IMPROMPTU SPEAKING FOR A PURPOSE

The ability to speak to an audience without prior preparation is a skill that can be improved through practice. Choosing topics that are engaging for students and meaningful as aids to instruction is critical. For example, "Speak for one minute on the color green," will not lead to a purposeful speech.

Devise topics using action verbs in the speech prompts to create speaking experiences that are engaging and easy for students to personalize creatively with their own explanations, arguments, and examples, but that also reinforce the instructional goal of speaking to achieve a specific purpose with the audience.

Think in terms of a prompt for speaking rather than a topic. Each prompt is worded in the form of a command rather than a question or phrase. Begin each prompt with an action verb and a reference to the audience, and end with an appropriate task.

Action Verb: Demonstrate for your audience
Task: Telephone etiquette

The action verb *demonstrate* can be paired with any number of tasks, depending upon the course and goals of the lesson. For example, *the proper use of a semi-colon* in English composition; *how to multiply negative exponents* in mathematics; or *how to open an interview* in counseling.

Action verbs may be adapted for multiple disciplines—help, reflect on, give, urge, show, introduce, describe, suggest, explain, teach, criticize, preview, advise, remind, take a stand on, predict, review, ask, demand, clarify, invoke, compare. This list can be expanded by varying the tasks associated with a particular action verb. For instance, *remind* can become: *Remind your audience to proofread their papers; remind your audience of the importance of good study habits*.

Prompts are prepared in advance on index cards, using one prompt per card, and worded with action verbs that identify a specific task for the speaker to accomplish. To introduce the activity, tell students that they will receive a prompt that asks them to accomplish a specific task in a 30-second to one-minute speech.

Distribute the index cards to three or four students at a time, and provide some time to think.

The following action verbs are paired with no particular task but invite students to be inventive:
- Reassure your audience.
- Bore your audience.
- Apologize to your audience.
- Reprimand your audience.
- Warn your audience.
- Congratulate your audience.
- Frighten your audience.
- Inspire your audience.
- Awaken your audience.

After the speeches, lead a discussion. Ask the class to assess the effectiveness of the speeches in achieving the desired responses. The following questions may be explored:
1. Which speeches were most effective?
2. How did the most effective speakers clarify their purposes for the audience?
3. What role does having a specific task to achieve in mind play in the development of an effective speech?
4. How does organization affect the success of a speech?

Students report enjoying this activity because prompts worded in this way allow for creativity and flexibility. No two speeches are alike; therefore, the prompts can be used multiple times without duplication. In addition, wording prompts with action verbs bring the concept of purposeful speaking to life while reinforcing the goals of a lesson.

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A NEW ADVISING STRATEGY

We meet our hygiene students in individualized "advisory" groups of second- and first-year students, divided among five faculty members. Each faculty member meets over lunch with her students (usually 12 or more) two or three times in one semester. We pair second-year "big sisters" with first-year "little sisters," have them sit together and help one another along the way.

The initial objective of advisory groups was as a quality control and chart audit while the student/practitioner was present. We wanted to re-emphasize the importance of documentation. It morphed into something far more fantastic. The students were comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas in these small groups; they asked questions they may not have asked in a larger group.

The meeting typically starts with the big sister and little sister exchanging a patient's chart (selected randomly by the secretary), each reviewing the other's for record of treatment, signatures, and information recorded about the dental hygiene diagnosis. This can take place between the two students only or be incorporated into the whole group. Next, students share concerns—i.e., "I don't think I'm going to finish my requirements." or "I'm not doing well in pharmacology." Many times it is not faculty members who reassure, but fellow students. Anything is fair game in these meetings as long as it remains positive and constructive.

The advisory groups have strengthened and improved the program by
- offering opportunities for second-year students to mentor first-year students
- creating an evaluation tool for clinical procedures
- enhancing communication between students and instructors
- encouraging fellowship between students and instructors
- offering an opportunity for peer review of patient treatment
- developing higher-order thinking skills in students
- encouraging student self-evaluation
- improving overall patient care in clinic
- increasing faculty calibration, and
- enhancing student advising.

Challenges and difficulties include:
- **Time**—It is difficult to find a day and time when first- and second-year students are available.
- **Instructor cooperation**—Some groups meet more than others.
- **Consistency**—Meeting outcomes may be different because no guidelines are available.
- **Follow through**—We need better mechanisms for ensuring that issues being addressed in the meetings appear on the agenda for faculty discussion.

We have received positive feedback about our advisory group meetings. Students perform better in clinic, and faculty are more collaborative than before. We anticipate more positive changes as our advisory group concept develops and matures.

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