

Using Peer Review to Redesign the Introductory Public Speaking Course for Online Asynchronous Learning

Chelsea Slack

Southeastern Louisiana University

Abstract

This paper proposes a comprehensive redesign of the introductory public speaking course for 100% online and asynchronous delivery, emphasizing peer review-based assessment. Research from the post-pandemic educational age informs this approach, which aims to meet the changing demands of online education for digital native students despite the financial constraints faced by institutions. This redesign is focused on improving student engagement, developing skills, and fostering adaptability in digital communication contexts through a flipped classroom model that leverages structured peer interactions to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills essential for modern professional and civic engagement. By utilizing technological tools (particularly FeedbackFruits) and flexible grading methods, the course supports diverse learning styles and promotes the ability to handle constructive criticism effectively. Ultimately, this paper advocates for reimagining traditional educational paradigms to better align with the needs of today's digital learners, preparing them for success in an interconnected world characterized by digital communication and remote collaboration.

Keywords: peer review, online asynchronous learning, public speaking, digital communication, asynchronous course design

Introduction

Every fall, college students arrive on campus ready to take on the challenges and opportunities the upcoming academic year has in store. Most of today's traditional college students are Gen Zers (Dimock, 2018, para. 12); they are digital natives who have grown up in progressively online environments. The next generation, Generation Alpha, has spent their whole educational lives reliant on digital tools, having grown up with the internet as a foundational tool in their lived experiences (Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2021). And yet, these digital natives are often greeted with archaic classrooms that do not align with their past educational experiences or skillsets. This situation highlights the growing demand for less traditional classroom paradigms

to appeal to new generations of students who are entering colleges and universities after having spent years of their lives in remote learning environments. Some students, it seems, may never want to return to class.

In the wake of this increased demand for online learning, fueled partially but not completely by the Covid-19 pandemic (Moy & Feldstein, 2024), institutions must contend with increasingly heavier faculty course loads due to budget cuts, particularly in the humanities and social sciences (Oman, 2024). In turn, departments and their faculty need to develop creative ways for general education courses to be a slightly lower lift for instructors while maintaining academic and practical value. The evolution of higher education toward online learning presents an opportunity to redesign foundational courses, such as the basic public speaking course, to better meet the needs of a diverse and technologically adept student population.

This paper proposes a comprehensive redesign of 100% online and asynchronous introductory public speaking courses with a significant focus on peer review-based assessment. Flipping the class to the extent described herein solves another current problem in education: student motivation in the face of hegemonic educational paradigms (Masland, 2023). The course in question uses a student-led approach that relies on various forms of assessment in addition to those by peers, allowing instructors to contend with higher course numbers, provide students with useful feedback when they need it, and instill within students the ability to take constructive criticism from an audience of many rather than one—an ability that is especially essential for students from Generation Z and the incoming Generation Alpha to thrive in today's world.

Theoretical Foundations

College communication programs depend on introductory public speaking classes, frequently the only general education courses in communication departments. Most basic communication curricula (57.8%) focus on the writing and giving of speeches (Morreale et al., 2006, p. 419). These classes cover research, organization, rhetorical theory, and audience awareness, similar to introductory composition courses. However, communication courses generally produce speeches, whereas composition courses produce writing. English classes emphasize the importance of writing abilities for professional success, which students understand is crucial to their professions.

Meanwhile, students often wonder why communication classes are important and how formal speech-making applies to them. When approached with these queries, instructors often

react by stressing the importance of communication abilities in the interview process and daily professional life. The fact that students will use both verbal and nonverbal communication in their interactions with others supports this idea. The conventional wisdom remains that students will be able to use the abilities they acquire in formal speech writing and delivery in a variety of future contexts, including their careers, relationships, and communities (Morreale et al., 2006).

Engleberg et al. (2014) identified the core competencies for introductory communication courses as “monitoring and presenting yourself,” “practicing communication ethics,” “adapting to others,” “practicing effective listening,” “expressing messages,” “identifying and explaining fundamental communication processes,” and “creating and analyzing message strategies” (p. 2). To support their argument that basic communication courses should be a general education requirement, the NCA cited civic engagement, and employer demands for more communication training in college (Simonds et al., 2012). If educators’ purpose is to develop these essential qualities and prepare students for jobs and civic life, they must re-examine how well current communication pedagogy meets these goals.

Rethinking college speech courses is essential to better prepare students for the realities of modern communication and collaboration, which are increasingly conducted in digital environments. In an era where remote work and online collaboration are becoming the norm, educational approaches must be adjusted. Online asynchronous settings offer unique opportunities to practice and develop communication skills in formats that reflect real-world scenarios, including digital presentations, remote collaboration with other students, and the taking and giving of constructive feedback. Ultimately, the goal should be reimagining the college speech class paradigm as one that fosters a more comprehensive and relevant skill set for today’s interconnected world, aligning with current communication trends while ensuring students are better prepared to engage and collaborate in diverse and dynamic environments.

Asynchronous Learning and Peer Review

Asynchronous learning provides flexibility, especially for non-traditional students who may be balancing education with work or family responsibilities. Undoubtedly, colleges and universities are now contending with a “new normal, which is defined as the changes and adaptations that have occurred in higher education, including a shift toward a more flexible and adaptable approach in the educational experience” (Svihus, 2024, p. 3175). Research has indicated that asynchronous learning environments can promote reflective thinking and deeper

understanding when combined with structured peer review activities (Wall, 2023, p. 8). Adams and Wilson (2020) found that asynchronous learning, when coupled with peer collaboration (such as peer review, group annotation, etc.), enhances student engagement and improves learning outcomes by allowing students to interact more frequently, reflect on other students' ideas at their own pace, and integrate those ideas into their work.

This learning mode also supports diverse learning styles and enables students to revisit materials and discussions as needed, promoting a more personalized learning experience (Wall, 2023, p. 3). Furthermore, asynchronous learning environments can reduce anxiety and pressure associated with real-time interactions, making the course more inclusive for students who struggle with traditional classroom settings (Huang & te Winkel, 2022, p. 8). This is especially true for introductory public speaking classes that focus primarily on preparing and presenting speeches, in which anxieties run higher than “regular” (non-presentation-based) courses. Yaniafari and Rihardini (2021) found that English language learners reported less anxiety in virtual speech courses because they felt less on-the-spot than in traditional, face-to-face speech courses.

Asynchronous courses that are “flipped,” i.e., courses which put students in the driver's seat of their own learning with the instructor acting as a facilitator rather than leader, have the potential to become environments that prize students' varying backgrounds and natural abilities, acknowledging all students have value and can bring something to the educational table. Additionally, according to Burek and Losos (2014), an important byproduct of communication courses is that “extroverted students, natural talkers, improve their listening skills. Introverted students, natural listeners, improve their speaking skills,” (p. 51). This highlights the importance of asynchronous course designs that require extensive back and forth between students with a range of ability levels who come from diverse backgrounds and learning styles. A foundational objective of asynchronous pedagogy for communication courses should be that all students get something out of the course and walk away with an increased ability to communicate effectively.

Peer review offers several educational benefits. It encourages active learning, critical thinking, and the development of evaluative skills. Moreover, it creates opportunities for collaborative learning and quick, easy-to-access feedback, which is essential for mastering complex concepts across content areas (Samarawickrema & Gavrilenko, 2020, p. 9). Campbell et al. (2020) emphasized that peer review helps students develop a critical eye and understand

diverse perspectives. Pearce et al. (2009) argued that the utilization of peer review processes can democratize the classroom by valuing each student's input, thus fostering a more participatory and inclusive learning environment. According to Wall (2023, p. 8), peer review not only aids in academic development but also builds confidence and communication skills, as students learn to articulate constructive feedback and engage in critical discourse. Grieger and Leontyev (2021, pp. 2886-2888) highlighted that peer review can also serve as a formative assessment tool, providing students with continuous feedback that guides their learning journey and helps them achieve better outcomes.

