

THE USE OF REASONED RESPONSE AS TRAINING FOR LIMITED PREPARATION SPEAKING

by

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Practice and competitive performance in limited preparation speaking events is a wonderful training ground for beginning speakers. Students are able to practice analysis of evidence, reasoning, organization, and speaking from limited notes. However, for beginning students these basic events can seem quite daunting. Attempts to compile evidence in a coherent manner for an extemp speech or struggles to present an eloquent impromptu speech with an aura of confidence can frustrate the young speaker and dampen the desire for continued practice. Too frequently the result is that the student is too embarrassed to practice or compete in front of more

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experienced team members or competitors and some even challenge their thoughts of forensic competition and education altogether.

In 1993, an activity was created which could prove useful in offering a graceful introduction to limited preparation events for new competitors. The activity is called "reasoned response" (Williams, Carver, & Hart, 1993). This activity is an impromptu public speaking exercise which gives the student more information in which to frame their speech than is found in traditional impromptu speaking, yet they will not be overwhelmed with the amount of material that can accompany the development of an extemp speech.

In reasoned response, students are given information on a prep slip which details a location, speaker's role, and situation. The location can be anything as general as "in the Southern part of the United States" or as specific as "an elementary classroom in Chicago". The speaker is to consider that he or she is about to deliver the speech in that location. The speaker's role will offer a description of what the speaker's persona should be or even whom they should be. The speaker's role might, for instance, be a "firefighter" or "an angry principal". Fi-

nally, the situation will explain to the student why they are speaking and what the specific subject matter will be.

A couple examples of prep slips would be:

Location:

Your principal's office

Speaker's Role:

Senior Class President

Situation:

You are attempting to persuade your principal to introduce and fund a new sport (of your choice) as an extracurricular activity.

Location:

New York City

Speaker's Role:

Mayor

Situation:

You are attempting to convince a group of concerned citizens that the city is now safe, after the Sept. 11 attacks.

The reasoned response activity can be beneficial for new forensics students practicing limited preparation events because it provides them with more context and information in which to generate a logical response. The student is still speaking with little preparation time (using the standard impromptu speaking, of seven minutes in which to prepare and deliver the speech, is

ideal) and minimal notes, but she or he can more easily develop a mental frame for the speech purpose and structure. This should facilitate the development of limited preparation speaking skill and, more importantly, confidence from the presentation of a clear and fairly clean presentation.

Additional Benefits of the Reasoned Response

As an additional educational benefit, the reasoned response allows the coach to introduce the importance of audience analysis. The concept of audience and audience analysis is largely absent from traditional impromptu and extemporaneous speaking. The notion of audience adaptation is relegated to the judge(s) in the room with acknowledgments of the other competitors or observers who might also be observing the performance.

Reasoned response is unique in that it creates an audience for the speaker to envision for the invention of the speech. From the above prep slip with New York City, the student could have a few cues to rely on for the adaptation of the speech. Aside from assuming the communicator style that would be appropriate for a mayor,

the student can attempt to adapt to a New York audience with recognition that the topic will address a very sensitive subject for them. The coach can follow the speech with a discussion of how the vocal tone, issues addressed, and confidence and credibility derived through the presentation would have affected a real New York audience.

This activity also offers the opportunity for coaches, or tournament directors, to help students explore issues of ethics or morality. While some caution is called for, coaches can write prep slips which requires the student to make decisions which challenge the notions of what would be the right or moral action to take. For example, the following prep slip could be used:

Location:

Employer's office

Speaker's Role:

Your employer suspects that a co-worker's stole company supplies.

Situation:

You are in your first job after graduation from H.S. or college and your employer has asked you about a co-worker's theft of two staplers and a small bundle of pencils.

You know for a fact that those items were stolen by the co-worker who happens to be your friend.

This prep slip requires the student to make a determination as to whether he or she is going to reveal the friend's theft, reveal the friend's theft but try to defend those actions or ask for leniency, or whether they will cover up the theft, possibly because it was a small loss to the company. Some coaches may not be comfortable with this approach to forensic education. However, a concern with ethical behavior and communication ethics is certainly a valid pedagogical issue for the study of communication and forensic competition.

Use of Reasoned Response in Competition

Reasoned response has been introduced as an instructional tool to help ease the new forensics student into limited preparation speaking events. The activity can also be used as a competitive event and has been used as such with great success. Texas Tech University uses reasoned response in one or two high school tournaments each year. The event works best if not put in the same pattern with impromptu speaking, thus allowing students to compete in both events and realize the difference that an (albeit hypothetical) audience makes in the presentation.

The reasoned response is a very useful event for tournaments scheduled early in the season. Frequently, entries will include a number of students who are new to forensics competition and are "trying out" the activity. They may not have events like oratory, prose, or dramatic interpretation prepared yet. Reasoned response provides them with an event that they can learn and practice quickly and enter in these early tournaments. This can help with retention of new forensics students.

Introducing the event would certainly require some basic information for the competitors and judges. The event is designed to operate with the same time limits as impromptu speaking and the use of hand time signals. The suggested primary issues for evaluation would include: speaking ability, adaptation to the situation, adaptation to the perceived audience members, and the strength of

the position advocated or information provided in the response. It should also be emphasized that the event is not meant to be an acting exercise. Students should refrain from the use of accents, posture, or movement which would coincide with the speaker's role. The coach or tournament director can assist students by writing prep slips that describes the speaker's role in more general than specific terms. For example, a prep slip could identify the speaker's role as "President of the United States" instead of "President George W. Bush".

Reasoned response has been offered here as an activity that can help the beginning student practice the skills required for competition in limited preparation speaking. Years of experience have also demonstrated that advanced students can also benefit from the audience component of the activity. The activity is also generally considered a very enjoyable speaking event allowing for creativity by both the coach who writes the prep slip and the student who responds to it. We encourage coaches to use this activity in practice and for tournament directors to consider its' worth as an experimental event.

References

Williams, D.E., Carver, C.T., & R.D. Hart (1993). Is it time for a change in impromptu speaking. *National Forensic Journal*, 11, 29-40.

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