Oral Communication Seminar: Tutorial Group
Paula V. Smith
May 1992

I. GENERAL QUESTIONS

What does each of us hope to gain from this seminar?

Regarding oral skills, what do we expect students to know, or be able to do, by the time they finish the tutorial semester?

Do we find it important to teach oral skills in tutorial? As important as teaching writing? Less? More? Do these two goals conflict or overlap?

Can students perceptibly improve their oral skills in one semester? If not, how do we view our task?

If students are to practice public speaking in tutorial, how can we give them both the opportunity to develop this skill and some feedback on how they are doing in this area?

Communication includes listening as well as talking. Across all kinds of oral assignments, is there any way to elicit, evaluate, and reward good listening?

Does Grinnell College have particular problems or expectations regarding oral work in the classroom?

Will tutorial students bring certain expectations based on their high school experience?

How important is it to make students feel comfortable and secure in the class, to give them what they think they need? By fostering an atmosphere of warm acceptance, do we risk turning the class into a therapy session or fun-and-games rather than a site of active learning? What if learning oral skills might feel uncomfortable?

In that they compel students to absorb, understand, summarize, analyze, re-shape, and extend the ideas explored in the tutorial, can oral skills be viewed as a critical component of effective thinking?

Discussion and oral reports are not the only forms of oral activity in the classroom. Of those listed below, which have you tried, or might you be interested in discussing?*

II. CLASS DISCUSSION

What purposes do tutorial discussions serve?

What makes a discussion successful?
- Is discussion something other than/more than a good conversation?
- Is "good discussion" an end in itself, or the means to an end?
- Is the instructor's job to teach, or to help students learn?

What value do we place on universal participation? Is it better for a few good discussants to carry the ideas along, while others listen attentively, or to get everyone talking even if the quality of their contributions is markedly uneven? Is it always the best students who talk the most? If not, does that matter?

In guiding a discussion, do various objectives and priorities sometimes come into conflict?

Is there a Grinnell style of discussion? A tutorial discussion style?

How are lecture classes different from discussion classes? What are the pitfalls and advantages of these two formats?

Should students leave each discussion with a sense that the ideas have been carried through to a clearly-articulated conclusion? How important is closure? Should we distinguish closure from "focus," for example, having an agreed point from which to begin the next discussion?

Who generates ideas for discussion—the teacher, or the students?

Focus on Group Dynamics: What roles do particular students arrogate in a discussion? Do the students below look familiar? How to respond to:

the reticent or quiet student – reasons (unprepared, shy, lazy, troubled?)
the voluble mouth – monopolizing discussion
rambling or off-on-a-tangent student
axe-to-grind student
inappropriately authoritative student
silent-yet-disruptive student (arrives late, leaves early, sneers, yawns, doodles, makes faces, exchanges notes with a friend, whispers, dozes, etc.)
class clown
good listener who valuably (but, alas, rarely) contributes
prober/questioner/critic (can be constructive or obnoxious)
protégé – wants to please instructor
inarticulate – has trouble getting the idea out, frustrated and perhaps frustrating to other students as well
evident emotional problems impede ability to participate
one with disrespect for other students' opinions
reconciler – eager to smooth over differences and distinctions
devil's advocate – contentious, always wants to disagree, take other side

Can we get all these students to work together? How might one establish a climate for productive discussion, develop skills for managing the discussion, get the students themselves to be self-aware and work on their own/each other's discussion problems?

Focus on the Quiet Student:

— Why do some students seldom or never speak in class? These students may be bright and organized and understand all that goes on, yet choose to learn in other ways, not by testing their ideas in a discussion. Other quiet students may be confused, shy, unprepared, or lacking in confidence. In any case, do we want to induce them to talk, or should we leave them alone?

— If a student remains silent in the friendly, intimate context of a tutorial, when *will* this person be able to address a group? For such a student, could the tutorial set a pattern of silence that persists for the next four years? Will such a pattern hurt the student, both in school and beyond?

— How do we respond if a student discloses a psychological inability to speak in a group? Would we accept a similar excuse that made the student unable to turn in papers or to take exams? Are the two cases different in some important way?

— Can a student be "engaged" in a discussion without actually talking?

— Do we think students have an obligation to "give" to class discussion, as well as to "take" (learn) from it? In other words, do we require not only that the student learn material (as judged through exams and papers), which could occur without even attending class, or do we impose an additional requirement of citizenship in discussion?

