

**Component Area Assessment Annual Report
Oral Communication Component Area
2015-2016 Academic Year**

Submitted by:
Jill C. Underhill, Ph.D.
CMM 103 Course Director
Department of Communication Studies
Smith Hall 250
Marshall University
Huntington, WV 25755-2632
304.696.3013
underhillj@marshall.edu

Assessment Criteria

Component Area Goals

After completing the oral communication general education experience, students will be able to:

1. **Recognize communication as a transactional process by:**
 - a. determining audience orientation toward a message
 - b. identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers
 - c. recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback
2. **Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by:**
 - a. identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions
 - b. understanding the limitations of different types of evidence
 - c. differentiating between various types of supporting evidence
 - d. identifying weaknesses in reasoning
3. **Produce organized informative and persuasive messages by:**
 - a. demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention
 - b. stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks
 - c. using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message
 - d. concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments
4. **Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills by:**
 - a. maintaining eye contact with intended receivers
 - b. using gestures which complement the verbal message
 - c. using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message

Learning Outcomes

Outcome 1: *Recognizing communication as a transactional process by a) determining audience orientation toward a message; b) identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers; and c) recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback.*

This outcome is practiced through students' preparation outlines and speech proposals, in which they describe their preparation activities. They discuss their audience analysis activities and relate that analysis to the selection of organizational patterns, arguments, and supporting material. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses on audience adaptation as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker. All eight assessment criteria are used as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker on this outcome.

Outcome 2: *Demonstrating critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by a) identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions; b) understanding the limitations of different types of evidence; c) differentiating between various types of supporting evidence; d) identifying weaknesses in reasoning.*

The focus on critical thinking in the course is reflected in all assignments, especially the preparation outlines, speeches, and self-analysis assignments. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses on the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: choosing and narrowing a topic appropriately for audience and occasion; communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; providing appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; and, using language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion.

Outcome 3: Producing organized informative and persuasive messages by a) demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention; b) stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks; c) using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message; d) concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments.

This outcome is practiced through students' preparation outlines and speech proposals, in which they describe their preparation activities. Most importantly, students learn how to use different organizational patterns for various types of speeches in the course. The structural elements of persuasive speaking are evident in speech performances. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses on the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; and, using an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion.

Outcome 4: Demonstrating effective extemporaneous speaking skills by a) maintaining eye contact with intended receivers; b) using gestures which complement the verbal message; c) using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message.

The development of extemporaneous speaking skills is one of the most important goals of this course. Students' competencies in maintaining eye contact, using gestures, and employing vocal variety are directly observable in their speech performances. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: using vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; using pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience; and using physical behaviors to support the message.

Method

Sample

For the fall and spring semesters, a total of 860 persuasive speech videos were loaded to the Ensemble system. A priori power analysis and pragmatic time constraints resulted in a selected sample of 266 speech videos ($\pm 5\%$, 95% CI) for analysis. Random sampling for the selection of speech videos was used, wherein the team selected every third speech video after an arbitrary starting point, selected via a random number generator. When the video was inaudible or corrupted, the team simply shifted to the next video and resumed with the pattern of selecting every third video. With this sampling method, a relatively even distribution between fall ($n = 121$) and spring ($n = 145$) was accomplished. Moreover, all uploaded sections had four to six videos sampled.

Procedure

The assessment team consisted of the basic course director and a long-time term instructor. Together, the team has over 25 years of teaching oral communication courses and both have participated in previous assessments. The team was created with a desire to have rigorous perspectives represented within the assessment process. The team met during June 2016 to conduct the assessment. The first session focused on training. The team reviewed the instrument, discussed definitions and criteria, and practiced assessing speeches. The team then coded a separate sample and attained 95% agreement on the ratings detailed below.

Although the team sat together for the assessment process, each of the videos was evaluated individually. When unsure of how to assess an element of a speech, team members would have a brief discussion and reach consensus. The totals for each team member were loaded into Excel; the results of individual assessments were not significantly different. A score for each facet and the overall speech was then averaged and tabulated into a group score. Group scores are reported below.

Measures

The National Communication Association's "Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form" was used as the main assessment tool. This form operationalizes eight criteria of effective speaking competencies. The eight criteria call on speakers to: 1) choose and narrow topic appropriately for the audience & occasion; 2) communicate the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; 3) provide appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; 4) use an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion; 5) use language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; 6) use vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity, to heighten and maintain interest; 7) use pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience, and 8) use physical behaviors that support the verbal message.

