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Assessing the Public Speaking Course

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ABSTRACT

College and high school speech communication instructors know full well how tedious and time-consuming assessment can be; however, this instructor has found a way to make assessment a more efficient and meaningful tool identifying strengths and weaknesses within the public speaking curriculum. After five years of extensive research, several drafts of rubrics and artifacts, the process has been streamlined and successful in that the data compiled reflects the strengths and challenges of this instructor's students. This article is intended to provide public speaking instructors the opportunity to replicate part of the Minnesota State Community & Technical College (M State) speech communication assessment project.

North Central Accreditation (NCA) began emphasizing assessment as a means to determine accreditation for colleges and universities in 1989, resulting in many institutions implementing an assessment program (Lopez, 1999). While some institutions adopted standardized or locally developed tests, other institutions developed their own instruments to document student learning (Lopez, 1999). Angelo and Cross (1993) published *College Assessment Techniques* (CATS), a handbook that became a popular conference topic for college development. Moskal (2000), in an article published in *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation,* described the different types of rubrics used to assess students' work, and in a 2001 article from that same journal, Mertler discussed how to design holistic and analytic rubrics. The American Association for Higher Education continues to produce the *Assessment Forum*, publishing and disseminating best practices for assessing student learning, while NCA has created the Assessment Academy to "develop institutional culture and increase institutional commitment to assessing and improving student learning" (Higher Learning Commission, 2008, para. 1).

With so much being written about assessment in general, it is interesting to note how little has been published specifically about speech communication assessment since *Assessing Communication Education: A Handbook for Media, Speech, and Theatre Educators* by W.G. Christ in 1994. The National Communication Association (NCA) hosts assessment resources on their web page; however, the resources are limited and not specific to certain courses. The Communication and Theatre Association of Minnesota (CTAM) holds a yearly conference, which has offered presentations on assessment, and Minnesota State University Mankato has

posted their assessment plan on their website. Still, speech communication colleagues seldom publicly share materials and results regarding assessment, particularly when identifying strengths and weaknesses within a specific course.

Procedure

In preparation for its North Central Accreditation (NCA) visit in 2003, an Assessment Plan Committee was formed to implement Fergus Falls Community College's Assessment plan (now M State – Fergus Falls). The assessment coordinator aligned the college's mission with NCA's assessment criteria and developed the "Cycle of Assessment and Institutional Improvement." Faculty assessment groups then designed learner outcomes for their departments.

Given samples of rubrics and action plans, the speech communication department first determined what skills to assess. Since students are required to take Introduction to Public Speaking (SPCH 1114), this course was the obvious choice to assess. Fergus Falls Community College, as grantor of the A.A. and A.S. degrees, is part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system and follows the ten goal areas and their outcomes as outlined in the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC). Introduction to Public Speaking meets goal area one, under Oral and Written Communication. Although there are six different outcomes listed for goal area one, the speech department developed two different rubrics to assess students' learning in content and in delivery. Techniques of Introduction, Thesis & Preview, Organization of the Body, Techniques of Conclusion, Use of Presentational Aids, Level of Sophistication and Audience Analysis were all assessed on the content rubric. Vocal Delivery: Clarity, Emotion & Style, Physical Delivery: Eye Contact & Expression, and Physical Delivery: Gestures & Poise were the criteria listed on the delivery rubric.

The artifacts used were videotapes of approximately 50 students' first and last speeches of the semester to determine how students' skills had changed from when they entered the class to when they completed it. The results confirmed that students made significant improvements in organization, audience analysis, presentational aids, and level of sophistication in content, and posture and volume in delivery, after completing Speech 1114. While the results were helpful in identifying weaknesses in introductions and thesis statements in content, and eye contact and rate in delivery, the department found the rubrics cumbersome and the data confusing. In addition, the rubrics did not correspond with the outcomes from the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.

