

Incorporating Oral Communication Skills into Your Class

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Definitions of Oral Communication:

- the effective interpretation, composition, and presentation of information, ideas, and values to a specific audience (University of Virginia Oral Communication Competency Report).
- the ability to compose, critically analyze, present, and deliver information through verbal interactions (University of Wyoming University Studies Program).
- information spoken by mouth; the use of speech (SIL International)
- the art of expressing and exchanging ideas in speech. It involves the ability to compose, critically analyze, and deliver information through verbal, vocal, and visual interactions (Old Dominion University Office of Institutional Research and Assessment).

Oral Communication vs. Written Communication

Oral communication is not simply just reading a written text out loud. It is an interactive and real-time experience among participants that involves not only verbal language, but nonverbal delivery as well. It also capitalizes on the relationship that forms between and among participants. As such, there are many differences between oral and written communication that faculty and students need to consider:

- 1) Time of encoding (putting thoughts into words)
- 2) Immediacy of communicator/audience relationship
- 3) Degree of permanence of the communication:
- 4) Time of decoding (the audience translation of words to ideas)

General Education Classes (Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, U.S. Diversity, African American Experience) must include 2 of 6 skill components (i.e., writing, quantitative literacy, critical thinking, information literacy, group work, oral communication).

For the Oral Communication skill area:

1. 15% of grade based on oral communication
2. Multiple opportunities and multiple venues to practice oral communication
3. Formal/explicit instruction in effective oral communication
4. Formal/explicit criteria for assessing oral communication competency

Examples of different types of Oral Communication assignments (assignments in *italics* will be discussed in the session; assessment rubrics included for those assignments with an *)

In smaller classroom settings (i.e., 40 and under):

1. Structured classroom discussion
2. *Case study discussion/facilitation**
3. Informative presentation *
4. Policy/Persuasive speech
5. Debates
6. Commemorative speech
7. Demonstration or “how to” speech
8. Teaching presentation (i.e., peer instruction)
9. *Research presentation**
10. *Panel discussion* (this could work well in a large class, too, by grouping students together in a thematic program, not unlike conference presentations)

11. Interviews
12. Press conference
13. Creative/aesthetic performance (e.g., story telling, performance of literature)

In larger classroom settings:

1. *Small group break-out discussions* (including study circles: highly participatory, democratic, small group discussions that uses dialogue to increase understanding of issues: see studycircles.org)*
2. Poster session
3. Inner circle or “Fishbowl” sessions (From *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips*): 6-10 students are chosen the class period before to be in the fishbowl, where they will have a discussion on a particular topic while the other students act as observers and recorders as they make notes about the process and content of discussion. At the end of the discussion, the observers will write or orally give a summary of the discussion and raise questions left unanswered from the discussion) .*
4. Podcasting/webcasting
5. Group presentations
6. Task groups (i.e., groups formed because they have a specific assignment to complete, such as an experiment, a marketing plan, a recommendation based on analysis of data, etc.) *

Some Excellent Websites and Resources

Faculty Resources: The following websites include tips on incorporating oral communication in one’s class, sample assignments, assessment rubrics, and other useful links. Some of these websites have links specifically for students as well. The ones marked with an “*” are particularly good.

UNC Greensboro Speaking Across the Curriculum website, including faculty resources
<http://www.uncg.edu/cac/SAC/sac.html>

University of Hawaii at Manoa, Teacher Resource page for Oral Communication

*NOTE: The “Steps to effective oral communication” portion would be particularly helpful for students who are assigned to give an oral presentation. It comes complete with PowerPoint slides covering the different steps. <http://www.hawaii.edu/gened/oc/oc.htm>

*An excellent source of assessment rubrics for many different assignments
<http://www.winona.edu/AIR/rubrics.htm>

*Primary Trait Analysis for Speaking Matrix for Assessment of Oral Presentations (complete with sample videos of competent vs. incompetent speakers) http://cats.eiu.edu/speakingrubric/Rubric_new_txt.htm

Speaking intensive resources from Bridgewater State College, including a powerpoint on podcasting
<http://www.bridgew.edu/SYS/facultyresources.cfm>

What faculty should consider when incorporating oral assignments, Hampden Sydney College
<http://www2.hsc.edu/academics/publicspeaking/faculty/incorporating.html>

Another good program description and faculty resource from Randolph Macon College.
<http://www.rmc.edu/directory/offices/hac/SAC/index.asp>

This site lists and describes a variety of oral communication assignments and exercises that can be used in different course settings, from the University of Wisconsin, Madison
<http://mendota.english.wisc.edu/~WAC/category.jsp?id=49>

*Presentation Help Online: A website for faculty using classroom *presentation* assignments, from St. Cloud State University <http://web.stcloudstate.edu/pho/index.html>

Speaking Across the Curriculum Resource Page from Sacramento State
<http://www.csus.edu/indiv/s/stonerm/SpeakingAcrossCurriculumHomePage.htm>

Information about Communication Apprehension/Speech Anxiety: A common fear that may prevent students from performing at their potential

Assessment tool to understand communication apprehension <http://www.hawaii.edu/gened/oc/PRCA-24.pdf>

Speech Anxiety website <http://www.roch.edu/dept/spchcom/anxiety.htm>

Student Resources: These websites contain information that would be helpful to students.

PPT presentation to introduce students to the basics of communication
<http://www.roch.edu/dept/spchcom/AnxietyPPT/sld001.htm>

How to prepare Research Posters
<http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/ming/Dept/Tips/present/posters.htm>

Allyn and Bacon Public Speaking website http://wps.ablongman.com/ab_public_speaking_2

Articles and Commentaries about Speaking Across the Curriculum Programs

Building a Solid Communication Across the Curriculum Program
http://www.ncsu.edu/chass/communication/www/faculty/faculty_profiles/dannels/papers/BuildingaSolidCXCProgramNCA02.pdf

Article in the Chronicle of Higher Education about SPAC programs
<http://chronicle.com/colloquy/99/speech/background.htm>

A conference paper that discusses several SPAC programs
<http://www.csus.edu/indiv/s/stonerm/Sustaining%20SXC%20Programs.pdf>

Oral communication literature review, Brunel University
http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/Literature/Oral_Communication.pdf

Case Study Leader Assignment: We will discuss 10-12 different case studies, 2 or 3 from each area of communication management: relational, organizational, health, conflict/mediation, and intercultural. For the case study assignments, you will choose 1 case study to analyze, based on the coursework you've completed (as that will give you the background needed to do the analysis). Typically, two cases will be assigned for a class date, so expect to spend 30-45 minutes presenting the case and leading the class in the discussion. To complete the assignment you will need to:

- *Provide a brief outline/summary of the case study for each class member, including a summary of the key communication theory/concepts that are applicable to the case* (1 page, front and back). Include specific discussion questions on the handout to guide the analysis (see example), and
- *Lead a group discussion* on issues you've selected as both interesting and relevant to the case study AND to communication studies (e.g., what does the case tell us about the specific communication theory/concept under consideration, what does the theory/concept tell us about the communicators in the case). Make sure to check your schedule and pick a date that you will have no potential conflicts, as the whole class will suffer if you are not able to present on your assigned date. Because it's necessary for me to consider the well-being of the class *as a whole*, I cannot make any exceptions or reschedule any missed case studies.

Case Analysis Rubric

Rater: _____

Course: _____

Student: _____

TRAIT	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Exemplary	Score
Issues	Does not recognize a problem or mentions problems that are not based on facts of the case	Recognizes one or more key problems in the case.	Recognizes multiple problems in the case. Indicates some issues are more important than others and explains why	
Perspectives	Does not recognize the perspectives of any characters in the case	Considers the perspectives of individuals who are related to the problems	Clearly describes the unique perspectives of multiple key characters.	
Knowledge	Simply repeats facts listed in case and does not discuss the relevance of these facts	Considers facts from the case and cites related knowledge from theoretical or empirical research	Discusses facts of the case in relation to empirical and theoretical research and add knowledge from personal experience	
Actions	No action proposed or proposes infeasible action(s)	More than one reasonable action proposed.	Proposed actions seem to deal with the most important issues	
Consequences	No positive and negative consequences are identified	Positive and negative consequences for each action are discussed	Consequences are tied to the issues deemed most important.	

Adapted from: <http://academic.scranton.edu/departments/assessment/ksom/>

Tragedy on the Tsangpo SAMPLE HANDOUT

Summary Outline:

- I. Information about the tragedy
 - a. On October 5, 1998, the expedition “put in” at the eastern portion of Tibet’s Tsangpo River.
 - b. Westerners had traversed this river only twice before, in 1924 and 1996.
 - c. There were 4 paddlers in the expedition.
 - d. The river was running between 20,000 to 25,000 cubic feet per second (cfs).
 - e. The team thought that the water level would drop by the time they got there, since the level was dropping two to four feet daily.
 - f. They also planned on hiking in areas where it was too dangerous.
 - g. No leader was discussed in the story, although Jamie McEwan seemed to be a major player in the story.
 - h. Doug Gordon, described as the best paddler of the group, participated in the decision making, sided with Jamie on the decision to paddle, and was described as “more aggressive” than other members of the team, paddling in areas that others would hike around.
 - i. Doug died as a result of the turbulent water on October 16.
 - j. Jamie says he would have made the same decision again if in this situation.
- II. Events that lead up to the tragedy:
 - a. One of the biggest monsoons in 30 years had hit before the expedition.
 - b. Flows of 70,000 to 90,000 cfs were reported 10 days before the expedition.
 - c. The group traveled “a long way” to the Tsangpo and had invested a lot of time and energy in the trip
 - d. The team felt they had to make the run before the snow filled mountain passes because the porters would not traverse the snowy passes.
 - e. Two other teams were planning the decent in the fall.
 - f. *National Geographic* gave a \$60,000 grant to the team for the expedition.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1. Why did the group embark on the journey, despite all the warning signs?
- 2. What symptoms and/or causes of groupthink are present in the case?
- 3. Who was/were the leader/s in the story? What role could they have had in the tragedy?
- 4. What could have been done to prevent this tragedy?

(OVER)

Summary of relevant communication concepts:

This case study is an example of groupthink (from *A First Look at Communication Theory* by Em Griffin. Retrieved 8/27/07 from <http://www.afirstlook.com/main.cfm>. and from *Communicating in Small Groups* by Beebe & Masterson, p. 274-280).

Definition: A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative course of action.

- I. *Symptoms:*
 - a. *Limited discussion of alternatives/critical thinking is not encouraged or rewarded*
 - b. *Illusion of invulnerability*
 - c. *Illusion of unanimity*
 - d. *Self-censorship*
 - e. *Direct pressure on dissenters*
 - f. *Belief in the inherent morality of the group*
 - g. *Members are too concerned about justifying their actions*
 - h. *Members are often too concerned about reinforcing the leader's beliefs*
- II. *Causes*
 - a. *Groups overestimate their power*
 - b. *Groups become closed-minded and narrowly focused in their discussion.*
 - c. *Groups pressure members to conform to rigid norms*
- III. *Consequences*
 - a. *No re-examination of original ideas despite countervailing information*
 - b. *No information-seeking from outsiders*
 - c. *Information that fails to support the decision is filtered out*
 - d. *In short, poorer quality of decisions!*
- IV. *Ways to guard against group think*
 - a. *Encourage conflict and disagreement*
 - b. *Appoint "devil's advocate"*
 - c. *Get outside help*
 - d. *Monitor for symptoms*

Panel Presentation Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is for you to prepare, practice, and present an actual public presentation in a real world setting. Along with 4, 5 or 6 of your classmates, your group will select a general theme for your session (e.g., Contemporary Trends in Engineering, The Future of Urban Universities, The Importance of a Liberal Arts Education for Students, The Definition of “Family”) during which you will give a 7-9 minute research presentation related to that topic. Members of the CSU community will be invited to attend (e.g., administrators, communication faculty, faculty members from your colleges, honors students, friends and family).

Sample Panel Title: The Cost of Feeling Good: A Commentary on Drugs, Health, and Ethics

Panel Abstract: When one considers the expense of health care, often we consider the cost of research to develop new drugs or treatments. Although a large portion of this is monetary expense, additional cost lies in the many years it takes for the research to be conducted appropriately and to be approved before it can be applied to a human population. But what about the ethical costs of health care and its impact on society? What cost does society pay for research? What cost does the human race pay for drugs that are beneficial in eradicating disease or relieving suffering, but are not made available to those that are suffering from the disease? How does society justify the stigma it places on a group of individuals simply because they had the misfortune of becoming ill? How much does it cost in research, treatments, and preventative medicine to live to a ripe old age? How long, after all this expense, can one expect to live? CSU Honors Students will address these questions in its symposium, “The Cost of Feeling Good: A Commentary on Drugs, Health, and Ethics.”

Individual Papers:

- *Fighting Cancer: The Process of Drug Development*
- *The Identification and Treatment of Deep Vein Thrombosis*
- *Stigma, Discrimination and AIDS*
- *Practices of Pharmaceutical Companies: Are People a Priority over Profit?*
- *How Long Can You Live?*

Rubric for Oral Communication in a Research Presentation

Levels of Achievement

Criteria	3 Sophisticated	2 Competent	1 Not Yet Competent
<i>Organization</i>	Presentation is clear, logical, and organized. Listener can follow line of reasoning.	Presentation is generally clear and well organized. A few minor points may be confusing.	Listener can follow presentation only with effort. Some arguments are not clear. Organization seems haphazard.
<i>Style</i>	Level of presentation is appropriate for the audience. Presentation is a planned conversation, paced for audience understanding. It is not a reading of a paper. Speaker is clearly comfortable in front of the group and can be heard by all.	Level of presentation is generally appropriate. Pacing is sometimes too fast or too slow. The presenter seems slightly uncomfortable at times, and the audience occasionally has trouble hearing him/her.	Aspects of presentation are too elementary or too sophisticated for audience. Presenter seems uncomfortable and can be heard only if listener is very attentive. Much of the information is read.
<i>Use of communication Aids (e.g., Transparencies, Slides, Posters, Handouts, Computer-Generated Materials)</i>	Communication aids enhance the presentation. They are prepared in a professional manner: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Font on visuals is large enough to be seen by all. Information is organized to maximize audience understanding. Details are minimized so that main points stand out. 	Communication aids contribute to the quality of the presentation. Font size is appropriate for reading. Appropriate information is included. Some material is not supported by visual aids.	Communication aids are poorly prepared or used inappropriately. Font is too small to be easily seen. Too much information is included. Unimportant material is highlighted. Listeners may be confused.
<i>Content</i>			
Depth of Content	Speaker provides accurate and complete explanation of key concepts and theories, drawing upon relevant literature. Applications of theory are included to illuminate issues. Listeners gain insight.	For the most part, explanations of concepts and theories are accurate and complete. Some helpful applications are included.	Explanations of concepts and/or theories are inaccurate or incomplete. Little attempt is made to tie theory to practice. Listeners gain little from presentation.
Accuracy of Content	Information (names, facts, etc.) included in the presentation is consistently accurate.	No significant errors are made. Listeners recognize any errors to be the result nervousness or oversight.	Enough errors are made to distract a knowledgeable listener, but some information is accurate. The presentation is useful if the listener can determine what information is reliable.
<i>Use of Language</i>			
Grammar and Word Choice	Sentences are complete and grammatical, and they flow together easily. Words are chosen for their precise meaning.	For the most part, sentences are complete and grammatical, and they flow together easily. With a few exceptions, words are chosen for their precise meaning.	Listeners can follow the presentation, but they are distracted by some grammatical errors and use of slang. Some sentences are incomplete/halting, and/or vocabulary is somewhat limited or inappropriate.
Freedom from Bias (e.g., Sexism, Racism, Ageism, Heterosexism, etc.)	Both oral language and body language are free from bias.	Oral language and body language are free from bias with one or two minor exceptions.	Oral language and/or body language includes some identifiable bias. Some listeners will be offended.
<i>Personal Appearance</i>			
	Personal appearance is completely appropriate for the occasion and the audience.	Personal appearance is generally appropriate for the occasion and audience. However, some aspects of appearance reflect lack of sensitivity to nuances of the occasion or expectations of the audience.	Personal appearance is inappropriate for the occasion and audience.
<i>Responsiveness to Audience</i>			
Verbal Interaction	Consistently clarifies, restates, and responds to questions. Summarizes when needed.	Generally responsive to audience comments, questions, and needs. Misses some opportunities for interaction.	Responds to questions inadequately.
Body Language	Body language reflects comfort interacting with audience.	Body language reflects some discomfort interacting with the audience.	Body language reveals a reluctance to interact with audience.

Adapted From:

<http://www.winona.edu/AIR/resourcelinks/oral%20communication%20grad%20program.pdf>

Fishbowl Discussion

Adapted from <http://jon.mueller.staff.noctrl.edu/toolbox/examples/keller00/task2.doc> and <http://www.civicsinstitute.org/curricula/downloads/1159387736group.doc>.

Assignment: You will be asked to think critically, question each other and yourself, and listen critically while participating in a fishbowl discussion. In this type of discussion you will form two circles containing an equal amount of students. There will be an outer and inner circle. The inner circle will discuss the questions they responded to prior to discussion. These students will state and support their opinion, beliefs, and values about the issues and ideas in the reading. The outer group will have a chance to say something by sitting in an open chair in their circle. While the inner circle participates in the discussion the outer circle will be listening critically to what is being said and will write down their ideas about the discussion. Once the inner group gets a chance to discuss all of the questions the two circles will reverse roles. Students will then evaluate the discussion as a group and as an individual.

You will write down your responses to open ended questions prior to the discussion. These will be the first questions asked during the discussion. These questions will ask you to relate the issues in the reading with real life situations.

You will write a post discussion paper analyzing the pros and cons of the group discussion. You will suggest any changes that should be made as well as commenting on the beneficial parts of the discussion. You will finally share their feelings about their role in the discussion.

GROUP DISCUSSION RUBRIC					
Content ___ Participated in the discussion by making relevant statements. ___ Statements exhibited an understanding of the content. ___ Appropriately challenged the accuracy, logic, or clarity of statements made by others.	5	4	3	2	1
Organization ___ Used logical reasoning. ___ Asked pertinent questions that lead others to think about the issue being discussed.	5	4	3	2	1
Conduct ___ Responded appropriately at all times. ___ Invited contributions of others.	5	4	3	2	1
OVERALL SCORE:					
COMMENTS:					

Public Speaking Rubric

Student Name: _____ Class: _____ Assignment: _____ Date: _____

Competency 1	Competency 2	Competency 3	Competency 4	Competency 5	Competency 6	Competency 7	Competency 8
Chooses and Narrows Topic Appropriately for Audience and Occasion	Communicates Thesis/Specific Purpose Appropriately for Audience and Occasion	Supporting Material is Appropriate based on Audience and Occasion	Organizational Pattern is Appropriate to Topic, Audience, Occasion and Purpose	Language is Appropriate to Topic, Audience, Occasion and Purpose	Vocal Variety in Rate, Pitch and Intensity Heighten and Maintain Interest	Pronunciation, Grammar and Articulation are Appropriate to the Designated Audience	Physical Behaviors Support the Verbal Message
Excellent Topic and focus are exceptionally appropriate for purpose, time constraints and audience	Excellent Thesis/Specific Purpose is exceptionally clear and identifiable	Excellent Supporting material is exceptional in quality and variety	Excellent Exceptional introduction and conclusion; exceptionally clear and logical progression within and between ideas	Excellent Language is exceptionally clear, vivid, and appropriate	Excellent Exceptional use of vocal variety in conversational mode	Excellent Exceptional articulation, pronunciation and grammar	Excellent Exceptional posture, gestures, bodily movement, facial expressions, eye contact and appearance
Satisfactory Topic and focus are appropriate for purpose, time constraints and audience	Satisfactory Thesis/Specific Purpose is adequately clear and identifiable	Satisfactory Supporting material is appropriate in quality and variety	Satisfactory Appropriate introduction and conclusion; reasonably clear and logical progression within and between ideas	Satisfactory Language is reasonably clear, vivid, and appropriate	Satisfactory Acceptable use of vocal variety in a conversational mode	Satisfactory Acceptable articulation; few pronunciation or grammatical errors	Satisfactory Acceptable posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and appearance
Unsatisfactory Topic and focus are not appropriate for either purpose, time constraints or audience	Unsatisfactory Does not communicate a clear and identifiable Thesis/Specific Purpose	Unsatisfactory Supporting material is inappropriate in quality and variety	Unsatisfactory No introduction or conclusion; no clear, logical progression within and between ideas	Unsatisfactory Language is unclear or inappropriate	Unsatisfactory Failure to use vocal variety or a conversational mode	Unsatisfactory Unacceptable articulation, pronunciation or grammar	Unsatisfactory Unacceptable posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact or appearance