How can metadiscussion (and self-steering) prove useful in the tutorial? How much time would you spend "discussing discussion" at the beginning of the semester (for example, coming up with a list of what makes a good discussion), and how would you follow up later in the semester? Does the investment pay off?

What is the status of "I" (personal experience, subjective response to a text, opinions and beliefs) in class discussion? Is all this stuff mere baggage, or possibly a resource for discussion? Does the students' sense of themselves as individuals conflict with the sense of community fostered by the tutorial group?

Should the instructor respond to everyone with the same tone, or take different approaches with different students? For example, should one be tougher on the students who seem "able to take it"? Should interchanges with different students be markedly different? In what cases ought we to have a word with a student *outside* of class?

Is the goal in discussion to have every student meet a certain standard, balanced between listening and talking? Or could we allow different personalities to flourish and succeed in their own ways, which might involve different levels and forms of participation?

Is there a preferred way to correct a student's factual error or misunderstanding of material?

Do you tend to notice where students are sitting in the classroom? What difference can this make?

What about race, class, gender, and other issues of "difference" among students in a class discussion? How can we deal with the highly-charged climate when these variables affect group dynamics but have not been made explicit? Should they be made explicit? What happens then?

In discussion, does it seem that the students gravitate toward an image of themselves, something to identify/align themselves with, an implied reader who seems appealing, in the text read for class?

How does the instructor's role as an authority affect the discussion?

Focus on Format of Discussion:

— How much, and in what ways, should the instructor intervene in discussion?

— Should students address each other, or the instructor? Should instructor call on each student who wants to speak?

— How does discussion begin? How are topics/issues generated?

— Should the format vary from one class day to the next? Can discussion be interrupted for an in-class writing or a few minutes of silence, or for metadiscussion?

—How does it conclude?

—How do we mediate between letting the discussion range freely and guiding its direction? How much of an agenda should tutorial instructors bring to class? Do we have points we want to make sure to get across, material that must be "covered" during the class session?

III. SMALL GROUPS

How do small-group discussions work in a tutorial? Do you ever meet with them in smaller groups? Do you divide the class into small groups and then reconvene?

What size of smaller group works best in a tutorial: pairs, groups of three, four, five, or six?

Do you assign the students to their small groups randomly? According to which side of a debate they choose? By topics that interest them? So that all the quiet ones are in the same small group? Using other criteria?

Should small groups have a free-ranging discussion, or carry out a specific, limited task? It is important for them to bring something tangible back to the class group as a whole?

Would you re-arrange members of the small groups or keep them consistent throughout the semester?

What can be done if some of the small groups finish their task or discussion (and begin chatting) while other groups are still at work?

Can pairs or other small groups hold discussions on their own, and then present their findings in class?

Could tutorial students learn computer or library skills in small groups, trios or pairs?

IV. COMBINING WRITTEN AND ORAL WORK

What sorts of written assignments might benefit from adding an oral component? Notes, essays, research papers, book reports, reviews, exams?

Students sometimes take notes on class discussion. Might this habit be formalized? Reported back to the class by one student, as "minutes"? Does discussion improve when students are *not* taking notes?

Could a multiple-step assignment combine oral and written, collaborative and individual work? For example: First, the whole class brainstorms some examples of pre-thesis or hypothesis; small groups refine/test the thesis, amass evidence and outline argument/counter-argument; half the students write it up individually in essay form, and the remaining students revise their classmates' drafts.

Might small group discussions produce a log or journal, an evaluation, a list of questions or topics, a written document of some kind? What about using the blackboard for lists, questions, agenda?

How can tutorial students use e-mail to communicate with their instructor? For feedback on discussion or presentations? To generate discussion topics? To explore further ideas not covered in class? To develop paper topics? Try out drafts of a thesis sentence? On-line communal journal?

Could a tutorial journal or logbook be kept on reserve in the library, to be written and read (and perhaps discussed) by all the students at regular intervals through the semester?

V. ORAL PRESENTATIONS

How do you choose a format for oral presentations? Variable elements include length of time for each report; factual report versus reasoned argument; individual or group (panel?) presentation; holding a question or discussion period after each report; audio or videotaping; how to prepare students for this assignment (give it in several steps or stages?); the relative importance of structure (outline of primary versus secondary ideas, etc.) and emphasis on careful rehearsal.

Should we let students read aloud from a text, or must they use notes/index cards/outlines? If the former, will the assignment be simply an exercise in how to read aloud? Can we teach students to write something that is not a formal academic paper, but a "speech" with cues meant for oral performance?