In 2003 Fergus Falls Community College consolidated with three area technical colleges (Detroit Lakes, Moorhead, and Wadena) to form Minnesota State Community and Technical College (M State) although only Fergus Falls and Moorhead have full time speech communication faculty. They or adjunct instructors teach speech courses on the Detroit Lakes and Wadena campuses. When all English and Speech instructors met for their first division meeting in 2003, speech faculty from the Fergus Falls campus shared their assessment process with the Moorhead faculty. The speech communication department agreed to continue assessing Introduction to Public Speaking and developed a rubric similar to the one used by the English

department, which was more aligned with the outcomes from Goal 1 from the transfer curriculum.

The new rubric (Appendix A) required faculty to collect a different set of artifacts from their students since it assessed four (2003-2006) or five (2006-present) of the six outcomes listed under Goal 1. From 2003-2006, the department assessed outcomes A, C, D and E, adding outcome F to the assessment process for the 2006-2007 school year. The outcomes for Goal 1 assessed, as listed in the MnTC, include:

A. Understand/demonstrate the writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing and presentation.
C. Locate, evaluate, and synthesize in a responsible manner material from diverse sources and points of view.
D. Select appropriate communication choices for specific audiences.
E. Construct logical and coherent arguments
F. Use authority, point-of-view, and individual voice and style in their writing and speaking. (2009)

The rubric included a key, assessing criteria listed under each outcome on a scale from 0 to 4:

0 = No proficiency
1 = Limited proficiency
2 = Developing proficiency
3 = Emerging mastery
4 = Mastery

The most appropriate assignment to assess all outcomes was the persuasive speech, an 8-10 minute speech requiring students to conduct outside, academic research. The videotape of the actual persuasive speech was used to assess students' knowledge of the speech topic, and their ability to make sound rhetorical choices when communicating ideas and information under Outcome F. Faculty also collected students' persuasive speech preparation, formal, and speaking outlines to assess how well they could demonstrate the speaking process through organization, drafting, revision, editing and presentation under Outcome A. Instructors chose a preliminary assignment they used that demonstrated students' ability to invent topics for their persuasive speeches. One such assignment used was the topic proposal (Appendix B). Within the formal outline, instructors also evaluated how well students located, evaluated, and synthesized outside research and used APA documentation correctly via in-text and oral citations, as well as on the reference page, as listed in Outcome C.   Additionally, they measured students' ability to use secondary sources to support their arguments using logical, emotional and ethical appeals and to acknowledge other arguments as listed under Outcome E. An audience analysis form (Appendix C) was created by the department, asking students to explain how they identified and analyzed

their audience, and how they would adapt their content, structure and delivery for multiple audiences as a means to assess Outcome D.

Methods

Each Introduction to Public Speaking course at MSCTC has a maximum of 25 students. All students were asked to turn in the following artifacts from their persuasive speech: pre-writing assignment, preparation, formal, and speaking outlines, and an audience analysis form. All speeches were videotaped by the individual instructor, who then randomly chose a sample of five students from each public speaking course they taught. Before assessing artifacts from a different campus than where they teach, all instructors assessed several students together during the fall curriculum day to check for biases.

