

# The SPEECH COMMUNICATION TEACHER

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## Developing Multimedia Presentations in a New Technology Communication Course

**Goal:** To develop the ability to produce digital/multimedia presentations through understanding the ever-emerging field of new technologies.

As new technologies continue to develop and become more and more pervasive, it is imperative that communication students learn to utilize this technology successfully. To address this issue, I have integrated a special assignment into my new technology course that informs the students about this technology while using technology. The results have improved the students' knowledge and proficiency in technology as well as public speaking.

### Assignment

**Develop Knowledge Base.** Assign students readings and discuss chapters from books on multimedia and the Internet (Courtright & Perse, 1997; Lindstrom, 1994). Tutorials and discussions of the various software programs and equipment are conducted to ensure students abilities to produce a multimedia presentation. The students are encouraged to visit various web sites in order to analyze

and discuss the uses of music, clip-art, sound effects and video (<http://www.geek-girl.com/audioclips.html>, <http://www.gold-tech.com/musicpages>, <http://baretta.calpoly.edu/audio-video/samples.htm>). In addition, students reviewed PowerPoint and other digital presentation sites to aid in the design of their digital presentations (<http://www.microsoft.com/powerpoint/default.htm>, <http://www.digitalmedia.org/>).

**Model a Digital/Multimedia Presentation.** Discuss proper speaking techniques integrating technology into the process. Display an actual multimedia presentation explaining the design and implementation of each slide and media. Take the students through a step by step process to the finished product.

**Student Presentations.** Assign students a presentation problem to create a five- to seven-minute PowerPoint presentation that will be given to the class defining, tracing the history, and exploring the future of a new technology.

This presentation utilizes new technology equipment and software. The use of PowerPoint was selected for its low learning curve and multimedia applications. The students were provided with the following material and had access to two communication computer labs.

HARDWARE	SOFTWARE
PowerMac's	PowerPoint
Scanners	PhotoShop
Digital Camera	Netscape Communicator
Audio CD	EasyPhoto

**Presentation Assignment.** The presentation must include a minimum of 15 slides. At least 15 graphics must be incorporated into the designs — utilizing the clip art feature of the program, imported images, sound, and video. Each slide must include some text explanation. Students

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can no longer claim that "he" is an inclusive term.

### Appraisal

Every term, there has been a thought-filled silence as the light bulbs go on in the student's heads. For the first time, they can really see that "he" does not mean "he and she." I also find that by using this exercise, I eliminate the arguments from people who say that they know that "he" means everyone; therefore, they now concede that "he" is not an inclusionary term.

Once they are aware that "he" is indeed an exclusionary term, they are more receptive to discussion about the implications of choosing language carefully. I usually reference some of the literature about how we limit student's career aspirations and present a distorted view of the world when we choose to use exclusionary language. Ivy and Backlund (1994) presented numerous reasons to use inclusionary language including that it reflects nonsexist attitudes, is unambiguous, demonstrates sensitivity to others as well as empowers others (pp. 95-98). I also like to present the idea that if the receiver finds the language to be offensive (justifiably or not), the speaker will have to deal with the consequences of his or her language choice (i.e. in the workplace, if I offend my co-workers or boss, there will be some type of penalty). Therefore, students need to understand the implications of exclusive language in a diverse world.

Ultimately, the lesson from this exercise is that we all make language choices. No choice is necessarily right or wrong, but they all have consequences of which the students need to be aware.

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## How to Evaluate Web Site Validity and Reliability

**Goal:** To teach students how to evaluate information obtained from Web sites for validity and reliability, to teach students how to be more critical consumers of information, and to provide students with critical evaluative tools.

Although no reliable numbers exist regarding the number of students who use the World Wide Web first when conducting research, or who use the Web for the majority of their "facts," considerable anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that student usage is quite high. Indeed, in many professional realms the Web is one of the primary sources for information. Ross and Middleberg (1997) surveyed 2,500 managing and business editors of newspapers and magazines and found that, "[w]hen reporting a breaking story after hours, journalists try for the source first, almost every time, but indicate they turn to company Web sites second for information" (Section I). Web sites are also one of the first places that many customers turn for up-to-date information or to purchase products. Given the obvious importance attached to the Web in both the academic and professional consciousness, students must be equipped with the tools to evaluate the accuracy, validity, and reliability of the information they find on the Web (cf., Kent & Taylor, 1998, for an up-to-date discussion of communication and the WWW). This exercise is designed to provide students with the tools to critically examine information found on the Web.

Subjecting evidence to tests of reliability/validity is not new, however, many introductory communication textbooks do a poor job of teaching students how to test evidence and

devote little attention to how to evaluate Web sites for reliability or validity. Instead, the focus of these texts is often on "evidence" as support for arguments, and logical fallacies as examples of defective evidence or reasoning (cf., Gronbeck, *et al.*, 1997; Osborn & Osborn, 1997).

### Explanation of Activity

Assign a brief speech or presentation (3-5 minutes) reporting on the reliability/validity of the information found on the World Wide Web. Introduce the following basic tests of evidence to students being sure to point out that these tests do not just apply to Web sites: (1) *credibility* of the ideas and the source independent of the audiences beliefs (i.e., by recognized experts and perceived credibility by the audience of the ideas and the source—based on the audiences beliefs, values, etc.), (2) *appropriateness/suitability* of the ideas and the source for the audience, (3) *believability* of the ideas and the source by the speaker, and believability by the audience, (4) *veracity, relevance, timeliness, morality* of information and arguments such as advocating equal rights, racial, or gender equality in the face of widespread public opposition, and (5) *sufficiency*.



Students should visit at least three Web sites related to the same general area. Students can be asked to do this as part of another upcoming assignment so their effort seems justified. Have students evaluate the information found in terms of the eight tests described above. Point out to students that evidence which fails a particular test, such as the inability

to establish the credibility of the source of the information, does not make it unreliable but does make it suspect. That is, many sites such as governmental agencies provide statistical or consumer information and very few sources include such information as the economist, researcher, or scholar who gathered the data. In a case such as this, the parent (governmental) site is probably "reliable," as is the information contained therein, in spite of the fact that precise source credibility is not available.

Instruct students to devote the majority of their evaluative speech to how the selected Web sites fail as credible/reliable sources and ask them to provide examples from the site to support their claims. Credible/reliable sites should not be ignored, but emphasis on the poor characteristics of sites is preferred here since students conducting such Web site evaluations often have a tendency to focus on the positive. By asking students to account for questionable aspects of Web sites students are, hopefully, led to the realization that credibility is not arbitrary. Many students are still honing their critical skills. By asking students to focus on the "negative," students are discouraged from responding "everything was good." Students should also be encouraged to print off Web pages to use as visual aids in their presentations.

#### Evaluation

The audience for these speeches should be provided with a critique form that allows them to answer several general questions: Would they find the particular source(s) ideas credible and why? Do they find the information believable? Can they identify the original source of the information? And, can they determine the timeliness of the information? Instructor evaluation of student presentations should use these same general questions but also include comments regarding delivery, visual aids, and organization.

#### Debriefing

In a debriefing session after the speeches, emphasize the accuracy of

the students' observations and how speakers need to be careful when using the Web as a source. Also, point out any issues associated with using the Web effectively that they may have overlooked. Issues include being able to identify the origin of information located on Web pages; the difficulty in evaluating the credibility of the author of information; and in some cases the difficulty in identifying the actual source of "facts" and data such as when a corporate Web site makes claims, or a personal Web page provides technical/expert information. Finally, be sure that students understand that merely because an individual or an organization has a Web page does not mean that the information is widely accepted or even valid. Web pages usually do not involve peer review, editorial oversight, or bibliographies, and are not subject to the public scrutiny and commentary that newspapers, radio, magazines, and television receive.

#### Appraisal

Through this exercise students should "get a feel" for how questionable the Web currently is as a source of "facts" and information. Although the Web functions as a wonderful tool of democracy by giving voice to disenfranchised groups and allowing individuals from across the globe to interact, it also serves corporate, marketing, and propagandistic ends.

One of the difficulties in teaching students to use the Web lies in making them aware that organizations create Web sites for strategic reasons and not as public service tools or tools of democracy. Merely because an organization places information on their Web pages does not mean that credible experts would consider the information accurate. Critically questioning Web sites leads to increased scrutiny of them by students and a heightened awareness of biased information in general.

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## Metaphor in the Classroom: A Patchwork of Inconsistency

**Goal:** To help instructors understand the dual nature and ethical implications of metaphor as both a figure of speech and a tool to create new cognitive understandings. To transform how metaphor is taught in the public speaking course.

A recent *Spectra* announced the availability of a resource aid for public speakers called *The Metaphor Dictionary* (Sommer & Weiss, 1995). The idea that speakers could use a dictionary to locate appropriate metaphors was intriguing. Sadly, the *Dictionary* primarily collected literary quotations containing metaphors without a discussion of their utility for the public speaker.

Traditionally, metaphor was clothed as a *trope*, a figure of speech that enlivened language and helped listeners "see" new concepts in terms of established ideas. Modern metaphor theory argues there are deeper connections between the primary and secondary terms within a metaphor (Black, 1979; Ricoeur, 1979). Instead of metaphors merely enlivening and giving a general context for a new concept, theorists believed cognitive structures, values, strategies, and other associations are transferred from one part of a metaphor's comparison to the other.

While theorists toil to expand metaphor's cognitive role, public speaking texts and other sources for speakers such as the dictionary continue to present metaphor as a trope.