Sociology 4CM3:

Critical Analysis of Media

Winter, 2023.

Day(s) and Time(s) of Class:

Thurs.,11:30 am to 2:20 pm.

Classroom: UH 101.

Instructor: Dr. David Young.

Email: youngd@mcmaster.ca (**Important:** Please read the instructions in the “Email Communication” sub-section below **before** sending messages).

Office Location: KTH 629.

Office Consultation:

Through Zoom and by appointment only (**Important:** Please read the “Virtual Office Meetings” sub-section below for more information).

Office Phone: Ext. 23615.

# Course Outline

My name is Dr. Young. Welcome to the course! Please carefully read through the following information in this course outline. I have covered many issues that students are often wondering about.

## Contact Information

Email communication will be one means for you to ask me questions, but you can also discuss things with me through virtual office meetings. Please read the two sub-sections below for more information.

### Email Communication

If you have a question, it is best to contact me through email. Email provides an opportunity for you to develop or practice the strong business communication skills that employers are looking for! Consequently, before sending an email message, please ensure that you have carefully followed the instructions in the seven points below. Please note that these points also apply to email communication with any TAs I may have for the course.

1. Please check to see if your question has been answered already somewhere in this course outline or in other course handouts. If your question has **not** been answered in the various course handouts, or if you need clarification about something in the outline or in other handouts, feel free to send an email message.
2. Please make sure that your question deals with something short and simple. Please note that complicated matters can only be addressed through face-to-face interaction (e.g., during a meeting held by appointment through Zoom).
3. Please send your message from your McMaster email account. Please do **not** send a message from another email account or from Avenue to Learn mail. Please understand that the Faculty of Social Sciences requires students to use their McMaster email account when communicating with university personnel, and university personnel are **not** obligated to reply if a message originates from another source.
4. Please use “Sociology 4CM3” as your subject line (so that it is possible to quickly and easily identify email pertaining to this course).
5. Please start your message with an appropriate greeting or form of address followed by my name (e.g., writing “Hi Dr. Young”, “Hello Dr. Young”, or “Dear Dr. Young”). In business communication, including communication with professors or TAs, please understand that it is proper etiquette to follow a greeting or form of address with the person’s name. Please also understand that “Hey” is **not** an appropriate greeting in business communication.
6. Please write your message in a professional manner. Be polite and respectful. Where appropriate, write “please” or “thank you.” Write in full sentences and with proper spelling. Please understand that writing formal business communication to professors or TAs is **not** the same as writing text messages to friends.
7. Please bring your message to a close in a professional manner (writing “Thank you”, “Thanks”, “Regards”, “Sincerely” or something similar followed by your full name and your student number).

In the points above, I have emphasized some elements of business communication because I am trying to help you to develop the strong business communication skills that are crucial for many desirable occupations in the work world. I want you to develop these communication skills so that you can be successful out there!

After you have sent your email message, please keep the following points in mind:

1. Email that fails to follow the instructions noted above may **not** be answered (or, as a learning exercise, you may be required to re-write and re-send the email message before your question or concern will be addressed).
2. Even if you have followed the instructions, please do **not** expect an immediate response. Please understand that professors and TAs are busy people, and it may take us up to two business days to reply. Furthermore, please keep in mind that email will **only** be read and answered during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm). Please understand that evenings and weekends are personal and family time for me and for any TAs I may have for this course.
3. If you have not received a reply after two full business days, please check to see if you followed all the instructions provided above. If you did and still did not receive a response, it may be that the message was not received or somehow got missed. At that point, please send a follow-up message.

### Virtual Office Meetings

Most matters can be dealt with through email, but there may be some occasions when it is useful or necessary to speak face-to-face.

Due to the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am **not** prepared at this point to resume physical office meetings with students. My office is very small and lacks windows which open. Obviously, it is much safer to meet with students through virtual office meetings. If you wish to speak with me, please use your McMaster email account to send me a meeting request (along with several days and times that you are available). I will then be happy to set up a mutually convenient day and time for us to connect via Zoom.

## Course Description

This course familiarizes students with selected issues associated with critical analysis of the media. It is not necessary to have previous background in relevant sociology courses (because I will be giving an introductory lecture that aims to get all students on the same page), but relevant background can certainly be useful. Relevant background includes courses on media institutions, media and power, media and social issues, political sociology, or social movements.

