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Kevin R. Myer  
*Illinois State University*


Ryan R. Kurtz  
*CDW Corp.*

Jamie L. Hines  
*J.C. Penney*

Cheri J. Simonds  
*Illinois State University*

Stephen K. Hunt  
*Illinois State University*

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## Assessing Preemptive Argumentation in Students' Persuasive Speech Outlines\*

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*Kevin R. Meyer*  
*Ryan R. Kurtz*  
*Jamie L. Hines*  
*Cheri J. Simonds*  
*Stephen K. Hunt*

Over the last 20 years, colleges and universities have been increasingly charged with the daunting task of establishing a basic communication course as a central feature of their general education curriculum (Cut-spec, McPherson, & Spiro, 1999). As a critical component of many general education programs, assessment in the basic communication course is an issue of significant concern (Allen, 2002; Hay, 1989; Hunt, Simonds, & Hinchliffe, 2000; Stitt, Simonds, & Hunt, 2003) and one of the most important facing basic course directors (Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999). According to Gardiner (1994), "assessment is essential not only to guide the development of individual students but also to monitor and continuously improve the quality of programs, inform prospective students and their parents, and provide evidence of accountability" (p. 109). To the extent that basic communication course directors answer the assessment challenge, they can advance the

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interests of the communication discipline as a whole (Allen, 2002).

One of the most common assignments in the basic communication course is the persuasive speech (Morreale et al., 1999). To develop effective persuasive arguments, students are often taught to anticipate objections to their own positions and provide counterarguments to these objections. Toulmin (2003) referred to the practice of countering objections to a speaker's position as preemptive argumentation. In fact, the use of preemptive argumentation is an important component of what Paul (1995) defines as critical thinking. Because critical thinking is often a goal of general education programs and the basic course in particular, it is important for researchers in the basic course to assess the quality of student learning in this area (Hunt, Novak, Semlak, & Meyer, 2005). Specifically, assessment efforts in the basic course could measure students' use of preemptive argumentation in the persuasive speech as one indicator of the development of critical thinking skills. Examining the use of preemptive arguments in students' persuasive speech outlines would, thus, provide evidence of whether this objective is being met in the basic course.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several guidelines for programmatic assessment are suggested in existing literature. Initially, assessment should be department specific and centered in the classroom (Benander, Denton, Page, & Skinner, 2000). Additionally, assessment efforts ought to marry student outcomes to course goals and be linked to learning objec-

tives (Allen, 2002). Finally, assessment should be an ongoing process that employs multiple methods (Hay, 1992). In terms of the communication discipline, Sprague (1993) argued that communication educators should research communication pedagogy through actual context and content. Thus, assessment efforts in the basic course should be incorporated as a part of effective teaching so as to advance the discipline's pedagogical content knowledge. Recent assessment studies have examined the effectiveness of the basic course in delivering critical thinking (Mazer, Hunt, & Kuznekoff, 2008) and information literacy instruction (Meyer et al., 2008). The purpose of the present study was to determine if a key component of basic course pedagogy can be meaningfully assessed through students' persuasive speech outlines.

### ***Critical Thinking Assessment***

Previous scholars have claimed that teaching and assessing critical thinking skills is an important concern in the basic communication course (Hunt et al., 2005). Not only is the basic course, through its emphasis on research and organization of ideas, ideally positioned to teach students critical thinking, it is naturally suited to help students learn about critical thinking and then apply these skills during actual presentations. In fact, one recent study, which employed a pretest/posttest experimental design, demonstrated that students' critical thinking skills significantly improved throughout the term when basic course sections specifically emphasized critical thinking instruction as compared to sections which did not (Mazer et al., 2008). Consequently, the

basic course can help students improve their critical thinking, but such improvement is optimized when instruction emphasizes these skills. In a similar manner, then, assessment efforts could examine the conditions under which critical thinking improvements are maximized.