Ultimately, whether the introductory public speaking course is taught 100% online, traditionally, or via some other hybrid/synchronous option, the heavy peer review approach can still be used, following the premise that in "real life" we are all communicators, and in "real world" speeches, the people students will be presenting to may not have college degrees. Indeed, Blythe (2009, pp. 76-77) noted that students need specific training in presenting to a general audience rather than a solely academic or expert one.

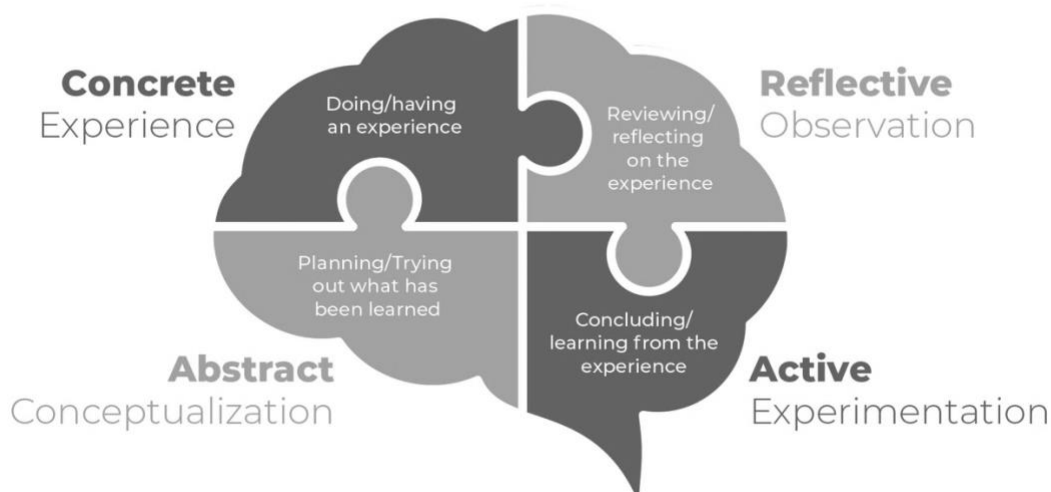
Academic audiences, such as a professor evaluating a speech, are common in the educational setting but are quite novel in "normal" life. So, we can conclude that all student reviews of other students' speeches have value—even those from, say, 18-year-old freshmen who have just entered higher education—especially in light of the research showing that peer review is an academically enriching and confidence-building experience (Pearce et al., 2009, p. 4). The confidence-building aspect of the course is key, as confidence levels generally correlate with student success rates in introductory public speaking courses (Al-Hebaish, 2012). The need to build confidence is even more pressing in order to prepare students to enter the workforce. According to Stajkovic and Luthans (1998), who conducted a meta-analysis of 114 studies concerned with self-efficacy in the workplace, self-confidence was correlated with performance at a level of .38, showing a moderate, significant linear relationship between confidence and workplace success. Following the peer review-heavy model described herein, students must speak and critically listen to others on an almost constant basis—an objective that is usually not possible following the more traditional, instructor-led, "sit and get" form of online pedagogy that is all too common at institutions across the world. By presenting speechmaking as a process of preparation, speaking, and listening, students learn the most from participating in this process versus individual pieces of feedback on a given speech.

The final significant theoretical underpinning of the practices described herein is David Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning, which maintained, "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Both Stokes-Eley (2007) and Siefker et al. (2020) reported positive outcomes from using experiential learning approaches in courses focused on communication. Kho and Ting (2023) noted that the pedagogy of Toastmasters International, the world-renowned network of public speaking clubs, is based upon Kolb's experiential learning cycle. The cycle is depicted below.

Figure 1.

Florida A&M School of Nursing.

Kolb's Learning Cycle



Course Design

Course Objectives

The redesigned course aims to:

1. Develop students' communication skills through critical analysis and constructive feedback.
2. Develop research and organizational skills to facilitate effective oral communication.
3. Foster an understanding of diverse audiences and perspectives in communication.

4. Enhance students' ability to self-assess and reflect on their speaking abilities and learning processes.

Content and Structure

The diverse instructional strategies of the course include lectures, online presentations, and interactive discussion boards. These methods are supplemented by videos and class projects that foster a dynamic learning environment. Student evaluation is multifaceted, involving written assignments, tests, and the crucial component of student speeches assessed by peer and instructor critiques. Exposure to a variety of assessment types offers numerous benefits to students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. Engaging with different assessment formats, such as essays, exams, presentations, and projects, enables students to develop versatile skills that are crucial in today's globalized world, thereby enhancing their academic adaptability and fostering confidence in navigating unfamiliar assessment styles commonly used in higher education institutions (Szkornik et al., 2015). The varied forms of assessment dealing with foundational course readings and theory are an important consideration if an ungrading approach is used for speech assessment (ungrading will be described below). A unique aspect of the course is the integration of FeedbackFruits, which facilitates the peer review process, enabling a seamless interaction within the learning management system (LMS). FeedbackFruits is an online platform that integrates with the LMS to facilitate interactive and collaborative learning. It provides tools for peer review, group member evaluations, and interactive assignments, allowing students to give and receive feedback, assess group contributions, and engage with course materials in a more dynamic way. Other peer review platforms may be used instead. Another platform, Kritik, has been associated with positive course outcomes (Sofjan et al., 2023).

Students must prepare and deliver three types of formal speeches: informative, persuasive, and special occasion. The development of each speech is presented to students in a workshop format, with a strong emphasis on learning through the process. Each workshop typically takes three to four weeks to complete, with multiple tasks required for each workshop. While not the focus of this article, it is important to highlight the importance of instructors providing direct formative assessment and feedback during each workshop's research and speech preparation components. This is an area of the course that is intentionally not flipped due to the overwhelming need for students to sharpen their research skills, a competency both higher

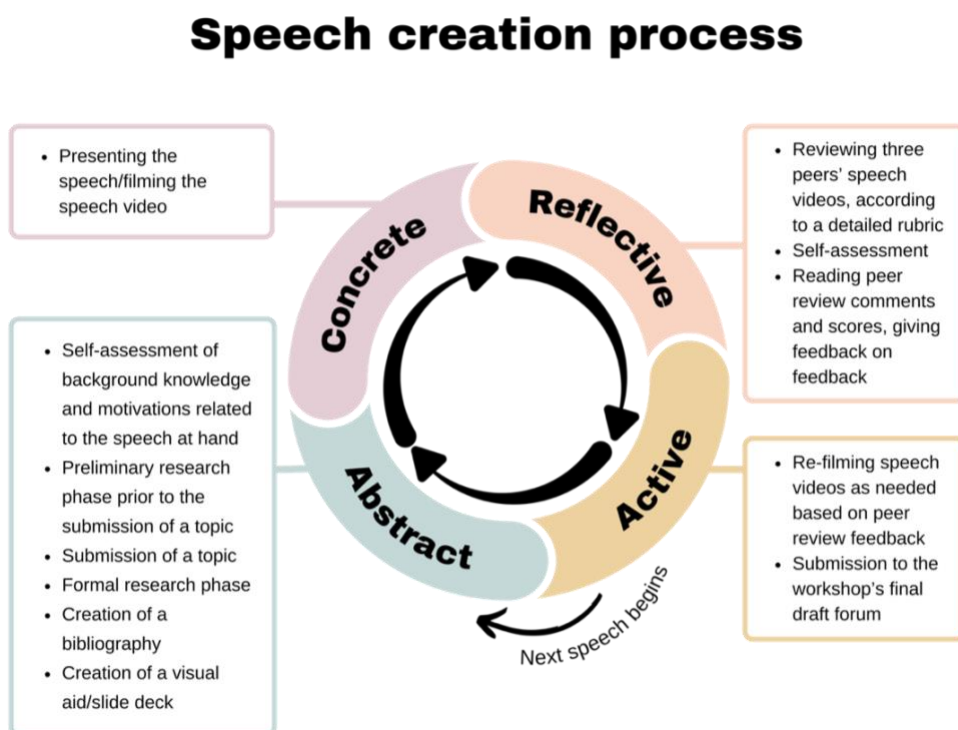
education faculty (Huddleston et al., 2019) and employers (Finley, 2023, pp. 2-17) say is lacking, in some cases severely, for undergraduates.

