January 2015

"It's Only a Hired": An Instructional Look at the Forensic Ballot

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Abstract

The judge’s ballot, within the forensic community, is used as an educational tool. Yet, the tool is often dismissed by the students it is designed to help (Chouinard, 2010). College forensic competitors repeatedly discredit ballots, especially if they are written by a “hired,” or nontraditional, judge (Hanson, 1998b). Through a content analysis, this study identifies that ballots from both hired judges or non-traditional judges and traditional judges (coaches) provide “speech acts” that instruct students about their performances (Austin, 1962, p. 5). This research looks at the specific speech act differences identified between nontraditional and traditional judge messages. The analysis suggests the use of scaffolding (through assisted performance) is necessary in order for students to become better ballot readers. In other words, coaches must teach students how to interpret ballots. This has implications for the classroom. If all teachers can assist students in understanding how to read comments, students might learn more effectively.

Introduction

In the fall of 2013, I attended the Bill Roberts Invitational at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. Before awards, four of the Gustavus seniors engaged the audience in an open discussion about forensics education (Abele, Jarvis, Johnson & Wildes, discussion on Forwarding Forensics Interests, October 20, 2013). Students, judges, and coaches discussed their perspectives regarding what the ballot means to them. One student raised her hand and said, “Judges, I really hate ballots that say, ‘Nice job. Good character development, fifth place.’ I do not learn anything from those comments” (Abele, Jarvis, Johnson, & Wildes). The room was filled with mumbled agreements and nods from the rest of the students. They seemed to agree ballots could be used as better educational tools.

The discussion reminded me of countless scenes of frustration I have encountered in my own speech squad room. I remember one particular time I walked into the squad room as students were passing out ballots from the previous tournament weekend. I watched one freshman as she read her ballots. Quite suddenly, she lowered her chin and shook her head while looking at a half-sheet of paper. A junior on the team walked over to the freshman, read the ballot over her shoulder, and said, “Don’t worry about that ballot, he is only a hired.” While the ballot was dismissed, the upperclassmen’s words remained burned in my brain. In both public speaking class and forensics, I teach my students audience analysis. I help them

1 “A hired” is defined as a nontraditional judge, also called a lay judge, who is “relatively unfamiliar with the nuances of current forensic practices” (Bartanen, 1994).
understand the importance of getting their message across to everyone in the audience. The students learn to tailor their messages to specific audiences, so the speech content is understood. Yet, within my forensics team, students focus on making their messages reach the traditional-judge audience and they are unsure how to tailor their messages to a more generic nontraditional judge and audience. Ironically, the messages get lost in the quest for competitive success and hardware. My students were not taking responsibility for how their messages were received. Instead, they attributed their low rank as a shortcoming of the judge. As Dean (1998) identified, “The tournament judge has long been the scapegoat of poor tournament performance” (p. 251). My junior team member’s message of “It’s only a hired” is echoed throughout many undergraduate forensics programs and can become dangerous when students fail to take responsibility for their performances. One needs to understand the messages sent through a ballot in order to stop the “It’s only a hired” statements.

It is important to look at what the ballots say in order for the students to improve. Ballots, much like basic course evaluation forms, are educational tools. Renz (1991) explained both educational tools provide feedback for the students. Kelly (2010) agreed saying, “intercollegiate forensics competitions serve as multi-institutional classrooms in which adjudicators from a variety of institutions provide a cross-section of student performance feedback” (p. 131). Looking at what the ballot is saying as a form of feedback may help scholars understand why students respond to evaluations the way they do.

Literature Review

Extensive research on grading and student feedback has resulted in a number of differing rubrics for different student needs (Harrell, 2005; Konold, Miller, & Konold, 2004). The discussion about how to grade is ongoing. A look at one particular grading tool, the speech critique, is the focus of this study. The classroom critique, for the purposes of this study, has been placed into the individual event forensics context. This move is appropriate as both are instructional contexts in which students gain knowledge. Both the classroom speech and the competitive speech exhibit a type of grading whether occurring in the form of a letter grade given in the classroom or a rank given at a tournament.