Part I of the course considers theoretical and methodological issues. We will become familiar with two critical perspectives on the media. One is critical political economy, and the other is critical cultural studies. These Marxian-influenced theoretical perspectives focus on the issues of power, inequality, and conflict in relation to the media. Essentially, critical political economy ties these issues to media production while the perspective of critical cultural studies links the issues to media content. While addressing theoretical issues, we will also discuss methodological approaches to analysis of the media by examining both administrative research and critical research.

Part II builds on the earlier discussion of critical political economy by examining a variety of topics connected to media production. These topics include ownership (such as the dangers of growing ownership concentration among media companies); globalization (including the impact of transnational media companies and the Internet); the state and its role (with regard to issues such as globalization, legislation, regulation, promotion, and broadcasting); and conflict between private media companies and the state (on the one hand) and social movements (on the other hand) over media policy and other issues.

Part III builds on the earlier discussion of critical cultural studies by considering several topics associated with media content. These topics include dominant ideology, hegemony, and counter hegemony; the under-representation and misrepresentation of subordinate groups (labour unions, the working class, women, racialized minorities, and Indigenous peoples) in the mainstream media; and the role of alternative media in relation to the political objectives of social movements.

## Course Learning Objectives

This course has several learning objectives. By the end of the course, you will:

* understand theoretical and methodological approaches that sociologists and other scholars have used to study the media in a critical way.
* comprehend how media production is connected to political and economic aspects of capitalist society (such as regulation and ownership).
* grasp how media content reflects capitalist, patriarchal, and racist ideology.
* recognize the conflicts that exist between powerful classes or groups and less powerful classes or groups with regard to media production and media content.

All of the objectives noted above are associated with the topic and content of the course. Additional objectives are connected to several of the [Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations](http://cll.mcmaster.ca/COU/degree/undergraduate.html) adopted at McMaster University. For instance, you will have the opportunity to enhance the depth and breadth of your knowledge as you learn about various theoretical ideas connected to critical analysis of media. Through written work, you will have the opportunity to apply knowledge acquired in the course. Along with verbal participation in class, the written work in the course will help to enhance your communication skills. Finally, as one more example, you will be encouraged to deepen your autonomy and professional capacity by developing qualities and transferable skills necessary for further study and employment (e.g., business communication skills, time management skills, reliability, maturity, personal responsibility, and behaviour consistent with academic integrity and social responsibility).

## Course Format

Unless McMaster University shifts online again, **all classes in this course will be held in-person**. You are expected to be physical present for the classes.

This course is a seminar. A seminar is a course in which a professor leads a relatively small group of students in a discussion of issues raised in required readings, educational films, or other course materials. In a seminar course, the professor does little or no lecturing. Instead, students are required to study the course materials **before** each class and then actively contribute to discussion of the course materials **during** each class. The professor leads the discussion, assesses each student’s knowledge of the course materials, and guides students to a deeper understanding of the materials.

Each class in this seminar course is scheduled to run for up to three hours a week (on the day and during the time noted at the beginning of this document). You will be given a short break at a convenient point (toward the middle of the class period). You **must** be prepared to stay for the entire class.

In the first week of the course, I will give you a lecture. Since students may have varying levels of knowledge about issues associated with critical analysis of media, this lecture will aim to get all students on the same page.

In some later weeks of the course, I will give you a link to an educational film that you are expected to view and take notes on at a convenient time prior to the in-person class. You are expected to view the film assigned for a given week and to show knowledge of the film during the class discussion.

For all weeks of the course, I will give you some questions to think about as you do the required readings for the topic that will be addressed during the in-person class. When we meet, we will go through the questions one by one. You are expected to complete all the readings assigned for a given week and to have some ideas jotted down in response to the provided questions. You are also expected to participate in the class discussion and to show knowledge of the readings.

**Please Note (Hearing Disability):** Please keep in mind that I am partially deaf. This can make it difficult for me to hear comments or questions, especially if there are many students in a course or if a classroom has poor acoustics. Therefore, when students are asking questions or making comments, or when any class discussion is taking place, please listen and refrain from making any noise. Competition from other sounds (talking, sorting notes, adjusting chairs, etc.) makes it extremely difficult for me to hear what someone is saying to me.

## Overview of Course Requirements

The course requirements, and the weights attached to them in the calculation of your final grade, are as follows:

Critical Media Analysis Assignment 20% Due on Feb. 2.