Before delving into speech workshop processes, a vital course policy must be emphasized: participation in the peer review workshops is absolutely mandatory. Otherwise, it is mathematically impossible to pass the course. This non-negotiable should be introduced to students at the outset of the course and detailed in the course syllabus and within the LMS; students may need frequent reminders/reinforcement of this policy. According to Fergus et al. (2021), student buy-in to the peer review process is vital. Students tend to get there eventually when it comes to peer review enthusiasm, with some being intrinsically motivated because of the agency being afforded to them, and others needing extrinsic motivation from the instructor at the outset of the course.

During experiential learning, students may begin anywhere in the cycle; for the purposes of this course design, learners start with the abstract phase. Each speech undergoes a rigorous process, anchored in Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Figure 2.

Speech creation process following Kolb's experiential learning cycle.



A more detailed breakdown of the speech creation process:

- self-assessment of background knowledge and motivations related to the speech at hand
- preliminary research phase prior to topic submission*
- submission of a topic
- formal research phase*
- creation of a bibliography*
 - The instructor may also stipulate the bibliography be annotated. In 100% online courses, students can use platforms such as [Loom](#) or [Zoom](#) to easily create videos of themselves talking the instructor through the source; students can then submit their videos in addition to their references. The “talk me through it” method serves to ensure students more deeply understand their research content, and it is also a way for instructors to prevent students from using AI to churn out an annotated bibliography. If the annotated bibliography video is required, the

instructor should create their own video modeling an exemplary submission for the assignment.

- creation of a visual aid/slide deck
- filming the speech video
- reviewing three peers' speech videos, according to a detailed rubric
- self-assessment/reflection
- reading peer review comments and scores, giving feedback on feedback
 - Each student is required to rate the helpfulness and accuracy of their reviewers and has the option to include written responses.
- re-filming speech videos as needed based on peer review feedback
- submission to the workshop's final draft forum

*These items are not required for the special occasion speech, which tends to require much less formal research than the informative and persuasive.

At this point, the instructor has a few choices for how to proceed with the workshop, depending on pedagogical philosophy: ungrading (final student speech grades are based on peer review scores alone), traditional (the instructor scores all speeches), and a hybrid of these two options, deemed herein as flex grading.

Ungrading, Flex Grading Approaches

In recent years, ungrading, which is “a *philosophy* of assessment that seeks to decenter grades (i.e., letters or numbers) in the learning process,” has emerged as a transformative approach in higher education (Masland, 2023, p. 89). Unlike conventional grading systems that emphasize numeric assessments of student performance and compliance, ungrading prioritizes qualitative feedback and formative assessments to foster student engagement and self-efficacy while reducing anxiety (Garvey, 2022, pp. 5-14). Considering Yaniafari and Rihardini's (2021) findings regarding high levels of anxiety in speech courses, making a turn toward ungrading reduces apprehension around the very assignments that cause students the most anxiety.

Importantly, ungrading is not a monolithic approach—it isn't all grades or no grades—but rather a “broad range of possible alternative approaches and ways of seeing assessment and feedback” (Compton, 2021, para. 4). For this course, a blended ungrading approach is used and branded as “flex grading” to highlight the instructor's openness to a less rigid grading philosophy while also giving students a sense of control over their success in the class. Mallette and Hawks

(2020) noted that contract grading (a form of ungrading) “may give students more agency to take risks, try new approaches, and engage in authentic learning experiences” (p. 1). They further argued that contract grading allows students from diverse backgrounds entering lower-level undergraduate courses with varying ability levels to “see a path for success” that they would not otherwise be able to attain following hegemonic grading practices (p. 5).

In Practice. In this vein of promoting student agency, the blended flex grading approach gives students the widest menu of options regarding their final speech grades. Maybe the student performed poorly in their video submitted to peer review and legitimately needs to re-film it so the instructor may grade it. Maybe they thought their speech was excellent only for it to be scored poorly by their peers, so they, too, need to re-film. Maybe they are happy with their peer review grade but still want to get feedback from the instructor on their performance. All of these options are available to students following a flex grading philosophy. When submitting to the final draft forum for each speech (a separate assignment from the speech workshop), students may submit the following:

- a note that they want to take their peer review grade; they are not required to re-upload their speech videos as they are already housed in the peer review portion of the LMS
- a note that they want to take their peer review grade but still want the professor to provide formative feedback/comments on their submission
- their re-filmed final draft for instructor review; crucially, if students choose to take this option, they are not allowed to submit the same video file as they submitted to peer review, as that defeats the purpose of the process

All students with a peer review score lower than 70% must re-film and re-submit to the final draft forum; students scoring lower than 70% are not allowed to take their peer review score as their final speech grade. In 100% online asynchronous speech courses, students can re-film their speeches as many times as needed, meaning that, in reality, much of the class has already practiced pretty extensively/re-filmed repeatedly before submitting to the peer review workshop. According to Welliver (2022, p. 2), online students report this aspect of 100% online speech courses as a benefit, and those who do re-film frequently have more positive course outcomes than those who do not.

Ultimately, this process cultivates a collaborative, student-led learning atmosphere, allows students to refine their speeches based on constructive feedback as needed, and treats

students' varied public speaking capabilities as an asset. Some students enrolled in a 100% online asynchronous speech course may already possess strong public speaking skills acquired from various backgrounds such as high school, work experience, religious or social organizations, or natural ability. For these proficient speakers, delivering speeches may be somewhat effortless, potentially leading them to feel that they derive limited benefits from the course beyond basic communication theory. However, in heavily flipped classes such as this one, these students play a dual role: their speeches serve as exemplars for their peers, and they (hopefully) receive critical feedback that challenges their expectations of perfection. Engaging in peer review encourages these high-performing students to recalibrate their standards and fosters empathy and understanding toward peers with varying skill levels. Topping (2009) and El-Senousy (2020) both noted the development of greater empathy for all students as a result of effective peer review use. In the long run, this process cultivates essential workplace skills like receiving and providing constructive criticism, which are crucial for professional growth and effective collaboration across diverse teams.

Instructors may also select one of the three speeches to assess themselves, with the special occasion speech being most highly recommended since, following this course design, it is the final speech and typically the most polished. It also requires less scaffolding and direct instruction in the preparation phase of the speech workshop, giving instructors more time to review students' final speeches. Going this route can also allow instructors to conduct a summative assessment of individual student growth throughout the semester (i.e., comparing performance in the first speech to performance in the final one), which can be as critical as needed but still focused on overall improvement.

