

Article

# Speaking Against Inequity in the Writing Classroom: Challenging the Performance Paradigm for Undergraduate Oral Presentations

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## **Abstract**

Many undergraduate students continue to think of oral presentations as performances for an audience rather than dialogic exchanges of research. This focus on the aesthetics of performance, often promoted by speaking pedagogies in Canadian universities, can exacerbate classroom inequities by valuing certain ways of speaking and, by extension, certain speakers: speaking pedagogies, for example, that instruct students to speak “clearly,” dress “professionally,” or even to appear “confident,” can encode prejudices that privilege some voices and bodies over others, perpetuating discrimination based on gender, race, sexuality, language, ability, and culture. This article argues that an equitable scholarly speaking pedagogy needs to shift student thinking about academic oral presentations away from a focus on aesthetics and toward a view of scholarly speaking as part of a collaborative research process. The writing classroom, where similar changes have occurred in how we teach academic writing, is the best place to change students thinking about scholarly speaking. Drawing on genre-theoretical approaches to academic writing, we argue that this shift can be achieved by using “precedents”—recorded examples of scholarly speaking—to familiarize students with academic oral discourse’s genre conventions, helping students to recognize scholarly speaking as situated and dialogic. The article introduces a web resource, created by the authors, that uses precedents to encourage students and instructors to understand academic oral presentations as opportunities for cooperative research structured by shared discursive norms.

Moreover, the site empowers students to challenge these norms, which might themselves encode biases. Ultimately, the site and the pedagogy that informs it not only challenge student prejudices about who can be a “good” speaker, but also remind students of their responsibilities—as speakers *and* audience members—to contribute to building an equitable classroom and university environment.

## Introduction

This essay is premised on our observation that undergraduate students perceive scholarly speaking as a performance to be judged rather than an opportunity to communicate and further their research. When we have informally asked our students what they believe makes effective scholarly speaking, the top answers have invariably included “speaking clearly,” “dressing professionally,” and “appearing confident.” Such criteria belong to what Michael T. Motley and Jennifer Molloy (1994) call a “performance orientation” to public speaking, where a speaker focusses on making “a positive aesthetic impression on an audience” (p. 49). This performance paradigm is often promoted by both popular and academic resources on public speaking. A web search for “how to give a class presentation” returns nearly a million hits and results are dominated by “tips” like “practice in front of the mirror,” “speak clearly,” and “maintain good posture.” A recent textbook published by Cambridge University Press on giving presentations in the Social Sciences and Humanities instructs students to dress for success: “It is simple: if your clothes look dodgy (in the eyes of your audience), the audience will expect your presentation to be dodgy. If you look smart, people expect your presentation to be smart” (Harink and Van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 143). At the University of Toronto, Continuing Education courses in public speaking are taught by “career coaches” who offer “important pointers on etiquette and body language” and stress “clarity, polish, and professionalism” (“Public Speaking and Presentation”).

In this essay, we argue that this pervasive performance paradigm, in promoting values that privilege certain speakers, perpetuates discrimination based on gender, race, sexuality, language, ability, and/or culture. The alternative we propose involves shifting students towards a *communication* paradigm instead, which focuses less on aesthetics and more on speaking as a method of joining a research conversation in progress—a paradigm already central in writing instruction. We propose this shift can be effected, in part, by using precedents—recorded examples of scholarly speaking—to empower students to recognize scholarly speaking as a research genre, or set of genres, they can learn to inhabit and transform. We join Mya Poe (this volume) in her assessment that

teachers of writing must face head on “assumptions about foundational theories, unexamined processes, and institutional structures” (p. 163) if we are to change how we approach equity in our classrooms. We suggest that how speaking is taught in the writing classroom—including what elements of speaking are valued in our classrooms—is one such “unexamined process.”

In the first section of this essay, we show how a performance orientation toward speaking privileges some voices and bodies over others and contributes to students’ feelings of inadequacy as well as institutional inequities. Here, we draw on academic writing pedagogy’s rich theoretical language for describing what Asao Inoue (2015) calls “White language supremacy.” Moreover, we suggest that inequities arising from valuing presentation over communication in *writing* assessment can be compounded by the prejudices around other modes of self-presentation involved in scholarly *speaking*. After establishing this problem, we move toward a solution in two parts. First, we outline a pedagogy that highlights the communicative value and the rhetorical specificities of academic speaking over the performance orientation’s emphasis on aesthetics. We argue that academic writing courses are ideal places to disrupt the performance paradigm: by imbricating the teaching of writing and speaking, we invite students to recognize scholarly speaking as part of a communicative and collaborative research process, rather than their polished “final say” on a subject<sup>1</sup>. In the second part, we build on genre-theoretical approaches in academic writing instruction to describe a pedagogy for scholarly speaking as a set of genres by teaching with precedents—by integrating examples of scholarly speaking into our classrooms. We argue that precedents, used widely to teach writing but less codified as a practice for teaching speaking in the writing classroom, can help familiarize students with oral presentations *as* research genres with knowable conventions. Precedents, and a shifting of presentation values—from performance to scholarly contribution—can defuse the effects of bias in contexts of student speaking. While rhetorical norms of scholarly speaking can themselves encode biases, identifying genre conventions, critically, *as* genre conventions can empower students not only to enact them more deliberately but also to challenge them.

