

**Component Area Assessment Annual Report
Oral Communication Component Area
2017-2018 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 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' competency 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 528 viewable persuasive speech videos were loaded to the Ensemble system. This number is lower than previous years because a damaged microphone in Smith Hall 414 made all the speeches recorded in that room impossible to assess. A priori power analysis and pragmatic time constraints resulted in a selected sample of 223 speech videos ($\pm 5\%$, 95% CI) for analysis. Systematic sampling with a random starting point for the selection of speech videos was used, wherein the team selected every third speech video after an arbitrary starting point. With this sampling method, we sampled more heavily from fall because more sections were offered and more videos were uploaded ($n = 140$) than in spring ($n = 83$). We attempted to ensure that all uploaded course sections had a minimum of three speech 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 experience teaching oral communication courses. The team was created with a desire to have rigorous perspectives represented within the assessment process. The team met during July and August of 2018 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. Each team member's ratings 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. Averaged scores are reported below.

Measures

The National Communication Association's "Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form" was used as the 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. This year, we added in a new assessment criteria: 9) presents a logical argument.

The nine 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 nine 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.

Nine Assessment Criteria

The nine criteria were rated as unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). Average ratings across the two coders were calculated. Pronunciation, grammar, and articulation ($M=1.98$, $SD=.15$), topic selection ($M= 1.93$, $SD= .32$), and vocal variety, pitch, and intensity ($M= 1.89$, $SD= .31$) were the three highest rated criteria. Use of language appropriate to the audience and occasion ($M= 1.84$, $SD= .37$), providing appropriate supporting material ($M= 1.76$, $SD= .48$), and physical behaviors that support the verbal message ($M= 1.74$, $SD= .45$) were all also satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with the lowest average ratings were: communicates a thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion ($M= 1.70$, $SD= .46$) and organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion ($M= 1.57$, $SD= .50$). The new criteria, presents a logical argument, had the lowest average score ($M= 1.53$, $SD=.50$).

Overall Ratings for Speeches

An overall summated rating for each speech was calculated based on scores for the nine criteria. The score given by each rater was then averaged. Scores could range between 9.00 and 18.00. An established minimum score of 12.60/18.00 (70%) on the nine criteria was determined as minimally competent. The average summated ratings in the sample ranged from 11.00 to 18.00, with an average summated score of 15.91 ($SD= 1.48$). Overall, 211 of the 223 speeches sampled scored 12.60 or higher. This translates to 94.61% of the speeches passing the minimum 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 12.60 (70%). The speeches averaged better than the minimal expectation ($M= 15.91$ $SD= 1.48$). Overall 211/223 speeches scored above 12.60, which means approximately 94.61% 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 had been assessed with the average score on critical thinking exam questions. The decision was made two years ago to eliminate exams. Therefore, the critical thinking outcome is now assessed on the following criteria from the speech assessment tool: communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; presents a logical argument; and, provides appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion. The minimum benchmark is a score of

4.20/6.00 (70%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 5.00 (SD= 1.11). Overall, 162 of the 223 speeches scored at or above 4.20. This translates to approximately 73% 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 3.24 (SD= .85). Overall, 159 of the 223 speeches sampled scored over 3.00 on these two criteria. This translates to 71% 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 the following 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 4.50/6.00 (75%). Scores can range from 3.00 to 6.00. This year's speeches averaged a score significantly better than the benchmark ($M= 5.66$, $SD= .59$). Overall, 220 of 223 speeches sampled scored a 4.50 or higher on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 99% 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 95% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 5% failed to meet the minimum standard.

Discussion

Assessment is the *sine qua non* of effectively administering a general education course. With 30+ sections across a semester being taught by 20+ instructors of varying expertise level, the efficacy of *CMM 103: Fundamentals of Speech Communication* could be called into question. Aggregating and examining data ensures we are delivering the course in a consistent and effective manner. Moreover, it would be impossible to identify what is working well in the course and what needs improvement without conducting frequent and rigorous assessment. The assessment team is rigorous in their assessment of persuasive speeches. Conservative estimations for hitting the desired benchmarks and identifying areas of needed improvement were genuinely preferred.

