UNIT 21
Criticism in the Public Speaking Classroom

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Throughout your study of public speaking, you'll be called upon to offer critiques of other speeches. By analyzing and criticizing the speeches of others, you'll gain insights into the principles of public speaking that you can't get from reading alone. So this unit offers suggestions for getting the most out of the criticism experience. More specifically, in this unit you'll learn

- what criticism is and why it's valuable
- how to criticize effectively

THE NATURE AND VALUES OF CRITICISM

Critics and criticism are essential parts of any art. The word *criticism* comes from the Greek adjective *kritikos,* meaning "able to discern or judge." Criticism of a speech, therefore, is the process of evaluating a speech, of rendering a judgment of its value. Note that there is nothing inherently negative about criticism; criticism may be negative, but it may also be positive.

Criticism, especially in a public speaking course in which the objective is to learn skills, can be of tremendous value. Perhaps the major value of criticism in the classroom is that it helps you improve your public speaking skills. Through the constructive criticism of others, you'll learn the principles of public speaking more effectively. You'll be shown what you do well; what you could improve; and, ideally, how you can improve. As a listener–critic you'll also learn the principles of public speaking through assessing the speeches of others. Just as you learn when you teach, you also learn when you criticize.

Criticism also helps you identify standards for evaluating the wide variety of speeches you'll hear throughout your life. Your critical frame of mind and guidelines for critical evaluation will help you assess all communications from the car salesperson's pitch to the advertiser's claims for Tylenol to the network's editorial on public policy.

And when you give criticism—as you do in a public speaking class—you're telling the speaker that you've listened carefully and that you care enough about the speech and the speaker to offer suggestions for improvement.

Of course, criticism can be difficult—for the critic (whether student or instructor) as well as for the person criticized. As a critic, you may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. After all, you might think, "Who am I to criticize another person's speech; my own speech won't be any better." Or you may be reluctant to offend, fearing that your criticism may make the speaker feel uncomfortable. Or you may view criticism as a confrontation that will do more harm than good.

Still another obstacle is that in offering criticism, you put yourself on the line; you state a position with which others may disagree and which you may be asked to defend. Considering these difficulties, you may conclude that the process isn't worth the effort and may decide to leave the criticism to others.

But reconsider this opinion. By offering criticism you help the speaker, giving her or him another perspective on the speech that should prove useful in future speeches. When you offer criticism, you're not claiming to be a better speaker; you're simply offering a fresh perspective. It's true that in offering criticism you're stating a position with which others may disagree. But that's one of the things that will make this class and the learning of the principles of public speaking exciting and challenging.

Criticism is also difficult to receive. After working on a speech for a week or two and dealing with the normal anxiety that comes with public speaking, the last thing you want is to stand in front of the class and hear others say what you did wrong. Public speaking is ego involving, and it's normal to personalize criticism. If you learn how to give and how to receive criticism, however, you can utilize it as an effective teaching and learning tool. Criticism will help you sharpen your skills and improve every aspect of your speech preparation and presentation process. Criticism can also serve as an important support mechanism for the developing public

speaker—as a way of patting the speaker on the back for all the positive effort.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN APPROACHES TO CRITICISM

There are vast cultural differences in what is considered proper when it comes to criticism. For example, criticism will be viewed very differently depending on whether members come from an individualistic culture (which emphasizes the individual and places primary value on the individual's goals) or from a collectivist culture (which emphasizes the group and places primary value on the group's goals).

Those who come from cultures that lean toward individualism and competition (the United States, Germany, and Sweden are examples) may find public criticism a normal part of the learning process. Those who come from cultures oriented toward collectivism, which emphasize the group rather than the individual (Japan, Mexico, and Korea are examples), are likely to find giving and receiving public criticism uncomfortable. Thus, a person from an individualistic culture may readily criticize others and is likely to expect the same "courtesy" from other listeners. "After all," this person might reason, "if I'm going to criticize your skills to help you improve, I expect you to help me in the same way." Persons from collectivist cultures, on the other hand, may feel that it's more important to be polite and courteous than to help someone learn a skill. Cultural rules developed to maintain peaceful relations among the Japanese (Midooka, 1990) and rules of politeness among many Asian cultures (Fraser, 1990) may conflict with the classroom cultural norm that calls for honest criticism. In some cultures, however being kind to the person is more important than telling the truth, and so members may say things that are complimentary but—in a literal sense—untrue.

As Unit 3 explained, collectivist cultures place a heavy emphasis on face-saving, on allowing people to always appear in a positive light. In such cultures contributing to someone's loss of face by, say, publicly criticizing the person violates an important cultural norm and may result in the critic's also losing face. The closest equivalent to loss of face in the United States is embarrassment, but loss of face is much more intense and long lasting. Also, whereas embarrassment can often be humorous (especially if you're not the one being embarrassed), loss of face is never humorous to anyone (James, 1995).