### ***Preemptive Argumentation***

Teaching argumentation and refutation skills is an important aspect of most introductory communication courses, an essential element of the communication discipline, and a vital means of providing students with training in critical thinking. For instance, if students are able to build arguments and refute positions contrary to their own, it would be reasonable to contend that students are learning key aspects of critical thinking (Paul, 1995). In fact, contemporary research, basic communication course textbooks, and persuasion textbooks recommend that students use preemptive argumentation to strengthen the quality of their position and enhance the persuasiveness of their speech (Allen, 1998; Hale, Mongeau, & Thomas, 1991; Perloff, 2008; Simonds, Hunt, & Simonds, 2008). More specifically, the reasoning behind this recommendation is that by anticipating objections and providing counterarguments to those objections, speakers are better able to present a complete argument which is stronger than an argument only demonstrating one side of the issue or topic at hand. This is particularly true when audiences are likely to hear from an opposing speaker next, such as in a debate or trial at law. Even if no opposing speech is made, though, audience members can still raise objec-

tions mentally as they evaluate the speaker's arguments (Simonds et al., 2008). Thus, preemption tends to enhance persuasiveness and strengthen argumentation. Independently, speakers who use preemption effectively are perceived as more credible by audiences since they are presenting a two-sided versus a one-sided message (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991). Unfortunately, there are no previous assessment studies examining the basic course as a vehicle for developing students' preemptive argumentation skills.

According to Toulmin (2003), preemption requires a speaker to anticipate objections to the position advocated in a speech and answer those objections with counterarguments ahead of time. For instance, if a speaker were giving a speech in opposition to flag burning, the speaker would need to advance arguments against flag burning (such as *flag burning is unpatriotic* or *flag burning disrespects the price that our military has paid for our freedom*) as well as answer arguments that those who defend flag burning might raise. Regardless of how many reasons the speaker can provide for why he or she is against flag burning, the speaker still has a burden to address opposing viewpoints. Even if no opposing speech is given, the audience may still raise objections to the speaker's position mentally. For example, an audience member might wonder how burning one flag can have such wide ramifications. If the speaker were to preempt this line of thinking by saying that "some might say that *a* flag can be burned, but *the* flag cannot be burned; however, each flag is a symbol of *the* flag." In this way, then, the speaker is able to explain the opposing viewpoint in a fair and reasonable manner, but also offer her or his response to such

an objection. Of course, audience members might also question whether the speaker's position might threaten freedom of speech and expression. If the speaker fails to respond to this issue, then audience members could reject the speaker's thesis because they believe freedoms will be threatened. However, if the speaker were to anticipate such an objection, communicate that objection fairly and objectively, and then respond to the objection (perhaps by saying that *rights are not absolute*) it is more likely that the speaker would be successful in his or her persuasive attempt. Does anticipating and raising the objections, then answering them, make a speech more or less effective? Some audience members might not be convinced to change their minds in either scenario. But, consider the flag burning speech without the preemptive argumentation above as compared to the flag burning speech above that incorporates preemptive argumentation. Which version of the speech is more likely to change an audience member's mind? According to communication and persuasion research and theory (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991), the speech containing preemptive argumentation stands a better chance of persuading audience members to change their minds (Perloff, 2008; Simonds et al., 2008). And, at the very least, theory and research indicate that the speaker who uses preemption would be perceived as more fair-minded and credible in the eyes of audience members (Simonds et al., 2008).

Of course, effective preemptive argumentation could be expected to consist not just of the presence of preemption, but also by the quality of such argumentation. The quality of preemptive argumentation is operationalized, for purposes of the present study, as the use of

and competency at presenting anticipated objections and making counterarguments in response to those objections. Because the ability to present anticipated objections and make counterarguments functions as a means of persuasive argumentation, a student's competency in these areas serves to strengthen the persuasive appeals of the speech (Simonds et al., 2008). The examination of persuasive speech outlines for anticipated objections and counterarguments, therefore, provides a means of evaluating the quality of preemptive argumentation. However, previous assessment studies have failed to determine how many students use preemptive argumentation and how competent students are at engaging in preemptive argumentation. Thus, the present study poses the following research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent do students incorporate preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines?
- RQ2: How competent are students at using preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines?

Because it is likely that the inclusion and competent use of preemptive argumentation leads to a stronger overall persuasive speech (Toulmin, 2003), it is reasonable to predict that preemptive argumentation will predict student grades on persuasive speeches. In basic course programs where all instructors receive the same training, use the same assignments requiring the use of preemptive arguments, and employ the same speech evaluation forms, it seems likely that the use and quality of preemptive argumentation will result in better



speech scores. Previous research has demonstrated that standardized training programs can improve inter-rater reliability and result in consistent grading performance among basic course instructors (Simonds, Meyer, Hunt, & Simonds, 2009; Stitt et al., 2003). Intuitively, it makes sense that students would receive higher grades if they include required elements of the assignment in their speeches. In other words, if students are required to include preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speeches, then it is reasonable to predict that whether or not they meet this requirement and how well they are able to execute such argumentation will influence their persuasive speech grade. Therefore, the following hypotheses are advanced:

- H1: The mean scores of students' persuasive speeches with preemptive argumentation will be higher than the mean scores for students' persuasive speeches without preemptive argumentation.
- H2: Students' persuasive speech scores will be positively related to their competency scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

Persuasive speech materials (instructor evaluation forms and graded student outlines) were extracted from a larger portfolio data set. Students enrolled in our basic course keep a portfolio of their work (including speech outlines, instructor evaluation forms, and other assign-

ments) throughout the term. Students turn the portfolio into their instructor near the end of the term for final grading purposes, and instructors return the portfolios to students at the end of the term. During course assessment, these portfolios can be used as data that help us to determine if our basic course is meeting its' stated objectives. All procedures in the study were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board and permission was obtained from students prior to using their portfolios as data. The student portfolios were collected from 15 instructors who had been the most recent trainees of our basic course program. This training program included extensive speech evaluation training on how to use our standardized criteria for evaluating speeches. Previous assessment in this area has revealed consistency and reliability of the persuasive speech evaluation measure as well as instructor feedback to students (Reynolds, Hunt, Simonds, & Cutbirth, 2004; Simonds et al., 2009; Stitt et al., 2003).

The initial sample consisted of 164 students' persuasive speech outlines provided by 15 instructors from the basic communication course at a large Midwestern university. Students enrolled in the basic course are expected to use preemptive argumentation in both their persuasive speech and accompanying outline. This expectation is communicated to students in oral and written forms through instructors' explanation, the student textbook and accompanying workbook for the course, and speech evaluation forms. Students' outlines are graded as a part of their overall speech score. Specifically, one-tenth of the points are devoted exclusively to the outline and references; but, the content of the outline also affects the remaining points according to our

instructor's evaluation rubric. All 164 outlines were analyzed for the presence of preemptive arguments in order to answer RQ1. These outlines were examined by three members of the research team to determine if the outlines contained anticipated objections and counterarguments. Each outline was examined by at least two researchers. A total of 111 outlines were found to contain anticipated objections and counterarguments. The anticipated objections and counterarguments were then highlighted for the purpose of further coding. The remaining 53 outlines did not contain anticipated objections and counterarguments, and were coded as such.

To answer RQ2, however, only those outlines that included preemptive argumentation were considered. Because there were 111 outlines that used preemptive arguments, a random sample of these outlines were selected to answer RQ2. The decision was made to examine a random sample of 85 outlines from the 111 that used preemptive arguments rather than the entire set of 111 outlines. This decision was based on procedures commonly employed in social scientific research that prefer the use of a random sample for purposes of better generalizing to the population from which the sample is drawn. The random sample of outlines was balanced by instructors so as to guard against the possibility of having particular instructors influence the sample unduly and so as to maximize the generalizability of our data to the population from which our sample was drawn. The choice to use a random sampling procedure, balanced by instructor, yields a better picture of the data than a decision to not randomly sample might have produced.

To answer the two hypotheses posited for this study, the original sample of 164 outlines were compared to persuasive speech grades. The persuasive speech grades were assigned by the 15 instructors who graded the students' speeches in their classes. Due to missing speech grade data that would allow comparison to the students' outlines, seven of these outlines were excluded from further analysis. Thus, a total of 79 outlines containing preemptive argumentation were compared to a total of 52 outlines that did not contain preemptive argumentation.

