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## Meeting Certification Requirements for Teacher Certification through the Basic Course

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# Meeting Certification Requirements for Teacher Certification through the Basic Course

## **Cover Page Footnote**

This paper was named a 1993 Speech Communication Association Top Paper.

# Meeting Certification Requirements For Teacher Certification Through the Basic Course

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In the 1980's education in the United States experienced unprecedented scrutiny and criticism which resulted in the identification of serious shortcomings. For example, a U.S. Department of Labor report claimed that in spite of efforts at improvements of schools during the 1980's, "students were performing essentially no better at the end of the decade than they were at the beginning." (April 1992. p. 7).

Among the many responses designed to improve education in the 1990's has been the strengthening of teacher education programs. Many institutions have recently made admission requirements more rigorous for teacher education programs and some states now require satisfactory completion of special tests to gain certification. Among the ideas for improving teacher preparation is the suggestion that demonstrated communication proficiency should also be a condition for licensure.

The recognition that effective communication skills is a requisite for teaching effectiveness is not new. Prior to the 80's, both education and communication professional organizations recognized the need for these skills. Among professional educational associations who have recognized the need for effective communication skills by teachers include the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

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(1979) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (1980). At its 1980 annual meeting in Dallas, the latter organization resolved that "oral communication skills" should be assessed for entry or continuance in a teacher education program. Among communication professionals who have addressed the role of communication skills in teaching are Rubin and Feezel who note that "abilities to carry on effective interpersonal relations with others, to speak clearly and concisely, to lead and interact in group environments, and to listen with understanding and empathy are most important for all teachers" (Rubin & Feezel, 1985).

Unfortunately, general recognition of the importance of communication skills for teachers for more than fifteen years has yet to be translated into clearly defined communication competency expectations within teacher education curriculums. A recent report by a subcommittee of the Committee on Assessment and Testing of the Speech Communication Association claims that "The actual requirement of competency in teacher education programs is at best unclear and inadequate." One of the conclusions of this subcommittee is that "Speech communication educators have not developed a clear and consistent procedure for assessing oral communication abilities" (DeWitt, Bozik, Hay, Litterst, Strohkirch, & Yocum, 1991).

The Communication Department at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh directly addressed the concerns expressed by the subcommittee, both by developing clear statements of oral communication proficiency for teachers and by valid and reliable procedures for assessment. This article explains how this was accomplished by describing the specific procedures used to assess cognitive, public speaking, interpersonal and listening competencies.

## INITIAL PLANNING

Effective on January 1, 1987, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction adopted a rule stating that all institutions which offer professional education programs leading to certification must submit to the Department for approval, written evidence that their programs comply with the requirements of Chapter PI4. The critical section of the chapter was PI 4.06(6)(a)2 which required "Demonstrated proficiency in speaking and listening as determined by the institution" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1987).

The speech fundamentals course has been a requirement for education students for many years. The new Department of Public Instruction rule forced many Communication faculty to reflect upon the question of whether they were satisfied with the education students' "demonstrated proficiency." Until then, each instructor had been responsible for developing his or her own course and standardization of the proficiencies across all sections of the course was nonexistent.

Thus, an appropriate time had come for the staff to define "proficiency in speaking and listening" and to develop procedures for assessing student performance. With the support of an institutional grant, the staff worked on the development of the course for several weeks during the summer to address the questions pertinent to a large-scale assessment effort.

The major question addressed was "What does the proficient communicator know and do?" We agreed that proficiency should include public speaking, as well as interpersonal and listening skills. This decision was based upon the content of the textbook for the course and a survey of employers regarding communication skills necessary for career success (Willmington, 1986). Definitions of the specific communication proficiencies we use are developed in the following four sections: assessing cognitive proficiency, assessing public speak-

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ing proficiency, assessing interpersonal proficiency, and assessing listening proficiency.

## **ASSESSING COGNITIVE PROFICIENCY**

Most theorists agree that the proficient communicator is able to demonstrate both cognitive and behavioral skills. Wiemann and Backlund, for example, argue that both non-behavioral (cognitive ) aspects of the communication process and specific references to actual communication behavior are necessary for a complete understanding of the communication behavior of individuals (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980).

Because we concurred that knowledge of the basic principles of communication is an essential part of communication proficiency, we began the task of developing an instrument to assess this knowledge. Cognitive proficiency is properly and most efficiently measured by a pencil and paper test. Thus, faculty committees developed questions to assess knowledge of public speaking, interpersonal communication, and listening.