We recognize, of course, that academic writing and communications instructors may already use some of these strategies in their courses. What we add to existing practices is the unfolding of a web resource we have designed that formalizes our approach toward establishing a more equitable scholarly speaking pedagogy: The Precedents Archive for Scholarly Speaking ([PASS](#)). The PASS is, in the first instance, a diverse, interdisciplinary, and multi-genre archive of video-recorded undergraduate scholarly presentations. The site also features lessons introducing students to the “scholarly moves” belonging to different academic speaking genres, as well as instructor guides and

assessment ideas focused on making scholarly speaking pedagogy more equitable. We offer the PASS, then, as an example of how we can directly challenge the performance paradigm through resources that align the teaching of writing and speaking and that frame speaking as part of the scholarly research and writing process.

## Against the Performance Paradigm—and Toward Equity—in Scholarly Speaking

Any instructor who has assigned a presentation to an undergraduate class will have met students whose concerns toward speaking align with Motley's (1990) description of the "performance orientation." These students share

a set of attitudes and beliefs that make public speaking analogous to the performances of Olympic figure skaters and concert pianists. The speaker's overriding impression is that the audience is hypercritically focused on his/her every move, and that success is measured by how flawlessly his/her oratorical skills are demonstrated. Thus, for example, minor mistakes are assumed to be unforgivable. Performance-oriented speakers are often unable to articulate what the critical behaviours are, but they invariably assume them to be more "formal," "polished," and "practiced" than the skills in their ordinary communication repertoire. Of equal importance, the performance orientation to public speaking assumes that the audience is involved primarily in *evaluation*, and the evaluation is based on an aesthetic impression of the speaker *qua* speaker. (p. 89)

This performance paradigm continues to determine what our students prioritize in producing and receiving academic oral presentations. Samantha Sabalis (2017) notes that when she tasked the students in her first-year writing class with observing each other's presentations, "[s]tudents seldom focused on the content of the presentations, instead commenting on the organization of the material, the delivery, and the presenter's overall demeanor" (142).

While, of course, organization is key to communicating one's ideas, a focus on "delivery" and "demeanor" draws attention to a student's body or way of speaking and is a reminder of the kinds of normative expectations one can bring when listening to spoken work. The performance orientation is pervasive beyond student populations—Motley's work identifies it as a key factor in widespread Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA)—but it is especially troubling in the classroom setting, where it can be linked to what writing scholars have called "profoundly exclusionary" pedagogies in which students are judged for being deficient in ways beyond their control (Rose, 1985, p. 352). As Inoue

and others working on raciolinguistics teach us, the evaluating audience referred to in the performance orientation often employ “White habits of judgement” that they “cannot fully see, hear or feel” (2019, p. 362). For example, classmates and instructors may be steeped in what Inoue calls a “White racial habitus” (2019, p. 358) and so find students with accented English simply to not be “speaking clearly.” As Flores and Rosa observe, “while we know that everyone has an accent—a typified way of using language—listening subjects perceive only some groups’ accents while leaving others’ linguistic practices unmarked” (2015, p. 152). As Rosina Lippi-Green (2011) argues, the variety of English a person speaks, highly regarded or stigmatized, standardlike or vernacular, cannot predict the quality and effectiveness of any given utterance. What *can* be predicted, Lippi-Green notes, is that listeners will make assumptions about the speaker based on language markers that signal alliance with certain social groups, primarily those having to do with race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Scholarship on dialects, and especially Black English in the U.S., notes similar prejudices<sup>2</sup>. In reviewing pedagogical debates about Black English literacy and orality, C. Jan Swearingen (2014) shows that the teaching of Standard English has been enforced by the “the depiction of Black English as ‘broken’” (p. 242).

Accents and dialects are not the only factors that can lead to discrimination against some speakers. Classmates and instructors who have internalized that a successful speaking performance includes smiling, making eye contact, and “connecting” with one’s audience may undervalue the presentations of neurodiverse students who do not exhibit those behaviours. As Margaret Price’s work on disability shows, academic values, including “presence,” “participation,” and “collegiality” contribute to “the construction of a rigid, elitist, hierarchical and inhumane academic system” (2011, p.8). Furthermore, such norms are built into the resources our students use to learn about academic speaking. A recent study by Fernando Sánchez (2019), for instance, explores how public speaking textbooks’ “discussion of voice and professional dress privilege[s] cisgendered bodies” (p. 183). In his review of twenty-six textbooks, Sánchez shows that sixteen of them focused on dress (e.g., “Wear clothes that suggest professionalism and confidence” [p. 196]) and twenty-two focused on voice (e.g., “A speaker’s voice should have a pleasing pitch” [p. 197]). It is not hard to think of how such discourse reinforces other harmful norms around gender performance. Another study on the visual representation of speakers in communication textbooks noted that photographs in these textbooks send “the message that white men are dominant” (Gullicks et al., 2005, p. 247). The performance orientation, in other words, is both pervasive and exclusionary.