How can presentations move the tutorial forward, rather than stopping it in its tracks or serving as some kind of irrelevant interlude? Should students present material that the rest of class hasn't read: summaries, critiques?

Do we need to teach students how to ask questions of each other? For example, should we explicitly go over the conventions governing various types of questions (pointing out gaps or contradictions, asking for elaboration, proposing an alternative view, asking student to account for a piece of evidence that doesn't seem to fit the theory, etc.) that might follow an oral presentation?

To what extent do we want to spell out the requirements of the oral assignment? Is it better to give detailed instructions for a step-by-step procedure, or to let students devise such a process on their own?

How can we help students to construct and present an oral argument?

How much time in class should be devoted to explaining, reviewing and practicing points of "delivery" (eye contact, pace, clear articulation, voice projection, posture, etc.)?

Do these formal presentations belong at the end of the semester? Why or why not? Might they be given at intervals throughout the semester?

VI. EVALUATING ORAL SKILLS

Is evaluation as important as simply giving students ample opportunity to work on oral skills in the tutorial?

Do you find evaluation of oral assignments more subjective than grading written work? What objective criteria might be applied?

What do we expect students to gain from these oral activities?

How do you assess their oral skills at the beginning of the semester?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your assignments?

How do you gauge improvement in oral skills? How do you reward this improvement?

When and how, if ever, do you comment on students' speech mannerisms – excessive use of fillers ("like," "uh," "you know," "sort of," "I mean"), the habit of ending statements interrogatively (especially common for female students), the tendency not to finish sentences, mumbling, etc."

Can (and should) students evaluate one another's oral work?

Focus on Discussion:

— How do you measure success in discussion as the semester goes on, both of individuals and of the whole group?

— By what measure do you grade students' contributions to discussion? Does counting discussion in a final grade tend to favor students raised to be assertive and confident? Are male students and/or white students dominant in this group?

— Does a lack of participation in class discussion lower a student's grade? How much, if any, of the final tutorial grade depends on the student's role in discussion? (This figure seems to vary greatly among instructors, from as little as 0-10% to as much as 50%!)

Focus on Presentations:

—How do you grade formal oral presentations? Do you use a log, table, checklist, or other so-called instrument?

— Do you separate "content" from "form" in these evaluations? Structure from delivery? What about just responding to the quality of the student's ideas?

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* ADDENDUM: Other formats for oral work, besides class discussion and individual oral presentations: students read their papers aloud; pairs of students prepare to lead discussion and meet with instructor beforehand; role playing or skits; debate; discussion for limited time with some ground rules, e.g., each comment must be explicitly linked to the previous one; teams of two students collaborate on and present a project (thesis supported by evidence); panels; preparing discussion questions in advance; interviewing one another or outsiders; pre-writing in advance of discussion; reading aloud from assigned texts (dramatic or public reading); required or recommended attendance at convocations or other public presentations, with concomitant assignment to summarize, respond to, or discuss the presentation; students exchange and comment on each other's paper drafts (perhaps several times during the semester); oral critique of a paper, by whole class or in pairs; oral midsem.

Jared Gardner
Oral Communication Workshop
June 18, 1998

Oral Communication Component of Tutorial on American Film of the 1920s and 30s

My goal is to bring more structured oral communication assignments to the Tutorial, and to make these assignments foundational to the course's structure. My first plan is to institute a shift away from the group presentations as I utilized them in my first tutorial, in which the whole class worked on and presented similar material. The effect of these presentations had been competition between groups, poor response to peer presentation, and rushed discussion of the material and issues of oral communication skills.

My new model, which has grown out of the discussions during this week's workshop, will make formal and informal presentations the foundation of the course through the following structure:

Every week (or every other week) a small group of three will have a research assignment involving primary materials on a topic related to the film and/or period we are discussing that week. In the course of the semester, each student will be involved in preparing two or three of these presentations. Topics will include: the reception by white and African Americans of Birth of a Nation; media representations of the New Woman in the 1920s; debates over film censorship in the 1930s; the response to the transition to sound in 1927, etc. The small group will work together to locate, summarize and analyze appropriate primary materials, which will then be presented to the class by each member individually. It will be up to the group to determine how to divide up the material to be presented, and each presenter will be expected to present a 5 minute organized presentation which 1) makes an argument about the material and topic at hand and 2) provides clear and concise evidence to support that claim. I will be primarily responsibly for evaluating the research, use of evidence, articulation of argument, and organization of ideas. But the class (using peer evaluation work sheets) will share with me the responsibility for evaluating issues of oral communication.

The second component of my revised Tutorial will involve the use of what I am calling informal presentations. One student will be responsible each class day for a five minute informal presentation (no peer evaluation) that develops a problem or identifies a set of issues central to the film that is on the table for discussion. The student will also be asked to offer a provisional response or argument in relation to the questions or issues they raise (questions of evidence here will be developed in discussion; my primary interest is with the identification of a problem and the articulation of an argument in relation to that problem). These informal presentations are to be preceded by an e-mail outline of the student's presentation, to be distributed via listserv the day before class by 5 p.m. The goal of these informal presentations is of course to get each student to help determine the structure of discussion, as well as to allow their peers to better prepare for their informal discussion in the second half of class. But my more specific goal in relation to the project of oral communication is to ask the class to come prepared to interrogate both the formal presentation (context) and the informal presentation (text) in order to begin to articulate connections between the various presentations, between text and context. Since learning how to work with a range of materials and to make connections across disciplines (film studies, history, American studies) is central to this course, this structure has great potential for the class. But more specific to the goal of developing oral communication skills, this structure, I hope, will give the informal discussion a built-in formal problem to tackle each week: how to make connections between seemingly disparate materials and claims by their peers and how to structure argument in relation to that problem, defending those claims and connections.

This structure of regular formal and informal presentations along with related informal discussion seems potentially to solve several of the problems I have had with oral communication exercises in the Tutorial:

1) it makes necessary connections between various kinds of oral communication
2) it explores implicitly the relationship between oral communication and writing
3) it insists on the relation between research and oral communication
4) the combination of small group research and individual presentation teaches the importance of working together while allowing students to be evaluated individually
5) the oral communication focus of the Tutorial breaks down the lecture-discussion model which I found ineffective in Tutorial, placing greater responsibility on the students to present/teach the contextual materials and posit readings that we will use to make new meanings out of the films
6) through peer evaluation and the challenges built into the directed informal discussion, it holds the students who are not presenting doubly responsible for careful and responsible attention to their peers presentations, formal and informal.

Oral Communications Workshop, 1995
Todd Armstrong

TUTORIAL: SLAVIC HISTORIES, SLAVIC MYSTERIES

ZDRAVO! Dzien dobry! ЗДРАВСТВУЙТЕ

Oral Assignment #1

For our first class meeting, you are to read the Introduction to Portal's *The Slavs. A Cultural and Historical Survey of the Slavonic People* (to be handed out during the Sunday meeting). During your reading, do the following to prepare for Thursday's discussion:

1) Define as best you can the term "Slavic." What makes it possible to talk about such a large and diverse group of peoples using this one, all-embracing term? What factors unite these peoples? List as many factors as you can, and bring your list to class.

2) Determine what you think are the most important and interesting factors that divide the Slavic world into separate entities (i.e., the larger groupings of East, West and South, or the smaller groupings of individual nations). List as many factors as you can, and bring your list to class.

3) Since this text was written in 1969, it is obviously not current; can you find any areas where Portal's statements should be modified or corrected in view of what you know about the contemporary situation in the Slavic world?

The objectives for this particular assignment are:

1) to introduce the area under study, with the hope that the students will be critical readers;

2) to test the students' ability to synthesize factual information presented in a text;

3) to determine students' prior knowledge of the Slavic world;

4) to provide material for oral discussion in class—a discussion that will lead into the first written assignment.

Lesson Plan Abstract for Thursday, August 25:

After some brief introductory/organizational remarks, I will divide the class into four groups. The students in each group are to discuss their individual responses to the three questions posed in the assignment; one member of each group will then be responsible for reporting to the class the findings of the group. In order to avoid duplication, after the discussion, each group will report on only one question.

This exercise will be in some respects a kind of brainstorming activity, in which we list on the board 1) what it means to be Slavic, and 2) the factors that go into Slavic (dis)unity; a possible list:

Religion
Race/Ethnic background
Geography
Politics/Ideology
History
Language/Linguistic History
Socioeconomic class

The discussion from today will lead into the first writing exercise:

Writing Assignment #1

Due in class, Tuesday, August 30:

In class, we discussed a number of factors that contribute to Slavic unity and disunity.

Write a **one-page** (typed and double-spaced) essay on one of the following:

1) Of the factors discussed in class, which is the most significant in unifying a nation, in establishing its identity?