Research Paper 30% Due on Apr. 6.

Seminar Attendance 10% Grade determined after classes end.

Seminar Participation 10% Grade determined after classes end.

Take Home Examination 30% Distributed on Apr. 14 and due on Apr. 28.

You **must** complete **all** these course requirements. More information about the course requirements can be found in the section below.

## Details of Course Requirements

Critical Media Analysis Assignment

To ensure that you have a solid foundation for understanding the material in this course, you will be required to prepare an assignment that addresses critical analysis of media. The assignment will cover Part I of the course.

The critical media analysis assignment will be 4 to 5 pages long. You will have to answer one question (possibly from a choice between two questions). When answering the question, you must utilize the introductory lecture (from Jan. 12) and the first set of readings in the course (from Jan. 19). No other readings will be required (or permitted), and no research will be required. Detailed instructions for completing the assignment will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Research Paper

You will be required to demonstrate adequate research, analytical, organizational, writing, and referencing skills through preparation of a research paper. The paper will be associated with issues raised in either Part II or Part III of the course.

The research paper will be 8 to 10 pages long. Several topics (questions) will be presented for research. You will select the one that interests you the most and write your paper on that topic. Some topics will be associated with Part II of the course (Critical Political Economy), and some topics will be associated with Part III of the course (Critical Cultural Studies). For your selected topic, you will need to do substantial research in the academic literature (i.e., in academic journals and academic books). Detailed instructions for completing the research paper will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Seminar Attendance

Your seminar attendance grade will be based on a quantitative count of how often your name appears on the attendance sheet that is distributed each week.

I reserve the right to reduce your grade if you arrive late for class, if you return late from a break, if you leave at the break and do not come back, or if you get up and walk out on assigned active learning activities.

I also reserve the right to reduce your grade if you engage in problematic behaviour while I am teaching the class (i.e., when I am lecturing or leading discussions). It should be obvious, for instance, that it is inappropriate to play with a smartphone in front of me while I am teaching you. For more information, please see the section below titled “The Need for Appropriate and Respectful Behaviour.” In the second paragraph of that section, I provide more examples of behaviour that can damage your grade.

Seminar Participation

Your seminar participation grade will be based on your verbal responses to discussion questions throughout the course.

You are expected to complete **both** the assigned readings for **each** week of the course. During each class in the course, you are also expected to verbally participate by offering thoughtful comments about the readings.

To facilitate discussion of the readings, I will post some discussion questions on Avenue to Learn about a week before each class. You must access the discussion questions on Avenue (at least a few days before class), consider these questions as you do the assigned readings for that week, and jot down some thoughts or ideas to bring up during the class discussion. Since everyone will know in advance the major questions that I will raise and have time to consider them in advance, there will be no excuse for not offering viewpoints during the class. It is extremely important that you develop speaking skills, and that is why emphasis is being placed on verbal responses to discussion questions.

Your seminar participation grade will primarily be based on my observation of the **quantity** and the **quality** of your **knowledgeable** contribution to class discussions (e.g., how often you say something about the required readings or the films shown in class and the degree of understanding you display of such course material). If you say nothing throughout the term, please be aware that I will be forced to give you a grade of zero for this component of your grade. If you say very little, I will be forced to give you a very low (failing) grade for this component. Please note that you will **only** get credit for making contributions that show knowledge and understanding of the material. For example, if we are discussing an article about video games, you will get credit for articulating some of the author’s points and articulating some thoughtful reactions to these points. Such commentary would have much value, but simply talking about your personal experiences with video games (because you did not read the article) would have little value (and you would not get credit for it).

Take Home Examination

To evaluate your overall learning at the end of the course, you will be required to write a take-home examination. The examination will be associated with issues raised in either Part II or Part III of the course.

The take home examination will be 8 to 10 pages long. You will be required to answer one question from among the two questions on the examination. To adequately assess your knowledge of all three parts of this course, you may be required to answer a question which focuses on the part of the course that you did **not** address in your research paper. For instance, if you decided to write a research paper that tackled a question associated with Part II (Critical Political Economy), then you may be required to answer a take home examination question on Part III (Critical Cultural Studies). However, much depends on how I decide to configure the questions for the take home examination. To successfully answer a question on the examination, you will have to display substantial understanding of the required readings associated with the topic of the question and any film presentations related to the topic of the question. Detailed instructions for completing the take home examination will be provided when it is distributed at the end of the course. Due to McMaster University’s “Test and Examination Restriction” (a ban that covers April 6 to April 13), I am **not** permitted to distribute the take home examination until April 14 at the earliest.

