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# INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDE

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To be used in the preparation of:

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COMM 45100 & COMM 45200

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August 2024

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In pursuing Independent Study, the word “independent” should not be interpreted to mean that the student does not seek or receive support or counsel. Quite the contrary, learning to be an effective independent scholar requires faculty mentoring. Independent Study is an evolving apprenticeship whereby the student develops and refines analytic thinking, writing, and oral communication skills. The faculty in the Department of Communication Studies will assist, encourage, and challenge you to seize the opportunities that I.S. affords.

### Independent Study Advisors

#### Senior I.S. Advisors

Due to the year-long requirements of Senior Independent Study, the faculty will divide Senior Independent Study candidates among the existing faculty based upon: (1) The stated interests and desires of senior majors; and (2) An equitable balance of I.S. advisees among the faculty. NOTE: Your Senior I.S. advisor may not be the same as your Junior I.S. advisor. The I.S. advising workload is an important part of faculty responsibilities at Wooster and thus plays a prominent role in the teaching load for faculty. Mandatory weekly meetings with your Senior I.S. advisor will be initiated early in the academic semester.

### Independent Study Requirements and Deadlines

#### College Standards and Policies

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Each individual department merely administers I.S. for the Dean for Curriculum and Academic Engagement. In this fashion, the Dean for Curriculum and Academic Engagement can exert a desirable degree of control over the consistency of I.S. from department

require more pages or sources depending upon your topic or the scope of your project. Students in the Department of Communication Studies must also fulfill the oral proficiency requirement of the Department by giving an oral presentation of their I.S. Successful completion of this oral presentation will be fulfilled by participation in the Senior Research Symposium in April. If you present a poster at symposium, follow the example in Appendix A.

No student may be registered for both COMM 45100 and COMM 45200 in the same semester. Students who do not meet the Department and advisor requirements for minimal performance in COMM 45100 will fail and may not take COMM 45200 in the subsequent semester. Students who fail COMM 45100 must re-enroll in COMM 45100 regardless of the amount of work remaining in COMM 45100. The Department is authorized only to hold orals for those students who are enrolled in COMM 45200.

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Selecting a Topic

Although students differ in their interests, a well-selected project is one that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_



- “to write an autoethnography to illuminate the politics of gender and race and the power structures within student organizations.”

In deciding whether you should develop a purpose statement or articulate a research question, you should consult with your advisor. Regardless of the approach you take, a purpose statement or research question is extremely important because it narrows the scope of your project and provides the foundation on which your entire Independent Study will be built. You should not, in other words, take such matters lightly, for a thoughtfully-articulated purpose statement or research question can provide the basis for a well-constructed project, while a sloppy or hastily-selected one will lead to problems as you proceed to the later stages of your Independent Study. In addition to conferring with your advisor, here is a checklist of points you will want to consider in choosing a purpose statement or research question:

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For example, “to study fear appeals” (purpose) or “How are fear appeals used?” (research question) are much too broad for any single research project, let alone your first formal research study. Instead, aim for depth rather than breadth: “to study how the American Cancer Society’s antismoking campaign, ‘Cancer Isn’t Pretty,’ used fear appeals to persuade teenagers” (purpose) or “How does the American Cancer Society’s antismoking campaign, ‘Cancer Isn’t Pretty,’ use fear appeals in its attempts to persuade teenagers?” (research question) are much better choices.





you wish to summarize. Communication faculty members strongly recommend that you confer with your advisor about this matter and that you submit a detailed outline of your literature review

4. Discussion of symbolic convergence theory
5. Research on public policy rhetoric and social movements
6. Research on strikes as a form of rhetoric

In this particular study, the student found that previous research could not be neatly

scholarship in this chapter as you explain (i.e., make sense of) your study.

### The Conclusions Chapter

The final chapter is the payday for your work – don't lose focus before you finish. Please leave enough time in your schedule to write a thoughtful, organized final chapter. This chapter demands a great deal of thought on your part so that you may examine your study critically and synthesize its various parts. In addition, a poorly written final chapter leaves readers with a negative final impression even if the remaining document is well-written. !