Our purpose here is not to critique textbooks; it is rather to invite teachers of academic discourse to look broadly at the structural and institutional ways performance skills are valued and to discover the role the writing classroom can play in addressing this issue. In the first instance, when we examine *where* speaking for an audience is taught at Canadian universities, a distinct pattern emerges: speaking is more often covered in the context of professionalization than in the context of academic inquiry. At our institution, for instance, students who wish to develop speaking proficiency will most likely be served in a professional program (Business, Forestry) or through their independent desire to professionalize—through co-curricular supports they may seek out on their own. They may, for example, seek support from the online library resources, where they will find performance-oriented tips like “dress[ing] appropriately” and “avoid[ing] distracting behaviours” (“Presentation Skills”)<sup>3</sup>. At other Canadian universities we surveyed, we found a few dedicated scholarly communication courses; in most cases, though, speaking skills are taught primarily through professional programs, Continuing Education, or para-academic supports.

This partitioning of speaking instruction suggests how speaking is often understood within the academy: as a skill disconnected from the robust and process-oriented research students are asked to perform in their classrooms. We argue that an antidote to this separation is to enlist writing classrooms as prime locations to address the performance paradigm; these are the classrooms where students are already invited to understand discourse as socially-situated—and to see discourses of research as dynamic and in-process. Writing scholars and instructors have already shifted away from a “skills narrative” that positions writing as a set of procedures to be mastered and then performed in a culminating assignment. Indeed, writing scholars have, for some time, brought attention to the inequities promoted by such a focus on skills, demonstrating how, for example, a focus on grammar, rules, and “proper writing” situates university writing instruction as a response to deficiency (Graves, 1994) and disadvantages marginalized students in particular<sup>4</sup>. They show how a skills-based approach frames individual students as having a “deficit” in need of fixing, shifting attention away from the discursive practices that students need to learn in order to recognize writing as socially-situated and process-oriented (see Giltrow, 2016; Bryant, 2017, Eaton, 2020). Such forward-thinking writing pedagogy has been instrumental in changing the focus from how to write without error to writing as a social action, intimately connected to dynamic situations (see also Miller 1984; Paré, 2009).

Despite this expansive work, when it comes to students *speaking* in our writing classrooms—something they do on a regular basis, whether through in-class discussions, oral presentations of

research, or other multimedia (e.g. podcast) assignments—the idea persists that speaking is an assembly of skills, needing to be perfected in performance. Students enter our classrooms having internalized the values of the performance orientation: make eye contact, memorize your script, speak “clearly.” If we do not confront these values directly through our classroom practices and assignments, we silo writing and speaking, and risk unfairly rewarding the abilities some students (native English speakers, extroverts...) already have rather than addressing these gaps<sup>5</sup>. In an essay on developing a robust speaking assignment for her composition/rhetoric class, Sabalis (2019) confesses something that may ring true for many writing teachers: “While students had spent the whole semester becoming more confident, persuasive academic writers, they learned next to nothing about giving informative and engaging oral presentations” (139). Vershawn Ashanti Young (2020) similarly argues that for many teachers, “there is no relationship between speech and writing” (p. 633), and he sees this as an equity barrier. He insists that it is imperative to train first-year writing instructors how “to help Black English speakers cultivate the relationship between speech communication and writing” as a step toward “defeat[ing] white rhetorical and communication supremacy” (p. 627). As we have argued, aligning writing and speaking pedagogies would help address a number of other inequities as well.

How then might we, with questions of equity in mind, turn attention to the moments when we ask our students to speak in our undergraduate writing classrooms? How might we bring students in touch with the discursive specificities of oral genres (a TED talk vs an academic roundtable, for example) in a way that sets them up for success no matter their cultural and educational background? How might we attend to the ways that recording their voices in a widely shared podcast (an increasingly common assignment for writing courses) may subject students to the “prejudiced responses of a public audience” (Bell, 2019, p. 61)? How might we talk with our students about the ways that PowerPoint, a seemingly requisite tool of any presentation, has what Kernbach et al (2015) call “constraining qualities,” including an overvaluation of aesthetics and “a selling attitude” (p. 304)? We move in the next sections to propose strategies for approaching academic speaking, importantly aligning practices of teaching speaking with our well-rehearsed practices for teaching writing. The writing classroom, where we interrogate conventional “tips” (never use “I”; avoid passive voice) and teach through sharing precedents and modeling, is an ideal place to interrogate too the implicit biases we, as speakers and as audiences, hold about speaking.

