

TIPS FOR SUCCESS!

Reasons Why Competent Speakers Don't Pass the Competency Exam

The COMM Department provides a single overview and preparation session for all students signed-up for the Speech Competency Exam. This is NOT a Public Speaking class; it is designed to assist those students who have had prior speech training or experience and who wish to maximize their opportunity to pass the speech competency exam.

Just “showing up” minimizes the chances of passing the exam. The best chance of success is to download the criteria and follow the instructions on the Communication Department website. Most people fail because they don’t “fully” cite reputable sources in their speech (no vague or inadequate references to websites), they go under or over the time limit, they “read” their speech, or they limit eye contact. A clear thesis statement, target audience, and organizational pattern are also important. You must submit an outline in proper outline format and annotate your bibliography. There is a review session the Wednesday before the Speech Competency Exam where you can ask questions and make any last-minute changes before presenting.

Here are some common mistakes students make when preparing for the Speech Competency Exam:

I. INVENTION

A. Cite a minimum of 4 Different “Verbally Cited” Sources FULLY, including (ALL 4): Author / Title / Source / Date.

1. Cite sources verbally in your speech – in addition to citing references in your Bibliography. Remember, you are speaking to a judge. Your audience is not reading a paper. Listeners will judge you based on what you “say,” not on what you have referenced in your Outline or Bibliography.
2. Don’t use vague references to source material.
 - a. “According to a study” – What study? Who published it? When? Why is it relevant?
 - b. “According to the website...www.org” – Don’t cite the website only; cite the article / study published on the website. Who is the author, etc.?
3. Verbally cite at least 4 different sources at a minimum – more is ideal. The more you cite, the more knowledgeable you appear to your audience. It shows that you have done your research, and you know what you are talking about.
4. Use mostly recent sources – within 6 months preferable! Nothing outdated.

B. Adapt to your Target Audience

1. State who your target audience is for this speech. Tailor your message to your target audience.
2. Use examples your target audience can relate to or find compelling.
3. Use engaging and vivid language to maintain interest.
4. Be inclusive. Include multiple viewpoints.
5. Anticipate objections and address those objections in your argument.

II. ORGANIZATION

A. State your Thesis (Specific Purpose) statement in your Introduction.

SPEECH COMPETENCY EXAM

1. Provide an Introduction. Introduce your topic / thesis to your target audience, establish your credibility on the subject matter, and gain their interest and attention.
 2. State your Thesis (Specific Purpose) clearly and early in your Introduction – using a single sentence. Follow up with a preview of your main points.
 3. Make sure your Thesis reflects the speech requirement of being Persuasive, and not Informative. A Persuasive speech needs to include a direct Call to Action or plea to Convince. It goes beyond simply informing them on an issue.
- B. Use an **Organizational Pattern** to keep listeners focused on your main points.
1. Introduction / Body / Conclusion – basic recognizable organizational pattern?
 2. Other organizational patterns include: Problem / Solution, Cause / Effect, Motivated Sequence, Topical.
 3. Use Transitions between your main points to connect your thoughts and highlight where you are going in your speech.
 4. Provide a Conclusion or summary of your main points.
- C. Use proper **Outline Format** and **Annotated Bibliography**.
1. Use **MLA** formatting.
 2. Use Full Sentences for each point – not phrases, bullet points, or paragraphs.
 3. Use proper outline notation (I. / A. / 1. / a. / i.)
 4. Indent correctly. Keep it consistent throughout.
 5. Every point should have at least two subpoints.
 6. Annotate your bibliography – write 1-2 sentences about each source.

III. DELIVERY

- A. Use **Extemporaneous Delivery**
1. Don't read from your note cards or speaker notes, refer to them only.
 2. Establish and maintain eye contact 70% at a minimum – ideally 85%.
 3. Be conversational, careful to not be so rehearsed or memorized that you come across stiff or robotic.
 4. Use hand gestures and body movement to keep and maintain interest.
 5. Limit your vocal fillers or “um’s” by practicing.
- B. Stay within the **Time Limit** of 8 minutes (+ / - 1 minute)!
1. Under 7 min. = lack content development / supporting details to back up your thesis
 2. Over 9 min. = disorganized / inadequate rehearsal of speech delivery
 3. **Time limit is strictly enforced and results in automatic failure if not within 7–9-minute time frame.**

See [Exam Instructions](#), [Oral Communication Criteria](#), and [Tips for Success](#) for all exam requirements.

Here is the [Evaluation Form](#) judges use to evaluate the Oral Competency Exam.

Additional resources available at [The Speech Center](#).