The eight criteria were rated as unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). During the training meeting, the team discussed the assessment instrument and normed on definitions of unsatisfactory and

satisfactory. It was agreed that unsatisfactory translated to a speech that would earn a D or F on the facet being assessed. A satisfactory mark translated to an A, B, or C grade on that facet.

Results

Across the two raters, an average for each of the eight elements was calculated for each speech. An overall averaged total score for each speech across the two raters was also calculated. These scores were then analyzed in terms of the student learning outcomes associated with this course.

Eight Assessment Criteria

The eight criteria were rated as unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). Average ratings across the two coders were calculated. Topic selection (M= 1.92, SD= .24); pronunciation, grammar, and articulation (M=1.90, SD= .23); and use of language appropriate to the audience and occasion (M= 1.90, SD= .23) were the three highest-rated criteria. Vocal variety, pitch, and intensity (M= 1.79, SD= .35); organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion (M= 1.70, SD= .37); and, physical behaviors that support the verbal message (M= 1.65, SD= .41) were all also satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with average ratings that were the lowest were: providing appropriate supporting material (M= 1.63, SD= .42); and, communicates a thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion (M= 1.57, SD= .46).

Overall Ratings for Speeches

An overall summated rating for each speech was calculated based on scores for the eight criteria. The score given by each rater was then averaged. Scores could range between 8 and 16. An established minimum score of 11.5/16 (71%) on the eight criteria was determined as minimally competent. Average summated ratings ranged from 8.00 to 16.00, with an average summated score of 13.98 (SD= 1.64). Overall, 247 of the 266 speeches sampled scored 11.50 or higher. This translates to 92.80% of the speeches passing the benchmark.

Assessment of Learning Objectives

Recognize public speaking as transactional. Criteria detailed in the “Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form” were used to evaluate benchmarks on student learning outcomes. The first learning outcome for students is to recognize public speaking as a transactional process. This course outcome has been assessed with the average score on all the criteria. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score above 11.50 (71%). The speeches averaged better than the minimal expectation (M= 13.98, SD= 1.64). Overall 235/266 speeches scored above 11.50, which means approximately 88.34% of speeches met this course outcome.

Demonstrate critical thinking. The second learning outcome is to demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. This course outcome has been assessed with the average score on critical thinking exam questions. The decision was made this past year to eliminate exams. Therefore, this year’s critical thinking outcome is assessed on the following criteria from the speech assessment tool: chooses and narrows a topic appropriately for audience

and occasion; communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; provides appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; and, uses language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion. The minimum benchmark is a score of 6.00/8.00 (75%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 6.95 (SD= 1.40). Overall, 233 of the 266 speeches scored at or above 6.00. This translates to approximately 88% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

Produce organized messages. The third learning outcome is to produce organized and informative persuasive messages. This course outcome was assessed with the average score on the following criteria: communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion and uses an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion. The minimum benchmark is a score of 3.00/4.00 (75%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 3.27 (SD= .83). Overall, 193 of the 266 speeches sampled scored over 3.00 on these two criteria. This translates to 72% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills. The fourth learning outcome is to demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills. The outcome has been assessed with the average score on three criteria: uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; uses pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience; and uses physical behaviors to support the message. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score of 4.50 (75%). Scores can range from 3.00 to 6.00. This year's speeches averaged a score significantly better than the benchmark ($M= 5.15$, $SD= 1.08$). Overall, 217 of 266 speeches sampled scored over 4.50 on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 82% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

BOT Initiative 2. The assessment procedures described in this report are consistent with BOT Initiative 2. In particular, a randomly selected sample of student work in the oral communication component of the general education curriculum is reviewed to determine the level of competency in both oral communication and critical thinking. This year approximately 92% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 8% failed to meet the standard.

Discussion

Last year's assessment demonstrated a variety of areas that needed attention and improvement in the course. In anticipation of these needs, the new basic course director revised all assignment guidelines and rubrics. Training and instruction for instructors was significantly increased during the past year. The new basic course director also provided additional resources and lesson plans for instructors. Teaching observations were conducted for new instructors and offered to all instructors. Feedback on teaching and guidance were increased. Finally, in-class examinations were eliminated and transitioned into online quizzes so that more instruction time could be dedicated to improving critical thinking and delivery skills.

The speeches sampled this year are a product of this new paradigm, especially new assignment guidelines and rubrics. The same standards for assessment established last year were continued in this term. The assessment team was rigorous in assessment of the persuasive speeches. Conservative estimations for hitting the desired benchmarks and identifying areas of needed improvement were preferred.