In cultures in which face-saving is a central norm, people may prefer not to say anything negative in public—and may even be reluctant to say anything positive, for fear that any omissions may be construed as negatives. Japanese executives, for instance, are reluctant to say *no* in a business meeting for fear of offending the other person. But their *yes,* properly interpreted in light of the context and the general discussion, may mean *no.* In cultures in which face-saving is especially important, communication rules such as the following often prevail:

- Don't express negative evaluation in public; instead, compliment the person.
- Don't prove someone wrong, especially in public; express agreement even if you know the person is wrong.
- Don't correct someone's errors; don't even acknowledge them.
- Don't ask difficult questions, lest the person not know the answer and lose face or be embarrassed; generally, avoid asking questions.

These differences can create special problems if you interpret others' behavior through your own cultural filters and fail to see that another meaning may have been intended. For example, if a speaker who expects comments and criticism gets none, he or she may interpret the silence to mean that the audience didn't care or wasn't listening. But they may have been listening very intently. They may simply be operating with a different cultural rule, a rule that says it's impolite to criticize or evaluate another person's work, especially in public.

The difficulties that these differences can cause may be lessened if they're discussed openly. Some people may become comfortable with criticism once it's explained that the cultural norms of most public speaking classrooms include public criticism (see Verderber, 2000) just as they incorporate informative and persuasive speaking or written outlines. Others may feel more comfortable offering written criticism as a substitute for oral and public criticism. Or perhaps private consultations can be arranged.

Building Communication Skills

Analyzing and Criticizing a Poorly Constructed Informative Speech

Hereis an especially poor speech, constructed to illustrate clearly and briefly some of the major faults that occur in informative speeches. This exercise can be returned to several times throughout the course. As the course progresses, your responses will become more complete, more insightful, and more effective.

After you've reviewed the speech and the comments on the right, phrase your criticism in the form of a relatively formal critique of one to two minutes. Assume that this is a student's first speech and that you're the public speaking instructor. What do you say?

THREE JOBS

Speech	Comments
Well, I mean, hello. Er . . . I'm new at public speaking so I'm a little nervous. I've always been shy. So don't watch my knees shake.	*The title seems adequate but not terribly exciting. After reading the speech, can you come up with a more appealing title? Generally, don't use your title as your opening words.* *This nervous reaction is understandable, but it's probably best not to share it with the listeners. After all, you don't want them to be uncomfortable for you.*
Eum, let me see my notes here. [Mumbles to self while shuffling notes: One, two, three, four, five—oh, they're all here.] Okay, here goes.	*Going through your notes makes the audience feel that you didn't prepare adequately and may be wasting their time.*
Three jobs. That's my title, and I'm going to talk about three jobs.	*This is the speaker's orientation. Is this sufficient? What else might the speaker have done in the introduction?*
The Health Care Field. This is the fastest-growing job in the country; one of the fastest, I guess I mean. I know that you're not interested in this topic and that you're all studying accounting. But there are a lot of new jobs in the health care field. The *Star* had an article on health care and said that health care will be needed more in the future than it is now. And now, you know, like they need a lot of health care people. In the hospital where I work—on the west side, uptown—they never have enough health aides and they always tell me to become a health aide, like, you know, to enter the health care field. To become a nurse. Or maybe a dental technician. But I hate going to the dentist. Maybe I will.	*Here the speaker shows such uncertainty that we question his or her competence. And we begin to wonder, Why is the speaker talking to us about this?* *Articles in the* Star *may be entertaining, but they don't constitute evidence. What does this reference do to the credibility you ascribe to the speaker?* *Everything in the speech must have a definite purpose. Asides such as not liking to go to the dentist are probably best omitted.*
I don't know what's going to happen with problems in managed care, but whatever happens, it won't change the need for health aides. I mean,	*Here the speaker has an opportunity to connect the topic with important current issues but fails to say anything that isn't obvious.*

people will still get sick; so it really doesn't matter what happens with health care.

The Robotics Field. This includes things like artificial intelligence. I don't really know what that is, but it's like growing real fast. They use this in making automobiles and planes and I think in computers. Japan is a leading country in this field. A lot of people in India go into this field, but I'm not sure why.

Introducing these topics like this is clear but probably not very interesting. How might each of the three main topics have been introduced more effectively?

Notice how vague the speaker is—"includes things like," "and I think in computers," "I'm not sure why." Phrasing like this communicates very little information to listeners and leaves them with little confidence that the speaker knows what he or she is talking about.

The Computer Graphics Field. This field has a lot to do with designing and making lots of different products, like CAD and CAM. This field also includes computer-aided imagery—CAI. And in movies, I think. Like *Star Wars* and *Terminator 2*. I saw *Terminator 2* four times. I didn't see *Star Wars* but I'm gonna rent the video. I don't know if you have to know a lot about computers or if you can just like be a designer and someone else will tell the computer what to do.

Again, there is little that is specific. CAD and CAM are not defined, and CAI is explained merely as "computer-aided imagery"; unless we already knew what these acronyms stood for, we would still not know after hearing the speaker. Again, the speaker inserts personal notes (for example, seeing Terminator 2 *four times) that have no meaningful connection to the topic.*

I got my information from a book that Carol Kleiman wrote, *The 100 Best Jobs for the 1990s and Beyond.* It was summarized in last Sunday's *News.*

The speaker uses only one source and, to make matters worse, doesn't even go to the original source but relies on a summary in the local newspaper. Especially with a topic such as career opportunities, listeners are likely to want a variety of viewpoints and additional reliable sources.

My conclusion. These are three of the fastest-growing fields in the U.S. and in the world, I think—but not in third-world countries, I don't think. China and India and Africa. More like Europe and Germany. And the U.S.—the U.S. is the big one. I hope you enjoyed my speech. Thank you.

Using the word conclusion *to signal that you're concluding isn't a bad idea, but work it into the text instead of presenting it like a heading or a book chapter title.*

Again, the speaker makes us question his or her competence and preparation by the lack of certainty. Note too that the speech lacked any statistics. This is a subject for which statistics are essential. Listeners will want to know how many jobs will be available in these fields, what will these fields look like in 5 or 10 years, how much these fields pay, and so on.

I wasn't as nervous as I thought I'd be. Are there any questions?

Again, personal comments are best left out.

STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES OF CRITICISM

What standards do you use when you criticize a speech? How do you measure the excellence of a speech? On what basis do you say that one speech is weak, another is good, and still another is great? And once you make these judgments, how do you express criticism?

Standards of Criticism

Three major standards quickly suggest themselves: effectiveness, universality, and conformity to the principles of the art.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness standard of criticism judges a speech in terms of whether or not it achieves its purpose. If the purpose is to sell soap, then the speech

is effective if it sells soap and is ineffective if it fails to sell soap. Not surprisingly, effectiveness is the standard that advertisers apply in evaluating advertising campaigns. Similarly, politicians often evaluate their speeches in terms of this standard; a speech is considered effective if it helps secure votes and ineffective if it doesn't. Increased sophistication in measuring communication effects—by means of telephone, e-mail, and website surveys, for example—makes this standard tempting to apply.

There are, however, problems with the effectiveness approach. In many situations—in the classroom, for example—the effects of a speech can't always be measured. Sometimes the effect of a speech is long term, and you may not be present to see it take hold. Also, some effects are simply not measurable; you can't always measure changes in attitudes or beliefs.

Sometimes, too, an audience may be so opposed to a speaker's position that even the greatest speech will have no observable effect. It may take an extended campaign to get such an audience to change its position even slightly. Or an audience may already agree with the speaker, in which case even the weakest speech will secure compliance. In situations like these, the effectiveness standard will lead to inaccurate and inappropriate judgments.

Universality

The universality standard of criticism (Murphy, 1958) asks to what extent a speech addresses values and issues that have significance for all people in all times. By this standard Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech would be judged positively—because it argues for beliefs, values, and actions that most people view positively.

A similar standard is that of historical justification. This standard asks to what extent the speech's thesis and purpose were justified by subsequent historical events. By this standard William Jennings Bryan's famous "Cross of Gold" speech (delivered in 1896) would be judged negatively—although it won Bryan the Democratic nomination for president—because it argued for a monetary standard that the world has since rejected.

Another similar standard is that of ethical merit. This standard asks to what extent the speech argues for what is true, moral, humane, or good. By this standard the speeches of Adolf Hitler would be judged negatively, because they supported ideas most people find repugnant. Other situations would not be so easy to judge with the ethical merit standard, however. For example, consider how different cultures would respond to such seemingly simple theses as the following:

- Try eating beef.
- Try eating pork.
- Try eating dog meat.
- Get divorced when things don't work out.
- Never get divorced.
- Support gay or lesbian marriage proposals.
- Defeat gay or lesbian marriage proposals.

Obviously, different cultures will respond with very different evaluations; some cultures will judge certain theses ethical, whereas other cultures will find the same theses unethical.

Conformity to the Principles of the Art

A more useful standard is to evaluate the speech on the basis of its conformity to the principles of the art of public speaking. With the conformity to the principles of the art standard of criticism, a speech is evaluated positively when it follows the principles of public speaking established by the critics, theorists, researchers, and practitioners of public speaking (and as described throughout the text of *Human Communication*)—and evaluated negatively to the extent that it deviates from these principles. These principles include, for example, speaking on a subject that is worthwhile, relevant, and interesting to listeners; designing a speech for a specific audience; and constructing a speech that is based on sound research. A list of critical guidelines for analyzing public speeches that are based on these principles is given later in this unit.

