

A DVD to assist students to develop their oral presentation skills

Donna Cooper, Queensland University of Technology

Introduction

The nature of higher education in our contemporary society is changing. For law schools this has meant a shift from teaching purely legal content to, in addition, the teaching of legal and generic skills that have been identified as important to the success of law graduates in the workplace.

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Law School in Brisbane has integrated legal and generic skills throughout the four years of its undergraduate law degree. Students are assisted to gradually develop each identified skill as they progress through their law degree. Oral communication skills are particularly important to the work of future law professionals. In the QUT law degree they are developed via oral presentation, advocacy and negotiation skills.

This session focuses on teaching strategies used to assist students with the development of their oral presentation skills in a first year undergraduate law subject, *Law Society and Justice*. In particular, it will focus on the development of a DVD, *Communication Skills in an Oral Presentation* which was created specifically to assist students with this assessment task.

The DVD will be shown during the session. It primarily aims is to assist students to understand the assessment criteria and to help them prepare and present a good oral presentation. It is now available on the subject's online teaching website and can be accessed by students at their convenience. It works in conjunction with the criteria referenced assessment sheet.

Law school staff assisted TALSS Television, an internal production facility at QUT, to develop the DVD with funds obtained from an internal teaching grant. Working on such a project involved a steep learning curve for academic staff. The issues that arose and lessons learnt will be discussed, in terms of creating a teaching tool for use in an academic subject and in working with actors and producers towards the final product.

Background

In The QUT Law School students are expected to reach a basic level of competency in oral presentations in the first year unit, *Law Society and Justice*. They then have the opportunity to gradually develop their skills in subsequent law subjects as they progress through their degree.

The following tables illustrate the subjects in which students are assisted to develop their oral presentation skills and the various levels that they progress through:

Skill	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3

Oral presentations	Law Society Justice	Public law	Civil procedure
		Theories of Law	Evidence

Skill level	Skills on graduation	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Oral presentations	Demonstrate an ability to express ideas in an oral presentation in an orderly, clear, logical and succinct manner.	Demonstrate an awareness of principles of making an effective oral presentation.	Demonstrate an ability to make a clear, logical and succinct presentation on a simple legal matter.	Demonstrate an ability to make a clear, logical and succinct presentation on a complex legal matter.

With the integration of skills into the law degree went the challenges of how to assess them in ways that would accurately determine whether a student has achieved the required standard of competency. This challenge has been heightened by the law school environment in which we teach, which is characterised by large student cohorts, from 850 first year students in 2003 to 710 law students in 2008. A further challenge was the realisation that we also had to find time and space in the law school curriculum to teach our students the skills that they were going to be assessed upon.

Law Society and Justice is taught in the first semester of the first year of the QUT law degree. The teaching delivery involves one hour lectures for thirteen weeks of semester and ninety minute tutorials, also running across the thirteen weeks of semester. The obvious place to teach and develop oral presentation skills was in the tutorials, particularly as lectures often occur in lecture rooms that hold five hundred students. In contrast, tutorials are held in small groups usually with a maximum of twenty students.

The oral presentation is a group task where groups of 4-5 students research and then present their oral presentation to their tutorial group. The oral presentations take from 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the number of students in the group. Each student is required to speak for 6 minutes. The presentation is marked by the tutor, and the tutor is assisted by written student peer feedback on the presentation received from the student audience. Although students present in a group, they receive an individual marked criteria sheet and an individual mark. Immediately after the presentation, the tutor provides the group with oral feedback their groups' performance. In the following week, each student is provided with written feedback via a criteria sheet, completed by their tutor. At the end of the semester, each student is provided with an individual mark which is posted on the online teaching website for the unit.

To prepare students for the oral presentation assessment task they are taken through the attached criteria sheet. They are also shown the DVD *Communication Skills in an Oral Presentation* to help them understand the criteria and to give them some tips on how to prepare and present. If tutors do not have sufficient time in class to show the DVD, students are asked to view it in their own time by accessing it on the subject's online teaching website. There has been positive student feedback to the DVD in formal student feedback.