The last chapter takes a macroscopic perspective on your study. You need to synthesize your smaller results from your I.S. in order to answer your research question or fulfill your overall purpose. This chapter also should consider how scholars could extend this line of research. The five major components of this chapter include: major conclusions, implications, limitations, recommendations for future research, and final thoughts.

- **C**

This section should articulate the broad patterns in your study. It does not simply reiterate the individual results but rather synthesizes those results to form higher order answers to your research question. In other words, what is the big picture? This section is about reporting the overall pattern of your individual results. How do those individual results come together?

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What is the significance or importance of your major conclusions?

You are not just restating the conclusions.

Your implications may be scholarly and/or practical.

- Do the results have theoretical implications?
- Are there implications for the field or discipline?
- How can the findings be used?
- What significance or importance do the findings have to people?
- How can your results be applied in the real world?

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Any study has weaknesses or shortcomings. Limitations may stem from the method used, the procedures followed, the amount/type of data collected, or the purpose of the study.

It is your ethical responsibility to articulate the weaknesses of your study.

What are the weaknesses of your study? Why do those weaknesses exist? What are the consequences of those weaknesses for the reporting and interpretation of your results?

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**F**

The recommendations should indicate how future research can overcome the limitations of your study but should not stop or primarily focus there. They should also identify ways in which scholars can extend this line of research.

These should be specific and clearly articulated. For example, do not just state that a different method should be used without identifying a recommended method. Why should a different method be employed? What would be the rationale for this alternate method?

- **F**

This is a conclusion for the study as a whole.

It is also an opportunity for the student to reflect on his or her study.

If you are doing a creative IS, consult with your advisor and second reader about your method and the format of your IS.

If your IS has a visual component, please provide an archival copy for the department.

## The Scholarly Writing of Independent Study

### General Guidelines

Although we come to know and understand one another in many different ways, the formal written expression of your ideas is valued most highly in the Independent Study process. Your writing constitutes your academic identity, your scholarly calling card, your \_\_\_\_\_. Through your academic writing, you are expected to express yourself clearly, argue effectively, examine critically, and report accurately. Learning to write as a scholar can be a daunting task, but one that can be made much easier if you keep the following guidelines in mind:

- \_\_\_\_\_ .
- \_\_\_\_\_ .





passive: It was found that most communication studies considered male communication patterns to be the norm (Huong & Jones, 1987). (In passive voice, the subject—in this case, “It”—is acted upon, rather than performing the action).

active: Huong and Jones (2023) found most communication studies considered male communication patterns to be the norm. (In active voice, the subject—in this case, “Huong and Jones”—performs the action).

- **A**

tense shift:

Incorrect: Smith argued that the experiment failed to support the hypothesis, but says it generated useful information nonetheless.

Correct: Smith argued that the experiment failed to support the hypotheses, but said it generated useful information nonetheless.

- **D**

Incorrect: Frustrated by the difficulty in locating archival documents, changing the nature of the study was necessary.

Correct: Frustrated by the difficulty in locating archival documents, I decided that a change in the nature of the study was necessary.

- - .

Sexist: The human being is, by nature, a symbol user; he is also the only animal who can use the negative to discuss matters of morality.

Non-Sexist: Human beings are, by nature, symbol users; they also are the only animals who can use the negative to discuss matters of morality.

Note: Another way to strive for non-sexist language is to alternate between the use of she/her/hers and he/him/his. That is, one sentence might refer to the listener of a radio program as "she," whereas the next paragraph might refer to an individual listener as "he." Of course, if your study deals only with male views of situation comedies or only with female leaders of sports teams, then you should use the appropriate sex identifiers

- **A** .

Incorrect: The study wasn't a complete success.

Correct: The study was not a complete success.

