Transferable Skills: From teaching written communication to teaching oral communication

Rebecca Nowacek, in the introduction to *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act,* writes that her interest is "how (and why and when) students connect learning from one domain with learning in another domain and how teachers can facilitate such connections" (Southern Illinois University Press, 2011, p. 3). She defines integrative learning as one type of transfer which encompasses "a broad range of connections between different classes, over time, and among curricular and co-curricular activities" (p. 2). Further, she argues that instructors importantly are an audience for students as they make efforts to integrate their learning, while concurrently fostering (as "agents" and "handlers") productive connections and transfer of learning (Nowacek, chapter 3). ***The purpose of this teaching guide is to encourage you to consider how much you know about teaching writing that is directly transferable to teaching oral communication.***

Foundations in Writing and Rhetoric. The topic of integrating the teaching of oral and written communication is not a new one for Puget Sound. In an earlier Core curriculum reform, the faculty centered the first-year Seminar in Writing and Rhetoric on argumentation because of significant transferable content. For example, the learning objectives were outlined as follows**: "**In each Seminar in Writing and Rhetoric, students encounter the two central aspects of the humanistic tradition of rhetorical education: argumentation and effective oral and written expression. Students in these seminars develop the intellectual habits and language capabilities to construct persuasive arguments and to write and speak effectively, and with integrity, for academic and civic purposes." Returning oral communication more fully into Puget Sound's curriculum is both possible and serves well the faculty's interest in integration and transfer.

Key components of argument are field invariant. Both teachers of writing and teachers of speech have for several decades found philosopher Steven Toulmin's conception of argument to be valuable (*The Uses of Argument*, 1958). His model sits behind Puget Sound's *Sound Writing* student handbook, Chapter 3 (the components of "claim," "evidence," "substantiation," "counterpoint"). Another aspect of Toulmin's work that reinforces transferable skills is his delineation of what he called "field invariant" and "field variant" (or field dependent) components of argument. In short, he suggested that the basic form of argument (claim, evidence, reasoning) holds constant across fields. What constitutes good evidence varies by discipline, e.g., a literary analysis will rely on citation and explication of excerpts from a text while a scientific paper or presentation will report on experimental findings and draw conclusions from that research. Chapter 5 of *Sound Writing* contains some content relevant to "field dependent" communication that could be helpful to your students, but a key factor here is that ***you are the expert for teaching student speakers in the field dependent areas of their work***. You are, in Nowacek's term, an *agent* of transfer as you teach and evaluate student papers and

presentations in your courses. You also know a good deal about field invariant components of argument based in your experience as a writer and as a teacher of writing.

Now, to some resources to reinforce and bolster your expertise in incorporating oral communication assignments into your courses:

Sound Writing. Please take a look (or a second look, if you already use this resource) at Puget Sound's excellent writing handbook, *Sound Communication* https://www.pugetsound.edu/files/resources/SoundWriting-electronic.pdf. Chapter 9 is focused on speaking and writing, noting important similarities and differences between both preparation for and completion of oral and written work. In particular, the discussion of simplicity of language for an oral presentation, as well as the importance of oral transitions that guide the audience through a speech – building in redundancy for audience retention of information – will be helpful for your students. Chapters 1-4, 6, and 8.1-8.2 are as useful for speech preparation as for the process of writing (and, if your speech assignment includes a bibliography – which is a good idea – then the balance of chapter 8 is useful also).

Audience analysis. Because students will be speaking directly to an audience – as opposed to writing for the instructor, or perhaps to a generalized or even hypothetical audience (e.g., a writing assignment that would suggest something like: "Write a memo to the City Council in which you argue . . .") – more specific audience analysis, as well as consideration of motivational and speaker credibility proofs, may be an important part of preparation for their presentations.

