Rationale Underlying Each Measure in the Rubric for Assessing Formal Oral Presentations

I. Skills Students Should Be Working On in their Formal Oral Communication Assignments in the FYP

A. Organizational Skills

Introduction

(1) Speakers should open their presentation with a "hook" that captures the audience's attention, simultaneously introducing them to the topic and enticing them to continue listening.

While doing so is no guarantee that audience members will remain attentive, it is difficult for speakers to command an audience's attention in the latter sections of their presentations if they have not done so from the start. Moreover, even if they are successful in doing so, audience members have likely already missed some crucial content.

(2) Speakers should reveal what they hope to accomplish in their presentation.

Just as the literature on assessment strongly urges educators to be transparent with their students about their learning goals, so, too, do public speaking texts strongly urge presenters to let their audiences in on both their general purpose (i.e., to infom1, to persuade, to inspire, to entertain) and their specific purpose (e.g., "to inspire audience members to commit to community service projects that enrich the lives of the elderly").

(3) Speakers should relate their topic to the particular audience they are addressing.

Because audience members who perceive a topic as relevant to their lives are much more likely to continue listening than audience members who do not, speakers are well advised to relate their topic to the specific audience they are addressing early on in their presentations, letting them know why the topic is significant and why they ought to care enough to continue listening.

(4) Speakers should relate their topic to themselves.

Just as audience members are more likely to attend to a presentation when the speaker explicitly links tl1e topic to them, so, too, they are more likely to "invest" in a speech when tl1ey understand why the speaker is "invested" in it. While accomplishing this task is typically easier when an assignment grants students substantial latitude in selecting their topics, few assigi1111ents are so prescriptive as to render accomplishing this task impossible.

(5) Speakers should conclude their introduction by previewing the main points they will pursue in the body of their presentations.

Listening to a presentation in which the speaker does not preview what is to follow is akin to being taken on a trip in which you do not know your destination or how or when you will get tl1ere. While some individuals occasionally enjoy the pleasant surprises that sometimes accompany a trip oftl1is sort, most prefer journeys less shrouded in tl1e fog of uncertainty.

Body

(6) The main points that comprise the body of a presentation should address the challenges of the particular rhetorical situation confronting the speaker.

Speakers necessarily decide what to include and exclude, as well as how to structure that which they include. These decisions should be based not on personal whims but on the confluence of the speaker's purpose and the audience being addressed. Consider two speeches advocating expanded background checks on firearm purchases: one for an audience of avid hunters who fear that expanded background checks will encroach on their second amendment rights, the other for a more heterogeneous audience, most of whom already favor what the speaker is proposing. Adopting a structure in which each main point refutes a specific counter-argument that speaker believes audience members are likely to hold makes considerable sense for the first of these rhetorical situations but little sense for the second. Conversely, adopting a structure in which each main point focuses on a specific step audience members can take to increase the likelihood that stricter background checks will, in fact, be adopted makes considerable sense for the second rhetorical situation but little sense for the first one.

(7) Speakers should deploy clear transitions to explicitly mark the divisions between main points.

While transitions are important in both oral and written communication, because the former lacks the visual organizational cues of writing (e.g., indentation for new paragraphs, inclusion of blank spaces between sections and/or section headers), it is especially vital that presenters provide clear transitions as they shift from one main point to the next. "Signposting" is a simple, efficient, and explicit transitioning method in which presenters numerically mark their main points (e.g., "In addition to____, a second reason for supporting mandatory term limits for senators & representatives is___").

Conclusion

(8) Speakers should clearly yet concisely review the main points they covered in the body of their presentation.

While providing reminders and reinforcement might be unnecessary in an ideal world where everybody "gets" and retains content the very first time they encounter it, the proliferation of "post-it" notes and "to-do" lists in our everyday lives is powerful proof that the world we actually inhabit, unlike the one just described, is fraught with lapses of memory that we need to guard against. Accordingly, speakers are well advised to clearly yet concisely review for their audiences the main points they covered in the body of their presentations. In fact, at a very basic level, public speaking can reduced to the following formula: tell the audience what you're going to tell them; tell it to them; tell them what you told them.

