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ABSTRACT

The use of videotape technology is an effective pedagogical tool with which to improve the overall performance of students enrolled in sections of basic public speaking. These uses and benefits in the classroom include: (1) practice feedback; (2) identification of style inhibitors; (3) analysis of structural-content issues; (4) suggestions for improvement of speaking style; and (5) suggestions for improvement of presentational content and structure. Students are encouraged to conduct their own impression management assessment as they view a recording of their initial presentations, focusing on a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues which include eye contact, gestures, physical movement, among others. The videotaped records can assist students in overcoming communication apprehension and reinforce the lessons introduced through classroom lecture and discussion pertaining to speech structure and evidence usage. The use of videotape has greatly enhanced the quality of student presentations, improved the classroom climate, and helped produce positive educational outcomes in the areas of delivery style, structural development, and research.
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USING VIDEO TO ENHANCE CONTENT AND DELIVERY SKILLS IN THE
BASIC ORAL COMMUNICATION COURSE:
SUMMARIZING THE USES AND BENEFITS

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BASIC ORAL COMMUNICATION COURSE: SUMMARIZING THE USES AND BENEFITS

INTRODUCTION

Since 1990, the use of videotape technology has been an integral part of the instruction in my sections of Basic Public Speaking. Initially, students are squeamish and uncomfortable with being videotaped because they are already experiencing peak levels of communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1974). As the semester progresses, however, their overall anxiety lessens and they begin to appreciate the presence of a third eye as a tool for performance enhancement. In this summary, we will briefly capsulize the uses and benefits of utilizing videotape technology in the Public Speaking classroom. The uses for video technology include (1) Practice feedback, (2) Identification of style inhibitors, (3) Analysis of structural-content issues, (4) Suggestions for improvement of speaking style, and (5) Suggestions for improvement of presentational content and structure.

PRACTICE FEEDBACK

The first step in improving the performance of student speakers is to provide opportunities for them to practice their presentations using video or audiotape technology. Taping a presentation allows the speaker to gain a sense of what they look or sound like in the eyes and ears of their audience (Lucas, 1995). To that end, my camcorder and tripod are usually available outside classtime for use in our regular classroom by students who wish to

tape their practice presentations. Students are also required to take the master tape from specific assignments (e.g. informative speeches) and view it in our learning center lab and complete a self-critique form. For highly motivated students, this assignment encourages them to see themselves as the audience saw them and begin recasting their speaking style accordingly. Once students have completed their self critique they are required to meet with me to review their progress and make plans for their next presentation. The self-critique form requires them to list 10 positive elements from their presentation and no more than 3 key areas they wish to improve upon for the next speech. After their first graded presentation, students hunger for positive feedback and consequently these sessions are usually high on praise and low on direct criticism (Phillips, Koughl, & Kelly, 1985). These conferences conclude with both sides agreeing to focus upon three central areas for improvement and grading emphasis during the next round of presentations.

IDENTIFICATION OF STYLE INHIBITORS

Students enrolled in the Basic Public Speaking course are encouraged to use the videotapes to identify distracting and anxiety signaling nuances within their delivery style. Before the first graded presentation, we spend at least two full class periods reviewing a host of anxiety reducing strategies including impression management behaviors, breathing techniques, gesture

usage, audience adapting behaviors, solid introduction development, and the generation of positive feedback prior to presenting the speech (Lucas, 1995; Freeley, 1996). Despite these discussions, some students still demonstrate noticeably high levels of communication apprehension during their initial presentation.

It is suggested that students with extremely high levels of communication apprehension need to work on anxiety reducing techniques centering upon recasting of the situation and their perceptions of the situation (e.g. transform the audience from threatening to supportive through cognitive reframing). The videotape can assist them in recasting the situation by recording the positive and supportive verbal and nonverbal cues displayed by their peers during their first speech. My 10 years of experience in the classroom confirm that students are generally very supportive of one another in Public Speaking courses and, consequently, this response is readily evident during most of the videotaped presentations.

Students are also encouraged to conduct their own impression management assessment as they view a recording of their initial presentations. They are instructed to focus upon a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues (see critique sheet for general areas) including the presence or quality of vocalics, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, physical movement, and artifact manipulation (e.g. playing with jewelry or clothing items while speaking).

Through this assessment process, students should be able to diagnostically examine their presentational styles and determine which areas of their delivery style require adjustment. Students can gain a clearer understanding of the essential components undergirding an effective delivery style by watching and critiquing, in class, demonstration videos featuring students from previous semesters or professionally produced speech tapes provided by various textbook publishers. By allowing students to critique the presentations of strangers, the instructor provides them with a "safe" target for criticism and evaluation. Do not take it personally when a videotaped presentation, which seems well done to you, is hacked to pieces by our students during these sessions. They need to exorcise their feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, and defensiveness and the anonymous video presenters allow them that opportunity. It is essential that you allow them to freely criticize the videotape, while employing their criticisms as a springboard to move the class toward a helpful discussion of possible solutions for the problems identified (Ross, 1980; Gamble & Gamble, 1993; Lucas, 1995)

ANALYZING STRUCTURAL-CONTENT ISSUES

Student speakers must learn the basic structural elements of speech organization (Intro, Body, and Conclusion) along with the methods for effectively using evidence and testimony to support the major claims presented (Baaske & Hollihan, 1995; Lucas, 1995;

Freeley, 1996). Consequently, the videotaped record of their practices and presentations can also be used to reinforce the lessons introduced through classroom lecture and discussion pertaining to speech structure and evidence usage. Last semester, students in my Public Speaking sections were required to directly cite at least five published sources in each of their graded presentations. In theory, this seems like a fairly reasonable request and many of my students met this requirement with ease. Conversely, a significant number of students demonstrated a high level of confusion concerning the need to document their major claims with credible sources. Some offered personal or anecdotal support for their major claims (e.g. my Uncle Ned smoked for fifty years and never got lung cancer so smoking can't be dangerous) which failed to meet the requirement concerning the use of "published sources." In order to improve their performance in this area, my standard approach is to ask them to list the published evidence in a typed bibliography and then review the tape to identify where those sources were directly cited in their speech. This post-presentation assignment definitely emphasizes the importance of using credible evidence and normally students exhibit a marked improvement in this areas during their second presentation.

The videotape assignments are usually less helpful when it comes to reinforcing the need for speaker's to employ a clear,

three part structure in writing and presenting their speeches. Instead, students who fail to employ the three part structure are encouraged to review the chapter and discussion segments pertaining to outlining and speech structure because these elements really should be ingrained by the time they reach a college classroom. Naturally, if a student lacks a basic understanding of speech structure then the outline requirement (to be turned in once their speech is completed) usually helps me to identify those individuals and work with them to fine tune their organizational skills.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SPEAKING STYLE

The use of videotape technology allows the student to privately examine and refine their speaking style. The biggest areas of improvement for my students include a reduction in communication apprehension, heightened motivation in terms of preparation, increased use of gestures, reduced use of the podium and other distracting barriers, and a marked improvement in their self-image as speakers. No student has ever insisted that they not be videotaped. It is essential students be aware, at the outset, of how the videotapes will be used. There are four basic rules of thumb that we follow in my classes to avoid embarrassment and put a positive spin on video usage: 1) No student will ever have a videotape of their speech shown to other students (unless they approve in advance), 2) Students are not required to look at the camera or upgrade their wardrobe style to accommodate the

videotape process, 3) Students are encouraged to bring their own tapes so they may maintain a synthesized record of their presentations and can see improvement over time, and 4) The best speeches from a given semester are usually integrated into a master tape of quality presentations maintained for each major speech form (e.g. persuasive, informative, and speeches to entertain).

SUGGESTIONS FOR STRUCTURE-CONTENT IMPROVEMENT

In this area, the taping process can be used to encourage students to model the behavior of those student-speakers who demonstrate a clear mastery of organizational and research techniques. To that end, on presentation days, we usually spend roughly 15 minutes at the end of each class period discussing the positive elements of content and style exhibited by those who spoke on a given day. If a student experienced problems during a speech, we attempt to cooperatively suggest strategies they could employ to better manage the situation next time (e.g. "What do I do with my hands when the podium is gone?") Similarly, we also spend time reviewing the basic elements of outline structure and evidence usage. I attempt to demonstrate hypothetical examples, perform a sample speech segment for them, and then open the floor to questions they may have about my explanation. The outline and bibliography requirement also serves as an effective inducement for students to demonstrate consistent improvement in those areas.

CONCLUSION

The use of video is an effective pedagogical tool with which to improve the overall performance of students enrolled in sections of Basic Public Speaking. In one sense, it is hard to imagine teaching the course without using videotaping as a mechanism for recording those "special moments" when a student demonstrates an incredible level of improvement or presents a speech of uncompromising quality. Students enrolled in an open-admissions institution routinely display a low regard for self when asked to critique their own performances. Consequently, students are required to critique each and every speech presented in class so that they become more confident and adept at evaluating their own performances.

Another additional benefit of videotaping most classroom presentations is the backup it provides for students who are absent on speech days and still need to complete their critiques. Students may access the tapes for review at home or on campus. It also establishes a level playing field because it means that absences from class exempt noone from fulfilling this requirement.

Overall, the use of videotaping has greatly enhanced the quality of student presentations in my classes, improved the classroom climate, and helped produce positive educational outcomes in the areas of delivery style, structural development, and research.

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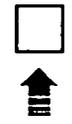
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