Results demonstrate that all criteria for assessing the speeches were satisfactory. Students were, on average, able to: choose and narrow topic appropriately for the audience & occasion; communicate the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; provide appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; use an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion; use language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; use vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity, to heighten and maintain interest; use pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience, and use physical behaviors that support the verbal message. Below, each dimension is discussed in the order it scored in the assessment.

Topic selection, a major issue in previous years, was the highest scoring dimension this year. A change was made in the course this past year that required student to select civic persuasive speech topics. Choosing topics of social importance helped make the topics appropriate for the audience and promote civic thinking in the course. Instructors were also asked to help students narrow topics appropriately and this work was evident in the speeches given by students in this sample.

Verbal dimensions associated with delivery were all satisfactory. Topic selection likely influenced the formality of language used in positive ways. A new dimension to verbal delivery, argumentative tone, was added to the rubric and stressed in class sessions. This inclusion arguably increased vocal variety, pitch, and intensity ratings from previous assessments. That said, the incorporation of oral citations seemed to decrease pronunciation ability as some students had not practiced enough to fluently communicate about specific authors (last names proved problematic at times).

Physical behaviors that support the verbal message were also satisfactory in the aggregate; there is, however, plenty of room for improvement. A major difference was noted between students using notecards and paper outlines. Instructors were asked to limit the number of notecards students could prepare or limit the paper outline to one page. When the notecards were limited

students had the best physical behaviors. When students were limited to one-page outlines, some did very well. Having too many notes for the presentation was associated with unsatisfactory physical behaviors. Podium use helped contribute to satisfactory delivery in students with paper outlines. Use of clickers to advance PowerPoint slides was also overall beneficial.

The appropriateness of information is often influenced by topic selection. Therefore, guiding topic selection helped improve the appropriateness of information. Additionally, a new requirement of 5 oral citations in the persuasive speech helped increase the quality of the information provided. Although it was one of the most difficult concepts for students to grasp in the course and required a significant amount of course instruction time, the inclusion of oral citations from high-credibility sources significantly improved the quality of the speeches. That said, there is still needed improvement on this dimension that will be discussed below.

Organizational pattern options for students were also narrowed, which likely helped to improve scores on this dimension. Students were advised to use a problem-solution format for these persuasive speeches. While it helped structure the speeches in terms of organizational pattern, it may have negatively influenced the generation of thesis statements (further discussed below).

Finally, communicating a thesis/specific purpose was the lowest rated criteria. Although technically satisfactory, the assessment team was not pleased with the majority of the thesis statements presented in the persuasive speeches. We believe the problem with this sample's thesis statements may have come from using the problem-solution organizational pattern. Whereas an appropriate thesis statement for a persuasive speech is an argument that tells the audience who should do what to solve a problem, too many of the sampled thesis statements were "X issue is a serious problem." While appropriate for an informative speech seeking to raise awareness, this format is not an appropriate thesis for a persuasive speech. Below means for remedying this issue are discussed.

Overall, the majority of the speeches (92%) met the minimum benchmark score. This represents a 53% increase in speeches meeting the benchmark from the previous year.

These criteria were used to assess successful completion of the learning outcomes. In this sample, approximately 88% of the students met the first learning objective of recognizing public speaking as a transactional process. Overall, 88% percent demonstrated critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. About 72% of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. Finally, 82% percent of students met the minimum benchmark for demonstrating extemporaneous speaking skills.

Action Plan

The assessment results show significant improvements in a variety of areas. These results also identify areas of needed improvement. Planned steps to improve our ability to exceed assessment criteria and accomplish learning outcomes are detailed below.

First, the course will adopt a new textbook and online platform. Starting this fall, all sections will use "Public Speaking: The Evolving Art" (3rd Ed.) by Stephanie Coopman and James Lull. This

textbook is accompanied by Cengage's Mindtap online platform. This textbook was chosen after an extensive review of public speaking textbooks for its balance of traditional public speaking instruction and innovative variations on core themes of oral communication. The textbook is arguably more accessible and appropriate for our student body, as many of our students did not have public speaking instruction as part of their secondary education. It also costs significantly less than our previous textbook, even with the addition of the online platform.

Cengage's Mindtap seamlessly integrates into Blackboard for easy use by instructors and students. It provides a more personalized learning experience to students and we hope it will better prepare them for class sessions and major assignments. Mindtap also has a variety of features that increase accessibility for students with disabilities. Students will be asked to complete the reading and a quiz or short activity before coming to class. It is hoped that by allocating points to the reading quizzes and activities, students will be better prepared for an activities-based classroom. These activities should increase delivery skills and critical thinking outcomes.

