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Fighting the Formula: Adherence to Unspoken Rules Limit the Value of Individual Events

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Fighting the Formula: Adherence to Unspoken Rules Limit the Value of Individual Events

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Fighting the Formula: Adherence to Unspoken Rules Limit the Value of Individual Events

Eric W. Mishne

Forensics is one of the most valuable activities in which college students can be involved. However, the strict adherence to formula and unspoken rules diminishes the educational benefits. This article explores an extensive body of literature highlighting the concerns of formulaic practices in collegiate forensics. The author asserts that authenticity, genuine learning, transferability of skills, innovation, and high quality speaking are the biggest victims of stringent adherence to the forensic formula. Specific recommendations for competitors, judges, coaches, and organizing bodies are given, suggesting that there are alternatives which can mitigate growing concerns.

Keywords: Forensics, formula, pedagogy, rules, norms

The activity of forensics provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to learn, improve, and practice public speaking skills. Skills such as the idea generation, organization of those ideas, and the oral presentation of the ideas and arguments are the most tangible takeaways. My involvement in Individual Events has always been motivated by its potential to mature participants into polished and confident thinkers and speakers. Through the time spent in coaching sessions, to the rounds at tournaments, to the countless hours spent practicing in their dorm rooms, the dedicated speaker truly becomes masters of his or her craft. But what craft are they mastering? Competition encourages students to work hard to meet specific standards, and in the spirit of education, standards are important. Yet, the rigidity with which the forensic community clings to their formulas urges me to argue that the craft being mastered is not the art of public speaking, but rather the art of forensic competition. It is no secret that there are expectations for how a winning forensic speech should look and sound in organization and delivery (Olson, 2010; Paine, 2005). Many speakers turn to these expectations as a rubric for creating a guaranteed winning speech (Olson, 2010; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005). However, with the stability and comfort found in these formulas, there also comes unintended consequences that cannot be ignored. This paper offers a description of formulaic speaking, reiterates its presence in forensics, highlights the consequences of those formulas, suggests ways that the forensic community can mitigate the negative impacts, and offers suggestions for research on formulaic speaking in forensics. While formulas are present in both individual events

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and debate, my experience and research is limited to individual events. Therefore this article does not address documented concerns and efforts regarding formula in the debate arena, and uses the term forensics to refer exclusively to individual events.

What is Formulaic Speaking?

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What I refer to as “formulaic speaking” occurs when a speaker makes rhetorical and presentational choices based on speaking conventions, expectations, norms, or other self-imposed limitations rather than thoughtful rationale that is motivated by the occasion, and subject matter. Formulaic speaking takes root in the absence of thoughtful consideration of the subject matter, and the reliance on inorganic practices. Whether or not the speech is formulaic depends solely on the process in which the speaker has engaged. If a speaker has modeled their speech exclusively after convention and norms, it is likely that a formula has been followed.

It is important to note that formulaic speaking does not occur every time prescribed techniques are used. While a speech may exhibit symptoms of having been created formulaically, the intentions or lack of intentions of the speaker is what makes it formulaic, not the specific techniques or strategies they employ.

Techniques are valuable only as they are appropriately relative to the situation (Dewey, 1934). A speaker may utilize common strategies like having three points and employing a speaker’s triangle, and sometimes those common choices are the most appropriate for the occasion and subject matter. Therefore, formulaic speaking is not exclusively concerned with what the speaker does, but the intentionality behind those choices. Formulaic speaking can be identified when the selection of techniques stem from arbitrary norms or unspoken rules absent of thoughtful consideration of their effectiveness at communicating the message. The entirety of my argument against formulaic speaking finds its root solely in the reason speakers make rhetorical and presentational choices.

... formulaic speaking is not exclusively concerned with what the speaker does, but the intentionality behind those choices.

Formula in Forensics

Forensics scholars agree that forensic competition is littered with unwritten rules (Bingham & Goodner, 2012; Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003; Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Reid, 2012). There are expectations for all aspects of a speech (Reid, 2015) including what a speech must look and sound like in topic, organizational strategies, vocal delivery, and movement. Paine (2005) defines unwritten rules as “habits and patterns which may become so entrenched that that operate as if they were rules” (p. 80). The distinction is that “rules” are formal requirements of participation while “unwritten rules” are expectations that have evolved through observation and repetition (Reid, 2015). These unwritten rules are created by speakers, coaches, and judges (Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Swift, 2006), even being published as a form of guidebook (e.g. Olson, 2010). Expectations for the organization of a speech, the use of a teaser in oral interpretation, the

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obligatory speakers triangle, and even a specific cadence in the vocal delivery for all speeches are all taught as the “way you need to speak” if you seek competitive success. These techniques dominate judging paradigms and direct every choice a speaker makes in preparation. Alyssa Reid (2012) argues “the forensic world is its own cultural microcosm filled with demanding norms that dictate how performers should look and act” (pg. 26). I confess to having contributed to this microcosm by coaching my own students to follow the formula, telling competitors that they will not do well in competition unless they adhere to these expectations.

