A Student-Devised Evaluation Form

Goal: To describe an in-class activity in which students devise an objective critique, for form evaluating the delivery aspects of graded speeches.

Speech-making involves material selection, organization, and delivery. The public speaking instructor can specify parameters for material selection and organization by defining the assignment (e.g., a 4-6 minute informative speech containing an introduction, body with 3 main points in which 2 sources are cited, and a conclusion). Further, students learn material on selection and organization skills in both the written and oral communication classrooms. However, the speech teacher has sole responsibility for instruction in delivery. Further, the speech assignment generally does not provide parameters for delivery. Indeed, it is difficult to identify objective criteria for evaluating delivery aspects of in-class speeches. Although 9 of the 13 evaluation forms recommended by D.G. Bock and E.H. Bock in their Evaluating Classroom Speaking (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1981) contain delivery elements, they list nonspecific criteria, such as “Is the speaker communicative?” and “Were the gestures meaningful?” Such general criteria may lead to disagreement among multiple critiquers, as well as disagreement between speaker and the grade assigner.

This essay describes an in-class activity in which students devise an objective critique form for evaluating the delivery aspects of graded speeches. Because the students themselves devise the form, they do not complain about the instructor’s selections of evaluation criteria. Further, they share consensual meaning regarding the specific criteria, thus eliminating most disagreements between multiple critiquers.

The activity requires 1-2 class periods and should be conducted before any graded speeches begin. The period begins with a “pop quiz.” Students write answers to the following 3 oral questions:

1. Sam appeared nervous as he spoke. What did Sam do with his hands?
2. Susan gave an excellent speech! What was Susan’s voice like?
3. During his speech, John maintained good eye contact. How often did he look at his notes?

Next, the instructor reviews the answers orally, noting the wide variety of answers. Then s/he explains that specific (vs. general and/or evaluative) feedback provides the speaker with...
more helpful information by offering descriptions of problematic, as well as positive, behaviors. At this point, the instructor talks briefly about behavior descriptions, defining the concept (a specific description of an observable behavior such as, "John looked at his notes during the first 30 seconds of his speech," and noting the nonjudgmental nature of such descriptions.

Next, groups containing 3-4 students are formed to generate lists of behavior actions that describe excellent delivery in extemporaneous speech making. The teacher assigns each group an aspect of delivery, such as eye contact, gestures, body movement and posture, voice, use of props and visual aids, audience inaudible language, to discuss for the next 7-10 minutes. When the volvement, groups complete their task, one at a time, they write their lists of behavior descriptions on the chalkboard and the teacher facilitates class discussion of the lists. Behavior descriptions are added, deleted, and/or modified until each class member agrees that the list defines excellent delivery for that topic.

The class uses behavior descriptions as a check list which,