## Positioning Scholarly Speaking in the Research Process

We developed the Precedents Archive for Scholarly Speaking (PASS) in order to materialize an equitable alternative to the performance paradigm: moving beyond a critique of the shortcomings we perceived in many existing assumptions about student speaking, we developed a model of scholarly speaking that actively challenges inequity. Here, Motley and Molloy's research, introduced above, again proves useful. While this research is mainly cited in literature on PSA, their work provides a framework for describing the shift necessary to make speaking pedagogy more equitable. For Motley and Molloy (1994), the performance orientation in which the presenter is focused on a "flawless delivery" (p. 49) forms one pole of what Motley (1990), in an earlier study, named the performance-communication "continuum" (p. 88); at the other end, then, is the "communication" orientation, where "success is measured by the extent to which the audience understands the message" and not on an evaluation of the speaker themselves (p. 90)<sup>6</sup>. Motley and Molloy (1994) later observe that when a speaker can be persuaded to take on a communication orientation and abandon a performance orientation, their anxiety diminishes. In one therapeutic strategy they designed, speakers are trained to view the audience "not as a group of evaluators, but rather as receivers who respond to the speaker's message" (p. 49). While students will always benefit from a general reduction in anxiety around scholarly speaking, our interest in Motley's "continuum" grows primarily from our sense that the performance orientation often reinforces prejudices—and that designing an equitable, communication-oriented paradigm involves getting students to rethink the relationship between presenter and audience. Efforts to use scholarly speaking instruction to make the university more equitable, then, must focus primarily not on improving student "performance," but on shifting students (speakers and listeners, both) and instructors toward a different paradigm. This entails situating speaking inside the collaborative process of scholarly inquiry—a process firmly established in many writing classrooms in Canada.

The PASS resource aims to help students see the continuity between their scholarly speaking and their written research training. In writing classrooms, we show students how to "be communicative" in a scholarly manner, and introduce them to the rewards of communicating their ideas while developing their academic research. We ask students daily to share their developing disciplinary knowledge and to participate in ongoing academic conversation. Indeed, the idea of academic work as an ongoing "conversation" is central to many contemporary pedagogies of academic writing. It underpins the popular textbook *They Say, I Say* which frames academic work as a "social,



conversational act” (Graff & Birkenstein, 2014, p. xvi); it drives Janet Giltrow et al.’s *Academic Writing: An Introduction* (2021), which teaches citation via the metaphor of “orchestrating voices” (p. 123); and it informs the title for Broadview Press’s latest textbook offering, Bettina Stumm’s *Joining the Dialogue* (2021). Kenneth Burke’s “parlor” metaphor, comparing intellectual engagement to an unending conversation, has been foundational in writing instruction for decades. As Walsh et al. (2018) write in an essay about using it to drive assignment design, Burke’s metaphor enables students “to view research as a process that builds knowledge through dialogue” (p. 107).

Ironically, Burke’s parlour metaphor is less often invoked in reference to scholarly speaking, despite its obvious relevance. Burke’s scene of conversation is so useful to our thinking because, like scholarly speaking itself, it is embodied: Burke (1974) asks us to imagine a person who enters a room where a conversation is already in progress; they “listen for a while” before they “put in their oar”; but the discussion itself is ongoing, “interminable”; it continues after they leave (p. 110). This is what students should see taking place when they give or watch a classroom presentation: scholarly speaking makes literal the idea of academic conversation, as students get a chance to not only “speak with” the scholars they cite, who might not actually be present in the room, but also to speak with an audience that reacts, questions, encourages, expounds. Emphases on speaker mannerisms and spoken delivery invite students to turn away from the conversation at hand to focus primarily, and often, anxiously, on their own performance within it.

This discrepancy between the obvious relevance of the conversation metaphor to speaking pedagogies and its relative absence reminds us of the problematic barrier that Vershawn Ashanti Young has identified between speech and writing. Young notes that Peter Elbow has long been calling for writing teachers to recognize the importance of speech in their classes. Elbow’s project has been to “enlist speech for writing” (2012, p.5) in part because he identifies speaking as coming easily to students; they have, Elbow writes, been speaking in many different situations throughout their lives and “we have a cultural tolerance for spoken imprecision” (p. 21)<sup>7</sup>. And yet, as we outlined above, “spoken imprecision” is rarely valued in academic or professional settings<sup>8</sup>. (In fact, students in our first-year writing classes identified “making a mistake” as their number one concern about speaking in class.) Our approach is then, in a fundamental way, related but opposite to Elbow’s: if he wanted to use habits of speaking to inform habits of writing, we wish to use habits of academic writing to inform habits of academic speaking. As McMillen and Hill (2004) argue in the context of writing instruction, “The metaphor of conversation fosters a process orientation instead of a task or product orientation” (p. 15). We can see how *these* opposing orientations align with the two poles of

Motley's continuum: the performance orientation is a product orientation, whereas a communication orientation is a process orientation. If a product orientation to speaking produces harmful inequities, then a process orientation is ameliorative: it moves students' attention from the focus on flawlessness to a focus on why they are sharing their research in the first place.