## Required Course Materials and Texts

All the required readings have been assembled as eReserves and are available through Avenue to Learn. These readings are crucial to your success in the course. You will have to demonstrate knowledge of the readings in several ways (e.g., through participation in weekly class discussions and through an answer on a take-home examination).

## Course Schedule and Required Readings

The course schedule below identifies the course topics, the scheduled dates when the topics will be addressed, and the required readings/educational films associated with the topics. You will be given reasonable notice if significant changes must be made to the course schedule (e.g., dropping a topic because we have run out of time).

### Part I: Theoretical and Methodological Issues

**Introduction to Sociological Analysis of the Media (Topic 1).**

Scheduled for Jan. 12.

Required Reading: None.

**Critical Perspectives on the Media (Topic 2).**

Scheduled for Jan. 19.

Required Reading: Mosco (eReserves, Reading 1).

Required Reading: Hamilton (eReserves, Reading 2).

### Part II: Critical Political Economy

**Ownership of the Media (Topic 3).**

Scheduled for Jan. 26.

Required Reading: Winseck (eReserves, Reading 3).

Required Reading: Bishop (eReserves, Reading 4).

Required Viewing: *Behind the Screens: Hollywood Goes Hypercommercial* (a link to this educational film will be posted on Avenue for viewing prior to class).

**Globalization of the Media (Topic 4).**

Scheduled for Feb. 2.

Required Reading: McChesney (eReserves, Reading 5).

Required Reading: Foster and McChesney (eReserves, Reading 6).

Required Viewing: *No Logo: Brands, Globalization, Resistance* (a link to this educational film will be posted on Avenue for viewing prior to class).

**The State and the Media I: Policy and Regulation (Topic 5).**

Scheduled for Feb. 9.

Required Reading: Nesbitt-Larking (eReserves, Reading 7).

Required Reading: Young (eReserves, Reading 8).

**The State and the Media II: Public Broadcasting (Topic 6).**

Scheduled for Feb. 16.

Required Reading: Raboy and Taras (eReserves, Reading 9).

Required Reading: Young (eReserves, Reading 10).

**Mid-Term Recess**

No classes from Feb. 20 to Feb. 24.

**Struggles over Media Policy (Topic 7).**

Scheduled for Mar. 2.

Required Reading: McChesney (eReserves, Reading 11).

Required Reading: Hackett and Anderson (eReserves, Reading 12).

### Part III: Critical Cultural Studies

**Media Representation I: Labour Unions and the Working Class (Topic 8).**

Scheduled for Mar. 9.

Required Reading: Steuter (eReserves, Reading 13).

Required Reading: Butsch (eReserves, Reading 14).

Required Viewing: *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class* (a link to this educational film will be posted on Avenue for viewing prior to class).

**Media Representation II: Women (Topic 9).**

Scheduled for Mar. 16.

Required Reading: Mendes (eReserves, Reading 15).

Required Reading: Kim (eReserves, Reading 16).

Required Viewing: *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women* (a link to this educational film will be posted on Avenue for viewing prior to class).

**Media Representation III: Racialized Minorities and Indigenous Peoples (Topic 10).**

Scheduled for Mar. 23.

Required Reading: Burns and Shor (eReserves, Reading 17).

Required Reading: Young (eReserves, Reading 18).

**Reception of Representation in Mainstream Media (Topic 11).**

Scheduled for Mar. 30.

Required Reading: Mahtani (eReserves, Reading 19).

Required Reading: Flores Espiritu (eReserves, Reading 20).

**Struggles through Alternative Media (Topic 12).**

Scheduled for Apr. 6.

Required Reading: Fuchs (eReserves, Reading 21).

Required Reading: Sullivan, Spicer, and Böhm (eReserves, Reading 22).

## Course Policies

Please familiarize yourself with the following course policies. You are responsible for being aware of and adhering to all policies established for this course.

### Use of Avenue to Learn

Some courses (including this one) may use online elements such as Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, usernames for McMaster email accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses online elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

Please do **not** contact me through Avenue to Learn. There are two reasons for this. First, I prefer to use my McMaster email account for correspondence. Second, it is impossible to reply to a message sent from Avenue to a McMaster email account. Consequently, if you expect your message to be read and answered, please send the message from your McMaster email account to my McMaster email account.