After being totally redesigned last year, all assignments are being significantly revised this summer. Guidelines and specific rubrics will still be included for each speech. Instructors are asked to spend instructional time reviewing the guidelines and rubrics at length. We will continue our new practice of not including in-class examinations after seeing significantly better results in our assessment data. Finally, a new major assignment, an invitational dialogue, is being added to increase critical thinking skills and delivery fluency.

To help students determine more appropriate and narrow topics for speeches (Criterion 1), the course now features a civic thinking component. Students are asked to find civic problems of interest as a dialogue and persuasive speech topic. This was piloted in the last year and worked extremely well. We will continue this practice in the coming year.

To improve the quality of thesis statements (Criterion 2), a variety of approaches will be taken. New supplementary materials on crafting thesis statements will now be included. Specifically, we will be incredibly explicit about the use of the "Who should do what" argumentative format of a persuasive thesis. Perhaps some instructors were confused last year, so time in training and a new module on our organizational course site will be added on persuasive arguments and thesis statements. Instructors will be instructed to dedicate one class period to discussing each student's thesis statement in class.

To improve the quality of the supporting material (Criterion 3), we will make some additions to last year's curriculum. We will continue to require five oral citations from high quality sources. Students practice creating these oral citations with a proposal and then place them in the speech by crafting a preparation outline. We will also continue to work with our research librarian, Sabrina Thomas, to further develop the new research guide for CMM 103, which provides guidance for finding sources and information literacy. Ms. Thomas also hosts a session for CMM 103 instructors on teaching information literacy. We will seek to provide more examples for students and encourage students to seek out assistance with their oral citations from the Writing Center and instructors.

To improve the organization of speeches (Criterion 4), students will use the Outline Builder tool in Mindtap. The rubrics now allocate more points on organizational elements and insist on transitions throughout the speech. Class activities focusing on organization have also been added as options for instructors. The new textbook presents organizational patterns in a more straightforward manner and offers some innovative activities to learn about how different organizational patterns can be used.

To improve language choices (Criterion 5), a new class activity on language choices was designed for instructors. Points on the persuasive speech are now allocated for “argumentativeness” that is operationalized as language choice and tone. Instructors will be encouraged to use an entire class session in the persuasive speech unit to teach and practice argumentative tone.

We are still exploring ways to improve delivery. Currently delivery is assessed through: vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity (Criterion 6); pronunciation, grammar, and articulation (Criterion 7); and physical behaviors that support the verbal message (Criterion 8). Instructors have been asked to spend more class time working with students on delivery. New exercises to improve delivery have been added to the class repository. Mindtap includes more example speeches that focus on delivery elements for student to view. Mindtap also includes a practice speech-recording device called “YouSeeU.” All students will be required to upload a practice session prior to presenting their speech to a live audience. Finally, assignment guidelines will be changed to require use of notecards (instead of paper outlines) and limit the number of notecards students can use for the presentation.

A few general steps have also been taken to improve our delivery of the course. First, an instructor-only course section was created on Blackboard last fall. This instructor space creates an opportunity to share information like lesson plans, video examples, and activities. We are creating a repository for best practices and central mechanism for information dissemination. The instructor organizational course site will continue to grow and offer more resources for faculty.

We have also incorporated more training for all instructors. Cengage has conducted two sessions on using Mindtap and will have orientations for instructors and students in the fall. Classroom observations of all first-year graduate students will continue to be conducted. Finally, we believe the new textbook with an online platform will allow us to spend more instructional time for experiential learning. We also believe this change will allow more infrastructure and more support for instructors, especially new graduate teaching instructors. Overall, a major goal is to spend more instructional time working with students on speech construction and delivery.

Assistance Needed

Continued funding for reviewers to conduct the assessment in summer is necessary.

Summary Table

Outcome	Method of Assessment	Standard	Evaluation	Action Plan
1. Recognize public speaking as a transactional process	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 11.50/16 on the 8 relevant criteria.	88% of speeches passed	Revised speech assignments to stress importance of audience.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 6/8 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	88% of speeches passed	New class activities and revised speech assignments stress critical thinking application.
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 3/4 (75%) on 2 relevant criteria.	72% of speeches passed.	Focus on teaching thesis statements as explicit arguments that tell audience who should do what.
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.5/6 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	82% of speeches passed.	Require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation.