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AUTHOR Holm, Todd  
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## ABSTRACT

The desire for consistent judging criteria is essential to the learning process of forensics students. When evaluating the After Dinner Speaking (ADS) judges need to focus on a variety of criteria. Some of these criteria transcend event descriptions while others are indigenous primarily to ADS. The topic chosen for the event should demonstrate that the student picked a topic that he or she was interested in and was suitable for him or her, one that had a universal audience appeal, and one that could be addressed within the realm of good taste. The topic or approach to the topic should be original. The structure and delivery of an ADS speech should be evaluated in the same way other public speeches are evaluated, with attention being paid to sound thematic development, the use of previews, reviews and a well organized body, with special attention paid to language, enthusiasm, timing, and flexibility. The ADS, while its main distinction is the use of humor, should contain a serious point that is woven throughout the speech rather than being tacked on at the end. Finally, since humor is a main ingredient in the After Dinner Speech, judges should be able to evaluate it objectively, not letting personal likes and dislikes dominate the evaluation. For their part, students should not be obsessed with getting nonstop laughs, thus sacrificing other elements of the speech such as the structure or serious point. (Fifteen references are attached.) (RAE)

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The Judging/Evaluative Criteria of After Dinner Speaking

Todd Holm

North Dakota State University

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Preventing the 1-3-5 split in After Dinner Speaking:

An Overview of Judging Criteria

Todd Holm

North Dakota State University

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### Abstract

The desire for consistent judging criteria is essential to the learning process of students. This paper will examine the judging criteria for After Dinner Speaking in an effort to promote a greater understanding of After Dinner Speaking and more consistent judging of the event. The issues discussed herein are by no means to be considered complete or concrete, but rather they should be looked upon as guidelines.

The 1-3-5 split; coaches and competitors see it time and time again. In some cases it can be attributed to the level of competition in the rounds. In some cases it is a sign of an inconsistent competitor or a squirrel judge. But in After Dinner Speaking it is often a sign of inconsistent evaluative judging criteria.

What one judge views as a joke in poor taste may not bother another judge at all. What one judge may consider to be a topic that is unsuitable for A.D.S. another may readily accept. Who is to say what is proper and what is not, what is in good taste and what is in poor taste, what is right and what is wrong?

The answer to this question can be provided by any first year forensics student--"The Judge". If we as instructors, evaluators and judges, are to pass judgement on humorous speaking it only seems fair to the students competing in inter-collegiate forensics that the evaluative criteria used be consistent from one judge to the next.

It is not the purpose of this paper to engrave in stone criteria for judging After Dinner Speaking but rather to help establish a universally acceptable set of evaluative criteria for the After Dinner speech to help develop a greater consistency in the judging of the event. Currently we see a lot of three rank splits (i.e. 1-5, 1-4, or 2-5) in national level competition.

For example, at the 1987 Pi Kappa Delta National

tournament in La Crosse WI, where two judges judge each speaker in the round, approximately 21% of the students entered in A.D.S. received ballots with three rank splits from judges watching the same round. This compares with an 18% ratio in Persuasive speaking, and a 16% ratio in both informative and Communication Analysis. The most consistent judging seemed to be in Extemporaneous speaking which show only an 8% the rank split ratio.

In order to establish such criteria we need to first identify the purpose of A.D.S., and then address the subjects of topic choice, structure, delivery, humor, and the serious point.

#### PURPOSE OF A.D.S.

"Because of this philosophical stance that forensics should be an extension of what is taught in the classrooms, After Dinner Speaking as a competitive event has emerged,"(Mills 1984).

A.D.S. is unique in that the intent of the speech is not to persuade or inform, but rather to entertain. "The audience comes with no expectation of receiving concrete information on which to take notes or to try to remember; listeners are encouraged to relax, have a good time, and leave feeling good,"(Ayres & Miller 1983). After Dinner Speaking probably has more direct audience involvement than all the other individual events.

The success or failure of an A.D.S. all too often lies

in the hand of the audience. The audience can influence the round in two ways; (1)the audience can discourage a contestant by not responding to his or her presentation; or (2)the audience can influence a judge (whether consciously or subconsciously) by clapping, laughing, or smiling, or by not clapping, laughing, or smiling. While A.D.S. is not supposed to be like a night club act and "...does not have to convert an audience into a howling mob convulsed with laughter..." (Klopf 1982) an unresponsive audience still takes its toll on even the most experienced speaker. The novice speaker may very well give up the event after three rounds of no response.

The judge may be influenced to give a ranking higher than the contestant deserves by an audience that is in convulsions of laughter. The judge may feel that he or she is simply "missing" the jokes or the judge may be caught up in some form of band wagon effect. After all, it is said that laughter is contagious.

It is true that the most distinctive factor of A.D.S. is entertainment. But this does not mean that the person who gets the most laughs wins. Even though the writer has seen judges make hash marks every time the speaker made a joke, the quantity of humor should not be the deciding factor, rather the quality of the humor should be the main focus of the humor evaluation. However the discussion of the humor takes place later in the paper. First we need to turn our attention to topic choice.

## TOPIC CHOICE

Many students fell that the hardest part of preparing a public speaking event, whether it be Informative or Persuasive speaking, Communication Analysis, or After Dinner Speaking, is selecting a topic. The problem will usually be either that they can't decided which topic to pick because they have so many, or that the students can't come up with a single topic.

Probably the most important thing is that the student likes the topic he or she chooses. No matter how good the topic is the performance will lack enthusiasm if the performer does not like it or thinks it isn't a good topic.

Vartabedian & Vartabedian suggest, "The topic you choose should mesh with the personal style and the physical style and appearance of the speaker," (1984). While we see a lot of skinny people doing speeches on being skinny and fat people doing speeches on being fat and minorities doing speeches on being minorities (whether it be race, color, or creed) the experienced speakers tend to shy away from such topics because topics like these lack a "universal appeal".

Vartabedian & Vartabedian clearly point out that "...your brother's irritating--though humorous--habits would not qualify as an A.D.S. topic with much potential. This topic would lack "universalism" or "broad audience appeal" which is crucial to consistently effective A.D.S." Faules, Rieke, & Rhodes point out in their book Directing Forensics (1976) that, "The student must therefore choose a



subject which will relate to as many potential listeners as possible."

The topic should be one of good taste, therefore A.D.S. speakers should avoid topics like feminine hygiene, contraception, or cancer. While it seems odd that we would have to point this out to students we need to keep in mind that to the new competitor A.D.S. is unlike anything they may have seen in the past. For many the only thing they can compare it to mentally is a stand-up comedy routine they may have seen.

Today many comedians make a good living through routines that are filled with foul language, sexual connotations and/or a series of put downs. I would like to think that an audience can still be entertained by a series and variety of different types of wit and humor. More like Bill Cosby than George Carlon, Eddie Murphy, Richard Prior, or Don Rickles. Ayres & Miller concur urging speakers "Do not make your listeners feel embarrassed or uncomfortable by holding them up to pain or ridicule."

Originality of the topic should also be considered to some extent. While the presidential elections, procrastination, and soap operas are all universally appealing and can easily be dealt with within the realms of good taste, they are overdone. If a student uses a topic that is done quite a bit but approaches it from a different angle, the student should be given credit for "originality" in terms of the humor and/or approach.

This, of course, brings up the question of "How does a

first year forensics student know what has been overdone?" Perhaps the standard of originality is unfair to new speakers because they are unaware of what is "overdone" but it is hard for a judge not to compare a speech on soap operas to the last soap opera speech they heard. While the jokes and exaggerations may have been extremely humorous the first time the judge heard an A.D.S. on soap operas, they almost expect to hear some of the same jokes the fifth or sixth time they hear someone do a soap opera A.D.S.

Originality is a basic premise of speech communication. Bert E. Bradley, points out, "If you are to be effective, you must search for fresh ways to express ideas. Of course there are times when a trite expressions may communicate meaning more effectively than an original phrasing, but in most instances the original statement will be more attention-getting and more effective."

In review then, in evaluating After Dinner Speaking in terms of the topic choice judges should look at the suitability of the topic for the speaker, the universalism of the topic, a non-offensive topic, and a topic that is original or that is approached in an original manner.

## **STRUCTURE**

The A.F.A.-N.I.E.T. description of After Dinner Speaking is as follows, "An original humorous speech by the student, designed to exhibit sound speech composition,

thematic coherence, direct communicative public speaking skills, and good taste. The speech should not resemble a night club act, an impersonation, or comic dialogue. Audio-visual aids may or may not be used to supplement and reinforce the message. Minimal notes are permitted. Maximum time limit is 10 minutes." A total of sixty-two words. It is interesting to note that the American Forensics Association saw it necessary to address the subject of structure first.

While "...sound speech composition, thematic coherence, direct communicative public speaking skills..." is clearly expressed in the event description, it is often the first thing sacrificed by the beginning speaker. They will often rely on an over abundance of humor to get them through.

As with any event, sound speech practices are needed. Vartabedian & Vartabedian suggest that the A.D.S. speech should contain the standard elements of speech composition such as an introduction, preview, body, and conclusion. The writer concurs adding that the introduction should be a four part introduction containing an attention getter, thesis statement, significance statement, and preview. While we usually find that A.D.S. speeches have attention getters, and most even contain previews, students often forget the other two components of an introduction.

The thesis statement and significance statement, while they may be modified, are every bit as important in A.D.S. as in any other event. The thesis statement in A.D.S.

gives the speech a direction from the very first step. It gives it what some have called "a purpose in life". This, linked with the significance statement, or why we should listen, gives us some idea of what we can expect to get out of the speech as well as what direction the speech is going to take. Then we can sit back and evaluate the content of the speech. A good structure makes things flow much more smoothly.

A.D.S. speeches often take on the formats of persuasive or informative speeches (chronological, spatial, topical, problem/solution, or cause-effect-solution), Ayres & Miller (1983), add that it is the persuasive or "...informative theme [that] helps you from sounding like an amateur stand-up comedian reciting a series of one liners."

#### DELIVERY

While the delivery of an After Dinner Speech should be evaluated, in many respects, the same way any other public speaking event should be with attention being paid to articulation, pronunciation, and nonverbal skills (nonverbals are usually more elaborate than in other public speaking events). However, in evaluating an A.D.S. speaker in terms of delivery we need to examine 4 areas that need more emphasis than with other public address speeches: (1) language (2) timing (3) energy and (4) flexibility.

In terms of language, A.D.S. is the poetry of the

public speaking world. The projected vivid images of a good A.D.S. are arrived at in much the same way the vivid imagery is achieved in poetry -- through careful deliberate word choice for maximum effect. Mills (1984) refers to this as the "economy" of words.

The language used should be imaginative and help project the humor of the speech. We as judges should ask the question "Do the images and allusions contained within the vocabulary conjure up the correct images and reactions for the topic and occasion?" (Mills 1984).

While language is an important aspect of A.D.S., it probably takes a back seat to timing because as Ayres & Miller (1983) point out "...even good material may not create the desired effect unless the speaker has or can develop the sense of timing and light touch that such a speech requires." The elusiveness of the concept of comic timing is what makes some people "funny" and other people "not so funny". Klopff (1982) also indicates that it is a sense of timing that can be essential in recalling and maintaining pleasant or humorous feelings and memories.

Vivid language and a good sense of timing when combined with a lively, energetic performance will usually prove to be an entertaining experience for the audience and a satisfying experience for the speaker. But if the speaker can't seem to produce the energy for a lively speech the material just doesn't come across as funny. When this happens the speaker is often frustrated because of a feeling of helplessness when they realize that it just

isn't as funny as usual and they can't make it work because the spark is gone.

Granted, it is not easy to always be able to produce energy upon demand, but nevertheless, "In your speech to entertain, your manner should be lively and vigorous and should show enjoyment and enthusiasm for the subject," (Ayres & Miller 1983). For some an 8:00 a.m. A.D.S. round can be the kiss of death because it is often hard to get started early in the morning. But a good speaker can adapt to any situation and learning how to deal with the 8:00 a.m. A.D.S. round is just one part of the total educational experience offered by intercollegiate forensics. Because the students are put to the test in terms of producing energy and being funny upon demand it is important that the student be able to allow for some flexibility in his or her speech.

Flexibility is what separates the good speakers from the truly great speakers. The ability to think on one's feet is not only useful in impromptu but is often utilized in A.D.S. as well. Often speakers will refer to prior speakers or make momentary fun of an unexpected response or the lack of a response to a part of the speech. Other students may show flexibility in covering up some flaw in their delivery or when something like a visual aid falls or doesn't work.

#### THE SERIOUS POINT

While the chief objective of A.D.S. is to entertain the speech should do more than just entertain, the speech should have some redeeming value or a "serious point".

Whether judging the speech to entertain at the high school level or the college level the serious point is an area of evaluation to be considered. The North Dakota High School Activities Association's handbook states, "The speech to entertain is NOT merely a funny story, but rather offers some challenging ideas to its audience while it is laced or couched with wit," (1987). Vartabedian & Vartabedian add that on the college level "One of the criteria used by most judges of After Dinner Speaking is whether or not the serious point of the speech is apparent and developed during the course of delivering the speech," (1984).

The idea of a serious point not only gives substance to the speech but it also often provides a central theme for the speech and "Without a central theme, the art of public speaking becomes pointless rambling. This is especially true of the after dinner speech which can be prone to strange humor tangents," (Vartabedian & Vartabedian 1983).

Often speakers will tack on their serious point in the conclusion. While this would fulfill the requirements of a serious point it does not do justice to the concept of a serious point or redeeming value. The serious point should be woven throughout the speech, from beginning to end.

Ayres & Miller concur stating "The body of the speech should have a single essential idea that you state vividly; then you should proceed to illustrate and develop it with supporting ideas. Even though there are digressions, the speech must progress" (1983).

The serious point will not always be easy for the After Dinner Speaking judge to find. Because of the nature of humor, especially satire, a serious point may be made within the humor. More than one ballot has been returned to a student saying "I'm not sure what your point was, but your speech was entertaining." If a judge is having difficulty determining what the serious point is or if there is a serious point at all Mills (1984) suggests that two possibilities exist, "...(1) the speech doesn't contain one and should be judged accordingly; or (2) perhaps the point was missed because of our attention to the humor when, in fact, the point was there and lucidly made."

Mills goes on to suggest that when looking for the serious point judges need to look at the big picture or "overall perspective" asking questions like "Was the serious point clearly stated?", or "Did the techniques used advance the clarify of the underlying serious point of the speech?"

In essence, the speech to entertain needs to have to give us something more than just momentary pleasure. While the serious point should not be more important than humor it should equally as important.



**HUMOR**

It is difficult to define humor and its type, because as Asa Berger so aptly put it, "Dissecting humor is an operation in which the patient usually dies." (1976). Ayres & Miller agree stating that "The nature of humor is ephemeral--it depends so much on timing and the mood of the moment that it threatens to disappear as you analyze it," (1983). But since humor is a main ingredient in an After Dinner Speech it is important that judges have a consistent basis for judging it. In order to understand and develop a consistent pattern of evaluating the humor used in A.D.S. we need to first address the idea of judging objectivity. As Grimes concluded, "The most important condition for the perception of humor is a state of objectivity or disinterest, a state marked by an attitude which is neither for nor against the main features of the joke, witticism, or happening." (1955)

While, "Some critics might enjoy and also encourage students to use puns, while other judges may dislike puns as a means of adding humor to a speech," and "superimposing the acceptance or rejection of the use of puns as a means of adding humor would seem inappropriate on the part of a judge," (Hanson 1987). Each person has personal likes and dislikes in terms of humor, when judging A.D.S. we need to put those personal preferences aside and accept what the student has presented in terms of humor.

The question of what type of humor a student should

use has long been a question as Faules, Rieke, and Rhodes point out, "Although most coaches would probably agree that he should entertain in some manner, they might well disagree on how the entertaining should be accomplished." (1976).

Klopf (1982) suggests, "A speaker achieves his or her purpose through the use of anecdotes, illustrations, and humorous stories, if these are appropriate to the audience and the occasion and are related to the subject." Ayres and Miller indicate, "Commonplace experiences seen from a new perspective can be an excellent source of humor," and go on to say that "...striking comparison or contrast, a humorous exaggeration, an apt quotation, bits of dialogue, a witty or surprising comment, concrete examples, or a dramatic anecdote, perhaps based on human-interest concerns or human peculiarities" would be prime areas to concentrate on for humor, (1983). But these are by no means a complete listing of the forms that humor takes. Humor takes on many forms from absurd to Analogy, from stereotypes to slapstick, but all contain the common thread of producing the desired effect of A.D.S., that of laughter.