### ***Procedures***

Because assessment literature suggests that assessment efforts aimed at measuring student learning are best conducted in naturalistic settings (Benander et al., 2000), we designed the study to collect and analyze actual data from student outlines created in our basic course. While the use of a naturalistic design and actual student data yields less control than an experimental design might, our design is a more accurate reflection of the student learning that occurs in the classroom. Furthermore, even within our naturalistic design, there were enough factors in common across the various sections of our basic course to give us confidence that students faced very similar persuasive tasks. Specifically, all of our instructors received the same training program, used the same textbook and supplemental student workbook, assigned the same persuasive speech assignment with preemptive argument requirements, and used the same speech evaluation form and criteria for evaluating speeches<sup>1</sup> that have been shown in our

previous assessment efforts to achieve inter-grader reliability (Reynolds et al., 2004; Simonds et al., 2009; Stitt et al., 2003). In addition, all students in our basic course receive the same speech assignment guidelines, use the same textbook and supplemental student workbook, are trained to use the same speech evaluation form that all our instructors use, and follow the same outline format. In sum, then, the standardization of our course and persuasive speech assignment controls for many of the variables that an experimental design might hope to control. The standardization of our basic course helps to establish evidence of the reliability and validity of student grades.

### ***Measurement***

A preemptive argumentation rubric was created for the purpose of the present study (see Appendix). The face validity of this instrument is derived primarily from Toulmin's (2003) conceptualization of preemptive argumentation. The rubric consisted of five items: *anticipated objection explanation*, *anticipated objection language*, *counterargument answer*, *counterargument reasoning*, and *counterargument language*. Each item received a score of 1 or 2 based upon the competence demonstrated in the student outline for each of the five items. Each of the five items measure specific components of preemptive argumentation as outlined by Toulmin. Finally, these five items were summed in order to maintain an overall assessment of preemptive argumentation used in the students' outlines. When summed, the five items create a total preemptive argumentation rubric score ranging from 5 to 10. Higher

mean scores indicate greater competency at preemptive argumentation for each of the five items and for the total rubric score.

### ***Coding***

Following an initial examination of the persuasive speech outlines, a code book explaining the preemptive argumentation rubric (see Appendix) and a coding form<sup>1</sup> were created. Three independent coders, who were not part of the research team, were used to code a random sample of 85 outlines that contained anticipated objections and counterarguments. Prior to coding, the researchers trained the three coders to use the preemptive argumentation rubric and discussed the code book instructions. The 85 outlines selected for the coding process were chosen by randomly selecting a balanced number of outlines from the 15 instructors who had students submit outlines for the study. The remaining 26 outlines that contained anticipated objections and counterarguments were not coded. Of the 85 outlines selected for the present study, 10 outlines were used to determine intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability among the three coders was calculated for the 10 outlines that were coded in common. Holsti's coefficient of reliability was .80 for the five-item preemptive argumentation rubric, indicating good reliability. The percentage of agreement among coders for the five rubric items was calculated: *anticipated objection explanation* (.87), *anticipated objection language* (.80), *counterargument answer* (.80), *counterargument reasoning* (.67), and *counterargument language* (.87). Each of the three coders then proceeded to code 25 outlines apiece.

## RESULTS

### *Research Question One*

The first research question examined how many students incorporate preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines. Of the 164 total outlines examined in the present study, 111 (67.68%) were determined to contain preemptive argumentation, while 53 (32.32%) were determined to not contain preemptive argumentation. In other words, the majority of students incorporated preemptive argumentation in their written outlines, meaning that preemption was present in their speech preparation. But, one-third of the outlines examined failed to demonstrate the presence of preemptive argumentation during speech preparation.

### *Research Question Two*

The second research question examined how competent students are at using preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines. Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for the 85 outlines coded using the preemptive argumentation rubric. The highest mean scores were for counterargument language and anticipated objection language, while the lowest mean score was for counterargument reasoning. Thus, students' competence at preemptive argumentation varied according to specific elements of preemption. Table 2 contains valid percentages for the 85 outlines coded using the preemptive argumentation rubric. The largest percentage of outlines received a total rubric score of 7. In

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics  
 for Preemptive Argumentation Rubric*

Rubric Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Anticipated Objections Explanation	1.48	.50	85
Anticipated Objections Language	1.54	.50	85
Counterarguments Answer	1.44	.50	85
Counterarguments Reasoning	1.33	.47	85
Counterarguments Language	1.55	.50	85
Preemptive Argumentation Rubric Total Score	7.34	1.56	85

*Note.* The five items of the preemptive argumentation rubric were scored as a 1 or 2. Higher mean scores indicate greater competency for each item. The total score for the rubric was calculated by summing the five items. Total scores for the rubric range from 5 to 10, with higher mean scores indicating greater competency at preemptive argumentation.

Table 2  
*Total Scores on the Preemptive Argumentation Rubric*

	Valid Percentage	<i>n</i>
Rubric Total Score of 5	15.29%	13
Rubric Total Score of 6	14.12%	12
Rubric Total Score of 7	28.24%	24
Rubric Total Score of 8	17.65%	15
Rubric Total Score of 9	12.94%	11
Rubric Total Score of 10	11.76%	10

*Note.* A total of 85 outlines coded using the preemptive argumentation rubric. Results are reported as a valid percentage of the total number of outlines coded.



other words, the findings indicated that the majority of students scored below the midpoint on the preemptive argumentation rubric.

### ***Hypothesis One***

The first hypothesis predicted that the mean scores of students' persuasive speeches with preemptive argumentation would be higher than the mean scores for students' persuasive speeches without preemptive argumentation. An independent-samples *t*-test was calculated comparing the mean persuasive speech grades for students who used preemptive argumentation in their outlines to the mean persuasive speech grades for students who did not use preemptive argumentation in their outlines. No significant difference was found ( $t(129) = 1.77, p > .05$ ). The mean persuasive speech grade for the 79 students who used preemptive argumentation ( $M = 83.57, SD = 7.85$ ) was not significantly different from the mean persuasive speech grade for the 52 students who did not use preemptive argumentation ( $M = 81.14, SD = 7.43$ ).

### ***Hypothesis Two***

The second hypothesis predicted that students' persuasive speech scores would be positively related to their competency scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric. High-quality use of preemptive argumentation was operationalized as those students' persuasive speech outlines that received total scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric of 8, 9, or 10. Low-quality use of preemptive argumentation was opera-

tionalized as those students' persuasive speech outlines that received total scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric of 5, 6, or 7. A Pearson product-moment correlation was run pairing students' mean persuasive speech grade with their competency scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric. A weak non-significant correlation was found ( $r(1) = -.11, p > .05$ ). The mean persuasive speech grade for students who used high-quality preemptive argumentation was not significantly different from the mean persuasive speech grade for students who used low-quality preemptive argumentation. The mean persuasive speech scores were higher for the 46 students who scored low on the preemptive argumentation rubric ( $M = 84.27, SD = 1.13$ ) than for the 33 students who scored high on the rubric ( $M = 82.59, SD = 8.11$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was two-fold. The first purpose was to determine how many students use preemptive argumentation and how well students are able to use preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines. The findings provide baseline data that illustrate the frequency and level at which students currently employ preemptive argumentation. The second purpose was to determine if the use and quality of preemptive argumentation on students' outlines predicted their speech grades. Thus, the results of this study have implications for basic communication course instructor training programs as well as classroom instruction. While the results of the present study are

limited to the particular basic course program involved in the study, the implications of this baseline data should be of interest to basic course directors at other universities. Future studies should be conducted to assess progress in preemptive argumentation development after the training program has been revised to emphasize the use of anticipated objections and counterarguments in student persuasive speech outlines.