Comments: _____

Grade: _____

Rubric for Team Work			
	Level of Achievement		
Criteria	4	2	0
	Exemplary	Satisfactory	Unacceptable
Group Functioning			
Attending	Most, if not all, members attend all meetings.	Most members are present at most meetings. When members have to be absent they inform and/or seek the agreement of the team.	Many members frequently miss meetings and do not inform the team.
Participating	There is a clear definition of tasks to be accomplished, anticipating future needs. All members take an active role. Tasks are defined by the group and assigned to all members. The team engages in follow-up activities to monitor progress.	Tasks are defined informally, and most but not all members understand them. Most members contribute. Follow-up is sporadic.	Tasks are not defined, and few members participate actively. There is no follow-up.
Defining Members' Roles	Every member's role on the team is defined and understood by all. Each team member can explain the role of others.	Members' roles are defined informally and may not be completely understood by all. Some members may not be able to explain the role of others.	There is little understanding of who does what.
Making Collective Decisions	Clear procedures for making decisions are established and documented. Decisions, the process by which they were made, and the involvement of members are also documented.	Decision-making procedures are established informally, leading to inconsistency in implementation and a failure to involve all members in decision making.	Because there is no decision-making process, decisions are made by individuals, and they do not reflect the thinking or the desires of the team.
Team Member Support	Every team member is treated with respect. All members listen to all ideas. The work of each person is acknowledged. Members feel free to seek assistance from others or to ask questions.	There is a general atmosphere of respect for team members, but some members may not be heard as much as others. Acknowledging others' work is serendipitous rather than planned. Some members may not feel free to turn to others for help.	The team atmosphere is competitive and individualistic rather than cooperative and supportive.

Criteria	4	2	0
Managing Conflict	Conflicts are consistently resolved through open discussion and compromise.	Members are generally able to resolve conflicts through open discussion and compromise.	Conflicts that arise are either not dealt with or cannot be resolved.
Process Management			
Meeting Regularly	Weekly or biweekly meetings are scheduled and held at defined times.	Meetings are schedule sporadically to keep the project going.	Meetings are rare.
Establishing Goals	Realistic, prioritized, and measurable goals are agreed upon and documented.	Goals are establish, but some may be too general or unquantifiable. Priorities may be unrealistic. Documentation may be incomplete.	Glear goals are nt formulated or documented.
Keeping Meeting Notes	Written minutes summarize attendance, discussions, and actions. Minutes are distributed electronically within two days of the meeting.	Minutes summarizing attendance, discussion, and actions are written and distributed but not consistently. Some minutes are more complete than others.	Minutes are either nonexistent or sketchy, containing little beyond attendance lists.
Adjusting	When working to achieve goals, the team is able to adjust plans as needs arise. There is a clear understanding of the nature of min-course corrections and why they were needed.	The team is not always able to adjust as needed to meet goals. Realization of the need for mid-course corrections sometimes comes too late.	The team seems to be trhrashing about. Activity plans (if they exist) are unfocused, and thus there is no ability to adjust and make corrections.
Timely Submission of Work Assignments and Reports	Team is self-motivated and can complete work assignements and reports in a timely manner without being reminded.	Work assignments and reports are submitted but are sometimes late.	Work assignments and reports are submitted inconsistently. The team is no self-motivated and needs constant chasing to get the work submitted.