Here is a brief overview of motivational and speaker credibility proofs, which join with evidence and reasoning (sometimes called *logos*) as support of a claim:

A. Emotional, or motivational proofs, sometimes called *pathos*:
   1. A personal example or illustration, narrative, poetry, photographs can be motivational, creating a sense of empathy or other emotional response.
   2. A student might employ Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, self-actualization) as a tool in thinking about motivational appeal that might be effective for persuading an audience.
   3. Speakers should use caution with fear appeals; while making people afraid may seem like a powerful move, the research on the effectiveness of scaring people as a means of persuasion vs. the harm such appeals can cause has raised serious questions about this approach.

B. Speaker credibility is also an important persuasive proof, sometimes called ethical proof or *ethos*.
   1. Speakers can convey credibility through their research, reasoning and speech organization; good preparation tells the audience that you know what you are talking about and can add to persuasive effectiveness.
   2. Speakers may have personal experience or their own narrative to bring to a particular topic or claim (which simultaneously serves as logical evidence and motivational appeal); in a presentation that calls for action, the speaker may indicate their own commitment to action (either in the past, or as an intention going forward) to add to their credibility as a persuasive speaker.
   3. Speaker credibility is also enhanced if, through the speech, the speaker demonstrates that they have the best interests of the audience in mind.

Here are some questions that students might want to consider in thinking about audience analysis:

A. What are the demographics of the audience? How might these factors affect how you develop your speech?
B. What does the audience already know? If the presentation is on a topic that the class as a whole has been studying, then they likely will need less background information in the speech and you can move more directly to the analytical support of the claim. On the other hand, a speech for a campus-wide symposium might need a more gradual approach.
C. What are the audience's beliefs, attitudes, and values? How might you know (without falling into problematic or stereotypical inferences)? How might beliefs, attitudes, and values affect choices of logical, motivational, and credibility proofs?
D. How might you, as speaker, adjust the wording of the claim, or organize the speech differently, depending upon their audience analysis?

Speech delivery. This may be the aspect of teaching oral communication that makes you, as instructor, and students most nervous. In addition to remembering that delivery is but one component of speech preparation, and that you as instructor can make judgments in how much you weigh that factor relative to others (just as you make judgments in how much to weigh grammar or citation format relative to other components of a writing assignment), here are some suggestions:

A. Preparing a full-sentence outline is a good preparation for a speech. It helps insure clear organization and gives the speaker a basis for conversational (also

known as extemporaneous) delivery of ideas. A full-sentence outline is <u>not</u> a speech manuscript reformatted into outline structure; it is the structural skeleton of the speech.

B. Students should not expect to read their speech, or to memorize it. Instead, they should prepare <u>speaking notes</u>; these might be key words from the outline with directly quoted material (and oral citations) written out. Only the student will see their notes, so they can underline or highlight key transition words, and use fonts and white space (or even reminders to pause and/or to breathe) to assist in delivery.

C. Every time they practice, they will be mapping alternative ways of saying the speech into their brains. This is a good thing! Practice, practice, practice is key.

D. Rehearsal with feedback is helpful.
   1. You can encourage them to make an appointment at the Speech Center to record and review their presentation, with feedback provided by a Peer Speech Consultant. They should bring a thumb drive (or be able to upload to their own Puget Sound Google drive) so that they can take their speech recording with them.
   2. Chapter 9 of *Sound Writing* has good suggestions, too. If students practice with classmates, roommates, or friends, they could have them ask the speaker a question or two so that, if your assignment includes Q&A, they will be more comfortable and ready for that speech component.

D. Nerves are OK. Audiences expect speakers to be nervous. Being nervous is less visible to audiences than they think, and nervous energy can actually contribute to a stronger speech. If they are seriously apprehensive, that's another good reason to prepare early and consult with folks at the Speech Center.

As you incorporate informal communication activities or formal speech or group presentation assignments into your courses, ***if you identify students with significant communication anxiety or social anxiety, please privately encourage them to come to the Speech Center for individual, low stress work on tactics for managing or reducing their communication anxiety*** (or ask the Speech Center Director to reach out to them). You might be contributing strongly to their retention and success at Puget Sound by making such a proactive suggestion.