Halaby (2007, pp. 11-18) recommended a growth-based approach in introductory communication courses, as it is better suited for diverse student populations who may be entering college with varying ability levels, regardless of entrance/placement scores. Campbell et al. (2020) stated that self-assessment is beneficial when used in combination with formative peer review, while Pearce et al. (2009) noted the benefit of using all three: formative peer reviews, self-assessment, and instructor summative assessment. While a formative self-assessment/reflection is required for each speech (completed after students assess their peers), a final potential addition to the special occasion speech workshop can be a summative self-

assessment, in which the students judge their growth as communicators from the beginning to the end of the semester.

Scaffolding, Other Considerations. For instructors thinking about implementing a flipped, peer review-heavy course, this alternative design can cause some apprehension. To mitigate these concerns effectively, instructors must first provide extensive scaffolding to teach students how to effectively peer review speeches. This entails creating instructional screencasts where the instructor models speech evaluation, offers sample rubrics, and guides students through the process step by step. Sofjan et al. (2023, p. 402) said that this can be done on an informal basis and further recommended that the instructor provide multiple examples of how to score student work at different ability levels (i.e., what it looks like to score a speech that needs much improvement vs. what it looks like to score a speech that needs little improvement).

Additionally, before students commence peer reviewing speeches, a “practice” peer review assignment can be incorporated (Sofjan et al., 2023, p. 402). This initial assignment can involve students writing an open response about an experience where they received beneficial critical feedback, serving as a low-stakes exercise to familiarize students with the platform/process and allowing instructors to preemptively address common pitfalls such as superficial or insufficiently detailed reviews. As the peer reviews for speeches begin, ongoing instructor follow-up is essential. FeedbackFruits’s analytics can aid in identifying and addressing issues promptly by tracking both response patterns and time spent on reviews to ensure students are engaging meaningfully with the material (Danmeri, 2018; Hasan & Rinaldi, 2021). This structured approach cultivates students’ critical evaluation skills and fosters a supportive learning environment conducive to constructive feedback and continuous improvement.

Another way for students to learn to apply consistent evaluation criteria is through a calibration session or a series of calibration sessions, similar to the methods used by the College Board to score Advanced Placement exams. A calibrated approach can be automated through the learning management system, where students review sample presentations for calibration purposes. They can then compare their scores against benchmark scores provided afterward, allowing for adjustments and ensuring alignment with grading standards. Multiple rounds of calibration may be necessary to refine students’ assessment skills effectively; the multiple rounds approach is also used by College Board as needed to ensure scorers are up to snuff before actually marking student exams (Morgan, 2018, pp. 189-191).

A calibration step can be structured as a quiz with “right” and “wrong” answers, accompanied by written justifications for each rating option that explain why the benchmark presentation would or would not warrant said rating for each measure. However, while automated calibration sessions serve the function of getting students to score peer work accurately (Pearce et al., 2009, pp. 23-25), they do not teach students how to give/write constructive feedback tied to those scores. For students to develop both skills, a combined approach is recommended, consisting of a low-stakes practice session with direct instructor feedback on review quality and automated calibration sessions.

Review Quality Concerns. Implementing student peer review requires careful consideration of several key factors to ensure its effectiveness and fairness. One critical challenge is managing variation in review quality, as different students may approach evaluation tasks with varying levels of rigor and understanding. According to Pearce et al. (2009, p. 8), increasing the number of reviewers per assignment can mitigate this issue by averaging out individual biases and errors, thereby providing a more balanced assessment overall. This “it all evens out in the wash” approach is especially useful for introductory communication courses since all feedback, even peer feedback a student does not necessarily agree with, has value simply because it opens their eyes to the many different ways they are perceived as communicators, reflecting “real life” communication paradigms. Indeed, in highly subjective fields such as communication, Baird et al. (2018, p. 14) found faculty scoring practices can sometimes penalize or overlook student work that deviates from entrenched, hegemonic standards of knowledge and success, leading to the undervaluation of legitimate skills that fall outside conventional criteria. In other words, in some fields, it is not only helpful to know how the “smartest person in the room” would assess a piece of work, but also how a more diverse audience would assess it.

For the course described herein, a structured rubric that guides students on how to critique their peers’ work is incorporated to ensure high-quality feedback (Appendix A). This rubric is aligned with the learning objectives of the course and covers various aspects such as presentation structure, content accuracy and clarity, presentation skills, and basic technical requirements. Sofjan et al. (2023, pp. 402-403) highlighted that detailed rubrics help maintain consistency and fairness in peer evaluations. Pearce et al. (2009, pp. 20-26) also stated that rubrics can be improved throughout rounds of feedback to best meet assessment needs in relation

to student achievement of course standards (e.g., modifying rubric weighting so students do not unintentionally focus too much on certain things that really stand out while glossing over others, such as focusing only on delivery and paying little mind to content).

Moreover, the assessment of reviews by instructors plays a pivotal role in maintaining review quality and providing valuable feedback to reviewers. As noted above, especially when incorporating a practice review step, instructors should dedicate time to assess and provide constructive feedback on student reviews. For reviews of speeches, while instructor feedback on every single review is likely unfeasible due to workload concerns, spot-checking is most certainly feasible with FeedbackFruits by leveraging automated functions within the LMS. According to Wright et al. (2015), who used a “mechanical TA” (teaching assistant) for a course that was assessed through peer review, having a human TA “spot check . . . reviews” is essential, even for students who have passed calibration checks to demonstrate peer review proficiency (p. 96). They also recommended using human TAs to backread reviews by all students who have not shown peer review efficiency. The mechanical TA used in this case is a tool similar to the automated functions for checking student work within FeedbackFruits.

FeedbackFruits peer review tool tracks overall review keywords (labeled “often mentioned by students”), keywords used in individual reviews (both given reviews and received reviews), number of reviews students have completed, amount of time spent on reviews, number of comments students have left on the work they are reviewing in total, and average rating reviewers award their peers. All of these tools allow instructors to quickly diagnose issues or problem reviewers, even while peer review is ongoing, as analytics are updated in real time so the instructor can reach out directly to students who are displaying unsatisfactory peer review behaviors.

Figure 3.*Overall analytics in FeedbackFruits.*

Analytics

Search

Name	Overall grade out of 100 %	Read instructions	Submitted	Give feedback	Time spent ↑	Comments	Read feedback
		✓	✓	---	27 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	28 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	28 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	29 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	29 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	31 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	39 min	19	---
		✓	✓	---	40 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	41 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	59 min	12	---
		✓	✓	---	65 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	66 min	18	---
		✓	✓	---	98 min	18	---