This standard is, of course, not totally separate from the effectiveness standard—because the principles of the art of public speaking are largely principles of effectiveness. When you follow the principles of the art, in other words, your speech will in all likelihood be effective.

The great advantage of this standard (especially in a learning situation such as a course in communication) is that it will help you master the principles of public speaking. When your speech is measured by its adherence to these principles, you'll be learning the principles by applying them to your unique situation.

The principles of public speaking are presented throughout *Human Communication*, and it's by these, supplemented by whatever principles your instructor adds, that your public speaking efforts will be evaluated. In your early speeches, follow the principles as closely as you can, even if their application seems mechanical and unimaginative. After you've mastered their application, you can begin to play with the principles, altering them to suit your own personality, the uniqueness of the situation, and your specific goals.

Principles of Expressing Criticism

Before reading the specific suggestions for making critical evaluations a more effective part of the total learning process and for avoiding some of the potentially negative aspects of expressing criticism, take the following self-test. It asks you to identify what's wrong with certain critical comments.

TEST YOURSELF

What's Wrong with These Comments?

For the purposes of this exercise, assume that each of the following 10 comments represents the critic's complete criticism. What's wrong with each?

1. I loved the speech. It was great. Really great.
2. The introduction didn't gain my attention.
3. You weren't interested in your own topic. How do you expect us to be interested?
4. Nobody was able to understand you.
5. The speech was weak.
6. The speech didn't do anything for me.
7. Your position was unfair to those of us on athletic scholarships; we earned those scholarships.
8. I found four things wrong with your speech. First, . . .
9. You needed better research.
10. I liked the speech; I agree that we need more police on campus.

How did you do? Before reading the discussion that follows, try to explain why each of these statements is ineffective. What makes one expression of criticism helpful and productive, and what makes another unhelpful and unproductive?

What will you do? Try restating the basic meaning of each of these comments but in a more constructive manner. As you read the rest of this unit, return to these statements and rewrite them as many times as you think helpful. ✔

Say Something Positive

Egos are fragile, and public speaking is extremely personal. Speakers are all like Noel Coward, who said, "I love criticism just as long as it's unqualified praise." Part of your function as a critic is to strengthen the already positive aspects of the speaker's performance. Positive criticism is particularly important in itself, but it's almost essential as a preface to negative comments. There are always positive characteristics about any speech, and it's more productive to concentrate on these first. Thus, instead of saying (as in the self-test), "The speech didn't do anything for me," first tell the speaker what you liked; then bring up some weakness and suggest how it might be corrected.

When criticizing a person's second or third speech, it's especially helpful if you can point out specific improvements ("You really held my attention in this speech, especially with your story of the crash." "I felt you were much more in control of your topic today than in your first speech.").

Remember, too, the irreversibility of communication. Once you say something, you can't take it back. Remember this when offering any criticism, especially negative criticism. If in doubt, err on the side of gentleness.

Be Specific

Criticism is most effective when it's specific. Criticisms such as "I thought your delivery was bad"; "I thought your examples were good"; or, as in the self-test, "I loved the speech. . . . Really great" or "The speech was weak" are poorly expressed. These statements don't specify what the speaker might do to improve weaknesses or to capitalize on strengths. Thus, in commenting on delivery, refer to such specifics as eye contact, vocal volume, or whatever else is of consequence. In commenting on examples, tell the speaker why his or her examples were good. Were they realistic? Were they especially interesting? Were they presented dramatically?

In giving negative criticism, specify and justify—to the extent that you can—positive alternatives. Here's an example.

> I liked the fact that you included lots of statistics. But I thought the way you introduced your statistics was

somewhat vague. I wasn't sure where the statistics came from or how recent or reliable they were. It might have been better to say something like "The U.S. Census figures for 2000 show that . . . ." That way we would know that the statistics were as recent as possible and the most reliable available.

Be Objective

In criticizing a speech, transcend your own biases as best you can—in contrast to our self-test item, "Your position was unfair . . . ; we earned those scholarships." See the speech as objectively as possible. Assume, for example, that you're strongly in favor of women's rights to abortion and you encounter a speech diametrically opposed to your position. In this situation you will need to take special care not to dismiss the speech because of your own attitudes. Examine the speech from the point of view of a detached critic; evaluate, for example, the language, the supporting materials, and the validity of the arguments and their suitability to the audience. Remember, you're evaluating the speech in terms of the extent to which it conforms to the principles of the art of public speaking. Conversely, take special care not to evaluate a speech positively because it presents a position with which you agree, as in "I liked the speech; I agree that we need more police on campus."