Please be aware that material posted on Avenue to Learn is protected by copyright. You are permitted to print or download one copy of material that I have written (e.g., course handouts or certain course content) so that you can privately read or study this material. However, any further copying or any distribution of this material (e.g., to websites or to students not enrolled in the course) is strictly prohibited. If some academic writing has been posted on Avenue (e.g., an excerpt from a book), please note that this has been done under provisions in Canada’s Copyright Act.

### Absences and Missed Academic Term Work

If you are absent due to medical situations or personal situations, and if you wish to receive accommodation, you are required to carefully follow the procedures established in McMaster’s [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Requests-for-Relief-for-Missed-Academic-Term-Work-Policy-on.pdf). Please note that this policy does **not** provide the basis for requesting accommodation associated with religious, spiritual, or disability-related situations. Such situations are covered by other McMaster policies.

Please note that, according to the policy noted above, you are required to follow-up with your instructor **immediately** to request accommodation after submitting a Self-Report MSAF (Type A) or obtaining a “special” Administrative Report MSAF (Type B). Failure to follow-up in a timely manner may negate the opportunity for relief and result in no consideration given for missed work.

Please note that submitting a Self-Report MSAF (Type A) or submitting documentation to support an Administrative Report MSAF (Type B) is **not** an automatic guarantee of accommodation for missed academic term work. Accommodation can be denied by your Faculty/Program Office or by your instructor for various reasons (e.g., submitting an MSAF far too late, submitting inadequate documentation or submitting the documentation too late, or failing to follow-up with the instructor in a timely manner to request accommodation).

If I grant accommodation for missed work based on the policy noted above, students will be required to enter into a written agreement with me through email. There will be no accommodation without an agreement. This agreement will specify arrangements for completing the missed work (e.g., establishing a date for writing a make-up test or establishing a new due date for an assignment). The agreement will also specify what happens if students still fail to complete the missed work by the new date that was established.

### Extensions on Assignments

In this course, extensions will be limited for three pedagogical reasons. First, as noted in the [Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations](http://cll.mcmaster.ca/COU/degree/undergraduate.html) adopted at McMaster University and described earlier in this document, students are required to develop autonomy and professional capacity (the qualities and transferrable skills necessary for further study, employment, etc.). Among other things, this includes learning personal responsibility and the time management skills that will be demanded by graduate schools and employers. In turn, this includes learning to complete work by stated deadlines, and extensions undermine such learning. Second, extensions can create unfair situations involving learning tasks. For example, if extensions are given to students who have delayed working on an assignment or otherwise failed to organize their time properly, such extensions become unfair to students who have diligently exerted themselves and successfully met the due date. Third, extensions may not be as beneficial as students think because they can put students at a disadvantage in terms of completing their learning tasks. For instance, an extension in one course can have a domino effect (triggering the need to get an extension in another course to meet the new deadline in the first course, all of which puts students further and further behind).

For all three of the reasons stated above, I will **only** give extensions to students facing exceptional circumstances that are completely beyond their control and well-supported by official written and time-dated documentation. Typically, this means that extensions will **only** be granted for the specific situations outlined below. I will give students a little more time to complete an assignment if:

* students have an MSAF (suitable for the weight of the assignment in relation to the final course grade) that covers an unfortunate and unanticipated medical or personal situation occurring on or shortly before the due date for the assignment (in accordance with McMaster’s [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Requests-for-Relief-for-Missed-Academic-Term-Work-Policy-on.pdf));
* students have an accommodation letter from Student Accessibility Services (SAS) which indicates that they are allowed to have an extension on an assignment due to a disability (in accordance with the McMaster’s policy on [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Academic-Accommodations-Policy.pdf));
* students have followed the procedures in McMaster’s [Policy on Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/02/Academic-Accommodation-for-Religious-Indigenous-and-Spiritual-Observances-Policy-on.pdf) (the RISO policy) to request accommodation (at the beginning of the term) for an observance that conflicts with the due date or the immediate time frame leading up to the due date for an assignment.

Very rarely, some students may experience serious situations that are completely beyond their control but do not fit into the three categories noted above. These students are advised to immediately contact me by email to discuss their circumstances. They will be required to present acceptable written and time-dated documentation of their situation to me through email. If I am convinced the situation warrants an extension, and if I find the written evidence of the situation to be appropriate, I may grant an extension. However, I reserve the right to refuse an extension (e.g., if I don’t think the situation warrants an extension, if I find the written evidence of the situation to be unconvincing, or if the request for an extension is made at the last minute).