2) Of the factors discussed in class, which is the most significant in driving a wedge between peoples?

You may base your argument on our discussion in class; you may also utilize personal experience. You are not Limited to thinking about the area in question, since we are only embarking on our study of Slavdom. (For example, you might think about the current situation in Rwanda, and the factors that have contributed to the tragic discord in that country.)

Oral presentation Assignment #2

You will divide into three groups. Each group will be responsible for introducing the specific context of the texts we will be reading:

The current war in former Yugoslavia	(Glenny and Drakulic)
World War II in Poland	(Andrzejewksi)
The Russian Revolution	(Pasternak)

If you have a prior interest in any of these areas, you are welcome to join that group. If you do not have a preference, I will assign you to one of them.

Since, obviously, these topics are enormous, you must try to focus on the most essential information for conveying to the rest of the class the *context* of the readings. A useful set of parameters will be the factors we discussed in class, and on which you wrote in your first writing assignment. We will also brainstorm during class to determine the kind of information we would like to hear from the respective panels. The group presentation will be in the form of a report by a panel of experts. Each student expert is responsible for reporting on a given aspect. Each group will meet with me prior to the presentation to brainstorm, discuss strategies, findings, problems, etc.

The class will be expected to formulate questions prior to and during the presentation, to critique the panel, to fill in gaps if possible, etc.

Since this assignment will require some research, we will have a research workshop at Burling Library on Tuesday, August 30.

The schedule for the presentations is as follows:

Group I
(Student Committee on War in former Yugoslavia, henceforth SCOWIFY):
Tuesday, Sept 6

Group II
(Student Committee on Poland and WWII, henceforth SCOPAW)
Tuesday, Sept 21

Group III
(Student Committee on Revolution in Russia, henceforth SCORCR)
Thursday, Oct 27

Of course, those students in Group I will have less time to prepare than students in I and II. At the same time, the first reading on the former Yugoslavia in many ways provides us with the context for Drakulic's work. Hence, we will all be responsible for adding to Group I's discussion of the former Yugoslavia. Group I's efforts to a degree will be experimental, and we will all try to assist in their presentation (by asking questions, adding our own commentary, etc.). We will use Group I's performance to set parameters for later presentations by Groups II and III; the expectations of Group III, then, may be considerably higher than at the beginning of the course.

1) Oral presentation project for tutorial

I originally assigned the following for an oral presentation in my tutorial last fall:

You will divide into three groups. Each group will be responsible for introducing the specific context of the texts we will be reading:

The current war in former Yugoslavia (Glenny and Drakulic)
World War II in Poland (Andrzejewksi)
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As can be seen from this assignment, there was an emphasis on process (the final group's presentation attaining the most refined level of presentation). At the same time, that was a shortcoming in this project—lack of repetition and feedback. I think that I can resolve these issues utilizing some of the ideas at which we arrived during the seminar.

As this assignment stands, the first groups had no chance to improve their own skills directly, but rather became passive observers of later presentations. I would attempt to remedy this situation in several ways.

I would first set up a more explicit set of guidelines for the presentation itself, relying on a brainstorming session for ideas, which would then be written up and handed out to all students prior to the first presentation. These guidelines could be amended/changed, etc. after each presentation.

I would set up a series of practice sessions, in which the members of each group coached the others in the various aspects of their part of the presentation. I would also consider having the students from the first groups help with this task in later groups. This would encourage the students to perceive the notion of process, as well as to consider more closely their own presentations in light of subsequent efforts groups come in to critique. This could also have the added benefit of encouraging more (comfortable) metadiscussion immediately after a given presentation. An option during these practice sessions might also include the use of a video camera (i.e., where students would record themselves in a less threatening environment than the formal classroom setting, and then view their presentations with the goal of self-evaluation and improvement.

Another supplement to this project would entail inviting someone accomplished in oral delivery (Richard Bright, for example) to come into class and discuss the formal points of an oral presentation.

Finally, I would like to set up a more precise system of evaluation, so that students understand more clearly the expectations of the assignment, and their performance. This might include some kind of general evaluation sheet which I would fill out either during or immediately after the class. This task also might be assigned to students in some way as well, giving them a more active role in the presentation itself. The expectation that students ask questions, which I included in my original assignment, would be elaborated more clearly as well.

These modifications would result in better presentations, I think. The students would also leave the tutorial with improved oral skills, with a better sense of the importance of oral work at Grinnell and hopefully better prepared for assignments of this kind in other courses.