<u>"Making Room" for Oral Communication Assignments in Your Courses</u>.
Many faculty remain concerned that they are unable to "fit" work in oral communication into their courses, even in Seminars in Scholarly Inquiry where the rubric calls for such work. Professor Susan Owen and I have also observed that oral communication assignments, when they exist in courses, tend to be clumped into the final weeks of the term; we, and the Peer Speech Consultants, have also observed that many students,

predominantly though not exclusively first-year students, are quite unprepared for the expectations of a summative individual or group presentation in the closing weeks of the semester.

We want to be helpful. In addition to the robust collection of resources we have prepared for faculty and for students (see also, Appendix 1), we offer the following:

1. Please consider how **active learning strategies** that you already employ in your courses can **build confidence and skill in oral communication**. Many students, particularly though not exclusively first-years, are scared of speaking or speaking up – especially in a new community where belonging is not yet well-established and expectations are different from their prior experiences (i.e., college in general and/or new class groups each term). How you can help:

   a. Learn students' names by getting them up and talking on the first or second day of class. You might pair them up, let them interview one another for a minute on two or three questions your provide (e.g., hometown, campus residence, best film seen over summer/winter break or 2-3 items related to your course topic), and then have them introduce their partner to the class (maximum one minute). In twenty minutes you will have completed a first oral communication assignment (ungraded, of course) and, if you take a few notes and review them after class, we bet you'll know your students' names by the next class period! (See also "bio-poem" below.)
   b. Use strategies 1-4 (or similar) from "Ten Tips for Transforming Any Classroom for Active, Student-Centered Learning" by Prof. Cathy Davidson.
      i. Modify them to fit into 15-20 minutes in your class, say, every other week pre-midterm. Every time students are called upon to speak, whether from their seats or (even better) on their feet, they (and you) learn more about the class-as-audience and they gain confidence in self-expression.
      ii. Davidson's strategy 8 may help you in considering how to craft a group project assignment (additional resources for group projects are listed below).
   c. Consider how you can incorporate impromptu speeches a couple of times in your courses prior to the due date for a major speech or group presentation.
      i. You can pick topics, quotations, questions, or visual prompts – ***directly related to your course content*** – and allow students a couple minutes to prepare, and then have them get up for one-minute with remarks to include a thesis/claim, two or three supporting points, and a conclusion.
      ii. If you want to complete this exercise using just part of a class session, divide the class into groups and have them deliver their impromptu speeches to the others in their group. You can circulate to hear some of what they're doing/saying, or a course assistant in your department and/or a Peer Speech

Consultant from the Speech Center could hear part of the class while you hear another. Again, practice in organizing a thesis and supporting points builds fluency and confidence!

    iii. For in-class workshops we have provided during 2019-20, course instructors have found that having students who are preparing a major paper, project, or thesis get up to speak for 1-3 minutes – using the same "impromptu" format (thesis/claim, two-three key points, conclusion) – is clarifying for them and prompts their further work. We've seen them receive positive interest from their peers, which is motivating, and the instructor also can get a sense of where further guidance may be needed.

    d. Another useful resource in transferring what you know about incorporating written work to build oral communication skills into your courses is John Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011). The eBook version is available at no cost via Collins Library. We have outlined in Appendix 2 of this document specific pages so that you may use limited reading, download, and/or copy provisions of Primo expeditiously.

2. Please reflect upon **how you scaffold your written communication assignments** – e.g., using stages of process writing such as (some or all of) drafting a thesis statement, doing a literature review, refining the thesis and outlining main supporting points, incorporating supporting material, first draft, next draft, (annotated) bibliography, final draft – **when you craft oral communication assignment prompts and stages**. Just as graded or ungraded process writing assignments scaffold students' successful completion of written work, so can such check-ins over key weeks of the term support students' successful completion of oral communication assignments.