If I grant an extension, students will be required to enter into a written agreement with me through email. There will be no assignment extension without an agreement. This agreement will specify the new due date for an assignment, and it will also specify what happens if the new due date is not met. Typically, students will be granted a few extra days and possibly up to one extra week to complete the work. Depending on the length of the extension, an assignment submitted after the new due date may be subjected to a lateness penalty or it may not be accepted at all.

### Lateness of Assignments

If students lack acceptable grounds for requesting more time to complete an assignment (see the two sub-sections directly above), a lateness penalty will be imposed.

Late papers will be subjected to a lateness penalty of 5% per day (**including** weekends and holidays) up to a maximum of seven days beyond the due date. After seven days, papers will **not** be accepted. Late papers are to be submitted through the “Assignments” section of Avenue to Learn. The day and time of submission (as recorded by Avenue) will be the basis for determining the lateness penalty. Assignments must be submitted by 11:59 pm on a given day or they will be considered an additional day late. Assignments submitted **after** 11:59 pm on the final possible day for submission will **not** be accepted by Avenue and will be given an automatic grade of zero. For more specific information, please see the “Policy on Lateness” near the end of the assignment instructions.

### Use of Turnitin.com

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student-submitted work. In courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g., Avenue to Learn) that employs plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) to check the work for academic dishonesty.

Turnitin.com will be used in this course. Students who do not wish their work to be submitted to plagiarism detection software must inform the instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., through an online search or the use of other software). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com, please visit the website for the [Office of Academic Integrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

If you do not wish to submit your work to plagiarism detection software, please be aware that I will need time to perform the laborious task of checking your work manually for signs of academic dishonesty. Consequently, I reserve the right to withhold your work until I have had a chance to check it manually. This means that you should **not** expect to get a graded assignment returned to you on the same day that graded work is returned to the students who did submit their work to plagiarism detection software. You will have to wait several weeks longer.

If you do submit your work to plagiarism detection software, and if analysis by the software suggests that there may be a problem with your work, I reserve the right to withhold your assignment until I can carry out a further investigation.

### Grade Changes on Assignments

Sometimes, students disagree with a grade on an assignment and want to know what is involved with trying to get a higher grade. In this course, the basic process is as follows:

1. Wait at least 24 hours from the time you received your graded assignment. If you are upset or angry, please take the time to calm yourself. Furthermore, please take the time to critically reflect on your work and try to understand why you were given that grade.
2. If 24 hours have gone by and you still believe that you deserve a higher grade, please prepare a letter to the grader (usually the TA) in which you make the case that the assignment is of better quality than the grader thought with regard to the four marking criteria that were identified, defined, and described by the instructor (knowledge, organization, writing, and referencing). Assignment grades are based on what you have **achieved** (in relation to the marking criteria), so please do **not** ask for a grade increase based on what you need, want, or desire (e.g., to maintain a certain grade point average, to be within a grade range that you prefer, to get a higher final grade in the course, or to get into a certain program).
3. Please ensure that your letter is written in a **polite** and **professional** manner while being limited to about 300 words. Insulting or otherwise disrespectful letters will **not** be acknowledged or tolerated (and may be reported to university authorities).
4. Please submit your letter to the grader within two weeks of the date the assignment grades were released to the entire class. Grade changes for assignments will **not** be considered beyond that point.
5. Please cut and paste your letter into an email message (no attachments) and send it to the grader from your McMaster email account (no other account). This letter will give the grader something to consider, but it is **not** a guarantee of a grade increase.
6. After receiving your letter, the grader will re-examine your assignment and do one of three things. **The grader may increase your grade, leave your grade as it is, or decrease your grade.** The grader may find that there is no merit to your argument for a higher grade. With more time to examine your assignment, the grader may even notice problems with your work that were not spotted the first time around and find it necessary to reduce your grade. Therefore, if you elect to write and send a letter, you do so with the understanding and full acceptance that you are taking a risk with your grade.

### Marking Schemes

This course may utilize two different marking schemes, both of which are based on the grading system adopted by McMaster University. This system involves the following grades.

