

2006

Speaking Assignment Options: Enhancing Student Involvement in the Learning Process

David E. Williams
Texas Tech University

Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter
Texas Tech University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca>

 Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Other Communication Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Williams, David E. and Punyanunt-Carter, Narissra M. (2006) "Speaking Assignment Options: Enhancing Student Involvement in the Learning Process," *Basic Communication Course Annual*: Vol. 18 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol18/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Basic Communication Course Annual by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

Speaking Assignment Options: Enhancing Student Involvement In the Learning Process

*David E. Williams
Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter*

Students who enroll in a public speaking course will typically encounter a range of assignments as part of a standardized syllabus. Most will complete an informative and persuasive speech along with one or two other traditional speech assignments (e.g. sales, impromptu, special occasion). Students are encouraged to exercise their creativity and critical thinking through the topics they select and how they research and develop each speech (Andrews, Andrews, & Williams, 2002; Gregory, 2002). This essay will report another means of enhancing student involvement in their own learning by allowing them to select between two options for a speech assignment. The student option speaking assignment advocated here uses a modified impromptu speech, known as the reasoned response, and a manuscript speech to allow students to select the exercise that would benefit students most. Following an introduction of the assignment option approach and its' benefits, each speech will be addressed along with reasons why students might select these options. These explanations will be supported with insights gained from the use of this assignment at Texas Tech University.

INTRODUCING STUDENT OPTIONS

This student option assignment is based on the learning theory concept of motivation (Ames & Ames, 1989; Atkinson & Raynor, 1974; Keller, 1983; Weiner, 1990). Keller introduced an instructional design model which suggests that implementation of four key strategies will increase student motivation to excel in their work. Those strategies include: arousing interest, creating relevance, developing an expectancy of success, and producing satisfaction through rewards. As described below, each of these elements play a role in the students' participation in the speech options assignment.

The concept of student options in course assignments is certainly not new or even reserved for college classrooms. Maurer (2001) reported on the use of assignment options at the elementary level for students who completed standardized, assigned work early. She created four assignment options for students to choose from while other students finished their work. Maurer noted that students excelled in their optional work because of increased motivation from working on projects they enjoyed.

Marybelle (1991) relied on insights from McKeachie (1969) and Cunningham (1975) to create an alternative to the term paper that employed the use of student assignment options. Having been unsatisfied with student papers created under the traditional term paper guidelines, Marybelle altered the assignment to allow students to choose between abstracts and book reviews, group papers and projects, thought papers, or a take-

home final. These alternatives reportedly fostered student projects that excelled in areas of creativity and effectiveness in learning.

When students recognize they have a choice in their assignment, they are more likely to be motivated to succeed with the project (Sharp & Johnstone, 1969). Students can select an assignment option that is more aligned with their interest or their perceived strengths. Hopefully, this translates into increased effort by the student because they have greater interest in the assignment or greater confidence in their abilities. Students will also feel a sense of ownership over the assignment when they are active partners in the learning process. They are more engaged in the learning process instead of passive receptors of information.

The choice between two options allows students to formulate a decision making criteria and determine which assignment would be more relevant to their needs, goals, and strengths and ultimately increase their own satisfaction with the exercise. Later, insights will be provided to help guide students on which option would be most appropriate or beneficial given a range of considerations.

The idea of student options in assignments has been used successfully in different disciplines and at different levels and may be particularly applicable to the public speaking class. While public speaking speech assignments are generally limited to the classroom laboratory, there is some latitude in the form, scope, and goal of the presentations. It is reasonable to assume that public speaking students would derive the same learning benefits from assignment options as students in other disciplines.

IMPLEMENTING STUDENT OPTIONS IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

A student option assignment was implemented at Texas Tech University with the use of reasoned response (impromptu) and manuscript speeches. These speeches were selected because they differ significantly in terms of preparation, skill development, delivery style, and even grading emphasis. It was believed that these two speech formats would give students clear distinctions in determining which assignment would benefit them more.

The optional assignment was scheduled approximately midway through the semester and in-between the informative and persuasive speeches. This placement provided some instructional variation from the two traditionally research intensive speeches. The speech was weighted at 10 percent of the final grade. Other speeches included the introductory speech (10 percent), informative speech (15 percent), and persuasive speech (20 percent). Prior to the graded performances, two class periods were devoted to explaining and demonstrating the speech options and helping students determine which would be most appropriate for them. During these class meetings, students saw samples of each type of speech, reviewed the grading criteria, and heard rationales for the educational benefits of each option. Each assignment option will be explained below, along with the rationale conveyed to students as to what might guide their selection.

Reasoned Response

Reasoned response is an impromptu speech developed and explained by Williams, Carver, and Hart (1993) and Williams and Shafer (2002), as an alternative to traditional impromptu speaking. As Bytwerk (1985) noted, “The impromptu speech, perhaps the type most often given, is also the one most neglected in public speaking courses and textbooks” (p. 148). However, the speaking form is important, frequently used, and even one of the most highly entered events in forensics tournaments. It might be that the shorter duration of the impromptu speech and the difficulty that many public speaking students have with the speech, make it less popular as a graded speech assignment. Despite its lack of attention in our textbooks and the reluctance of many to make it a significant graded assignment, the impromptu speech is still (and has long been) regarded as critical to the development of public speaking skills (Dowling, 1957; Hendrix, 1968; Rosenfeld, 1966).

The format of the reasoned response speech is similar to traditional impromptu speeches in that a student receives information and is given a brief period (2 minutes) in which to devise a response. However, the significant difference is found in the information provided to the student. Whereas impromptu assignments might typically follow the forensics format and use a quotation, cartoon, or interview question, reasoned response provides more information on which students can develop their response. Each student selects three prep slips each containing a location, speaker’s role, and situation. The student keeps one prep slip and then use the two minutes to prepare a response. By providing a

location, speaker's role, and situation, the instructor gives the student more information to base the speech on and introduces a more fully developed composite of information for audience analysis. See figure A for sample prep slips.

With this information, the student, and instructor can conceptualize an audience outside of the classroom as well as audience demographics and environmental factors that may or may not be present in the classroom. Prep slips can take the students to an unlimited number of places (e.g. Chicago, Hawaii, a small town in Ohio) and have them fulfilling a wide variety of speaking roles (e.g. running for mayor, selling a product, introducing someone else).

Location:	Outside the college library
Speaker's Role:	Student advocate for the library
Situation:	You are attempting to persuade other students to convince the administration to increase funding for the library.
Location:	Board of Trustees meeting
Speaker's Role:	Advocate for a cause of your choice
Situation:	You are attempting to persuade the Board to allocate funding to your group or cause.
Location:	West Hall
Speaker's Role:	Student Running for SGA office
Situation:	You are running for SGA president and you are speaking to a gathering of students outside of West Hall.

Figure A — Sample Prep Slip

After students have prepared for two minutes in the hallway, they re-enter the room and read the prep slip to the audience. This allows the audience to participate in witnessing the efforts at audience adaptation. It is helpful to have a few student volunteers do un-graded reasoned responses a day before they are done for grades. These practice sessions also allow the instructor to make the important distinction that the activity is a speaking exercise and not an acting exercise. The suggested time range for reasoned responses is two to four minutes. Students are instructed that reasoned response challenges ones' ability to think and organize quickly. While it is an impromptu speech, there is still some expectation of an organized response to the situation. Basic elements of speech structure and coherence should be evident.

Grading for the reasoned response should be based on arrangement, content, audience adaptation, and vocal and physical presentation. Expectations for vocal and physical presentation would be the same as expectations for a regular impromptu speech. Instructors can evaluate the vocal presentation on standard criteria such as rate, volume, pitch and variation with some allowance for vocalized pauses and minor errors. The expectations for physical delivery, likewise, would be similar to expectations for any other impromptu speech. However, instructors may need to divert students away from attempts to physically present themselves as the person in the speaker's role. For example, if a prep slip indicates that the speaker is a grandfather or grandmother in the year 2030 who is speaking to a grandchild about what television was like in 2005, the speaker

should not attempt to hunch over or pretend that they are standing with a cane.

Arrangement and content of the reasoned response provides the instructor with more to evaluate than the traditional impromptu speech. Guidance provided on a prep slip can make a speech persuasive, informative, or ceremonial thus suggesting a range of more and less effective organizational formats, arguments, and appeals. For example, a prep slip that places the speaker in a sales position would suggest a persuasive arrangement while a prep slip asking the student to be an employer praising the employee of the year at the company banquet could suggest an informative pattern.

Audience analysis provides the most significant difference between reasoned response and traditional impromptu speaking. Reasoned response allows the instructor to evaluate students on their ability to assess the audience and how to best address them. Given the circumstances on the prep slip. This will provide a greater challenge to the student and the instructor. Instructors will have to develop a variety of different audiences and some thought should be given to the difficulty of the audience analysis. For example, a student asked to give a reasoned response to an implied audience of their fellow students or classmates will likely have an easier task than the student asked to speak to an implied audience of South African military leaders.

In discussing this assignment option, instructors would emphasize that students need to be able to think and organize quickly during the preparation period. The use of a note card to develop a speaking outline will be helpful. Students need to be able to not only develop a general outline, but also elaborate on those ideas in a

convincing manner. This option might be a wise selection for those who anticipate interviewing in the near future as the need to quickly formulate and articulate a response for a reasoned response is similar to the skills needed in an interview. Students who anticipate careers that require frequent interaction with the public or specific stakeholders might also wish to select the reasoned response option. These careers would include examples such as customer service, news reporting and sales.

Manuscript Speech

Manuscript delivery is given less attention in public speaking texts and assigned less frequently in our courses. However, some texts provide useful insights into this speech form (e.g. Bostrom, Waldhart, Shelton, & Bertino, 1995; Griffin, 2003; Gruner, 1993; Zarefsky, 2002). This speech option is graded on the quality of speech writing as well as the vocal and physical presentation elements.

The type of manuscript speech to be presented can take many forms. Speeches of acceptance, nomination speeches, and speeches of blame are just a few. The option typically used at Texas Tech is the speech of tribute in which the student writes a speech in which they honor someone from the present or past and acknowledges their accomplishments.

The manuscript speech allows for accuracy of information and eloquence in the construction of the speech. Students should be encouraged to review material on language use and emotion-evoking language before writing this speech (Wood, 1998). Instructor can discuss the value of using active language through lively and

vivid description. A review of figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, alliteration and others would also be appropriate here. This format also allows the student greater control over time. Therefore, there is a time limit of three to four minutes with a penalty for speeches that exceed or fall short of the time range.

Some useful advice for the creation of manuscript speeches include typing the speech in large print with double spacing, marking intentional pauses in the text of the speech, and highlighting phrases for vocal emphasis. Students also need to be instructed (or reminded) of the differences between oral style and written style. Writing in oral style (O'Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2003) is an important skill for this option. Oral style consists of: less-complex and specific word choice, vivid language, shorter sentences and phrases, and the use of the active voice.

The manuscript speech option should have a very high expectation for vocal delivery. Aside from vocal fillers and articulation errors, students should be expected to have recognizable vocal variety in the presentation, and a clear familiarity with the speech such that it flows easily. Snidecor (1943) studied differences in impromptu and manuscript speaking and found that manuscript delivery typically had more pitch variation and faster rate than impromptu speeches. While the speech is delivered from a podium and the physical presentation is limited, students should still be expected to initiate eye contact with audience members and attempt to respond to their feedback.

Students should provide a copy of their manuscript to the instructor before the speech. This will help the instructor follow the speech and identify where vocal

emphasis and variety was, or should have been, employed. This will also help the instructor evaluate speech writing skills. Comments can be written on the manuscript, during and after the performance, that will be beneficial for the student.

This speech option would most clearly benefit students who anticipate a career in politics as many will initially think of politicians when considering why they might do a manuscript speech. However, instructors can point out that his speech format would be useful for anyone who anticipates seeking leadership roles in professional or social life. Corporate CEO's, company team leaders, and heads of organizations devoted to specific causes or concerns are all called on to speak at occasions requiring the delivery of a speech from manuscript.

Instructors should encourage students to identify which would be better practice for what they see themselves doing in the future, professionally and otherwise. However, students will likely balance that decision with concern for which option they would perform with better. Hildebrandt and Stevens (1963) conducted a study comparing extemporaneous speaking and manuscript delivery. They determined that the ability of the speaker with a particular form of speaking was more important than the form in determining which would be more effective. Some are better impromptu or extemporaneous speakers than they are with manuscripts and others perform better with the prepared text. In a study of 273 students who completed the speaking assignment option at Texas Tech, respondents reported that the concerns of "which option I would get a better grade on" and "which option better fit my public speaking skills" were more important in

their decision than “which option relates more to my academic/career goals”.

In preparation for the speech assignment options, instructors should create one or two sample manuscripts and many prep slips. The sample manuscripts could use local individuals as subjects for tribute and demonstrate a range of styles (e.g. funny, serious, research based, etc.). These samples can also show how to properly mark manuscripts for pauses and emphasis. Developing prep slips may take longer than writing sample speech manuscripts. For a class of 30 students, instructors would need to write approximately 40 prep slips to help insure students are able to speak on one of the three slips they draw. Instructors might want to write prep slips that can not become easily out-dated. For example, a prep slip that included a situation of giving a brief campaign appeal in support of George Bush or John Kerry would have worked well, but would have to be replaced in spring semester 2005. Both of these speech options tend to be shorter than traditional informative and persuasive speeches. Therefore, it might take less time to complete a round of speech option assignments.

The optional speech assignment brings variety to the public speaking class. Giving students a more active role in their learning, introducing less utilized speaking formats, and the quicker pace of the speeches each present a change of pace that can be appreciated by students. Instructors should evaluate their own syllabi to determine where such a change would be most effective. Changes to course structure and syllabi should be guided by what can be derived from motivation theory. Basic Course Directors can use motivational devices,

such as the speaking assignment options, to generate a wider range of appeals to students' intellect and their desire to achieve. Course development that provides opportunities for students to be active learners and participate from an, albeit limited, administrative role can foster greater motivation in the classroom and in out-of-class preparations. Hopefully, instructors and students will recognize the educational benefits to be derived from incorporating student selected speech assignment options in the public speaking classroom.

REFERENCES

- Ames, C. & Ames, R. (1989). *Research in motivation in education, vol. 3*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Andrews, P.H., Andrews, J.R. & G. Williams (2002). *Public speaking: Connecting you and your audience*. 2nd. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Atkinson, J. & Raynor, O. (1974). *Motivation and achievement*. Washington: Winston.
- Bostrum, R.N., Waldhart, E.S., Shelton, M.W. & Bertino, S. (1995). *Getting there: Functional public speaking*. Prospect Heights: Waveland.
- Bytwerk, R.L. (1985). Impromptu speaking exercises. *Communication Education, 34*,148-149.
- Cunningham, D. (1975). A better start on term papers. *Improving College and University Teaching, 23*(4): 220.
- Dowling, F. (1957). Teaching impromptu speaking. *Speech Teacher, 6*, 205-208.

- Gregory, H. (2002). *Public speaking for college and career*. 6th Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Griffin, C.L. (2003). *Invitation to public speaking*. Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth.
- Gruner, C. (1993). *Essentials of public speaking*. San Diego: Collegiate Press.
- Hendrix, J.A. (1968). The impromptu classroom speech. *Speech Teacher*, 17, 334-335.
- Hildebrandt, H.W. & Stevens, W.W. (1963). Manuscript and extemporaneous delivery in communicating information. *Speech Monographs*, 30, 369-372.
- Keller, J. (1983). Motivational design of instruction. In C. Riegeluth (ed.), *Instructional design theories and models*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.
- Marybelle, K.C. (1991). Creative alternatives to the term paper. *College Teaching*, 39(3), p. 105-107.
- Maurer, M.E. (2001). What do I do now? *Teaching PreK-8*, 32(2), 56-57.
- McKeachie, W.J. (1969). *Teaching tips: A guidebook for the beginning college teacher* 6th. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath.
- O'Hair, H.D., Stewart, R. & Rubenstein, H. (2003). *A Speaker's Guidebook*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Rosenfeld, L.B. (1966). Teaching impromptu speaking. *Speech Teacher*, 15, 232-235.
- Sharp, H. Jr. & Johnstone, C. (1969). Independent study for undergraduates. *Speech Teacher*, 18, 308-311.

- Snidecor, J.C. (1943). A comparative study of the pitch and duration characteristics of impromptu speaking and oral reading. *Speech Monographs*, 10, 50-56.
- Weiner, B. (1990). History of motivational research in education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(4), 616-622.
- Williams, D.E., Carver, C., & R.D. Hart (1993). Is it time for a change in impromptu speaking? *National Forensic Journal*, 11, 29-40.
- Williams, D.E. & Shafer, R. (2002). The use of reasoned response as training for limited preparation speaking. *Rostrum*, 76(7), 37, 32.
- Wood, J.T. (1998). *But I thought you meant... Misunderstanding in human communication*. Mountain View, CA.: Mayfield
- Zarefsky, D. (2002). *Public speaking: Strategies for success*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.