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- The survey included a number of ambiguous phrases; thus, the survey's results may not be valid.
- The essay examines the use of communication by four social movement leaders: Malcolm X, Betty Friedman, Cesar Chavez, and Maggie Kuhn.  
The surveys were not randomly distributed: the researcher asked people he knew to complete the questionnaires.  
Students enrolled in Independent Study would have more success if they remembered this important rule: One must manage one's time carefully. (Note: A rule or principle after a colon must begin with a capital letter).
- "We will," he said, "emerge triumphant."
- **C**  
He murmured, "The wind is howling"; however, I could hear only silence.  
When she came in, she whispered hoarsely, "All is lost": the enemy had broken through the city's barricades.
- She asked, "What is plagiarism?"  
What is meant by "objectivity"?  
They chanted, "Tell us what happened!"  
Stop whistling "Don't Worry, Be Happy"!
- somebody's research      Carol's essay      an hour's work      Chris's book
- **F**  
trees' leaves      Browns' party
- **F**  
men's hats      women's clothing
- Children with hearing impairments versus hearing-impaired children

• A . E

- \_\_\_\_\_: You paraphrase carefully or quote accurately, but use the wrong authors when you attribute the source. This is an inappropriate citation.

To avoid such instances of plagiarism, you have two options available





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Style Manuals

All Junior and Senior Independent Studies will be expected to follow the format established by either MLA (Modern Language Association) or APA (American Psychological Association). Consult with your advisor on which to use.

Academic writing employs a rather formal style that not only pertains to Independent Study, but also has great application in other realms, as well. Familiarizing yourself with a style manual is an important part of the Independent Study process that you will use in the future to present your ideas and/or the results of your inquiries.

When using a style manual:

- Read the manual for guidance.
- Use the entire manual. Even though some of the rules for things like margins and quotations may seem petty, do not “invent” your way of presenting this information.
- Be consistent in everything that you do.

Format Requirements

In this section, we provide additional information or amend the APA and MLA style guides in specific ways that you are required to follow. Formatting is to be consistent in all documents and pages.

- C C

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDIES		
<p>Communication research should always be conducted in a systematic way. The five basic steps in research (outlined below) may be followed as a <u>general</u> guideline when a qualitative study is planned, conducted, and reported. Across from these research steps are the equivalent chapters (with specific content subheadings) that <u>may</u> be appropriate chapters in a qualitative Independent Study. Consult with your I.S. advisor to determine which specific chapters and subheadings you will need.</p>		
1. SPECIFY THE CRITICAL PROBLEM	CHAPTER I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction (no header)</li> <li>- Purpose Statement or Research Question</li> <li>- Rationales</li> <li>- Background (as needed)</li> <li>- Definitions</li> <li>- Description of Method</li> <li>- Conclusion</li> </ul>
2. REVIEW PREVIOUS CRITICAL STUDIES	CHAPTER II	



### QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH STUDIES

Communication research should always be conducted in a systematic way. The five basic steps in research (outlined below) may be followed as a general guideline when a quantitative study is planned, conducted, and reported. Across from these research steps are the equivalent chapters that may be appropriate chapters in a quantitative Independent

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**F**

Tables and graphs or figures are visual references that you add to your study to help organize or explain information for your reader. Tables and graphs should be located close to the body of copy that supports them. In all instances, copy should flow around these items. If a table is a half-page in length, the rest of the page should be filled with copy. Follow APA or MLA for labeling tables and graphs or figures.

Pagination must conform to The Department of Communication's standards. It is required that all chapters that are submitted to your advisor for review must have pagination.

- The final (bound) version of your I.S. should be printed double sided.
- With the exception of your title page, which has no page number.

(see Appendix C)

Import the watermark of the college. The title of your I.S. is capitalized. Everything else on the title sheet is upper and lower case. All elements are equally spaced on the page. The title page is considered to be page i of the study, but no lower case Roman numeral appears. Use the template on the Communication Department Wiki page.

**A** (see Appendix D)

An abstract is a concise description of a scholarly paper that allows the reader to get a general overview of the study. An abstract should include the purpose of the study, as well as a brief description of the method, results, and conclusions. These 150-200 word paragraphs appear at the beginning of the paper and should be understandable independent of the study itself. Finally, a list of 3-4 "Keywords" should appear at the end of the paper.

- Table of Figures  
If you use a "Table of Figures," it goes on a separate page.