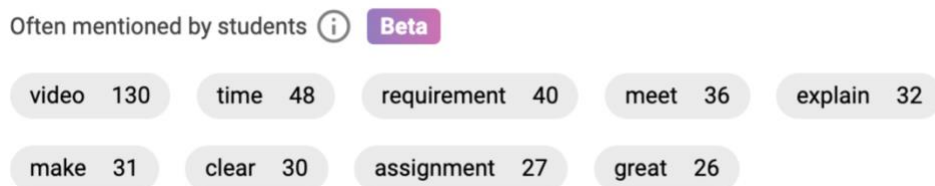
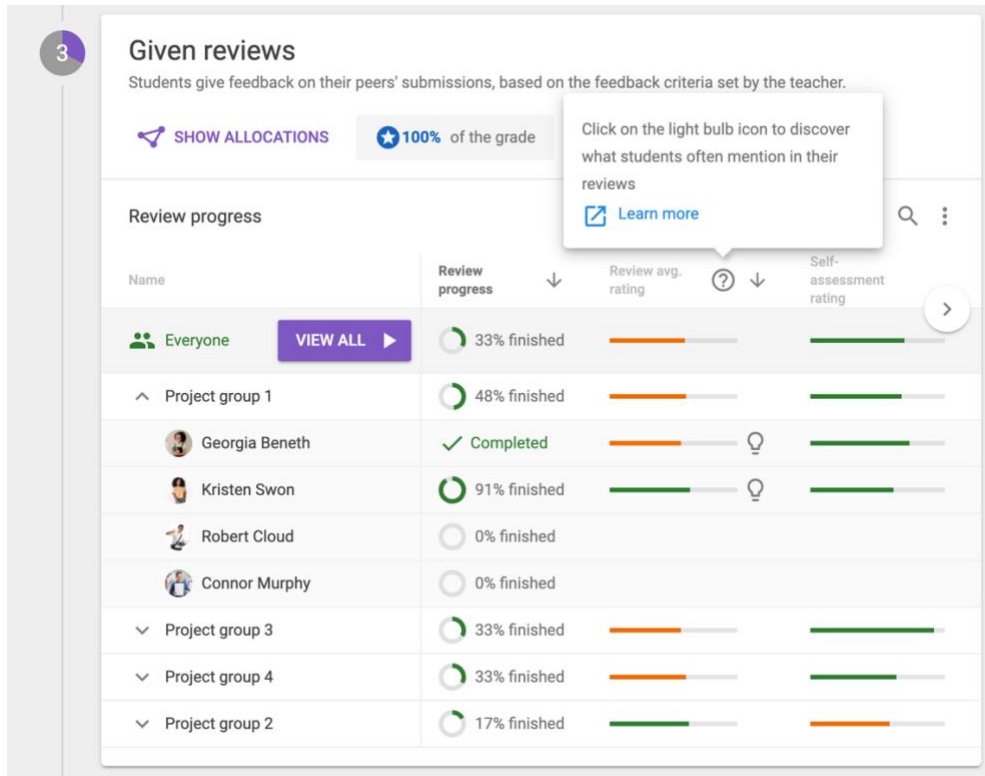
Figure 4.*Overall analytics, often mentioned by students, FeedbackFruits.*

Figure 5.

Given reviews analytics (FeedbackFruits, 2024a).

**Figure 6.**

Often mentioned by student, accessed via light bulb button on given reviews screen.

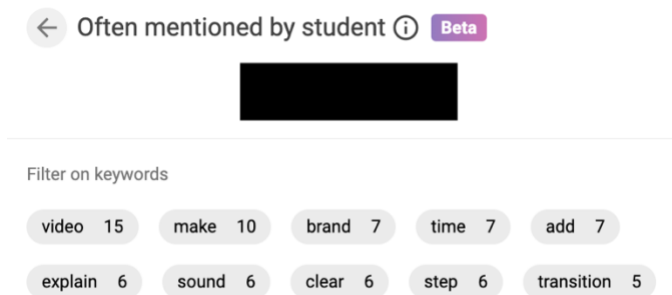
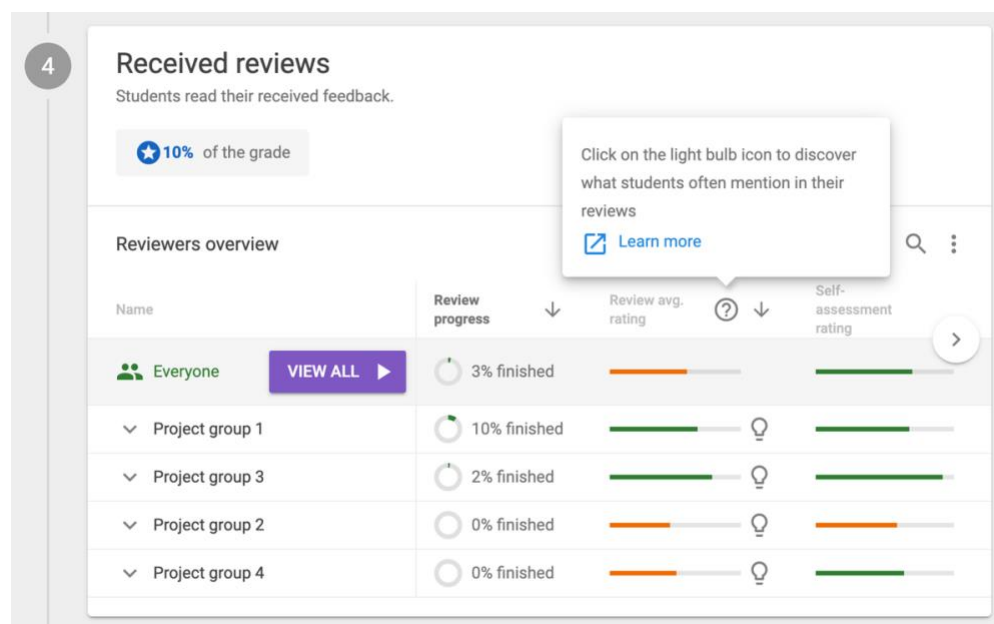
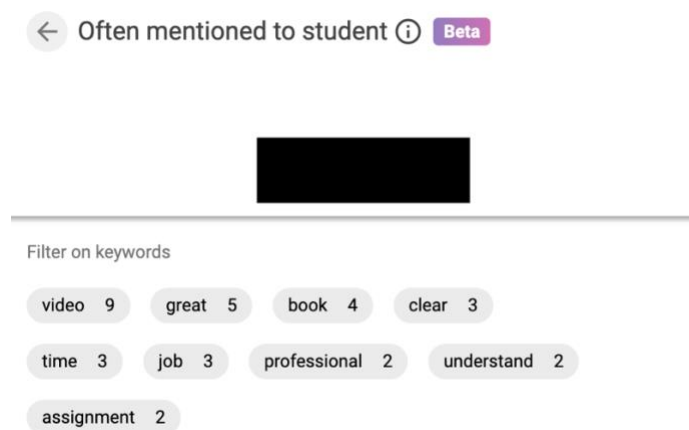


Figure 7.

Received reviews analytics (FeedbackFruits, 2024b).

**Figure 8.**

Often mentioned to student, accessed via light bulb button on received reviews screen.

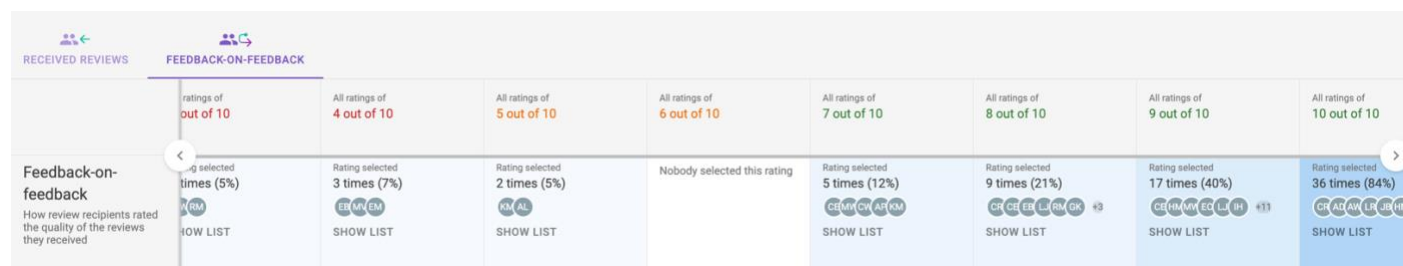


If students are required to leave feedback for their peer reviewers, the tool will also track the average rating reviewers received by the peers they reviewed; the feedback-on-feedback step is meant to gauge how helpful students feel their peer reviewers were, allowing them to rate and respond back to their reviewers. The feedback-on-feedback step provides data that allows for

discussions with students who were not flagged previously but are nonetheless displaying peer review behaviors that leave something to be desired. Feedback on feedback is especially necessary for addressing students who tend to be too harsh in their reviews, i.e., students who display peer review behaviors that are the opposite of those who might be flagged quickly by the aforementioned built-in capabilities of FeedbackFruits.