You might consider some or all of the following, perhaps grouped into at least three phases (e.g., Part I: a-c, Part II: d-f, Part III: g-h):

a. Has each student or group drafted a clear speech or presentation claim?

b. Have they narrowed their research to a limited and cohesive set of primary and secondary source materials and, based on that research, refined their claim?

c. How have they considered the audience to whom they will be speaking, how to organize their material for most effective reception by the audience, and chosen strong supporting material to support their main points in support of their claim?

d. Do they need to translate from a written paper (crafted for the eye) to a spoken presentation style (crafted for the ear)?

e. Have they outlined a strong introduction, clear transitions, and a strong conclusion – whether for an individual or a group communication situation?

f. Are they using visual aids and, if so, have they prepared those appropriately?
g. Are you encouraging (or requiring) them to practice, practice, practice – including rehearsal at the Speech Center?
h. If you are expecting them to lead or manage a class discussion, or respond to class questions, how have they prepared for this component of the assignment?

Please check out the Speech Center website for additional resources, including sample assignment prompts and rubrics, additional readings, some examples of contemporary speeches, and resources for students.

Contact speechcenter@pugetsound.edu for additional assistance. We would be glad to support you and your students.

Appendix 1: List of short guides on the CSEA website that you can use to support your teaching:

Under *Resources for Students* (these are useful handouts you may use)
● Audio-based Communication (including podcasts, webinars)
● Ceremonial Speaking
● Ceremonial Speaking Genres
● Delivery Tips
● Group Presentations
● Leading Effective Group Discussions
● Oral v. Written Style
● Outline Script (Structure & Source Citation)
● Questions and Answers
● Speaking to Persuade
● Virtual Presentations
● Visual Aids

Under *Faculty Resources* (these are guides for you)
● Completing Oral Communication Assignments Virtually – FAQ
● Evaluating "Ephemeral" Oral Assignments
● Group Oral Communication Assignments
● Guidelines for Accessible Visual Presentations
● Writing Oral Communication Assignment Prompts

Appendix 2: Locations of transferable written-to-oral active learning strategies in John Bean's *Engaging Ideas* text:

o The Process of Giving a Formal Writing Assignment (Chapter 6, *to prompt thinking about crafting **oral communication** assignments*)

o Twenty-Two Ideas for Incorporating Exploratory Writing *[Speaking!]* into a Course (p. 131)
   o Writing *[Speaking]* at the Beginning of Class to Probe a Subject (p. 132)
   o Writing *[Speaking]* During Class to Refocus a Lagging Discussion or Cool Off a Heated One (p. 132)
   o Writing *[Speaking]* During Class to Ask Questions or Express Confusion (p. 132)
   o Writing *[Speaking]* at the End of Class to Sum Up a Lecture or Discussion (p. 132)
   o Writing *[Speaking]* Dialogues (p. 136)
   o Writing *[Speaking]* Bio-Poems (p. 137 – this out-of-class writing could be the basis for opening class interview pairs, noted above)
   o Metaphor Games, Extended Analogies (p. 138)
   o Eight Exploration Tasks for an Argument Addressing an Issue (Exhibit 7.3, p. 140)

o Ten Strategies for Designing Critical Thinking Tasks (pp. 151-160, *Bean describes ten ideas here that could be used directly or adapted to incorporate oral communication activities into a course.*)

o Some Strategies for Helping Students Become Better Readers
   o Teach Students How to Write *[Discuss]* "What It Says" and "What It Does" Statements (p. 170)
   o Teach Students to Play the "Believing and Doubting Game" (p. 176)
   o Imagined Interviews with the Author (p. 179)

o **Chapter 10: Coaching Thinking Through the Use of Small Groups**
   o "Making Small Groups Work" (p. 196):
      ▪ What is the Best Size for Groups?
      ▪ Should You Form Groups at Random or According to Some Distributing Scheme?
      ▪ How Do You Teach Groups to Work Well Together?

o Alternative Approaches to Active Learning in the Classroom
   o Consider Time-Outs to Write the Discussion (p. 207)
   o Have Students Generate the Questions to Be Discussed (p. 207)
   o Have Students Complete a Weekly Critical Incident Questionnaire (p. 208)
   o Early in the Course, Hold a Discussion about Discussions (p. 208)

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