The outcome was four equivalent test forms — each consisting of 60 multiple-choice questions. The determination of the number of questions in each form of the test was based upon two factors: the amount of space devoted to the topic in the textbook used for the course and the amount of time devoted to the topic in the teaching of a typical section of the course. This is consistent with the advice of Lindquist, (1963).

The four forms of the exam were administered to sections of the basic course during the fall semester. Item analysis was performed on the questions to check for their ability to discriminate and their difficulty level. The discrimination measure examines whether persons who have high overall scores on the test select the correct answer to a question more frequently than do persons who have low scores. Questions

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found to discriminate inadequately were given to the appropriate proficiency team for revision.

A second measure was the difficulty level of the question (e.g., "What percent of the subjects are able to answer the question correctly?"). Questions answered correctly less than 30% of the time (too difficult ) or correctly more that 70% of the time (too easy) were given to the appropriate proficiency team for repair.

The exams were revised based on the item analysis and again administered to over 30 sections of the course the following semester. Based on these results, we established initial norms for the test banks. The mean score on the 60-item test banks was 43.5 with a standard deviation of 5.6. Using this data, we determined that a minimum score of 33 would be required to demonstrate cognitive proficiency.

To insure that the cognitive paper and pencil measure is reliable and valid, ongoing monitoring of the discriminating and of the difficulty levels of questions is required. In addition, norms need to be revised as necessary.

## **ASSESSING PUBLIC SPEAKING PROFICIENCY**

To measure proficiency in public speaking, it was necessary to develop a student task that allows the instructor to measure the student's skill with the characteristics enumerated in the definition of proficiency. Although all instructors who teach the basic course required graded public speaking assignments, the nature of these speeches varied widely from instructor to instructor. However, because all instructors assigned at least one informative speech, it was decided that the public speaking task would be an informative speech. To aid in the standardization of this assignment, a one-page handout for students outlining the specific requirements for the speech was prepared. (See Appendix A).

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It was also decided that each instructor would, as a minimum, assign two other speeches. One of these would be a persuasive speech and the nature of the other speaking assignment would be left to the instructor's discretion. To avoid basing the assessment on only one performance, it was decided that to be deemed proficient in public speaking, a student must have a *C* average on these three speeches. A *C*-average would not meet proficiency requirements.

The next step was to develop a rating form to assess the public speaking skills described in the proficiency profile. The following traits were included in the form: introduction/conclusion; speech purpose; message organization; supporting materials; audience adaptation; language/style; vocal usage; and physical elements.

We experimented with 3, 5, and 7-point evaluation scales measuring each of the eight skill areas. Our experiments determined that the items would be most effectively measured using a 5-point scale, with scores of 1 and 2 designating a lack of proficiency, 3 equaling a minimal expectation for proficiency, and 4 and 5 representing scores well above the minimal expectation for proficiency. We decided that if students average a 3 (minimally proficient) on the eight-point scale, for a total score of 24, we would deem them proficient as a public speaker. (See Appendix B).

Since completing this project, differential weighting of individual items on the rating form has been discussed. Concern has been voiced that some of the individual items should be weighted more heavily than others. Further research will be done on this issue.

## **ASSESSING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION PROFICIENCY**

The question of how to define and assess interpersonal communication proficiency has received much attention from



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communication scholars in the past decade. After study and discussion of the subject, we identified seven areas of interpersonal communication proficiency. The seven areas are physical involvement, vocal usage, promoting interaction, language usage, listening, empathy, and self-disclosure. (See Appendix C).

To assess interpersonal communication proficiency, we sought to develop a single student performance assignment that would enable him or her to demonstrate the skills identified above. The final product was a structured interpersonal encounter of approximately five minutes. In this encounter, the instructor, or a trained initiator, engages the student in a conversation in a rather casual manner, but at the same time making sure that certain planned prompts are given during the conversation designed to allow the student to demonstrate, or fail to demonstrate, each of the seven interpersonal proficiency behaviors.

Some of the behaviors such as physical involvement, vocal usage, and language usage are assessed throughout the encounter. Others require the use of a prompt. For example, to assess proficiency in promoting interaction, at some time during the course of the conversation, the initiator can pause and invite the student to introduce a subject that might be appropriate for the two of them to discuss. If the student is able to readily introduce a subject that related to an interest, a viewpoint, or a frustrating situation described earlier by the initiator, the student can also be credited with listening or possibly empathy skills. Empathy is also assessed by introducing a subject that allows students to express an understanding of a feeling or a point of view different from their own. For example, non-Native American students can be invited to look at the use of school mascot names perceived as offensive by certain Native Americans. Empathic students may express their own personal feelings on a subject, but they should also be able to recognize feelings different from their

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own. The other two behaviors assessed are listening and self disclosure. (See Appendix D.)

Students are rated on a 1-5 point scale for each of the seven behaviors. They are deemed proficient if they score a total of 21 points which means they have to average a 3 rating for the seven behaviors.

## **ASSESSING LISTENING PROFICIENCY**

The listening committee searched for a standardized listening test that we could employ to assess listening skills as we defined them. Unsatisfied with the commercial tests available, two of our faculty produced the Steinbrecher-Willmington Listening Test.\* The test is on videotape, contains 55 questions, and takes 45 minutes to administer. Students are asked to respond to 13 separate messages or interactions seen on the video. Included are a four-minute speech, three brief announcements, a set of directions, a description, five scenes involving dyads, three statements using evidence, and three statements using reasoning.

The test includes three types of listening: comprehensive, critical, and empathic. The questions concerning the types of listening include 39 out of 55 focusing on comprehension, 12 focusing on critical listening, and 4 focusing on empathic listening. Based on normative data for the test, we set a score of 25 as the minimum necessary for proficiency.

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\* For more information about the Steinbrecher-Willmington Listening Test contact M. Steinbrecher (414-235-7736) or C. Willmington (414-424-4420) at Dept. of Communication, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Oshkosh, WI 54901.

## ASSESSING TRANSFER STUDENTS

UW-Oshkosh accepts approximately 100 transfer students annually who apply for admission into the College of Education. Before students can be accepted into the education program, one of the requirements they must fulfill is to pass our public speaking, interpersonal, and listening proficiency tests. Although these students have usually received credit for a basic course through the transfer process, they have not necessarily demonstrated minimal levels of communication proficiency as required by our program. To accommodate the College of Education, the assessment of transfer students occurs periodically throughout the year. Students receive information in the mail outlining the procedures that will be followed for assessing their interpersonal, public speaking, and listening skills. Additionally, they are given handouts specifying the requirements for a 5-6 minute informative speech and the criteria by which they will be assessed.

Each student is evaluated by two communication faculty members who teach the basic course, one of whom evaluates the student's public speaking performance, while the other instructor assesses the interpersonal skills. Afterwards, the student is given the listening test. A transfer student must receive the same minimum scores as students in our basic course to pass the proficiency requirement and be admitted into the professional education program. The student pays a \$15.00 fee to cover the expenses of this additional assessment procedure.

This same out-of-class procedure is also used to assess students who have failed a specific component of the proficiency test while enrolled in the basic course. This method allows a second opportunity for the student to be reevaluated on the relevant communication skills. Additionally, students who decide to major in education after completing the basic course may also use this procedure to become certified as

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minimally proficient, allowing them admission into the university's teacher education program.

## **EVALUATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**

A typical response of communication departments to challenges from sources such as Colleges of Business, Education, or in our case, a state Department of Education, is to say, "Take our course. If you pass with a C or better, you're O.K." We note two major concerns with this simple and quick response.

First, bear in mind that the course projected as meeting the need was undoubtedly designed to address other perceived educational needs. Further, faculty members teaching the course have their own agendas and reasons for teaching the course a certain way. Consequently, they are unlikely to immediately abandon what they have been doing in favor of more directly addressing a new purpose of the course.

Second, we discovered that while our staff included "communication proficiency" as a course goal, the course grade was an imperfect indication of student proficiency. Instructors assign grades based on several factors other than communication proficiency. Instructors typically include in their calculation of course grades such things as class attendance and participation, performance on quizzes, and completing work on time. Even if they do not recognize it, it is suspected that effort and improvement may figure into the evaluation. While possibly justified as considerations in student evaluation, these factors may relate very little to "communication proficiency" by any standard, thus calling into question the assumption that a course grade in a basic communication course is an accurate measure of student proficiency.

A strength of the UW-Oshkosh plan is that we address communication proficiency as an essentially independent

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entity from the course grade. In this way faculty are confident that when they sign the proficiency form for students and submit them to the College of Education, the students have indeed demonstrated observable proficiency in communication as we define it.

Any proficiency assessment plan needs to be evaluated by appropriate criteria. The two most basic criteria are validity and reliability.

### ***Validity***

We have worked for validity by tying both the pencil and paper tests and the performance tests directly to the definitions of proficiency we developed. The definitions reflected the knowledge and skills considered appropriate as found in communication literature and survey of employers mentioned earlier.

Validity of the pencil and paper test is enhanced by the inclusion of a certain number of questions pertaining to the major topic areas identified in the textbook. As mentioned earlier, the number of questions per topic area reflects the emphasis given to each area in the course. Validity of the performance tests in public speaking and interpersonal communication was promoted by the development of rating scales which insured proper attention to the eight traits that constitute public speaking proficiency and the seven traits that constitute interpersonal proficiency. The number of questions on the listening test involving comprehension, evaluation, and empathy were determined according to what appear to be representative of the portion of time those kinds of listening are employed.

### ***Reliability***

The reliability of the various assessment instruments varies. The Kuder-Richardson #20 (KR20) test of reliability

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for the paper and pencil test averaged slightly above .7 for classes taking the test in a single year. The KR20 for the Steinbrecher-Willmington Listening Test averages slightly below .7 for the same time period. Most testing theorists would accept these reliabilities as satisfactory (Cangelosi, 1982).

The reliability of the public speaking and interpersonal performance tests are more difficult to determine. The whole staff assembles periodically to review and independently rate videotapes of student performances. Comparison of these ratings shows interpersonal rating reliability averages .7 or above. Surprisingly, the public speaking reliability has been lower, often around .5. Reliability quotients vary greatly among the factors evaluated. For example, the message organization factor correlates highly with overall ratings, while the use of supporting materials fails to show much correlation with overall ratings. We cannot calculate reliability scores for either public speaking or interpersonal performances in the individual classrooms because there is only a single rating given by a single instructor.

## CONCLUSION

The Communication Department at UW-Oshkosh has made a direct response to the rule of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction that teacher preparation institutions recommend students for certification only after they have demonstrated proficiency in speaking and listening. Proficiency is demonstrated by certain key tasks completed by students enrolled in the basic communication course. Assessment instruments have been developed and are used to assess knowledge of communication principles and performance in public speaking, interpersonal communication, and listening.

Since the institutionalization of this assessment program in 1987, the communication skills of hundreds of perspective

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education students have been evaluated. The vast majority of them met or exceeded the assessment criteria. However, there are several students annually who must retake the cognitive, listening, and/or public speaking portions of the test. Some students never meet the minimal proficiency level and are prohibited from admission into the College of Education. A greater number of students may be initially deterred from seeking a teaching certificate because they have to demonstrate a minimum level of proficiency in their communication skills. In a profession that has continually graduated a surplus of students compared to job availability, such a deterrent factor may be beneficial.

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## APPENDIX A

### ***Speech to Inform***

To demonstrate oral communication proficiency, you are to prepare a *speech to inform* which meets the following requirements:

1. Length: *5 - 7 minutes*
2. A speech which is *your original work*. Use of a speech constructed by another is not allowed and will result in automatic failure in this performance.
3. A speech which attempts to provide your audience with new information or new understanding about a subject or consequence.
4. A speech which is presented *extemporaneously*; that is, one which has been *carefully constructed* and which has been *practiced but not memorized* until it can be presented *fluently*, with the use of a *limited number of note cards*. Important: reading of the speech from a manuscript or from note cards will not be acceptable.

### **Evaluator Expectations for Speech Content:**

1. *Develop an effective introduction* to your speech which:
  - a. Arouses interest in the topic.
  - b. Suggests why knowledge about the topic may be of importance to the speaker and the listener.
  - c. Identifies your speech topic and focus in a clear purpose statement.

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- d. Identifies main points to be covered in the body of the speech.
2. Develop an effective speech body:
  - a. Main ideas are clearly identified by the use of such techniques as parallel wording, internal summaries and transitions.
  - b. Ideas are organized effectively, using a suitable arrangement pattern for a speech to inform.
  - c. *Supporting materials from at least 3 different quality (non- personal) sources are to be used and you should cite the sources as you use the material.* You may use appropriate personal experience as additional support.
  - d. Visual aids may be used to increase the effective communication of your information (they are optional.) If used, they are expected to be:
    1. Purposefully selected and used.
    2. Neat, attractive and large enough
    3. Well-timed (shown only when discussing them.)
    4. Effectively positioned and well-handled (all can see them; they don't detract from your delivery.
  - e. Adapt speech to the audience, which will consist of a UW-Oshkosh Communication Dept. faculty member. If given in a class 96-111 classmates will also be present.
3. *Develop a conclusion* which effectively reinforces your thesis.

## **Evaluator Expectations for Delivery**

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1. Use an extemporaneous speaking style (see #4 on previous page)
2. Use effective eye contact
3. Demonstrate effective posture
4. Use effective gestures
5. Demonstrate effective vocal presentation: sufficient vocal enthusiasm, vocal variety, (pitch, rate & force), adequate volume, clear articulation, correct grammar, and avoidance of vocal clutter (vocal fillers, vocalized pauses, etc.)

