

Strategic Thinking and Communications Certificate

Capstone: Resume & LinkedIn Representation

Faculty Guide | University of South Carolina 2026

Part 1 - Competency Inventory

Before students can write strong resume bullets or a LinkedIn narrative, they need to know what they actually built. This worksheet asks them to map their own coursework to NACE competencies, surfacing evidence before drafting begins.

Student Instructions

Step 1

List every course you completed for the certificate in the first column.

Step 2

For each NACE competency below, identify at least one course or assignment where you developed that skill. Be specific — name the assignment, not just the course.

Step 3

Rate your confidence in representing each competency: 1 = still developing, 2 = solid, 3 = strong. Be honest — this is a planning tool, not a grade.

Step 4

Circle your two strongest competencies. These will anchor your resume bullets and LinkedIn narrative in Parts 2 and 3.

Competency	Course/Assignment Where I Built This	Specific Thing I Did	Strength (1-3)
Communication			1 = developing 2 = solid 3 = strong
Critical Thinking			1 = developing 2 = solid 3 = strong

Professionalism			1 = developing 2 = solid 3 = strong
Teamwork			1 = developing 2 = solid 3 = strong
Leadership			1 = developing 2 = solid 3 = strong
Career and Self-Development			1 = developing 2 = solid 3 = strong

Faculty note: Students often underrate themselves on Critical Thinking because they associate it with data or logic rather than with communication strategy. Encourage them to look for moments where they analyzed an audience, diagnosed why a message failed, evaluated a persuasive argument, or made a principled judgment under ethical pressure — those are critical thinking moments that employers value in communications roles.

Part 2 - Resume Content

This part guides students through two resume components: a certificate entry and a skills section addition. Both require them to translate academic language into employer-facing language.

2A - Certificate Entry

Students should list the certificate in their Education section or a dedicated Certifications section. The entry itself is straightforward — the work is in the two bullet points beneath it.

Certificate Entry Format	Faculty Tip
Strategic Thinking and Communications Certificate University of South Carolina Columbia, SC Month Year Awarded • Work 1 • Work 2	Tell students the certificate entry on its own says very little. The bullets are where differentiation happens — and they must describe what the student actually communicated, for whom, and with what strategic intent. A bullet that just says they 'improved communication skills' tells an employer nothing.

Writing the Bullets - The Formula

Teach students this three-part structure for certificate bullets:

Action Verb	Start with a strong, specific verb that reflects what you actually did. Wrote, Delivered, Designed, Developed, Analyzed, Produced, Advised, Facilitated, Advocated.
Skill or Method	Name the specific skill, framework, or approach you used. Reference the specific communication skill or context you developed — persuasive writing, strategic message design, public relations, argumentation and debate, audience analysis, intercultural communication, social media strategy.
Context or Result	Anchor it in a real course, project, or outcome. Anchor it in a real course project or experience. 'for a nonprofit advocacy campaign scenario' or 'adapting a policy recommendation for three distinct audiences with different levels of technical knowledge' is stronger than a generic claim.

Before & After Examples

Weak (avoid)	Strong (model)
Studied communication, writing, and public speaking in certificate coursework.	Designed and delivered a persuasive stakeholder presentation adapting a complex organizational recommendation for a non-expert audience, applying rhetorical frameworks and audience analysis to structure an argument that anticipated and addressed counterarguments.

Weak (avoid)	Strong (model)
Learned about ethics in mass communications and professional writing.	Applied journalism law and ethics frameworks to analyze five professional communication scenarios involving privacy, defamation, and disclosure, producing a professional brief identifying the legal boundaries and ethical obligations at stake in each case.

Student Prompt - Write Your Two Bullets

Bullet 1 - Focus on your strongest NACE competency from Part 1:

Write a bullet that captures a specific thing you did, using the Action Verb + Skill + Context formula. Avoid describing what the course covered. Describe what you did.

Bullet 2 - Focus on your second strongest competency:

Write a second bullet that adds a different dimension of your skills. It should not repeat the same verb or competency as Bullet 1.

2B - Skills Section

Students should add 3-5 certificate-relevant skills to their resume skills section. The key coaching point: these must be phrased in employer language, not course titles.

Avoid (course-title language)	Use instead (employer language)
Communication Public Speaking Writing Persuasion Ethics	Strategic Message Design, Persuasive Writing and Argumentation Public Relations Writing Audience Analysis and Adaptation Intercultural Communication Social Media Strategy Media Law and Ethics

Student Prompt - Draft your 3-5 skills:

List the skills you want to include on your resume. Use employer language. For each one, ask yourself: if a recruiter searched this term, would they find it meaningful?

Part 3 - LinkedIn Content

LinkedIn operates differently from a resume. It is conversational, searchable, and narrative-forward. These two elements work together to tell a professional story about the student's credential.

3A - About Paragraph

The About section is where students connect their credential to a career direction in their own voice. It should not sound like a press release or a job description. It should sound like a person who knows what they bring and where they are headed.

Length	3-5 sentences. Concise is more readable on LinkedIn than comprehensive.
Structure	Sentence 1-2: Who you are and what you are building toward. Sentence 3: What the certificate specifically equipped you to do. Sentence 4-5: How you want to apply it — the field, the type of problem, the kind of work.
Tone	First person. Active voice. Specific over general. Avoid 'passionate,' 'hardworking,' and 'innovative' — they mean nothing. Use what you actually know and what you actually did.

