

2018

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Justin J. Rudnick

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Recommended Citation

Rudnick, Justin J. (2018) "Showing and Telling: A Technique for Teaching Delivery Skills," *Discourse: The Journal of the SCASD*: Vol. 4 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/discoursejournal/vol4/iss1/5>

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GREAT IDEA FOR TEACHING

Showing and Telling: A Technique for Teaching Delivery Skills**Justin J. Rudnick¹**

Assistant Professor

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Abstract

This single-class activity provides a framework for instructors to “coach” students to use various delivery skills for presentational speaking. By rotating student groups through three stations, the activity cultivates the students’ understanding of direct eye contact, hand gestures, and vocal volume and articulation. Students prepare a story to share in groups and actively practice each skill while the instructor demonstrates acceptable standards. After completing a debrief discussion, students are better equipped to practice delivery skills with a frame of reference for how those skills should be cultivated in class.

Courses

Public Speaking, Advanced Public Speaking, and Professional Speaking

Objectives

- To recognize effective oral-delivery skills.
- To demonstrate effective oral-delivery skills.
- To appraise the delivery skills of yourself and your peers.

Introduction and Rationale

The public-speaking class is often a student’s first exposure to what effective presentations should look and sound like. Introductory communication courses—particularly classes that include an emphasis on developing oral-communication skills—cultivate students’ knowledge of public-speaking content (i.e., components of a speech, organizational patterns, outlining techniques, etc.) and provide students with evaluations about the *delivery* of their oral presentations (Avanzino, 2010). As communication instructors, one of our most important tasks is to help students observe and practice delivery skills in order to ensure that students understand the theory behind oral presentations and are able to demonstrate those skills. Teaching delivery skills is uniquely challenging due to its reliance on cultivating both the cognitive domain (Bloom, 1956) and the physical/psychomotor domain (Harrow, 1972) of learning. Although written comments from instructors and peers offer valuable feedback to students upon the completion of their presentations, such written feedback does not *show* students what to do differently or have them *practice* those skills (Waisanen & Reynolds, 2008). Lom (2012) notes that “when students *do* something they learn it better than if they hear about it” (p. A65). Therefore, by providing students with in-class opportunities to see, practice, and evaluate important delivery skills, students are able to cultivate a better understanding of the speaking

¹ Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to Justin Rudnick (PhD, Ohio University) Department of Communication Studies, Mankato State University, Mankato, MN 56001. Contact email: justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu

behaviors that are commonly emphasized in basic speech courses (Bruss, 2012). Although lectures, discussions, and written feedback also promote this understanding, activities that have students engage with delivery skills in a practical manner provide an added benefit (Lom, 2012).

To complement written feedback, this activity encourages students to practice specified delivery skills in class. Instructors are free to adjust which delivery skills they choose to address with this workshop by following a model similar to the one outlined here. Following Nelson, Titsworth, and Pearson's (2011) suggestion that novice speakers focus on "speaking intelligibly, maintaining eye contact, and avoiding mannerisms that will distract listeners" (p. 161), I focus this workshop on three specific skills: eye contact, hand gestures, and vocal volume and articulation. These skills are particularly useful for beginning speakers who desire concrete strategies to improve speaking abilities.

There are plentiful academic and trade publications that provide speech instructors with tips and tools to teach effective delivery, but a number of resources have proven to be influential to my approach to this activity. For example, O'Hair, Stewart, and Rubenstein (2012) explain how making effective eye contact with an audience typically involves moving your gaze "from one listener to another and from one section to another, pausing to gaze at one person long enough to complete a full thought before removing your gaze and shifting it to another listener" (pp. 273-274). Public-speaking gestures have received contentious attention, to the chagrin of scholars who argue that the abundance of sophisticated gesturing strategies amounts to "nonsense" (Lucas, 2009, p. 257). However, the consensus among speech scholars is that gestures should emphasize, illustrate, or reinforce a spoken message (see Fraleigh & Tuman, 2011). In this workshop, I encourage students to use two simple gestures: a palm-up gesture (to illustrate a question, intrigue, or positivity) and a palm-down gesture (to illustrate a statement, definitive claim, or negativity). Finally, Beebe and Beebe (2010) emphasize volume and articulation as the two most important factors of vocal delivery: "The fundamental purpose of your vocal delivery is to speak loudly enough that your audience can hear you. . . . In addition to speaking loudly enough, say your words so that your audience can understand them" (p. 301). These frameworks might prove useful to instructors who are looking for activity parameters, although the workshop's flexibility enables instructors to approach the activity in a variety of ways.

Description of the Activity

This delivery workshop typically lasts about 40-45 minutes and provides a hands-on experience to practice delivery skills. In particular, the students completing this activity will practice the aforementioned delivery skills by rotating in small groups through three different stations, with each one dedicated to a specific skill. This process also enables the instructor to address different or additional delivery skills based on the needs of their particular students. By having students practice delivery skills in a fun and non-threatening environment, the students learn "what better delivery *feels* like" (Waisanen & Reynolds, 2008, p. 18) in-the-moment and are provided with a reference point for the instructor's future written feedback.