Figure 9.

Feedback on feedback overall analytics.



FeedbackFruits data is also exportable into spreadsheet form (Arvizu & Davis, 2024, pp. 2145-2147) and may be further analyzed via advanced Excel functions/data analysis software, including more in-depth analysis of keywords and score trends across reviews, which highlight areas where students may need guidance on improving their evaluations. By utilizing automated functions, instructors can efficiently identify and support reviewers who require additional assistance, optimizing the peer review process while reducing the instructor's manual workload. Reducing workload is especially important to emphasize, as Freeborn (2022) noted that in his research, asynchronous courses require an additional 85.5 “hours of effort” on the instructor's part compared to courses that are not asynchronous (“Effect of Transition to Asynchronous” section, para. 1).

Grading Offsets. The course uses a multi-assessment approach, including a strong peer review component, outlines, visual aids, tests, and exams to gauge student understanding and performance against course objectives. This varied assessment framework provides a more complete picture of a student's talents, which also mitigates worries about over-reliance on peer evaluation. Approximately 20% of the final course grade is based upon participation in and quality of work submitted to peer review workshops. Another 20% consists of the final grades for the three required speeches; the grading philosophy and pedagogical approach determine the

options students have available to them for determining final speech grades. Under the flex grading approach described above, students have the option of taking their peer review score for two of the three required speeches if their score is 70% or higher. The final special occasion speech that is always scored by the instructor operates as a formative assessment, with the instructor considering the students' progress from the first speech to the last.

All of the course assessments—including the peer review workshops, unit challenges, speech analysis, chapter tests, midterm, and final exams—contribute to the final grade (see Appendix B). These traditional measures ensure that a significant portion of the students' grades are based on instructor-evaluated work. For example, the final and midterm exams are worth a combined 175 points; another 140 points come from chapter tests, which makes just over 30% of students' grades in the course based upon highly traditional assessment formats. For students who are worried that peer reviews may disproportionately affect their final scores, this hybrid approach to evaluation can help mitigate their concerns while allowing instructors to maintain a certain percentage of the course grade based on more traditional, objective measures of assessment.

FeedbackFruits facilitates the scoring of the peer review workshops. Each workshop grade consists of four components: 50% for the assignment as evaluated by peers, 20% for the completion of assessments, 20% for the quality of review, and 10% for the response to and rating of peer review comments. This scoring setup means students are assessed based on how actively they participated in and contributed to the peer review process, in addition to their performance on the speeches themselves. Students are expected to give extensive feedback (ranging from 25 to 50 words for each line on the rubric) on their classmates' work during the peer review process. To ensure the peer review process is fair and fruitful, instructors can use the aforementioned tools within FeedbackFruits to monitor and quantify the feedback quality. These tools also allow them to address questionable/unacceptable peer review behaviors. Ultimately, the grading system that is utilized in this course is intended to cultivate an atmosphere that encourages collaborative learning while also ensuring a well-rounded approach to assessment. Through the use of a variety of evaluation methods, the course resolves concerns over the reliance on peer review and offers a thorough and objective evaluation of students' abilities and knowledge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, incorporating peer review into online, asynchronous introductory public speaking courses is a significant step forward in meeting the needs of today's digitally savvy students. As educators adapt to the changing educational landscape influenced by technology and evolving student expectations, it's clear that traditional classroom paradigms must evolve to stay relevant and impactful. By embracing asynchronous learning environments and leveraging peer review as a cornerstone of assessment, educators can foster a more inclusive, engaging, and reflective learning experience.

The theoretical basis behind this redesign emphasizes the importance of equipping students with essential communication skills tailored to contemporary digital contexts. Through structured interactions with peers, students enhance their public speaking skills while developing critical thinking, empathy, and collaboration skills essential for success in diverse professional and civic environments. This approach meets educational objectives and aligns with broader societal shifts toward digital communication and remote collaboration. With institutions facing budget constraints and growing demand for flexible learning options, this proposed redesign offers a sustainable solution that balances academic rigor with practical applicability. The course promotes self-directed learning and personal growth by emphasizing continuous feedback and student agency through grading methods that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences.

Research and assessment must be conducted to improve and enhance peer review processes for the future of online higher education. This includes exploring best practices in peer assessment, enhancing technological supports, and overcoming obstacles related to review quality and scalability. By embracing innovation and adaptation, educators can continue to elevate the educational experience, preparing students for academic success, lifelong learning, and professional achievement in a globally connected society.

References

- Adams, B., & Wilson, N. S. (2020). Building community in asynchronous online higher education courses through collaborative annotation. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(2), 250–261.
- Al-Hebaish, S. M. (2012). The correlation between general self-confidence and academic achievement in the oral presentation course. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(1), 60–65. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.1.60-65>

- Baird, J.-A., Isaacs, T., Opposs, D., & Gray, L. (Eds.). (2018). *Examination standards: How measures and meanings differ around the world*. UCL Institute of Education Press, University College London.
- Blythe, J. (2009). *100 great PR ideas: From leading companies around the world*. Marshall Cavendish Business.
- Burek, D., & Losos, C. (2014). Debate: Where speaking and listening come first. *Voices from the Middle*, 22(1), 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.58680/vm201426063>
- Campbell, C., Borer, L., & McCarthy, S. (2020). Enhancing feedback with FeedbackFruits: Scaling for transformative implementation. In S. Gregory, S. Warburton, & M. Parkes (Eds.), *ASCILITE's First Virtual Conference: 37th International Conference on Innovation, Practice and Research in the Use of Educational Technologies in Tertiary Education* (pp. 322–327). University of New England. <https://2020conference.ascilite.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ASCILITE-2020-Proceedings-Campbell-C-Borer-L-McCarthy-S.pdf>
- Compton, M. (2021). *Ungrading: A continuum of possibilities to change assessment and feedback*. Freedom to Learn. University College London. <https://reflect.ucl.ac.uk/mcarena/2021/05/26/ungrading/>
- Danmeri, F. (2018). *Investigating teachers' perspectives: Students' experiences of collaboration, feedback and reflection using an educational technology tool* [Master's thesis, Tampere University of Applied Sciences]. <https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/157646>
- Dimock, M. (2018). Where millennials end and post-millennials begin. *Pew Research Center*. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/defining-generations-where-millennials-end-and-post-millennials-begin/>
- El-Senousy, H. (2020). How peer assessment could be interactive and effective. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(2), Article #1651. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n2a1651>
- Engleberg, I., Disbrow, L., Katt, J., Myers, S. A., O'Keefe, P., & Ward, S. (2014). The case for core competencies in introductory communication courses. National Communication Association. https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/pages/Basic_Course_and_Gen_Ed_Case_for_Core_Competencies_in_Introductory_Comm_April_2014.pdf

