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Limited Time: Meeting Judge Expectations and Pedagogical Standards in Rhetorical Criticism

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Since the creation of Communication Analysis/Rhetorical Criticism as an event in competitive college forensics, forensic research has critiqued the depth of analysis in Communication Analysis/Rhetorical Criticism speeches, with many arguing that effective analysis was impossible due to the ten-minute time limit. Considering this criticism, spanning three decades, I argue time has come for an increase to the time limit, allowing students to more effectively analyze artifacts, to better understand the methodology they employ, and to make changes to the structure of their speeches in response to the critiques of other scholars. Such a change would increase the educational impact of the event and address concerns that have long been discussed.

Before its inception in 1974 at the National Forensics Association National Assembly and early in its life as a speech event, Rhetorical Criticism/Communication Analysis had been the subject of much critique, primarily because of a desire to provide further clarity to the event description and rules (Harris, 1987; Larson, 1985). Larson (1985) specifically noted, “the fact still remains that students who compete in the event cannot find a set of guidelines directing their composition of a communication analysis speech” (p. 142). Since the 1970s and 80s, changes to the rules and the emergence of normative judge expectations have provided further clarification to the event. According to the current rules, the purpose of the speech is to:

Offer an explanation and/or evaluation of a communication event such as a speech, speaker, movement, poem, poster, film, campaign, etc., through the use of rhetorical principles. ("AFA-NIET description of events," p. 1)
Describe, analyze, and evaluate the rhetorical dynamics related to a significant rhetorical artifact or event. Rhetorical Criticisms are characterized by enlightening critical insight, in-depth analysis, description and application of rhetorical principles or a theoretical framework, topic significance, credible sources, and vocal and nonverbal delivery choices that reflect the speech's purpose ("NFA Bylaws," 2015, 2A3).

Subtle differences exist between the two organizations' descriptions for the event. While the American Forensics Association rules describe specific artifacts that could be subject to analysis, the reference to rhetorical principles is nondescript. On the other hand, the

NFA rules do not mention specific types of artifacts, but emphasize that the speech must not only explain, but also evaluate the artifact, referring to specific rhetorical principles such as “enlightening critical insight” and “topic significance” (“NFA Bylaws,” 2015, 2A3). The addition of the phrasing “rhetorical principles or a theoretical framework” in the NFA description quoted above were intended to counter these movements toward formulaic analysis and invite students to provide deeper, more varied analysis.

Regulating behaviors also exist which further define the responsibilities of the competitor. Hatfield-Edstrom (2011) further contended, “the ‘rules’ that guide our students’ speech writing and performances are convention and normative practices” (p. 138). White (2009) concurred, writing that Rhetorical Criticism has seemingly “become one of the most standardized” events (p. 105). Certainly, judge preferences have always been paramount in Rhetorical Criticism, due in part to the openness provided by the description of the event. For example, Dean and Benoit (1984) and Harris (1987) found judges displayed consistent expectations that emphasized the effective inclusion of background information, description and application of a method, and provision of a rhetorical judgment about the artifact. In other articles, scholars theorized pedagogies of the event based on personal experience and influences of the communication discipline with regard to theory and rhetoric (Dean, 1985; German, 1985; Givens, 1994; Kay & Aden, 1989; Murphy, 1988; Rosenthal, 1985; Shields & Preston, 1985).

Some, however, consider these expectations of judges too burdensome for the 10-minute time frame. As Green and Schnoor (1990) lamented, “We as coaches/judges may be demanding too much to be accomplished in the ten-minute time-frame” (p. 197). The connections between the time limit associated with the event and complaints about depth of analysis have a complicated relationship with judge expectations: given high expectations, students try to do more in 10 minutes, and judging norms arise based on choices students make on what to include; at the same time, judging norms and competitive rewards influence the choices students make. Unraveling where these trends and norms emerged is an impossible task. Nevertheless, the combination of time constraints and such high expectations of coaches and judges means that inevitably, somehow part of the analysis ends up being shortchanged. Historically and more recently, new rules and norms have attempted to counter these concerns about the pedagogy of the event, often specifically attempting to increase depth of analysis. Therefore, I first examine concerns regarding depth of analysis in the event, and past rule changes and normative moves intended to increase depth of analysis. I then argue for the implementation of an increased time limit, providing a suggestion further attempt to resolve problems associated with depth of analysis.

Depth of Analysis

Given the competitive nature of the event, judge expectations necessarily structure decisions made by students and coaches regarding the content of Rhetorical Criticism speeches. Though many scholars have noted the connections between the pedagogical aims of the forensics event and research papers in rhetorical criticism, choices made for competitive reasons may not always be pedagogically sound, especially when a time limit must be considered (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Houge, 2008; Paine, 2008; Richardson, 2008; White, 2008; Wood, 2008). Nevertheless, because forensics competition is closely aligned with the communication discipline, tying our competitive standards to pedagogical standards within the discipline makes sense (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014). This tension between pedagogical and competitive aims is likely at the root of the disconnection between the long-expressed concerns in articles regarding the quality of analysis in these speeches and the actual advice given by coaches and by judges in the forensics sphere. Slow changes to norms as well as rule changes have attempted to resolve this dialectic. Areas of change or

concern have shifted over the history of the event, including debates over a questioning period, inclusion of background information, research questions, method, and implications.

Questioning Period

Meant to allow the judge to verify student authorship and encourage students to understand their research in more depth, the questioning period rule provided time for the judge to ask a question of competitors in Rhetorical Criticism. Since the questioning period also had an impact on the time limit of the event, consideration of its history in the event is especially relevant. The questioning period was eventually eliminated in 1989, due in part to coach concerns about time constraints, abuse of questions, and perceived elitism. Nevertheless, its end was heavily debated and the involvement of coaches in the writing process of Rhetorical Criticism remained a concern through the early 1990s (Cutbirth, 1985; Gorsline, 1985; Green & Schnoor, 1990; Levasseur & Dean, 1989; Manchester, 1985; O'Rourke, 1985; Reynolds, 1985; Sellnow & Hanson, 1990).

Many argued that the use of the question discouraged coaches from writing speeches and encouraged competitors to be more knowledgeable both about the process of rhetorical criticism and their own speeches (Cutbirth, 1985; Lasseur & Dean, 1989; Reynolds, 1985). In fact, some, such as Cutbirth (1985), saw the question as the only defense against students misleading judges who were not as familiar with rhetorical criticism, as such judges might not have the necessary background to question assertions made by the students. In contrast, Gorsline (1985) argued that students had ample opportunity to prepare for questions, thus not resulting in less coach involvement. Other forensics educators noted that judge abuse of the question as a mechanism for showing off their own knowledge was problematic (Gorsline, 1985; Green & Schnoor, 1990; Reynolds, 1985; Sellnow & Hanson, 1990). Equally troubling was a lack of judge consistency in questions asked, leading to potential unfairness in the amount of time competitors received to explain their ideas (Green & Schnoor, 1990; Manchester, 1985). Others, however, such as Levasseur and Dean (1989), argued that judge abuse rarely happened, noting that students were in favor of keeping the questioning period. Reynolds (1985) also emphasized that, despite problems, students tended to support the use of the question. Nevertheless, considering the debate in the literature, the use of the questioning period had a dubious impact on depth of analysis in the event.

Because the NFA tournament was the only national competition to employ the questioning period and only in the Rhetorical Criticism event, concerns over consistency and perceived elitism, due to Rhetorical Criticism being the only event allowed a questioning period, also contributed to the demise of the questioning period (Manchester, 1985). Though Levasseur and Dean (1989) argued that Rhetorical Criticism was more suited to the inclusion of a question than other events, others, including Green and Schnoor (1990), Manchester (1985), O'Rourke (1985), and Sellnow and Hanson (1990), claimed that Rhetorical Criticism was no more suited for question-asking than other public address events.

Ultimately, however, the concerns of tournament administrators over the amount of time taken by the questions overruled potential positives. Green and Schnoor (1990) emphasized that, despite potential educational benefits, tournament operations had to take priority. Thus, as O'Rourke (1985) emphasized, judges had to "extend contestants in rhetorical criticism the same courtesy we extend to all other forensic competitors: accept their work as original without the aid of a question" (p. 166). Thus, the subject of question-asking, though a contentious issue three decades ago, no longer occupies the minds of forensic educators nor the content of forensic research. Nevertheless, the same concerns regarding tournament administration problematize any increase in time limit, though I attempt to answer these objections below.

Consideration of Background Information

Background information, often the section where cuts are first made in a speech, provided in successful speeches rarely meets educational standards as students tend to not address the larger institutional contexts of their artifacts within their speech, often not even doing sufficient research about background information (Givens, 1994). Givens argued that this was problematic for several reasons, namely that it restricted the students' ability to select appropriate methods and that kept implications from addressing larger social structures and concerns. Hatfield-Edstrom (2011) argued that such a lack of context is only to be expected in a situation where students write rhetorical criticisms purely for competitive purposes, suggesting that coaches require students to write rhetorical criticisms initially for academic purposes and then adapt the papers for competition. She argued that such a process would increase the ability of the student to properly synthesize their ideas, provide stronger implications, and a more complex understanding and explanation of theory (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011). Though concerns about adequate context are mentioned in research about the event, time limits and norms that preference implications over other speech content restrict the student's ability to provide necessary information (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011).

Research Questions

Paine (2009), affirmed Lemaster's 2005 call, as he proposed a re-evaluation of the appropriateness of the use of a research question in competitive Rhetorical Criticism, noting that the increase in use of research questions is an attempt to mimic current academic practices. Kellam (2014), in an analysis of the 2011 NFA final round, similarly found, "omission of a research question in rhetorical criticism is an extremely rare occurrence" (p. 29). Certainly, many of the most popular rhetorical analysis, especially those geared toward undergraduate students, emphasize the importance of including research questions (Zdenek, 2009). Specifically, Foss' textbook, one of the most popular, presents the research question as, in essence, a requirement (Zdenek, 2009).

Paine (2009) notes that the trend toward using research questions is strongly influenced by judge comments on ballots, further arguing that these comments are based in a desire to create change, create deeper analysis, and base the rhetorical criticism done by forensics students on an academic foundation. However, Paine claims forensics students do not follow academic standards for research questions in practice: namely, that the research question is often written after, rather than before, selecting a method of analysis. Paine argues that this creates a problem in which students attempt to answer a question about an artifact using the same steps another author applied to a different artifact in order to answer a different question. Kellam argues, "Not all questions are bad questions...but when students are automatically expected to have a research question, or worse penalized if they do not, the forensic community encourages students to contrive questions into criticism that may not actually need them" (p. 29). Kellam proposed a solution to this problem posed by contrived research questions, namely that students should avoid using language that positions their research as social scientific and should make an argument, rather than ask a questions.

Method

Normative practices reinforced by judges rewarding certain behaviors has resulted in a change in the ways students use methods and theory in their speeches. White (2009) noted that students often cut corners when describing the aspects of their methodology, limiting their understanding of its application, a shift from the 1980s when a focus on method was considered primary (Murphy, 1988). Both Paine (2009) and White (2009) noted that students are now spending less time explaining and applying their method than examining their implications. This lack of time allocated to explanation and application of methods is especially problematic, considering the move from using more general methodologies in the

1980s (German, 1985; Shields & Preston, 1985) to much more specific, artifact-focused methodologies (see: Houge, 2008; Paine, 2009; White, 2009; Wood, 2008). Thus, there is a decrease in likelihood that the judge would be familiar with the method used by the student. In fact, Kellam (2014) argues that the use of the word *method* is, in fact, a misnomer, since it implies that, “that the process of criticism...should be performed step-by-step and without deviation...it calls us to imagine the speech as a distinctly scientific project” (pp. 30-31).

Additionally, White (2009) observed that students are expected to use at the most two, but usually one, scholarly resource for their method, which decreases both the depth and breadth of the student’s understanding. Willoughby (2010) noted that students generally choose so-called *tenets* of the method, which are narrowly applied to the artifact. Similarly, Kay and Aden (1989) had written about their concerns with limited analysis generated by the use of a singular method, arguing that students should use a perspective developed from the work of several scholars. Students who spend even less time on applying than explaining the methodology (Murphy, 1988; Paine, 2009; White, 2008). Murphy (1988) argued that a lack of focus on applying the method to the text being examined is problematic because it limits the specificity of the analysis and called for more time to be spent on application, rather than on explanation of the method. Kay and Aden (1989), however, criticized Murphy’s argument based on the concern that the suggestion would lead to a weaker understanding of methods and therefore, shallow critiques. Considering that student explanation of methods are already considered lacking, Kay and Aden are likely correct that no time can be spared from such explanation. Richardson (2008) noted that learning to balance explanation and application of methodology was especially important for students who desired to seek graduate education in the field. As the norms of the event have shifted away from a focus on method, concern over the educational value with regard to method has grown. To solve this problem, Kellam (2014) suggests a critical shift in language use, arguing for the use of words like *dynamics* instead of *tenets*, that students should analyze their artifact rather than apply tenets. They should employ theoretical perspectives rather than methods, and use language that speaks to possibilities like *can* rather than statements using the word *must*.

Insufficient Implications

Since the 1990s, a trend has developed in forensic writing toward encouraging scholars to advance theory. In Rhetorical Criticism, this trend is indicated by a shift toward the inclusion of implications regarding the methodology used by the speaker (Houge, 2008; Wood, 2008). Since the 1990s, students have tended to offer two implications, one about the artifact and the other building off the method (Givens, 1994; Houge, 2008; Wood, 2008). Though scholars have noted a trend toward allocating more time to developing critical conclusions, more time has not translated to a lack of problems (Houge, 2008; Paine, 2009; White, 2009; Wood, 2008). Primarily, concern is in two areas: confusion surrounding the distinction between method and theory, and lack of breadth in implications regarding method.

The distinction between theory and method in rhetorical criticism tends to be murky, with the terms often used interchangeably (White, 2009). This confusion is not limited to forensics; Bineham (1990) noted that a debate exists within Communication Studies at large over the roles that theory and methodology play in rhetorical analysis. He claimed:

The theory-method relationship is explained in various fashions. A popular contemporary explanation of this relationship holds that theory and method converge in rhetorical criticism, so that no distinction exists between the two. Others maintain that theory and method are distinct; because method, even in rhetorical criticism, tests theory. (Bineham, 1990, p. 30)

Arguably, the lack of distinction between theory and method in forensics Rhetorical Criticism is due more to confusion within the discipline at large than to a lack of time; however, the trend toward including implications regarding methodology does impact the amount of time available for other tasks within the speech.

Because, as White (2009) noted, students tend to solely focus on the work of one author in their method section, the implications students are able to draw about their method/theory are limited in the breadth of their applicability. Houge (2008) and Wood (2008) further argued that a lack of understanding of both a theory's context and specific applications meant that implications which attempted to build theory tended to be weak or based on incorrect assumptions about the method. This concern is not new; Rosenthal (1985) argued that students should not be expected to build on theory within their speeches, because time constraints limited their ability to effectively do so. Because rewards from judges maintain an emphasis on theory-building in the implications section of these speeches, implications regarding method are unlikely to disappear soon or at the behest of concerned academics and coaches. We can, however, tackle contributing causes by educating our students more broadly by employing Kellam's (2014) recommendations and by considering the issue of time limits.

Proposed Rule Change for Communication Analysis/Rhetorical Criticism

As Billings (2011), Hinck (2003), Littlefield (2006), Lux (2014), and McBath (1975) have all emphasized, education continues to be valued in forensics; thus, critiques of the event based on pedagogical standards are warranted and should be welcomed by the forensic community. While Kellam (2014) is correct to critique the norms of language choices that so narrowly structure rhetorical criticism, I argue that changes in norms are only one area in which changes can be made to strengthen our students' depth of analysis. After all, as Benoit and Dean (1985) so aptly note, experiments with changes to Rhetorical Criticism, even when they have failed, have served to both "[invigorate] the practice of rhetorical criticism" and "[provide] insights which would have been difficult to obtain with traditional approaches" (p. 154). Thus, I propose, as has been debated frequently in the forensics community, that the time limit of the event be extended to twelve minutes, arguing that an extended time limit would provide the space needed to more thoroughly articulate the argument, theoretical perspectives, and analysis that Kellam (2014) and others so rightfully claim these speeches require. I will briefly provide the context of past arguments for an increase in the time limit and the ensuing objections before providing answers to these concerns.

Since the 1980s, forensics scholars have expressed concern over the ability for students to meet both judge and pedagogical expectations for effective rhetorical criticism. As Cutburch (1985) stated, "It is impossible to conduct a meaningful, in-depth analysis of a worthwhile rhetorical artifact within the time allowed for the event" (p. 177). Many scholars have noted that the expectations of judges exceed what can be effectively and ethically accomplished within a ten-minute time limit (Green & Schnoor, 1990; Levasseur & Dean, 1989; O'Rourke, 1985; White, 2009). A primary objection to increased time limits came from tournament directors who were concerned about tournaments running according to the schedule, noting a problem where question-asking caused tournaments to run long (Green & Schnoor, 1990; O'Rourke, 1985). Another concern, similarly present in the debate over question-asking, was that giving increased time limits in rhetorical criticism would be unfair to participants in other events (Green & Schnoor, 1990; Levasseur & Dean, 1989; O'Rourke, 1985).

While I disagree with Green and Schnoor's (1990) assertion that tournament considerations with regard to time should overrule potential educational benefits, tournament

logistics still deserve attention. Rounds of Rhetorical Criticism could be run with five competitors, rather than six, thus solving the time problem. While the argument could be made that such a structural change would increase the number of sweepstakes points available within Rhetorical Criticism, the increase, if any, would be incremental, as tournament directors already frequently make adjustments to round sizes based on number of competitors in the event and last-minute drops (M. Dreher, personal communication, December 1, 2014). However, if the tournament director desired, points adjustments could be made in tab to offset the possible increased opportunity to earn points as follows, per a personal correspondence with M. Dreher (December 1, 2014):

Say you do use a multiplier in CA. Example: 18 people in CA. Normally, 3 sections of 6. In the [author] proposal, we now have 4 sections (2 of 5, 2 of 4). To be fair, the multiplier becomes $\frac{3}{4}$. 36 people in CA. Normally 6 sections of 6. In the [author] proposal, we have either 7 sections (6 of 5 and 1 of 6), or we have 9 sections of 4. Then the multiplier is $\frac{6}{9} = \frac{2}{3}$ or $\frac{6}{7}$ (para. 21).

In the past three years of the NFA national tournament and the AFA-NIET, running rounds of Communication Analysis/Rhetorical Criticism in sections of five, rather than six, would only have increased sections by, at most, five, based on the tab sheets and schematics of the tournaments. Compared to the amount of sections in Prose and Program Oral Interpretation (AFA-only), the amount of sections for Communication Analysis/Rhetorical Criticism would have still remained significantly less (except for the 2013 AFA, where CA would have tied Prose for the most sections if this rule was applied).

Regarding the relative fairness of increasing time limits in Rhetorical Criticism, I argue that time limits of forensics events should reflect the relative burdens of evidence in each event. The Code of Ethics of both the National Forensics Association (2014) and the American Forensics Association (2009) require students to accurately represent the evidence they cite. Kelly et al. (2014) further argued that education and ethics are intrinsically-linked, writing, “The basic premise that must function as the foundation for this form of learning is a stringent code that compels students to make ethical choices as a foundational consideration of audience” (p. 43). Impromptu and Extemporaneous Speaking have had substantially lower speaking time allocations, without substantial complaint, than the rest of the speaking events because we understand the required evidence in these events to be lower than that of other speeches. We do not expect speakers in Impromptu to provide more than a brief explanation of whatever principle or story they use to illustrate their point; similarly, in Extemporaneous, we expect recent evidence to support student assertions, but limit our expectations due to the 30-minute preparation time period. In Rhetorical Criticism, however, the structure of the event has provided a widespread ethical dilemma with regard to the evidence provided by students, in that students must either provide a light, likely inaccurate, summary of a method or perform poorly if they focus too much on methods and not enough on implications.

Though critiques of evidence in Persuasion, After Dinner Speaking, and Informative have been made, the focus has been more on inaccuracy and less on complexity, making room for the argument that these speeches are able to meet judge and pedagogical expectations in the provided time. This does not mean that Rhetorical Criticism is a more elite event, in the same way that we would not consider Impromptu and Extemporaneous to have less standing than other events. However, in Rhetorical Criticism, if Kellam’s (2014) suggestion for a focus on theoretical perspective is to be implemented, additional time for explanation of the complexity of theory is necessary. If, as White (2009) noted, the constraints of time and length limit the ability of the student to provide an accurate, ethical presentation of existing research, then the Rhetorical Criticism time limit is both a problem of

ethics and of education. The current requirements of the event allow students to perform competitively well while presenting a limited and possibly skewed understanding of the theories and methods they use. If the structure of a particular event has created a widespread ethical dilemma, in that students must either provide a light, likely inaccurate, summary of a method or perform poorly if they focus too much on methods and not enough on implications, then the structure of the event itself ought to change. Thus, to further the balance between competitive success and educational/ethical standards, the time limit for Rhetorical Criticism should be extended to twelve minutes. If, after experimentation, two minutes is not adequate to resolve ethical concerns over theory use, the time limit can be revisited.

Conclusion

With the goal of strengthening the educational impact of competing in the Rhetorical Criticism event, I argue that the association should experiment with a change by extending the time limit for the event to twelve minutes. This change would greatly increase the ability of students to respond to the critiques of forensics scholars regarding the depth of their analysis and the ethical use of theory. While problematic event norms will not change quickly, adding two-minutes will require coaches and competitors to make intentional choices on how to use the additional time. As they make those decisions, I would urge students and their mentors to consider the scholarship written regarding the event, both in the past and more recently. An additional two minutes represents an opportunity to enact more time-consuming experiments with content and form and to bring speeches closer to the pedagogical standards of our home discipline. Throughout the life of this event, forensics scholars have challenged norms and attempted to raise the bar: Let's give our students the time to effectively and ethically respond.

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