Before & After Examples

Weak - generic and vague:

I am a University of South Carolina student who completed the Strategic Thinking and Communications Certificate. I am a strong communicator with experience in writing, public speaking, and professional communication.

Strong - specific and directional:

I am a journalism student at the University of South Carolina building the strategic communication and ethical reasoning skills to work in public relations, advocacy, or organizational communications. Through the Strategic Thinking and Communications Certificate, I developed skills in persuasive writing, audience analysis, stakeholder communication, and the legal and ethical frameworks that govern professional communication. I am looking for roles where I can help organizations communicate clearly, credibly, and with integrity — in contexts where what you say and how you say it actually matters.

Student Prompt - Draft Your About Paragraph

Write your 3-5 sentence LinkedIn About paragraph.

Use the structure above. Then read it aloud — if it does not sound like you, revise it. If it could apply to any student anywhere, make it more specific.

3B - Featured Section or Skills

Students should identify at least one artifact from their certificate coursework to feature or reference on LinkedIn.

Option A

Write a short LinkedIn post (150-200 words) describing a key insight or project from the certificate. What did you learn? What surprised you? Why does it matter to your career? Posts that teach something perform better than posts that just announce credentials.

Option B

Upload a sanitized version of a strong assignment to the Featured section with a 2-3 sentence caption that explains what it demonstrates professionally.

Option C

Add certificate skills to the LinkedIn Skills section and ask a faculty member or peer who witnessed your work to endorse the relevant skills.

Student Prompt - Choose one option above and draft it.

For Option A, write the post. For Option B, write the caption. For Option C, list the 3 skills you will add and note who you will ask for an endorsement.

Part 4 - Peer Review

Students exchange their resume content and LinkedIn drafts with a peer and complete the review rubric below. The goal is not to edit each other's work — it is to give the kind of honest, specific feedback a career advisor would give.

Assign pairs before class. Allow 20-25 minutes in class or assign asynchronously with a 48-hour turnaround. Reviewers complete the rubric below and return it with verbal or written summary feedback.

Criterion	Reviewer Prompt	Feedback (write here)
Resume: Certificate Entry	Is the certificate clearly and accurately listed? Does the formatting match the rest of the resume?	

Resume: Bullet Points	Do the bullets describe specific communication acts — not just that the student took communication courses? Are they grounded in a real project or audience?	
Resume: Skills Section	Are the skills specific enough to be meaningful to a communications or PR hiring manager? Do they go beyond generic terms like 'communication' or 'writing'?	
LinkedIn: About Paragraph	Is the narrative clear and directional? Does it connect the certificate to a specific field or type of communication work? Does it sound like the student?	
LinkedIn: Representation	Does the profile accurately represent what the certificate builds — strategic communication and ethics — without overstating technical or data skills the certificate does not develop?	
Overall Feedback	What is the strongest element? What one change would have the most impact?	

Faculty note: Brief the class before peer review begins. Tell students that vague feedback ('looks good') is not useful. Tell them that the most helpful feedback is specific and actionable: 'This bullet is too general — what exactly did you do in that assignment?' Model one example before they begin.

Part 5 - Final Reflection

The capstone closes with a structured reflection. This is not a summary of what students did — it is a forward-facing document about who they are becoming as a professional.

Length: 300-400 words. Graded on depth and specificity, not correctness.

Reflection Prompts

Prompt 1	Which NACE competency do you feel most confident representing to an employer right now, and why? Name a specific communication project or scenario from this certificate where you built it.
Prompt 2	What does communicating with integrity mean to you professionally? Describe a moment in this certificate where you had to think carefully about the ethical dimensions of a communication decision.
Prompt 3	What is one communication skill you want to continue developing beyond this certificate? What kind of role, project, or audience would push you to grow in that direction?
Prompt 4	If a recruiter asked you tomorrow to describe what this certificate gave you, what would you say? Write the actual words you would use.

Faculty note: The response to Prompt 4 is the most directly career-relevant output of this capstone. Communications roles often open with 'tell me about yourself' and students who have rehearsed a specific, grounded, directional answer in writing are significantly better prepared than those who improvise. Consider asking students to share their Prompt 4 answer in a brief closing discussion to give them a low-stakes rehearsal opportunity.

Suggested Grading Approach

This capstone is best graded on effort, specificity, and reflection depth — not on whether the resume bullets are 'correct.' Career documents are living drafts, not finished products, and students should feel safe being honest rather than performing confidence they do not yet have.

Component	Full Credit Criteria	Suggested Weight
Competency Inventory	All competencies addressed; evidence is specific and honest	15%

Resume Bullets	Action verb + skill + context formula followed; grounded in real coursework	20%
Resume Skills Section	Employer language used; relevant and accurate	10%
LinkedIn About Paragraph	Specific, directional, first person; does not sound templated	20%
LinkedIn Featured/Skills	Artifact or post drafted; caption is professional and clear	10%
Peer Review	Feedback is specific, actionable, and addresses all criteria	10%
Final Reflection	Honest, specific, forward-facing; Prompt 4 answer is interview-ready	15%