Then artifacts were distributed and assessed by two faculty members from a different campus. Students from the Fergus Falls campus were assessed by Moorhead faculty and Moorhead students assessed by Fergus Falls' faculty. Students' speeches from Detroit Lakes and Wadena were unavailable for assessment from 2003-2005 and 2008 since some of the courses were taught by adjunct faculty who had not been present at department or curriculum day meetings. Students from all four campuses were assessed in 2006-2007.
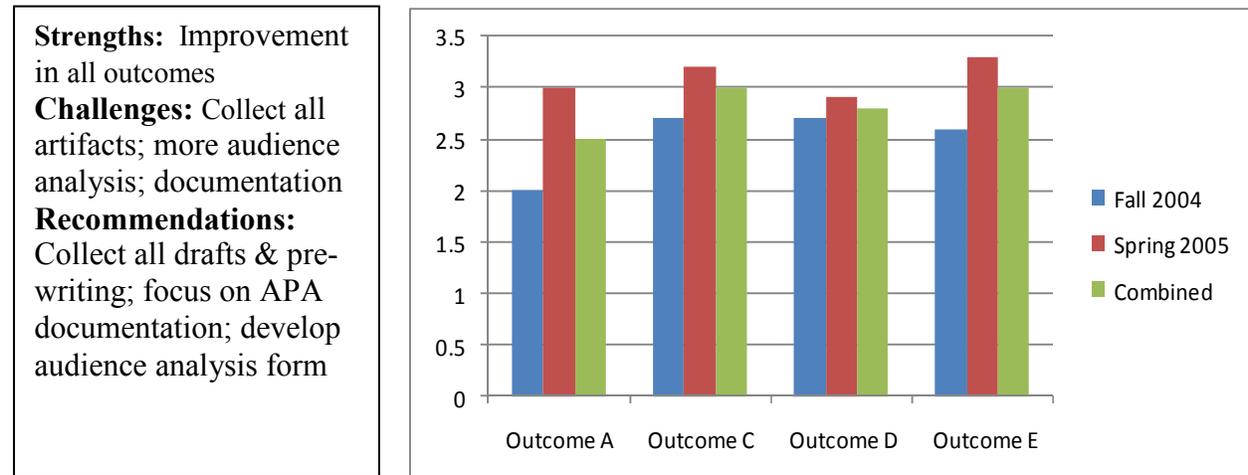
When all speech communication faculty members met for their spring 2008 department meeting, instructors agreed that logistically, it was too difficult to assess students from different campuses. Starting fall semester 2008, faculty from each campus decided to assess students from their own campuses, reporting the data from their students to the college's required action plans (Appendix D) posted on the Intranet. The department also included concurrently enrolled speech students during the 2007-2008 school year. High school concurrent enrollment speech instructors were sent a letter fall 2007 identifying which artifacts to collect from their students and explaining the process, and the rubric used to assess.

Results

From 1999 to 2003 the M State – Fergus Falls speech communication department assessed students and posted the results in a PowerPoint presentation. Since that time, however, due to busy and often conflicting schedules, the data had not been analyzed, nor had the department been able to evaluate strengths or weaknesses. As part of a sabbatical plan, this instructor reviewed and analyzed assessment data from 2004 to 2008, evaluating strengths and weaknesses. Performance targets were set at 2.5-3.0 for each outcome. Although there was significant improvement made in all outcomes from fall to spring semester, suggesting improvements in teaching methods, one of the challenges was getting students to turn in all artifacts. The department suggested assigning points for the different assignments in order to collect the necessary artifacts. It also became evident that instructors needed to spend more time
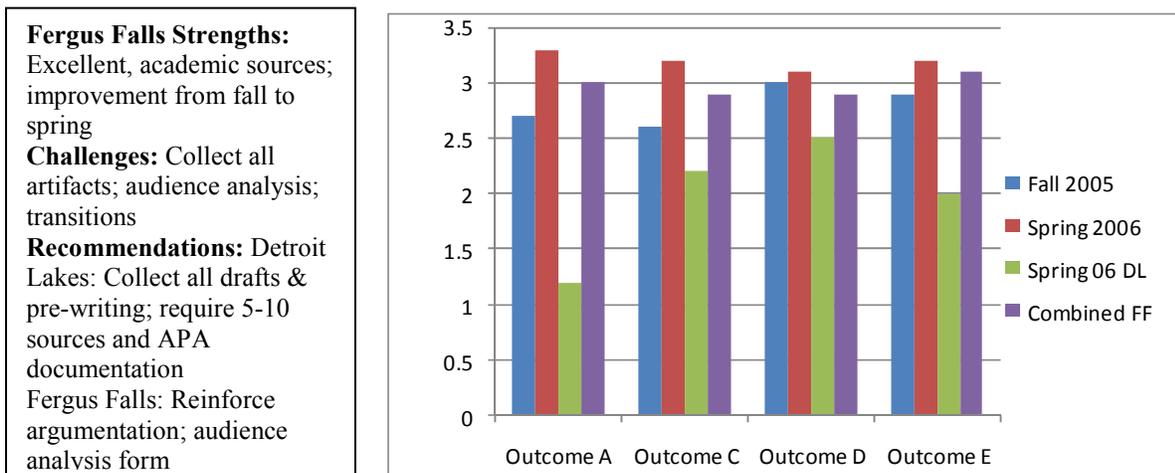
teaching students APA documentation. The 2004-2005 school year assessment results for Outcomes A, C, D, and E are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Fergus Falls Campus 2004-2005 Assessment Results

| **Strengths:** Improvement in all outcomes **Challenges:** Collect all artifacts; more audience analysis; documentation **Recommendations:** Collect all drafts & pre-writing; focus on APA documentation; develop audience analysis form |
|---|

Results from the 2005-2006 school year revealed similar strengths and challenges. Performance targets from students on the Fergus Falls campus were met for each outcome, indicating improvements from the previous year. Scores also improved from fall to spring semester. Scores from students on the Detroit Lakes campus were significantly lower because not all artifacts necessary to assess were collected. A challenge noted among all students was the need to reinforce argumentation, APA documentation, and to ensure all instructors' persuasive speech assignments were somewhat uniform in their requirements, including 5-10 outside, academic sources. The department also recognized the need to develop an audience analysis form that sufficiently addressed all of the criteria under Outcome D. The 2005-2006 results are noted in Table 2.

Table 2. Fergus Falls 2005-2006 and Detroit Lakes 2006 Assessment Results

Fergus Falls Strengths: Excellent, academic sources; improvement from fall to spring **Challenges:** Collect all artifacts; audience analysis; transitions **Recommendations:** Detroit Lakes: Collect all drafts & pre-writing; require 5-10 sources and APA documentation Fergus Falls: Reinforce argumentation; audience analysis form

Students from all four campuses were assessed during the 2006-2007 school year. Scores from students on the Detroit Lakes and Wadena campuses were significantly lower because not all artifacts necessary to assess were collected. If students had not provided instructors with the audience analysis form, for example, it was difficult to assess if students understood how to vary their text for diverse audiences. However, students on the Fergus Falls campus made considerable improvements in all outcomes, showing the benefits from several years of assessment and analyzing data to improve teaching and benefiting future students. One recurrent challenge was how to make assessment requirements available for adjunct instructors teaching public speaking on the two campuses (Detroit Lakes and Wadena) that did not have full time instructors. Often adjunct instructors are hired with short notice and without the speech department's knowledge. Therefore, it was difficult for their students to achieve at the same level as the two campuses with full time speech communication instructors. The 2006-2007 results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. All Campuses 2006-2007 Assessment Results
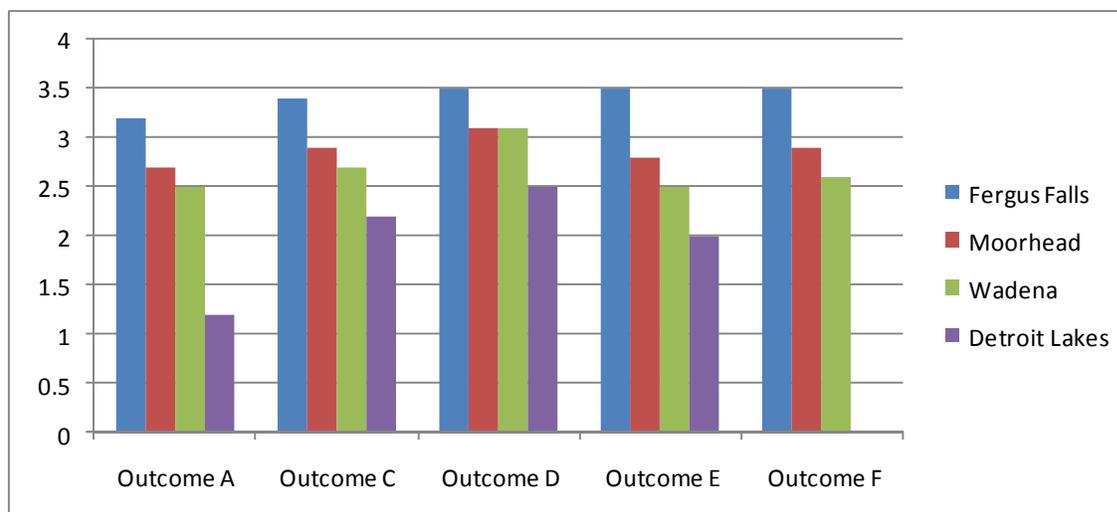
Conclusion

Often assessment is perceived by instructors as a time-consuming, meaningless activity required by administration or NCA. However, selecting artifacts and rubrics that are aligned with the outcomes we are teaching, analyzing the data to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and then making curricular changes may benefit both instructors and students. Assessment compels instructors to openly evaluate his or her teaching and to make adjustments that ensure student learning. Developing an assessment plan can be an arduous and somewhat tedious process, but this instructor is hopeful that other public speaking teachers can learn from many years of experience assessing the public speaking course. In addition, perhaps using M State's speech

117

communication department assessment process, methods, and tools will help other instructors glean their own results, thus improving their own students' learning.

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Appendix A
Program Outcomes Assessment Rubric:
## Persuasive Speech Preparation, Formal & Speaking Outline

Key   0 = No proficiency 1= Limited proficiency 2 = Developing proficiency 3 = Emerging mastery 4 =Mastery
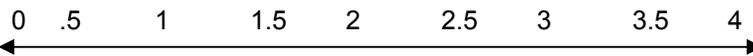
Program Outcomes

A.   Understand/demonstrate the writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing and presentation.
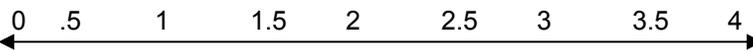
Criteria

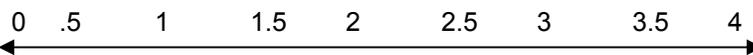1. learners will employ forms of prewriting to generate ideas for a text

0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4
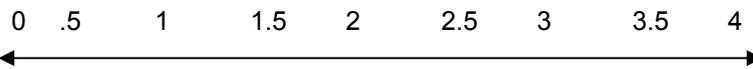
2. learners will generate multiple drafts to complete written assignments

0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

3. learners will adapt written assignments into appropriate presentation notes

0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

4.   learners will revise and improve written assignments based on feedback

0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

5.   learners will maintain unity by incorporating effective transitions and by composing body main points that clearly support the thesis
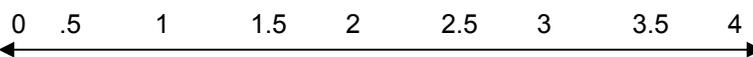
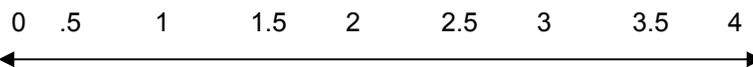0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

Overall Outcome Rating:

| 0	.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4

C.   Locate, evaluate, and synthesize in a responsible manner material from diverse sources and points of view
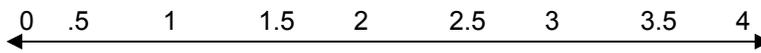
Criteria

1. learners will conduct library/on-line research to gather a sufficient number of credible sources to complete the research assignment
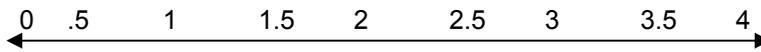
0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

2. learners will document integrated sources through a precise reference page

   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4
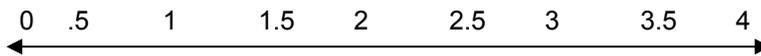
3. learners will accurately document sources through precise in-text citations

   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4

4. learners will integrate credible secondary sources to provide support, illustrate alternative perspectives, and/or establish context and background

   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4

5. learners will efficiently and accurately quote, paraphrase, and summarize research, making sure to provide a clear context for integrated material and to avoid plagiarism
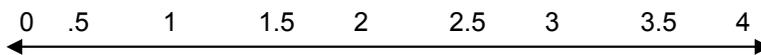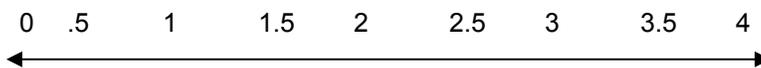
   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4

Overall Outcome Rating:

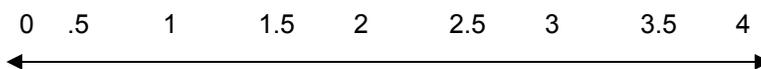| 0	.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4

D. Select appropriate communication choices for specific audiences.

Criteria

1. learners will identify and analyze audience

   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4

2. learners will compose a variety of texts for multiple purposes and audiences

   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4

3. learners will adjust sentence variety, tone, diction, and syntax to purpose and audience expectations
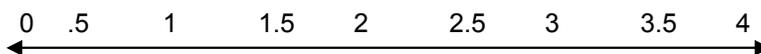
   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4

Overall Outcome Rating:

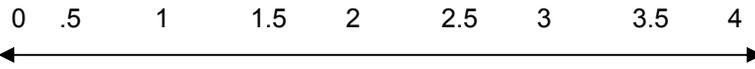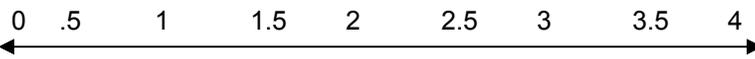| 0	.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4

E. Construct logical and coherent arguments

Criteria

1. learners will establish argumentative claims expressed in clear authoritative positions on assigned or chosen topics
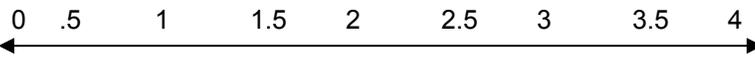
   0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4
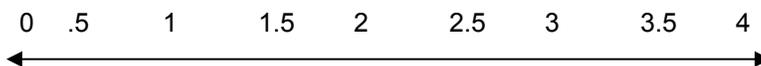
2. learners will support argumentative claims through a strong line of reasoning with appropriate logical, emotional, and ethical appeals

    0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

3. learners will acknowledge other arguments to enhance credibility

    0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

4. learners will, when necessary, integrate credible secondary sources to provide support, illustrate alternative perspectives, or establish context and background
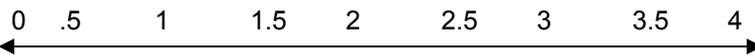
    0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

Overall Outcome Rating:

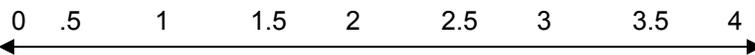| 0	.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4

F.   Use authority, point-of-view, and individual voice and style in writing and speaking.

Criteria

1. learners will write speeches that display strong knowledge of the chosen speech matter

    0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

2. learners will write speeches that demonstrate a clear critical perspective on the subject

    0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

3. learners will demonstrate the ability to make sound rhetorical choices when communicating ideas and information
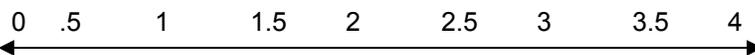
    0   .5   1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4

Overall Outcome Rating:

0	.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4

Total/Average Score:

0	.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4

Appendix B
M STATE – FERGUS FALLS
AUDIENCE ANALYSIS FORM

SPEECH 1114
MS. FREEMAN

Name_____Topic_____

Directions: Analyze your audience by asking their points of view on your persuasive speech thesis. Then fill out the following information **AND** include the survey questions you used to discover this information, along with your tabulated results (**15 points**).

1. How well do you feel you know your audience members? How is your topic beneficial to the audience?

2. Identify your thesis and preview for this speech. Considering the time limit of 8-10 minutes, how have you narrowed your speech so it will be appropriate for this audience and situation?

3. Does your audience agree, disagree or feel neutral about your thesis? Based on that information, are you writing an actuation persuasive speech or a dispositional persuasive speech?

4. How should you adapt your delivery style, content and structure if the audience **agrees** with your thesis?

5. How should you adapt your delivery style, content and structure if the audience **disagrees** with your thesis?

6. How should you adapt your delivery style, content and structure if the audience is **neutral** about your thesis?

Appendix C
Persuasive Speech Topic Proposal

Ms. Freeman
Speech 1114

1. Select one or two topics you have already brainstormed, perhaps from your Expanded Personal Inventory. Please avoid the following topics that are too broad & overdone: abortion, gun control, animal testing, capital punishment, euthanasia, the drinking age, legalizing marijuana, steroids, creationism, etc. In addition, avoid trying to turn a research paper you've written into a speech.

2. Spend at least an hour in the library or on the Internet tracking down possible sources and making sure there is enough academic and recent information available on the topic to generate an 8-10 minute persuasive speech. Keep in mind that you will need approximately 5-10 credible, academic sources (journal articles, books, newspapers, etc.) to give you a solid understanding of the topic and to enable you to support your thesis. Only 1-2 may be from the Internet.

3. As you're engaging in your preliminary research, you'll need to skim over all sources, while reading some of them more closely. You want, in your proposal, to be able to voice some observation you've made about your topic, as well as how you intend to explore the issue further.

4. Finally, write out your proposal. It will be approximately one page in length. The proposal should include the following elements:

    a. Temporary thesis
    b. Main points and/or pattern of organization (Note the different patterns for persuasive speeches)
    c. Preliminary observations or hypothesis about your topic (Are you going to want us to take action or just slightly change how we feel about the topic?)
    d. Potential sources (List specific ones that you've found.)
    e. Your credibility with the topic (Why did you choose this topic?)
    f. Audience motivation (Why should we listen?)
    g. Potential questions for audience analysis

Your proposal should be typed (double spaced) and is due April 3, at the beginning of class. Consider writing a survey using surveymonkey.com to analyze your audience. After your topic proposal has been approved, begin writing your preparation outline & reference page (due April 15). If you change your mind about your topic, you must resubmit a new proposal to me. The topic proposal is worth 25 points.

Appendix D
Minnesota State Community & Technical College
Program Assessment Action Plan Fall 2007
General Education Division: Oral Communication

Goal Area # 1 **Oral Communication**	Develop students who use the English Language effectively and who speak and listen critically. Speaking and listening skills need reinforcement through multiple opportunities for interpersonal communication, public speaking, and discussion. As a base, all students should complete introductory communication requirements early in their collegiate studies.			
Performance Goals: MN Transfer Curriculum Goals	**Assessment Tools**	**Performance Targets**	**Data Summary**	**Actions**
Understand/demonstrate the speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing and presentation.	Instructor's embedded written preparation, formal, and speaking outlines in SPCH 1114. Assessed by outcome rubric.	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.5-3.0	Mean outcome rubric score: 3.0 (Fergus Falls On-Campus 2.3 (Concurrent)	* Assess artifacts (Completed Summer'08) * Compile data summary (Completed Fall '08) *Collect pre-writing assignments (Completed Fall '08)
Locate, evaluate, and synthesize in a responsible manner material from diverse sources and points of view.	Persuasive Speech written outlines and oral product embedded in SPCH 1114. Assessed by outcome rubric.	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.5-3.0	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.8 (Fergus Falls On-Campus 2.0 (Concurrent)	* Assess artifacts (Completed Summer'08) * Compile data summary (Completed Fall '08) *Concurrent: Find more academic sources. (Completed Fall '08)
Select appropriate communication choices for specific audiences.	Audience analysis form and/or written & videotaped assignment in SPCH 1114. Assessed by outcome rubric.	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.5-3.0	Mean outcome rubric score: 3.0 (Fergus Falls On-Campus 2.3 (Concurrent)	* Assess artifacts (Completed Summer '08) * Compile data summary (Completed Fall '08) *Use audience analysis form (Completed Fall'08)
Construct logical and coherent arguments.	Persuasive Speech written outlines and oral product embedded in SPCH 1114. Assessed by outcome rubric.	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.5-3.0	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.9 (Fergus Falls On-Campus 2.5 (Concurrent)	* Assess artifacts (Completed Summer'08) * Compile data summary (Completed Fall '08) *Provide depth & breadth to support argument (Completed Fall '08)
Use authority, point-of-view, and individual voice and style in their writing and speaking.	Instructor's choice of embedded written and oral product in SPCH 1114. Assessed by outcome rubric.	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.5-3.0	Mean outcome rubric score: 2.9 (Fergus Falls On-Campus 2.5 (Concurrent)	* Assess artifacts (Completed Summer'08) * Compile data summary (Completed Fall '08) *Conversational delivery style and more eye contact (Completed Fall '08)

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