The forms of humor are many and diversified. To attempt to list them all would be an impossible task, but often times we need to delineate our subject matter in order to fully understand it.

Arthur Asa Berger (1976) compiled a list of a number of different types of humor. While this list is rather extensive, it is by no means a complete listing.

"Language	Logic	Identity	Action
Allusion	Absurdity	Before/After	Chase Scenes
Bombast	Accident	Burlesque	Slapstick
Definition	Analogy	Caricature	Speed
Exaggeration	Catalogue	Embarrassment	Time"
Facetiousness	Coincidence	Eccentricity	
Irony	Disappointment	Exposure	
Misunderstanding	Ignorance	Grotesque	
Over-literalness	Mistakes	Imitation	
Puns	Repetition	Impersonation	
Repartee	Reversal	Infantilism	
Ridicule	Rigidity	Mimicry	
Sarcasm	Theme and	Parody	
Satire	variation	Scale	
		Stereotype	
		Unmasking	

While each of these forms of humor has merit by itself, using solely one type of humor limits the performance. A good A.D.S. should contain a variety of humor to meet the expectations of the variety of judges the speaker and speech will encounter. While puns may be an appealing form of humor to some an eight to ten minute speech utilizing nothing but puns for humor will eventually become more annoying than amusing.

Another issue with which the judge should concern him or herself is that of the amount of humor being used. Klopff (1982) clearly points out, "An After-Dinner speech does not have to convert an audience into a howling mob convulsed with laughter; a speech that is brightened with humor and that offers a good-natured approach to a worthwhile subject usually is more appropriate." Vartabedian & Vartabedian concur warning that "...one should not become obsessed with audience response, e.g., getting non-stop laughter." Mills (1984) takes the idea one step further saying "Too much humor, even if supported,

will become the focus of the listener's attention and cause him to lose sight of points which the humor is intended to emphasize." A good rule of thumb to use might be that each joke should make a point rather than each point making a joke.

Researchers do offer one piece of advice in the use of humor and that is, "Do not make your listeners feel embarrassed or uncomfortable by holding them up to pain or ridicule," (Ayres & Miller 1983). No one likes to be the butt of a joke. So if you are going to select someone as the target of a joke select yourself. This is called self-disparaging humor and some speakers will shy away from it because they are concerned with possible damage to speaker credibility, but as Gruner (1985) points out "Humor that is self-disparaging may further enhance speaker image. Some speech authorities recommend 'laughing at' oneself publicly to show that you have a good sense of humor, do not take yourself too seriously, are warm and human, etc." Comedians such as Rodney Dangerfield use this type of humor often and with a great deal of success.

## Conclusions

When evaluating the A.D.S. judges need to focus on a variety of criteria. Some of the criteria transcend event descriptions while others are indigenous primarily to A.D.S..

The topic chosen for the event needs to demonstrate

that the student took care to pick a topic that he or she was interested in, one that was suited for him or her, one that had a universal audience appeal, and one that could be addressed within the realm of good taste. The topic or approach to the topic should be original.

The structure of an A.D.S. speech should be evaluated the same way other public speeches are evaluated, with attention being paid to sound thematic development, the use of previews, reviews and a well organized body.

The delivery of an A.D.S. should be evaluated in many respects the same as other public speeches but with special attention paid to language, enthusiasm, timing, and flexibility.

The A.D.S., while its main distinction is the use of humor, should contain a serious point that is woven throughout the speech rather than being tacked on the end.

Finally, since humor is a main ingredient in the After Dinner Speech, judges should be able to evaluate it. The basis for evaluation should be an objective one, not letting our personal likes and dislikes dominate the evaluation. Students should be encouraged to use a variety of humor and discouraged from using one type of humor exclusively. The student should not be obsessed with getting nonstop laughs, thus sacrificing the other elements of the speech such as the structure or serious point.

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