August 18, 1994

To: Helen Scott

From: Michael Cavanagh, English Department

Re: Talking Seminar with Peter Connelly, Aug 15-18, 1994.

This was my first seminar concerning discussion and related matters. I thought it went very well, and I'd be much surprised to hear that the other participants didn't think as I did. From our discussions, which revolved frequently around what Finkel and Monk call "The Atlas Complex" ("Teachers and Learning Groups: Dissolution of the Atlas Complex") and their conviction that this complex discourages students from assuming some of their proper self-educative functions, I derived a pedagogy which I'm going to put into immediate practice in my fall, 1994 tutorial. It is this (or something like this): I'm going to put my students into small discussion groups 3-4 times during the semester: at least 2 and perhaps 3 times at the start of the term, and once right at the end. These small group meetings, which will take place outside of class, will have a poem as a discussion text; what is discussed in them will eventually issue in a paper by each student on that poem, the preparation for which is—of course—the student's own reading of that poem and the discussion session, during which the student will exchange ideas and perceptions with the other students. Students will report on the "results" of these discussion sessions in class: I'm hopeful that further discussion will ensue from the group at large. The preparation for two papers in the early fall is, then, as follows: reading, small group session, large group session, more reading and synthesis. . .paper. The idea is to get the students to help themselves and each other through discussion, to get them to see how discussion (including disagreement) can be a mode of discovery, and that they can discover without a teacher guiding them through every step of the way. I intend to follow the advice both of Finkel-Monk and of Peter Connelly and write up a kind of procedural modus operandi (Finkel-Monk call it a "worksheet", Connelly a "heuristic") for the students, i.e., a list of general questions leading toward a discovery of the properties and particular qualities of a literary genre, which would permit the students to start and sustain a discussion, and which would, in time, become part of their mental furniture in thinking about literature. This procedure would be given to them early in the semester. The use of it would obviate or greatly reduce the necessity of asking in advance questions about every specific text assigned in the course.

These discussions would occur at the beginning of the semester. But I intend to put the students back in small groups at the end, in order that they might themselves generate topics for their most important paper of the semester.

June 6, 1995
To: Helen Scott
From: Douglas Caulkins
RE: Report on Oral Skills Workshop

Tutorial Description

The Legacy of Wounded Knee

The massacre of 150 Sioux men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1690 signaled the end of the Plains Indian wars, revenge for Custer's Last Stand, and a new mythologizing of the West. The armed siege at Wounded Knee in 1973, involving supporters of the American Indian Movement (AIM), resonated with the earlier incident, in which government agents feared the rise of the Ghost Dance, a Native American revitalization movement. The cultural and political legacy of both Wounded Knee I & II will be explored through varied historical, biographical, including Matthiessen's, Mary Crow Dog's Lakota Woman, and the films Incident at Oglala, and Thunderheart. More briefly, we will examine the contrasting mythologizing of the gold miners and frontier characters who swept into the Black Hills, the sacred land of the Sioux to establish the legendary town of Deadwood.

I used the workshop to rethink oral and written assignments for my new tutorial. Students, I assume, enjoy talking about something that they have experienced in common, as well as things for which they are the class authority. This requires two different kinds of oral presentations. The first, as a prelude to more extensive discussion, requires students to draw attention to important issues in some reading or film that they have experienced in common. Concretely, here is an example of an assignment dealing with two videos for the tutorial:

Assignment for Thunderheart and Incident at Oglala

Five Minute Oral Presentation:

Pick one scene from each of these videos and show how the scene reveals (1) important cultural assumptions of one of the characters or group of characters or (2) power relations among the characters or group of characters. You might want to select two scenes that illustrate different cultural assumptions or power relations.

Since everyone has seen the films, you will not need to describe the scenes in detail, but can devote most of your time to an analysis of the scenes.

For the second oral assignment I begin with the assumption that one way to encourage team learning and a non-competitive classroom environment is for each student to be the major authority on some material that can be used by the whole group. While all should master a set of core readings, everyone should have a reading of one's own. One student might read Kehoe's The Ghost Dance, another might read Philip Hall's To Have This Land, a third, Murphy Snell's The Genius of Sitting Bull, etc. This reading can be summarized in an oral presentation that is brief, selective and responsive to the themes of the tutorial.

