

## **Communication Beyond Carolina**

Sample strategies and assignments to achieve its five learning outcomes

### **Five learning outcomes**

1. Ascertain the expectations, opportunities, and barriers to oral communication in distinct situations.
2. Tailor communications to different kinds of settings, including individual, small group, and public communication.
3. Tailor communications to different levels of expertise (inexpert, informed, expert), and to varying levels of alignment (resistant, ambivalent, supportive) and distinct contexts.
4. Make informed situation- and audience-sensitive strategic choices in content and delivery.
5. Improve ability to move audiences, as measured by best practices, audience feedback, and instructor feedback.

### **Overview**

- All knowledge must be communicated and adapted to an audience to become intelligible. The Communication Beyond Carolina requirement emphasizes the role of oral communication, with particular attention to tailoring communication to different audiences.
- Rather than think about developing different “communication assignments,” consider how communication might enrich a variety of assignments and class engagements.
- The Program for Public Discourse offers a variety of communication workshops and consultations for faculty and students. In addition, the Center for Faculty Excellence can assist with curriculum development.

## Facilitating learning outcome 1

Ascertain the expectations, opportunities, and barriers to oral communication in distinct situations.

### Faculty questions

1. How should I begin to teach students how to assess distinct (rhetorical) situations?
  - a. Try having students critique sample speeches and other presentations.
  - b. Develop a general “rhetorical situation” template they can apply to all assignments.
2. What templates can students utilize?
  - a. The following template covers the fundamental questions of any rhetorical situation.
    - i. What is the exigence (the urgent demand compelling me to speak)?
    - ii. Who is my audience (what do they know, believe, value, etc.)?
    - iii. What is the stasis (the specific point of conflict undergirding my presentation, e.g., a question of fact, definition, value, or policy)?
    - iv. What are my constraints (barriers to persuading my audience, e.g., time, motivation, age, experience, politics, personal interests, etc.)?
    - v. What are my available means of persuasion (the tools or rhetorical strategies I can employ to overcome my constraints)?
3. Does the template always look the same?
  - a. Instructors may add more specific questions to satisfy the demands of the particular assignment and situation, but speakers will always find the questions above useful.
4. How can students develop the capacities to make use of the information they ascertain?
  - a. As with all techne, practice makes perfect. The more opportunities students have to assess and respond to different rhetorical situations, the more competent communicators they will become.

### Assignment suggestions

1. When possible, try assessing student knowledge in the form of realistic oral presentations they may find themselves delivering in that particular field.
2. Before they deliver their presentations, try having students submit an analysis of their rhetorical situation utilizing the template above.
3. Try leaving enough time to evaluate and return their analysis before they deliver their presentation so they can incorporate your feedback.
4. Make the situation as detailed as possible, allowing students the opportunity to make better informed and more sophisticated rhetorical choices.
5. Try varying the type of situations across different assignments to help students experiment more widely.

## Facilitating learning outcome 2

Tailor communications to different kinds of settings, including individual, small group, and public communication.

### Faculty questions

1. Why does the setting matter? If knowledge is knowledge, shouldn't the message remain the same regardless?
  - a. Different settings place different demands on communicators.
  - b. In individual settings, communication is typically more interpersonal and improvisational. If someone lacks competence adjusting to shifting discussion, that will hurt their chances for effective communication.
  - c. By contrast, public settings typically are more formal and require speakers to construct messages for complex, diverse compositions of audiences. If a speaker assumes everyone shares the same experiences, they can alienate their audience.
2. Should I emphasize one type of setting over another?
  - a. Allow the contours of your field of inquiry to inform your assignments and the situations you create.
  - b. Typically, all fields of knowledge require some combination of the settings above.

### Assignment suggestions

1. Try creating assignments that allow students to experiment with different types of settings.
2. Particular assignments may even be divided according to the settings above.
3. For example, students negotiating a peace treaty may first communicate in small groups with foreign leaders, before eventually communicating their proposed resolution to the public. Students should learn how each setting demands different rhetorical choices.

### Facilitating learning outcome 3

Tailor communications to different levels of expertise (inexpert, informed, expert), and to varying levels of alignment (resistant, ambivalent, supportive) and distinct contexts.