Forensics as Educational & Instructional

Students need to be savvy in getting their message across to a variety of audiences (similar to what is taught in traditional public speaking courses). As part of the educational process within forensics, students are expected to learn how to adapt speeches to larger audiences (Butler, 2002; Mills, 1983; Rogers, 2002). Fo-

2 Conversations between current individual event coaches commenced during the National Communication Association conference 2010. The conversations focused around judge credibility and how students externally attribute a low rate and rank to the ineptitude of a hired/lay judge.
Forensics students need to learn how to grow and adapt. When in front of the audience, students become teachers and it is their job to help their students (the judge and fellow competitors) learn.

Forensics, as a co-curricular activity, has been viewed as an educational endeavor. The activity teaches students reasoning, structure, argumentation, problem solving, reflection, listening, organization, group interaction, public speaking, and self-confidence, all helping to develop well-rounded students and citizens (Bartanen, 1998; Brand, 2000; McBath, 1975; Schroeder & Schroeder, 1995; Yaremchuk, 2002). Knapp stated, “There is absolutely no question or qualification in my mind that debate and individual events attracts some of the finest students on campus, and that the activity itself prepares these students to be effective and responsible citizens, community leaders, and often national leaders” (in Schroeder & Fletcher Schroeder, 1995). Within forensic programs, students are instructed on how to become better speakers and critical thinkers. In return, students teach others about what they have learned. This shared knowledge brings nontraditional judges into the forensics circle and educates them about new technologies, events, and forensic-specific cultural expectations. This is often an issue that speech teams must negotiate, the student’s job is to educate the nontraditional judge of the forensic expectations while at the same time finding a way to reach the judge based on his/her experiences. This balance is difficult to reach. As one student said, “I see a hired in my round and I think, ‘This is my chance to teach them something new. I can help them see poetry in a different way’” (2004-2005 forensic competitor, personal communication, June 19, 2005).

Forensics is instructional in nature where both the judges and competitors learn. Within a tournament setting, the students receive feedback, in the form of ballots, and learn how to improve their performances. Judges have an opportunity to gain new information about technology, argumentation, current events, and other topic areas provided by the competitors’ speeches. Extension of knowledge is what allows the forensic community to thrive. As Millsap (1998), Brand (2000), and Butler (2002) articulated, the individual events circuit and debate circuit need to bring others into the forensics context to show the importance of the activity as an educational experience. One avenue for this outreach is the judge/competitor relationship because nontraditional judges can share knowledge from outside the forensic community. Hill (1982) and Dyer (2004) found students are motivated more by educational needs than by competition. The students need to understand why they received the ranks they get. Just as a student in the classroom wants feedback explaining the grade he/she received. A student wants to know why his/her performance was not as strong as others in the round. Even though classroom students are graded based on the assignment outcomes, and forensic students are ranked in comparison to the other competitors in the round, both need extensive feedback to grow as speakers. The ballot is a very strong educational tool. Addressing feedback provided by judges is an important element in understanding forensic students’ responses. The first step in this process is looking at the ballot as an instructional tool.
Ballots as Instructional Tools

In order to help students take more responsibility for their performances, the messages received through ballots deserves attention. As the main educational tool used in forensics (Broeckelman, 2005), the ballot is used to give direction regarding a student’s performance as well as a tool to rate and rank a performance. Previous research has concentrated on ballot analysis through the method of content analysis (Bartanen, 1990; Cronn-Mills & Croucher, 2001; Dean & Benoit, 1984; Edwards & Thompson, 2001; Kadlecek & Kracht, 2012; Klosa & DuBois, 2001; Mills, 1990; Preston, 1990) and each of these studies looked at nontraditional and traditional judge ballots together in order to develop categories of judge comments. The categories that formed concentrated mainly on content/analysis, delivery, and documentation. Each study found many of the messages on the ballots help educate students regarding their performances, but the ballots often do not provide specific reasons as to why the student received the rank he/she achieved. Kadlecek and Kracht (2012) analyzed more than 335 ballots comparing ballot comments from traditional judges who represent top 20 AFA-NIET programs to ballots from traditional judges who do not represent top 20 programs. Kadlecek and Kracht found “Judges, of all types, are providing a significant amount of comments related to a learning objective(s) without providing sufficient rational to support/explain the comment” (p. 8). The adjudicators are providing information but just not in ways that can substantially improve performances. Kadlecek and Kracht did not find unified judging criteria, meaning evaluations were not standardized.

Other researchers developed guidelines for ballot completion (Bartanen, 1990; Cronn-Mills, 1991; Hanson, 1988a; Mills, 1983; Trimble, 1994). The guidelines included both performative and content aspects of one’s presentation. These researchers identified that judges need to provide reasons for decisions in order to clarify the intent of the ballot. However, the suggestions have been largely ignored within the forensic circuit as coaches have other more pressing concerns, such as finding resources to keep programs running (Brand, 2000) or competitive standardization. Judge training is less of a priority when the survival of a program is on the line. Training judges takes time and directors fear over-standardizing judging and “homogenizes contests,” where only performances that follow similar expectations would be rewarded (Bartanen, 1994, p. 249). Standardization might actually decrease the number of comments presented. Preston (1990) found, “[C]riteria on ballots bring about little if any difference in the types of comments critics make to students in the limited preparation events, and that printing criteria on ballots actually decreases the total average number of constructive comments per ballot critics offer students” (p. 2). While Preston’s research concentrated on collegiate limited preparation events (extemporaneous and impromptu speaking), his findings articulate that increasing standardization may have the opposite effect intended.

Within the same year, Bartanen (1990) found written criteria on ballots that may enhance ballot comments. With written criteria on the ballot, 40% of public address judges and 46% of the interpretation judges paid more attention to certain
criteria over others. The judges concentrated on writing comments dealing with the thesis, link, support, organization, and language (Bartanen, 1990, p. 134). More than 50% of public address and interpretation ballots chose to write their own comments regardless of provided ballot criteria. The results are mixed as to whether the criteria actually improved judges’ comments. Because of the mixed results, more research is needed to explore if a new ballot system would improve judge comments. Therefore, before the entire ballot system is revamped, one should compare traditional and nontraditional judges’ comments to see what the ballots are saying. Rather than the current practice of relying on anecdotal evidence, this comparison can provide more substantive data to support or deny the claim that traditional judges write better qualitative and quantitative comments than hired judges.

The ballot as an educational tool is viewed both negatively and positively. The negative aspects include student frustration and confusion (King & Behnke, 1988; Lewis & Larsen, 1981; Olson, 1992; Trimble, 1994). The student experiences apprehension when ballots are seen as unclear, incomplete, or contradictory (Congalton & Olson, 1995; Mills, 1983). The ballot as an instructional tool may “adversely impact the student’s self-concept” if personal comments are made (Hanson, 1988c, p. 3), lowering the utility of the ballot. Just as students cannot learn how to improve their public speaking presentation if they do not read the evaluation sheets, likewise, students cannot learn from a competitive speech critique if the ballot is not read, interpreted and understood. Regardless of the adjudicator, the ballot as an instructional tool must be utilized for forensic students to grow as speakers. Specific focus on nontraditional versus traditional judges’ comments may compel discussion regarding ballot helpfulness.

The positive aspects of forensics ballots identified in the literature include providing helpful instructional messages. Hanson (1998b) found students appreciate a judge who “writes concrete, helpful, truthful comments in a sufficient amount that you can learn from them” (p. 16). The students want to read the ballot for specific steps one can take in order to improve.

Hanson’s findings are interesting and help highlight a reason why students are quick to dismiss the words of a nontraditional judge, as his/her credibility might be hindered because he/she is not “one of us.” As Hanson (1991) pointed out, students will integrate comments from judges they perceive to be “good judges” (p. 22). “Good judges” are seen as the long-time circuit coaches, who have been around and traveled with forensics teams for years. As one student stated, “If I receive ‘Good Job’ on a ballot what this means to me depends on the person. If it were Craig Brown [an individual event coach for more than 20 years] I’d take it as a compliment. If it wasn’t clearly a coach, I think I might take offense to a certain extent …” (personal communication, June 16, 2005). The credibility of the judge is seen in whether he/she is a coach. The credibility also comes from...
a judge providing specific behavioral suggestions to improve. Nontraditional judges must overcome many student judgments in order to be seen as credible. As Chouinard (2010) explains:

As forensic insiders, it is easy for us to think of hired judges evaluating our students as less than ideal. I, too, was guilty of making this association between contentious ballots and hired judges—that is, until I became one. There is nothing quite like moving a thousand miles out of your district and having no team affiliation to change your view on “hireds.” Every time I wrote X on a ballot next to my name, I faced the reality that my twelve years in the activity were obsolete. (p. 39)

Labeling a judge as “hired” brings forth cultural connotations as Chouinard (2010) explained. A student must look past the label and fully read the comments to gain from the ballot. Students cannot just push aside those comments if they want to improve; an analysis of their ballots is warranted.

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to understand how speech acts are articulated on ballots and if nontraditional judges use speech acts differently than traditional judges. Forensic research has concentrated on categorizing judges’ comments and identifying guidelines judges can use to develop critical ballots. Through all of the research, students still find ballots unclear. By focusing on the messages that call for some type of action and identifying what ballots ask competitors to do, the forensic community can determine if ballots are instructing some type of corrective action or if they are only articulating an evaluation. Much like a classroom critique, students cannot improve through evaluation alone; they need to know what to do in order to improve. As Hanson (1988b) discovered, forensic students equate good judges with those who write helpful comments from which one can learn. Ballots must be educational and should request some change of a student’s presentation in order to help the competitor improve. By looking at the speech acts within ballots, the forensic community will better understand the instructional actions judges are taking to reach competitors.

Mills (1983) identified that research regarding the decisions of traditional judges versus nontraditional judges has made its way through the debate circuit but has not been conducted regarding individual events. Mills (1983) called for research between traditional and nontraditional judges in order to see if “lay judges are capable of judging the various individual events” (p. 30). If students are going to complain about nontraditional judges, understanding what the students’ are criticizing gives insight to the differing judge comments. Looking at

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3 The credibility of a judge is not determined based on sex. Billings (1999) noted biological sex is not a variable in rating students. Male and female judges provide equal rankings to both sexes.
what each judge asks a student to do, as identified through speech acts, can more closely help students and teachers understand messages within ballots.

**Speech Act Theory**

An understanding of speech act theory is necessary to lay foundation for this study. To understand more fully the instructional messages (behavioral, cognitive, and affective) sent within ballots, one must assess speech acts within the ballot. Speech acts are utterances (spoken, written, or nonverbal). The speech in and of itself is an action. Through using speech act theory when reading a ballot, one understands the actions a judge intends. Austin (1962) defines a speech act as, “the doing of an action, which again would not normally [emphasis in original] be described as, or as ‘just’ saying something” (p.5). Speaking often makes a request, but may do other things as well, such as provide condolences or offer agreement to some message. Speech acts are exemplified in ballots because they ask students to change their performances in order to improve. As Bach (2005) stated, “[Speech acts] fall under the broad category of intentional action” (para. 8). When analyzing ballots, one needs to identify the action the judge intends in order to know how a competitor should respond to the ballot. Three speech acts are continually found within the ballot; constatives, directives, and acknowledgement acts. 4. **Constatives** are affirming, classifying, ranking, and informing speech acts. **Directives** include instructing, ordering, advising, and warning acts. **Acknowledgements** include apologies, congratulating remarks, and statements of thanks. In looking at ballots as speech acts, the following research questions emerged:

**RQ1:** What, if any, speech acts are judges writing?

**RQ2:** Do nontraditional judges and traditional judges use different speech acts when writing ballots?

**Method**

A comparison analysis between the nontraditional judges’ ballots and the traditional judges’ ballots was the focus of this research. Analyzing the ballots for written speech act comments helps one understand more completely the instructional messages articulated within the ballots. This content analysis also identifies if different speech acts are articulated by a nontraditional judge than by a traditional judge.

More than 200 ballots from 20 different tournaments held in different regions throughout the country were used for analysis. The ballots were written for students ranging from first through fourth year of competition at one AFA-NIET top 20 school. Eighty-seven different nontraditional judges and 87 different traditional judges were identified in this analysis. Nontraditional judges were distinguished from traditional judges based on the school affiliation marked on the ballot. Judges’ ballots were identified when a school was marked in the affiliation

4 When analyzing the ballots, Bach & Harnish’s (1979) categorization of speech acts (as borrowed from Austin & Searle) is utilized.
Spot. Hired ballots were identified if the judge wrote they were a hired on the critique sheet or if he/she left the school affiliation spot of the ballot blank. Sometimes nontraditional judges write their affiliation as being the host school. The coders identified those ballots and coded them as nontraditional judge comments, if there were any questions regarding judge affiliation the ballot was eliminated from analysis.

A total of 105 nontraditional judge ballots and 105 traditional judge ballots were analyzed. The unit of analysis was a complete thought unit ranging from two words to four sentences. A speech act was identified when the judge used informing, advising, or congratulating language. More than one speech act was often found within the same sentence and each act was recorded. A statement such as, “Congratulations on finals, now you must work to control the room” provides an acknowledgment and then gives a directive. All comments were color-coded, coder reviewed, and charted. Coders were given the criteria for each speech act category. There were two coders used for this project including the researcher. The coders were trained on sample ballots and they identified each speech act within those ballots. The coding instruments were refined and a random sample of 40 ballots (20 from each judge type) were given to the coders to test inter-coder reliability, which occurred with an overall coefficient of .85 for assigning the appropriate category to the judge’s comments. The coders were then asked to code all 210 ballots. Any disagreements that occurred when analyzing the full sample were resolved by the coders discussing the thought unit and collectively deciding if a speech act was present and if so agreeing on the type of act found within the ballot. A total of 1041 comments were analyzed. The ballots represented all 11 individual events hosted at the American Forensics Association—National Individual Events Tournament. The ballots were from the 2004-2005 season.

Results

Research question one looked specifically at the types of speech acts judges write. The content analysis revealed judges are writing all three types of speech acts analyzed but are mostly using directives and acknowledgements in instructing students how to perform (see Table 1). Overall, judges tended to give more advice and acknowledgements and gave fewer constatives no matter if the judge was a traditional or nontraditional judge.

Research question two explored any differences between the type of speech acts used by nontraditional judges and traditional judges. Differences between the two judging types were found. A Chi Square analysis was conducted on the categorical data. The results were found to be significant at the .05 level (see Table 1). The first difference observed was the number of comments given by each judge type. Of the instructional messages found, traditional judges gave 54.5% of the speech act comments analyzed while nontraditional judges made up 45.5% of the speech acts. The comparison between judges is a 9% difference in amount of written responses between those who volunteer their time on the weekend and those who provide educational ballots weekend after weekend. In regard to the speech.
acts, coaches presented 79 constative comments while hired judges gave 45 constative comments. The category allowed for any informational acts the judge provided such as informing the competitor of their reasons for decision and identifying any personal beliefs about the speech topic. Within the directive category (advising, suggesting, instructing, asking), the traditional judges gave considerably more advice. The traditional judges stated 336 directives (equating to 59% of the traditional judge comments) while the nontraditional judges wrote 212 (45% of the nontraditional judge comments). Almost 62% came from the traditional and 38% from the nontraditional judges. Within the directives category, many of the suggestions were implied. The judge would ask for change in the form of a question such as, “Where is your preview?” The directive suggested the student needs to change his/her preview. Comments suggesting change needed to occur were often implied as well. For example, “It was a jump from Sex in the City [the HBO series] to your topic,” gives the implied directive that the student needs to explain the warrant to connect Sex in the City more fully to the topic. The traditional judges’ ballots identified 57 implied directives (which is almost 17% of the traditional judges’ directive messages) and nontraditional judges only stated 25 implied directives (which is almost 12% of the hired judge directive messages).

Acknowledgements (congratulating, thanking, and condoling) were used most often by hired judges. Hired judges were found to give acknowledgements in more than 45% of all the hired judge messages analyzed. Traditional judges gave acknowledgements in only 26% of their messages. The results indicate nontraditional judges send more encouraging acknowledgement messages while traditional judges send more critical directive messages.

**TABLE 1: Content Analysis of Speech Acts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech Act</th>
<th>Traditional Judge Comments</th>
<th>Nontraditional Judge Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constatives</td>
<td>79 (67.54) [1.94]</td>
<td>45 (56.46) [2.33]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directives</td>
<td>336 (57)* (298.48) [4.72]</td>
<td>212 (25)* (249.52) [5.64]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>152 (200.98) [11.94]</td>
<td>217 (168.02) [14.28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Speech Acts</strong></td>
<td><strong>567</strong></td>
<td><strong>474</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square statistic is 40.8485. The P-Value is <0.00001. The result is significant at p<0.05.

* Coder agreed upon, implied directives were identified within the total number of identified directive speech acts.

**Implications**

Both traditional and nontraditional judges use speech acts in communicating to the forensic competitors. A difference of 9% total message output is not enough of a difference to outweigh the need for judges at a contest. Without nontraditional judges, tournaments would not happen. The results acknowledge that many nontraditional judges provide instructional comments regarding performance im-
improvement, and they are helpful. As a result, the students need to learn better audience analysis skills in order to appeal to traditional and nontraditional judges alike.

More Directives Please

The results lead one to believe students want more directives within the ballot. Students pleaded to have more constructive ballots during the conversation at the Gustavus Adolphus tournament. The students argued they did not care to hear the acknowledgements but wanted directives on the ballot to help their performances improve (Abele, Jarvis, Johnson, & Wildes, discussion on Forwarding Forensics Interests October 20, 2013). Students complain about nontraditional judges because the comments supposedly do not tell them anything. This analysis shows the nontraditional judges do say something. They are acknowledging the students’ positive aspects of performance, but tension occurs because students want specific instruction on how to improve. The forensic students seem to be asking for more clear directives. Therefore, the nontraditional judges need to acknowledge less and give more direction in order for student to value the ballots.

Many of the nontraditional judge ballot’s directives were preceded by acknowledgements. Often different speech acts would occur within the same sentence. For example, the statement “Your accent was good, but at times it seemed to falter a bit” congratulates the student on achieving a “good” accent, but then identifies a dismissive statement implying the student needs to work on the accent. This conflicting comment, recognizes why students might find frustration with ballots. If a positive element turns into something they need to work on, the messages become confusing.

The overuse of polite acknowledgements might discourage students within the speech circuit and might affect classroom grading. Instructors want to provide constructive criticism on student work. Teachers acknowledge positive aspects of student writing, identify areas needing improvement, and usually provide suggestions regarding how to do so. Within the evaluation, the directives need to provide specific instructions on how the student may improve. If a student is given too many positive acknowledgements followed directly by a correctional directive, he/she may become confused and frustrated.

Instructors and judges need to stop being polite, by acknowledging all of the successful executions. Instead they need to start explaining how one can enhance a presentation, paper, or project. While acknowledgements help the student’s self-esteem, the directives help the student improve. As the analysis suggests, more acknowledgements were given by the nontraditional judges (217) than by traditional judges (152), which helps highlight why students are frustrated by nontraditional judges. Teachers and judges should reduce the number of acknowledgements within their feedback and increase the number of directives. Acknowledgements and directives should also come in separate sentences, so students can see clearly what they did well and in what areas they need work. When coding the thought units, more discrepancies occurred between coders when multiple speech acts were identified within the same complete thought. To improve clarity of the
written feedback, teachers must take the time to explain the differences between each speech act, explain the comments on a critique sheet, and help students learn. These strategies will allow students to better interpret teacher comments and forensic ballots.

**Scaffolding Education**

To help students stop saying, “It’s only a hired,” coaches need to teach students how to read ballots. Bruner termed “scaffolding” to be the method used when teachers guide students in learning something new (in Cazden, 1988, p. 104). Understanding how to read ballots is a new activity for many college students. They would often rather allow themselves to throw away the ballots in frustration than take the time to learn (Renz, 1991). The students need what Vygotsky called “assisted performance” (cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1991, p. 20). The coach needs to sit down with each of his/her competitors and explain to them the different speech acts. To assist in the scaffolding process, I developed a ballot reading handout (see Appendix). These suggestions help students learn to critically read a ballot and can be modified to fit the needs of the students and the speech program.