LWB142 Oral Presentation Criteria Sheet (20%)
Name of student:
Topic:
Week and Tutorial:

Criteria	Excellent	Very Good	Good	In need of improvement	In need of substantial improvement
Individual performance					
Content and Analysis (Objectives 5 and 6)	Your choice of content was highly relevant and you demonstrated an excellent and comprehensive understanding of the topic. All of the essential concepts were analysed and explained in a highly effective manner.	Your choice of content was relevant and you demonstrated a very good understanding of the topic. Most of the essential concepts were effectively analysed and explained.	Your choice of content was mostly relevant and you demonstrated a good understanding of the topic. Some of the essential concepts were analysed and explained, although not always effectively or in enough detail.	Your choice of content often lacked relevance and you demonstrated limited understanding of the topic. Few concepts were analysed or they were not always essential to the topic and/or lacked effective explanations.	Your choice of content lacked relevance and you demonstrated little understanding of the topic. You had difficulty analysing and explaining essential concepts.
Verbal communication (objective 9)	Words were pronounced correctly; confident and clear articulation at all times. Your pace was slow enough so that your audience could understand your content, and you made good use of vocal variation and pauses to emphasise important points.	Words were pronounced correctly; confident and clear articulation throughout most of your presentation. You made use of vocal variation, although you needed to slow your pace at times and/or use pauses to emphasise important points.	Familiar words were pronounced correctly. You were mostly confident and clear throughout your presentation. You need to slow your pace/ speak louder or softer and/or make more use of vocal variation and pauses to emphasise points.	You experienced some significant problems with pronunciation. At many times you did not exhibit confident and clear articulation. You need to slow your pace/ speak louder or softer and/or make more use of vocal variation.	Pronunciation problems made your presentation difficult to understand. You did not exhibit confident and clear articulation. You need to slow your pace/ speak louder or softer and/or make more use of vocal variation.
Non-Verbal Communication (objective 9)	Open body language (eg. no crossed arms or legs). You maintained consistent eye contact with your audience throughout and only occasionally referred to your material.	Open body language. You sometimes read your material or frequently referred to it, however, made regular eye contact with your audience.	Some closed body language and/or you read your material and made occasional eye contact with your audience.	Your body language was often closed and /or you read your material and eye contact was rarely made with your audience.	Closed body language and/ or you read your entire presentation without making any eye contact with your audience.
Teamwork (Objective 10)					
Structure	The overall presentation dealt with issues in a logical order. The segments clearly linked together. The presentation was delivered within the time limit being 6 mins per person.	The overall presentation dealt with issues in a logical order. The segments linked together. The presentation was delivered within a suitable time frame and/or your group was 2-3 minutes over time.	Your group showed some attempt to deal with issues in a logical order and some aspects did not clearly link together and/or your presentation ran up to 5 minutes over time.	Your group did not present issues in a logical order; many segments were not clearly linked and/or your presentation ran more than 5 minutes over time.	Your group's presentation did not evidence any planning and structure. It did not deal with issues in a logical order and/or the presentation ran more than 10 minutes over time.

Criteria	Excellent	Very Good	Good	In need of improvement	In need of substantial improvement
Teamwork (cont.) (Objective 10)					
Equity and team linkages	You contributed as a team member to the research and delivery of the content of the presentation. Your segment clearly linked to the next presenter to produce a highly effective overall presentation.	You contributed as a team member to the research and delivery of the content of the presentation. Your segment linked to the next presenter to produce an effective overall presentation.	You contributed as a team member to the research and delivery of the content of the presentation. Your segment had some links to the overall presentation.	You did not contribute as a team member to the research and/or delivery of the content of the presentation. Your segment was poorly linked to the next presenter's segment and overall presentation.	You did not contribute to the research and/or delivery of the presentation. Your segment had no links to the next presenter's segment and overall presentation.
Written outline (summary of content covered in presentation)	Your group's outline and visual aids (if used) were extremely useful and professionally prepared. They were used effectively to significantly enhance your presentation.	Your group's outline and visual aids (if used) were useful and well prepared. They were used appropriately to enhance your presentation.	Your group's outline and visual aids (if used) were of some use but could have been improved eg. more logical summary of content in outline, your delivery aligning with each slide in your powerpoints or powerpoints containing less detail.	Your group's outline and visual aids (if used) were prepared but they were not useful. The outline did not summarise the content and any visual aids were distracting and/or difficult to read and did not enhance your presentation.	Your group did not prepare an outline and/or any visual aids were not well-prepared and detracted from your presentation.
Visual Aids (If used)					
Completion of Reflection sheet	Your reflection sheet has been comprehensively completed. You have included detailed reflection on your teamwork experience and what you have learned.	Your reflection sheet has been well completed. There is some reflection on your teamwork experience, although you could have included more detailed reflections in some parts.	Your reflection sheet has been completed adequately. You have included some brief notes about your teamwork experience, but you have not reflected on these experiences (eg. what you have learned about working in a team).	Your reflection sheet has not been completed adequately. You have not included notes about your teamwork experience you have not reflected on these experiences or did not complete your reflection sheet <i>before</i> your oral presentation.	You did not complete a reflection sheet.

Further comments:

Individual Mark: **(out of 20%)**