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Anyone who has seen recent rounds of public address can testify that patterns for winning speeches are followed as if they were law (Walker, 2018). Patterns have existed for decades (Paine, 2005; VerLinden, 1987). In nearly every Individual Event (IE) collegiate forensics offers, there is a formula for how that speech is expected to be arranged. Even Impromptu Speaking has its own formula – the event that, ironically, should be the most flexible in structure and argument (Preston, 1991). The practice that is the easiest example of formulaic speaking in the forensic community is the organization of the speech, most notable in persuasion, and impromptu. I recently browsed through over 60 selections of finalists published in *Winning Orations*, the annual publication of the speeches entered in the annual Interstate Oratorical Association (IOA) speech contest. Creative license in organizational patterns extended only as far as choosing between two options: problem/cause/solution, and cause/effect/solution. Few exceptions were noted. Granted, these structures are easy to follow and are effective methods with which to discuss an important topic while presenting practical actions the audience can take. But the forensic community’s “blind devotion to a single organizational pattern” (Bingham & Goodner, 2012, p.49) is exactly what I mean when I speak of formulaic speaking. It is the overt expectation that it is the only acceptable method (Ribarsky, 2005) that becomes problematic, not the existence of the method itself.

In addition to formulas for organizational patterns, forensic formulas exist for delivery and style as well. Forensic speakers implement specific vocal patterns and styles of movement (Mishne, 2017; Reid, 2015; Walker, 2018). Public address speeches require a method of citing sources that is quite specific and meticulous (Walker, 2018). The expectations of style for oral interpretation are also formulaic, from the way the book is held and opened, to the way a speaker is expected to employ a teaser and make a social argument in their introduction, to the way a speaker inflects a question onto their sentences (Reid, 2015). This dedication to specific techniques and styles is created and perpetuated through a monkey-see-monkey-do type mimicry (Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015). Emulation of previous national finalists is rampant (Gaer, 2002). I admit to falling victim to this practice myself in my time as a competitor 15 years ago. I would attend national tournaments and go to out rounds, taking detailed notes on what speakers were doing and how I can work to implement those same techniques. For me, it was learning how to be a better and more competitive speaker. Little did I know, I was participating in the perpetuation of the very formulas I would someday critique. It is little more than sophistic mimicry of performance (Reid, 2012).

Dangers of Formulaic Speaking

In its earliest days of intellectualism, rhetoric was critiqued by the likes of Plato as being antithetical to logical argument and careful analysis (Griswold, 2016). Plato's fear was that speaking would become mere imitation (Griswold, 2016) and that speakers would cease to engage in independent thought and rational discourse. This is also my fear for forensics today. It is clear that formulaic speaking occurs in forensics (Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005). Some may articulately argue that there are notable benefits to be gleaned from formulaic practices. Standards must be held, and beginning students should be taught successful processes in order to learn how to think for themselves. However, I believe it is crucial for us to be aware of the negative impacts of these practices as well. While there are certainly more concerns than mentioned in this essay, there are five that I will address: adherence to formula fosters inauthentic performances, restricts learning, limits transferability of speech skills, stifles creativity and innovation, and discourages high quality speaking.

Formulaic Speaking Fosters Inauthentic Performances

The first impact of formulaic speaking in the forensic world is that it fosters inauthentic performances. The authenticity of a speech has an impact on both the speaker and the audience. Carmine Gallo (2014) writes in his book *Talk Like TED*, that the very first thing a successful speaker must do is find something they are passionate about. Passion is what fuels a poignant and effective oration. Without passion, there cannot be authenticity. Authenticity is one of the most valued characteristics in today's younger generation (Richardson, 2017), and we cannot afford to squelch it. By forcing speakers to fit into the prescribed formulaic mold, some of the organic passion is removed from the presentation. When a speaker's topic and organizational style is dictated by external factors, their ability to allow the subject matter to speak to them and through them is diminished, thus the end product is a less-than-authentic performance. Billings (1997) points out what I believe to be one of the greatest tragedies of formula: the loss of personal style. No one enjoys watching a series of speeches that look and sound the same. Mills (1984) articulates profoundly that "style should not become an artificial decoration to be exhibited" (p.18).

By forcing speakers to fit into the prescribed formulaic mold, some of the organic passion is removed from the presentation.

In fact, this monotony could be enough to cause competitors and coaches alike to lose interest in the activity of forensics (Paine, 2005). Most would agree that individual differences and diversity in performances are good (Billings, 1997). The forensics community prides itself on its inclusionary policies and diversity.

Yet, the competitive formulas that are systemic in the competitive arena force each diverse speaker to perform identically. Observation of out rounds of Drama at the 2017 and 2018 NFA, for example, revealed most speeches beginning with a one and a half to two and a half minute lighthearted teaser ending with a "twist" in the plot setting up the remainder of the story, is followed by a one-two minute introduction highlighting the social or philosophical issue

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illustrated by the story, and the remaining six minutes build to a highly emotional climax at 8:45 and resolve in a “bum, ba-dum, ba-dum” cadenced ending at 9:50. This predictable pattern is made more apparent when you hear indescribable yet distinctly recognizable vocal rhythms adopted by nearly every speaker. While this is simply my own observation absent of empirical study, I do believe it is indicative of the event as a whole. Prose Interpretation follows similar patterns, making it nearly indistinguishable from Drama (Rudnick, Peavy, Cosby, Harter, & Dougherty, in press). When adhering to so strict a formula, a speaker’s individuality as a performer and thinker is lost and we create a homogenous community of speakers (Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005).

