, Course / Section, Professor, Date - top left margin (single spaced)
- **MARGINS** - 1” top, bottom, left and right with
- **LEFT-ALIGNMENT**
- **PARAGRAPHS** – indent first line 5 spaces
- **SPACING** - double space most assignments
- **FONT / SIZE** - Arial, Verdana, Garamond, Times Roman; 10-12 point type
- **INSERT PAGE NUMBERS** (except on page 1)
- **CITATIONS** – use MLA formatting when referencing outside sources
MCA Basic Guidelines

• ALL WORK must be word processed, error free and grammatically correct
• USE CORRECT ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION—DON’T GUESS. LOOK IT UP IF YOU ARE NOT SURE WHAT IS CORRECT.
• ADD EMPHASIS - sparingly use bold, italics (headlines, headings)
• PROOFREAD
• USE TECH TOOLS (spell check, online dictionary, thesaurus, Microsoft Office tutorials)
• ADHERE TO CCNY Green “digital” standards – MCA professors accept many assignments via email or Blackboard (ask to be sure, sometimes printouts are requested)
• SAVE AS – create filenames with meaning. For example: “name-projectone-7-23-09.doc”

> RESOURCES

1. The Writing Center - The Samuel Rudin Academic Resource Center
NAC Building, Amsterdam Ave. Plaza, 3rd Floor South
http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/writingcenter/

Writing consultants work with students one-on-one or you can attend a wide range of workshops. Visit the Writing Center for schedules and obtain useful handouts and tip sheets; realize online info may be dated.

You must make the time and take the right steps to improve your writing; everything isn’t simply a click away. Speak to someone face to face and get the help you need instead of working in a vacuum. Your writing will improve over time and there are a wide range of resources available to assist you!

2. Professors - Despite what you may have experienced in other academic settings, MCA professors are here to help. Set up a meeting EARLY IN THE SEMESTER to review assignments, especially if there are tons of red marks or tracking edits on your papers! To determine EXACTLY what’s expected, ask questions and see if the instructor has a template or student guidelines for assignments. Reach out and get the help you need.

3. Reference Books & Citations - MCA professors strongly recommend the following tools, available at the CCNY bookstore, Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble. These books are useful throughout your college career and also of use at initial jobs in the communications field.

• Associated Press (AP) Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law by AP Editors
• The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White
• Modern Language Association (MLA)
• Additional books professors suggest that help you meet class standards

4. Research Libraries - Google and Wikipedia are NOT the final answers and NOT ACCEPTED as primary resources when instructors ask you to cite references for research papers, analyses, assignments or the Advertising / Public Relations Workshop (final MCA course students take before graduation to reinforce what you’ve learned in the major). Thorough research strengthens your content, improves your message and gives power to your ideas. Without sound research, your document is weak and will you will earn a low grade.

First, make use of the CCNY Library and explore what’s available here on campus. Reference librarians are on call to help students access the VAST RESOURCES offered by the City University of New York (CUNY) system. Explore the value a research librarian can provide and watch your grades soar!
Second, explore the **New York, Queens or Brooklyn Public Libraries** or your hometown branches in New Jersey, Pennsylvania or Long Island.

Third, visit **New York Public Library’s Science Industry and Business Library**. Known as “SIBL,” it’s the world’s largest business library open to the public and is located at 34th Street and Fifth Avenue, in the same building as the CUNY Graduate Center. [http://www.nypl.org/sibl](http://www.nypl.org/sibl)

You live in New York City, the media capital of the world! **“SIBL” is the epicenter** of valuable information and provides what you need to compete and excel in today’s competitive business environment. Most research associates (a.k.a. librarians) have masters’ in library science or other specializations and are armed with high-powered expertise. Harness that power, apply for an Access card (library card) and obtain what you need to succeed as an MCA major. It’s literally as simple as a Metrocard swipe!