The focus on process is central to the PASS. The site invites students to "recognize scholarly speaking as an opportunity to share ideas that [they] care about and to receive feedback that could refine and improve them." The guides on the site instill values drawn from the genre-theoretical approach to academic writing, which teaches students to make their ideas accessible and legible for an audience of fellow-scholars with whom they are in conversation. Similarly, the PASS frames scholarly speaking as a specific *type* of public speaking, with its own norms and expectations, and with responsibilities for effective dialogue divided between the speaker and audience. Indeed, the available guides cover topics familiar in academic-writing pedagogy (citation practices, literature reviews, argument positioning and so on), but with an eye to the specificities of various scholarly speaking situations. The "Speaking with Citation" and "Joining the Conversation" guides, for example, ask students to reflect on how they can engage with other scholars and position their work without the benefit of written citations. The "Anticipating Audience Needs" and "Discussing Research" guides, on the other hand, focus more directly on the reciprocal nature of scholarly speaking situations, encouraging students to think, respectively, about how they can best communicate their key ideas in an oral setting and how they can benefit from the interactive nature of many academic presentation genres.

In designing the PASS, we took into account as well that we needed to prepare students to be not only effective scholarly speakers but also effective scholarly listeners. In their capacity as "audience members," students likewise need to recognize their role in the collaborative research process to create a more inclusive and cooperative classroom environment. A performance-oriented speaking pedagogy can instill exclusionary values in students, who come to think of themselves as judges, rather than interlocutors, for other student speakers. Lippi-Green (2011) theorizes oral communication as "based on a principle of mutual responsibility" (p. 72), arguing that the "negative social evaluation" of, in her study, an accent can lead to listeners rejecting their share "of the communicative burden" (p. 73). A shift away from a performance-orientation reminds students of their responsibility and role in a collective research process—the speaker, to be sure, must fulfill their part in communicating their ideas as effectively as possible, but this responsibility is shared in a way that many existing speaking pedagogies fail to acknowledge. In the following section, we argue

that familiarizing students with the conventions of scholarly discourse, and empowering them also to interrogate these norms, is a crucial step in establishing shared situational knowledge that is necessary for cooperative, process-driven, and equitable scholarly speaking.

## Teaching Scholarly Speaking Through Precedents

Teaching with precedents—sharing recorded presentations with students or facilitating their attendance at live scholarly events—is a vital way to introduce students to scholarly conversations and help them build comfort and competence in scholarly speaking situations. And, as we argue, teaching with precedents helps correct the performance paradigm's inequities. A belief in the importance of exposing students to existing academic writing is central to genre-theoretical pedagogy: almost all writing textbooks append sample essays or excerpts. The popular textbooks we noted above all complement their introductions to key features of academic discourse (e.g., "signal phrases" or "forecasts") with a range of samples from different disciplines and genres exemplifying the topics under discussion. Yet, despite current composition pedagogy's reliance on examples, scholarship on academic speaking instruction has not articulated a pedagogy centred on using precedents. Some educators influenced by genre-theoretical writing pedagogies—specifically a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) approach—have developed the Speaking in the Disciplines (SID) approach to scholarly speaking. For example, Deanna P. Dannels et al. (2017) argue that “we need to help [students] understand communication within the disciplines, rather than communication as a generic skill that works in the same way in every situation” (p. 14). And yet SID scholarship has rarely imported WID's emphasis on teaching with precedents—indeed, in contrast to WID textbooks, the Dannels et al. volume carves out no place for precedents.

To be sure, many instructors find ways to integrate precedents into their courses, whether by sharing their own research in an oral academic genre, facilitating attendance to campus academic speaking events, or using video recorded precedents found online. Still, while precedents for academic *writing* are abundantly available—not only in writing textbooks but also, simply, more widely online—precedents for academic oral presentations are harder to find. This is due, in part, to the ephemerality of speech; even transcripts of spoken academic presentations lose so much of what students learn about the genre from seeing academic conversations live, or at least aloud. Using the PASS archive, instructors can bring video precedents into the class—playing, pausing, and replaying in order to draw attention to certain moments or check in with student comprehension—or the videos can be assigned for viewing outside of class hours. Precedents allow students to observe

what scholarly speaking looks like in action: presenters struggling to articulate a difficult concept; presenters pausing to note a topic that might be taken up at a later time or in a question period; presenters listening to each other; audience members asking questions that may suggest to the speaker a new territory for research. Scholarly speaking is seldom flawless and its virtue is often in its aliveness, its responsiveness to its context and audience.

One of our goals with the PASS is to change students' preconceptions about what an effective speech is and who can be an effective speaker. Our initial archive consists of videos recorded at the University of British Columbia Coordinated Arts Program's undergraduate interdisciplinary conference, or CAPCON, held online in April 2021. The conference was international—quite literally, with presenters Zooming in from all over the world—and our videos feature a range of spoken English language varieties. The presenters reflect the diversity of our undergraduate classrooms in terms of race, nationality, gender expression, language use, and ability. It is important for us that a resource aimed at undergraduate students features videos of their peers, so students understand that while they are new to academia, they, too, are valid contributors to scholarly conversations. In the PASS, students can see their peers enacting the research process through scholarly conversations, whether or not a speaker speaks with an accent, dresses in a certain way, or makes a mistake while speaking. We like the videos we have *for* their imperfections; they are not always polished, professional presentations. Students make mistakes, mispronounce words, get flustered. But on the whole, the presenters are able to effectively communicate their ideas.

A precedents-based approach to scholarly speaking addresses inequity not just through representation, but also by fostering disciplinary knowledge. Precedents can acquaint students with scholarly discourse's fundamental rhetorical moves—articulating previously “unspoken” rules and making them available to students from a range of backgrounds and with a range of abilities. Students familiar with the genre norms of academic presentations also make less biased audience members and research interlocutors, as they move beyond an evaluative vocabulary that can privilege some student populations over others. We know, too, that university students want to see “how other people do it”—our approach also responds directly to frequent student requests for sample assignments, requests which reflect their unfamiliarity with academic genres as much as their uncertainty about instructor expectations.

There are precedents for the idea that a precedents-based approach can address inequities in the classroom. Drawing on her case study of an English-speaking high school in Canada with a large immigrant population from Hong Kong, Tara Goldstein (2003) argues that “many of the students at

Northside who were linguistically privileged because they spoke with a Standard Canadian-English accent were also advantaged because they had already accumulated the cultural capital needed to give an effective school presentation in English.” Goldstein observes that ESOL [English to Speakers of Other Languages] students benefited from “some explicit instruction around the norms associated with giving a classroom presentation” (p. 131). Moreover, Goldstein builds on sociolinguist James Gee’s notion that “discourses are acquired in natural settings and that discourse competence is realized socially through interaction”: “Gee writes that students develop school discourses, such as the discourse of making classroom presentations, through ‘apprenticeship.’” Goldstein thus reiterates the advice that her assistant Judith Ngan gave students about the best way to learn the norms of oral presentations: “Watch how other people do it” (p. 132). In the university classroom, the need for precedents for scholarly speaking is even more pressing, given the educational diversity of students who come together in our classes and the increased emphasis on scholarly and disciplinary expectations in post-secondary education.

The relation of genre instruction to social justice has an important lineage in writing pedagogy—and this is the relation we mean to import to speaking pedagogy. In their introduction to *Learning and Teaching Genre* (1994), Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway recognized that many saw the “*demystifying*” potential of the genre-theoretical approach (italics in original, p.12). As many subsequent scholars have noted, such demystification can help even the playing field of the university classroom, generally peopled by students unevenly familiar with academic discourse’s conventions. In a survey of WID scholarship, Laura Wilder (2012) reminds us that the belief that traditional academic writing pedagogies reinscribe social inequities was foundational to the genre-theoretical intervention: early efforts to explicitly teach the conventional features of academic genres were driven by a recognition that student writers flagged as “in need of remediation were in fact socially rather than cognitively disadvantaged” (p. 112). Similarly, the assumption of an uneven natural competency in speaking—which can be summarized as “you either have it or you don’t”—upon further inspection might amplify broader social inequities, since, as Wilder explains in the context of academic writing, “complex social circumstances likely support the development of some students’ apparent special ‘knacks’ for intuiting the implicit rhetorical instruction of the disciplines” (p. 111). We believe that, especially within the context of undergraduate instruction, familiarizing students with the genre expectations of scholarly speaking through direct instruction remains the most immediate way of overcoming discrepancies in familiarity with the norms of spoken academic discourse. As we discuss below, such explicit instruction familiarizes students with the conventions

of scholarly speaking; it highlights key rhetorical moves that scholars make to communicate their research and invite audience members into a scholarly conversation.

Arguments for such “explicit instruction” in genre conventions have long been countered by those who believe “tacit immersion” in a discourse is the best way to achieve competency, in what amounts to a longstanding debate about the best way to inculcate students into knowledge of academic writing genres. Proponents of this latter view agree that students should be exposed to precedents to learn academic discourse, but they argue that too much guidance for students—too much explicit instruction about which scholarly moves “work”—can lead to the reproduction of exclusionary norms. Without such instruction, they say, students will better be able to identify what does and does not work for them within status quo academic discourse, free from the normative force that is compounded by explicit instruction. We are sympathetic to critiques of explicit instruction that, in essence, argue that we should develop pedagogies to challenge rather than reproduce inequitable conventions in academic discourse. We argue, however, that a precedents-based pedagogy disrupts the tacit-explicit binary: a precedents model for academic speaking merges direct instruction and immersion, making them complementary<sup>9</sup>.

Such a hybrid approach has informed the design of the PASS. There are two key ways for students to engage with the PASS. First, they can use the student guides that offer explicit instruction around the norms of spoken scholarly discourse. In addition to accessing these guides, students can also browse the full presentation videos in the archive “on their own”. In curating the precedents that students view, we have aimed to ensure that students see examples that model the norms of scholarly discourse, rather than emphasizing performance and self-presentation. However, one of our intentions with the site is to discourage students from treating a precedent as a template to be copied by rote—and we do this by giving them the opportunity to interact with diverse examples rather than a single model. The website thus aims to demonstrate how even with an emphasis on rhetorical norms, there is still a possibility for great diversity of approaches to scholarly speaking, each effective for communicating research.

Ultimately, the PASS aims to both familiarize students with the conventions governing academic discourse *and* empower them to challenge these norms. Such empowerment is crucial, insofar as we recognize that these norms themselves often encode cultural biases, many of which likely remain hidden to us now and will require new and future scholars—i.e., students—to uncover. Our approach to scholarly speaking pedagogy thus aligns with the values and commitments at the core of “critical communication pedagogy,” defined by Fassett and Warren (2007) as “teaching and research

addressed toward understanding how communication creates and may, therefore, challenge sociocultural oppressions” (p. 3). We chose the term “precedent” over “model” to encourage a dynamic relationship with the examples we provide for students. The *OED* defines a “precedent” as “a previous instance taken as an example or rule by which to be guided in similar cases or circumstances” (Oxford University Press, n.d.). For most, the word “precedent” has legal connotations, and in some circumstances, precedents can be binding rules—a connotation of the term not in line with our goals and values. But, sticking with the legal metaphor, what attracts us to the term is that, in practice, precedents are often examples open to interpretation, evaluation, negotiation, and debate. Citing a precedent in a court of law involves comparing circumstances to evaluate whether the precedent applies in the given case.

A communication-oriented approach thus encourages students to get beyond just *recognizing and copying* the key moves made by scholars within specific academic disciplines. Student interaction with precedents aims to encourage reflexivity on the scholarly speaking situation, at once as an iterative genre and as a singular instance. Fassett and Kathryn B. Golsan (2018) warn against reducing oral communication instruction to evaluating “the effectiveness of different speech elements, including attention-getters, transitions, and clinchers” (p. 44). But the guided exposure to scholarly speaking precedents encouraged by the PASS pushes beyond the “skills” approach, rather than just shifting the set of skills students learn; it will protect against reducing scholarly speaking to a checklist of presentation strategies that students can memorize.

## Conclusion

Our dual goal in our pedagogy, and in our project, has been to address current inequities in speaking pedagogies, and to train students to develop more equitable approaches to academic speaking as they grow as scholars over the course of their degrees. The inclusion offered by explicit instruction in genre and disciplinary norms is just a first step toward promoting equity in the classroom. Jake Simmons and Shawn T. Wahl (2016) describe the pitfalls of many “inclusive” pedagogies: “through inclusion,” they explain, “the institution maintains a (white, male, straight, able-bodied) identity with power over the bodies it ostensibly includes” (p. 234). One way to resist promoting discriminatory “universal” ideals of presentation style is to, as Boromisza-Habashi et al. (2016) write in their work on internationalizing public speaking curriculum, teach speaking as a “a patterned, context-bound, locally meaningful communicative activity” (p. 22). While precedents help students recognize the conventions of academic genres, their own scholarly presentations are where they take the next step

of negotiating and even contesting these norms—in dialogue with their audience. For this reason, the PASS encourages students to interact with the precedents, not as models to be emulated, but rather as examples to be evaluated according to how effectively they respond to a diverse audience's needs in a specific scholarly communicative scenario. Indeed, the guides feature reflection prompts and activity ideas that ask students to do just such evaluative work. If students find the precedents to be problematic—if the methods they identify in the examples are found to be constricting, if the conventions they enact are in fact discriminatory—they should feel themselves empowered to make their own way, now that they know the goals of research communication. Currently, we are constructing an additional guide devoted to unconventional presentations that challenge normative academic expectations around sharing and receiving knowledge—a page with some *unprecedented precedents* to help inspire students to make scholarly speaking more open and equitable.