- https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/pages/Basic_Course_and_Gen_Ed_Case_for_Core_Competencies_in_Introductory_Comm_April_2014.pdf
- FeedbackFruits. (2024a). Given reviews [Screenshot] In *Insights feature*. Retrieved May 2024 from <https://help.feedbackfruits.com/en/articles/7066598-insights-feature>
- FeedbackFruits. (2024b). Received reviews [Screenshot] In *Insights feature*. Retrieved May 2024 from <https://help.feedbackfruits.com/en/articles/7066598-insights-feature>
- Fergus, S., Hirani, E., Parkar, N., & Kirton, S. B. (2021, Spring). Strategic engagement: Exploring student buy-in across a formative and summative assessment. *AISHE-J: All Ireland Journal of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education*, 13(1), 1–24. <https://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/441>
- Finley, A. P. (2023). *The career-ready graduate: What employers say about the difference college makes*. American Association of Colleges and Universities. <https://www.aacu.org/research/the-career-ready-graduate-what-employers-say-about-the-difference-college-makes>
- Florida A&M University School of Nursing. (n.d.). Kolb's learning cycle [Infographic]. In *Experiential learning*. Retrieved <>insert retrieval date here<>, from <https://nursing.famu.edu/experiential-learning.php>
- Freeborn, T. (2022, August), *Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Instructor Course Preparation Time During Transition to Asynchronous and Flipped-Style Lectures: A Case Study* Paper presented at 2022 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition, Minneapolis, MN. 10.18260/1-2--40639
- Garvey, G. (2022). Ungrading, grading contracts, gamification and game-based learning. In D. Ortega-Sánchez (Ed.), *Active Learning - Research and Practice for STEAM and Social Sciences Education* (pp. 1–31). IntechOpen. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.105967>
- Grieger, K., & Leontyev, A. (2021). Student-generated infographics for learning green chemistry and developing professional skills. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 98(9), 2881–2891. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.1c00446>
- Hasan, D., & Rinaldi, M. (2021). Stimulating active participation with class materials using Interactive Document. *e-mentor*, 3(90), 84–90. <https://doi.org/10.15219/em90.1525>
- Huang, Z., & te Winkel, W. (2022). Automated feedback: An AI-powered tool to scale micro-level feedback for better academic writing. In *Proceedings of EUNIS 2022 Annual*

- Congress: “Good for All in the Digital World.” European University Information Systems and Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. <https://eunis.org/eunis2022/schedule/>
- Halaby, C. N. (2007, July). *An assessment study of the effectiveness of the General Education Communication “A” requirement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: A report submitted to the University General Education Committee.* https://gened.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/991/2019/05/commA_reportFtot2.pdf
- Huddleston, B. S., Bond, J. D., Chenoweth, L. L., & Hull, T. L. (2019, Winter). Faculty perspectives on undergraduate research skills: Nine core skills for research success. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 59(2), 118–130. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/rusq.59.2.7277>
- Kho, M. G.-W., & Ting, S.-H. (2023). Experiential learning and Toastmasters International Programme: Transformative effects of public speaking training on oral presentations. Qeios. <https://doi.org/10.32388/1KT0GY>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice.
- Luna Arvizu, L., & Davis, T. (2024). Improving active learning using an interactive document tool and thinking routines. In J. Cohen & G. Solano (Eds.), *SITE 2024, 35th International Conference: Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education* (pp. 2143–2148). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). <https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/224272/>
- Mallette, J. C., & Hawks, A. (2020). Building student agency through contract grading in technical communication. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 13(2).
- Masland, L. C. (2023). Ungrading: The joys of doing everything wrong. *Zeal: A Journal for the Liberal Arts*, 1(2), 88–93.
- Morgan, D. L. (2018). Setting standards in the United States: The Advanced Placement programme. In J.-A. Baird, T. Isaacs, D. Opposs, & L. Gray (Eds.), *Examination standards: How measures and meanings differ around the world* (pp. 257–282). UCL Institute of Education Press.
- Morreale, S., Hugenberg, L., & Worley, D. (2006). The basic communication course at U.S. colleges and universities in the 21st century: Study VII. *Communication Education*, 55(4), 415–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520600879162>

- Moy, M., & Feldstein, A. (2024, Spring). Fostering digital communities: A case study of a university's digital master plan designed for networked learning among online learners. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Networked Learning*, 14(1).
<https://doi.org/10.54337/nlc.v14i1.8090>
- Oman, P. (2024). The humanities model is in trouble—Let's rethink it. *Middle West Review*, 10(2), 143–149. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mwr.2024.a925151>
- Pearce, J., Mulder, R., & Baik, C. (2009). *Involving students in peer review: Case studies and practical strategies for university teaching*. Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.
- Samarawickrema, G., & Gavrilenko, O. (2020). Immersive professional learning to foster technology-enabled peer-review. In S. Gregory, S. Warburton, & M. Parkes (Eds.), *Proceedings of ASCILITE 2020 in Armidale: ASCILITE's First Virtual Conference* (pp. 7–11). <https://doi.org/10.14742/ascilite2020.0133>
- Siefker, D., Hu, L., & Borkovska, N. (2020, Spring). The application of Kolb's experiential learning model in a business English program. *CONTACT Magazine*, 46(1), 26–31.
<https://contact.teslontario.org/the-application-of-kolbs-experiential-learning-model-in-a-business-english-program/>
- Simonds, C., Buckrop, J., Redmond, M., & Quianthy, D. (2012). *Revised resolution on the role of communication in general education, adopted by the NCA Legislative Assembly*. National Communication Association.
https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/pages/Basic_Course_and_Gen_Ed_Resolution_in_Support_of_Communication_as_a_General.pdf
- Sofjan, A. K., Nguyen, K. A., Surati, D., & Marett, C. (2023). Assessment of the validity of peer scores and peer feedback in an online peer assessment platform (Kritik). *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 15(4), 400–407.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2023.04.004>
- Stajkovic, A. D., & Luthans, F. (1998). Self-efficacy and work-related performance: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(2), 240–261. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.124.2.240>
- Stokes-Eley, S. (2007). Using Kolb's experiential learning cycle in chapter presentations. *Communication Teacher*, 21(1), 26–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404620701211584>

- Svihus, C. L. (2024). Online teaching in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29, 3175–3193.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11971-7>
- Szkornik, K., Cage, A. G., Oliver, I., Robinson, Z. P., Stimpson, I., Stott, K. J., Ullah, S., & Waller, R. I. (2015). Preparing international students for the diversity of assessment in UK Higher Education. *PedRIO*, (7), 30–35.
- Topping, K. J. (2009). Peer assessment. *Theory into Practice*, 48(1), 20–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840802577569>
- Wall, J. (2023). Creating interaction effects between parallel campus and online courses: Course design proposal for diversified student group. In J. Midemalm, A. Vadiie, E. Uhlemann, F. Georgsson, G. Carlsson Kvarnlöf, J. Månsson, & K. Ed (Eds.), *Proceedings from the 9th Swedish Engineering Education Development Conference* (pp. 19–29). Mälardalen University. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:bth-25635>
- Welliver, M. C. (2022). Change happened: Innovative teaching in a new virtual-only environment. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 27.
- Wright, J. R., Thornton, C., & Leyton-Brown, K. (2015). Mechanical TA: Partially automated high-stakes peer grading. In *SIGCSE '15: Proceedings of the 46th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education* (pp. 96–101). Association for Computing Machinery.
- Yanifari, R. P., & Rihardini, A. A. (2021, May). Face-to-face or online speaking practice: A comparison of students' foreign language classroom anxiety level. *JEELS (Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies)*, 8(1), 49–67.
<https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v8i1.222>
- Ziatdinov, R., & Cilliers, J. (2021). Generation Alpha: Understanding the next cohort of university students. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 10(3), 783–789.
<https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2202.01422>

Author Biography

Dr. Chelsea Slack holds a PhD in Rhetorics, Communication and Information Design from Clemson University. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Southeastern Louisiana University. Her research interests focus on

exploring innovative digital pedagogies, enhancing asynchronous learning experiences, and integrating AI technologies to transform classroom dynamics and improve educational outcomes.

