

**Component Area Assessment Annual Report
Oral Communication Component Area
2018-2019 Academic Year**

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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 475 viewable persuasive speech videos were loaded to the Ensemble system. A priori power resulted in a selected sample of 252 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 almost equally from fall (28 sections; $n = 112$) and spring (22 sections; $n = 99$) semesters. 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 2019 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. We also have added our own additional criterion for the past two years: 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), vocal variety, pitch, and intensity (M= 1.94, SD= .29), and use of language appropriate to the audience and occasion (M= 1.92, SD= .27) were the three highest rated criteria. Topic selection (M= 1.90, SD= .29), providing appropriate supporting material (M= 1.87, SD= .34), and physical behaviors that support the verbal message (M= 1.85, SD= .34) were all also satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with the lowest average ratings were: organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion (M= 1.71, SD= .45); communicates a thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion (M= 1.70, SD= .46); and, presents a logical argument, (M= 1.66, SD=.47).

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 16.53 (SD= 1.76). Twenty-one of the 211 speeches scored in the 70% - 79% range; 42 of the 211 speeches scored in the 80% - 89% range; and 140 of the 211 speeches scored at the 90% range or above. Overall, 203 of the 211 speeches sampled scored 12.60 or higher. This translates to 96% 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 203 of the 211 speeches scored above 12.60, which means approximately 96% 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. The critical thinking outcome is 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; uses language appropriate to the audience and occasion; and, provides appropriate

supporting material based on the audience and occasion. The minimum benchmark is a score of 5.60/8.00 (70%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 7.14 (SD= 1.11). Overall, 182 of the 211 speeches scored at or above 5.60. This translates to approximately 86% 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 2.80/4.00 (70%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 3.40 (SD= .78). Overall, 159 of the 211 speeches sampled scored over 3.00 on these two criteria. This translates to 75% 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%). This year's speeches averaged a score significantly better than the benchmark ($M= 5.72$, $SD= .62$). Overall, 204 of 211 speeches sampled scored a 4.50 or higher on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 97% 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 96% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 4% failed to meet the minimum standard.

Discussion

Assessment is a vital component of ensuring quality and consistency across multiple sections of 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.

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 two years ago: 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. The addition of this new assessment criterion allowed us to identify a weakness and take action to remedy it. We included additional course material and allocated extra class time toward building arguments. As a result of this focus, we were able to increase the average rating on this criterion by 10% and significantly increase the number of speeches that met the minimum standard.

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 once again modified the proposal assignments to make students justify the relationship of their information to the claims they were wanting to make in the speech. 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 again showed improvement and still requires more attention. Instructor training has focused heavily on 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 past two years, further plans for improvement are discussed below.

The results of the organizational pattern assessment did not show any 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. We now believe that potentially revising this outline could lead to better organization between the introduction and body of the speech. Further plans for improvement are detailed below.

Delivery-focused classroom instruction and more training for instructors on how to teach delivery skills has improved student delivery significantly. Students are required to use only notecards when presenting their speeches. We will continue to reinforce the best practices for delivery instruction.

Verbal dimensions associated with delivery were all satisfactory. Topic selection likely influenced the formality of language used in positive ways. For the fourth year, argumentative tone was stressed in class sessions. Although we would like to hear even more argumentative verbal delivery from our students, 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. Although improved, there are still a few instructors who did not follow the guideline to have students use notecards when presenting. There was again a noticeable difference in delivery between students who use presentation outlines and students who present with notecards, such that the notecard users engage more with the audience; they were more likely to make eye contact and use gestures during their speech.

Overall, the majority of the speeches (96%) met the minimum benchmark score. This represents a 1.4% 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 96% of the students met the first learning objective of recognizing public speaking as a transactional process. Overall, 86% demonstrated critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. About 70% of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. Finally, 97% of students met the minimum benchmark for demonstrating extemporaneous speaking skills.

Action Plan

We will continue with a few major elements in the course that have arguably facilitated our best 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 can help us target some of our weakest areas in assessment. All students are required to use the workbook in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The basic course director will continue building a variety of supplemental resources for instructors. An instructor section was created on Blackboard five 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 via a central mechanism for information dissemination. The instructor organizational course site will continue to grow and offer more resources for instructors.

Next, we will detail our plans to address criterion that need improvement:

To improve the quality of thesis statements (Criterion 2), we will work with instructors on identifying appropriate change agents for social policy. First, instructors will be asked to focus on policy speeches and be incredibly explicit about the use of the “Who should do what” argumentative thesis format. The syllabus template also now dedicates one class period to discussing each student’s thesis statement as a question of policy in class. Moreover, we will include extra instructor training on identifying the appropriate “who” for policy-related issues, so that they can help their students do the same.

To improve the organization of speeches (Criterion 4), we have to look at the multiple antecedents of this issue. 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. 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 again asking instructors to allocate points toward practicing speeches. This did not have a high adoption rate over the past year, so we will try to get more instructors do build this dynamic into their courses. We also believe that slightly revising the introduction to the speech could help with

organizational issues experienced by some students who tend to “get lost” between their introduction and first claim.

Finally, we will continue the steps to build logical arguments that have been successful over the past two years. Instructors will continue to be asked to assign workbook-related material on making claims, finding evidence, and logical fallacies. We have also asked instructors to build in additional course time to have students work in small groups to analyze arguments and translate that work into their own speeches.

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.	96% 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.	86% of speeches passed	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching logic. Spend 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.	70% of speeches passed.	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching organizational patterns. Perhaps edit outline format.
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.5/6 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	97% of speeches passed.	Continue to require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation.