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Recommended Citation
Letters from Leaders

A letter from the DSR-TKA President
(Moore & Edmonds)
Pg 6

A letter from the Speaker & Gavel Editor
(Holm)
Pg 7

A letter from the Novice National Forensic Association
(Delzer)
Pg 8

Featured Articles

Fighting the Formula: Adherence to Unspoken Rules Limit the Value of Individual Events
(Michne)
Pg 10

Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper
(Ohl)
Pg 32

Alumni Corner

Tyson Carter: What forensics did for me
(Tyson Carter)
Pg 52

Chris Vein: What forensics did for me
(Chris Vein)
Pg 55
Call for Papers

Speaker and Gavel is an international, peer-reviewed journal publishing high-quality, original research in the field of communication studies. While it has its roots in the pedagogy of competitive speech and debate and welcomes submissions from that sub-discipline it is open to, and regularly publishes, articles from any of communication’s sub-disciplines. We maintain a focus on competitive speech and debate issues but we are also open to submissions from all communication related fields including (but not limited to):

Becoming a Member of the Editorial Board

In an effort to not overload our editors and ensure a quick turn-around from subject matter experts, we accept nominations and self-nomination to the board. Contact the editor if you or someone you know has a terminal degree (PhD, EdD, JD, MFA), a forensics background either as a competitor or coach, and some publication experience. You don’t have to be currently active in forensics; as a matter of fact, former forensics people are perfect for our needs because they are not as overloaded during the travel season.

Speaker & Gavel is the publication of
The Novice National Forensic Association
The Submission Process

Additionally the journal is open to all research methodologies, (rhetorical, qualitative, quantitative, historical, etc.). In addition S&G will also except one or two literature reviews for each issue and a limited number of scholarly book reviews may also be considered. Viewpoint articles - research-based commentary, preferably on a currently relevant issue related to the forensics and/or debate community will also be considered. All research, with the exception of the literature reviews and scholarly book reviews, should further our understanding of human communication. The way(s) in which the manuscript does that should be clear and evident. All submissions are independently reviewed by anonymous expert peer referees.

If you are new to the process of publishing do not hesitate to ask questions. We are always willing to help fledgling academics find their ways. Generally when you submit to S&G you will hear back from us within six weeks. If your article is seen as valuable enough for publication you will most likely be offered the opportunity to Revise and Resubmit the article based on reviewer comments. We would like to see those revisions, along with a letter explaining how you have revised the article based on the feedback you received, within a month but if more time is needed we will work with you.

By Submitting an Article for Publication

When you submit a paper for publication you are stipulating that:

1. The manuscript is your own original work and has not been previously published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

2. If a previous draft was presented at a conference or convention (a fact that will not negatively affect the chances of publication and is encouraged) it has been noted on the title page.

3. The manuscript does not contain anything abusive, libelous, obscene, illegal, or defamatory, nor does it contain information you know or suspect to be false or misleading.

4. You have gained permission to use copyrighted material (photos, cartoons, etc.) and can provide proof of that permission upon acceptance.

5. You have conducted any original empirical research after the approval of and in accordance with your institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).
Guidelines for Submission

1. Has a rolling submission deadline. Submit anytime. It is never too early to submit your article.

2. Submissions should be made via email as Word document attachments with the author(s) contact information in a separate attachment. (Send to toddtholm@gmail.com)

3. Speaker & Gavel requires submissions follow the most recent Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines.

4. The text should be double-spaced throughout and should be standard Times New Roman 12 point font.

5. Personal identifiers should be removed from the title page and from the document. The rest of the information on the title page and abstract should remain intact.

6. Please provide full contact information for the corresponding author including email, mailing address, and preferred contact phone number. Also include academic affiliations for all co-authors. This information should be sent in a document separate from the main text of the article to ensure an anonymous peer review.

7. Please provide information about any special funding the research received or conventions or conferences at which previous drafts have been presented so it can be noted in the publication.

8. Once accepted for publication you will be expected to provide some additional biographical information, a headshot, and recommended pop-out box text.
Table of Contents

Letters from Leaders

A letter from the DSR-TKA President (Moore & Edmonds)  Pg 6

A letter from the Speaker & Gavel Editor (Holm)  Pg 7

A letter from the Novice National Forensic Association (Delzer)  Pg 8

Featured Articles

Fighting the Formula: Adherence to Unspoken Rules Limit the Value of Individual Events (Michne)  Pg 10

Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper (Ohl)  Pg 32

Alumni Corner

Tyson Carter: What forensics did for me (Carter)  Pg 52

Chris Vein: What forensics did for me (Vein)  Pg 55
A Letter from the DSR-TKA President

It is with great regret and sadness that I announce the dissolution of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha (DSR-TKA). Our rich history as the oldest forensic organization can be traced back to DSR’s founding in 1906 as a national honorary fraternity, and TKA’s formation two years later. The two merged in 1963 and by 1967 the organization boasted more than 20,000 members. While once the largest and most competitive national tournaments, DSR-TKA hasn’t hosted a national tournament since 2013.

After much effort and energy by dedicated coaches to revive the organization, it has become clear that the needs of the community are being met by current forensic organizations. Forensic training is one of the most valuable education experiences that a student may have and therefore in April of 2018 the remaining organizational funds were distributed to the National Forensic Association to support their work with students and coaches and the American Forensic Association who will help the DSR-TKA name live on through an annual coaching award. We are thankful that the board at Novice Nationals voted an emphatic yes to housing the journal for many years to come.

Dr. Leroy T. Laase reminded the membership in his presidential address at the fourth annual Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha National Conference in Detroit, Michigan on March 30, 1967 that, “The mission of our Society is to promote interest in and to award suitable recognition for excellence in forensics and original speaking; and foster a respect for and an appreciation of freedom of speech as a vital element of a democracy.” As programs and speech itself are currently under attack, it is our sincere hope that Lassey’s reminder continues to guide forensic competition and education.

Mary Moore & Mike Edmonds
A Letter from the Speaker & Gavel Editor

Big Change, Little Change

Change is an inevitability, but it is with a sense of personal loss that I see Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha close its doors. As a member I have fond memories of taking my team to the DSR-TKA national tournaments. I am saddened to know that others will not get to have that same experience. However, our community is filled with wonderful people and wonderful organizations that will no doubt step up to fill the void. I am also a member of Pi Kappa Delta and Phi Rho Pi and I have fond memories of taking my teams to those respective national tournaments as well. Some of my fondest memories of competition are from the PKD national tournament in Fayetteville Arkansas. These are great organizations with strong leaders and long histories. Because of them, I am certain the activity of collegiate forensics will continue and thrive.

Speaker & Gavel will also continue. When I was informed that DSR-TKA was going to close its doors is wasn’t long before another organization approached me about serving as a parent organization to house Speaker & Gavel. The Novice National Forensic Association will serve as host for S&G. This is a particularly good fit because, in addition to publishing works from noted communication scholars and forensic dignitaries, S&G has often been a starting point for fledgling scholars seeking their first publication. Our editorial board is filled with current and former coaches who bring their love for coaching and years of experience mentoring students to the academic publishing process. Many of the people who have submitted manuscripts to S&G have told me that the feedback they received from our editors didn’t just improve the articles they were submitting, it improved them as scholars. That is a trait that the editorial board and the members of the NNFA have in common.

I have worked with many of the members of the NNFA. I have known some of them since I was a competitor decades ago. Others are people I have known since they were competitors fewer decades ago. The thing we all share is the desire to help people improve, achieve, and become successful. The members of NNFA have some exciting ideas for ways Speaker & Gavel can evolve and grow. I look forward to working with them for as long as they are willing to let me sit in the editor’s chair. While the loss of DSR-TKA is a big change, little will change for Speaker & Gavel.

Todd T. Holm
Editor
Greetings,

On behalf of the Novice National Forensic Association, I am excited to welcome Speaker and Gavel to our organization. For 55 years, this journal has been committed to what we believe is an integral part of forensic education: research. This research is what helps us improve and grow our programs and ensure that what we are teaching in forensics enriches the lives—not just the competitive experience—of those who participate.

The Novice National Forensic Association and Speaker & Gavel share a common goal in our dedication to education. Our national tournament offers an opportunity for first year competitors to experience a level-playing field where they compete against other novices on a national stage, learning and growing in the process. However, Novice Nationals is more than just a tournament; as an organization, we are focused on pedagogy and supporting those who are new to this activity, including new students, new coaches, and new programs.

We look forward to advancing our organization’s mission to serve, support, and educate the “new” in forensics through our partnership with Speaker & Gavel. Yet we wouldn’t be able to do so without the extensive devotion of Todd Holm. As editor, Todd spends countless hours ensuring that the quality of scholarship included in these pages is the highest that our profession has to offer. We are excited for Todd to continue this role moving forward.

Thank you all for your continuing commitment to forensic education by supporting and contributing to Speaker & Gavel. Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Matt Delzer
Executive Director
Novice National Forensic Association
Fighting the Formula: Adherence to Unspoken Rules Limit the Value of Individual Events

Eric Mishne – Independent Scholar

Eric Mishne (MA, Ohio University)

Eric is an independent public speaking coach for high-school forensics and non-academic contexts. He is also the Executive Director of a not-for-profit theatre company in Columbus, Ohio. Prior to that, he served as an assistant forensic coach as Cedarville University and Ohio University. Eric holds a Master’s degree from Western Michigan University, and a Master’s degree from Ohio University.

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Fighting the Formula: Adherence to Unspoken Rules Limit the Value of Individual Events

Eric W. Mishne

Forensics is one of the most valuable activities in which college students can be involved. However, the strict adherence to formula and unspoken rules diminishes the educational benefits. This article explores an extensive body of literature highlighting the concerns of formulaic practices in collegiate forensics. The author asserts that authenticity, genuine learning, transferability of skills, innovation, and high quality speaking are the biggest victims of stringent adherence to the forensic formula. Specific recommendations for competitors, judges, coaches, and organizing bodies are given, suggesting that there are alternatives which can mitigate growing concerns.

Keywords: Forensics, formula, pedagogy, rules, norms

The activity of forensics provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to learn, improve, and practice public speaking skills. Skills such as the idea generation, organization of those ideas, and the oral presentation of the ideas and arguments are the most tangible takeaways. My involvement in Individual Events has always been motivated by its potential to mature participants into polished and confident thinkers and speakers. Through the time spent in coaching sessions, to the rounds at tournaments, to the countless hours spent practicing in their dorm rooms, the dedicated speaker truly becomes masters of his or her craft. But what craft are they mastering? Competition encourages students to work hard to meet specific standards, and in the spirit of education, standards are important. Yet, the rigidity with which the forensic community clings to their formulas urges me to argue that the craft being mastered is not the art of public speaking, but rather the art of forensic competition. It is no secret that there are expectations for how a winning forensic speech should look and sound in organization and delivery (Olson, 2010; Paine, 2005). Many speakers turn to these expectations as a rubric for creating a guaranteed winning speech (Olson, 2010; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005). However, with the stability and comfort found in these formulas, there also comes unintended consequences that cannot be ignored. This paper offers a description of formulaic speaking, reiterates its presence in forensics, highlights the consequences of those formulas, suggests ways that the forensic community can mitigate the negative impacts, and offers suggestions for research on formulaic speaking in forensics. While formulas are present in both individual events...
and debate, my experience and research is limited to individual events. Therefore this article does not address documented concerns and efforts regarding formula in the debate arena, and uses the term forensics to refer exclusively to individual events.

What is Formulaic Speaking?

What I refer to as “formulaic speaking” occurs when a speaker makes rhetorical and presentational choices based on speaking conventions, expectations, norms, or other self-imposed limitations rather than thoughtful rationale that is motivated by the occasion, and subject matter. Formulaic speaking takes root in the absence of thoughtful consideration of the subject matter, and the reliance on inorganic practices. Whether or not the speech is formulaic depends solely on the process in which the speaker has engaged. If a speaker has modeled their speech exclusively after convention and norms, it is likely that a formula has been followed. It is important to note that formulaic speaking does not occur every time prescribed techniques are used. While a speech may exhibit symptoms of having been created formulaically, the intentions or lack of intentions of the speaker is what makes it formulaic, not the specific techniques or strategies they employ. Techniques are valuable only as they are appropriately relative to the situation (Dewey, 1934). A speaker may utilize common strategies like having three points and employing a speaker’s triangle, and sometimes those common choices are the most appropriate for the occasion and subject matter. Therefore, formulaic speaking is not exclusively concerned with what the speaker does, but the intentionality behind those choices. Formulaic speaking can be identified when the selection of techniques stem from arbitrary norms or unspoken rules absent of thoughtful consideration of their effectiveness at communicating the message. The entirety of my argument against formulaic speaking finds its root solely in the reason speakers make rhetorical and presentational choices.