#### Faculty questions

1. How should the level of audience expertise inform one's communication?
  - a. Speakers should consider audience expertise to help determine many rhetorical features, such as appropriate terminology, level of depth, and background information.
  - b. Otherwise, speakers could run the risk of confusing, upsetting, and ultimately alienating their audience.
  - c. A technical expert will address a colleague in their subfield differently more technically than they will address a colleague outside that subfield, and lay audiences may require vastly different communicative styles altogether.
2. How should the level of audience alignment inform one's communication?
  - a. Speakers should consider audience alignment to consider what level of commitment they should attempt to facilitate.
  - b. With resistant audiences, it is important, first, to build identification.
  - c. With supportive audiences, speakers can take greater risks and ask for greater levels of commitment.
  - d. With ambivalent audiences, speakers first must overcome ignorance and apathy.
  - e. With mixed audiences, speakers typically want to connect them via broad, unifying themes.

#### Assignment suggestions

1. Try creating assignments that allow students to craft messages for specific hypothetical audiences other than just the class.
2. For example, students might develop a solution to a course-related problem. After developing their solution, allow them to sell that idea to a specific audience or gatekeeper germane to the issue.
3. Try assigning different groups to different audiences with varying levels of expertise and alignment in the attempt to illuminate the importance of audience analysis.
4. Be sure to evaluate the presentation based upon their consideration of their specific audience, not just the merits of the solution.

## Facilitating learning outcome 4

Make informed situation- and audience-sensitive strategic choices in content and delivery.

### Faculty questions

1. What is an example of an audience/situation-centered choice in content?
  - a. Every presentation or communicative exchange is comprised of numerous choices. The more closely the speaker considers their situation (including audience), the more sophisticated their message will be.
  - b. Distinct informative situations call for differing informative strategies, such as statistics, analogies, definitions, and testimonies.
  - c. Distinct persuasive situations call for differing persuasive strategies, such as inductive, deductive or narrative reasoning.
  - d. Distinct situations also call for differing combinations of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals.
2. What is an example of an audience/situation-centered choice in delivery?
  - a. Different rhetorical situations call for different modes of delivery.
  - b. A highly formal presentation, for example, may call for a manuscript delivery.
  - c. A semi-formal presentation, by contrast, may call for extemporaneous delivery, where the message is prepared and polished but also appears natural and capable of adjusting to unexpected circumstances.
  - d. Students should also develop competence in improvisational speaking for when they will need it.

### Assignment suggestions

1. Try assigning students to construct a full-sentence outline of their presentation, highlighting their rhetorical choices addressing situational and audience constraints.
2. Assign students to record and self-critique their presentations to assess how they can make better informed choices in the future. They will notice shortcomings they didn't realize before.

## Facilitating learning outcome 5

Improve ability to move audiences, as measured by best practices, audience feedback, and instructor feedback.

### Faculty questions

1. What are some best practices with regard to moving audiences?
  - a. Speakers must first consider the generic expectations of their situation.
  - b. For example, a classroom lecture typically utilizes less emotional appeals than a protest rally. Disrupting that expectation may disorient one's audience.
2. How should students utilize audience feedback?
  - a. Speakers best utilize audience feedback when speaking extemporaneously, i.e., outlined and prepared but not memorized verbatim. Extemporaneous delivery is also the most generally applicable mode of delivery.
  - b. Extemporaneous delivery will allow students to learn how to engage their audience more naturally and adjust to nonverbal cues indicating confusion, boredom, or disagreement.
3. How should instructors provide feedback for oral presentations?
  - a. Students typically benefit from targeted criticism. Rather than itemize every mistake, try focusing on one or two global issues they can improve down the road.
  - b. Global issues cover the essential components, such as structure, research, and argument.
  - c. After global issues are satisfied, you can begin to focus on local issues, such as word choice, types of examples, pacing, etc.
  - d. A combination of quantitative and qualitative feedback can also be useful, allowing students to focus on specific aspects of their communication while also appreciating the bigger picture of their work.

### Assignment suggestions

1. Assign students to record their presentations, write self-critiques, and peer-review the work of their classmates.
2. Provide students with long term goals toward which they can climb throughout the semester.
3. Have students practice engaging in Q&A after each presentation, helping them adjust to challenging and unexpected feedback.
4. Encourage students to speak extemporaneously, so they can practice adjusting to nonverbal audience feedback throughout their presentations.
5. Encourage students to rehearse their presentations for their peers to help gauge their effectiveness: what was my thesis, what were my three main points, etc.? Students outside the class should not give advice to those in the class, but they can serve as reliable audience members.

## **Sample 1: Selling a technical project to disparate lay audiences**

### Rationale

The following assignment stems from a development economics course but could easily be adjusted to courses across the curriculum. Its purpose is to test student knowledge of course content while also channeling that knowledge through realistic communicative situations in which one would put it to use. Additionally, given the contentious nature of the topic, students should also have time to discuss and debate its broader implications and competing perspectives before and after their presentations.

### Assignment

Your assignment is to develop a randomized controlled trial (RCT) designed to help impoverished farmers gain greater access to micro loans in the interest of eliminating structural cycles of poverty. You will base your trial on this week's readings concerning the lived experiences and structural constraints of farmers in developing nations. Developing the trial, however, is just your first challenge. Next, you will need to communicate with two groups of people instrumental to its success. First, you will need to inform that nation's department of commerce about your project and persuade it to allow you to set up the trial. Second, you will need to inform the farmers about micro loans and persuade them to participate. You will construct and deliver a ten-minute oral presentation for each audience.

### Presentation Guidelines

1. Consider your rhetorical situation:
  - a. Exigence: What is the urgent demand of your presentation?
  - b. Audience: Whom specifically are you addressing?
  - c. Constraints: What barriers exist between your audience and your intended goal?
2. The answers to the questions above will inform your entire presentation.
3. Consider your respective audiences. Take into account factors such as education level; motivation; level of trust with regard to you and the topic, etc. Remember, you are persuading a hypothetical audience, not your instructor. The dept. of commerce, for example, will likely be comprised of educated members but not experts in your field. The farmers might be illiterate. Likewise, make sure to avoid unnecessary jargon or scientific explanations that could confuse and thus alienate your audience.
4. Consider your presentation materials. Strategize visual aids such as images and charts that can highlight your intended message. Think about which device will most effectively serve each purpose.
5. Consider the available means of persuasion. Resist information-overload. Tell people only what they need to know to make an informed decision. Consider the needs and lived experience of your audience, and connect with them in a meaningful way.
6. Consider your delivery. Resist reading a script or memorizing a text verbatim. Try speaking extemporaneously, that is, prepared but conversational. Try striking an optimal balance between professional and friendly. Allow yourself room to improvise and adapt to situation.

## **Sample 2:** Presenting an historical event across disparate rhetorical situations

### Rationale

The following assignment applies to a history course but could easily be adapted to courses across the curriculum. Its purpose is to test student knowledge of course content while also challenging students to identify the needs and restraints of communicating specific content in different situations toward different ends.

### Assignment

Your assignment is to communicate the health effects of nuclear war to a particular audience. You will be split into groups, and each will be assigned one of the following situation/audiences:

- a. A middle school history course
- b. A high school history course
- c. A protest rally for nuclear disarmament
- d. A public lecture at the local library on the topic of presidential leadership
- e. A high school science course examining the effects of radiation

Each group will deliver a ten-minute oral presentation designed for its respective hypothetical audience. In addition to your comprehension of course content, you will also be evaluated on your capacity to craft and deliver a compelling message for your particular rhetorical situation.

### Presentation guidelines

1. Consider your rhetorical situation:
  - a. Exigence: What is the urgent demand of your presentation?
  - b. Audience: Whom are you addressing?
  - c. Constraints: What barriers exist between your audience and your intended goal?
2. The answers to the questions above will inform your entire presentation.
3. Is your goal to inform, persuade conceptually, call to action, or some combination of all?
4. Consider your audience.
  - a. What do they already know, and what is appropriate for them to learn?
  - b. What do they need to know in light of your purpose for addressing them?
5. Consider the available means of persuasion.
  - a. Does the situation call for more emotional or logical appeals?
  - b. Does the situation require you to establish credibility?
  - c. Should you rely more on data, narratives, testimonies, or images, etc.?
6. Consider perspective.
  - a. Is it more appropriate to preserve neutrality or adopt a particular perspective?
  - b. Whose perspective matters in this situation?
7. Consider structure: How will you organize your presentation and why?
8. Consider delivery. Which mode of delivery will be most effective in this situation and why?

After each group has delivered its presentation, the class will engage in a critical discussion of the strengths and limitations of each group's rhetorical choices for that particular situation.

### **Sample 3:** Delivering a poster presentation of an independent project to a lay audience

#### Rationale

The following assignment engages the perennial challenge to prepare students to share their knowledge competently and effectively beyond the classroom. Despite common misconception, this assignment demands sophisticated rhetorical choices—not just an “explanation” of one’s work. This particular assignment applies to a hypothetical poster session for a campus audience, but it can easily be applied to narrower or broader audiences. A narrower audience, for example, might include a group of people within a discipline but outside the specific area of focus. A broader audience would include members of the public without a college education.

