

**Component Area Assessment Annual Report  
Oral Communication Component Area  
2023-2024 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**

In Fall 2023 there were 26 sections of Communication 103 and two sections of CMM 104H. Four of the 103 sections were for high school dual enrollment and two were off campus through MOVC and Charleston. In Spring 2024 there were 23 sections of CMM 103 and two sections of CMM 104H. One of these sections was a Web course and three of them were high school dual enrollment. One final section was through the Herd Humanities program. For every section that had recorded speeches, four speeches were randomly sampled from that section.

For Fall 2023 we collected 92 speeches from 23 sections. We did not have speeches available for the off-campus or dual enrollment sections. We were unable to obtain speeches from the honors section. For Spring 2023 we collected 84 speeches from 19 sections. We did not have speeches available for the Web or dual enrollment sections. Speeches were also not made available from the honors sections. In one section, the audio failed in the room and we were unable to evaluate them. After reviewing and removing speeches that we were unable to fully view, our final sample consisted of 168 randomly selected artifacts. Occasionally we had a fully unviable speech where the sound and/or video was so bad we chose a subsequent speech. We analyzed 20 more speeches this year than last year. We are still working with some instructors to ensure they are recording their videos but have continued to have issues.

### **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 July 2024 to review the instrument, discussed definitions and criteria, and practiced assessing speeches. However, due to scheduling issues the team had some difficulty connecting to finalize reviewing the speeches and writing the report. We apologize for the lateness of it.

To establish interrater agreement (i.e., intercoder reliability) the following approach was taken. First, a selection of speeches was individually coded using the assessment rubric. Then scores were compared and then the raters met and discussed discrepancies. Finally, Cohen's Kappa was calculated, and all scores met the minimum threshold of .70.

### **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 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 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. The BCD taught one section through the Herd Humanities grant program in Spring 2024 that included some additional requirements. Starting in fall 2024, we will be teaching 4 of these sections. Because the BCD taught that section, the speeches in that section were evaluated by Dr. Brown. One technical issue we found was that occasionally we had a temporary instructor who had some struggles with recording. We did have to find some additional videos to replace the random selections so that we could see the entire body of the speaker. There were enough of these speeches, but the selection was not as random. Additionally, during Fall 2023 two instructors were replaced by other instructors. However, there did not seem to be any issues with the speeches or recording of speeches in these sections.

## **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. Uses language that is appropriate to the audience & occasion ( $M = 1.83$ ,  $SD = .37$ ), uses pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = .40$ ), and chooses and narrows a topic appropriately for the audience and occasion ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = .40$ ) were the three highest-rated criteria. Uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message ( $M = 1.29$ ,  $SD = .46$ ), uses vocal variety in rate, pitch and intensity, to heighten & maintain interest were ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = .50$ ), and presents a logical argument ( $M = 1.57$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) were all satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with the lowest average rating was “uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message” ( $M = 1.29$ ,  $SD = .46$ ).

### **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 16.00. An established minimum score of 11/16 (70%) on the eight criteria was determined as minimally competent. The average summated ratings in the sample ranged from 9.00 to 16.00, with an average summated score of 13.2 ( $SD = 1.78$ ). Thirteen of the 168 speeches scored at or below the minimum score of 11. Forty-three speeches scored in the 71% - 79% range; seventy-five speeches of the 168 speeches scored in the 80% - 89% range

and thirty-seven speeches scored 90% or above. Overall, 155 of the 168 speeches sampled scored 11 (70%) or higher. This translates to 92% of the sample 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 11.2 (70%). The speeches averaged better than the minimal expectation ( $M = 13.2$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ). Overall, 155/168 speeches scored at or above 11.00, which means approximately 92% 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 6.80 ( $SD = 1.18$ ). Overall, 141 of the 168 speeches scored at or above 5.60. This translates to approximately 84% 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 3.23 ( $SD = .80$ ). Overall, 130 of the 168 speeches sampled scored at or above 2.80. This translates to 77% 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 4.20/6.00 (70%). The average summated score for this year’s sample was 4.58 ( $SD = .91$ ). Overall, 84 of the 168 speeches sampled scored a 4.50 or higher on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 50% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

*BOT Initiative 2.* The assessment procedures described in this report are consistent with BOT Initiative 2. 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 92% of student speeches

reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 8% failed to meet the minimum standard.