I expect to work with each student to help identify and summarize the materials that would be most appropriate to convey to the class. Identifying relevant information will, in my opinion, become one of the major skills needed for students entering the information society. I expect to have each student deal with an outside reading in both a written and an oral report. Relating both of these tasks to the same reading should help to make space on the syllabus for the many items in the tutorial agenda. Since the task of making a report is conceptually simple, this project should allow students to concentrate on the mechanics of oral presentation. I plan to work with students to develop visual aids that can make their presentations more effective. I will concentrate on the use of simple transparencies and overhead projection and will do a class demonstration contrasting some effective and ineffective transparencies. Since visual aids are used in most oral presentations in business and, increasingly, in many academic fields, this part of the assignment should

promote skills that can be used after graduation as well as before. Finally, I will have students practice their presentations with an audience of one or two other members of the class who will be responsible for giving constructive criticism before the presentation is given for the class as a whole.

REPORT ON OUTSIDE READING:

Each of you have selected a different background reading that will illuminate the Legacy of Wounded Knee. What are the important points in your reading, as they relate to the themes of the tutorial? In five pages, condense these important points and relate them to the themes.

ORAL PRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE READING

Using overhead transparencies where appropriate for maps, illustration, outline, and major points and quotations, present a report on your outside reading as it relates to the themes of the tutorial.

May 31, 1995

TO: Helen Scott

FROM: Johanna Meehan

RE: Oral Communication Seminar: Final Proposal

This was an excellent seminar that forced me to grapple with the issue of how best to teach and evaluate oral communication in the classroom, and particularly in the tutorial. After much discussion with fellow seminar participants I have tentatively decided upon the following assignments, designed to help students with their oral skills.

Early in the semester I will ask my students to read two different versions of the same fairy tale. I will divide the students into teams of two and will have each student help prepare and coach the other for a five minute oral presentation during which they will compare and contrast the two versions. Later in the semester, after they have had a chance to digest some theoretical analyses of race, class, gender and sexuality they will be asked to do a slightly longer analysis of the fairy tales they previously discussed employing their newly acquired and hopefully more sophisticated theoretical tools. These will again be student coached and evaluated prior to the classroom presentation. Having a second opportunity to present orally, although time consuming, will underscore the pedagogical goal of the assignments.

May 31, 1995

To: Helen Scott
From: Anita Solow
Subject: Report of oral skills

Helen:

Here is a short report of what I intend to do next year after taking the Oral Skills workshop last week. First let me say that I enjoyed the workshop a great deal and that Paula did an excellent job of organizing it, keeping us on track, and feeding us.

The course that I will focus on is the tutorial. The topic that I am using is Gambling. I have taught this tutorial twice in the past, but not for many years. A brief looking through Burling's listings shows that there is a great deal of new material out there that I need to incorporate into the course. I do not plan to deal with this until some time in July, which means that the following report will be sketchy, at best. Please let me know if this is sufficient or not.

When I last taught the tutorial, I think I did a fairly good job of planning the writing throughout the course. There were five papers, of varying length. The progression made sense and seemed to satisfy the goals of the course. However, I did not do a good job with the oral component. The only formal oral exercise occurred at the end of the semester when each student gave an oral report based on their final paper. There was also some discussion throughout the course.

This time, I want to plan the oral component of the course in much the same way as the written one. There will be multiple oral exercises of varying types, so that the students can learn from their experiences and build throughout the course.

Here are some of the things I plan to do:

1. Early in the course, I will divide the students into several 3-4 person groups. Each group will become the expert on a particular form of gambling, and will teach the rest the basics of the game and the odds involved with it.

2. I think it is useful in this course to actually have students work through the basic probability needed to analyze the games. I plan on assigning a small number of problems, have students work on them at home and then in groups in class, and then have a student from each group present that group's solution to the class.

3. Discussion will, of course, be a regular part of the tutorial. I am going to try requiring each student to post a question on the reading onto a computer bulletin-board for the class. I will then take these, arrange them, and use them as the basis for class discussion. This will not be done all the time, but for appropriate topics several times during the semester.

4. I am still planning individual final oral presentations. They may be in addition to their final paper, or I might only have them do the oral presentation together with a bibliography. The students will be divided into groups again. Each group will work together to practice their talks and act as critics for each other, both in regards to the content of the talk as well as the way it is delivered. This way each student will have practiced the talk twice before they deliver it in class. We talked about giving a scoring sheet to each member of the group to use to help them judge the talks during the practice sessions.