Pre-Class Preparations

This workshop is most successful when delivery has been discussed conceptually in class so that students have a theoretical frame of reference. Although instructors are free to address the subject of delivery how they see fit, my discussion typically involves a review about the defining characteristics of different delivery styles, the attributes of effective and ineffective delivery, and an analysis of various speeches so that students begin to think critically about what they consider to be effective speech delivery. Once students are provided with this conceptual framework, they should be instructed to come to the next class (the workshop day) prepared with a short (1-2 minute) personal story to share with a group. Instructors may wish to set guidelines for appropriate story topics.

Workshop Materials

Instructors should prepare slides or handouts with the discussion questions provided in the debrief section. Additionally, instructors should prepare posters to designate classroom areas for each skill station. These posters should highlight the specific skill to be practiced and list instructions for groups to follow once they rotate to that station. For example, a poster about volume and articulation should instruct the audience members to raise their hands if they cannot hear the speaker clearly, the speaker to talk with appropriate volume and clarity, and the audience members to lower their hands if they can hear the speaker clearly.

Procedure

The day of the workshop, divide the class into three equally sized groups, and assign each group to a station. After each group has been seated at their assigned station, explain the workshop instructions. In your explanations, be sure to define the parameters for each station based on your teaching style and the students' needs (e.g., "Direct eye contact" means sustaining eye contact with each member of the group for approximately half a sentence or whatever your guidelines might be.).

Station 1: Eye contact. The group should choose one member to speak first; the rest of the group should stand. The speaker proceeds to tell their story to the group, making direct eye contact with each member. Instruct the group members to sit down when they feel that the speaker has made direct eye contact with them. Instruct the speaker to keep talking until each group member is seated. Once the speaker has finished the story, he/she should sit down, and another student should begin. The group should proceed until each member has practiced making direct eye contact with the audience.

Station 2: Hand gestures. The group should choose one member to speak first; the rest of the group should sit. The speaker tells their story to the group while incorporating each one of the specified gestures into the presentation. (Again, instructors are encouraged to set specific parameters that match their expectations.) Instruct the group to point at the speaker's hand(s) if, at any point, the speaker performs a gesture incorrectly or ineffectually; the speaker should then attempt that gesture a second time. Instruct the speaker to finish their story and to practice specific gestures if the group highlights them. Once the speaker has finished the story, he/she

should sit down, and another student should start. The group should proceed until each member has practiced gesturing.

Station 3: Vocal volume and articulation. The group should choose one member to speak first; the rest of the group should sit. The speaker walks to the far side of the room and proceed to tell their story to the group. Instruct the speaker to speak loudly and clearly enough to be heard and understood by the group across the room. Instruct the group members to raise their hands if, at any point, they cannot hear or comprehend the speaker; the speaker should then adjust their volume and/or articulation to compensate. The speaker continues the story, adjusting their volume and/or articulation when group members raise their hands. Once the speaker has finished the story, they should sit down, and another student should start. The group should proceed until each member has practiced maintaining the appropriate volume and articulation.

Once all students have participated at their assigned station, rotate the groups to a new station. Continue the workshop until every student has participated at each skill station. Typically, students will “allow” unsatisfactory demonstrations for each delivery skill because they are unaware of the instructor’s standards. To counteract this tendency, I encourage instructors to rotate through each station repeatedly, participating as a group member and showing students the expected “norms” for each skill.

Debriefing

Upon completion of the workshop, gather the students together as a class in order to debrief about their experiences. Typically, students are eager to share their perceptions of the activity because they find the experience humorous and challenging. The debrief provides a unique opportunity to discuss the students’ current understanding of delivery skills and what they might need to work on throughout the semester. Instructors are encouraged to engage in a “think, pair, share” activity by making the questions visible to the class and by having students respond to each question with a partner. Following this partnered conversation, a class discussion can be helpful to gauge what students took from the activity. The following questions may be useful for the debriefing conversation:

- Describe your experiences during the delivery workshop you just completed.
- Which station was the most difficult or uncomfortable for you, and why?
- As a *speaker*, how did you feel at each station when you were telling your stories?
- As an *audience member*, how did you feel about the skills at each station?
- What did you learn from each station?
- How did the skills you practiced at each station affect your story or the stories you heard in your groups? How were the stories enhanced (or not?) Why?
- How can/will you practice these skills in your upcoming speeches?

Appraisal

This workshop is consistently successful for both lower-level and upper-level speech courses. Students frequently report that they appreciate learning the instructor’s standards for delivery and that they value the time to practice each skill before they are formally graded. Students have commented on this workshop in both informal and formal course evaluations,

providing statements such as “The workshop was very helpful because it was way outside of my comfort zone but it was still fun,” and “The workshop helped me out a lot. It gave me confidence when I gave the actual speech.” This success is likely due to what Lom (2012) calls “active teaching,” which is characterized by “spending time in a classroom experiencing [specific] techniques” (p. A65). “Students use repetition and refinement in their learning processes,” Lom explains, and the combination of cognitive and psychomotor skills that are fostered by this workshop encourages students to engage in both strategies (p. A70). The workshop emphasizes “dynamic speech training that enhances delivery skill” (Waisanen & Reynolds, 2008, p. 21) and equips students to enact and to evaluate different delivery techniques by virtue of their practice before they give any graded presentations. Students find the practice invaluable.

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