Formula in Forensics

Forensics scholars agree that forensic competition is littered with unwritten rules (Bingham & Goodner, 2012; Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003; Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Reid, 2012). There are expectations for all aspects of a speech (Reid, 2015) including what a speech must look and sound like in topic, organizational strategies, vocal delivery, and movement. Paine (2005) defines unwritten rules as “habits and patterns which may become so entrenched that that operate as if they were rules” (p. 80). The distinction is that “rules” are formal requirements of participation while “unwritten rules” are expectations that have evolved through observation and repetition (Reid, 2015). These unwritten rules are created by speakers, coaches, and judges (Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Swift, 2006), even being published as a form of guidebook (e.g. Olson, 2010). Expectations for the organization of a speech, the use of a teaser in oral interpretation, the
Fighting the Formula

obligatory speakers triangle, and even a specific cadence in the vocal delivery for all speeches are all taught as the “way you need to speak” if you seek competitive success. These techniques dominate judging paradigms and direct every choice a speaker makes in preparation. Alyssa Reid (2012) argues “the forensic world is its own cultural microcosm filled with demanding norms that dictate how performers should look and act” (pg. 26). I confess to having contributed to this microcosm by coaching my own students to follow the formula, telling competitors that they will not do well in competition unless they adhere to these expectations.

Anyone who has seen recent rounds of public address can testify that patterns for winning speeches are followed as if they were law (Walker, 2018). Patterns have existed for decades (Paine, 2005; VerLinden, 1987). In nearly every Individual Event (IE) collegiate forensics offers, there is a formula for how that speech is expected to be arranged. Even Impromptu Speaking has its own formula – the event that, ironically, should be the most flexible in structure and argument (Preston, 1991). The practice that is the easiest example of formulaic speaking in the forensic community is the organization of the speech, most notable in persuasion, and impromptu. I recently browsed through over 60 selections of finalists published in Winning Orations, the annual publication of the speeches entered in the annual Interstate Oratorical Association (IOA) speech contest. Creative license in organizational patterns extended only as far as choosing between two options: problem/cause/solution, and cause/effect/solution. Few exceptions were noted. Granted, these structures are easy to follow and are effective methods with which to discuss an important topic while presenting practical actions the audience can take. But the forensic community’s “blind devotion to a single organizational pattern” (Bingham & Goodner, 2012, p.49) is exactly what I mean when I speak of formulaic speaking. It is the overt expectation that it is the only acceptable method (Ribarsky, 2005) that becomes problematic, not the existence of the method itself.

In addition to formulas for organizational patterns, forensic formulas exist for delivery and style as well. Forensic speakers implement specific vocal patterns and styles of movement (Mishne, 2017; Reid, 2015; Walker, 2018). Public address speeches require a method of citing sources that is quite specific and meticulous (Walker, 2018). The expectations of style for oral interpretation are also formulaic, from the way the book is held and opened, to the way a speaker is expected to employ a teaser and make a social argument in their introduction, to the way a speaker inflects a question onto their sentences (Reid, 2015). This dedication to specific techniques and styles is created and perpetuated through a monkey-see-monkey-do type mimicry (Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015). Emulation of previous national finalists is rampant (Gaer, 2002). I admit to falling victim to this practice myself in my time as a competitor 15 years ago. I would attend national tournaments and go to out rounds, taking detailed notes on what speakers were doing and how I can work to implement those same techniques. For me, it was learning how to be a better and more competitive speaker. Little did I know, I was participating in the perpetuation of the very formulas I would someday critique. It is little more than sophistic mimicry of performance (Reid, 2012).
Dangers of Formulaic Speaking

In its earliest days of intellectualism, rhetoric was critiqued by the likes of Plato as being antithetical to logical argument and careful analysis (Griswold, 2016). Plato’s fear was that speaking would become mere imitation (Griswold, 2016) and that speakers would cease to engage in independent thought and rational discourse. This is also my fear for forensics today. It is clear that formulaic speaking occurs in forensics (Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005). Some may articulately argue that there are notable benefits to be gleaned from formulaic practices. Standards must be held, and beginning students should be taught successful processes in order to learn how to think for themselves. However, I believe it is crucial for us to be aware of the negative impacts of these practices as well. While there are certainly more concerns than mentioned in this essay, there are five that I will address: adherence to formula fosters inauthentic performances, restricts learning, limits transferability of speech skills, stifles creativity and innovation, and discourages high quality speaking.

Formulaic Speaking Fosters Inauthentic Performances

The first impact of formulaic speaking in the forensic world is that it fosters inauthentic performances. The authenticity of a speech has an impact on both the speaker and the audience. Carmine Gallo (2014) writes in his book Talk Like TED, that the very first thing a successful speaker must do is find something they are passionate about. Passion is what fuels a poignant and effective oration. Without passion, there cannot be authenticity. Authenticity is one of the most valued characteristics in today’s younger generation (Richardson, 2017), and we cannot afford to squelch it. By forcing speakers to fit into the prescribed formulaic mold, some of the organic passion is removed from the presentation. When a speaker’s topic and organizational style is dictated by external factors, their ability to allow the subject matter to speak to them and through them is diminished, thus the end product is a less-than-authentic performance. Billings (1997) points out what I believe to be one of the greatest tragedies of formula: the loss of personal style. No one enjoys watching a series of speeches that look and sound the same. Mills (1984) articulates profoundly that “style should not become an artificial decoration to be exhibited” (p.18).

In fact, this monotony could be enough to cause competitors and coaches alike to lose interest in the activity of forensics (Paine, 2005). Most would agree that individual differences and diversity in performances are good (Billings, 1997). The forensics community prides itself on its inclusionary policies and diversity. Yet, the competitive formulas that are systemic in the competitive arena force each diverse speaker to perform identically. Observation of out rounds of Drama at the 2017 and 2018 NFA, for example, revealed most speeches beginning with a one and a half to two and a half minute lighthearted teaser ending with a “twist” in the plot setting up the remainder of the story, is followed by a one-two minute introduction highlighting the social or philosophical issue.
Fighting the Formula

illustrated by the story, and the remaining six minutes build to a highly emotional climax at 8:45 and resolve in a “bum, ba-dum, ba-dum” cadenced ending at 9:50. This predictable pattern is made more apparent when you hear indescribable yet distinctly recognizable vocal rhythms adopted by nearly every speaker. While this is simply my own observation absent of empirical study, I do believe it is indicative of the event as a whole. Prose Interpretation follows similar patterns, making it nearly indistinguishable from Drama (Rudnick, Peavy, Cosby, Harter, & Dougherty, in press). When adhering to so strict a formula, a speaker’s individuality as a performer and thinker is lost and we create a homogenous community of speakers (Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005).

Judges are putting too much emphasis on the “how” the speech is said, de-emphasizing the “what” of the speech (Bacon, 1979), and ultimately devaluing the speaker themselves. One coach describes disturbing ballots received by one of their students who is confined to a motor scooter. “We receive so many ballots that penalize [her] for the inability to sound or move like the scripted and dehumanized mode of persuasion I refer to as the Persuade-O-Bot 2020” (Hinderaker, personal communication, 2018). The fact that a young woman who wants to improve her public speaking ability is critiqued because her wheelchair limits her ability to move around the space is disgraceful. Absolutely unacceptable. Some would argue forensics fosters an “elitism” that excludes the physically challenged competitor (Kosloski, 1994, p.38), and I would add that our unspoken rules play a large part in creating that elitism. Hinderaker goes on to express praise for the few ballots received rewarding the student for her courage and thanking her for embracing her own speaking style rather than mimicking other speakers. I find hope in the fact that there are at least a few judges out there who praise speaker’s individuality. Unfortunately, those judges seem to be the exception to the norm.

I recall a persuasive speech I judged several years ago in which a young man spoke of his own personal struggle with the physical condition discussed in the speech. His emotion seemed genuine and he formed a connection through his passion for the topic. Today, possibly due to this young man’s competitive success (I believe he was a national finalist in several events including Persuasion), pointing out a personal connection to the topic is commonplace and now a part of the formula for persuasive speaking (Richardson, 2017). When a speaker makes a unique choice that goes over well, others begin to adopt it (Reid, 2015). Ironically, the unspoken rule that you must have a melodramatic personal experience with your persuasive topic or the theme in your POI or poetry can diminish the authenticity of the performance by making students feign emotion. Even 100 years ago, as written in the very first issue of the Quarterly Journal of Speech, it was understood that when a speaker's “emotion is artificially worked up or thrust upon us...his appeal is mechanical and ineffective” (Gunnison, 1915, p. 144). This artificiality evolved into a common practice and diminishes the individuality of the speaker, breeding inauthenticity.

Formulaic Speaking Restricts Learning

The educational goals of forensics are touted by every coach and Director of Forensics as the reason for the activity. I often repeat the mantra, “competition is the motivation to learn, not
the reason to learn.” However, competition too often becomes the sole reason for learning (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Ribarsky, 2005; Williams & Gantt, 2008). It is these oppressive formulas that give credence to Burnett, Brand, and Meister’s (2003) claim that education as the goal of forensics is a myth. They assert “the practice of competition coopts education” (p. 12). This argument begins to hold water when you realize that students do not need to learn public speaking skills in order to compete well – they only need to learn the norms of forensics competition (Reid, 2012). The nature of these conventions promotes competition, not learning (Gaer, 2002) and are “pedagogically irresponsible” (Reid, 2015, p. 9).

As we teach students to give speeches in a specific manner, we teach them to do, not think. This limits the student’s ability to reach for higher levels of education and keeps them low on Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a philosophy of the stages of learning (Bloom, Furst, Hill, Engelhart, & Krathwohl, 1956). The terminology for the 6 tiers consists of classifications ranging from “remembering” – the lowest tier – to “creating” – the highest tier (Forehand, 2010). The lower tiers engage in memory skills and a simpler understanding and application of ideas (Forehand, 2010). Mastery to some extent occurs at each level (Furgerson, 2012), but students fully master a subject and find value in it through the highest tiers. When one engages in challenging activities they are able reach for the highest level of learning, the place where they can create new knowledge (Forehand, 2010), true education is occurring. When blindly following a blueprint, speakers are forced to remain at the lower levels of learning, as they have no reason to question why they are doing it (Reid, 2015). Absent of the high level conceptual learning and comprehension of principles achieved through the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, current formulaic practices in individual events disadvantage the students by requiring imitation of a model. Plato would roll in his grave.

Part of the educational value of any activity is the opportunity for students to try new things, experiment with different ideas, and practice skills they have not yet mastered (Paine, 2005). However, adherence to prescribed formulas does not leave very much room for students of public speaking in forensics to engage in new concepts or experiment with new practices. Forensics should be teaching speakers more than a checklist of things to do to win awards (Richardson, 1999). Because of the way speakers are forced to conform to certain expectations, and are taught how to do so by their coaches, they come to rely on these techniques rather than learning theoretical or rhetorical principles.

When examining the formulas demanded by judges in forensics, we can see them as checklists working against educational goals of forensics; goals like creativity, critical thinking and argumentation (Richardson, 1999). Not only do formulas require strategies and techniques not included in most public speaking curriculum, some scholars believe they defy what is taught in public speaking courses (Gaer, 2002; Reid, 2015; Shafer, 2005). This “devolution of forensic education” (Bingham & Goodner, 2012, p. 51), not only disadvantages speakers who do not know the formula (Paine, 2005), but leaves behind the very motivation we claim to have: education (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Ribarsky, 2005).
Fighting the Formula

Formulaic Speaking Limits Transferability

Another significant problem with the reliance on formula in forensics is the lack of transferability to “real world” situations (Billings, 2011; Duncan, 2013; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005; Walker, 2018). VerLinden (1986) says the forensic community gathers not to inform an audience, but to compete and compare ourselves with others. This remains true in recent years as well (Duncan, 2013). To this end we have adopted methods of speaking that makes public speaking objective in the minds of the judges, rather than transferable methods applicable to situations one would encounter post-graduation. We create “effective forensic speakers rather than effective public speakers [emphasis added]” (Reid, 2015, p. 8). The real world is a far more diverse population than that of forensics (Kosloski, 1994), yet our speaking style is tailored only to those in our tight knit community (Grace, 2015). The value of forensics comes in the application of the skills learned through competition to the real world such as interviews, day to day conversation, and meetings (Preston, 1991). However, given the intricacies of the conventions, particularly those in Public Address, direct application of forensic skills to those real-world situations is difficult (Walker, 2018), though admittedly not impossible, and there are certainly intelligent students who have become effective speakers outside of forensics.

Judging paradigms seem to be made up of checklists of techniques required by judges that are not going to cut it in the real world (Reid, 2015; Richardson, 1999). The checklists include practices like over-enunciation and robotic gestures and movements that are unwelcome to outsiders (Bingham & Goodner, 2012; Reid, 2015, Richardson, 2017; Walker 2018). I have shown videos of national finalists and national champions to my public speaking classes and they are bothered and displeased by the style. Even still, we meticulously train our speakers to talk in this manner because it’s what wins awards in forensics (Reid, 2015). In prioritizing competitive success, we sacrifice imparting skills that will have more diverse application in non-forensic settings. At the risk of being criticized for using non-academic sources, I did some digging into the Internet to find what businesses and organizations value in their motivational speakers, keynote addresses, and other speaking in the workforce. I was not surprised to find that of the 13 “must-haves” listed on one site (Farber, 2017), none of them related to delivery style or structure of the speech. While delivery and organization are the two characteristics forensics evaluates the most harshly, business and keynote speakers are evaluated more on their topic, passion, interaction with the audience, and ability to make the topic relatable (Farber, 2017). These are skills forensic speakers certainly can possess, but they are not part of most judging paradigms. If forensics has the goal of education and preparation for the real world, we should evaluate speakers on the characteristics demanded by the real world’s “social context” (Richardson, 2017, p. 58), not on the demands of unspoken rules.

Formulaic Speaking Stifles Creativity and Innovation

Forensic formula “kills creativity and rewards mediocrity” (Bingham and Goodner, 2012, p. 47). Innovation is simply not welcome in the forensic community (Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005). Public speaking is an art form (Walker, 2018). Much like painting, sculpting, creative
writing, or theatre, public speaking requires a combination of creativity and mastery over technique. If one is to reach their audience in effective ways, an artist, therefore a speaker, must employ creative efforts as well as rely on both skill and style that will speak to their audience (Dewey, 1934). However, trends to exclusively reward speeches fitting the mold ignore the importance of artistry and innovation in oratory (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Paine, 2005; Ribarsky, 2005) and treats it as if it there were a scientific formula for an effective speech. Speakers are not encouraged to step outside of the box and engage in creative speaking styles (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Walker, 2018). Artistry is identified in part by the artists ability to adapt and be spontaneous, responding to the needs of the subject matter and audience (Dewey, 1934). While events such as After Dinner Speaking (ADS) allow for some flexibility in off-the-cuff adaptations (Billings, 1997) this is not commonplace in other events. On the contrary, in forensics, spontaneity is stifled as the speakers are forced into conformity (Bingham and Goodner, 2012). Imagination takes a back seat to imitation as judges hold narrow paradigms that evaluate speeches as if they are a “paint by number” (Richardson, 1999).

While some forensic participants can find value in formulaic modes of expression and practice, they largely work against the artistic and “inhibit experimentation and potentially ground-breaking risk-taking” (Paine, 2005, p. 83). When we engage in formulaic practices of oratory, creativity is stifled and we “ignore free thought and expression” (Gaer, 2002, p. 55). This realization should strike fear into forensic educators and advocates. As I’ve already mentioned, freedom of thought and expression is a core value in the forensic community, and is a highly valued aspect even among competitors (Billings, 2011). Yet, our common practices work against this very fundament. A few interactions with competitors and rounds of oral interpretation make the overwhelming amount of diversity, creativity, and artistry in the forensic community it abundantly clear. Unfortunately, our marriage to strict formulas in every event restricts the potential of participants to reach for even greater creative heights. With speakers so tied to a specific type of speech, it is difficult to learn a new style (Billings, 2011). Walker (2018) even suggests that we teach a “powerwalk” (p. 3) version of the most basic public speaking skills, rather than teaching them advanced public speaking skills. Tying this concept back to the diminished educational value and borrowing from the metaphor of a painter, Lauth (2010) posits this question: “As educators...do we want students to show us the paintings of others, or do we want to hand them a brush and let them paint?” (p. 90).

**Formulaic Speaking Discourages High Quality Speaking**

As communication educators we must accept the responsibility to urge our students to reach for excellence. We must “represent [and] define the ideal” communication (Richardson, 2017, p. 57) However, formulaic speaking discourages the pursuit of high quality speaking (Ribarsky, 2005). The true way to reach the highest quality of art is to allow the subject matter and the occasion to dictate the form (Dewey, 1934). The subject matter is possibly the most influential aspect of the speech and refers to the topic and the purpose of the speech-making process. The topic should be the very first thing a speaker considers as it must influence the form
of the speech (Dewey, 1934). However, when speakers resort to relying on a formula for their speech, the subject matter is seldom given appropriate consideration. Forensic speakers who break the mold in pursuit of the best strategies for their speech are often penalized (Paine, 2005; Ribarsky, 2005). This penalty is rarely overt, and few judges would ever admit to it – because most people know such judgements are unreasonable – but observation of final rounds at most large tournaments all seem to indicate undeniable patterns, suggesting that judges prefer certain methods of presentation. Thus, when a speaker engages in a divergent organizational pattern or speaking style, they most often do not advance past preliminary rounds. Granted, exceptions bring a breath of fresh air, and informative speaking seems to be the event to recently break the mold. Unfortunately, many competitors who present distinctive speeches motivated by the subject matter and not by the expectations, will not find a welcome home in collegiate forensics (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2015).

The canons of rhetoric are one of the foundational building blocks of oration. They are the process of speech-making engaged with by every speaker. These five components of the speech-making process each play a distinct role in the crafting of a speech. The first canon, invention, is where the speaker imagines their topic and conceptualizes their approach to the topic and the speech as a whole. The arrangement phase is when the speaker organizes their content into an appropriate order and arranges their arguments and examples into what will become the outline of their speech. Memory, or as some contemporary texts call it, “understanding” (Nelson, Titsworth, & Pearson, 2013), refers to the knowledge of the subject matter possessed by the speaker, including, but extending far beyond, memorizing the specific content selected. Style refers to one’s language style, writing style, speaking style, and overall presentation style. The fifth canon is delivery, which encompasses the actual presentation of the oration and considers the specific medium and components of delivering the content to the audience. Active engagement and thoughtful, intentional choices at each canon’s juncture is crucial for the development of an effective speech of high quality. Appropriate attention to the canons allows a speaker to craft a speech that will be effective at sharing the subject matter with the audience.

I mention the canons of rhetoric because they are victims of formulaic speaking (Walker, 2018). The more a speaker observes a strict formula, the less effort they need to put into the canons. When a speaker is told to use a topical structure for their speech, they virtually skip over the canon of arrangement. If they had given it more thought, and allowed the topic to speak to them, they may have discovered a chronological approach or addressing their topic considering regional variances may have been more effective. But speakers in forensics are not given this opportunity. For example, in the event of persuasion, forensic norms have demanded for a problem/cause/solution for over a decade (Bingham & Goodner, 2012; Ribarsky, 2005). Since the arrangement of this speech is predetermined, in depth engagement in the process of arrangement is useless. The expectations for style of performance eliminate the need to consider the canon of style. Adhering to a formula reduces the need to expend energy on the canons of rhetoric at every turn, decreasing the quality of the speech.
Alternatives and Solutions

The existence of formulas in forensics is evident, and these formulas are detrimental to many aspects of the student’s personal growth and development and for the activity itself. We must consider ways to eliminate the over reliance on these techniques and the value placed on them. Change is not easy, and it cannot be achieved by one group of people or a handful of scholarly articles and NCA panels. Competitors, judges, coaches, and even sponsoring organizations and tournaments must all see the importance of loosening the grasp on these unspoken rules, and make the following changes to practice and ideology.

For Competitors

**Write organically and thoughtfully.** If you are a competitor, there are several things you can do to resist and change the formulaic norms. First and foremost, you need to resist the pressure to write speeches that conform to the norm, and instead, set aside formula when writing your speech (Walker, 2018). Ultimately, you can arrive at a presentation that is most appropriate for the subject matter by engaging in the canons of rhetoric (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011, Walker, 2018). This is not a difficult step to take. In fact, sometimes it is easier to write a speech organically, rather than smashing a topic into a prescribed structure. True meaning can only rise out of organic development and deliberation (Dewey, 1934). The first step to creating an artful public address must be thought. Brainstorming, experimentation, and discussion with others about the topic are key to making sure your approach will be worthwhile. Devoting time to think about your topic in the infancy of your speech development is crucial if you want to avoid resorting to formula. Art comes out of the natural process of consideration, not the forcing of form (Dewey, 1934). Every expression should be deliberate (Paine, 2005), and expression takes time (Dewey, 1934). As speakers, you must discover your method of expression for yourself, and not be told how to express yourself. Unfortunately, this may mean putting your competitive success on the line (Paine. 2005). These steps necessitate a reevaluation of your priorities and goals. Remember, this event is for you. Do what will benefit you most in the long-run. Allow yourself to “do speech” your way. Cezanne writes “we should not be content to keep the formula of our illustrious predecessors” (as cited in Read, 1954), rather we should adapt and improve on what has come before.

**Allow technique to emerge organically.** Public speakers need to de-emphasize the use of techniques when crafting a speech (Mishne, 2017; Richardson, 2017). You have the freedom to pick and choose your speaking strategies and techniques. For example, the “speaker’s triangle” is a technique of physical delivery that can be an effective strategy for providing a physical delineation between your ideas. However, there are other effective ways to demonstrate a separation of ideas. Self-evaluation of your speaking choices in light of the content of the speech and your own style can help avoid formula for formula’s sake (Reid, 2015). You must be willing to use organic strategies, rather than automatically employing techniques because it’s
expected. Instead of working to incorporate the popular techniques into your speech, allow your
technique to emerge from the demands of your topic and purpose (Walker, 2018). Walker (2018)
argues that the canons of arrangement and style are being lost through current trends in forensics,
and can be recaptured through consideration of each speech topic. Only then will you have an
authentic performance.

**Be creative.** Speakers should feel encouraged to engage in artful speaking. Without
imagination, you as a speaker and artist miss out on the “chief instrument of the good” (Dewey,
1934, p. 362). This goes beyond creative use of language. Creativity should also be employed in
the form of the speech (Walker, 2018), in the examples used, and in the delivery style. The
relationship between the elements of your speech must be clear; otherwise, design is in vain
(Dewey, 1934). Creativity is the well-spring of the memorable. And when something is
memorable, it is impactful. Artists engage in self-expression and self-expression is of utmost
importance (Dewey, 1934). When giving a speech, which is expression of the most public nature,
you must be artful if not for the sole sake of reaching an audience, but for the sake of creating
something that speaks on behalf of itself. Recognize that there is no right or wrong way to give a
speech (Mishne, 2017; Paine, 2005) and that effective public speaking is not a science; “the artist
cannot work mechanically” (Dewey, 1934, p.8). You cannot simply take a prototype and apply
your topic to it, as you might a mathematical equation. You must bend the unspoken rules and
adapt existing models to fit the occasion and subject matter in creative ways.

**Observe a variety of speakers.** Finally, you need to be choosy in who you turn to for
public speaking inspiration. Too often speakers mimic past winners because they think it will
give them a competitive advantage (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky,
2005). It is a natural instinct and a good habit for you to observe other highly revered speakers as
inspiration for your own speaking, but you should do so with caution and discernment (Reid,
2015). Recognized speakers from TED Talks, champions from forensics and Toastmasters, and
even the occasional celebrity speaker, provide a wide assortment of high quality examples from
which you can draw inspiration. Ironically, speakers who copy their speaking idol’s style and
techniques, in effect, create a formula out of a good speech, and in the process, miss the potential
of developing their own style (Ribarsky, 2005). When looking for inspiration, you should view
several speeches from different sources to gain a well-rounded arsenal of ideas and techniques
from which you can carefully chose the form of your speech, rather than relying on the previous
year’s national finalists as your exclusive model. Masters “do not follow either models or rules
but subdue both of these things to serve enlargement of personal experience” (Dewey, 1935, p.
314), warning us that even those who are revered should not be mimicked.

**Judges**

**Value personal style.** I believe the buck stops with you. The power to decide which
speakers, and ultimately which conventions will be rewarded, lies in the hands of the judges
(Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015). It doesn’t matter what a student does, you have to change your judging paradigm if forensics is to see real change. There are several things you can and are obligated to do in order to reduce negative impacts of unspoken rules in forensics. I believe the first step is to be open to different styles of speaking (Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Ribarsky, 2005). There should be no limit to the individuality a good work of art or a speech can possess (Dewey, 1934). Speakers who show individualism in their speech should be rewarded not penalized. As an important clarification, I do not believe creativity should be a requirement or that speakers should be rewarded only for their individuality. This will only lead students to force “creative” choices upon their speech regardless of effectiveness. Speakers must still demonstrate good speech-making skills (Kay, 2017). Even considering those speakers who are not able-bodied, it is still possible for them to give a great speech, not despite their disability, but on the basis of the qualifications of a good speech (Brockmann & Jeffress, 2017). Speakers must be allowed to seek out and find a personal style of their own. You must permit speakers to engage with their topics in a manner showcasing their own individuality and personal style. It is not enough however, to permit speakers to be themselves, you need to encourage them when you see it. Judges can and should use the ballot to encourage behaviors they find valuable (Reid, 2015; Richardson, 2017).

**Break down organizational norms.** Since judges create the norms, it is up to you to change them. While the speakers can take all of the aforementioned suggestions, if judges still expect and demand adherence to ambiguous and unspoken rules, student’s efforts towards creating more effective speaking will be in vain. If we are to foster the maturing of a speaker, we cannot force subjective standards on them, but rather, we should allow them to create their own standards (Dewey, 1934). No speaker should be penalized because they chose not to use the speaker’s triangle. Speakers engage in formulaic practices because they believe it’s what the forensic community wants to see. As you evaluate your role in this activity, consider your contribution in the forensic community. You dictate “what the forensic community wants to see.” You may even use ballots to instruct speakers to engage or not to engage in a particular technique because “that’s not what will win this competition.” Richardson asserts that “ballots...represent our teaching.” (2017, p. 56) If judges stopped judging on what they think the “community” wants to see, and starts judging based on what they find important in a speech we will begin to break down the overbearing organizational norms that are not grounded in pedagogy or theory.

**Re-evaluate judging paradigm.** Hanson (1988) identified four criteria for ADS, that I believe should be applicable to all speeches: suitable subject, originality and creativity in the development of the subject, appropriate and effective language for the subject and occasion, and delivery adapted to the nature of the subject. This should be the criteria on which all other criteria are based. Judging paradigms requiring students to use specific verbiage such as “Today, we will first ... second, we will ... before finally…” are exactly the type of paradigms that needs to be challenged. Such specific judging paradigms are concerning and need to be abandoned in
favor of more subjective paradigms that will leave room for speakers to be original and creative. Your judging paradigm must evaluate the speech rather than impose your own opinion about style and convention (Billings, 1997). Judges must also evaluate the speech based on good communication in an effort to use the ballot as a teaching tool (Rudnick, Peavy, Cosby, Harter, & Dougherty, in press). Part of this evaluation is the practice of using the ballot as a way to encourage the speaker’s own style and offer public speaking advice, not as a platform to teach specific styles and tell them why they aren’t doing it “right.” (Gaer, 2002).

Coaches and Directors of Forensics

**Encourage innovation in coaching and judging.** The coach is the middle point between judge and student. Coaches direct students and also serve as judges. If anyone is in a position to make changes it is the coach (Reid, 2015). Coaches, encourage your students to break the mold. Push them to think outside the box and to engage in good public speaking practices, not just the ones likely to advance them to the final round (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Reid, 2015). Once you have helped your students break the mold, judge rounds using the same paradigm. Hypocrisy in this area is counterproductive (Reid, 2015). Coach/judges who coach their students to use the formulas in order to ensure their place in out rounds, but criticize the same formula used by other competitors when judging are part of the problem, not the solution.

**Teach theory in forensics.** Good pedagogical practices should be the goal of every coach. NFA is explicit about their desire to train coaches to be teachers as well as coaches (Morris, 2017). Reid (2012) argues that coach/teachers must bridge the gap between our practice of speaking, and the theoretical foundations of speaking if we want to break out of the forensic microcosm and push students learning higher on Bloom’s Taxonomy. You must train speakers to choose strategies best suited to their presentation by teaching communication theory such as the canons of rhetoric. Individualistic pedagogy, rather than formulaic and prescriptive techniques, will teach students more advanced public speaking skills (Walker, 2018). Students of public speaking need to be taught how to approach a topic based on the subject matter and occasion. While they should be learning the basics of these in their entry level speech classes, if they are to become skilled speakers, it cannot stop there (Walker, 2018). Giving a novice an outline to serve as a model is the natural first step to learning, but it cannot stop there (Walker, 2018). Speech writers should understand what it means to “invent” their speech, the implications of various “arrangement” strategies, devote time to “understanding” their topic, learn to develop a personal “style” for their speaking, and then choose the mode of “delivery” best suited for their holistic presentation. Monroe’s Motivated Sequence, a theory of persuasive speaking should be taught specifically when learning about persuasive speeches. Armed with the knowledge of how an audience can be persuaded and effective strategies for engaging an audience, speakers will be equipped not only with the tools of public speaking but with an understanding of how to use them and how to adapt them to their subject matter and occasion. You, the forensics coach, carry some of the responsibility to teach these concepts.
Participate in non-traditional events. Coaches choose what tournaments their teams attend. Participating in leagues that reward innovation and transferable skills without conforming to the ridged styles can be a significant statement for the activity of forensics (Ribarsky, 2005). Leagues like the Public Communication Speech and Debate League offer events like Table Topics, Public Narrative, and Interviewing, which apply public speaking skills to situations and topics likely to be encountered in the real world (West, 2015). Events like these can help situate forensics as a part of the larger academic community and “must be attended to and managed to ensure the continued success of forensics programs and forensics as an activity” (Holm & Miller, 2004, p. 23). Some individual tournaments offer these events in addition to the traditional forensic events. Encourage your team members to participate in them. If you are hosting a tournament, offer these events. Directors of Forensics who are passionate about changing the nature of forensics and re-creating a truly educational activity can choose to exclusively participate in tournaments offering these highly transferable events. If we are to increase the value of the event, and the diversity of those in it, we must make significant alterations to current practices (Holm & Miller, 2004). It will come at a price to be sure, but not until you take a stance and let the governing organizations know what is truly valuable will we see massive shifts in judging paradigms and organization norms (Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015).

The Leagues and Tournament Directors

Utilize more lay judges. The responsibility for change does not rest on the students and coaches alone. One thing tournaments can do to challenge formulaic speaking is to rely on more lay judges (Ribarsky, 2005). First, while “hired” judges can get a bad rap as competitors are frustrated with these “inexperienced” judges who “don’t know what they are talking” about (Grace, 2015), these are the people who will be the audiences of our speakers once they graduate. If anyone’s opinion should be considered, it is these “untrained” judges with real world expectations of what a speech should look like. Second, by using more lay judges, we will balance out the judging pool with evaluators who do not know or adhere to the formulas. They will judge the speakers based on the principles of natural speaking ability and good quality research, without imposing the demands of a formula. Lay judges are necessary for the fostering of real world speaking skills void of oppressive organizational norms.

Offer more experimental events. One league, the Public Communication Speech and Debate League (PCSDL), has introduces a set of events that appeal to those students and forensic programs seeking real-world speaking practice. Events like Public Narrative, Slam Poetry, Radio News Broadcasting, and Powerpoint Sales, have a direct transferability to real world situations. The Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament has also begun including Interviewing as a primary event. Some small tournaments have even begun offering these events alongside their standard NFA/AFA events. This is a step in the right direction. More tournament directors ought to consider offering these events at all tournaments. While it may create more administrative work,
the net benefits should be enough to warrant offering events that give participants a chance to practice highly transferable public speaking skills.

Be open about purpose. In her *Update from the President*, Karen Morris discusses the importance of pedagogy in the context of NFA (2017). She asserts that organizations like NFA must focus on training coaches to be teachers, not just coaches (2017). This is great as long as pedagogy really is the purpose of forensics. There is some debate over this (e.g. Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003), and no doubt that the focus shifts over time. The purpose of forensics impacts this debate over formula. Some of the ideas in this article are easily dismissed if you adhere to the philosophy of forensics as a very specific type of competitive speaking, and speakers follow the techniques they do because they are part of the “game.” But, forensic organizations do not often use this “game” type of language when referring to their purpose. Ironically, they utilize the “game” terminology such as competition, judges, rounds, awards, etc. in all aspects of the activity (Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003). This conflict of purpose statement and praxis is problematic and confusing to participants (Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003). Tournament sponsors must be clear about their expectations and acknowledge that their preferred style and is not the only or best method of delivering a speech (Mishne, 2017; Paine, 2005). While some may consider this to be interference with the integrity of competition, organizations have a responsibility to encourage the type of participation they value, and to discourage practices detrimental to their goals. If they are open about their purpose, and make rules and policies reflecting that purpose, we can avoid misunderstanding about the stylistic requirements and perhaps open the door to less stringent expectations.

Research Possibilities

While I have outlined some practical steps to be taken by speakers, judges, coaches, and organizations sponsoring tournaments, there are also several areas of research and inquiry that can help shed light on this problem, and provide detail to these possible solutions. First, for those who doubt the widespread practice of only rewarding forensic competitors who follow the expected formula, I encourage a longitudinal study of out round advances at multiple national tournaments. By examining videos and manuscripts of both winning speeches and non-finalist breaks at national tournaments over an extended period of time reaching back multiple decades, we will be able to ascertain the extent of formulaic expectations. Research of this nature has been done before on different scales and for different purposes and often only examining a specific event (e.g. Kelly, Kelly, & Schnoor, 2008; White & Messer, 2003), but a larger scale study is needed. Examination of the organizational choices, delivery techniques, and specific content across multiple national organizations such as NFA, AFA, and PKD will likely reveal undeniable patterns. Looking at each event independently and then comparing the trends across events will expose the formulas and expectations permeating all of individual event competitions. While this is a massive undertaking, it is a step that will lead the forensic community closer to its common goals.
Interviews with judges, coaches and competitors may also reinforce the prevalence of formulaic practices in forensics, while also shedding light on how we can move away from these trends. Few forensic researchers employ interviews (e.g. Pelletier, 2015), but that method would provide a very rich understanding to this complex issue of formulaic forensics. Since interviews provide a rich understanding of how participants understand the context (Tracy, 2013) it would benefit forensics to engage in more research of this nature. Interviews with coaches and competitors alike would not only reveal what they consider to be the unspoken rules, but would provide understanding into the motivation for adhering to that formula. Additionally, interviewing judges from both within forensics and without would shed light on the different ways judges reward formulas, and what expectations different judges bring into the rounds.

Little has been done to explore the long term effects of specific forensics skills (Billings, 2011). While Billings (2011) looked at past participants in forensics regarding their satisfaction with the activity and some general benefits, I suggest inquiring specifically about their post-forensics experiences with public speaking (Kerber & Cronn-Mills, 2005). Former competitors are largely positive when speaking of their time in forensics (Billings, 2011), but the direct applicability of speaking skills is not addressed in research. Examining the use of forensic skills in a different context will allow forensic scholars and participants to better evaluate the use of formulaic practices, and of all practices in forensics. If anyone can speak to the transferability of these formulas, it would be those who have used them in the real world.

Finally, Ribarsky (2005) began investigating ways to foster innovation in forensics. Scholars would be wise to pick up that torch and seek out practices encouraging speakers to engage in creativity and independent thought when preparing their speeches. Open ended surveys, interviews, or participant observation would likely be the most effective approach to this line of inquiry as each would allow the participants to share their experiences and provide detailed examples of how their own innovations were received.

Tracking trends in an activity such as forensics can shed a lot of light on the impact it has on those it serves. This proposed research would allow scholars to identify prominent trends and changing norms, and guide forensic educators as they coach, judge, and offer administrative support to their forensic teams. The overall value of an event is determined by the outcomes and the methods of achieving those outcomes. The trends and norms that would be illuminated by research on forensic formulas and the unspoken rules would offer long lasting insights into the value of this event for past, present, and future participants.

Conclusion

There are some very reasonable arguments in favor of forensic conventions (Duncan, 2013; Paine, 2005). I do not want to diminish the efforts of some to create a standardized method of education and evaluation. Nevertheless, I firmly believe the consequences of formulaic practices in individual events outweigh the potential benefits. While many in the forensic community are open to discussing this issue and there have been countless panels and papers presented at conferences on the matter (Holm, 2018), rarely do changes occur (Hatfield-Edstrom,
Fighting the Formula

2011; Reid, 2015). While norms are always changing and evolving, the truth of the matter is that there are many conventions that have remained unchanged for decades (Paine, 2005) and even when they do change, they continue to be problematic as evidenced by references to other scholarly work in this essay spanning several decades and all discussing the same concerns.

Considering lost individuality, discouraged artfulness and creativity, stifled learning, and diminished transferability of skills, formulaic speaking in forensics cannot be ignored. Its effects are widespread, stealthy, and detrimental. As a competitor and a coach I have fallen victim to the allure of a shiny method of speaking in exchange for a shiny trophy only to discover too late that I missed a great opportunity to speak for myself or to encourage a student to seek out their own personal identity as a speaker. I do not think that every speech needs to be brand new and innovative. Humans need order and familiarity as much as they need novelty (Dewey, 1934). There are many occasions where an old trick is the most effective. There is nothing new under the sun, and it is futile for a speaker to re-invent the wheel every time they begin creating a speech. But the knowledge of many techniques and styles must be accessed before blindly choosing the form of a speech. When speaking of memorable speakers, Gail Larsen (2013) offers this observation:

“They avoid formulaic speaking at all costs. They understand their particular configuration of gifts, talents, and life experiences is unlike that of anyone else. The best they have to give to speaking is contained in their unique perspective. This original medicine, the source of their brilliance, springs from the heart of who they are, creating a singular pattern nowhere else to be duplicated.”

We can no longer blindly follow in the footsteps of the speakers who have come before us. The cost is too great. As educators, we must seek out the most effective and meaningful activities for our students. By scrutinizing the values that dictate our practices, and the practices that mold the values, we can reach great heights in the field of communication and oratory. Our students, our academic field, and our country need us to train speakers who can think for themselves and craft messages that will move those around them to see the truth that only comes when imagination and reason are combined in artful and thoughtful oratory.
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Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper

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**Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper**

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**Abstract**

This essay advocates for the reinvigoration of imitatio pedagogy to reestablish disciplinary commitment to civic education in perilous democratic times. I argue that imitatio offers a needed response to several contemporary democratic challenges. After mapping out three theoretical relations of imitatio, I describe one approach for inculcating democratic citizenship via imitatio designed for undergraduate education. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the specific affordances of imitatio education in the digital age and call on educators of rhetoric and communication to once again perceive democratic well-being as a disciplinary responsibility.

**Keywords:** imitatio; pedagogy; civic education, rhetoric; digital

The mythos surrounding rhetoric’s origins in 5th century Syracuse following the overthrow of the tyrant Thrasybulus imparts a recurring lesson that rhetoric is simultaneously democracy’s greatest hope and largest threat (Blankenship, 1966; Bryant & Wallace, 1953; Farenga, 1979; Gencarella, 2007). Scholars, practitioners, and teachers of rhetoric and communication regularly turn to public discourse as a thermometer to diagnose the health of the body politic, and in an era in which misogyny is defended as “locker room talk,” and white supremacists are recast as “very fine people,” it is difficult not to worry that the times are a changin’ in the worst ways and for the most terrible reasons. Contesting these troubling trends requires a renewal of the historical foundation of our disciplinary pedagogy, developing students equipped to “the life of an active and responsible citizen” (Hauser, 2004, p. 40). Despite considerable theoretical and methodological differences, the pedagogical mission of engendering a citizenry capable of carefully and ethically addressing collective concerns remains a common, if overlooked, denominator in the field.

This essay responds to Craig R. Rood’s (2016) call for “more scholarly attention to rhetorical education” (p. 137) by elevating *imitatio*, an ancient rhetorical exercise involving the rigorous and embodied study, repetition, and revision of exemplarily models of public discourse. *Imitatio* is uniquely attuned to civic education and offers a formidable defense against several contemporary democratic vulnerabilities (Erdmann, 1993; Ewalt, Ohl, & Pfister, 2016; Hariman, 2004; Sullivan, 1989; Terrill, 2011; Terrill, 2014). My intention with this essay is twofold: first, to provide a robust explication and defense of *imitatio*; and second, to advance *imitatio* pedagogy by proposing one specific method for its application in the classroom. Although *imitatio* was “the single most common instructional method in the West for well over two millennia” (Muckelbauer, 2008, p. 52), the goal of this essay is not to uncritically “Make Communication
Education Great Again” by blindly venerating ancient techniques, but instead to demonstrate that the inherent mutability of *imitatio* allows the exercise to be rearticulated for the needs of present. In the next section, I briefly describe three theoretical relations of *imitatio* in order to familiarize readers with the ancient pedagogical practice. Second, I outline one approach for inculcating democratic citizenship via *imitatio* designed for undergraduate education. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the specific affordances of *imitatio* education in the digital age.

**Relations of Imitatio**

Because *imitatio* purposefully blends theory and practice into a holistic civic education, it is necessary to understand the theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogical exercise. *Imitatio*’s rarefied status in the annals of rhetorical education in no way equates to universal agreement regarding the precise meaning or preferred process behind the exercise. McKeon (1936) identifies as many as five distinct attitudes in antiquity alone associated with this protean concept; and even within the same intellectual tradition, no two theorists or educators shared complete agreement on how best to conduct *imitatio*. Unpacking the nuanced and meandering conceptualizations of *imitatio* throughout the intellectual histories of philosophy, aesthetics, and rhetoric is beyond the scope of this essay, and is inappropriate in most educational settings (See Corbett, 1951). Rather than provide an exhaustive list of *imitatio*’s meanings, I turn to John Muckelbauer’s (2008) generative heuristic that organizes the history of *imitatio* into three distinct but interconnected relations, or rhythms, between model, copy, and rhetor: “repetition-of-the-same,” “repetition-of-difference,” and “difference and repetition.” It is important to discuss each relation at length, because as I will advocate in the next section, the civic potential of *imitatio* is maximized when all three relations are unified in a single practice.

The first relation, “repetition-of-the-same,” is likely what first comes to mind when people think about imitation in an educational setting. It is not uncommon, especially in high school forensics curricula, for students to initiate their rhetorical training by delivering recitation speeches that closely mimic iconic public addresses to hone delivery and memory skills. Although Plato (1991) is generally allergic to the idea of creating replicas, he tolerates this mode of *imitatio* in his *Republic* because the aim is faithful replication of the exemplar. Creating an exact copy of any model is unachievable, and yet the reverence and labor involved in getting as close to the original as possible familiarizes the student with the agents, strategies, and constraints of “real-world models” of historical significance (Terrill, 2011, p. 301).

 Faithful replication of a consummate model of rhetoric carries both technical and moral implications for student growth. Erasmus (Erdmann, 1993) would require pupils recite passages four separate times so that the technical and moral proficiencies embodied in the text would be imprinted for future use. Frederick Douglass (2016) recounts in his own education that copying speeches contained in *The Colombian Orator* “gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance” (p. 36). Imitating an impactful message, whether via speech, prose, music, or film, requires literacy
in rudimentary elements of communication that can only be mastered through repetition, such as audience analysis, the deployment of tropes, and achievement of argumentative consistency. Repetition-of-the-same can manifest itself as mindless regurgitation of material; however, this bastardization overlooks the magnitude of critical thinking and critical listening involved in the process of unlocking the innerworkings of a text, and how with practice, repetitive exercise empowers students to “unconsciously and spontaneously reproduce” (Corbertt, 1971, p. 247) the style of the model, as if by drawing from rhetorical muscle memory.

Embedded within the artifact worthy of imitation is not only the technical components of eloquence, but also the attitudes, virtues, and morals of a community. Kirt H. Wilson (2003) asserts that the “ultimate goal of pedagogical imitatio is to instill moral values” (p. 91). By exposing students to a paragon of rhetorical excellence, and requiring sophisticated analysis and disciplined repetition, “repetition-of-the-same” is a “potent and persistent medium of indoctrination” (Haskins, 2000, p. 13) that initiates participation in a political culture with its own unique history and expectations of decorum. Assuming that moral character can “rub-off” on a student makes the selection of the model to emulate critical, as it could mean that imitation of an ethically corrupt model, say Hitler’s Mein Kampf, would sabotage student development and threaten democracy.

A truly poignant representation of “repetition-of-the-same” can be found in Ken Burns’s (2014) documentary The Address. The film follows students of the Greenwood School, a small boarding school in Putney Vermont for students with learning disabilities, as they embark on their year-long tradition of reciting from memory Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Pasha, a 16-year-old student at Greenwood, reflects on the impact of the imitatio by stating:

Throughout my entire life, I actually really stuttered a lot. And I noticed that this speech will actually kind of improve my stuttering and my pronunciation in words, too, my articulation, in the t-h sounds. I actually wanted to actually recite the Gettysburg Address because […] the address, was actually really inspiring to me. So if I recite this Address in front of people, I think it’ll make me feel like I could actually do anything I want and will eventually make me feel like a new man.

As these adolescents learn the words, phrases, organization, and historical context of the speech, the rigors of the activity nurture patience, resilience, social bonds, and personal confidence, valuable behaviors to maintain well after the exercise concludes. “Perfect” reproduction of Lincoln’s oratory is far less important than the process of personal discovery and collective identity formation that occurs as students strive to emulate a great American orator attempting to salvage a tattered union.
For proponents of “repetition-of-the-same,” the second relation of *imitatio*, “repetition-of-difference,” is typically viewed with hostility as it actively encourages modification of the exemplar “in the spirit of generous rivalry” (Fiske, 1971, p. 27). Whereas “repetition-of-the-same” tasks students with coming as close to the model of excellence as possible, “repetition-of-difference” implores students invent improvements to that which is already deemed exceptional. Quintilian (2001) championed this approach by noting that even with the most admirable performances, it is incorrect to assume that “everything which the best authors said is necessarily perfect. They do sometimes slip, stagger under the load, and indulge in the pleasures of their own ingenuity” (X. i. 25). Of course, complete and total revision of a model would no longer qualify as *imitatio*, and would in fact suggest the model was not deserving of emulation in the first place; however, methodical revision can augment understanding and appreciation of the original. Rob Pope (1995) explains, “the best way to understand how a text works is to change it: to play around with it, to intervene in it in some way (large or small), and then to try to account for the exact effect of what you have done” (p. 1). Thus, Quintilian (2001) instructed students in the art of paraphrasing with the aim to cultivate “the capacity to expand what is by nature brief, amplify the insignificant, vary the monotonous, lend charm to what has been already set out, and speak well and at length on a limited subject” (X.v.9-11). Although the distinction is not made in the previous literature as far as I can discern, I find it useful to conceptualize “repetition-of-difference” as advanced rhetorical training because instead of relying on sound habits instilled through “repetition-of-the-same,” students must utilize their critical faculties and creativity to locate openings for intervention. While students are allowed to make changes, modification does not automatically equate to an improved piece of rhetoric. I have witnessed multiple occasions in which students struggle or “fail” to improve the original, the process evokes self-reflexivity on the complicated nature of rhetorical invention.

An added advantage of “repetition-of-difference” is its applicability to the particular needs of the burgeoning rhetor. Bowing at the feet of immortalized speakers and texts fossilizes rhetoric, in effect undermining the art’s connection to lived experience and responsiveness to fluctuating conditions for political struggle (Chávez, 2011). “Repetition-of-the-same” assuages

**Examples of Imitatio Projects**

- *Adapting Pete Seeger’s anti-war anthem “Bring ‘em Home” to oppose the War on Terror*
- *Turning Dr. Seuss’s “Oh, the Places You’ll Go!” into an adult themed video game*
- *A photographic essay on gender transitioning evoking Sojourner Truth’s speech “Ain’t I a Woman?”*
the tension between blind dogma and historical amnesia by producing a “new text that stands alongside the original, shaped and informed by it […] but not overlying or mimicking it” (Terrill, 2014, 167). *Imitatio* has at times been maligned as little more than inauthentic and impersonal forgery that suppresses the individuality of the rhetor. However, rather than forcing strict conformity, Quintilian responds that the “perfect orator” in *imitatio* “adds his own good qualities” (X. ii, 28.), essentially imbuing the model with a rhetorical bravado reflecting the student’s unique voice and objectives.

The final relation of *imitatio*, “difference and repetition,” is by far the most elusive even though it is immanent to “repetition-of-the-same” and “repetition-of-difference.” “Difference and repetition” denotes a mysterious, almost otherworldly awakening in the rhetor that “transmits itself through a kind of infectious quality” (Muckelbauer, 2008, p. 74). In the process of becoming consubstantial with the model, it is not only the artifact that undergoes transformation, but the student as well. Longinus (1991) references the activity of the muses to describe this relation, writing that in *imitatio* the student, like the Pythian priestess of Delphi, inhales a “divine vapor; thus, at once she becomes impregnated with divine power, and suddenly inspired, she utters oracles” (XIII. ii). Daniel M. Hooley (1990) likewise describes *imitatio* in terms of inspiration “wherein the soul of the imitator becomes inflamed in the pursuit of its model” (p. 80). Inspiration is difficult to account for, much less predict and control, but if the encounter between student and model reaches the level of intimacy, a stimulation may occur propelling students forward. Notice in the preceding quotation from *The Address* that Pasha felt “inspired” by the Gettysburg Address to the point of becoming a “new man” in his *imitatio*.

Inspiration may initially occur at the level of the individual, but what makes this relation so vital for civic education and democratic vitality is that students are propelled outward, into the community, armed with a newly found resolve that things *can* and *should* be different (See Ewalt, Ohl, & Pfister, 2016). It is here where the conservative underpinnings of “repetition-of-the-same” recede, where a student no longer uses rhetoric, but, in the words of David Fleming (1998, p. 178-9) “becomes rhetorical.” Munsell’s (2006) pedagogical program combining the mission of social justice with the promotion of racial equality is one example among many of how *imitatio* invites learned and engaged activism. As both students and educators seek ways of collapsing the distance between classroom exercises and the “outside world,” *imitatio* provides both the theoretical foundation and affective momentum to generate social change.

**Twenty-First-Century Imitatio**
In the previous section, the three relations of *imitatio* were disentangled for the purposes of description; however, it is hopefully clear that the boundary between the rhythms is porous, and that “repetition-of-the-same,” “repetition-of-difference,” and “difference and repetition” each accentuate complementary skills and behaviors integral to robust civic education. Given the voluminous writing on *imitatio*, the relative lack of detailed instruction for its usage in the classroom is problematic. Even if educators are persuaded to include *imitatio* in their courses, knowing exactly how to teach *imitatio* is by no means obvious. In this section, I outline one method of *imitatio* pedagogy designed for undergraduate majors in communication that I refined over three years of teaching an introductory course in rhetoric and communication at a small liberal arts university. The approach offered in these pages should not be interpreted as the definitive method for teaching *imitatio*, indeed the very nature of *imitatio* itself dictates this assignment and all subsequent iterations remain open to revision, but what follows is one accessible means for incorporating *imitatio* into the classroom.

Given that *imitatio* brings theory and practice together (Sullivan, 1989), it is necessary for educators to first familiarize students with *imitatio* and rhetoric’s broader historical project of civic education. I recommend initiating this introduction by exposing students to Isocrates’s *Evagorus* (1894), a funeral oration recognizing the deceased Cyprian ruler Evagorus in which Isocrates attempts to convince the king’s son Nicocles to rule nobly as his father’s successor. The *Evagorus* serves as a touchstone for students to theorize how audience expectations inform the production of a satisfying funeral oration. Moreover, Isocrates’s *Evagorus* is both a sophisticated epideictic speech suitable for imitation, and an oration that voices the importance of *imitatio* by exhorting Nicocles to replicate, and exceed, the achievements of his father. After connecting Evagorus’s lineage to the god Zeus, and spinning captivating tales of the king’s violent overthrow of an illegitimate usurper, Isocrates’s ingratiation subtly shifts to challenge Nicocles: “Who would not prefer the perils of Evagoras to the lot of those who inherited kingdoms from the fathers?” (Isocrates, 35). The irony, of course, is that while Evagoras was purportedly a “self-made” ruler, Nicocles was just bequeathed a kingdom on birthright alone. Isocrates masterfully walks a delicate tightrope in the oration, juggling flattery and provocation while delicately warning Nicocles against complacency in favor of the honorable pursuit of education and “proving yourself inferior to none of the Hellenes either in word or deed” (p. 77). In doing so, Isocrates illustrates that the *telos* of *imitatio* resides not simply in the creation of a text, but in the formation of a person who, by “imitat[ing] the manners and ideas of others that are contained in spoken discourse” (p. 75) grows their talents and habits in the service of others. Connecting with ancient texts and authors helps students of rhetoric and communication position themselves in relation to a consequential, albeit flawed, intellectual tradition that is increasingly displaced (Jackson, 2007), and to identify morality and citizenship as valued educational outcomes.

With the ethical and pedagogical investments of *imitatio* crystalized, I teach students the three relations of *imitatio* outlined above by exploring the work Bob Ross, the famed American art instructor and perhaps the greatest twentieth-century practitioner of *imitatio* pedagogy. As students learn by watching select episodes of Ross’s beloved public television series *The Joy of
Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper

Painting, Ross blends “repetition-of-the-same,” “repetition-of-difference,” and “difference and repetition” to make the art of painting accessible, therapeutic, and titillating. In each episode, Ross calmly guides viewers both verbally and visually in the raw mechanics of painting, such as creating color, selecting proper materials, producing visual depth, and, his personal favorite, the cathartic labor of cleaning paint brushes. The viewer learns by observing and mimicking Ross’s precise gestures and placid demeanor; however, as the instructor is careful to point out, “don’t try to copy exactly what I am doing here, let your imagination go.” While “repetition-of-the-same” inculcates the requisite skills to create, Ross insists upon the imaginative force of “repetition-of-difference,” giving students license to invent on canvas their own “happy little world.” Finally, as teacher, pupil, model, and copy join in the choreographed dance of imitatio, “difference and repetition” spontaneously erupts to the surface, supplying inspiration even to those who never hold a paintbrush. In the middle of completing his work “Quiet Pond,” Ross is unexpectedly interrupted by memories of his mother: “These are the kind of paintings that my mother likes, so maybe I’ll just dedicate this one to my mommy […] She’s my favorite lady in the whole world. So this is her painting” (Schenckm 1985). There is an innocence to Ross’s nostalgia, an infectious tenderness that manifests itself in audible “ahs” and subsequent promises of greater generosity. By studying The Joy of Painting, students witness the impactful synthesis of all three relations of imitatio, and learn that imitatio need not be confined to traditional public address to be rhetorical.

After students possess a satisfactory handle on the form and function of imitatio, it is time to transition to what Cicero (1970) determined to be the most consequential decision in the exercise—the selection of model. This decision was traditionally the responsibility of the instructor, who after accessing the particular strengths and weaknesses of the student, would carefully select a model suited to amplify their nascent talents and character (Fantham, 1978). Imitatio pedagogy tailored to individual students is impractical in most lecture settings, so I permit students to select their own models. The expansion of contemporary rhetorical theory beyond the traditional confines of public address affords students the freedom to select from a vast array of materials, including speeches, poetry, music, short stories, viral videos, photography, dance, among many others. Diversifying the range of imitatio allows students to appreciate the presence and power of rhetoric on their own terms, making the art relevant at the level of everyday life.

While students are provided the freedom to select their models, this affordance comes with a catch. Students are responsible for selecting artifacts deserving of imitatio, a somewhat fluid albeit essential requirement. It must be stressed that a high standard exists with imitatio, certainly not all artifacts carry technical and moral merits worthy of aspiration, and this expectation requires introspection and analysis on the part of students to produce a robust defense of their selection. Students are sometimes tempted to select deficient models, such as public gaffes or speeches immortalized online for embarrassing reasons, because they anticipate the comparative ease of making improvements to the original later on with “repetition-of-difference.” However, the ambition behind imitatio lies not in recuperating a poor example of
rhetoric, which may inadvertently lead to the assimilation of counterproductive habits, but in elevating an already esteemed and celebrated example of eloquence to greater heights. Judging rhetoric on the basis of “eloquence,” “effectiveness,” or “notoriety” is always already ideological, and for this reason, it is important that precepts for “deserving” models of imitatio do not drown-out subjugated voices or displace marginalized subjectivities. In rejecting the traditional association between imitatio and the discourse of the elite, Josh P. Ewalt, Jessy J. Ohl, and Damien S. Pfister (2016) advocate for a turn toward vernacular imitatio, a “‘bottom-up’ and polyvocal embodiment of live rhetorical activity” (p. 49). Vernacular imitatio democratizes the practice to the activities of everyday citizens as it maintains the rigorous stipulation that any model for imitatio must contain clear evidence of rhetorical ingenuity and ethical prowess.

With model in hand, students identify the internal and external dynamics of the exemplar for the purposes of maintaining fundamental features through “repetition-of-the-same.” Textual observations, including word choice, argumentative strategies, and organization, are added to contextual features such as authorial intent, public reception, and audiences. Taken together, this information directs students in the selection of essential features necessary to preserve the rhetorical integrity of the model (Corbett, 1951). For example, in an imitatio of Carl Sagan’s “Pale Blue Dot,” a student determined that the profound visual rhetoric of the Voyager 1 photograph needed to remain unchanged. Producing an entirely original text suggests that the model did not fulfill its role as exemplar; therefore, students must determine which indispensable aspects should be protected to maintain the artifact’s rhetoricity.

Changing the model for the purposes of improvement can occur through a variety of strategies, and typically requires experimentation on behalf of students to strike the appropriate balance between “repetition-of-the-same” and “repetition-of-difference.” A catalysis for “repetition-of-difference” is provided in the form of the ancient quadripartia ratio, four categories of qualitative change that can be applied to artifacts for rhetorical effect: addition, subtraction, transposition, and substitution (Lausberg, 1998; Pfister & Woods, 2016). As the name implies, with “addition” students can improve the existing model by inserting content, oftentimes by elaborating on latent themes, repeating key phrases, or inputting supplementary material. One of my favorite imitatio projects is of Jonathan Reed’s wonderful palindrome poem “Lost Generation” in which a student kept the poem intact, but produced an accompanying visual narrative capturing the physical and emotional movement of the poem’s multi-directionality. With subtraction, less is more. Prevailing digital sensibilities valuing efficiency and truncation make subtraction an attractive option for many younger students. Subtraction is also a method for modernizing a text or ameliorating problematic content, such as when students decide to excise derogatory references to women and racial groups. I once had an African American student conduct an imitatio of NWA’s song “Today Was A Good Day” for the purposes of motivating young black men, and as a result, he defended the strategic choice of removing the N-word. Transposing alters the structure and/or organization of the artifact. For instance, rearranging paragraphs can be used to build dramatic tensions. Finally, substituting content in the model can be a generative form of differentiation, especially when the switch cuts against
prevailing expectations. I was particularly moved by the decision of a student in her *imitatio* of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream Speech” to periodically interchange “dream” with “nightmare” in order to puncture narratives of racial progress circulating after the police shooting of Eric Garner.

“Repetition-of-difference” frees students from slavish devotion to the past by permitting revision through the imagination of different audiences and connection to contemporary controversies in order for students to invent “discourse fitted to [their] purposes, abilities, and audience” (Terrill, 2011, p. 303). Under the best circumstances, *imitatio* should be “equipment for living” (Burke, 1973) that is relevant to the professional and personal aspirations of students. I am reminded of an *imitatio* involving a subversive reworking of the Book of Genesis. After encountering the anti-LGBTQ slogan “God Made Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Steve,” a student authored an alternative creation narrative in which God actually did make Adam and Steve. The resulting myth was a hilarious and uplifting story that attempted to neutralize social prejudices by arguing that regardless of sexual orientation, acceptance is the most reasonable option given the humbling fact that everyone is apparently just “rib meat.”

The final relation of *imitatio*, “difference and repetition,” can bring confusion and anxiety, especially if students believe their grade depends on being inspired and inspirational. No roadmap exists to summon inspiration at will, but I can attest after observing hundreds of *imitatios* that this activity profoundly impacted myself and many students. Model selection is a contributing factor to “difference and repetition” because texts that resonate with students awaken hidden talents, arouse emotional commitment, and invite rigorous study that is sometimes rewarded with inspiration. If students are unable to dwell within the model and open themselves up to its influence, inspiration remains elusive. Memorization assists in triggering inspiration by bringing students in closer proximity to the model. When we take memorization seriously as a type of “learning by heart,” Terrill (2011, p. 306) argues that the discourse “does not simply reside within the student as an inert or benign parasite, but instead actually exerts a transformative impact, altering the discourse produced by the student, much as the DNA of some viruses intermingles with their hosts.” We each carry with us discursive fragments (aphorisms, song lyrics, movie quotations, etc.) that provide relief and guidance in turbulent times. In his Pulitzer Prize winning memoir, Hisham Matar (2016) recounts that his father, a political prisoner who recited poetry from memory in his Libyan jail cell to sooth fellow dissidents of the Gadhafi regime, taught him that “knowing a book by heart is like carrying a house inside your chest.” I ask that students memorize and recite portions of their *imitatio* in the hopes of erecting similar structures providing sanctuary.

For this assignment, *imitatio* is not completed until students compose a detailed account of the process and deliver a public performance. Rhetorical self-consciousness is an indispensable component of *imitatio* because, instead of acting randomly, students acquire the rhetorical capacity to make strategic decisions. As Plato (1998) instructs in the *Gorgias*, the art of rhetoric must be able to account for itself, offering a systematic explanation for its practices,
achievements, and limitations. Likewise, in a relatively short essay, I require students justify their model selection, identify which material was repeated and changed, and defend these important choices. Producing robust reasons for deciding what to keep and what to change is beneficial even in situations where the imitatio falls short of the original. Rhetoric is by nature wild, and even the most carefully laid plans do not always come to fruition. “Perfect” models will remain elusive, but it is within our agency to make theoretically informed decisions, and reflect on the symbolic and material consequences of our choices in preparation for future rhetorical situations.

Orality remains a foundation of communication proficiency and civic action, and although many past educators did not make oral performance an indivisible part of imitatio pedagogy, encouraging students to present their process and perform selections of their imitatio is highly recommend for two reasons. First, delivering a short presentation/performance renews commitment to the voice as a materiality of the discipline (See Gunn, 2007). At the same time that rhetoric and communication have gained by expanding beyond the classical confines of public speaking, Hauser (2004) contends “[w]e must reassert the importance of capacitating students by focusing on their powers of performance (dunamis) rather than focusing exclusively on their service to discovering knowledge” (p. 41). Second, performance attracts “difference and repetition” because students physically embody the model. Reading imitatio essays is certainly edifying, but nothing is more moving than seeing and hearing students perform their creations.

Before concluding this essay by discussing several specific affordances of imitatio pedagogy in the digital age, I wish to close this section by presenting with permission a laudable example of imitatio amenable to this format that symbolizes the exercise. For his imitatio, Ryan Hastings, a non-traditional student and Army veteran, selected Dylan Thomas’s villanelle poem “Do not go gentle into that good night.” Ryan recounts in his essay a kinship with the poem dating back to intermediate school that matured into adulthood: “I loved its meter and rhythm and the visions that it invoked in my young mind. However, it was not until later when I grasped its true message, and I embraced it to make it a part of me.” Of its multiple interpretations, Thomas’s poem is viewed by many as an adult son’s plea to his dying father to face the inevitability of death with bravery and defiance, a message that resonated with Ryan given his experience of performing at multiple funeral services as an Army bugler. Ryan strived to remain faithful to the original meter, rhyme and tempo, yet whereas Thomas’s poem is concerned with how we exit life, Ryan’s imitatio centers on a father’s request that his children, in Ryan’s words, “live a life worth living.”
\textit{Imitatio}, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
\textit{Do not sit idle on this good day,}
Old age should burn and rave at close of day; \textit{Your chores await, as they will not do themselves;}
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. \textit{Rage, rage against the urge to do nothing.}

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
\textit{Your rooms must be cleaned and your clothes put away,}
Because their words had forked no lightning they \textit{And, please for the love of God, someone change the cat’s litter box}
Do not go gentle into that good night. \textit{Do not sit idle on this good day.}

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
\textit{Good children, that sit before me, crying “not now!”}
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay, \textit{I say, these meager tasks that you shun, do give light to what you possibly might become}
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. \textit{Rage, rage against the urge to do nothing.}

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
\textit{Shiftless children, whose apathy for all deeds as you walk through life,}
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way, \textit{Do learn, often too late, to be contented is not the way}
Do not go gentle into that good night. \textit{Do not sit idle on this good day.}

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
\textit{Grave parents, near wits end, who sees the mess all around}
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay, \textit{Blind eyes do blaze with fire at the idleness before them}
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. \textit{Rage, rage against the urge to do nothing.}

\textit{And you, my father, there on that sad height,}
\textit{And here, your father, standing on this sad thought,}
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray. \textit{Curse, swear at me now with your fierce tears, I beseech.}

Do not go gentle into that good night. \textit{But do not sit idle on this good day.}
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. \textit{Rage, rage against the urge to do nothing.}

Dylan Thomas
Ryan Hastings

In comparison to Thomas’s rebuke of fear and cowardice at the end of life, Ryan’s \textit{imitatio} confronts the role of complacency in robbing everyday life of its potential. With regard to the relationship between model and copy, Ryan humbly defers to the brilliance of the original but contends that Thomas’s work motivated him to craft his own unique message. For Ryan, \textit{imitatio} agitated a response to a disconcerting scene in the form of a text equipped to solidify a parental lesson to his young audience that menial tasks can be dignifying, and that each day is an opportunity to grow that should not be squandered. “In this capacity,” Ryan writes channeling Isocrates, “life itself becomes an \textit{imitatio}, as we must all set an example for our children to emulate, where they can hopefully grow, to live rich, full, and happy lives.”

\textit{Imitatio and the Digital Mood}

Once a staple of rhetorical pedagogy, \textit{imitatio} has undoubtedly fallen on hard times, a decline attributed to the emergence of romanticism, which valued creativity, originality, and
authenticity over the creation of copies (Duhamel, 1973). Sullivan (1989) persuasively argues that *imitatio* as it was classically understood was simply at odds with the “modern temper” (p. 15) defined as a cultural belief in progress, individual genius, and scientific approaches to communication. My objective with this essay has been to bolster disciplinary commitment to civic education by outlining the history of *imitatio* pedagogy and offering a method for its application in the classroom. I conclude this essay by returning to the matter of social temperament, because I believe that the forces alienating *imitatio* from the modern temper rearticulate the practice to our increasingly “digital temper.” My position is not that *imitatio* is exclusively relevant to discourse on digital platforms, but rather that *imitatio* inculcates attitudes and practices aligned with many ambient conditions of digitality that structure everyday rhetorical operations (Boyle, Brown Jr, & Ceraso, 2018). In what follows, I turn to the potential of *imitatio* to develop three sensibilities of particular relevance for civic education in the digital age.

First, in contrast to the modern presumption that invention is an isolated process marked by originality, *imitatio* is ideally suited for the digital approach to invention as intertextual and collaborative remix. Scott H. Church (2017) defines remix as “the process of creating a new work by taking existing content from various places and combing it” (p. 161), a method that has greatly accelerated in usage and sophistication thanks to advances in digital technologies and the proliferation of retrievable content. Despite the recent cache of remix as a mode of cultural appropriation and political resistance (Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010), *imitatio* suggests that remix is in fact ancient in origins. Indeed, perhaps no better metaphor for remix exists than that which is given by Seneca (1925) in his description of *imitatio* as analogous to the activity of a bee “darting from one source to another, ingesting, digesting, recasting influences in novel and individual configurations” (84.5). In Quintilian’s (2001) *imitatio* pedagogy, students would draw from multiple models “so that one thing stays in our minds from one of them, and another from another, and we can use each in the appropriate place.” Likewise, Terrill (2011) states that in dividing the attention of students between the exemplar and their own rhetorical production, *imitatio* encourages students to “appreciate the inherent intertextuality of rhetorical texts, and to engage in a transformative discourse of duality” (p. 297). To the extent that civic participation involves the creation and circulation of influential discourse, *imitatio* teaches students to draw from multiple rhetorical registers to gain and maintain the attention of contemporary audiences. *Imitatio* as remix also brings to the forefront a number of pertinent questions for digital invention concerning the line between ethical appropriation and plagiarism. I once worked with a student inspired to do an *imitatio* of Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” in which the iconic rap anthem was refashioned into a slam poem commenting on the Black Lives Matter Movement that she supported. As a white woman, the student was especially sensitive to the ethical implications of such a project, but rather than asking “can I do this,” a more nuanced and difficult set of questions arose, such as “how might I do this *imitatio* in a way that honors the original” and “how can reimagining ‘Fight the Power’ unite people across racial differences in the fight against injustice.” Her strategy was to play recordings of the chorus “Fight the Power,” emphasize
contemporary issues of racial inequality mentioned at local protests, and lambast white apathy and hypocrisy that she witnessed. *Imitatio* challenges the integrity of the “original” model while simultaneously paying homage to noteworthy rhetorical antecedents. Ethical *imitatio* must strike a careful balance between repetition and difference resulting in a novel iteration that does not compromise morality by neglecting to acknowledge the existence and influence of preceding models, or by drawing from the exemplar in ways that are antithetical to its core purpose.

Second, *imitatio* substitutes romantic notions of identity as inherently unified and unitary with a view of identity as an amalgamation of multiple perspectives that come into focus through play, experimentation, and practice. Whereas romanticism sought the discovery of one’s “true self,” *imitatio* pedagogy anticipates the post-modern position that identity is constantly negotiated and discursively produced. The assumption that identity is always already fragmented places the onus on the selection of pieces and their creative assemblage, which is precisely the function of *imitatio* in guiding students to “keep trying on the language, again and again, listening, until some parts of it begin to fit your tongue” (Madison, 1999, p. 109). In taking on the style of the exemplar, if only momentarily, students “play with roles, with ways of thinking, and, thus, with ways of being” (Lanham, 1974, p. 124). *Imitatio*’s approach to identity formation is critical in the digital age because it takes full advantage of digital platforms, which Sherry Turkle (1995) describe as “laboratories for experimenting with one’s identity” (p. 12). It is certainly correct that digital technologies exacerbate cultural anxieties surrounding deception and authenticity; however, as most twenty-first-century students realize, the strict division between real/fake, offline/online, is archaic and restrictive in the digital age. It follows that in crafting and refining multiple identities over time, “nimble rhetors” (Rood, 2016, p. 140) are empowered through *imitatio* to select the approach most appropriate for the foreseen and unforeseen situations they encounter.

Finally, in addition to advancing several prevailing aspects of the “digital mood,” *imitatio* provides a needed corrective for behaviors threatening democracy in the digital age, especially at the level of analysis and critique. The long-established investment of rhetorical pedagogy in argumentation and forensics is based on the conviction that civil society and democratic institutions are best equipped to address social challenges when the subtleties, ambiguities, and of implications of public controversies are taken seriously (Eberly, 2002; McGeough & Rudick, 2018; Rief, 2018; Rood 2014). Unfortunately, many digital platforms eschew nuanced discussion and provoke political polarization by enabling users to easily falsify information (Cook et al., 2014), filter content for confirmation of previously held opinions (Lewandowsky et al., 2012), and misrepresent divergent positions (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). This is not to say that edifying conversations don’t take place online, but that many digital infrastructures as currently configured privilege knee-jerk reactions and hyperbole over painstaking research, introspection, and listening. When perusing through social media feeds, it appears digital culture is marked by an ever accelerating oscillation between hype and backlash. Be it a film, meme, or social campaign, whatever ascends to the status of “mattering” online is quickly debased as hopelessly naïve, endlessly hypocritical, and ideologically predatory. The result of this “all-or-nothing”
ricochet is myopia that drastically collapses the range of possible responses by underestimating the complexity of human relations. Through the exercise of identifying which material should be repeated, and concomitantly which material should be changed, *imitatio* instructs students to resist immediate, univocal conclusions, and instead conduct analysis and criticism reflecting that communication is composed of enabling and constraining features. Democracy is underserved by an impoverished view of analysis and criticism as completely affirmative or negative. What is needed now more than ever is a broader notion of analysis and criticism as “taking thought as to what is better and worse in any field at any time, with some conscious awareness of why the better is better and why the worse is worse” (Dewey, 1930, p. 12). Unlike weaponized calls for political civility, such a perspective reinforces opposition to social injustice by generating more savvy and justifiable forms of outrage (Desilet & Appel, 2011).

Reinvigorating *imitatio* pedagogy addresses two interconnected phenomenon, a purported decline in democratic survivability, and a move in rhetoric and communication away from the mission of developing citizens. Stitching theory and teaching together is in the best interest of the field, and the public at large, given the potential of rhetoric and communication to explain, and potentially improve, societal conditions. Scholars and teachers of rhetoric and communication alike have long perceived themselves as responsible for securing democratic well-being. By reviewing three relations of *imitatio*, outlining a specific classroom assignment, and unpacking the relevance of the practice in the digital age, I hope this essay contributes to the renewal of that commitment. The discipline’s role in civic education has long served as a defining characteristic, but it might now serve a larger more fundamental function with stakes that couldn’t be higher for our democracy.

**Notes**

[1] The historical narrative tying rhetoric and communication to citizenship is not without detractors. Chávez (2015) argues that basing rhetorical studies on citizenship serves the interests of the nation-state and excludes research and subjectivities that operate outside of non-Western perspectives. I concur with Chávez that citizenship has been deployedconceptually to force consent and homogeneity; however, when citizenship is conceptualized as a verb, as a way of being and doing in relation to others, rather than a judicial/bureaucratic status bequeathed for the purposes of control, then citizenship need not serve the interests of
Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper

the sovereign, and may in fact contribute to the formation of global, democratic subjectivities resistant to the forces of empire (See Hardt & Negri, 2005).

[2] Concerns regarding authenticity and originality in nineteenth-century America embroiled imitatio in racial controversy that continues to this day. Wilson (2003) argues that especially following the Emancipation Proclamation, the embrace of imitatio by some African American intellectuals as a strategy to threaten the dominant signs of white power had the reverse effect, solidifying racial inequality by framing African Americans as primitive imitators. Drawing from the work of Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha, and Giles Deleuze, Wilson maintains that imitation is a careful balancing act, and a tool for the disenfranchised that “does not require that one abandon blackness for whiteness” (p.105). I agree with Munsell (2006) that imitatio is a project in critical thinking, and not a method for teaching “White students how to co-opt African American discourse, nor Black students how to be more African American” (p. 31). While educators must be on guard so as to not encourage imitatio from resulting in the next Rachel Dolezal, imitatio allows students to see beyond their particular subject position and invites ethical conversations regarding representation and the problem of speaking for others (Alcoff, 1991-1992).
References


Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper


Imitatio, Civic Education, and the Digital Temper


Alumni Corner

Tyson Carter: What Forensics Did For Me
Ball State University (1993-1998)

Tyson Carter

Tyson Carter is the Manager of Client Education & Communications at IMT, a software and professional services firm specializing in Identity Management solutions. In his 20 years working in technology training he has taught software courses to students from all around the globe. His areas of instruction ranged from MS Word to advanced probabilistic matching algorithms used in healthcare and law enforcement.

After graduation, Tyson moved to Chicago where he completed Improvisational Comedy studies at the Players’ Workshop of the Second City. Outside of work, Tyson volunteers with the Cary-Grove High School Speech Team, the American Blues Theater Company, and Cub Scout Pack 577 in the Blackhawk Area Council. Tyson would like to thank all of the teammates he had at Ball State and the lifelong friends he made from other teams. He would like to remind you that he has ENERGY and you have PACE.

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What Forensics Did For Me

Tyson Carter
Manager of Client Education & Communications
InfoMagnetics Technologies

ALUMNI CORNER: The forensic community is filled with alumni who will tout the benefits they received through their participation in intercollegiate speech and debate activities. As directors of forensics programs face battles for budgets and sometimes for their program’s very existence, having a collection of published testimonies about the positive influence of forensics can be a tremendous help. To that end, Speaker & Gavel is setting aside space in each issue for our alumni to talk about how forensics has helped them in their professional life. These are our alumni’s stories.

Keywords: forensics, benefits of forensics, Alumni Corner

As a child, I was interested in just about everything from literature to art, from architecture to horticulture, and from horses to disco. During high school I was active in just about every club, played the tuba, and even got varsity letters in swimming. But when I started my freshman year at Ball State University in Muncie, IN, I put all of those activities in my past and focus on my future. That fall some of my friends from the residence hall were talking about going to check out the speech team during a weekend retreat. I was free and thought it sounded like something interesting. Little did I know that my interest in “everything” was an applicable set of skills—especially to forensics.

During that weekend retreat, we played a few ice-breaker games, we talked a bit about what the speech team entailed, and we watch a few of the older team members perform their persuasion, duo, and poetry pieces. I was enthralled. This was a new world to me. My high school did not have a forensics program and I sat there thinking, “This feels like home.” When it came time for breakouts. We were walked through the formula for a three-point speech and given an impromptu prompt. That moment is ingrained in my mind, the sun-dappled shade, the light breeze, and the faces of graduate student coaches, but I’m afraid not much else. Those seven minutes flew past in a whirlwind. At the end, they asked, “You said you have never done this before, right?”

I went on to compete for four years at Ball State and then stayed on for a fifth year as a graduate assistant coach while receiving my Master of Arts in Communication Studies. After graduation, Robert Heyart approached me and asked if I would be interested in working at his company in Chicago doing software training. That is where a 20-year career in technology education took off for me. In the fall of 1998, I joined National TechTeam in their Chicago office. This was a time when people still needed instructional education in how to use MS Word, PowerPoint, and Excel (laughable by today’s standards). My speaking abilities and quick thinking were marketable skills in the world of corporate education.

My career has led me through small companies and large ones. From tiny software startups through behemoths like Arthur Andersen and IBM. Through it all, the ability to speak
What Forensics Did For Me
dynamically, connect with learners on a variety of subjects, and entertain while informing can be directly attributed to my time on the speech team at Ball State.

My involvement in forensics has evolved over the years, and now forensics has become a family affair. I brought my fiancée, now wife, to help judge the NFA National Tournament in 2000 at Ohio University. She caught the forensics bug and has coached at various high schools in the Chicago suburbs ever since. I help out at her team’s summer speech camp and with extra coaching when I can. For the past two years, our oldest son has participated in the elementary school speech tournament. We are passing along the joy of public speaking to the next generation of our family.

Outside of work I am a Cub Scout leader for our local Cub Scout Pack and work with the District Training Committee, where I teach presentation skills, outdoor skills, and leadership skills to Scout leaders in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin - from the Chicago suburbs all the way west to the Mississippi. The skills I learned in forensics come in very handy, from being able to project when speaking to a large group without a microphone to leading youth in an activity with clear, concise instructions. I use the skills I learned during my time on the speech team every day.

I’ll be honest, I was never a great competitor. I think my best finish was 2nd or 3rd place at a handful of tournaments. But for me, Forensics was never about the competition - it was about the connections. I was most interested in meeting people from different backgrounds, with different interests, learning about innovation, feeling the full set of emotions, and forming lasting relationships with a community of amazing people.

I am who I am today because of Forensics. I would not have the career I have, I would not have the extra-curricular activities I have, and I would never have met my best friend if it was not for forensics. Forensics taught me the rules and how to break them – see, no three-point formula here. My interest in “just about everything” existed before I knew about forensics, but the serendipity of finding the speech team gave that interest a focus, and that focus has turned into a passion. I am so thankful that I was “free” that Saturday in the fall of 1993 and went to that speech team retreat. It was the best decision of my life.
Alumni Corner

Chris Vein: What Forensics Did For Me
University of North Dakota (1979)
Miami University (OH) (1980-1983)

Chris Vein

Chris Vein is passionate about using science, technology, and innovation to solve some of the biggest challenges facing the world today. He served as Deputy US Chief Technology Officer for Government Innovation in the White House Office of Science & Technology, the Chief Innovation Officer for Global Technology Development at the World Bank, and the Chief Information Officer of City and county of San Francisco. Chris is intensely curious and never afraid to take risks, Chris says he owes any success in his career to his years of competition in forensics for the University of North Dakota and Miami of Ohio.

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**ALUMNI CORNER:** The forensic community is filled with alumni who will tout the benefits they received through their participation in intercollegiate speech and debate activities. As directors of forensics programs face battles for budgets and sometimes for their program’s very existence, having a collection of published testimonies about the positive influence of forensics can be a tremendous help. To that end, Speaker & Gavel is setting aside space in each issue for our alumni to talk about how forensics has helped them in their professional life. These are our alumni’s stories.

**Keywords:** forensics, benefits of forensics, Alumni Corner

My mother was turning 90 and I asked what she wanted for her birthday. She asked me to write the story of my life. That was not what I expected. There is only so long before mom’s win. So for her 91st birthday I wrote it. As I did, I was reminded about how much forensics shaped not only who I am but provided the foundation for success in my career. Of all the benefits of forensics that exist, three skills standout: learning strength, courage, and wisdom. So, from that simple request from my mother, here are three stories that explain how forensics helped me become a global leader.

**Strength**

One of the most important lessons from competing in forensics is to dig deep within oneself to find strength to face any situation, regardless of the odds. Walking into a competition, it is you and the judge with no one else. You either find the strength to win or you don’t. Developing the strength to face any situation is one of the lasting gifts of forensics.

On my first day as Chief Innovation Officer at the World Bank, I walked several blocks to meet my new administrative assistant, attend new hire training and at 5:00, board a plane to Moscow. At a conference several days later, I was asked to teach Russian government officials about global best practices in government. In the afternoon, I was approached by the master of ceremony (MC) for the closing session and told that the Russian Prime Minister (PM) Medvedev wanted to pass instructions to me. I listened with growing dread. The MC said that the PM and I would be the sole participants on stage. Invited dignitaries would be behind us. There would be about 500 people in the audience and the event would be televised on Russian TV. The PM would not be preparing remarks. Rather I would go first and he would respond to my remarks. There would be general question and answer afterwards. He stopped and asked me if I had any questions. I responded by saying that I didn’t think I was authorized to do this. He responded by saying that I didn’t have any choice and walked away.
For the next 45 agonizing minutes, I thought about what to say, how to say it, and what to do if I got in trouble. Stressful to say the least, my speech training came in handy. I dug deep, found strength in believing I could win the “round” with the PM, and spoke extemporaneously for 2 hours. I was invited back to Russia several months later to participate in another and larger forum.

It’s funny but I hated extemporaneous speaking when I was a competitor, and yet the skills I learned from it are used every day. Winning is rarely by luck. There is a structure, a process, and practice to it - lots of practice. I’ve found in my career, I rarely had all (or even enough of) the data, information, or knowledge. But I could leverage what I did have to creatively resolve the challenge and most important, tell a story that provided understanding.

Courage

We all have bad days. We face crises that require a decision: either we give in to the circumstances we face and accept the outcome or we act courageously and perform as if we had prepared for that moment our entire life. Sounds like a round in forensics.

I was working as the Chief Information Officer (CIO) for the City and County of San Francisco. One of my employees decided that he was the only one who understood the technology needs of the City, that management could not to be trusted, and that he needed to lock out everyone and blow up the system if we reprimanded him.

I remember getting a call from the Mayor asking me if I was watching the news. I said no. He then told me that the City Attorney was indicting my employee on four felony counts. He went to jail. But the real and emerging issue was the time bomb he set. Time was rapidly taking us to the point where access to every management system in the City would be destroyed for an unknown period of time. And as the head of the agency for centralized technology and communications systems, it was my problem to solve.

In the end, I had to ask the Mayor to go the jail and visit my employee to get the access codes to servers so we could prevent their self-destruction. The codes didn’t work. I had to ask the Mayor to go again. He did and the codes didn’t work. It wasn’t until the third time the codes worked and crisis was stopped.

This made local, national and international news. No one in the world had dealt with such a public situation. So I did what I did every time I walked into a speaking round – I dug deep for strength and against the odds, had the guts, or courage to do the best I could in a situation out of my control. We won that round. Barely.

Of all the events in forensics, the art of persuasion is the most universal skill. Every day we persuade others to listen to us, or to do as we ask, or to support us. Again, there is a structure and a process to this. Usually in three parts – we define the problem, provide options, and then
show how one or all of the options will actually make the life of the listener just a little bit easier. Whether one administers, manages, or leads, being persuasive is fundamental to success.

**Wisdom**

There is nothing like losing. My successes blur in my mind but my failures keep pushing me toward success. Forensics can be a great equalizer. Even the best, the most successful can lose. There will always be someone who is better than you - competition never ends. What sets one apart is our wisdom – the collective experience of learning, of winning and losing.

Sometimes wisdom though comes from surprising places. As a corporate leader, I did the usual developing of strategies and plans, communicating areas where focus was needed, but also celebrating success. These events were quarterly and I usually did my best Steve Jobs impression on stage. And I thought I was inspirational.

I remember one day, after such a session, walking back to the office and meeting a payroll clerk on the street. As she came up to me I assumed she was going to thank me for the inspiring and insightful meeting I’d just led. She didn’t. She stopped to thank me not for my leadership but for my smile, my friendly greeting each day, for my remembering her name.

Sometimes what sets you apart is something different from what you think. Sometimes wisdom is a simple gesture, a simple act. But always it is about making a connection with your audience.

As technology increasingly dictates our communication, we’ve also learned that making an emotional connection with a listener is becoming more important. Much has been written about emotional intelligence, but any success I’ve had in my career has started with empathy. Interpretive in nature, if my audience doesn’t trust me, it doesn’t matter how much structure, process, or practice I do, success will always be elusive.

**ADVICE FROM CHRIS**

"Many of us in our professional and personal lives spend our day convincing others to follow our lead or to do something they’d rather not. Success is found, in part, in our skill at persuasive and impromptu communication. This will only become more important as technology changes the very fabric of our lives."