8 June 1994

To: Helen Scott
From: Ed Phillips
Re: Oral Skills Workshop (May 23-27, 1994)

The oral skills workshop led by Dave Lopatto in late May was stimulating and helpful; it should prove of significant use as I revise and re-think the oral assignments in two courses I will teach this next year, Humanities 101 and 102. I had taken a similar workshop about six years ago, but it focused mainly on oral components for tutorials with a heavy emphasis on videotaping. Our interests this time around were more diverse since the participants had concerns about many different kinds of courses—introductory literature, all levels of language instruction, advanced seminars, etc. Incidentally, our discussion drifted occasionally and profitably to writing and reading assignments, as well as oral ones. It was, moreover, helpful for me to reconsider some of the ideas I had encountered in the earlier workshop and have used in courses since then—sometimes successfully, sometimes not—but also to think about possible oral assignments for a variety of instructional situations. The following are some of the ideas I have for modifying oral assignments in either or both of the humanities courses.

General Comments:

1. I will probably articulate more directly at the beginning of my courses my awareness that students have differing levels of comfort with oral assignments and my intention not to penalize those who are significantly uncomfortable with speaking publicly. I would suggest, however, the likelihood that they will find it necessary in their careers to speak with and before people in more or less formal situations, and they might as well get some practice. I may have five or six kinds of oral assignments and let them suggest which ones they would prefer not to be graded on and which ones (four, perhaps) they will choose to be graded on. I will try to be excessively, if not too obviously, positive and encouraging about their oral performances.

2. I expect to work up for my syllabi a more explicit and definitive set of guidelines or instructions for oral presentations and discussion—perhaps something like Jerry Lalonde's.

3. I may have a short reading assignment for the first class session (e.g., Book 1 of the *Iliad* or the first act of *The Brothers Menaechmus*), have the class discuss the characteristics (thematic and structural) of literary openers for about 20 minutes, and then have a discussion of the "discussion"—what this discussion was like, and what discussion ought to be.

4. I will probably be more emphatic about the importance of their making marginal comments and questions on the reading assignments—on their being active readers. And if I use study guides for a particular text or assignment, I will be more consistent about having the students respond to my questions—and to look for "gaps" in my questions—that is, questions I should have asked, but didn't. It would probably be a good idea to have the students write up their own study/discussion guide for the final reading assignment on each of the texts in Hum 101/102-rather than to pass out mine.

5. The initial focus of the workshop was on the so-called "Atlas-Complex," by which teachers assume all the burden for class sessions. I am certainly completely in favor of reducing whatever is "Atlantic" about my own teaching.

Types of Oral Presentations:

1. Individuals, pairs, and small groups will be assigned responsibility for initiating discussion for most, if not all, class sessions. Here they might choose particular questions to answer from a study guide. It is important, I think. that they address specific passages that are significant or problematic, that they make interpretations, and that they ask questions. The format would be informal; presentations would be limited to seven minutes; in response to a suggestion made by John Mohan, I think, I may have them pretend to be Siskel and Ebert, or some other combo, and play off each other's interpretation of the "essence" of a passage.

2. As an alternative to #1, a student might deliver a I0-minute mini-lecture on some aspect of the reading assignment. Here, it would be important for the student to get practice distinguishing between points of primary significance and ones that are secondary.

3. Formal reading or dramatic interpretation of sections of the reading assignments. The texts in the humanities courses are particularly susceptible to this kind of assignment; informal and formal speeches are central to Homeric epic, personal lyric, tragedic drama, historical writing, and Platonic dialogue; the same is true for Roman comedy, Ciceronian oratory, Lucretian philosophic argument, Boethian consolation, satiric monologue, and other works read in 102. Furthermore, since all reading in the ancient world was oral, and not silent, recitation and performance seem especially appropriate. This could also be a good way to get students to notice such things as parallel construction, appropriate diction, assonance, and other rhetorical effects; maybe their own writing would benefit.

4. They also might read from their own writing assignments—perhaps distributed anonymously; problems in organization. diction, and rhetoric can become readily observable when essays are read aloud.

5. I have also used debates (in connection with assignments in the *Iliad, Bacchoe,* and *Peloponnesian War*) and persuasive speeches (on key points/assertions in Socrates' apologetic speeches and philosophic conversations). I will probably continue to use these oral assignments, but I will give more explicit instructions for these oral assignments.

6. Another possibility is to enact an imitative symposium—a set of speeches in which the students imitate the characters and ideas of specific ancient speakers, but use their own words, images, and evidence.

Discussion:

1. I hope to make more regular use of small discussion groups—with a limited set of open-ended questions to discuss in about 15 minutes.