



# Session

## CONNECTING THEORY AND PRACTICE

At the end of this session, international students will:

- Be able to extract and discuss a concept from a scholarly article and relate this to a 'real-life' media and communication issue, practice or a case
- Have practised writing a short text which illustrates the relevance of theory to practice or to the analysis of a case study
- Appreciate how to synthesise ideas from more than one text in order to respond to an essay topic
- Be confident about referencing different types of text.

### How and when to use this material

This Session enables students to practise identifying concepts from readings and linking these to (a) a written or real example or case, as well as to (b) a particular topic, such as an upcoming essay assignment. Once students have identified a concept in their reading, they are then encouraged to find a relevant contemporary example to illustrate the concept, and then to incorporate this through synthesis into a draft paragraph which focuses on a particular topic or essay question.

Example texts are provided here for students to work through as an exercise, but the ideal way to run this Session is to modify it to suit an upcoming assignment by drawing on course readings and case studies that students are already working on within their program of study.

The following Briefing Notes may be useful in providing information around this topic area:

- **Critical and creative thinking, and asking questions**
- **Why Chinese postgraduate students struggle with listening, speaking, reading and writing in English**

## **Introduction**

A key skill in critical thinking is the ability to identify one or more relevant theoretical concepts and provide examples of how they work in practice. Such examples might be gleaned from written reports, media stories, or real case studies that students are involved in researching.

For this exercise, students are required to read a scholarly article, then extract a theoretical concept from the article, and relate this to an example found in an online media story before writing a short synthesis. So students have to read two short texts. If linking this Session to an upcoming assignment, ensure that at least one of the readings is central to this assignment.

To read a reflection on how one lecturer adapted this Session for her own teaching, see **Connecting theory to practice: A case study showing how these materials were used by a postgraduate lecturer in public relations and communication.**

### **Pre-reading and preparation:**

In advance of this Session, the lecturer to copy **Handout: Academic concept sheet** for distribution in the seminar.

In advance, ask students to read the following 2 texts and jot down the main points of the readings, including examples. Bring these to class.

1. Scholarly reading (3 pages only): Veil, S. and Yang, A. 2012. Media manipulation in the Sanlu milk contamination crisis, *Public Relations Review*, 38, 935-937. (N.B. Students will be familiar with this article if they have participated in the earlier Session on **Reading critically.**)
2. News story: Anderson, T. 2013. Managing Brand Reputation in the Age of Twitter. *The Guardian*, July 18. Available from <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/jul/17/managing-brand-reputation-in-the-age-of-twitter>

## Student activity 1: Selecting a concept, linking it with an example, and making notes

### Lecturer input

Introduce students to how a concept in the academic literature can (a) be explained by relating it to a real example, or (b) give insight into an issue or situation in real life.

Remind students that many written assignments require them to take concepts from their readings and relate these to contemporary phenomena. Media news stories can be a good source of contemporary examples.

Students already have skills in taking knowledge from one field of their experience and applying it successfully into another, although they might not have recognised this yet. For example, if students play a team sport such as football or netball, they will have a good understanding of how teams work and what it takes to be an effective team member. Remind them that probably they are transferring this knowledge already when they work in other types of groups, such as their academic project groups.

- Give students a few minutes to read through their previously prepared notes on the academic reading by Veil and Young (2012). Ask them to select ONE concept (or abstract idea) that will help them to answer the following question on the whiteboard:

*How might a corporate communicator or public relations expert, acting ethically and responsibly, prevent the escalation of a corporate crisis?*

- In pairs, each student should explain to their partner their chosen concept (e.g. *What is the concept and what does it mean? How does it relate to the question?*).
- After discussion, each pair should agree on a single concept to focus on. Then they should explain to their partner how the concept links to the example media story, i.e. Anderson (2013) (e.g. *How does the concept work in 'real life'? Or: How does the real example (media story) help to explain the concept?*)

- Give out **Handout: Academic concept sheet** and ask students in pairs to fill in the blank boxes based on their discussion, linking the concept from the scholarly reading with the example in the media story. Here is the example Handout:

<b>Handout: Academic concept sheet</b>	
<b>Assignment topic</b>	
<b>Name the concept from your academic reading</b>	
<b>Name the author/s who discuss it (Reference/s)</b>	
<b>What does the concept mean?</b> <i>(Write 2-3 sentences in your own words to explain the concept.)</i>	
<b>What evidence do the author/s give in support of the concept?</b> <i>(Write 2-3 sentences about this. You might consider including a significant quotation, and its page number reference here.)</i>	
<b>Connect the concept to your case study or example.</b> <i>(Provide an illustration of how the concept works in 'real' practice, or how the 'real' example helps to explain the concept.)</i>	
<b>Provide a reference for your illustration/example</b>	
<b>How do the concept and example relate to your assignment topic?</b> <i>(Explain in detail in 2-3 sentences.)</i>	

### Note to lecturer

For this Session, the purpose of giving students the second text (the media story) is designed to get them to consider how their chosen concept might be applied to a contemporary example in order to provide an illustration of the concept in action, or in order to understand a problem or issue in the contemporary example.

Note that Chinese students may need plenty of time and individual support to fill in the sheet as they will need to re-read their pre-prepared notes or synopses and think about which ideas are likely to be useful for responding to the question (or assignment topic).

## Student activity 2: Transferring notes into a written paragraph that focuses on an essay topic

This activity builds on **Student activity 1**. Here students are required individually to transfer their writing on **Handout: Academic concept sheet** into a draft paragraph which focuses on the essay topic provided earlier:

*How might a corporate communicator or public relations expert, acting ethically and responsibly, prevent the escalation of a corporate crisis?*

### Lecturer input

Before starting, the lecturer should mention the following:

- Tell students that they will be drafting a paragraph which will be based on their completed **Handout: Academic concept sheet** and that, by doing this, they will be combining – or synthesising - ideas from two articles in order to respond to the essay question.
  - When writing, it is important to use your own words, but you can also utilise phrases and even longer quotes (if they're significant) directly from the article associated with your chosen concept in order to describe the author's ideas.
  - Remind students that developing expertise in written English takes time and practice and that good writing usually requires more than one draft. The best pieces of writing have usually been drafted several times, to make sure that the sentences link together clearly and the structure is easy to read.
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- Ask students to transfer the text they wrote on **Handout: Academic concept sheet** into a draft paragraph which uses and links the sentences from each section, ensuring they relate this to the essay topic. (Note: if students are writing on computers, a quick way to start the draft paragraph is to erase the lines and boxes about the text on the Handout.)
  - Explain that the words may need to be adjusted later for flow, fullness, and formality. However, students should concentrate at this stage on writing a logically structured paragraph rather than expecting to write a final draft. Allow up to fifteen minutes for drafting.

### Note to lecturer

Students may prefer to work on their written piece together, and they may need your advice and encouragement as they transfer the notes and sentences from the **Handout: Academic concept sheet** into a paragraph format.

### Student activity 3: Examining how the paragraph is constructed

This group activity will add a further 30-40 minutes to the overall Session and therefore some lecturers may prefer to end the Session at this point.

- On completion of their writing, put students in small groups of 6-8. Ensure that students do not self-select their groups.
- Ask for a confident volunteer in each group to display their draft paragraph on a table in front of their group, and read this aloud to the group.
- Put the following questions on the whiteboard and ask the groups to comment or raise questions:
  - *Is there any confusion as to what the concept is, where it comes from, and why it is relevant to the student's topic?*
  - *Are there any gaps or omissions?*
  - *Have they provided evidence in examples and citations?*
- At this point, have the volunteer student place on the table in front of their group the completed **Handout: Academic concept sheet**. By pointing from the Handout to their draft paragraph, the volunteer should explain to the group the process of transferring (and perhaps rewriting sentences) from the Handout to their draft writing, including how they retained their focus on the essay topic.
- Finally, the lecturer should select one good piece of work from the groups to show and discuss with the whole class. This can be done via a projector, or by sticking the two pages onto the wall, i.e. the handwritten draft paragraph and the completed **Handout: Academic concept sheet**. Have students gather around the display and point out how ideas and sentences were transferred across to enable the draft to be written.
- Suggest simple solutions for any problems raised within the groups, and point out if/how the paragraph might be amended in relation to word order, expression or structure.



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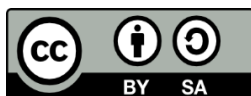
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Additional materials and resources are available from  
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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