

## SE 300 PUBLIC SPEAKING

### Course Description:

This course is designed to develop the basic oral communication skills that you will need to deliver a coherent, persuasive public speech that advances ideas logically to a particular audience on a specific occasion in order to achieve a clear purpose. These skills will serve you well not only in your academic work at the Institute but also in your civic and professional endeavors after you graduate.

As part of the Core Curriculum, this course encourages active learning. Therefore, most of the class time will be devoted to your speeches and the subsequent critiques. You will be asked to give an oral interpretation, an informative speech, and an argument/persuasion speech and to participate in the class discussion of your classmates' speeches.

### Course Goals:

Once you complete SE 300, you will be able to

- analyze the audience, occasion, and purpose of a rhetorical situation in order to formulate a response to an idea or problem;
- develop ideas fully, offering compelling support and evidence for assertions or conclusions;
- organize ideas coherently;
- speak in language that is grammatically correct and appropriate for the particular audience;
- speak at an appropriate pace and at sufficient volume, sustain eye contact, and use body language effectively to communicate points; and
- employ visual aids that are designed and timed to reinforce points.

**Required Text:** none

### Schedule of Assignments:

Date	Meeting	Assignment
Sept. 3	1	Introduction. Syllabus. Assign oral interpretation
Sept. 10	2	Practice oral interpretation
Sept. 17	3	Oral interpretation ( <b>Groups 1 and 2</b> )
Sept. 24	4	Oral interpretation ( <b>Groups 3 and 4</b> )
Oct. 1	5	Informative speech: introduction
Oct. 8	6	Informative speech ( <b>Group 4</b> )
Oct. 15	7	Informative speech ( <b>Group 3</b> )
Oct. 22	8	Informative speech ( <b>Group 2</b> )
Oct. 29	9	Informative speech ( <b>Group 1</b> )
Nov. 5	10	Argument/persuasion speech: introduction

Nov. 12	11	Argument/persuasion speech ( <b>Group 3</b> )
Nov. 19	12	Argument/persuasion speech ( <b>Group 1</b> )
Dec. 3	13	Argument/persuasion speech ( <b>Group 4</b> )
Dec. 10	14	Argument/persuasion speech ( <b>Group 2</b> )

### **Evaluation:**

The oral interpretation will have a weight of two grades, the informative speech of four grades, and the argument/persuasion speech of eight grades. Your comments on your classmates' speeches will have a weight of one grade. You must give all three speeches in order to pass the course.

### **Policies and Procedures:**

- 1. Work for Grade.** See the attached statements of Institute and Departmental Work for Grade policies.
- 2. Group Assignments.** You will be permanently assigned to one of four speech groups; the dates of your speeches are determined by this group assignment.
- 3. Attendance.** You must attend at least ten class meetings in order to receive credit for the course. In other words, you cannot miss more than four class meetings, however legitimate your excuses. *Be careful:* absences from a course that meets only once a week accumulate quickly.
- 4. Preparation.** This is mainly a skills course, and skills are sharpened through practice. You should rehearse any oral presentation at least **three** times—once, perhaps, in front of another cadet who has already taken SE 300 or is currently taking it. You may act upon his or her suggestions in revising portions of your speech.
- 5. Conferences.** I encourage you to meet individually with me as you plan your speeches. You can set up an appointment ahead of time or come to my office during my office hours.
- 6. My contact information and office hours.**

## INSTITUTE WORK FOR GRADE POLICY

Development of the spirit as well as the skills of academic inquiry is central to the mission of VMI's Academic Program. As a community of scholars, posing questions and seeking answers, we invariably consult and build upon the ideas, discoveries, and products of others who have wrestled with related issues and problems before us. We are obligated ethically and in many instances legally to acknowledge the sources of all borrowed material that we use in our own work. This is the case whether we find that material in conventional resources, such as the library or cyberspace, or discover it in other places like conversations with our peers.

Academic integrity requires the full and proper documentation of any material that is not original with us. It is therefore a matter of honor. To misrepresent someone else's words, ideas, images, data, or other intellectual property as one's own is stealing, lying, and cheating all at once.

Because the offense of improper or incomplete documentation is so serious, and the consequences so potentially grave, the following policies regarding work for grade have been adopted as a guide to cadets and faculty in upholding the Honor Code under which all VMI cadets live:

### 1) Cadets' responsibilities

"Work for grade" is defined as any work presented to an instructor for a formal grade or undertaken in satisfaction of a requirement for successful completion of a course or degree requirement. All work submitted for grade is considered the cadet's own work. "Cadet's own work" means that he or she has composed the work from his or her general accumulation of knowledge and skill except as clearly and fully documented and that it has been composed especially for the current assignment. No work previously submitted in any course at VMI or elsewhere will be resubmitted or reformatted for submission in a current course without the specific approval of the instructor.

In all work for grade, failure to distinguish between the cadet's own work and ideas and the work and ideas of others is known as plagiarism. Proper documentation clearly and fully identifies the sources of all borrowed ideas, quotations, or other assistance. The cadet is referred to the VMI-authorized handbook for rules concerning quotations, paraphrases, and documentation.

In all written work for grade, the cadet must include the words "HELP RECEIVED" conspicuously on the document, and he or she must then do one of two things: (1) state "none," meaning that no help was received except as documented in the work; or (2) explain in detail the nature of the help received. In oral work for grade, the cadet must make the same declaration before beginning the presentation. Admission of help received may result in a lower grade but will not result in prosecution for an honor violation.

Cadets are prohibited from discussing the contents of a quiz/exam until it is returned to them or final course grades are posted. This enjoinder does not imply that any inadvertent expression or behavior that might indicate one's feeling about the test should be considered a breach of honor. The real issue is whether cadets received information, not available to everyone else in the class,

which would give them an unfair advantage. If a cadet inadvertently gives or receives information, the incident must be reported to the professor and the Honor Court.

Each cadet bears the responsibility for familiarizing himself or herself thoroughly with the policies stated in this section, with any supplementary statement regarding work for grade expressed by the academic department in which he or she is taking a course, and with any special conditions provided in writing by the professor for a given assignment. If there is any doubt or uncertainty about the correct interpretation of a policy, the cadet should consult the instructor of the course. There should be no confusion, however, on the basic principle that it is never acceptable to submit someone else's work, written or otherwise, formally graded or not, as one's own.

The violation by a cadet of any of these policies will, if he or she is found guilty by the Honor Court, result in his or her being dismissed from VMI. Neither ignorance nor professed confusion about the correct interpretation of these policies is an excuse.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND FINE ARTS  
STATEMENT OF POLICY CONCERNING WORK FOR GRADE**

The following points apply to work done for courses taught in the Department of English and Fine Arts:

**1. Tutoring**

Unless directed otherwise in writing by the instructor, Cadets may receive **critical comments\*** from tutors on written assignments provided they explain the exact nature of this assistance in their Help Received statements. Cadets may seek assistance from tutors in both understanding course material and preparing for tests, and they do not need to cite this help in their Help Received statements.

**2. Peer Collaboration**

Unless directed otherwise in writing by the instructor, Cadets may receive **critical comments\*** from peers on written assignments provided they explain the exact nature of this assistance in their Help Received statements. Cadets may seek assistance from peers in both understanding course material and preparing for tests, and they do not need to cite this help in their Help Received statements.

**3. Computer Aids**

Cadets may use electronic spelling, style, and grammar checkers, and they do not have to cite this assistance in their Help Received statements.

**4. Documentation Format**

Cadets must use the MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation format when writing essays for courses in this department.

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**\*Definitions from the VMI Work for Grade Policy:**

“Offering **critical comments** means giving general advice on such matters as organization, thesis development, support for assertions, and patterns of errors. It does not include proofreading or editing.

**Proofreading** means correcting errors (e.g., in spelling, grammar, and punctuation). It is the last step taken by the writer in the **editing** process. In addition to the corrections made in proofreading, **editing** includes making such changes as the addition, deletion, or reordering of paragraphs, phrases, sentences, or words. **A cadet may not have his or her work proofread or edited by someone other than the instructor.**”

## ORAL INTERPRETATION ASSIGNMENT

For this assignment you are to select a prose passage to read aloud. It can be either fiction or non-fiction, but it should be interesting or exciting enough to appeal to your cadet audience. (No religious passages and no pornography, please.) Your reading should be between three and four minutes long. Your objective is to demonstrate that you can convey the *meaning*—the intellectual and emotional content—of your chosen passage.

- **Thesis:** You should select a passage which contains a clearly identifiable *thesis*. The thesis, either stated or, more usually, implied, is the author's main point. It is not the same as the subject, which merely identifies the content of the passage. "Capital punishment" would label the content of a passage the thesis of which might read thus: "Capital punishment is an instrument of revenge, not justice."
- **Tone:** You will also be expected to convey the *tone*, which is the writer's attitude toward his or her thesis and audience. You can do this by changing your facial expression, altering the volume or pitch of your voice, increasing or decreasing the speed at which you speak, etc.
- **3" X 5" card:** Before you begin reading, you will be asked to turn in a 3" X 5" card containing your name, the *thesis* of your selection, and the *tone* that you intend to convey. When you have finished your reading, your classmates will write down what they understand your thesis and tone to have been. Although it is unlikely that everyone will write down exactly the same thing, there should be a general similarity among the statements.
- **Eye contact:** Even though you are reading, you should make frequent eye contact with your audience. To do this, you will have to be thoroughly familiar with your passage. Therefore, you should read it aloud several times before coming to class. If while practicing you consistently fail to find your place again after looking up, do not attempt eye contact. If your reading is otherwise fluent, emphatic, moderately paced and sufficiently loud, you will lose few points.
- **Emphasis:** To hold the attention of your audience and to emphasize the important points in your passage you should, while maintaining a *generally* moderate tempo, vary the volume and speed of your delivery. You should also pause for emphasis where it seems effective to do so.

## INFORMATIVE SPEECH ASSIGNMENT

You're to deliver an informative speech lasting five minutes and requiring the use of visual aids. You may explain how something works, explain how to do something, analyze the cause of something, or explain how something happened. Your choice of topic will in most cases be dictated by your interests, although you might use this occasion to learn something new. Your presentation of the topic will in part be determined by your audience, which, fortunately, will be composed of cadets with whom you share many interests. Your objective is to offer your audience, the members of this class, interesting, perhaps useful, information. As you plan your speech, consider carefully what you need to include to ensure that they understand and remember what you have to say.

A speech on brewing coffee or field-stripping the M-14 will tell your fellow cadets nothing they didn't already know and will, even if effectively delivered, probably bore them. However, even a somewhat dully delivered speech explaining the steps to be taken after being bitten by a timber rattler should hold their attention. Therefore choose a topic that you're fairly sure will interest your listeners.

Your topic will, of course, determine what kinds of visual aids you use that is, whether objects, texts, or both. If, for example, you wanted to explain the meaning of the price-earning ratio used in estimating the value of a common stock, you could either project enlargements of Standard & Poore's tables with the overhead projector or display hand-lettered charts on an easel. If, on the other hand, you chose to explain how to pack a parachute you would have to display, or project, photographs or diagrams of the steps involved, for packing the thing in class would prove hopelessly cumbersome. An explanation of certain maneuvers in rock-climbing would probably involve the use of both diagrams *and* pieces of equipment.

Explaining something in five minutes is considerably more challenging than reading for grade. Once you've chosen a topic and brainstormed it, you should arrange the results according to a rationally articulated outline. You should, moreover, shape an effective *introduction* about a clearly stated *thesis* and devise a brief, memorable *conclusion*. Because audiences have notoriously weak memories, you should somehow build into the structure of your speech three statements of your main ideas.

You may equip yourself with one 3" X 5" index card, on which you may place notes, an outline, or whatever. Quotations may be written out on a separate sheet and read, but because you must sustain eye-contact with your audience these should be few and brief.

Remember that you're trying to acquire the public speaker's skills and that the acquisition of skills requires practice. Once you have chosen a topic, rationally organized it, and found (or created) the visual aids that will clarify and reinforce its main points, you should rehearse your speech several times *using your visual aids*.

## ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION SPEECH

### PURPOSE AND CONTENT

Your purpose is to convince your audience of the correctness of your views upon a controversial issue. To accomplish this aim, you will use both argument and persuasion. **Argument** is the *rational* content of a speech—its organization, its logic, its ideas, and the examples which support its general assertions. **Persuasion** is the *emotional* content—the result of the use of those skills which you have been sharpening in your first two speeches: effective pacing, modulation of volume, change of emphasis, sustained eye-contact, well-timed gestures, and so forth.

### AUDIENCE

Your topic will, in part, determine the identity of your audience. If you address an issue of interest to cadets, you will speak to the members of this section, with whose attitudes you are generally familiar. If, however, you address a wider issue, one affecting Institute policy, you might speak to the Board of Visitors or the Academic Board. If you do, you must be prepared to take into account what you imagine to be their biases, their likely objections, the shared attitudes of their social class, and so forth. You must also address them in an appropriately formal manner. If you are speaking on an issue of interest to those beyond the Institute, you may want to imagine an audience elsewhere (e.g., a congressional committee, the city council of your hometown, the school board of your high school). In any case, as you plan your speech, you will need to consider carefully your purpose, your audience members, and the occasion on which you would address them.

### REQUIREMENTS

- Your speech must contain a strong, clear, effectively placed thesis: a comprehensive statement of the position that you have chosen to take on the issue on which you are speaking.
- It must be five to seven minutes long.
- Its point of view must differ from that which, in your opinion, is generally held by your audience. (There is no point in attempting to convince the already convinced—i.e., “preaching to the choir.”)
- It must be extemporized from the notes contained on a single 3" X 5" index card, although quotations may be read from accompanying sheets of paper.
- It must involve the use of visual aids.

- Before you begin your speech, you must announce to the class who your intended audience is.
- You must have your topic (and intended audience) approved by me no later than two days before you speak.

## METHODS: ARGUMENT

Although a single method of organization might provide the framework of your argument, you will probably use several methods, depending upon your topic. Whatever your plan, you must cite *specific examples* to buttress your general assertions.

- Some topics lend themselves to development by means of **example**, of which there are several types: statistical, historical, literary, hypothetical, personal (anecdotes), etc.
- Other topics require that you develop your argument through the method of **comparison and contrast**, of which there are two major patterns:

**Element-by-element.** First, you define all of the characteristics of one element of the comparison. Then, being careful to recall the points you have already made, you proceed to define those of the second element.

**Point-by-point.** You define and discuss *both* elements with reference to the first point of similarity or (dissimilarity)—then proceed to explain the second point, the third point, and so forth. This method is somewhat safer because it *forces* you to compare (or contrast) and thus to avoid the risk of producing two self-contained “mini-speeches.”

- You may choose to argue by means of **analogy**: an extended comparison the purpose of which is to explain an unfamiliar quantity with reference to the details of a familiar one. (For example, you might compare the expanding universe of the Big Bang theory of creation to a rising loaf of raisin bread.)
- If your topic warrants, you may use **cause and effect** as your main method of organization. To be persuasive, a causal argument must deal not only with *immediate* causes (or effects) but also with some important *remote* causes (or effects).
- The basic plan of your argument may be either deductive or inductive. The former requires that you argue from *premises*, or general propositions, the latter to generalize from *specific data*. Whatever method you use, you should argue logically and honestly, being careful to avoid the fallacies listed in the accompanying handout.

## METHODS: PERSUASION

The methods of persuasion are designed to engage the *emotions* of your audience—to provide the “medium” by which your “message” (your argument) is transmitted to them. It is by such methods that you communicate your apparent enthusiasm for your topic, sustain rapport, and establish ethos. They include the following:

- “Charged” *diction*: words precisely selected and carefully placed for emotional impact
- *Examples* chosen for their graphic, unusual or inherently interesting content
- Modulations of the *speed* and *volume* of your delivery for dramatic effect
- Alterations in *tone* and *emphasis*
- Emphatic, carefully rehearsed *gestures* and *body movements*
- Sustained *eye-contact*
- Interestingly designed, legibly executed, and skillfully handled *visual aids*