



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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SPEECH 101: LIFE SURVIVAL SKILLS

I teach Speech 101 as a combination public speaking and life skills survival course. Once one has faced and dealt with fear—such as the fear of public speaking—and survived, one can face almost anything in life. Once my students have learned and developed strong performance skills, they can use them in their personal and professional lives to generate and fulfill their hopes and achieve their goals. It is a journey my students and I take together.

My experience with industry and my commitment to academic standards of excellence are teaching strengths that I bring to the classroom. I am especially interested in creating a balance between the academic expectations that the college has of its students and the professional expectations that business and industry will have. When my students leave me at the end of the semester, they take with them a new part of themselves, which many of them have discovered for the first time in my course.

In designing my course as a life skills survival experience, I begin by asking students to write a self-inventory, telling me about themselves and what they need and want from a communications course. I ask that if I could custom design this course to meet their personal needs, what would they want from the course and from me. Their responses have been varied and often moving. At the end of the semester, I return their self-inventories and ask students to do another. However, this time the self-inventory will be shared orally with the class as we sit in a circle, facing one another. I ask each student to compare the feelings and thoughts that were expressed in the earlier self-inventory with more current ones—especially in regard to development in their public-speaking skills, their interpersonal skills, and their relationships in the workplace. Then after each student shares his or her insights, we move around the circle with class members sharing their thoughts and observations about how that particular student has grown and developed over the semester.

The critiquing skills the students have learned are obvious and never better than in this session. They are insightful and caring in their delivery. This is one of my

favorite moments in the course. I am part of the circle as facilitator only. This is their time, and they usually touch every communication standard I taught and hoped they would learn.

I begin the speech course with an examination of communication skills and their relationships to self-concept. Typically, most students indicate that they do not know anything about their self-concepts, so we discuss aspects of self and how self shapes our communication styles and patterns. We discuss the effects of gender on the development of self, as well as the devastation caused by negative self-concepts and self-fulfilling prophecies. We move into the realm of interpersonal skills where we study relationships in the workplace and family communication. I teach a lesson on interviewing for a job, teaching from the perspective of a former employer.

Lessons on non-verbal communication help students better understand their individual communication styles. One of these lessons—an exercise of emotional charades—emphasizes the role and awareness of self in intimate interpersonal, as well as public, communication.

In teaching lessons about the art of public speaking, I ask students to complete specific exercises at the lectern. After I have demonstrated the appropriate skills that they should be developing—e.g., projecting their voices, using good eye contact—each student comes to the lectern, repeats one word from a sample outline, “works the room” using the eye-contact pattern I have taught, and pays special attention to voice projection. When I call out the word “change,” the student must look down at the outline, find another word or phrase, determine where he or she left off, and continue. Eventually, at some future date when the exercise is repeated, speaking at the lectern involves using complete sentences, which more closely simulates an actual public speaking experience.

Invariably, when I ask students for feedback about the course, they tell me that these practical sessions were invaluable. In essence, I show and then walk them through all aspects of the art form before they are asked to deliver their first speech. I believe that this is a crucial use of preparation time.



My work with students focuses on seeing and hearing positive changes and significant growth in their self-esteem, poise, and public selves. The skills that they develop will not only get them through public speaking experiences, but they can use them in their personal and professional lives to demonstrate the best of themselves. In the final analysis, this is the overarching goal.

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HISTORY AS COMPOSITION: SPRINGBOARDS FOR RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

The biggest challenge I face as a composition instructor is finding new and interesting ways to teach the various methods for developing essays. Perhaps the most effective strategy I have found is incorporating historical components into the fabric of these developmental forms.

History offers compelling choices for discussion. For example, the Cuban Missile Crisis provides a wealth of possibilities for combining composition instruction and history. All of my short essay assignments, using history as springboards, require students to conduct research and demonstrate critical thinking skills.

Comparison/Contrast

When there are two sides to an issue, there will always be possibilities for comparison. In an historical context, there may well be more, and the possibilities are even richer. For example, when there are three nations involved, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis, students might examine the respective stances of Khrushchev and Kennedy, after evidence of missiles only 90 miles off the coast of the United States. Another possible analysis might lie in the respective pressures felt by Castro and Kennedy.

Causal Analysis

There are always several factors leading to historical conflicts, as well as short- and long-term effects. Students could examine the backgrounds of the three

nations involved in the missile crisis and, with the help of their sources, make some informed decisions about causes and results. What were the events leading up to the heightened state of angst felt not only by the White House, but the entire country? How did this conflict change the relationships between the three countries involved?

Students might tackle this approach by thinking about the possibilities the countries involved might have considered. To illustrate, Kennedy and Khrushchev had a bit of a "chess match" before the President set up U.S. blockades. What else might Kennedy have done? What were the options for Khrushchev and Castro?

Process Analysis

Students might examine the process by which the U.S., Cuba, and the Soviet Union made their respective decisions. They should emphasize the chronological order of events if they are discussing an overview of the entire crisis, but more focused short essays would highlight details of only one side's decision-making process.

Conclusions

I currently use a causal analysis approach to discussing historical conflict, and the students find it challenging and interesting. Occasionally, students feel intimidated until I remind them that much of the study of history is an analysis of causes and effects. Once they understand and can articulate the basic events leading up to the conflict, they can proceed to this analysis.

An historical conflict is only one situation that students can use to work with rhetorical strategies and is far more interesting than relying solely on models, such as professional and student writings. While model essays are essential components in an arsenal of teaching strategies, history and critical thinking can provide writers with deeper, more broad-based learning experiences.

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