**Percentage Grades** **Equivalent Letter Grades**

90-100 A+

85-89 A

80-84 A-

77-79 B+

73-76 B

70-72 B-

67-69 C+

63-66 C

60-62 C-

57-59 D+

53-56 D

50-52 D-

0-49 F

Percentage grades will be used for any multiple choice or true/false testing. Letter grades will be used for any written work. Letter grades are preferred for written work since a numerical scheme implies that it is possible to produce a perfect piece of writing. However, for purposes of interpretation and calculation of a final course grade, the numerical mid-point of a letter grade (or the approximate numerical mid-point) will also be provided. In the case of a failing grade (i.e., an F), the numerical equivalent (between 0%-49%) will be the decision of the marker.

### The Need for Appropriate and Respectful Behaviour

In this course, you are expected to exhibit appropriate and respectful behaviour. Such behaviour is required for interactions through email and through Zoom, just as it is required for interactions taking place in person. Professors, TAs, and your fellow students deserve to be treated in a polite and courteous manner.

It is your responsibility to conduct yourself in an appropriate manner during classes in this course. While we (either me or a TA) are trying to teach you, and while other students are trying to learn, please do **not** engage in any behaviour which is rude or distracting. Such behaviour includes (but is not limited to): having a private conversation with another student; eating food; reading a book or magazine; putting your head down or sleeping; doing work for another course; using a laptop computer for anything other than taking notes; and using a smartphone or other personal electronic device for any reason while the class or tutorial is underway. Please understand that such rude or distracting behaviour can make it difficult for the professor or TA to teach, and this behaviour can also make it difficult for other students to learn. For example, other students may find it hard to learn if they are distracted by the sound of chatting or eating and the sight of someone in front of them surfing the Web or playing a video game on a computer or a smartphone. You are welcome to engage in such activities while waiting for the class or tutorial to begin or while enjoying a scheduled break in the class time. However, while the class or tutorial is underway, please show consideration for me, your TA, and your classmates. If you are bothered by the behaviour of other students, you are welcome to discuss your concerns with me privately.

It is your responsibility to interact with the professor, the TA, and other students in a respectful manner. Disruptive or unacceptable behaviour is strictly prohibited. This behaviour includes (but is not limited to): speaking from your seat – or speaking up during class discussions – without raising your hand and waiting to be acknowledged by the professor or the TA; yelling at the professor, the TA, or other students; and engaging in any threatening, intimidating, degrading, harassing, or discriminatory behaviour (physically, verbally, or in writing) that is directed at the professor, the TA, or other students. Such behaviour is **not** permitted in person, and it is also **not** permitted through any electronic media where there is a clear connection to the McMaster community. Disruptive or unacceptable behaviour that occurs in or out of class may constitute a violation of McMaster University’s “Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities” (formerly known as the “Student Code of Conduct”) and be punishable by various sanctions (penalties) that can be imposed on students by the university. According to the university, all McMaster students have an obligation to familiarize themselves with the “Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities.” Again, if you are bothered by the behaviour of other students, you are welcome to discuss your concerns with me privately.

## Faculty and University Policies

Please familiarize yourself with the following Faculty and University policies. You are responsible for being aware of and adhering to policies established by the Faculty of Social Sciences and McMaster University.

### Faculty of Social Sciences Email Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster email account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply.

### Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences. It can result in the grade of zero on an assignment; loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (the notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”); and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to McMaster’s [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy-1-1.pdf) and visit the website for the [Office of Academic Integrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: plagiarism (e.g., the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained); improper

collaboration in group work; and copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning, and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Code-of-Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities.pdf) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g., the use of Avenue to Learn or Zoom) will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

### Accommodation for Missed Academic Term Work

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow McMaster’s [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Requests-for-Relief-for-Missed-Academic-Term-Work-Policy-on.pdf).

### Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](https://sas.mcmaster.ca/) (SAS) at 905-525-9140, Ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster’s policy on [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Academic-Accommodations-Policy.pdf).

### Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, Indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in McMaster’s [Policy on Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/02/Academic-Accommodation-for-Religious-Indigenous-and-Spiritual-Observances-Policy-on.pdf) (the RISO policy). Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of the term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

### Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor constitute copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic work, **including lectures** by university instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by the instructor (for the purpose of authorized distribution) or by a student (for the purpose of personal study). Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

### Extreme Circumstances and Course Modification

The university reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather or labour disruptions). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels (such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn, and/or McMaster email).