(9) The final moments of an oral presentation should provide psychological closure.

While all speeches end, not all provide their audiences adequate psychological closure. One way to comprehend the difference between a speech that "just ends" and one that provides adequate closure is to consider the very different states invoked in viewers by the conclusion of an episode of an afternoon soap opera and the conclusion of an episode of a situation comedy or dramatic series. Speakers should craft the closing moments of their presentation such that the speech doesn't just trail off or end abruptly but instead feels whole, done, complete without the speaker having to resort to verbally or nonverbally signaling to the audience that the presentation has ended (e.g., "That's it," "Thank you," projecting a "Works Cited" PowerPoint slide).

B. Skills Related to Thesis Development & the Use of Evidence

(1OJ Presenters should advance a thesis/central idea that is *sufficiently focused and capable of being supported via evidence and reasoning, and, when warranted by the rhetorical situation, they should also afford appropriate consideration to alternative points of view.*

Given the relatively short time frame of most presentations, speakers are unable to adequately develop and support a thesis/central idea unless it has been sufficiently focused. Moreover, if this overarching claim is not capable of being supported by an appropriate combination of evidence and reasoning, then presenters stand little or no chance of realizing their rhetorical goals. Additionally, when a substantial portion of the audience is likely to dispute tl1e speaker's overarching argument, as well as when audience members are likely to encounter and perhaps be persuaded by counter-arguments after listening to the speech, presenters are well advised to afford adequate consideration to competing points of view.

(11 & 12) Speaker should substantiate their overarching claim with an appropriate mix of types of supporting material drawn from an appropriate variety of types of sources.

Like writers, the three major types of supporting material speakers use to substantiate claims are examples, statistics, and testimony (including both paraphrases & direct quotations). While each type of supporting material has the potential to fulfill a range of rhetorical functions, each also carries out rhetorical functions the others are incapable of fulfilling. The amom1t of each type of supporting material presenters should draw on varies widely depending on the confluence of topic, purpose, and audience. In addition to drawing on an appropriate variety of types of supporting material, presenters should also draw on material from an appropriate variety of types of sources (e.g., popular, scholarly, alternative, personal interviews). Depending on the assignments, drawing on no outside sources may also be appropriate.

(13) Speakers should orally cite their sources such that audience members are able to clearly ascertain which information came from which sources.

Citing sources fulfills tl1e same sorts of functions in an oral communication context as it does in writing. Among other possible functions, when speakers orally cite their sources in an appropriate manner tl1ey maintain basic principles of academic integrity, bolster tl1eir credibility, and enable their audience to assess tl1e sources of the evidence upon which they are drawing. Because a knowing which information came from which source is a fundamental aspect of appropriate oral citation of sources, it is imperative that speakers cite their sources at the moment in their presentation when they are actually integrating information from that source rather than merely providing an oral works cited list at the end of their speech or momentarily flashing a "Works Cited" slide.

C. Skills Related to Language & Style

(14) The speaker's language should result in a presentation that is *consistently clear, and the speaker's stylistic choices should result in a presentation that* is *imaginative, memorable, & compelling.*

Because the fundamental purpose of all oral presentations is the communication of ideas, speakers should strive, first & foremost, for a level of clarity that will facilitate tl1e audience's understanding. However, because audiences often encounter clear presentations whose content is quickly forgotten, once this first threshold has been achieved, speakers should also strive to help their audiences to retain tl1e information they communicate by crafting a presentation that is imaginative, memorable, and compelling.

D. Delivery

(15, 16, & 17) T71e vocal & physical aspects of delive1y should advance the presenter's rhetorical aims.

Iftl1e cardinal rule for style is "clarity above all else," the cardinal rule for delivery is "avoid distracting vocal and physical mam1erisms." As was the case with style, however, once tl1is fundamental benchmark has been achieved, speakers should strive to deliver tl1eir presentations in a manner that cultivates audience engagement witl1 and understanding of the ideas they are expressing.