### ***Findings***

The findings for each research question provide baseline data for students' use of preemptive argumentation. The results indicate that approximately two-thirds of the student outlines employed preemptive argumentation. This finding is encouraging given that communication textbooks, theory, and research advocate the use of preemption in persuasive messages (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991; Perloff, 2008; Simonds et al., 2008). However, the findings for RQ1 suggest that a surprising number of students do not use preemptive argumentation at all in persuasive speech outlines, despite assignment guidelines requiring that they do so. Given that one-third of the students involved in our study did not use preemptive argumentation, our assessment study reveals an important area which can be targeted for improvement. The results also indicate that 57.7% of the student outlines evaluated by the coders scored a 7 or below on the total preemptive argumentation rubric. Thus, the findings for RQ2 suggest the majority of students who use preemptive argumentation are not able to so at a high-level of competency. Obviously, the *presence* of preemptive argumentation does

not always translate into *quality* preemptive argumentation. Perhaps more classroom instruction is needed to emphasize the importance of integrating preemptive argumentation and to train students to use high-quality preemptive argumentation.

The findings did not support either hypothesis. While mean scores are in the direction predicted by H1, the results did not reveal significant differences in persuasive speech grades when student outlines contained preemptive argumentation compared to when outlines did not. An examination of mean speech grades, however, suggest that when students' outlines contain preemptive argumentation students received higher overall speech grades than when students' outlines did not contain preemptive argumentation. Surprisingly, though, the mean speech grades were higher when students' outlines contained low-quality preemptive argumentation as compared to when students' outlines contained high-quality preemptive argumentation. Thus, the findings do not support H2. In fact, the mean grades are in the opposite direction of the expected results. One possible explanation for this null finding could be that instructors perceived students' speeches to be persuasive even without the use of preemptive argumentation. For instance, students' delivery and content could have influenced their total speech grades more than the quality of their preemptive argumentation. In other words, students' initial arguments and general presentational skills may have compensated for low-quality preemptive arguments. Another possible explanation for these results might lie in the potential discrepancy between what is written on students' outlines and what is orally delivered during their speeches. Although stu-

dents' written outlines are the best assessment data available for determining the inclusion and quality of preemptive argumentation in students' persuasive speeches, it is entirely likely that some students' oral presentations stray or deviate from their written outlines. In any case, it seems reasonable to conclude that instructor grading does not reflect the use and quality of students' preemptive argumentation as well as we would like it to. Therefore, our training program and grading forms might need to be adjusted so as to emphasize and account for both the presence and quality students' preemptive argumentation.

### ***Implications***

The findings of the present study suggest several implications for the basic communication course training program. Because no significant differences were found for persuasive speech grades between those outlines containing preemptive argumentation and those outlines not containing preemptive argumentation, the training program for basic communication course instructors could be revised in order to emphasize preemptive argumentation instruction. Specifically, the training program and speech evaluation forms could be revised to stress the importance of including preemptive argumentation in persuasive speech outlines. Perhaps the requirement that students employ preemptive argumentation in their outlines and speeches is not assessed as rigorously by instructors as we would desire. Not only could instructors assess the presence of preemptive argumentation, but they could evaluate the quality of the preemptive argumentation. Future modi-

fications to the persuasive speech evaluation form and the criteria for evaluating the speech could prove fruitful in encouraging more rigorous assessment. Additionally, because those outlines containing low-quality preemptive argumentation received higher mean grades than outlines containing high-quality preemptive argumentation, the training program could instruct and advise basic course instructors to assess the quality of anticipated objections and counterarguments used in student persuasive speeches and outlines. As demonstrated in our study, one of the advantages of conducting course assessment is that we discover what is not working as well as we intended. After all, if assessment efforts function as they should, course directors are provided with valuable information about which areas of instruction or training need modification and improvement.

Although it was expected that the data would confirm each hypothesis, the results are meaningful for our basic course program and provide useful information for other institutions. Even non-significant assessment findings can be highly informative and serve as a valuable resource from which our institution might improve the instruction and assessment of students' preemptive argumentation. Other institutions might also benefit from our results by designing their own assessment efforts based upon the lessons learned in the present study. Teaching students to employ preemptive argumentation is an important objective of the basic course. The persuasive speech outline provides evidence of whether the basic course is able to meet this learning objective or not. Specifically, the persuasive speech outline is an ideal document that students produce in the

basic course that can provide evidence that this learning objective is either being met or not.

Although data demonstrate that the majority of students do employ preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines, many do so at a low-level of proficiency. It is quite possible that these unfortunate results are not all that uncommon at other institutions. Thus, the non-significant findings produced in answer to the hypotheses in our study should serve as a warning sign that although the basic course aims to teach students to use effective persuasive argument construction, which necessarily entails the use of preemptive argumentation (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991; Toulmin, 2003), we may not always achieve this objective. Instructors and basic course directors at other institutions should take notice of the importance of preemptive argumentation in the persuasive speech as well as the importance of accurately assessing whether this learning objective is being met in their courses.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

Given that the data collected in the present study comprise baseline indicators of preemptive argumentation, future assessment studies should evaluate the progress made in regard to training adjustments and classroom instruction. Future studies could compare student outlines following a revised training program to the baseline data collected in the present study. The preemptive argumentation rubric was successful at achieving intercoder reliability, but the counterargument reasoning item produced the lowest reliability rating. Therefore, the code book (see Appendix) should be re-

vised in the future to provide clearer instructions for coders on this item. Furthermore, revising the preemptive argumentation rubric to encompass a more holistic assessment of preemptive argumentation could prove beneficial. The preemptive argumentation rubric used to code the students' outlines was created for the purposes of the present study. Although future research would be able to establish greater evidence of the validity and reliability of the measure, our study has taken important steps in this direction. First, we were able to successfully achieve intercoder reliability with the use of the preemptive argumentation rubric. Second, by summing the five sub-components of the rubric, we were able to analyze the specific qualities of preemptive argumentation and, at the same time, provide a holistic assessment of preemptive argumentation. There are other possible ways in which to design such a measure and such ways might prove useful in future research, but our measure provides a valid means of assessing the presence and quality of preemptive argumentation in students' outlines. The face validity of the instrument is found in the five sub-components and based upon Toulmin's Model of Argumentation.

The study was also limited by the small number of outlines included in the sample. It is possible that with a larger sample size, future assessment may yield significant results for the hypotheses posed in the present study. An additional limitation to the present study is that no information was collected from the 15 instructors whose students submitted outlines for the sample in regards to the preemptive argumentation requirements and expectations in those individual classrooms. Importantly, though, all the instructors received the



same training program, used the same speech evaluation forms, used a common textbook and supplemental student workbook, and followed general assignment guidelines requiring the use of preemptive argumentation. Future studies could compare the specific guidelines provided by instructors for the use of and competency at preemptive argumentation.

### ***Conclusions***

Ultimately, assessment efforts help basic course directors in two ways. First, assessment tells course directors if the course is meeting its' stated objectives. If the course is meeting those objectives, then assessment studies provide directors with data to support the efficacy of the course and reinforce the importance of the course in the university's general education curriculum. Having measurable outcomes and authentic data, such as student portfolios, equips directors with evidence that can capture the attention of university administrators. Second, assessment highlights areas in need of improvement. Even if assessment efforts show that the objectives are not being achieved, directors still learn valuable information about the possible sources of such shortcomings and glean insight into how improvements can be made to the program. Outlining these shortcomings and accompanying strategies for improvement to university administrators can be just as useful as studies that show glowing data about the success of a program. After all, some administrators may be most interested in what needs to be fixed rather than what is working well. In other words, systematic course assessment provides preemptive argumentation that basic

course directors can use to improve their program and communicate with administrators.

In the present study, we expected to find that the inclusion and quality of preemptive argumentation would be predictive of students' persuasive speech grades. Instead, the results revealed areas in our program that could be improved and raised other questions in need of attention. Along the way, the findings reinforced our belief in the pedagogical importance of teaching students preemptive argumentation and strengthened our resolve to improve the instructor training program to accomplish this objective.