The scaffolding experience should take the coach into his/her own personal spiral (Sprague, 2002). The coach should be reminded of what it was like for him or her to read seemingly nondescript ballots when he/she was a competitor and then use the experience to facilitate learning for the present generation of students. Coaches need to identify how students should read the implied speech acts as well and understand each student has a choice regarding the messages he/she chooses to use when enhancing a performance. The only way choice can be made is if the student knows how to decode the ballot. Reading the ballots collaboratively allows students to gain “multiple perceptions” (Renz, 1991, p. 168). If the perceptions are acknowledged, the judges help inform the student’s next adventure. The learning process for an individual event student has many levels: the judges instruct, the coaches instruct, but within the core the student, must decide what is best for him/her. When provided with the right amount of scaffolding, the best decisions result.

Classrooms can benefit from evaluation scaffolding. If teachers are able to set up 15-minute conferences with each student when handing back the first speech evaluation, more clarity will follow. If the comments are explained the first time, the student will be more prepared to read the comments on his/her own for the next speech. Teachers should explain the speech acts that occur within the evaluation to help students understand how to proceed. With guidance, students will improve.

The next time I hear one of my students mutter, “I don’t have to listen to that ballot, it is only a hired judge.” I will create an instructional opportunity. I will sit with the student and help decode the seemingly cryptic messages. I will also help my students learn how to read the comments on their own and become successful speakers inside and outside a forensic round.
 References


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Appendix

Ballot Reading Suggestions

1. Do not read your ballots until you have had adequate time away from the tournament.
2. Read your ballots “tabula rasa.” Do not go into them thinking “this judge hates me.” Think instead that you are going to learn something new about your performance by reading the ballots.
3. As you read your ballots, think about what changes you can make to reach your audience better. Most often people will attribute shortcomings of presentations or performances onto the judge. Turn that thinking around and instead ask yourself, “How did my presentation miss my audience, and what can I do to make sure my message reaches a wider audience?”
4. When reading the ballots, highlight or circle the directives given such as 1. Close your book more naturally 2. You need more of a climax 3. Watch rolling your eyes as you speak. These directives are a “speech act” that call a speaker to action. These are the comments you can work on and can do something about to enhance your performance. Spend time analyzing what these directives are asking you to do. They will usually fall into the following categories:
   a. Book Tech (how one holds the book, page turns, etc.)
   b. Presentation (blocking, movement, rate, style, intonation, etc.)
   c. Content (arguments, answering the question, example variety)
   d. Fidelity/Significance (audience connection)
   e. Organization (plot progression, climax placement, main point structure, etc.)
5. Think of ways to implement what the judge is suggesting. If the judge is asking you to re-write or re-cut a piece think about how you can make that change to reach a larger audience in the process.
6. Give yourself time to make the changes. If you have the option, don’t travel the following weekend if it means you will have time to develop your speech.
7. Read your new cutting or newly revised speech to a new person, like a roommate, to get a feel if the speech has coherence. Getting a layperson’s opinion will help you appeal to a larger audience.
8. While reading your ballots too soon is problematic, do not wait until the Wed. of the week you are planning to travel to absorb the criticism. Try to get the ballots on Monday so you can make changes to your speech before you travel next.

If you receive the same directive in multiple ballots then please make a change to your speech. The saying goes, “If one person tells you, you look like a horse, you shrug it off. If two people tell you, you look like a horse, you might think about it; but if three people tell you, you look like a horse, you better buy the saddle.” You do not need to wait until the third person tells you to make a change. However, if three people do tell you to change the speech/performance
you should “buy the saddle” and change the speech. Remember, judges are there to help you improve your speaking abilities. They have differing opinions. Take those opinions and discover what suggestions will work to enhance your speech. Remember, you are the artist; you have the ultimate say in your speech. But, if your goal is to reach an audience beyond yourself, you need to attribute less fault on the judge “not getting your speech” and take ownership of the evaluations. Let the criticism help mold your masterpiece into a work of art everyone can enjoy.