5. **Plagiarism** - As per CUNY’s Policy on Academic Integrity, “Academic Dishonesty is Prohibited in the City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension and expulsion.” MCA students should review and adhere to the following policies for all assignments: [http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf](http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf)

> **WRITING BASICS**

Whether you’re writing a paper, a creative brief, an analyses or a press release, it helps to outline points you’re trying to get across. That way you can refine your message as you gather details. It also helps to write in the active voice, remember less is more (don’t use 10 words when five will do) and pick one style or format and stick to it throughout the assignment. Make sure your document includes:

- Intro
- Body / Content
- Support for your thesis or main idea (research, quotes)
- Conclusion
- Don’t forget a separate Works Cited Page whenever using outside references

> **EMAILS & ATTACHMENTS**

Email is the preferred method of communication for most businesses and here on campus, in many cases. While the rules of composition are not as rigid as in an academic document, proper grammar, spelling, etc. is still expected. Remember the importance of email etiquette such as appropriate salutations, sign-offs, tone, and usage. Despite the instantaneousness of email, give professors a reasonable time to respond to your queries. Because of the unpredictable nature of Internet correspondence, it’s smart to get into the habit of confirming receipt of all communication.

Be sure you include an “**action oriented**” subject line:

Example: MCA Uniform Writing Standards (review immediately)

Remember to **assign meaningful tags for attachments**, which helps recipients (including professors) store digital files on their desktops; use dates to help manage versions and track projects:

Example: MCA_Writing_Standards_011809
> **WRITING THE “MCA WAY”**

Some people are natural born writers, others aren’t. One thing’s for sure, a great deal of writing is required to successfully complete this major. If your papers are laden with “red ink,” take the wise counsel from your professors and learn how you can improve. **Corrections mean an instructor takes their job seriously and cares about your writing progress.** They want to point you in the right direction, but you must seek out extra help. Get over yourself, loose the attitude and get the help you need. Edits and revisions boost skills so you can land—and keep a job!

Today’s fast-paced, limited attention span audiences tend to prefer writing that’s **brief and to the point.** While contemporary writing tends to be conversational, MCA adheres to “formal writing” standards. **Use complete sentences, make sure subject and verbs agree, check your grammar and spelling, punctuate precisely, format carefully, proofread and be proud of the work you turn in. Anything less is unacceptable.**

As a communications professional, understand there are various writing styles including academic or scholarly writing, used on campus by many professors, both in and outside the major. During your time as an MCA student, your writing will evolve and ultimately “transition” to more of a business style, useful for specific entry level jobs in the advertising and public relations fields.

**Heads up!** Texts and twitter “tweets” are abbreviated, “shorthand” messages that offer bite sized blurbs to whet the appetite, but don’t completely feed the reader. U R familiar with this type of writing—which is NOT ACCEPTABLE for formal class assignments. While you’re probably smiling as you read this, avoid using “emoticons” such as : ) or 😎.

As you progress in your career, you’ll learn there are numerous writing and content development specializations including healthcare, legal, financial relations and entertainment. Online channel managers include designers and editors who enhance copy, visuals and graphics, formatting content for digital use.

**Always ask professors for their specific class guidelines, because our program offers a wide range of specialties and every instructor is different.**

Welcome to the wonderful world of writing and content development!

###
Make Every Word Count
“20 Tips”

M anage your writing
A lways be clear
K eep reader interested
I nitiate action
N ever leave questions unanswered
G enerate responses that move projects forward

E dit, edit, edit
V alue your reader’s time and talents
E valuate content, sentence structure, word choice
R elay useful information
Y oke or connect key subjects

W rite like you talk
O ffer insight
R espond to deadlines, timing, special requests
D istinguish fact from fiction; delegate when possible
(i.e. designate who will follow up and when)

C reate atmosphere of trust, supervision, partnership
O pportunities & options (create)
U nderstand needs of reader, client or audience
N egate challenges—provide solutions
T each preferred techniques & best practices
(build your writing network and share talent with fellow students and colleagues)

##

courtesy
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Discover the Power of Effective Communication™
The Writing & Re-Writing Process

STAR

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<td>• clarification of meanings</td>
<td>• the order for a more logical flow</td>
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LEVELS OF REVISION

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