Appendix A

Informative Speech Rubric

CATEGORY	Advanced	Proficient	Intermediate	Novice
Introduction and Conclusion	Introduction uses a creative and highly engaging attention getter, provides strong reason for this specific audience to listen, clearly establishes speaker credibility, conveys the specific purpose of the speech, and provides a clear preview statement. Conclusion clearly signals the speech is coming to an end, concretely reviews main points, and ends powerfully.	Introduction uses a somewhat successful attention getter, attempts to provide a general reason to listen, establishes credibility but somewhat weakly, conveys specific purpose of the speech, provides at least a general preview statement. Might not clearly signal end of speech, generally reviews main points, and attempts to use a powerful closing device.	Introduction starts abruptly, lacking a clear attention getter. Does not establish credibility or provide a reason for listening. Conveys a general purpose, and provides a general preview statement. Conclusion does not clearly signal the end of the speech. Generally reviews main points. Ends abruptly, without a clear closing device.	Introduction is missing or does not convey the general purpose of the speech. Preview statement is missing. Conclusion is missing or ends abruptly without reviewing main points.
Content, Organization, and Transitions	Topic choice is interesting and content goes far beyond common knowledge. Content includes ideas with complexity, demonstrating superior understanding of the topic. Body of speech includes useful definition, description, and explanation of the significance or meaning of the topic. The speaker goes into some detail describing/explaining examples from the exhibit. Verbal citations make it clear where all information comes from. At least three scholarly sources are cited, with meaningful ideas taken from them.	Topic choice is interesting, but it might not be clear what the significance or meaning is. Description but might not provide enough explanation, or might include too much common knowledge. Verbal citations usually demonstrate where information comes from. Three scholarly sources are cited, with somewhat useful/relevant ideas taken from them and incorporated into speech.	Topic might be unclear or simplistic. The speech skims the surface of the topic, asking few thoughtful questions. Content includes a lot of common knowledge and/or unfounded assumptions. Little or no detailed explanation is used. Few verbal citations are used. Might not cite scholarly sources.	An organizing pattern is not discernible, and the speech lacks transitions.
Physical Delivery	Vocal delivery is well paced, smooth, and expressive, using vocal variety in a natural-sounding manner. Few if any vocal fillers (ums, er, like, ya know, etc.). Eye contact is frequent and direct, addressing the whole audience. A strong stance is used, with engaging gestures, and very few distracting gestures. Delivery is extemporaneous (minimal to no reading), with notes used primarily for reference. Speaker conveys strong energy, conviction, and ownership of the material.	Vocal delivery is well paced, reasonably smooth with some stumbling, unnecessary pauses, or vocal fillers. Eye contact is frequent, but might ignore some parts of the audience. Posture is decent, with some fidgeting, a few strong gestures, and some distracting gestures. Delivery is somewhat extemporaneous, but the speaker reads from the index cards somewhat frequently. Speaker conveys some energy and partial ownership of the material.	Vocal delivery is hard to follow, with pace or volume problems and a good deal of stumbling or fillers. Eye contact is infrequent. Speaker is very dependent on notes/frequently reads from board or cue cards off screen. Posture lacks confidence, effective gestures are not used, distracting gestures might be overwhelming. Little energy is displayed, and the speaker does not seem to "own" the material.	Vocal delivery is ineffective, with major problems with pace, volume, stumbling, fillers, monotone, etc. Speaker reads entirely from notes/board or is obviously reading cue cards off screen, does not speak extemporaneously or make eye contact. Body language is distracting and lacks energy. Speaker does not seem to "own" or care about the material.
Use of Visual Aid	Visual aids enhance understanding of material and are smoothly integrated into the presentation. Slides are designed with consistency and simplicity. Speaker interacts with images shown, drawing out particular meanings and observations (i.e. from images, charts or graphs, saying things like, "As we can see in this chart here. " Text is limited to labels and brief bullet points.	Visual aids enhance understanding of material and are mostly smoothly integrated into the presentation. Slides are designed with consistency and simplicity. Speaker shows images and visual data but does not fully interact with it or explain it. Might incorporate too much text.	Visual aids are present, but do not always clearly enhance understanding. Slides may be cluttered, inconsistent, or sloppy. Speaker shows images and visual data but does not sufficiently explain it. Might incorporate too much text.	Visual aids are absent or do not enhance understanding. Slides are cluttered, inconsistent or sloppy to the point that they are significantly distracting. Speaker might read extensively from text on slides.
Time Requirement	Speech meets time requirement.	Speech is within 30 seconds of the time requirement.	Speech is within 1 minute of the time requirement.	Speech is more than one minute under or over the time requirement.
Audience	5 audience members are present	4 audience members are present	3 audience members are present	Less than 3 audience members are present
Technical Requirements - Videos shouldn't be: 1) Shaky 2) Dark 3) Audio hard to hear 4) Improperly rotated/video is sideways on screen 5) 1/2 or more of speaker's body not visible 6) Loud/distracting noise in background	All tech requirements are met (none of the violations of tech requirements are present)	Most tech requirements are met (one of the violations of tech requirements is present)	Some tech requirements are met (two of the violations of tech requirements are present)	Many tech requirements are not met (more than 3 of the violations of tech requirements are present)

Appendix B

Assignment	Points Possible	My Points
Syllabus Quiz	15 points	
Outline Submissions (3)	3 due, 15 points each = 45 points	
Presentation Visual Aids (2)	2 due, 20 points each = 40 points	
Introduction Video	Video = 30 points Responses = 5 points/post Total = 40 points	
Intro to Peer Review Assignment	20 points FeedbackFruits will combine all of the parts of the workshop into one score, broken down as follows: 50% for assignment, as assessed by peers 20% for completing peer assessments 20% for peer assessment quality 10% for responding to peer review feedback	
Informative Speech Workshop	80 points FeedbackFruits will combine all of the parts of the workshop into one score, broken down as follows: 50% for assignment, as assessed by peers 20% for completing peer assessments 20% for peer assessment quality 10% for responding to peer review feedback	
Informative Speech Final Grade	50 points	
Persuasive Speech Workshop	100 points FeedbackFruits will combine all of the parts of the workshop into one score, broken down as follows: 50% for assignment, as assessed by peers 20% for completing peer assessments 20% for peer assessment quality 10% for responding to peer review feedback	
Persuasive Speech Final Grade	60 points	
Special Occasion Speech	90 points	
Unit Challenges	4 units, 3 @ 25 points each, 1 @ 40 points = 115 points	
Speech Analysis Challenge	30 points	
Chapter Tests	4 due, 2 @ 30 points each, 2 @ 40 points each = 140 points	
Midterm Exam	75 points	
Final Exam	100 points	
Total Points Possible	1000 points	