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Judges are putting too much emphasis on the “how” the speech is said, de-emphasizing the “what” of the speech (Bacon, 1979), and ultimately devaluing the speaker themselves. One coach describes disturbing ballots received by one of their students who is confined to a motor scooter. “We receive so many ballots that penalize [her] for the inability to sound or move like the scripted and dehumanized mode of persuasion I refer to as the Persuade-O-Bot 2020” (Hinderaker, personal communication, 2018). The fact that a young woman who wants to improve her public speaking ability is critiqued because her wheelchair limits her ability to move around the space is disgraceful. Absolutely unacceptable. Some would argue forensics fosters an “elitism” that excludes the physically challenged competitor (Kosloski, 1994, p.38), and I would add that our unspoken rules play a large part in creating that elitism. Hinderaker goes on to express praise for the few ballots received rewarding the student for her courage and thanking her for embracing her own speaking style rather than mimicking other speakers. I find hope in the fact that there are at least a few judges out there who praise speaker’s individuality. Unfortunately, those judges seem to be the exception to the norm.

I recall a persuasive speech I judged several years ago in which a young man spoke of his own personal struggle with the physical condition discussed in the speech. His emotion seemed genuine and he formed a connection through his passion for the topic. Today, possibly due to this young man’s competitive success (I believe he was a national finalist in several events including Persuasion), pointing out a personal connection to the topic is commonplace and now a part of the formula for persuasive speaking (Richardson, 2017). When a speaker makes a unique choice that goes over well, others begin to adopt it (Reid, 2015). Ironically, the unspoken rule that you must have a melodramatic personal experience with your persuasive topic or the theme in your POI or poetry can diminish the authenticity of the performance by making students feign emotion. Even 100 years ago, as written in the very first issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, it was understood that when a speaker’s “emotion is artificially worked up or thrust upon us...his appeal is mechanical and ineffective” (Gunnison, 1915, p. 144). This artificiality evolved into a common practice and diminishes the individuality of the speaker, breeding inauthenticity.

Formulaic Speaking Restricts Learning

The educational goals of forensics are touted by every coach and Director of Forensics as the reason for the activity. I often repeat the mantra, “competition is the motivation to learn, not

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the reason to learn.” However, competition too often becomes the sole reason for learning (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Ribarsky, 2005; Williams & Gantt, 2008). It is these oppressive formulas that give credence to Burnett, Brand, and Meister’s (2003) claim that education as the goal of forensics is a myth. They assert “the practice of competition coopts education” (p. 12). This argument begins to hold water when you realize that students do not need to learn public speaking skills in order to compete well – they only need to learn the norms of forensics competition (Reid, 2012). The nature of these conventions promotes competition, not learning (Gaer, 2002) and are “pedagogically irresponsible” (Reid, 2015, p. 9).

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As we teach students to give speeches in a specific manner, we teach them to *do*, not *think*. This limits the student’s ability to reach for higher levels of education and keeps them low on Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a philosophy of the stages of learning (Bloom, Furst, Hill, Engelhart, & Krathwohl, 1956). The terminology for the 6 tiers consists of classifications ranging from “remembering” – the lowest tier – to “creating” – the highest tier (Forehand, 2010). The lower tiers engage in memory skills and a simpler understanding and application of ideas (Forehand, 2010). Mastery to some extent occurs at each level (Furgerson, 2012), but students fully master a subject and find value in it through the highest tiers. When one engages in challenging activities they are able reach for the highest level of learning, the place where they can create new knowledge (Forehand, 2010), true education is occurring. When blindly following a blueprint, speakers are forced to remain at the lower levels of learning, as they have no reason to question why they are doing it (Reid, 2015). Absent of the high level conceptual learning and comprehension of principles achieved through the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, current formulaic practices in individual events disadvantage the students by requiring imitation of a model. Plato would roll in his grave.

Part of the educational value of any activity is the opportunity for students to try new things, experiment with different ideas, and practice skills they have not yet mastered (Paine, 2005). However, adherence to prescribed formulas does not leave very much room for students of public speaking in forensics to engage in new concepts or experiment with new practices. Forensics should be teaching speakers more than a checklist of things to do to win awards (Richardson, 1999). Because of the way speakers are forced to conform to certain expectations, and are taught how to do so by their coaches, they come to rely on these techniques rather than learning theoretical or rhetorical principles.

When examining the formulas demanded by judges in forensics, we can see them as checklists working against educational goals of forensics; goals like creativity, critical thinking and argumentation (Richardson, 1999). Not only do formulas require strategies and techniques not included in most public speaking curriculum, some scholars believe they defy what is taught in public speaking courses (Gaer, 2002; Reid, 2015; Shafer, 2005). This “devolution of forensic education” (Bingham & Goodner, 2012, p. 51), not only disadvantages speakers who do not know the formula (Paine, 2005), but leaves behind the very motivation we claim to have: education (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Ribarsky, 2005).

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Formulaic Speaking Limits Transferability

Another significant problem with the reliance on formula in forensics is the lack of transferability to “real world” situations (Billings, 2011; Duncan, 2013; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005; Walker, 2018). VerLinden (1986) says the forensic community gathers not to inform an audience, but to compete and compare ourselves with others. This remains true in recent years as well (Duncan, 2013). To this end we have adopted methods of speaking that makes public speaking objective in the minds of the judges, rather than transferable methods applicable to situations one would encounter post-graduation. We create “effective *forensic* speakers rather than effective *public* speakers [emphasis added]” (Reid, 2015, p. 8). The real world is a far more diverse population than that of forensics (Kosloski, 1994), yet our speaking style is tailored only to those in our tight knit community (Grace, 2015). The value of forensics comes in the application of the skills learned through competition to the real world such as interviews, day to day conversation, and meetings (Preston, 1991). However, given the intricacies of the conventions, particularly those in Public Address, direct application of forensic skills to those real-world situations is difficult (Walker, 2018), though admittedly not impossible, and there are certainly intelligent students who have become effective speakers outside of forensics.

Judging paradigms seem to be made up of checklists of techniques required by judges that are not going to cut it in the real world (Reid, 2015; Richardson, 1999). The checklists include practices like over-enunciation and robotic gestures and movements that are unwelcome to outsiders (Bingham & Goodner, 2012; Reid, 2015, Richardson, 2017; Walker 2018). I have shown videos of national finalists and national champions to my public speaking classes and they are bothered and displeased by the style. Even still, we meticulously train our speakers to talk in this manner because it’s what wins awards in forensics (Reid, 2015). In prioritizing competitive success, we sacrifice imparting skills that will have more diverse application in non-forensic settings. At the risk of being criticized for using non-academic sources, I did some digging into the Internet to find what businesses and organizations value in their motivational speakers, keynote addresses, and other speaking in the workforce. I was not surprised to find that of the 13 “must-haves” listed on one site (Farber, 2017), none of them related to delivery style or structure of the speech. While delivery and organization are the two characteristics forensics evaluates the most harshly, business and keynote speakers are evaluated more on their topic, passion, interaction with the audience, and ability to make the topic relatable (Farber, 2017). These are skills forensics speakers certainly can possess, but they are not part of most judging paradigms. If forensics has the goal of education and preparation for the real world, we should evaluate speakers on the characteristics demanded by the real world’s “social context” (Richardson, 2017, p. 58), not on the demands of unspoken rules.

Formulaic Speaking Stifles Creativity and Innovation

Forensic formula “kills creativity and rewards mediocrity” (Bingham and Goodner, 2012, p. 47). Innovation is simply not welcome in the forensic community (Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005). Public speaking is an art form (Walker, 2018). Much like painting, sculpting, creative

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writing, or theatre, public speaking requires a combination of creativity and mastery over technique. If one is to reach their audience in effective ways, an artist, therefore a speaker, must employ creative efforts as well as rely on both skill and style that will speak to their audience (Dewey, 1934). However, trends to exclusively reward speeches fitting the mold ignore the importance of artistry and innovation in oratory (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Paine, 2005; Ribarsky, 2005) and treats it as if there were a scientific formula for an effective speech. Speakers are not encouraged to step outside of the box and engage in creative speaking styles (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Walker, 2018). Artistry is identified in part by the artists ability to adapt and be spontaneous, responding to the needs of the subject matter and audience (Dewey, 1934). While events such as After Dinner Speaking (ADS) allow for some flexibility in off-the-cuff adaptations (Billings, 1997) this is not commonplace in other events. On the contrary, in forensics, spontaneity is stifled as the speakers are forced into conformity (Bingham and Goodner, 2012). Imagination takes a back seat to imitation as judges hold narrow paradigms that evaluate speeches as if they are a “paint by number” (Richardson, 1999).

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While some forensic participants can find value in formulaic modes of expression and practice, they largely work against the artistic and “inhibit experimentation and potentially ground-breaking risk-taking” (Paine, 2005, p. 83). When we engage in formulaic practices of oratory, creativity is stifled and we “ignore free thought and expression” (Gaer, 2002, p. 55). This realization should strike fear into forensic educators and advocates. As I’ve already mentioned, freedom of thought and expression is a core value in the forensic community, and is a highly valued aspect even among competitors (Billings, 2011). Yet, our common practices work against this very fundament. A few interactions with competitors and rounds of oral interpretation make the overwhelming amount of diversity, creativity, and artistry in the forensic community it abundantly clear. Unfortunately, our marriage to strict formulas in every event restricts the potential of participants to reach for even greater creative heights. With speakers so tied to a specific type of speech, it is difficult to learn a new style (Billings, 2011). Walker (2018) even suggests that we teach a “powerwalk” (p. 3) version of the most basic public speaking skills, rather than teaching them advanced public speaking skills. Tying this concept back to the diminished educational value and borrowing from the metaphor of a painter, Lauth (2010) posits this question: “As educators...do we want students to show us the paintings of others, or do we want to hand them a brush and let them paint?” (p. 90).

Formulaic Speaking Discourages High Quality Speaking

As communication educators we must accept the responsibility to urge our students to reach for excellence. We must “represent [and] define the ideal” communication (Richardson, 2017, p. 57) However, formulaic speaking discourages the pursuit of high quality speaking (Ribarsky, 2005). The true way to reach the highest quality of art is to allow the subject matter and the occasion to dictate the form (Dewey, 1934). The subject matter is possibly the most influential aspect of the speech and refers to the topic and the purpose of the speech-making process. The topic should be the very first thing a speaker considers as it must influence the form

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of the speech (Dewey, 1934). However, when speakers resort to relying on a formula for their speech, the subject matter is seldom given appropriate consideration. Forensic speakers who break the mold in pursuit of the best strategies for their speech are often penalized (Paine, 2005; Ribarsky, 2005). This penalty is rarely overt, and few judges would ever admit to it – because most people know such judgements are unreasonable – but observation of final rounds at most large tournaments all seem to indicate undeniable patterns, suggesting that judges prefer certain methods of presentation. Thus, when a speaker engages in a divergent organizational pattern or speaking style, they most often do not advance past preliminary rounds. Granted, exceptions bring a breath of fresh air, and informative speaking seems to be the event to recently break the mold. Unfortunately, many competitors who present distinctive speeches motivated by the subject matter and not by the expectations, will not find a welcome home in collegiate forensics (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2015).