Limit Criticism

Cataloging a speaker's weak points, as in "I found four things wrong with your speech," will overwhelm, not help, the speaker. If you're the sole critic, your criticism will naturally need to be more extensive. If you're one of many critics, however, limit your criticism to one or perhaps two points. In all cases, your guide should be the value your comments will have for the speaker.

Be Constructive

Above all, your goal should be to provide the speaker with insight that you feel will prove useful in future public speaking transactions, a point made clear in Building Communication Skills. For example, to say, "The introduction didn't gain my attention" doesn't tell the speaker how he or she might have gained your attention. Instead, you might say, "The example about the computer crash would have been a more effective hook in the introduction."

Focus on Behavior

Focus criticism on what the speaker said and did during the actual speech. Try to avoid the natural tendency to read the mind of the speaker—to assume that you know why the speaker did one thing rather than another. Compare the critical comments presented in the table below. Note that the comments in the first column, "Criticism as Attack," try to identify the reasons the speaker did as he or she did; they try to read the speaker's mind. At the same time, they blame the speaker for what happened. Those in the second column, "Criticism as Support," focus on the specific behavior. Note, too, that those in the first column are likely to encourage defensiveness; you can almost hear the speaker saying, for example, "Yes I *was* interested in the topic." Those in the second column are unlikely to create defensiveness and are more likely to be appreciated as honest reflections of how the critic perceived the speech.

Own Your Own Criticism

In giving criticism, own your comments; take responsibility for your criticism. Again, the best way to express this ownership is to use I-messages rather than you-messages. Instead of saying "You needed

Criticism as Attack and as Support

Criticism as Attack	*Criticism as Support*
"You weren't interested in your topic."	"I would have liked to see greater variety in your delivery. It would have made me feel that you were more interested."
"You should have put more time into the speech."	"I think it would have been more effective if you had looked at your notes less."
"You didn't care about your audience."	"I would have liked it if you had looked more directly at the audience while speaking."

BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Analyzing and Criticizing a Poorly Constructed Persuasive Speech

Like the informative speech in the previous Building Communication Skills box, the following persuasive speech was written to illustrate some blatant as well as some rather subtle errors that a beginning speaker might make in constructing a persuasive speech. First, read the entire speech without reading any of the questions in the right-hand column. Then, after you've read the entire speech, reread each paragraph and respond to the critical thinking questions. What other questions might prove productive to ask?

XXX HAS GOT TO GO

Speech	Critical Thinking Questions
You probably didn't read the papers this weekend, but there's a XXX movie, I mean video, store that moved in on Broadway and Fifth Streets. My parents, who are retired teachers, are protesting it and so am I. My parents are organizing a protest for the next weekend.	*Visualizing yourself as a listener, how would the opening comment make you feel?* *Does the speaker gain your attention?* *What thesis do you think the speaker will support?* *Does mentioning "my parents" help or hurt the speaker's credibility?*
There must be hundreds of XXX video stores in the country, and they all need to be closed down. I have a lot of reasons.	*What is the speaker's thesis?* *What impression are you beginning to get of the speaker?*
First, my parents think it should be closed down. My parents are retired teachers and have organized protests over the proposed new homeless shelter and to prevent the city from making that park on Elm Street. So they know what they're doing.	*How do the speaker's parents sound to you? Do they sound like credible leaders with a consistent cause? Or professional protesters (with perhaps a negative agenda)?* *What evidence is offered to support the assertion that we should believe the speaker's parents? Is this adequate? What would you need to know about people before believing them?*
The XXX video place is un-Christian. No good Christian people would ever go there. Our minister is against it and is joining in the protest.	*What does this statement assume about the audience? How would this statement be responded to by your public speaking class? What do you think of the speaker's characterization of XXX video stores as un-Christian?*
These stores bring crime into the neighborhood. I have proof of that. Morristown's crime increased after the XXX video store opened. And in Martinsville, where they got rid of the video store, crime did not increase. If we allow the video store in our own town, then we're going to be like Morristown and our crime is going to increase.	*What do you think of the reasoning used here? Are there other factors that could have influenced Morristown's crime increase? Is any evidence presented to back up the suggestion that getting rid of the video store resulted in the stable crime rate in Martinsville? What assumption about the audience does the speaker make in using Martinsville and Morristown as analogies?*
These stores make lots of garbage. The plastic wrappings from the videos will add to our already overextended and overutilized landfill. And a lot of them are going to wind up as litter on the streets.	*Do you agree with this argument about the garbage? For example, is this argument in any way unique to video stores? Is it likely that people will open the wrappers and drop them on the street?*

continued

Building Communication Skills continued

The XXX Video House stays open seven days a week, 24 hours a day. People will be forced to work at all hours and on Sunday and that's not fair. And the store will increase the noise level at night with the cars pulling up and all.

What validity do you give to each of these arguments? Given the 24-hour policy, how might you construct an argument against the video store? Also, are there advantages to a neighborhood store's 24-hour availability that the audience may be thinking of, thus countering the speaker's argument? If there are, how should the speaker deal with them?

The XXX Video House—that's it's name, by the way—doesn't carry regular videos that most people want. So why do we want them?

On hearing this, would you be likely to extend the argument and start asking yourself, "Do we now close down all stores that most people don't want?"

The XXX Video House got a lease from an owner who doesn't even live in the community, someone by the name of, well, it's an organization called XYX Management. And their address is Carlson Place in Jeffersonville. So they don't even live here.

Is there a connection between who the owner is and whether the video store should or shouldn't be closed? Could the speaker have effectively used this information in support of the thesis to close the video store?

A neighboring store owner says he thinks the store is in violation of several fire laws. He says they have no sprinkler system and no metal doors to prevent the spread of a fire. So he thinks they should be closed down too.

What credibility do you ascribe to the "neighboring store owner"? Do you begin to wonder if the speaker would agree simply to have the store brought up to the fire code regulations?

Last week on *Oprah* three women were on and they were in the XXX movie business and they were all on drugs and had been in jail and they said it all started when they went into the porno business. One woman wanted to be a teacher, another wanted to be a nurse, and the other wanted to be a beautician. If there weren't any XXX video stores, then there wouldn't be a porn business, and, you know, pornography is part of organized crime and so if you stop pornography you take a bite out of crime.

What is the cause and what is the effect that the speaker is asserting? How likely is it that the proposed cause actually produced the effect? Might there have been causes other than the pornography that might have led these women into drugs?

What credibility do you give to people you see on talk shows? Does credibility vary with the specific talk show?

Do you accept the argument that there would be no pornography business without video stores? What would have to be proved to you before you accepted this connection?

How do you respond to the expression "take a bite out of crime"?

One of the reasons I think it should be closed is that the legitimate video stores—the ones that have only a small selection of XXX movies somewhere in the back—lose business. And if they continue to lose business, they'll leave the neighborhood and we'll have no video stores.

Is the speaker implying that this is the real argument against XXX video stores?

Do you start wondering whether the speaker is against XXX video—as it seemed in the last argument—or only against stores that deal in XXX products exclusively? What effect does this question have on your evaluation of the speaker's credibility and the speaker's thesis?

That's a lot of reasons against XXX movie houses. I have a quote here: Reason is "a portion of the divine spirit set in a human body." Seneca.

How do you feel about the number of "reasons"? Would you have preferred more reasons or fewer reasons more fully developed?

What purpose does the Seneca quotation serve?

In conclusion and to wrap it up and close my speech, I want to repeat and say again that the XXX video stores should all be closed down. They corrupt minors. And they're offensive to men and

Might the speaker have introduced the conclusion differently?

Now, what is the speaker's thesis?

women and especially women. I hope you'll all protest with the Marshalls—my mother and father—and there'll be lots of others there too. My minister, I think, is coming too.

What do you think of the new arguments about offensiveness and the corruption of minors? What effect do they have, coming here in the conclusion?

Do you think you'd go to the protest? Why?

better research," say "I would have been more persuaded if you had used more recent research."

Avoid attributing what you found wrong to others. Instead of saying "Nobody was able to understand you," say "I had difficulty understanding you. It would have helped me if you had spoken more slowly." Remember that your criticism is important precisely because it's your perception of what the speaker did and what the speaker could have done more effectively. Speaking for the entire audience ("We couldn't hear you clearly" or "No one was convinced by your arguments") will not help the speaker, and it's likely to prove demoralizing.

I-messages will also prevent you from using "should messages," a type of expression that almost invariably creates defensiveness and resentment. When you say "You should have done this" or "You shouldn't have done that," you assume a superior

BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Listening to Criticism?

Although criticism is a valuable part of public speaking and of life in general, listening to it is difficult. Here are some suggestions for making listening to criticism both easier and more effective.

Accept the Critic's Viewpoint. When a listener offers criticism, it's the listener's perception. Because of this, the critic is always right. That is, if the critic says that he or she wasn't convinced by the evidence, it doesn't matter that you used 10 or 12 references in your speech; the fact remains that this critic was not convinced. So consider why these references were not convincing to your critic. Perhaps you didn't emphasize the credibility of the sources or didn't stress their recency or didn't emphasize their connection to your proposition—or perhaps you were simply asking your listeners to make too big an adjustment of attitudes, beliefs, or values.

Listen Openly. Because public speaking is so ego involving, it's tempting to block out criticism. If you do, however, you'll lose out on potentially useful suggestions for improvement. So express support for the critic and show open-mindedness and a readiness to hear the criticism. Make the critic know that you're really listening to what he or she has to say.