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## APPENDIX

### ***Preemptive Argumentation Rubric and Code Book***

1. Coder Identification# refers to the number assigned to each coder.
2. Student Identification# refers to the number assigned to each student persuasive outline.
3. Anticipated Objections (A.O.) refer to those arguments that disagree with the position identified in the speaker’s thesis statement. Read the thesis statement on the first page of the persuasive outline, before beginning, to determine the position of the speaker. Examine only those anticipating objection(s) which are located within the green high-

lighted boxes. Each outline will contain at least one objection, but could contain several objections. The speaker may signal the objection(s) with language noting that a particular person, such as another student in class, a referenced source, a hypothetical person, or an unidentified person raised the objection(s).

4. *A.O. Explanation Score (1 or 2)* refers to the overall score for the explanation of the anticipating objection(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those anticipated objection(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes. Determine if the speaker offers sufficient explanation when identifying the anticipated objection(s). Sufficient explanation is defined as a fully identifying the argument and reasoning behind the anticipated objection(s). If the outline contains one or more anticipated objection(s) that is *not* sufficiently explained, then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the second column. Use the following criteria to score the explanation of the anticipating objection(s):

“1” = The speaker briefly mentions, but does *not* sufficiently explain the anticipated objection(s).

“2” = The speaker sufficiently explains the anticipated objection(s).

5. *A.O. Language Score (1 or 2)* refers to the overall score for the language used to explain the anticipating objection(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those anticipated objection(s) which are located within the green high-

lighted boxes. Determine if the speaker uses language that reflects open-mindedness when identifying the anticipated objection(s). Open-minded language is defined as lending credibility to the anticipated objection(s), while also avoiding biased or slanted wording. If the outline contains one or more anticipated objection(s) that do *not* use language that reflects open-mindedness, then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the third column. Use the following criteria to score the language of the anticipating objection(s):

- “1” = The speaker does *not* use language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the anticipated objection(s).
  - “2” = The speaker uses language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the anticipated objection(s).
6. *Counterarguments (C.A.)* refer to arguments that directly refute anticipated objection(s), thereby supporting the position identified in the thesis statement. Read the thesis statement on the first page of the persuasive outline, before beginning, to determine the position of the speaker. Examine only those counterargument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes. Speakers may identify multiple counterarguments for each anticipated objection.
  7. *C.A. Answer Score (1 or 2)* refers to the overall score for the counterargument(s) answering the anticipated objection(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those counterar-

gument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes on the persuasive outline. Determine if the counterargument(s) specifically addresses the anticipated objection(s). Counterargument(s) that specifically address the anticipated objection(s) are defined as directly answering the argument presented by the anticipated objection(s). If the outline contains one or more counterargument(s) that do *not* specifically address the anticipated objection(s), then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the fourth column. Use the following criteria to score the counterargument(s) answer:

- 1 = The speaker does *not* present counterargument(s) that specifically address the anticipated objection(s).
  - 2 = The speaker presents counterargument(s) that specifically address the anticipated objection(s).
8. *C.A. Reasoning Score (1 or 2)* refers to the overall score for the counterargument(s) identifying flaws in reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s) by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those counterargument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes on the persuasive outline. Determine if the counterargument(s) identify flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s). Identifying the flaws in reasoning used by the anticipated objection(s) is defined as counterargument(s) that demonstrate unsound reasoning in the objection(s). If the outline contains one or more counterargument(s) that do *not* identify flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s), then



the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the fifth column. Use the following criteria to score the counterargument(s) identification of flaws in reasoning:

- 1 = The speaker does *not* identify flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s).
  - 2 = The speaker identifies flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s).
9. *C.A. Language Score (1 or 2)* refers to the overall score for the language of the counterargument(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those counterargument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes on the persuasive outline. Determine if the language used by the speaker to present the counterargument(s) reflects open-mindedness. Open-minded language is defined as lending credibility to the counterargument(s), while also avoiding biased or slanted wording. If the outline contains one or more counterargument(s) that do *not* use language that reflects open-mindedness, then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the sixth column. Use the following criteria to score the language of the counterargument(s):
- “1” = The speaker does *not* use language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the counterargument(s).

“2” = The speaker uses language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the counterargument(s).

### ***Endnotes***

<sup>1</sup>The persuasive speech evaluation form, criteria for evaluating speeches, and coding form are available upon request from the first author.