Key concepts addressed here are exigency, stasis, and narrative. Exigency refers to the demand for scholarly intervention. Stasis refers to the specific standstill in the field the project attempts to overcome. Narrative refers to the speaker’s capacity to situate the project within an ongoing story that resonates with the audience.

#### Assignment

Your assignment is to present the findings of your independent project to a campus audience at the upcoming poster session of student work. You will craft a five-minute oral presentation, accompanied by a visual presentation on a poster board (which should have its own set of criteria and guidelines as well).

#### Presentation guidelines

1. Offer a general introduction to the primary theme of your project
2. Narrow focus to the specific concept, problem, or question you addressed
3. Pose an exigency for your intervention, i.e., what specifically motivated your project?
4. Identify the stasis or scholarly impasse in the field: Does your project:
  - a. Close a gap in knowledge?
  - b. Apply knowledge in a new direction?
  - c. Refute existing beliefs in the field?
  - d. Combine multiple perspectives?
5. Explain the broader significance of addressing that question or problem
6. Explain your method of investigation, minimizing technical jargon
7. Share your findings and acknowledge limitations
8. Highlight the potential impact of your work for a lay audience
9. Frame each component within a broader scholarly and social narrative
10. Point to potential future directions of scholarship

Remember, the goal of your presentation is to provide a lay audience with the necessary information and context to make sense of A) what problem your project addresses; B) why it is significant; and C) the takeaway of your findings. Your audience will not walk away experts, but they should walk away better informed and interested in your work.

## Sample 4: Informing unfavorable audiences about contemporary critical concepts

### Rationale

The following assignment addresses the challenge of communicating new and often troubling concepts to audiences outside the academy. It applies to a sociology course but could easily be adjusted to most courses across the humanities and beyond. The intended audience is a group of (hypothetical) police officers, but it could also be adjusted to a continuing education class or perhaps even students outside the realm of inquiry in question. The assignment centers on the challenges of A) introducing new, sometimes disturbing, information to groups settled in their ways of thinking; and B) connecting with unfavorable audiences while learning how to negotiate your mutual space.

### Assignment

Recently we have explored a range of critical concepts such as implicit bias, whiteness, systemic racism, and intersectionality. Although such concepts carry a scholarly inflection, they are most relevant beyond the classroom in social realms such as law enforcement. Likewise, your task is to prepare a thirty-minute workshop addressing at least two of the concepts above for a (hypothetical) audience of town council members. The presentation will be divided into a lecture and an interactive activity.

Please bear in mind, the town council members are open to learning, but they remain uncertain or even skeptical of certain terms circulating in academia. Your goal is to provide the town council members A) with useful introductions to the scholarly concepts, so they can B) better address the needs of the community they serve, and C) feel compelled to come back and attend a second workshop with interested colleagues. If successful, you will have the opportunity to transform your presentation into a proposed policy recommendation.

### Presentation guidelines

1. Consider your rhetorical situation:
  - a. Exigence: What is the urgent demand of your presentation?
  - b. Audience: Whom are you addressing?
  - c. Constraints: What barriers exist between your audience and your intended goal?
2. The answers to the questions above will inform your entire presentation.
3. Consider your audience
  - a. What is their typical level of education?
  - b. What is their relationship to the topic and to you?
  - c. What is at stake for them with regard to this material?
  - d. Which style of communication will best connect to them?
4. Consider the available means of persuasion
  - a. Statistics, Definitions, Analogies, Testimonies, Narratives, etc.
5. Consider the multiple ways to frame the situation and how these concepts apply to it.
6. What activities might best facilitate empathy and other useful dynamics?
7. Consider your long-term goals and strategize which devices will best help accomplish them.

## **Sample 5: Role-playing a public forum addressing contemporary issues public controversy**

### Rationale

The following assignment stems from a media policy and law course but easily could be adjusted to courses across the curriculum. Its purpose is to test student knowledge of course content while also testing students' capacities to think through public issues from the perspectives of various stakeholders and create compelling arguments for specific audiences.

### Assignment: Judicial hearing on data privacy

The class will be assigned to participate in a judicial hearing regarding the obligation of media companies such as Apple to grant government access to customers' private information under exceptional circumstances. Two students will be assigned the part of Solicitor General, and two students will be assigned the part of Apple attorneys. Each side will be granted seven minutes of time to address the court, which they can also defer strategically. Nine students will each be assigned to the role of a specific court justice, responding to legal arguments from the perspective of that judge. The judges will then share fifteen minutes to question the attorneys.

### Alternative format: Legislative hearing on media censorship

The class will be assigned to participate in a legislative hearing regarding the issue of censorship on third-party platforms of digital content. Each student will choose to play the role of a particular U.S. senator, C.E.O. of a particular corporation, or another relevant stakeholder. Each person will be given two minutes to advance a particular argument with regard to the issue, keeping in mind one's constituents, employees, stakeholders, etc.

### Presentation guidelines

1. Research the interests of your assigned character
2. Research the interests of your intended audience(s)
3. Research the history of the topic and its ensuing debate
4. Research the points and counterpoints of your position
5. Cite sources when necessary
6. Adhere to the generic expectations of the setting
7. Speak extemporaneously
8. Practice improvising Q&A to prepare for answering questions on the fly
9. Do not take criticism personally; remember, people are performing roles
10. Practice adjusting arguments in light of critical questions and counterarguments

## Sample 6: Public Dialogue

### Rationale

The following assignment addresses the perennial challenge to spark and facilitate robust classroom dialogue. Contrary to common misconception, the activity requires more than a simple prompt for discussion. It demands careful facilitation and clear ground rules designed to cultivate meaningful reflection and peer engagement.

### Assignment: Class discussion

A significant portion of your final grade will stem from participation, and a significant portion of your participation grade will stem from class discussion. Over the course of the semester, we will examine course content in a number of ways, including by engaging one another in meaningful dialogue. During class discussions, students will be evaluated according the following criteria, which we elaborate in greater detail in an upcoming class:

### Guidelines for discussion

1. Direct comments to one another rather than the instructor.
2. Respond to the previous comment before changing direction.
3. Attempt to understand one another before simply expressing disagreement.
4. Contextualize disagreements and try to identify the precise point of conflict.
5. Utilize devices to ensure optimal communication, e.g., “if I understand you correctly...”
6. Shoot for depth rather than breadth. Dig deeper into the topic before branching out.
7. Support comments with evidence and cite course readings when possible.
8. Cite classmates to acknowledge their contributions and build on their ideas.
9. Consider the diverse perspectives and experiences of your classmates.
10. Open yourself to the possibility of transformation.
11. Engage criticism as an opportunity to sharpen your perspective.

### Ground rules for discussion

1. Separate people from their ideas—avoid ad-hominem attacks.
2. Speak for yourself, not others, and certainly not entire groups.
3. Resist “side-barring” your conversation; get others involved.
4. Do not interrupt.
5. Use positive body language to help build a trusting environment.
6. (For at least the first couple weeks) Let everyone speak once before you speak again.

**Sample 7: Grading**

**Oral Presentation Rubric**

**Introduction**

1. Grabs audience's attention with prepared opening statement
2. Piques audience investment by addressing problem/urgency
3. Clearly states thesis/solution, main points and context

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**Invention**

1. Clearly defines material for intended audience
2. Provides ample and effective examples
3. Utilizes a variety of informational strategies/cogent arguments
4. Anticipates and addresses audience questions/concerns

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**Arrangement**

1. Logical division of main points
2. Fluid progression of material and rhetorical moves
3. Clear topic and transitional statements
4. Coherent overarching narrative

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**Delivery**

1. Extemporaneous, i.e., conversational, yet prepared
2. Appropriately suited to audience and situation
3. Strong vocal variety, diction and projection
4. Deliberate tempo/pacing/pauses

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**Style**

1. Engaging command of tropes
2. Measured generation of pathos
3. Repertoire of rhetorical devices
4. Balance of rhetorical appeals

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**Conclusion**

1. Restates thesis and summarizes main points
2. Reemphasizes social significance and urgency
3. Leaves audience with memorable clincher

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**Keep up:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Citations:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Work on:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consider:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please note:** Of course, the grading rubric can be adjusted in numerous ways in light of the specific goals of the instructor and the contours of the assignment. There are, however, recommended best practices. For example, it helps to utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative feedback. It also helps to strike an optimal middle ground between overly broad categories and reductively narrow objectives. Finally, notice the absence of categories such as “**content.**” Such terminology exacerbates the misconception that content comes first and communication comes second. In reality, we see that the quality of the presentation remains indivisible to the rhetorical choices on which it rests. In other words, knowledge is never devoid of communication.