Respond without Defensiveness. Defensiveness seals off effective communication and prevents you from receiving the very information that may help you in your future efforts. The more you defend yourself, the less attention you can give to the critic's comments.

Separate Criticism of Your Speech from Criticism of Yourself. Externalize both positive and negative critical evaluations; view them dispassionately. If you're to improve your skills and yet not be psychologically crushed by negative evaluations, recognize that when some aspect of your speech comes in for negative comment, this does not bear on your personality or your worth as an individual.

Seek Clarification. If you don't understand the criticism or if you don't understand how to improve your future efforts, ask for clarification. For example, if you're told that your specific purpose was too broad, and it's unclear to you how you might narrow it, ask the critic for concrete explanation. Your critics should welcome such opportunities to clarify their views.

position and imply that what you're saying is correct and that what the speaker did was incorrect. On the other hand, when you own your evaluations and use I-messages, you're giving your perception; it's then up to the speaker to accept or reject them.

Be Guided by the Standard of Conformity to the Principles of the Art

The following series of guidelines will help you look at a speech through the standards of the principles of the art of public speaking; they're in the nature of a beginner's guide to speech criticism. These questions come from the topics in Units 14 through 16, where they are discussed in detail. Units 19 and 18 amplify the basic principles in applying them specifically to informative and persuasive speeches. You'll find it helpful to use these guidelines not only in criticism but also as a checklist for your own speeches. They'll help you make sure that you've followed the key principles of the art of public speaking.

The Subject and Purpose. The speech subject should be worthwhile, relevant, and interesting to the audience. The speech purpose should be clear and sufficiently narrow so that it can be achieved in the allotted time. Here are some questions to guide your criticism:

1. Is the subject a worthwhile one?
2. Is the subject relevant and interesting to the audience and to the speaker?
3. Is the information presented beneficial to the audience in some way?
4. What is the general purpose of the speech (to inform, to persuade, to secure goodwill, etc.)? Is this purpose clear to the audience?
5. Is the specific topic narrow enough to be covered in some depth in the time allotted?

The Audience, Occasion, and Context. A public speech is designed for a specific audience and occasion and takes into account the characteristics of the audience.

6. Has the speaker taken into consideration the age; gender; culture; occupation, income, and status; and religion and religiousness of the audience? How are these factors dealt with in the speech?
7. Is the speech topic appropriate to the specific occasion and the general context?

Research. A public speech needs to be based on accurate and reliable information. The topic needs to be thoroughly researched, and the speaker needs to demonstrate a command of the subject matter.

8. Is the speech adequately researched? Do the sources appear to be reliable and up to date?
9. Does the speaker have a thorough understanding of the subject?
10. Is the speaker's research and understanding communicated effectively to the audience?

The Thesis and Major Propositions. The public speech should have one clear thesis to which the major propositions in the speech are clearly related.

11. Is the thesis of the speech clear and limited to one central idea?
12. Are the main propositions of the speech clearly related to the thesis? Is there an appropriate number of major propositions in the speech (not too many, not too few)?

Supporting Materials. The speech's propositions need to be supported by a variety of appropriate supporting materials that explain or prove their validity.

13. Is each major proposition adequately supported? Are the supporting materials varied and appropriate to the speech and to the propositions?
14. Do the supporting materials amplify what they purport to amplify? Do they prove what they purport to prove?

Organization. The speech materials need to be organized into a meaningful whole to facilitate audience understanding.

15. Is the body of the speech organized in a pattern that is appropriate to the speech topic? To the audience?
16. Is the pattern of organization clear to the audience? Does it help the audience follow the speech?

The Introduction, Conclusion, and Transitions. The introduction should gain attention and orient

the audience. The conclusion should summarize the major points raised in the speech and should provide clear and crisp closure. Transitions should connect the various parts of the speech so that they flow into one another and should provide guideposts for the audience to help them follow the speaker's train of thought.

17. Does the introduction gain the attention of the audience and provide a clear orientation to the subject matter of the speech?
18. Does the conclusion effectively summarize the main points identified in the speech and effectively wrap up the speech, providing recognizable closure?
19. Are there adequate transitions? Do the transitions help the audience better understand the development of the speech?

Style and Language. The language and style of the speech should help the audience understand the speaker's message. It should be consistent in tone with the speech topic and purpose.

20. Does the language help the audience understand clearly and immediately what the speaker is saying? For example, does the speaker use simple rather than complex and concrete rather than abstract words? Personal and informal language? Simple and active sentences?
21. Is the language offensive to any person or group of persons?

Delivery. Effective delivery should help maintain audience attention and help the speaker emphasize the ideas in the speech.

22. Does the speaker maintain eye contact with the audience?
23. Are there any distractions (of mannerisms, dress, or vocal characteristics) that will divert attention from the speech?
24. Can the speaker be easily heard? Are the volume and rate of speech appropriate?

Reflections on Ethics in Human Communication

The Ethics of the Critic

Just as the speaker and listener have ethical obligations, so does the critic. Here are a few guidelines.

First, the ethical critic separates personal feelings about the speaker from his or her evaluation of the speech. Liking the speaker (in and of itself) shouldn't lead you to give positive evaluations of the speech, nor should disliking the speaker lead you to give negative evaluations of the speech.

Second, the ethical critic separates personal feelings about the issues from an evaluation of the validity of the arguments. The ethical critic recognizes the validity of an argument even if it contradicts a deeply held belief and at the same time recognizes the fallaciousness of an argument even if it supports a deeply held belief.

Third, the ethical critic is culturally sensitive, is aware of his or her own ethnocentrism, and doesn't negatively evaluate customs and forms of speech simply because they deviate from her or his own. Similarly, the ethical critic does not positively evaluate a speech merely because it supports her or his own cultural beliefs and values. The ethical critic does not discriminate against or favor speakers simply because they're of a particular gender, race, nationality, religion, age group, or affectional orientation.

What would you do? *You've been asked to give a critique of a speech by a student you were hoping to ask on a date. Unfortunately, the speech was terrible. You feel you have to either lie about the speech or forget about any future dates. What can you do?*

Summary

In this unit we looked at the nature and principles of criticism, especially as they apply to the criticism of public speeches in a learning environment.

1. Criticism is a process of judging and evaluating a work.
2. Among the values of criticism are that it (1) helps identify strengths and weaknesses and thereby helps you improve as a public speaker, (2) clarifies standards for evaluating all sorts of public speeches, and (3) shows that the audience is listening and is concerned about the speaker's progress.
3. Cultures differ in their views of criticism and in the rules of criticism they consider appropriate. For example, members of individualistic cultures may find public criticism easier and more acceptable than people from collectivist cultures. Interpreting critical responses (or the absence of such responses) through your own cultural filters may prevent you from understanding the meaning intended.
4. One standard of speech criticism is effectiveness: How effectively did the speaker accomplish his or her purpose?
5. The universality standard asks if this speech applies to all people in all times.
6. The standard of conformity to the principles of the art asks how effectively the speaker applied the principles of the art of public speaking.
7. The following suggestions will help to make criticism more productive:
   - Say something positive.
   - Be specific.
   - Be objective.
   - Limit criticism.
   - Be constructive.
   - Focus on behavior.
   - Own your own criticism.
   - Be guided by the standard of conformity to the principles of the art.

Key Terms

criticism
individualism
collectivism
effectiveness standard of criticism
universality as a standard of criticism
conformity to the principles of the art standard

Thinking Critically About

Criticism in the Public Speaking Classroom

1. How would you define criticism?
2. What value might the principles of criticism have for you on your job? That is, what suggestions offered here can you apply to the workplace?
3. What are some cultural differences that affect speech criticism in your particular communication classroom?
4. Ralph and Tony are best friends and are in public speaking class together. Ralph is a very effective speaker and wants to help Tony. What principles of criticism would you advise Ralph to be especially sensitive to in helping Tony?
5. Mirta has been asked to serve as a guest judge for a debate in a sixth-grade class. The plan is for the students to conduct the debate and then for the guest judge to deliver a 5- to 10-minute critique of the various speeches and question–answer exchanges. The audience will consist of students, a few teachers, and the parents of the debaters. What advice would you give Mirta for presenting her critiques?
6. Read one of the speeches on this website or on any of the many websites containing public speeches and evaluate it using each of the three standards

discussed here: effectiveness, universality, and conformity to the principles of the art.

7. Review one of your own speeches and try to criticize it, using the standards and suggestions identified here, as objectively as you can.
8. Visit Mississippi State University's Historical Text Archive at http://www.msstate.edu/Archives/History and read one of the presidential inaugural addresses. How would you evaluate the speech, using any standard you think is appropriate?
9. Visit the website for the Congressional Record (http:P//thomas.loc.gov/home/abt.cong.rec.html). Read one of the speeches and evaluate it according to the standards identified in this unit.
10. Prepare and deliver a two-minute speech in which you
    - explain what you think would be the ideal critical evaluation for a speaker to receive from a critic
    - explain why criticism is so difficult to give or to receive (select one)
    - explain what you think is the most appropriate standard to use for criticizing the classroom speech, the religious sermon, the college lecture, the political campaign speech, or the advertiser's pitch (select one or compare two)
    - offer a critical evaluation of any one of the speeches contained in the text of *Human Communication* or of a speech from some other source