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## APPENDIX B

### Public Speaking Rating Form

Speaker Name \_\_\_\_\_

Rater Name \_\_\_\_\_

Score \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the single best response for each factor.

1. **Introduction/Conclusion** — Clearly develops an appropriate introduction and conclusion

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Seriously Deficient</i>	<i>Deficient</i>	<i>Minimally Competent</i>	<i>Clearly Competent</i>	<i>Highly Competent</i>

2. **Speech Purpose** — Speech clearly addresses the assigned purpose.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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3. **Message Organization** — Uses a clear and appropriate organization pattern; uses appropriate transitions.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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4. **Supporting Materials** — Uses and cites sources of materials to inform or persuade to achieve purpose.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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5. **Audience Adaptation** — Message is appropriate for the audience, and occasion

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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6. **Language/Style** — Appropriate (avoids excessive use of slang, profanity), clear, correct grammar.

1	2	3	4	5
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7. **Vocal Usage** — Expressive, varied; fluent, avoids excessive vocalized pauses/  
fillers; appropriate volume, rate; clear articulation; correct pronunciation; suitable vocal quality.

1	2	3	4	5
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8. **Physical elements** — Effective eye-contact; posture, gestures, and/or movement used purposefully; sufficiently poised.

1	2	3	4	5
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## APPENDIX C

### Interpersonal Skills Rating Form

Speaker Name \_\_\_\_\_

Rater Name \_\_\_\_\_

Score \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the single best response for each factor.

1. **Physical Involvement** — Uses eye contact, facial expression, appropriate posture, gesture, and poise.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Seriously Deficient</i>	<i>Deficient</i>	<i>Minimally Competent</i>	<i>Clearly Competent</i>	<i>Highly Competent</i>

2. **Vocal usage** — Expressive, varied; fluent, avoids excessive vocalized pauses/  
fillers; appropriate volume, rate; clear articulation; correct pronunciation;  
suitable vocal quality.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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3. **Promoting Interaction** — Initiates, sustains interaction; gives appropriate responses; shares conversation involvement.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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4. **Language Usage** — Appropriate (avoids excessive use of slang, profanity),  
clear correct.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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5. **Listening** — Listens carefully; gives appropriate feedback (picks up topic  
after interruption and able to summarize main topics).

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1	2	3	4	5
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6. **Empathy** — Responses show sensitivity to the ideas and feelings of others.

1	2	3	4	5
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7. **Self-Disclosure** — Gives appropriate amount and type of information about self.

1	2	3	4	5
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## APPENDIX D

### Interpersonal Encounter Questions

QUESTION	I.P. BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT
1. Hi _____. Your information card tells me _____, Can you tell me any more about that hobby, hometown, or previous communication courses/s?	Self-disclosure
2. The Speech Fundamentals course has now become a required course for all students at this university. Do you agree with this requirement? Why or why not?	Self-disclosure
3. You've just finished your informative speech and I'd like to talk with you about it for just a few minutes.	Physical Involvement
a. Why did you select the particular topic?	Vocal Usage
b. Why did you think this was important information for the audience	Language Use
c. Why you thought about the people listening to the speech, what strategies did you use to adapt your information to the audience?	Assessed throughout the encounter
1. Were they successful?	
2. Why or why not? (Follow-up)	
4. This may be the first time you can vote in a political election.	Self-disclosure
a. Are you planning to vote?	
b. Do you believe voting is important? Why or why not?	
5. Let me ask you about a sensitive issue that is facing parents and educational professionals: School-age children that have contacted aids or have tested positive for the HIV virus.	
a. Some communities are trying to keep these children from attending school. How do you feel about this?	Empathy
b. Well, what about the fears of parents of healthy children? Do you think their concerns are legitimate?	



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| 6. What is your reaction to the Native American controversy over school and athletic mascots and team names that they find derogatory and offensive? Should teams be forced to change such names and mascots?   | Empathy               |
| 7. You know, I am really frustrated with my 8:00 a.m. speech class. The students just sit there, never participate, and appear to be sleeping. I've tried everything to get them involved in class discussion and activities and I've run out of ideas. I just don't know what to do. | Empathy               |
| 8. I've been promoting the conversation so far. In the shot time we have left, what is one thing (about class or college) that you would like to talk about or ask me?  | Promoting Interaction |
| 9. If someone were to ask you to identify the major topics we've talked about today, what would you say?  | Listening             |
| 10. Well, I've enjoyed talking with you . . . .   |                       |

Note: These are sample questions and are not all used during a five to ten minute conversation.