

**Tell Me About It!**  
**Undergraduate Student Self-Evaluation Assessment of Public Speaking Performance**

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### **Introduction**

Students in public speaking courses commonly experience high speech anxiety while delivering speeches in a classroom setting. Daly et al. (1989) stated the anxious reaction could be due to students focusing on their speech presentation, as it is often positively correlated to a sense of being self-conscious of judgement when delivering speeches. This combination of heightened vulnerability when speaking in front of a live or virtual audience can cause greater self-focus, especially for highly anxious speakers (Baumeister, 1984). However, self-evaluations can help relieve some of the psychological distress, as it often has a direct influence on performance (Hofmann & DiBartolo, 2000). The act of reflection can also encourage persistence with academic exercises despite performance-related stress (Feldman et al., 2014) and rumination related to interpersonal difficulties (Brinker et al., 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this innovative teaching idea was to engage students in a series of self-evaluation questions after three speech presentations to reduce speaking anxiety toward future public speaking experiences.

### **How it Works**

Guided by Daly et al.'s (1989) framework for self-reflection when delivering oral presentations, we implemented a series of three self-evaluation assessments in a leadership and oral communication course ( $n = 102$ ) at New Mexico State University during the spring 2023 semester. This course was a general communications course that was open to all majors, which included students with varying levels of leadership development and public speaking experience. Many of whom expressed in a "welcome to the course" form that public speaking rated as one of their worst social fears. Throughout the span of the course, students delivered three speeches—an introduction of a keynote speaker speech, a prepared persuasive speech, and a prepared informative speech—in their lab sections ranging of 10–15 students. For each speech, students selected topics based on their career interests in the food, agriculture, natural resources, and human (FANH) sciences.

For this activity, we provided students with a self-assessment questionnaire after they presented their individual speeches. Students were given five to 15 minutes at the end of each lab to finish their reflections. The assessment included six questions designed to encourage students to assess their overall thoughts about their speech content, preparation, and delivery (Daly et al., 1989). Questions included: 1) Overall: In two sentences, how do you feel that your speech went?; 2) Overall: What was your favorite part and least favorite part of your speech?; 3) How did you prepare for your speech (for example: practiced with friends, in the mirror, wrote it out, etc.)?; 4) In two sentences, how did you feel before your speech today?; 5) What do you wish you would have done differently?; 5) List the verbal and non-verbal cues you used and which emotion(s) you wished to elicit from your audience; and 6) What tools did you observe from your fellow classmates that you wish to implement in your next speech? Following the end of their second speeches, we also included a final question asking students to assign themselves a letter grade on their speech preparation and speech delivery. The final question was intended to help students to provide insight on their growth as based on the speech rubric.

### **Results to Date**

Based on the students' reflections, we observed that students' awareness of their speaking aptitude and delivery style improved throughout the semester. These reflections also provided insight for future course and assignment preparations, which was beneficial when gauging student progress in the course. We also discovered that as students progressed in the semester, their reflections became more detailed regarding non-verbal and language techniques that students wanted to use to make their speech more memorable. The importance of visual aids, pace, preparation, rhetorical devices, and body language were the most common practices students wished to improve upon. Students stated that they gained confidence after each speech experience, and while anxiety was still present for many students, they noted that they felt more confident overcoming it because of the support provided by their peers. We also observed that students were more critical on evaluating their own speeches, while they praised their classmates and credited them with more confidence and impact.

Throughout the semester, students admitted decreasing the time they spent practicing their delivery before each speech, due to external factors and procrastination, as well as a decreased need to practice due to gaining confidence. Nearly half of the students mentioned practicing their first and second speeches with a friend/family member, and few students mentioned using Zoom or iPhone recordings to watch and listen to themselves speak. Nearly all of the students said they wished they would have practiced and memorized their content more prior to the start of their lab sections. Even with less preparation time, students noted they became increasingly more passionate about their FANH topics, which resulted in making them more confident and comfortable to present. As students graded their final two speeches, most students rated their scores from a C to low A. Overall, the self-assessment reinforced connection points from the lecture material regarding speech delivery, making students evaluate their own use of competencies to connect and relate with their audiences. Many of the students commented on the growth they experienced from their first speech to the last speech, and many noted that they used techniques they learned from their peers to improve their personal speaking abilities. Some students also noted that the repetitive nature of this reflection assignment reinforced their confidence when preparing subsequent speeches because they knew the speech rubrics were designed to improve their speaking abilities and not to penalize them.

### **Advice to Others**

To no surprise, students noted that they felt more comfortable giving speeches when they were able to select FANH topics they were passionate about. Therefore, we recommend allowing students to choose from a range of topics, and then, provide reflection exercises that help them reinforce why they selected their target topics. We recommend providing repetitive, intentional self-reflections focusing on speech preparation and delivery to engage self-awareness of steps needed to improve and boost self-confidence throughout the course.

### **Costs and Resources**

Instructors will need to prepare speech topics, rubrics, and reflection questionnaires; however, there are no other associated costs.

## References

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