TABLE OF FIGURES	
Figure 1: Bar Graph of Mean Ages of Subjects.....	62



## The Oral Examination of Senior Independent Study

### Purpose

Oral examinations or oral defenses are perhaps the least understood aspect of the Independent Study process. The goal of the oral exam is to allow you to display your knowledge and understanding about some significant portion or portions of your thesis. The exam gives you the opportunity to “show off” what you know about your project—its strengths and its weaknesses. Orals also provide you with the opportunity to answer questions that your committee has about your project, to clarify any aspects of your thesis that may be unclear, and to note any minor corrections.

### The Second Reader

Second readers provide an outside perspective on what you have done. They read your work with a “cold call” approach. This means that they know little about the processes that you went through, but focus mainly on the results that they read for themselves.

### Scheduling

Consult with your advisor about the scheduling of I.S. orals. Orals will be scheduled for a 90-minute time block (1 hour for the orals and 30 minutes for debrief).

### Procedures Leading Up to the Oral Examination

Once your oral exam is scheduled, you may presume—unless you have been told otherwise—that you have written a passing document. However, your advisor and second reader

should be expected.

### Procedures During the Oral Examination

You should come to your oral exam dressed professionally and have several items with you: your I.S., any notes to which you wish to refer, and paper to write down suggestions and to record the changes that your committee desires. You also may be asked to bring other relevant reference material (e.g., the actual messages that you examined in your rhetorical criticism, transcripts of your ethnographic interviews, completed questionnaires, the coding manual and completed codings from your content analysis, print-outs of statistical operations, etc.).

To begin the oral exam, your advisor will ask you to talk about how you first became interested in your topic, as well as the most interesting findings of the study and/or any minor corrections that you would like to make. Avoid the temptation of simply repeating what you have already written. (Remember, your committee has read the document.)

After your opening statement, your advisor and second reader will begin to ask you questions. You should answer these questions to the best of your ability. Do not be afraid to ask for clarification on a question or to refer to your notes if you need to do so. On the other hand, you should strive as much as possible to be so prepared that you can answer your questions in a poised, articulate way. Many students are surprised to find that the oral examination can actually be fun. Orals are an opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge and ponder the wider implications of their research.

At the end of the one-hour exam, your advisor and second reader will ask you to leave the room so that they may confer. An additional 20-30 minute period is used to indicate to you whether you have failed or passed your oral exam, and to debrief you regarding the next steps you need to take. If you have failed your oral exam, you must re-schedule (within two academic

reflection on your worth as a human being, how well you are liked, or what your future will hold. Indeed, one of the most difficult tasks that first and second readers face is assigning a grade to a student that they know will make that student unhappy, even though it is the grade that the student has earned. In short, we want you to take pride in your Independent Study, but we also want you to put your I.S. grade in perspective and not let it ruin the relationships that you have with your advisor, second reader, fellow Department of Communication students, and friends. Four Senior Independent Study grades exist. They signify the following:

- No Credit - Seriously deficient in written content, method, or form, and/or oral demonstration of understanding in regard to content,

details. If these changes are not made OR are not made to the degree that your committee requested, it may result in a lower grade in COMM 45200 or even, possibly, turn a borderline



- Spell-check all of your drafts.
- Do not provide your advisor with a hastily-written, and/or incomplete draft. At this level, a certain professionalism in writing is a minimal expectation. Proofread your writing. If your work has an excessive number of syntax, grammar, and/or spelling errors, it will be returned to you. You will be expected to revise it. If the revision also contains a significant number of errors, the process begins anew.





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## APPENDIX D: Sample Abstracts

APPENDIX E: Senior I.S. Checklist

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A 2014 Gallup study found a strong relationship between certain types of experiences during college and “great jobs and great lives” for students after college. More specifically, students have significantly better odds of being “engaged at work” and “thriving in all areas of well-being” after college if they work on a project that takes a semester or more to complete and if they have a mentor who encourages them to pursue their goals.

-Julie Ray, and Stephanie Kafka. “Life in College Matters for Life After College.” Gallup, 6 May 2014. Web. May 21, 2015. <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/168848/life-college-matters-life-college.aspx>>.