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The canons of rhetoric are one of the foundational building blocks of oration. They are the process of speech-making engaged with by every speaker. These five components of the speech-making process each play a distinct role in the crafting of a speech. The first canon, invention, is where the speaker imagines their topic and conceptualizes their approach to the topic and the speech as a whole. The arrangement phase is when the speaker organizes their content into an appropriate order and arranges their arguments and examples into what will become the outline of their speech. Memory, or as some contemporary texts call it, “understanding” (Nelson, Titsworth, & Pearson, 2013), refers to the knowledge of the subject matter possessed by the speaker, including, but extending far beyond, memorizing the specific content selected. Style refers to one's language style, writing style, speaking style, and overall presentation style. The fifth canon is delivery, which encompasses the actual presentation of the oration and considers the specific medium and components of delivering the content to the audience. Active engagement and thoughtful, intentional choices at each canon's juncture is crucial for the development of an effective speech of high quality. Appropriate attention to the canons allows a speaker to craft a speech that will be effective at sharing the subject matter with the audience.

I mention the canons of rhetoric because they are victims of formulaic speaking (Walker, 2018). The more a speaker observes a strict formula, the less effort they need to put into the canons. When a speaker is told to use a topical structure for their speech, they virtually skip over the canon of arrangement. If they had given it more thought, and allowed the topic to speak to them, they may have discovered a chronological approach or addressing their topic considering regional variances may have been more effective. But speakers in forensics are not given this opportunity. For example, in the event of persuasion, forensic norms have demanded for a problem/cause/solution for over a decade (Bingham & Goodner, 2012; Ribarsky, 2005). Since the arrangement of this speech is predetermined, in depth engagement in the process of arrangement is useless. The expectations for style of performance eliminate the need to consider the canon of style. Adhering to a formula reduces the need to expend energy on the canons of rhetoric at every turn, decreasing the quality of the speech.

Alternatives and Solutions

The existence of formulas in forensics is evident, and these formulas are detrimental to many aspects of the student's personal growth and development and for the activity itself. We must consider ways to eliminate the over reliance on these techniques and the value placed on them. Change is not easy, and it cannot be achieved by one group of people or a handful of scholarly articles and NCA panels. Competitors, judges, coaches, and even sponsoring organizations and tournaments must all see the importance of loosening the grasp on these unspoken rules, and make the following changes to practice and ideology.

For Competitors

Write organically and thoughtfully. If you are a competitor, there are several things you can do to resist and change the formulaic norms. First and foremost, you need to resist the pressure to write speeches that conform to the norm, and instead, set aside formula when writing your speech (Walker, 2018). Ultimately, you can arrive at a presentation that is most appropriate for the subject matter by engaging in the canons of rhetoric (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011, Walker, 2018). This is not a difficult step to take. In fact, sometimes it is *easier* to write a speech organically, rather than smashing a topic into a prescribed structure. True meaning can only rise out of organic development and deliberation (Dewey, 1934). The first step to creating an artful public address must be thought. Brainstorming, experimentation, and discussion with others about the topic are key to making sure your approach will be worthwhile. Devoting time to think about your topic in the infancy of your speech development is crucial if you want to avoid resorting to formula. Art comes out of the natural process of consideration, not the forcing of form (Dewey, 1934). Every expression should be deliberate (Paine, 2005), and expression takes time (Dewey, 1934). As speakers, you must discover your method of expression for yourself, and not be told how to express yourself. Unfortunately, this may mean putting your competitive success on the line (Paine, 2005). These steps necessitate a reevaluation of your priorities and goals. Remember, this event is for you. Do what will benefit you most in the long-run. Allow yourself to “do speech” your way. Cezanne writes “we should not be content to keep the formula of our illustrious predecessors” (as cited in Read, 1954), rather we should adapt and improve on what has come before.

Allow technique to emerge organically. Public speakers need to de-emphasize the use of techniques when crafting a speech (Mishne, 2017; Richardson, 2017). You have the freedom to pick and choose your speaking strategies and techniques. For example, the “speaker's triangle” is a technique of physical delivery that can be an effective strategy for providing a physical delineation between your ideas. However, there are other effective ways to demonstrate a separation of ideas. Self-evaluation of your speaking choices in light of the content of the speech and your own style can help avoid formula for formula's sake (Reid, 2015). You must be willing to use organic strategies, rather than automatically employing techniques because it's

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expected. Instead of working to incorporate the popular techniques into your speech, allow your technique to emerge from the demands of your topic and purpose (Walker, 2018). Walker (2018) argues that the canons of arrangement and style are being lost through current trends in forensics, and can be recaptured through consideration of each speech topic. Only then will you have an authentic performance.

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Be creative. Speakers should feel encouraged to engage in artful speaking. Without imagination, you as a speaker and artist miss out on the “chief instrument of the good” (Dewey, 1934, p. 362). This goes beyond creative use of language. Creativity should also be employed in the form of the speech (Walker, 2018), in the examples used, and in the delivery style. The relationship between the elements of your speech must be clear; otherwise, design is in vain (Dewey, 1934). Creativity is the well-spring of the memorable. And when something is memorable, it is impactful. Artists engage in self-expression and self-expression is of utmost importance (Dewey, 1934). When giving a speech, which is expression of the most public nature, you must be artful if not for the sole sake of reaching an audience, but for the sake of creating something that speaks on behalf of itself. Recognize that there is no right or wrong way to give a speech (Mishne, 2017; Paine, 2005) and that effective public speaking is not a science; “the artist cannot work mechanically” (Dewey, 1934, p.8). You cannot simply take a prototype and apply your topic to it, as you might a mathematical equation. You must bend the unspoken rules and adapt existing models to fit the occasion and subject matter in creative ways.

Observe a variety of speakers. Finally, you need to be choosy in who you turn to for public speaking inspiration. Too often speakers mimic past winners because they think it will give them a competitive advantage (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015; Ribarsky, 2005). It is a natural instinct and a good habit for you to observe other highly revered speakers as inspiration for your own speaking, but you should do so with caution and discernment (Reid, 2015). Recognized speakers from TED Talks, champions from forensics and Toastmasters, and even the occasional celebrity speaker, provide a wide assortment of high quality examples from which you can draw inspiration. Ironically, speakers who copy their speaking idol’s style and techniques, in effect, create a formula out of a good speech, and in the process, miss the potential of developing their own style (Ribarsky, 2005). When looking for inspiration, you should view several speeches from different sources to gain a well-rounded arsenal of ideas and techniques from which you can carefully chose the form of your speech, rather than relying on the previous year’s national finalists as your exclusive model. Masters “do not follow either models or rules but subdue both of these things to serve enlargement of personal experience” (Dewey, 1935, p. 314), warning us that even those who are revered should not be mimicked.

Judges

Value personal style. I believe the buck stops with you. The power to decide which speakers, and ultimately which conventions will be rewarded, lies in the hands of the judges

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(Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015). It doesn't matter what a student does, you have to change your judging paradigm if forensics is to see real change. There are several things you can and are obligated to do in order to reduce negative impacts of unspoken rules in forensics. I believe the first step is to be open to different styles of speaking (Gaer, 2002; Paine, 2005; Ribarsky, 2005). There should be no limit to the individuality a good work of art or a speech can possess (Dewey, 1934). Speakers who show individualism in their speech should be rewarded not penalized. As an important clarification, I do not believe creativity should be a requirement or that speakers should be rewarded only for their individuality. This will only lead students to force "creative" choices upon their speech regardless of effectiveness. Speakers must still demonstrate good speech-making skills (Kay, 2017). Even considering those speakers who are not able-bodied, it is still possible for them to give a great speech, not despite their disability, but on the basis of the qualifications of a good speech (Brockmann & Jeffress, 2017). Speakers must be allowed to seek out and find a personal style of their own. You must permit speakers to engage with their topics in a manner showcasing their own individuality and personal style. It is not enough however, to permit speakers to be themselves, you need to encourage them when you see it. Judges can and should use the ballot to encourage behaviors they find valuable (Reid, 2015; Richardson, 2017).

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Break down organizational norms. Since judges create the norms, it is up to you to change them. While the speakers can take all of the aforementioned suggestions, if judges still expect and demand adherence to ambiguous and unspoken rules, student's efforts towards creating more effective speaking will be in vain. If we are to foster the maturing of a speaker, we cannot force subjective standards on them, but rather, we should allow them to create their own standards (Dewey, 1934). No speaker should be penalized because they chose not to use the speaker's triangle. Speakers engage in formulaic practices because they believe it's what the forensic community wants to see. As you evaluate your role in this activity, consider your contribution in the forensic community. You dictate "what the forensic community wants to see." You may even use ballots to instruct speakers to engage or not to engage in a particular technique because "that's not what will win this competition." Richardson asserts that "ballots...represent our teaching." (2017, p. 56) If judges stopped judging on what they think the "community" wants to see, and starts judging based on what *they* find important in a speech we will begin to break down the overbearing organizational norms that are not grounded in pedagogy or theory.

Re-evaluate judging paradigm. Hanson (1988) identified four criteria for ADS, that I believe should be applicable to all speeches: suitable subject, originality and creativity in the development of the subject, appropriate and effective language for the subject and occasion, and delivery adapted to the nature of the subject. This should be the criteria on which all other criteria are based. Judging paradigms requiring students to use specific verbiage such as "Today, we will first ... second, we will ... before finally..." are exactly the type of paradigms that needs to be challenged. Such specific judging paradigms are concerning and need to be abandoned in

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favor of more subjective paradigms that will leave room for speakers to be original and creative. Your judging paradigm must evaluate the speech rather than impose your own opinion about style and convention (Billings, 1997). Judges must also evaluate the speech based on good communication in an effort to use the ballot as a teaching tool (Rudnick, Peavy, Cosby, Harter, & Dougherty, in press). Part of this evaluation is the practice of using the ballot as a way to encourage the speaker's own style and offer public speaking advice, not as a platform to teach specific styles and tell them why they aren't doing it "right." (Gaer, 2002).

Coaches and Directors of Forensics

Encourage innovation in coaching and judging. The coach is the middle point between judge and student. Coaches direct students and also serve as judges. If anyone is in a position to make changes it is the coach (Reid, 2015). Coaches, encourage your students to break the mold. Push them to think outside the box and to engage in good public speaking practices, not just the ones likely to advance them to the final round (Hatfield-Edstrom, 2011; Reid, 2015). Once you have helped your students break the mold, judge rounds using the same paradigm. Hypocrisy in this area is counterproductive (Reid, 2015). Coach/judges who coach their students to use the formulas in order to ensure their place in out rounds, but criticize the same formula used by other competitors when judging are part of the problem, not the solution.

Teach theory in forensics. Good pedagogical practices should be the goal of every coach. NFA is explicit about their desire to train coaches to be teachers as well as coaches (Morris, 2017). Reid (2012) argues that coach/teachers must bridge the gap between our practice of speaking, and the theoretical foundations of speaking if we want to break out of the forensic microcosm and push students learning higher on Bloom's Taxonomy. You must train speakers to choose strategies best suited to their presentation by teaching communication theory such as the canons of rhetoric. Individualistic pedagogy, rather than formulaic and prescriptive techniques, will teach students more advanced public speaking skills (Walker, 2018). Students of public speaking need to be taught how to approach a topic based on the subject matter and occasion. While they should be learning the basics of these in their entry level speech classes, if they are to become skilled speakers, it cannot stop there (Walker, 2018). Giving a novice an outline to serve as a model is the natural first step to learning, but it cannot stop there (Walker, 2018). Speech writers should understand what it means to "invent" their speech, the implications of various "arrangement" strategies, devote time to "understanding" their topic, learn to develop a personal "style" for their speaking, and then choose the mode of "delivery" best suited for their holistic presentation. Monroe's Motivated Sequence, a theory of persuasive speaking should be taught specifically when learning about persuasive speeches. Armed with the knowledge of how an audience can be persuaded and effective strategies for engaging an audience, speakers will be equipped not only with the tools of public speaking but with an understanding of how to use them and how to adapt them to their subject matter and occasion. You, the forensics coach, carry some of the responsibility to teach these concepts.

Participate in non-traditional events. Coaches choose what tournaments their teams attend. Participating in leagues that reward innovation and transferable skills without conforming to the ridged styles can be a significant statement for the activity of forensics (Ribarsky, 2005). Leagues like the Public Communication Speech and Debate League offer events like Table Topics, Public Narrative, and Interviewing, which apply public speaking skills to situations and topics likely to be encountered in the real world (West, 2015). Events like these can help situate forensics as a part of the larger academic community and “must be attended to and managed to ensure the continued success of forensics programs and forensics as an activity” (Holm & Miller, 2004, p. 23). Some individual tournaments offer these events in addition to the traditional forensic events. Encourage your team members to participate in them. If you are hosting a tournament, offer these events. Directors of Forensics who are passionate about changing the nature of forensics and re-creating a truly educational activity can choose to exclusively participate in tournaments offering these highly transferable events. If we are to increase the value of the event, and the diversity of those in it, we must make significant alterations to current practices (Holm & Miller, 2004). It will come at a price to be sure, but not until you take a stance and let the governing organizations know what is truly valuable will we see massive shifts in judging paradigms and organization norms (Paine, 2005; Reid, 2015).

The Leagues and Tournament Directors

Utilize more lay judges. The responsibility for change does not rest on the students and coaches alone. One thing tournaments can do to challenge formulaic speaking is to rely on more lay judges (Ribarsky, 2005). First, while “hired” judges can get a bad rap as competitors are frustrated with these “inexperienced” judges who “don’t know what they are talking” about (Grace, 2015), these are the people who will be the audiences of our speakers once they graduate. If anyone’s opinion should be considered, it is these “untrained” judges with real world expectations of what a speech should look like. Second, by using more lay judges, we will balance out the judging pool with evaluators who do not know or adhere to the formulas. They will judge the speakers based on the principles of natural speaking ability and good quality research, without imposing the demands of a formula. Lay judges are necessary for the fostering of real world speaking skills void of oppressive organizational norms.

Offer more experimental events. One league, the Public Communication Speech and Debate League (PCSDL), has introduced a set of events that appeal to those students and forensic programs seeking real-world speaking practice. Events like Public Narrative, Slam Poetry, Radio News Broadcasting, and Powerpoint Sales, have a direct transferability to real world situations. The Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament has also begun including Interviewing as a primary event. Some small tournaments have even begun offering these events alongside their standard NFA/AFA events. This is a step in the right direction. More tournament directors ought to consider offering these events at all tournaments. While it may create more administrative work,

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the net benefits should be enough to warrant offering events that give participants a chance to practice highly transferable public speaking skills.

Be open about purpose. In her *Update from the President*, Karen Morris discusses the importance of pedagogy in the context of NFA (2017). She asserts that organizations like NFA must focus on training coaches to be teachers, not just coaches (2017). This is great as long as pedagogy really is the purpose of forensics. There is some debate over this (e.g. Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003), and no doubt that the focus shifts over time. The purpose of forensics impacts this debate over formula. Some of the ideas in this article are easily dismissed if you adhere to the philosophy of forensics as a very specific type of competitive speaking, and speakers follow the techniques they do because they are part of the “game.” But, forensic organizations do not often use this “game” type of language when referring to their purpose. Ironically, they utilize the “game” terminology such as competition, judges, rounds, awards, etc. in all aspects of the activity (Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003). This conflict of purpose statement and praxis is problematic and confusing to participants (Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003). Tournament sponsors must be clear about their expectations and acknowledge that their preferred style and is not the only or best method of delivering a speech (Mishne, 2017; Paine, 2005). While some may consider this to be interference with the integrity of competition, organizations have a responsibility to encourage the type of participation they value, and to discourage practices detrimental to their goals. If they are open about their purpose, and make rules and policies reflecting that purpose, we can avoid misunderstanding about the stylistic requirements and perhaps open the door to less stringent expectations.

Research Possibilities

While I have outlined some practical steps to be taken by speakers, judges, coaches, and organizations sponsoring tournaments, there are also several areas of research and inquiry that can help shed light on this problem, and provide detail to these possible solutions. First, for those who doubt the widespread practice of only rewarding forensic competitors who follow the expected formula, I encourage a longitudinal study of out round advances at multiple national tournaments. By examining videos and manuscripts of both winning speeches and non-finalist breaks at national tournaments over an extended period of time reaching back multiple decades, we will be able to ascertain the extent of formulaic expectations. Research of this nature has been done before on different scales and for different purposes and often only examining a specific event (e.g. Kelly, Kelly, & Schnoor, 2008; White & Messer, 2003), but a larger scale study is needed. Examination of the organizational choices, delivery techniques, and specific content across multiple national organizations such as NFA, AFA, and PKD will likely reveal undeniable patterns. Looking at each event independently and then comparing the trends across events will expose the formulas and expectations permeating all of individual event competitions. While this is a massive undertaking, it is a step that will lead the forensic community closer to its common goals.

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Interviews with judges, coaches and competitors may also reinforce the prevalence of formulaic practices in forensics, while also shedding light on how we can move away from these trends. Few forensic researchers employ interviews (e.g. Pelletier, 2015), but that method would provide a very rich understanding to this complex issue of formulaic forensics. Since interviews provide a rich understanding of how participants understand the context (Tracy, 2013) it would benefit forensics to engage in more research of this nature. Interviews with coaches and competitors alike would not only reveal what they consider to be the unspoken rules, but would provide understanding into the motivation for adhering to that formula. Additionally, interviewing judges from both within forensics and without would shed light on the different ways judges reward formulas, and what expectations different judges bring into the rounds.

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Little has been done to explore the long term effects of specific forensics skills (Billings, 2011). While Billings (2011) looked at past participants in forensics regarding their satisfaction with the activity and some general benefits, I suggest inquiring specifically about their post-forensics experiences with public speaking (Kerber & Cronn-Mills, 2005). Former competitors are largely positive when speaking of their time in forensics (Billings, 2011), but the direct applicability of speaking skills is not addressed in research. Examining the use of forensic skills in a different context will allow forensic scholars and participants to better evaluate the use of formulaic practices, and of all practices in forensics. If anyone can speak to the transferability of these formulas, it would be those who have used them in the real world.

Finally, Ribarsky (2005) began investigating ways to foster innovation in forensics. Scholars would be wise to pick up that torch and seek out practices encouraging speakers to engage in creativity and independent thought when preparing their speeches. Open ended surveys, interviews, or participant observation would likely be the most effective approach to this line of inquiry as each would allow the participants to share their experiences and provide detailed examples of how their own innovations were received.

Tracking trends in an activity such as forensics can shed a lot of light on the impact it has on those it serves. This proposed research would allow scholars to identify prominent trends and changing norms, and guide forensic educators as they coach, judge, and offer administrative support to their forensic teams. The overall value of an event is determined by the outcomes and the methods of achieving those outcomes. The trends and norms that would be illuminated by research on forensic formulas and the unspoken rules would offer long lasting insights into the value of this event for past, present, and future participants.

Conclusion

There are some very reasonable arguments in favor of forensic conventions (Duncan, 2013; Paine, 2005). I do not want to diminish the efforts of some to create a standardized method of education and evaluation. Nevertheless, I firmly believe the consequences of formulaic practices in individual events outweigh the potential benefits. While many in the forensic community are open to discussing this issue and there have been countless panels and papers presented at conferences on the matter (Holm, 2018), rarely do changes occur (Hatfield-Edstrom,

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2011; Reid, 2015). While norms are always changing and evolving, the truth of the matter is that there are many conventions that have remained unchanged for decades (Paine, 2005) and even when they do change, they continue to be problematic as evidenced by references to other scholarly work in this essay spanning several decades and all discussing the same concerns.

Considering lost individuality, discouraged artfulness and creativity, stifled learning, and diminished transferability of skills, formulaic speaking in forensics cannot be ignored. Its effects are widespread, stealthy, and detrimental. As a competitor and a coach I have fallen victim to the allure of a shiny method of speaking in exchange for a shiny trophy only to discover too late that I missed a great opportunity to speak for myself or to encourage a student to seek out their own personal identity as a speaker. I do not think that every speech needs to be brand new and innovative. Humans need order and familiarity as much as they need novelty (Dewey, 1934). There are many occasions where an old trick is the most effective. There is nothing new under the sun, and it is futile for a speaker to reinvent the wheel every time they begin creating a speech. But the knowledge of many techniques and styles must be accessed before blindly choosing the form of a speech. When speaking of memorable speakers, Gail Larsen (2013) offers this observation:

“They avoid formulaic speaking at all costs. They understand their particular configuration of gifts, talents, and life experiences is unlike that of anyone else. The best they have to give to speaking is contained in their unique perspective. This original medicine, the source of their brilliance, springs from the heart of who they are, creating a singular pattern nowhere else to be duplicated.”

We can no longer blindly follow in the footsteps of the speakers who have come before us. The cost is too great. As educators, we must seek out the most effective and meaningful activities for our students. By scrutinizing the values that dictate our practices, and the practices that mold the values, we can reach great heights in the field of communication and oratory. Our students, our academic field, and our country need us to train speakers who can think for themselves and craft messages that will move those around them to see the truth that only comes when imagination and reason are combined in artful and thoughtful oratory.



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