## Discussion

Assessment is the *sine qua non* of effectively administering a general education course. With 20+ sections across a semester being taught by 15+ instructors of varying expertise levels, 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.

Results of this year's assessment showed a decline in all learning objectives. Recognizing public speaking as a transactional process and demonstrating critical thinking were just slightly down but still in satisfactory range. However, the categories of producing organized persuasive speeches and demonstrating effective extemporaneous skills dropped substantially. Producing organized speeches is still above where it was five years ago, but it dropped substantially from the prior year. 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; and use an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion to make a logical argument. The area of our biggest concern was in demonstrating effective extemporaneous speaking skills such as: using language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; 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 that support the verbal message. This particular objective has been declining over the last four years.

Previously speech topic selection improved as the prior BCD required students to select a civic topic. However, it was observed that this protocol is still not being enforced by all graduate teaching assistants, or when it is, it is not being followed by some students. Although we believe choosing topics of social importance has helped make the topics appropriate for the audience and promotes civic thinking in the course, we are relaxing that requirement to some extent. We believe that allowing students to find a topic they are interested in may help them conduct better quality work. As such, we have been asking students to choose the same topic for both their informative and persuasive topic to illustrate the continuity between speeches and to ensure a deeper engagement with the topic. Additionally, we are asking students to turn in a list of topics so their instructor can provide them with feedback on the appropriateness of the topic and their ability to connect both informative and persuasive speeches. Instructors were also asked to help students to narrow topics appropriately and we have noticed most students are selecting more interesting and relevant topics. Instructors have also been given permission to "ban" certain topics in their classroom. For instance, topics like legalizing marijuana and pet adoption are highly overused and frequently poorly researched. Because relevancy of information is often influenced by topic selection, 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. Speech preparation

assignments are now asking students to provide at least 8 credible sources, 4 of which are academic and peer-reviewed, once their topic is approved. Students still only need to provide 5 oral citations, but this practice allows the instructor the opportunity to review both the sources and the content they plan to use prior to the speech. 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. To aid in this, we work closely with library instruction to help students understand how to research their speeches.

Communicating a thesis/specific purpose continues to require 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. Like selecting a topic, we still find problems with instructors enforcing this guideline or students following it. Because there are a variety of formats for a persuasive speech we are giving the students more choices on the type of persuasive speech. We are looking more at the quality of topic and presentation of the speech than the particular type of speech.

Delivery-focused classroom instruction and more training for instructors on how to teach delivery skills has been implemented, however, in 2023-2024, the pass rate dropped substantially from 66.7% to 50%. While we cannot pinpoint exactly what is causing this, we have identified several potential issues. First, students are 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. We continue to observe in our reviews that some students were reading from scripts, phones, or computers which negatively impacted their delivery. This typically causes monotone and stationary delivery. This may very well be an ongoing factor connecting back to COVID 19. Multiple studies have indicated students are still experiencing large learning gaps, there is a reduction in verbal and non-verbal communication, and students are experiencing more socio-emotional struggles. As students are adapting to in-person classes, these struggles may be more noticeable in a class that requires communication. In addition, faculty and graduate student teachers continue to note that students are not turning in outlines in a timely manner, so they are unable to give feedback to the students prior to their speeches. This may also be a factor related to the learning gap, as well as experiences with some high schools having more lenient assignment policies. We do not wish to just suggest that students and COVID are to blame. It is possible that we need to adapt new assignments or activities to help these students as they transition to college after COVID. The assessment team has also noted that the technology for recording these speeches could be better. Often the images are grainy, students are too far away from the camera to adequately see what they are doing, or the sound is problematic. This may cause the reviewers to be missing key elements in these speeches. We also do not want to dismiss coder bias. It is possible that due to our unusually busy schedules we were less attentive or more prone to view these harsher than in the past. In any event, we will continue to work to bring these scores back up.

To help combat delivery issues we will continue to allow more time between speeches and provide workdays in class for students to work with the instructor and peers on their outlines to try to get them done in a timely manner. We will attempt to make better use of technology to allow students to record and evaluate their own and their peers' speeches. We will work more closely with teaching assistants, adjuncts, and other faculty on issues with delivery.

### **Action Plan**

As of fall 2024, Dr. Clinton Brown will transition into the role of Basic Course Director. At this time, he will continue to use McGraw Hill's online learning platform, CONNECT. This product allows us to provide homework that requires students to engage in the textbook material. In addition, this resource provides video examples of speeches and other venues for recording and assessing speeches. We will continue to add more speeches and/or activities to get students engaged in speaking publicly in a variety of ways. As the new director, Dr. Brown will begin developing ways to include the informative speech as part of the assessment, he will also be administering a pre- and post-test to assess the students' knowledge and attitudes about public speaking.

Based on our findings for this last year, the new BCD is going to discontinue the group video project for the next year and provide more time for work on the other two speeches. Although the instructors like this project, we are not sure the students are gaining the skills and knowledge intended as it has become compressed at the end of the semester. The BCD will review the assignments at the end of the spring 2025 semester to decide if this is a project that should be brought back in or temporarily tabled.

Due to declining enrollment in our graduate program, we have had to make changes to the number of courses we offer. As such, the department has discontinued offering the CMM 674 Communication Pedagogy Course (which was required for our graduate students) every fall and instead it has been put into our general rotation of graduate courses and will only be taught during the odd fall semesters pending interest. As such, Dr. Brown is creating more ongoing training for the teaching assistants to ensure they are following course protocols, engaging in specific activities, and ensuring students are following course guidelines for homework and speeches. The BCD will continue to work on the repository of information for GAs and instructors. Dr. Brown has created course guide binders that provide rubrics, assignment prompts, teaching guidelines, etc. to guide graduate students and adjuncts throughout the semester. For professional development, Dr. Brown attended the Basic Course Director conference where he learned more about incorporating AI into the basic course. This was something that was typically attended by our BCD, however that conference was put on hiatus during COVID and just recently started back up again.

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, Dr. Brown may reach out to the assessment office for advice and suggestions.

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Method of Assessment</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Action Plan</b>
1. Recognize public speaking as a transactional process	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 11.2/16 on the 8 relevant criteria.	92% of speeches passed	Continue focus on audience-centered public speaking. Introducing new speeches into the course to give more practice to students.
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.	84% of speeches passed	Continue to provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching logic. Spend more class time and have more assignments/activities 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.	77% of speeches passed.	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching organizational patterns. Incorporate additional activities to address organization.
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.2/6 (70%) on 3 relevant criteria.	50% of speeches passed.	Continue to require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation. Create more avenues to promote practicing of speeches.

The last two pages of this assessment contain tables for summaries. Table 1 on page 10 is a summary of the outcomes. Table 2 on page 11 is a comparison table of the last 5 years of evaluation.

### **Assistance Needed**

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

*Summary Table #1*

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>2018-2019 Evaluation n</b>	<b>2019-2020 Evaluation n</b>	<b>2020-2021 Evaluation n</b>	<b>2021-2022 Evaluation n</b>	<b>2022-2023 Evaluation n</b>	<b>2023-3025 Evaluation n</b>
1. Recognize public speaking as a transactional process	95% passed	93% passed	74% passed	80% passed	93% passed	92% passed
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	73% passed	91% passed	86% passed	86% passed	87% passed	84% passed
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	71% passed	71% passed	79% passed	80.8% passed	86% passed	77% passed
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	99% passed	92% passed	59% passed	73.9% passed	66.7% passed	50% passed

*Comparison Table #2*