

## Peer Critique Assignment Description

### *Objectives*

By writing peer critiques, students should refine their abilities to:

- Critically analyze all aspects of speech composition and delivery
- Distinguish between weak and strong support
- Identify unclear speech arrangement and identify possible solutions
- Diagnose delivery problems and propose remedies

### *Description*

Like a number of other arts, we refine our public speaking abilities through a mixture of instruction, practice, and imitation. As such, critically examining your peers' speeches provides you another venue for thinking about how to adapt to the complexity of different rhetorical situations. Additionally, individual speakers benefit immensely from articulate feedback from their audiences. Over the course of the quarter, you will be required to critique your classmates' speeches. Your peer critique assignments are listed on the speaker order sheet. You will be required to provide oral criticism immediately following a peer's speech, followed by written comments to be handed in to your TA. These peer critiques, like your self-critiques, will be graded on a ✓/- system.

### *In-class oral comments*

If you are called upon to provide an in-class critique, you should identify at least one strength of the speech and one area for improvement. Please remember that you will be hindering your classmate's future public speaking success by being untruthful, vague, or indirect about opportunities for improvement. By the same token, you should provide constructive criticism intended to help the speaker improve. Due to the time constraints of the class, we may not be able to get to everyone's comments during the assigned class time. Regardless of whether you deliver an oral critique, you must turn in written critiques by the beginning of the next discussion section.

### *Written comments*

In contrast to the in-class peer critiques, your written critiques should provide detailed and thorough feedback to the speaker concerning all aspects of the section you were assigned to critique. Your peer critiques should not be overly vague or praise the speaker for 90% of the critique. These are not softball critiques; we are all students of public speaking and can think about the real strengths and shortcomings of a speech. You are critiquing the speech, which was an act of communication between the speaker and the audience; you are not critiquing the person as a person. Your peer critiques should be, at minimum, half a page single-spaced in length (approximately 300 words). Peer critiques must be written in complete sentences and in essay format (no bullet points).

A peer critique will receive a ✓ if:

1. the student was in class to deliver an in-class critique
2. the student turns in 2 copies of the peer critique
3. the critique references specific parts of the observed speech
4. the critique identifies both strengths and weaknesses
5. the critique addresses some of the assigned critical questions (see below)
6. the critique is courteous and aimed at helping the speaker improve

A peer critique will receive a - if:

1. the student was not present in class on the day of the speech
2. the student only turns in 1 copy of the peer critique
3. the critique is overly vague
4. the critique only praises the observed speech and ignores its major weaknesses
5. the critique only provides a summary of the observed speech
6. the critique is rude towards the person

**DUE DATES:** You peer critiques are due during the following discussion section. If you are assigned to critique a peer on Tuesday the 9th, your peer critique paper is due on Thursday the 11th. If you are assigned to critique a peer on Thursday the 11th, your peer critique paper is due on Tuesday the 16th.

### ***What to critique***

When developing your peer critiques you should reference specific parts and passages of the speech. Avoid critiques that are overly vague (e.g. “Your introduction was good”, “I thought your speech flowed nicely”) and work on providing specific comments (e.g. “Your call for the replacement of the UW athletic director needed some testimony from a respected UW source”). Below are some questions you can use to guide your critique. **NOTE: You do not have to answer each and every question, but you should address a majority of the questions.** These are simply some questions to guide your analysis and critique of a speech

### **Impromptu Speech: Critical Focus on Invention and Arrangement**

- Did the speaker’s main points clearly support her/his thesis statement? How could this support have been clearer?
- Were the main points balanced? If not, what seemed out of balance?
- Did the speaker’s evidence clearly support her/his main points? How could this evidence have been clearer?
- Did the speaker provide concrete and specific evidence? How could this evidence have been stronger?
- Did the speaker provide a clear preview of her/his main points? How could this have been clearer?
- Did the speaker provide clear transitions? How could these have been clearer?
- Did the speaker provide a clear conclusion that summarized her/his main points? How could this have been clearer?

### **Persuasive Speech: Critical Focus on Argument**

- Did the speaker make her/his arguments clearly? Did you understand what the speaker was asserting? How could these arguments have been clearer?
- Did the speaker engage the opposing arguments effectively and fairly? Were there other arguments that the speaker did not address that she/he should have?
- Did the speaker make language choices that were appealing to an oppositional audience?
- Did the speaker provide enough supporting material to justify his/her claims? Where did the speaker need more supporting material/evidence?
- Was the supporting material appropriate for this speech? Was it credible?
- Was the speech delivered in a persuasive manner? How could the delivery have been more persuasive?

### **Advocacy Speech: Critical Focus on Style and Delivery**

- Did the speaker clearly explain the problem? Did the speaker clearly identify the problem that was obstructing the desired solutions? How could the identification of the problem and/or the adversary have been more powerful for the audience?
- Did the speaker make a clear argument? Was it clear what types of actions the audience should take? How could these solutions have been better?
- Did the speaker use stylistic devices well? Did the speaker’s language choice increase the speech’s intensity? How could the speaker have used language more effectively?
- Did the speaker motivate the audience? How could the speaker have engaged the audience more?
- Did the speaker deliver the speech passionately? Did the speaker engage and energize the audience?
- Did the speaker engage in appropriate advocacy behaviors? What else could the speaker have done to motivate the audience to act on her/his solutions?

### **Peer Critique for Myname Here's Persuasive Speech**

I thought this was a great speech that really spoke to the majority in the audience that was against the idea of expanding America's utilization on nuclear energy. The speaker began with a compelling attention-gaining device, that of the destruction of Hurricane Katrina and the resulting impact on our nation's oil supply. This set up a clear problem that called for her argument that we need to reconsider the benefits and potential costs of nuclear fuel. She also established her ethos well early on, by being calm, friendly, looking directly at her audience at all times and speaking in a measured, clear voice that was well-varied and easy to listen to. At the same time, it was clear that she was not simply reading from her notecard; her delivery was relatively natural although it was obvious she practiced and knew her material well.

The speaker's arrangement was good considering her audience—she spoke first about the most glaring concerns most people have about nuclear power: accidental meltdown, waste storage, and possible security breaches. She then provided information to the audience that effectively rebutted their concerns; aka new technology has been designed to address nearly all of these problems. After putting her audience at ease, she provided several independent advantages of using nuclear energy. Here she provided excellent reluctant testimony from a founder of Greenpeace that he was in support of nuclear energy as a source of clean fuel. Considering most of those opposed to nuclear energy are environmental groups, this was an excellent use of evidence from a source the audience would probably find credible. I also really liked her airplane analogy that illustrated that we accept some risks in order to gain higher benefits. In fact, I wish she had developed this further; it felt like it went by quite quickly. Her conclusion was great in that it provided it reviewed the primary points she was making and re-visited the purpose of her speech; New Orleans showed us how precarious and dangerous dependence on traditional fuel sources can be, and we need to consider new ones.

I think there are a few things the speaker can do to improve. While this was an excellent speech, there were still some areas for improvement. At some points it was a bit unclear as to where she was getting some of her information—she cited some very specific data and didn't always tell her audience where this information came from. For the most part though, her oral citations were quite good. Her structure was fairly clear, but her signposts were not always reinforcing what that structure was. (e.g. she used "and" as her only signpost, numbers might have been more helpful). This was a bit of a problem since there was so much evidence and some of the sub-points were so closely related that I was unclear at times as to what environmentalist concern she was addressing. In her discussion of waste storage, she did not discuss current opposition many environmental activists have to the Yucca Mountain facility—it's hard to prove waste storage isn't a problem by using a primary example that many people consider to be a big problem—if anything it might feed their concerns. While her delivery was also overall excellent, the speaker had a tendency to look a bit staged at points. While she engaged the audience frequently, there were moments where voice and gestures seemed unnatural. Her voice was quite clear and loud enough to be heard at almost all points, however, her volume dropped at points and it was hard to hear.