The PASS is still a work in progress, and the site has just recently launched. Early data is promising, and we look forward to sharing further research after we have completed further evaluation. For now, however, we want to present the PASS as a concrete point of reference in presenting our aspirations for making scholarly speaking more equitable. We have framed our argument by exploring the PASS not because we want to suggest the website as a stand-alone solution to the problems we have described but because we believe the principles on which the site is based are important for shifting toward an equitable scholarly speaking pedagogy: 1) facing head on the relation of speaking and writing in the larger research process; and 2) building on genre-theoretical approaches to academic writing by enhancing the ways we teach with precedents. These strategies, we have argued, will help shift student thinking away from the harmful performance paradigm, and instead toward a view of scholarly speaking as *relational*, as students reflect on how scholars can best communicate with each other. The PASS thus also helps us illustrate the need for a *critical and reflexive* scholarly speaking pedagogy that asks students to not just become conversant with the norms that structure existing academic discourse, but also to consider what exclusions such normativity promotes, and imagine alternatives.

In keeping with our emphasis on scholarly dialogue, we are especially hopeful that the principles and strategies we have outlined here will further conversations in the field about what the equitable teaching of academic oral genres might look like—a conversation to take place both among instructors and within our classrooms. We hope that our work might contribute to a shift in how we teach scholarly speaking in Canadian universities, moving us toward a more communication-oriented, process-driven, and precedent-informed scholarly speaking pedagogy. Finally, and



ultimately, we hope this shift will help students feel confident in their scholarly speaking, and, consequently, in their belonging in their classrooms, their universities, and the broader academic community.

## Endnotes

1. In aligning speaking pedagogy with academic writing instruction, our argument resonates with scholarship and pedagogy growing from “Speaking in the Disciplines” (SID) or “Communication Across the Curriculum” (CXC or CAC) initiatives in the U.S. CXC and related programs offer cross-curricular instructional support to instructors to incorporate speaking pedagogies in their disciplinary teaching. Many universities offer courses with a “C” designation similar to the “W” designation attached to writing-intensive courses in Canada. The literature on CXC shows how speaking pedagogies align with writing pedagogies – as Dannels and Housley Gaffney (2009) write, “their overlapping goals make them close siblings” (p. 126) – and maps the challenges and controversies attendant when one discipline (Communication) sits in on another’s class. Yet, as Amanda M. Gunn (2007) articulates, “current approaches to CAC limit communication education to basic communication skill development” (p. 2). Our purpose is not to overview or critique CXC, nor to suggest that such programs should be wider-spread in Canada—instead, we suggest that existing academic writing courses are an ideal home for teaching scholarly speaking.

2. This scholarly field is rich and spans work, particularly in Sociolinguistics, on translingualism (see Piller, 2016), and linguistic social justice (see Lee, 2016). Much has been written on vernacular spoken English in Education (see Rickford et al., 2012 for an extensive bibliography), in particular on African American Vernacular English (see, for example, Young, 2004, on code-meshing as an African American in academia).

3. Such resources are at least as much an effect as a cause of disconnecting speaking from broader research processes. Cynthia Selfe (2009) references the nineteenth-century shift “from an older style based on declamation, oratory, forensics, and delivery to a new style of education based primarily on the study and analysis of written texts, both and contemporary” (p. 621). We would add that one effect of minimizing oral forms in modern education is that, rather than evolving with other research practices, oral presentation pedagogy in many ways remains invested in the values prized in older oral modes—oratory, debate—that emphasize persuasion and performance. The primacy of written genres in higher education was also the focus of Andrea Lunsford’s 2019 CASDW keynote address, “Rethinking the Writing/Speaking Relationship: What’s Talk Got to do with it?”

4. Here we also note, though do not fully recount, work on translingual pedagogies that highlight the discriminatory effects of composition classes that reward what Missy Watson (2018) calls “standardized English.” See also You (2016).

5. Though some individual instructors will have already thought carefully about how to integrate speaking into their writing classes, the literature bears out the silo-effect that concerns us here: there is little crossover between writing-focused and communication-focused journals, for example.

6. This is not to say that audience perception of the character of the speaker (Aristotle’s *ethos*) does not matter at all. Perception of character *does* matter (for trust, credibility; a speaker should, according to Aristotle (1960) be seen as having “intelligence, character, and goodwill” [p.91]). What we are doing with our project, though, is aiming to disrupt what counts as markers of those things.

7. As Selfe (2009) notes, instructors have long been incorporating oral assessments into their research assignments. Yet, as she writes, the “primary reason for speaking and listening in composition classrooms was identified as improved writing” (p. 634).

8. We caution against conceiving orality itself as a way to get beyond oppressive linguistic strictures, and thus thinking of speaking, when compared to writing, as inherently progressive. We are aware, too, that labeling certain cultures as “oral” can have racist undertones. C. Jan Swearingen (2004), for example, summarizes (but does not fully endorse) the view that calling African American language or culture “oral” is a “a racist romanticizing” that should be exchanged for a more nuanced account of “African American language...and culture” (p. 250).

9. Goldstein similarly notes that in order to address classroom inequities, instructors need to both “create the conditions for such [immersive] acquisition as well as provide explicit instruction” (p. 132).

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