Last year's assessment demonstrated that the course was meeting the baseline goals for the oral communication requirement. Results of this year's assessment demonstrate that all NCA criteria for assessing speeches were again 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.

We introduced a new assessment criterion this year: presents a logical argument. This criterion was included after realizing we were not directly assessing the logic of the persuasive speech through the previous eight measures. We wanted to include a measure that allowed us to examine how well we were meeting a crucial element of persuasive speaking: logic. In previous assessments, we noticed a number of speeches that did not seem to be following any type of logical structure or contained at least one logical fallacy. The addition of this new assessment criterion arguably shows a weakness that the assessment team had informally identified in previous years. This direct assessment criterion now has provided data that demonstrates a need to focus more on logic and logically fallacies in our instructor training and curriculum. Plans to address weaknesses in logical arguments are presented in the action plan.

Speech topic selection has vastly improved in recent years and we will continue our current protocol in this area. Students are required to select civic persuasive speech topics. Choosing topics of social importance helped make the topics appropriate for the audience and promotes 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.

The appropriateness of information is often influenced by topic selection. Therefore, appropriate topic selection improves the quality of information provided in the speech. Additionally, the requirement of five oral citations in the persuasive speech has helped increase the quality of the information provided. Although it is one of the most difficult concepts for students to grasp in the course and requires a significant amount of course instruction time, the inclusion of oral citations from high-credibility sources significantly improves the quality of the speeches. We

modified the proposal assignments last year to include questions about the credibility of the source. We believe these questions made students evaluate the quality of the information more than they have in the past. That said, there is still plenty of room for improvement on this dimension.

Communicating a thesis/specific purpose is slowly improving and still requires more attention. The majority of instructor training and supplemental material was dedicated to improving student thesis statements. Additional guidelines were created for the persuasive speech assignment that asked students to argue a question of policy. These guidelines noted that the thesis statement associated with a question of policy should be framed as “Who should do what.” Although there was improvement from the previous year, plans for improvement are discussed below.

The results of the organizational pattern assessment did show improvement from the previous year. Significant effort was made to increase speech organization in the past year. First, instructors received training on the problem-solution outlining format. Next, students were required to use the problem-solution format. Unfortunately, students were often missing claims in their speech and going from the thesis into long informational sections—these speeches were deemed as unsatisfactory. The action plan details ideas we will attempt in the coming year to improve the organizational quality of our speeches.

Delivery-focused classroom instruction and more training for instructors on how to teach delivery skills has improved student delivery significantly over the past three years. Students are now required to use only notecards when presenting their speeches. We have yet to figure out how to balance the use of keywords on notecards while maintaining highly organized presentations. Because they have fewer notes for delivery, students must engage in distributive practice sessions to “learn” their speech. In the coming year, we will look for avenues to incentivize student practice.

Verbal dimensions associated with delivery were all satisfactory. Topic selection likely influenced the formality of language used in positive ways. For the third year, argumentative tone was stressed in class sessions. Although we would like to hear even more argumentative tones, the focus on this style seemingly helps students increase their vocal variety, pitch, and intensity.

Physical behaviors that support the verbal message were also satisfactory in the aggregate; there is, however, plenty of room for improvement. Not all instructors followed the guideline to have students use notecards when presenting. There was again noticeable differences in delivery between students who used presentation outlines and students who presented with notecards. Notecard users engaged more with the audience, were more likely to make eye contact, and used more gestures during their speech.

Overall, the majority of the speeches (94.6%) met the minimum benchmark score. This represents a -.2% decrease 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 95% of the students met the first learning objective of recognizing public

speaking as a transactional process. Overall, 73% percent demonstrated critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. About 71% of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. Finally, 99% percent of students met the minimum benchmark for demonstrating extemporaneous speaking skills.

Action Plan

We will continue with a few major elements in the course after three years of positive assessment results. First, we will continue our practice of not including in-class examinations after seeing significantly better results in our assessment data. Online reading quizzes now serve as a way to ensure that students are prepared for class time that can then be focused on experiential learning activities.

We will also continue using the same textbook. Student feedback indicates that the textbook is clear and provides helpful information for students while they are strategically planning their speeches. The revised edition of the workbook also contains significantly more class activities and supplemental instruction than previous versions. The activities in the workbook are going to help us target some of our weakest areas in assessment. All students are required to use the workbook in the 2018-2019 academic year.

The basic course director will continue building a variety of supplemental resources for instructors. An instructor section was created on Blackboard three years ago. 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 instructors.

To improve the quality of thesis statements (Criterion 2), we will continue to take a variety of approaches. First, the basic course instructor is going to create a short instructional video for instructors about crafting a thesis statement. Although a meeting was held last fall to address this issue, poor attendance meant that not all instructors were reached. Instead of having meetings, short instructional videos will be sent out to all instructors. We will continue to focus on policy speeches and be incredibly explicit about the use of the “Who should do what” argumentative format of a question of policy persuasive thesis. The syllabus template also now dedicates one class period to discussing each student’s thesis statement as a question of policy in class.

To improve the organization of speeches (Criterion 4), we have to look at the multiple antecedents of this issue. Students use an outline template to create their preparation outlines and are given ample feedback by instructors. We continue to suspect that the organizational issues are likely more rooted in the change from using a presentation outline to using a limited number of notecards. Whereas students previously were allowed to take up significantly more notes with them to present, we are only allowing minimal notes to increase extemporaneous delivery skills. Therefore, the organizational issues associated in the speech presentations may be a function of a lack of preparation by students. They are not practicing enough to “know” the organization of their speeches. The assessment team’s informal notes continuously remarked that students did not seem prepared and sometimes even seemed surprised by the contents on their notecards. To

address this issue, we are going to have instructors stress the importance of distributive practice. Whereas students do not need to memorize their entire speech, they do need to memorize the framework of that speech to be able to present it in a coherent way. Instructors will now dedicate one class period for each speech to discuss distributive practice and explicitly teach students the steps necessary to adequately practice their speech presentations. To build on this plan from last year, we are asking instructors to allocate points toward practicing speeches. Students can gather in small groups, record themselves practicing, and class time is now allocated for practicing elements of the speech. We are hoping an increased focus on practicing will improve the organization of their speech.

Finally, we now have sufficient evidence that logical arguments need to be addressed and improved in our course. The largest problem that we noticed was students giving a persuasive thesis, but then not making a logical argument (with claims and evidence) in the body of their speech. They would either use a flimsy “logic of good reasons” or use an informative structure. We believe this problem can be improved in a variety of ways. First, we may need to consider switching from using a problem-solution format for both the informative and persuasive speech. Students (and perhaps some instructors) seem to believe they are synonymous and do not transition to making claims for the persuasive speech. Although it is too late to make that change for the coming academic year, we will consider a switch to another organizational format in coming years. For this year, the basic course director is going to make a video series specifically addressing how to teach logical arguments to students. Our assessment data arguably indicates that instructors need more guidance on teaching this unit. Moreover, instructors will be asked to assign workbook-related material on making claims, finding evidence, and logical fallacies. Finally, additional time has been allocated in the course schedule for argumentation.

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 12.60/18 on the 9 relevant criteria.	95% of speeches passed	Continue focus on audience-centered public speaking.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.20/6 (70%) on 3 relevant criteria.	73% of speeches passed	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching logic. Spend more class time and have more assignments targeting argumentation.
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 3/4 (75%) on 2 relevant criteria.	71% of speeches passed.	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching organizational patterns..
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.5/6 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	99% of speeches passed.	Continue to require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation.