

**Component Area Assessment Annual Report
Oral Communication Component Area
2020-2021 Academic Year**

Submitted by:
Julie Snyder-Yuly, Ph.D.
Department of Communication Studies
Smith Hall 246
Marshall University
Huntington, WV 25755-2632
304.696.2808
snyderyuly@marshall.edu

Assessment completed by Dr. Julie Snyder-Yuly and Dr. Clinton Brown

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

The COVID-19 pandemic created major challenges for our Fundamentals of Public Speaking CMM 103 course. Starting in Fall 2020 the University was teaching in a variety of hybrid manners to effectively prevent the spread of COVID 19. In some instances classes were taught virtually online, others had half the students online and half virtual during class, and a few with very small classes taught in class. In addition, some of the virtual classes were taught through Blackboard Collaborate and some through Microsoft Teams. Unfortunately, this led to the inconsistent recording of the speeches, and a large percent of instructors failed to load their speeches to Ensemble. For those who did not put their speeches on Ensemble, we were unable to access them after the semester ended. In addition, some speeches were recorded in class, and others were recorded at home and uploaded onto Ensemble. In some cases, there were duplicates of the same speech, and some speeches were uploaded in segments, resulting in multiple parts of the same speech.

Although we collectively did our best to teach this unit and prepare students to present their persuasive speeches from home, the quality of the speeches we received was highly variable. Students especially struggled with the lack of necessary equipment to record themselves presenting a speech in a way that allowed us to assess their nonverbal and verbal communication. Either the camera was too far away to pick up the audio or the camera was too close to assess nonverbal communication outside of facial expression. Often the virtual presentations and the use of our equipment resulted in glitches. For instance, sometimes during the speech the camera or sound would cut out or it would switch from the screen to the classroom. Our current assessment is set up to examine in-person speeches that are given to groups.

We were able to access speech recordings from 13 sections in the spring and 11 sections in the fall. Because of the lack of speeches available, we reviewed 4-6 speeches from each section. In total we reviewed 106 speeches from 14 sections. Speeches were randomly sampled from each section. Occasionally we had a fully unviable speech where the sound and/or video was so bad we chose a subsequent speech. In the instances where we had some marginal issues, a score of zero was given to indicate this aspect could not be evaluated. We recognize that this does affect the overall score of the speech, rendering several speeches below the score of 12. This will be addressed in the results section.

Procedure

The assessment team consisted of the basic course director and an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies. Together, the team has over 10 years of experience teaching oral communication courses. The team was created with a desire to have rigorous perspectives represented within the assessment process. But also to evaluate the assessment process. The team met during September of 2021 to conduct the assessment. The first session focused on training. The prior basic course director reviewed the process that has been previously used. The team reviewed the instrument, discussed definitions and criteria, and practiced assessing speeches.

The team worked together to establish validity. Following the establishment of validity, the team was assigned their respective speeches and worked individually to evaluate and code them.

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) presents a logical argument (also designated as: uses 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 unavailable (0), unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). During the training meeting, the team discussed the assessment instrument and normed on definitions of unavailable, 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. As there were still a number of students presenting their speeches online or recording them, we often faced issues when watching these. An unavailable or zero meant that we were unable to score an aspect because we could not hear it or see it because of the recordings. This has unfortunately lowered the scores from the previous years. Please recognize this as a technical issue, rather than a teaching or learning issue.

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. Use of language appropriate to the audience and occasion ($M= 1.94$, $SD= .23$), topic selection ($M= 1.80$, $SD= .42$), and selecting appropriate support material ($M= 1.75$, $SD= .48$) were the three highest-rated criteria. Uses pronunciation, grammar, & articulation appropriate to the audience, ($M= 1.73$, $SD= .45$), communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience & occasion ($M= 1.62$, $SD= .54$), uses vocal variety in rate, pitch & intensity, to heighten & maintain interest were ($M= 1.60$, $SD= .51$), and presents a logical argument ($M= 1.60$, $SD= .53$) were all satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with the lowest average rating was uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message ($M= 1.28$, $SD= .76$). However, many speeches in this category received 0 as the coders were unable to

assess physical behaviors as speeches were delivered via video as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic (i.e., student isolation/quarantine).

Overall Ratings for Speeches

An overall summated rating for each speech was calculated based on scores for the eight criteria. Scores could range between 8.00 and 18.00. An established minimum score of 13/18 (72%) on the eight criteria was determined as minimally competent. The average summated ratings in the sample ranged from 8.00 to 18.00, with an average summated score of 13.30 (SD= 2.13). Twenty four of the 106 speeches scored at or below the minimum score of 13, 31 speeches scored in the 73% - 79% range; 27 of the 106 speeches scored in the 80% - 89% range; and 22 of the 106 speeches scored 90% range or above. Overall, 82 of the 106 speeches sampled scored 13 (72%) or higher. This translates to 74% 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 (72%). The speeches averaged better than the minimal expectation (M= 13.30 SD= 2.13). Overall 82/106 speeches scored above 12.00, which means approximately 74% 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 four 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 6.92 (SD= 1.26). Overall, 92 of the 106 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 makes a logical argument. The minimum benchmark is a score of 2.80/4.00 (70%). The average summated score for this year’s sample was 3.22 (SD= .88). Overall, 84 of the 125 speeches sampled scored at or above 2.80. This translates to 79.1% 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. The average summated score for this year's sample was 4.58 (SD= 1.33). Overall, 63 of the 106 speeches sampled scored a 4.50 or higher on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 59% of the speeches passing this benchmark. Again, this score was impacted by the number of speeches, approximately 40 presenting using video equipment and appropriate physical movements could not be assessed.

BOT Initiative 2. The assessment procedures described in this report are consistent with BOT Initiative 2. In particular, a selected sample of student work in the oral communication component of the general education curriculum was reviewed to determine the level of competency in both oral communication and critical thinking. This year, approximately 82% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 28% 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 a frequent assessment. The assessment team was rigorous in their assessment of persuasive speeches. Conservative estimations for hitting the desired benchmarks and identifying areas of needed improvement were genuinely preferred.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted our ability to deliver traditional basic communication courses during the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters. Although we did our best to transition to ever-changing teaching modalities of online, virtual, and/or hybrid teaching, we were not able to adequately prepare our instructors for each of these modalities. The pandemic shifted our reliance on technology and has accelerated our need to adapt the basic course to online environments. This idea is further discussed in the action plan.

Results of this year's assessment demonstrate that all NCA criteria for assessing speeches were lower than in the past, they 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 to make a logical argument; 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.

Speech topic selection continues to improve 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 the 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.

Communicating a thesis/specific purpose still requires more attention. A large amount of instructor training and supplemental material is dedicated to improving the quality of 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 an improvement from the previous year, plans for improvement are discussed below.

Delivery-focused classroom instruction and more training for instructors on how to teach delivery skills have improved student delivery significantly. Students are now required to use only notecards when presenting their speeches. Because they have fewer notes for delivery, students must engage in distributive practice sessions to “learn” their speech. Verbal dimensions associated with delivery were all satisfactory. Topic selection likely influenced the formality of the language used in positive ways. For the fifth year, the argumentative tone was stressed in class sessions. 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. In the coming year, we will look for avenues to incentivize student practice.

These criteria were used to assess the successful completion of the learning outcomes. In this sample, approximately 74% 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. Seventy-nine percent of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. The lowest scoring skill was extemporaneous speaking. Unfortunately, due to issues with recordings we were unable to successfully assess all of these, and several students received zeros to indicate unavailable to assess. As such only 59% of the speeches passed this benchmark. We recognize that overall the scores were lower than in the past; however, this is likely due to issues related to online and hybrid formats of teaching and presenting.

Action Plan

This report represents the first submission as the new Basic Course Director. As the new director, I have worked closely with the previous director to work on continuing the priorities that have been established for the course.

We will continue with a few major elements in the course after four 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.

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 a central mechanism for information dissemination. The instructor organizational course site will continue to grow and offer more resources for instructors.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the public presentations have been online. As we are hopefully moving back into the classroom, our presentations should revert back to the prior format. However, we will be working on protocols for those speeches that must be delivered

online or recorded and submitted. As previously noted, it is imperative for the basic communication course to begin training our students to be effective public communicators online.

As the new Basic Course Director, we are making several changes to the curriculum. I have added some additional speeches to the syllabus in an effort to get students up and in front of the class several times prior to their major speeches. I am also working on revising our workbook to make it more practical for student use. We have also been experimenting with several online programs to see if they could be a viable opportunity for students to learn. Finally, I have changed the final speech to a group project focusing on persuasion using a multimedia platform. The idea behind these projects is to better prepare our students to be effective communications on multiple platforms and in multiple formats.

As the course develops we will be looking for new assignments, activities, and speaking formats to continue to meet the learning objectives for this course. The assessment team is also exploring some new methods of assessment. Rather than a simple meeting or failing learning objectives, we would like to gather more specific information to learn which aspects we need to focus more of our attention and teaching. As we move forward on this, I will reach out to the assessment office for advice and suggestion.

Assistance Needed

Continued funding for reviewers to conduct the assessment during 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 12/16 on the 9 relevant criteria.	74% 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 5.6/8 (70%) on 3 relevant criteria.	86% 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 2.8/4 (70%) on 2 relevant criteria.	79.1% 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.	*59% of speeches passed.	Continue to require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation.

*Because many of our speeches were online or recorded in formats not in the classroom, often we could not fully evaluate how a student had done due to problems in the system requiring us to give a 0, rather than a 1 or 2. This substantially lowered scores from the previous assessment. We recognize this is a system issue and not a teaching and learning issue.