

Doing More with Less: Using Peer Feedback and Posters to Save Time Teaching Presentation Skills

By Benjamin Garner

Persuasive communication skills are essential for today's sales students. Sales calls, emails, pitch presentations, and interpersonal buyer-seller interactions all necessitate effective persuasive skills. However, factors such as semester time constraints and increased class sizes limit strategies for teaching communication competencies. This research project examines the way instructors can use peer feedback and poster presentations to help students develop persuasive communication skills in an efficient and effective format. Students (N=75, M=38, F=37; M_{age} = 21.47 years) were surveyed at the end of the semester to reflect on their experiences with pedagogical strategies for teaching verbal presentation delivery, persuasive skills, and peer-review assessment. The results showed that persuasive poster presentations combined with peer grading can be an effective and time-saving tool that increases learning opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Effective persuasive communication and presentation skills are essential for today's sales students (Stowe et al., 2012), and yet managers and recruiters have reported that students lack effective communication (Groza et al. 2021). In a recent study, skills such as verbal communication, presentation competency, rapport building, and language abilities were among the most important skills needed for B2B solution selling (Koponen et al., 2019). Additionally, faculty, industry, and accreditation bodies like AACSB have acknowledged the importance of communication for business education (Stowe et al., 2012). Trends towards increased digitization, use of social media, increased cell phone use, and other cultural changes have meant that younger generations are increasingly communicating through digital channels and getting less practice with face-to-face communication. Recent scholarship indicates that younger generations are increasingly anxious (Haidt 2024), and delivering public presentations is often at the top of students' list of stress-inducing activities. Stakeholders consistently have reported that college graduates need effective communication to be successful in the workplace (Brink and Costigan 2015; Osmani et al. 2019), and accreditation bodies often cite communication skills as a critical need (Brink et al. 2014; Brink and

Costigan 2015; Pohowala 2019). Universities are also increasingly seeing the value of sales curricula and are beginning to develop programs to meet industry demand (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy 2011).

However, barriers such as time and class enrollment size can limit instructors' ability to teach communication skills effectively. Research in marketing education has shown that factors such as faculty workloads and class sizes can limit instructors' ability to assign experiential learning opportunities (Passyn and Billups 2019). Communication and verbal presentation assignments take up class time to deliver and increase instructor grading time. More creative and efficient ways to teach sales and communication skills are needed.

This research project examines an innovative way instructors can effectively and efficiently teach persuasive communication skills, while at the same time reducing grading time and decreasing the amount of class time required for verbal presentations by using peer feedback. The methods described here can also increase student engagement by tapping into the benefits of social learning through peer feedback.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Skills in Demand

Verbal persuasive presentation skills are critical for business students in today's job market. Employers are looking for new hires who are effective at communication and soft skills, including presentation abilities (Kleckner

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and Butz 2021; Osmani et al. 2019; Riley and Nicewicz 2022). Research with industry practitioners has shown that communication skills are a critical need, including persuasive skills, nonverbal skills, and presentation skills (Newberry and Collins 2015). Employees need to be able to persuade their colleagues and managers internally, and they also need to be able to persuade clients that the product or service their company offers will provide a solution for their challenge.

Unfortunately, managers and recruiters see a deficit in effective communication skills such as verbal communication, listening, professionalism, and adaptive selling (Groza et al. 2021). There is also a supply gap in which there are more sales jobs than qualified students (Neilson and Cummins 2019), and employers are often screening for key communication and soft skills when looking for new hires (Fuller et al. 2022). Organizations specializing in workforce development, such as the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), have observed that communication and soft skills are critical for employee success (Hastings 2012; Rockwood 2021). The marketing discipline in particular has a critical need to teach communication skills, especially in the sales area. In sales, verbal communication relates to delivering business presentations, making sales calls, listening to feedback, negotiating deals, and delivering pitches to earn business or funding.

There is a perception that communication is a “paraskill” that complements a technical skill (i.e., communication *helps* accountants talk with clients). However, in fields like sales and marketing, communication is the technical skill needed. Employers recognize they need more students interested in sales (Neilson and Cummins 2019), and educators want more curricula that teaches selling skills (Cespedes and Weinfurter 2016). Positive examples of sales curricula that builds communication competencies include sales competition activities (Sleep and McCulloch 2022) and cold calling activities (Dockery et al. 2021). The good news is that sales education is effective. One recent study found that new graduates with sales education were more successful in their first year compared to students who lacked sales education (Bolander et al., 2014).

Teaching Presentation Skills

Teaching presentation skills is important for today’s sales instructors. A recent study with sales practitioners revealed that presentation skills, including the use of visuals, effective use of voice, and engaging the audience was of critical importance today (Newberry and Collins 2015). While there are multiple dimensions of communication skills that need to be addressed (Brink and Costigan 2015), verbal communication skills are at the top of the list. Most instructors, if they teach communication at all, do so through PowerPoint (PPT) presentations. However, barriers prevent many from assigning even this simple assignment. With high class enrollments, finding the in-class time for presentations is challenging, and providing detailed feedback to each student is also time-consuming (Calcich and Weilbaker 1992; Carroll 2006). As class sizes increase, instructors’ ability to assign experiential, hands-on projects are limited and time-constrained (Metcalf et al. 2016).

Presentations typically require several days to complete. In a class of 30 students, allowing 5-7 minutes per student to deliver presentations may use up a minimum of 3-4 class periods, which equates to at least 2 weeks of class, if not more. If you want to allow students to deliver a second presentation, then this requires even more class time. One study on sales presentations found that 2 rounds of presentations helped improve learning outcomes, and each round of presentations took 3 weeks of class time, or 6 weeks total (Calcich and Weilbaker 1992). This can be shortened through the use of group presentations, but each student gets less time-on-task (Godwin et al. 2021) and less individualized feedback. Larger class sizes of 50-75 students or more mean that it takes even more class periods to complete the assignment, even if group presentations are utilized. These issues are critical for faculty to manage effectively in order to balance the typical workload of teaching, research, and service.

Marketing scholars who have endeavored to teach communication and persuasive skills have taken different approaches, including the use of role-plays (Carroll 2006; Delpechitre and Baker 2017), Pecha Kucha style presentation structures (Levin and Petersen 2013; Oliver and Kowalczyk 2013), sales competitions

(Magnotta et al. 2020), storytelling projects (Spiller 2018), and similar methods. There are many goals instructors have when assigning student presentations. The following are a list of learning objectives that have been explored in previous pedagogical research, including how to:

- Build interpersonal and verbal communication skills (Calcich and Weilbaker 1992)
- Deliver effective sales calls (Carroll 2006)
- Gain cultural intelligence (Delpechitre and Baker 2017)
- Deliver group presentations (Oliver and Kowalczyk 2013)
- Communicate and defend a thesis (Levin and Peterson 2013).

While the format and method can vary for teaching persuasive skills, one common challenge that unites these pedagogies is that they take time. Whether role plays or sales competitions or student presentations, instructors must devote in-class time to activities and out-of-class time for grading. Additionally, a recent AACSB article noted that effective communication pedagogy is difficult with class sizes larger than 25 students (Lucas 2017). Learning depends on students receiving feedback and then applying that feedback through time-on-task practice. Unfortunately, many sales and marketing faculty teach courses of 30-45 students or more, which makes it challenging to devote class time and provide individualized feedback at that scale.

Sales Assignments for Developing Communication Skills

There are several ways sales educators have chosen to teach persuasive communication skills, and four of the most frequently cited assignment types include: cold-calling, role plays, sales competitions, and traditional PPT presentations. For example, Dockery et al. (2021) utilized a cold-calling assignment in which students used a laboratory as a call center to phone alumni to raise money for student scholarships. Students were given a target of 20 phone conversations and questions they need to get from participants, and by the end of the project, students reduced their anxiety about calling

and increased their confidence. Likewise, role plays for teaching presentations are a common method (Calcich and Weilbaker, 1992; Carroll 2006). In one example, Calcich and Weilbaker (1992) made use of the role-play in which students pitched products to fellow students (peers). Magnotta et al. (2020) conducted an experiment using sales competitions and found them elicit higher perceived learning gains than a traditional role play activity and suggested this type of activity elicited more interest in a sales career. Lastly, instructors often teach presentation skills by assigning PPT projects or equivalent slide decks (Favia and Welliver 2019; Loe and Inks 2014). In one study, Favia and Welliver (2019) attempted to simulate sales management training and required students to teach their peers using effective visuals and PPT slides. The present study is best aligned with this last example in that it focuses on using effective slide design and verbal communication to deliver presentation material. However, the use of a poster board and persuasive communication with small groups adds a unique wrinkle that is little understood in the literature.

Feedback Strategies

Regardless of the format for teaching persuasive communication, feedback is an essential element for student improvement. The typical source of the feedback comes from the instructor of record, student peers, self-evaluation, community partners (working professionals), or some combination of these sources (Calcich and Weilbaker 1992; Carroll 2006; Lastner et al. 2021; Magnotta et al. 2020; Widmier et al. 2007). As mentioned above, time constraints and class size sometimes limit the instructor's ability to provide in-depth feedback for each student (Metcalf et al 2016). This is especially true in larger class sections where time-intensive written feedback is provided (Passyn and Billups, 2019).

While instructors face time limitations with regard to grading and use of class time, self-assessment and peer feedback offer the potential to increase classroom efficiency. Peer feedback, specifically, enables instructors to require assignments that would otherwise be too time-consuming to grade (Aniche et al. 2021; Patchan et al. 2018; Vander Schee and Birrittella 2021). Peer grading can provide "individualized attention" and

“teaching efficiencies” without placing an undue burden on instructors (Lastner et al. 2021, p. 229). Peer grading has been suggested as one possible solution to a post-Covid educational climate in which faculty are being asked to manage more students with fewer resources and less personal contact (Vander Schee and Birrittella 2021). However, peer grading is not a one-size-fits-all, and some instructors maintain skepticism that peer grading can be objective and accurate (Avery, 2014).

Recent research has shown that peer-graded work can be a fair assessment tool that can produce valuable feedback while also yielding similar grades to instructors (Avery 2014; Lastner et al. 2021; Vander Schee and Birrittella 2021). In fact, there are reasons to believe that peer feedback can be even more effective than instructor feedback in certain ways (Tullis and Goldstone 2020; Versteeg et al. 2019). For example, Ye et al. (2021) found that peers are often viewed as more approachable than instructors and fellow students are able to explain concepts at a level that is easier to understand. These authors cite the success of jigsaw peer teaching, which involves using small groups to divide students into learning experts on a particular subject; students learn the material together in one group and then go back to their primary group to instruct their classmates (Ye et al. 2021). Tullis and Goldstone (2020) go so far as to state that “...fellow students may be particularly effective explainers because they can better take the perspective of their peer than the teacher...better able than expert teachers to explain concepts in familiar terms.” (p.9). Peer feedback also can encourage a collaborative and active learning atmosphere as opposed to focusing solely on the instructor as the source of knowledge (Avery, 2014). Other benefits for students are that by teaching others, they recognize the gaps in their own knowledge and are motivated to close those gaps or risk being embarrassed by a lack of knowledge (Burnett and Pettijohn 1999).

The use of peer teaching in the classroom also mirrors learning opportunities in the professional world. Corporate trainers have long understood the idea that a significant portion of on-the-job training has a social component whereby employees learn from colleagues (Biech 2017). Likewise, research has explored the ways salespeople often learn from and influence one

another (Atefi and Pourmasoudi 2019). Methods that foster active and social learning strategies are valuable (Green 2015).

The Research Gap

There are four ways this study extends current research. First, this study will explore a creative approach to teaching persuasive verbal communication and presentation skills that mimics real-world business scenarios. Second, this research tackles the challenge of time limitations: limited classroom time for presentations and limited instructor time for grading. Third, it will build upon our understanding of peer feedback as a pedagogical tool. Finally, this study will fill a specific gap in the peer-feedback literature regarding the value of peer instruction from students on the same education and experience level, as opposed to having a more experienced student provide peer feedback.

To our knowledge, no work has been done to explore ways to make presentation assignments more efficient for faculty—and thus more achievable amidst the constraints discussed above. While there is some literature on creative styles such as the Pecha Kucha approach (Oliver and Kowalczyk 2013), there has been very little in the marketing literature that explores creative options that mimic real world scenarios, such as business expos and booth presentations.

Research has explored whether peer-graded feedback is *equivalent* to instructor feedback, but there is only a modicum of research on exploring the qualitative benefits students receive as the result of peer grading. Lastner et al. (2021) used a format that involved more advanced sales students helping introductory students and found that peer mentors and mentees improved their understanding of the sales process and improved their performance as a result. Likewise, Metcalf et al. (2016) used a technique referred to as the *advanced student model*, in which higher level, advanced students assist with introductory marketing students. However, recent published works in marketing education indicate that more research is still needed on the peer-instruction area (Lastner et al. 2021).

The advanced student model has many benefits when feasible, but it also has serious barriers to adoption.

This method involves many more administrative steps, increased time coordinating, training, and hiring students, and often involves multiple instructors collaborating. In some cases, it even involves budgeting for and paying peer mentors (Metcalf et al. 2016). The present research emphasizes peer learning possibilities when students are in the same course and at the same level and which is feasible for a single instructor to implement. It will build on the foundation by previous marketing educators (Lastner et al. 2021; Metcalf et al. 2016) and provide additional qualitative observations about the pros and cons of this method, specifically with students at equal educational levels. In sum, there remain gaps in our understanding of the peer-grading method and ways to help instructors teach presentations in a more efficient way. As a result, the following research questions are explored:

RQ1: What are students' perceptions regarding the efficacy of poster presentation in terms of their learning gains?

RQ2: What are students' self-reported learning outcomes from peer grading other students' work?

Assignment Procedure

Instructional Design

This research took place across a face-to-face semester course, and the instructor assigned two presentations during the semester. Offering two presentations allowed students the chance to apply feedback and improve on their mistakes. Other research has demonstrated that the two-presentation structure is very effective at helping students learn verbal communication skills (Calcich and Weilbaker 1992). The first presentation students delivered was a traditional informative PPT. This provided students a baseline level of feedback on what to practice in terms of delivery skills, and the instructor provided written feedback at this stage. PPT presentations lasted 4-5 minutes and were delivered to a room of 25-30 student peers.

The second presentation's learning objective centered around internal persuasive communication and aimed to persuade their manager that a change was needed in the organization. Peers served as the primary evaluators of the persuasive presentation. As described

above, internal persuasive skills are applicable for sales professionals when recommending a change to the organization's process, purchases, resources, or techniques.

Building upon the first presentation, presentation two reinforced students' communication skills and added the persuasive dimension. The assignment frame was a problem-solution research project in which students evaluated a problem "need" and then provide three alternative solutions and their final recommendation. Students created and presented their research findings on 24x36-inch posters. The format itself also reinforced a contextual factor that sales students may expect from sales roles, such as expo-style presentations in which vendors pitch their product from behind a booth space. Within the frame of the assignment, students were allowed to choose their own topic. Allowing students to select their own topic has been shown to increase intrinsic motivation (Patall et al. 2008). While the topics varied, they included everything from improving customer service to reducing theft in the workplace.

The poster presentation lasted 5-7 minutes, plus time for a Q&A and peer-review scoring. Students typically created a slide deck, printed it, and then taped or glued that onto the poster. To save time and mimic an expo type setting, 4-5 students presented at once, and tripods were used for the posters. Presentations and reviews were delivered standing up. Groups of 3-5 students used both a quantitative and qualitative rubric to peer grade their classmates' presentations. The time-saving aspect of peer grading was so successful that the instructor (who had blocked off multiple days), was able to allow students to present twice, back-to-back to two different groups of student peer reviewers. This allowed students to make immediate changes between presentations and improve further.

The instructor observed that peer grading added value in two additional and unexpected ways. Student peer reviewers' questions during the Q&A session informed the presenter if they had not clarified a topic or communicated effectively. Additionally, the peer reviewers would give the presenters suggestions—things they had missed or forgotten. Student presenters were then able to apply that feedback to the second round to the new group of reviewers and achieve a

potentially better score. At the end of the presentation, the presenters would collect their stack of qualitative feedback, and the instructor would take the stack of quantitative rubric scores and average them to generate a final score. To facilitate multiple student presentations simultaneously, the instructor was not able to provide individualized feedback and relied on students to utilize the rubric and methods learned from previous feedback and apply that to the second presentation. The instructor's role shifted from a centralized expert to that of a decentralized facilitator, something that has proven to be effective as a pedagogical tool (Foster et al., 2016). The students also earned a portion of their presentation grade by reviewing their peers' qualitative feedback and summarizing their next steps for improvement. The poster presentation format afforded multiple ways for students to learn verbal communication skills: by presenting, by peer grading, and by reviewing their peers' comments. Following the end of the semester, the instructor surveyed students.

Methods

Students (N=75, M=38, F=37; $M_{age} = 21.47$ years) across three course sections were surveyed at the end of the semester to reflect on their experiences with the poster format and the peer grading. This included 2 freshmen, 12 sophomores, 47 juniors, and 9 seniors. The sample was drawn from three sections of a business communication course. This survey yielded descriptive statistics and qualitative responses. The thematic qualitative analysis described below went far beyond descriptions and instead uncovered the most dominant themes and reoccurring motifs in the qualitative comments (Terry et al., 2017). As research in grounded theory shows, this qualitative method fits within the "abductive" reasoning tradition, which "starts with the data and subsequently moves toward hypothesis formation" (Charmaz 2006, p. 103). In this project, open-ended comments were analyzed for reoccurring patterns. This process revealed multiple themes, which are explored in-depth below.

Using an interpretive and exploratory approach, the author manually coded the qualitative comments using techniques from thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Terry et al. 2017) and grounded theory (Charmaz

2006). This included triangulating the survey data and generating a list of most common benefits and drawbacks of the various presentation styles to improve instructor teaching methods. As the researcher combed through the data, initial words or phrases were given a generic code name. As the researcher read through the data corpus, similar themes or frequently mentioned ideas were noted, categorized, expanded, or combined (Braun and Clarke 2006; Warren and Karner 2010). Open coding (Charmaz 2006) was completed first to create general themes relating to the positive and negative attributes. From there, more analytic notes were taken to create categories. There were multiple themes related to the pros and cons of the poster method (Table 1), and six themes related to student perceptions of the peer-grading system (Table 2). Since the original data were gathered, the instructor has continued the use of this method. These observational insights also inform the data analysis and interpretation.

Results

There were several compelling findings in this pedagogical study. Students perceived that the poster method for teaching presentations was effective. The average student rating for the poster was 4.24/5.00. Additionally, while not the main focus of this study, 66.67% of students preferred the poster format over the traditional PPT presentation assignment, whereas 32% preferred the PPT format used earlier in the semester; 1.33% had no preference. As is demonstrated below in Table 1, students were more relaxed presenting to a group of 3-5 peers using a poster and tripod when compared to standing in front of the entire class using a PPT. Students reported feeling less pressure, and they were able to present the poster presentation twice to improve their results. Finally, it is possible that since the poster was presented after the PPT, they may have gained confidence from their previous presentation. A paired T-Test was also used to explore the difference between student perception of the first presentation (PPT) and the second presentation (poster) during the semester. The results showed that students rated the poster presentation to be significantly ($p=.007$) more helpful.

To further unpack student perceptions of the poster format, qualitative student comments were analyzed (See Table 1).

Table 1: Qualitative Comments from Poster Presentations

Pros	REPRESENTATIVE COMMENT
Personal	"Easier to connect with audience." "More intimate." "Smaller group, easy to connect."
Less Nervous	"Made me feel more comfortable. Easy to Relax..." "Less presentation anxiety."
Topic Choice	"...more confidence to present the topic we personally picked." "...familiar topic to me."
Question & Answer	"Smaller group, asked more questions to see if you really knew the material."
Back-to-Back Presentation	"Presenting more than once allowed me to apply feedback to improve."
Engaged	"More people paying attention." "People listened more because they weren't distracted."
Less Reliance on Slides	"You could not rely on reading off your poster, which forced you to know the material better."
Cons	
Room Distractions	"The room was crowded..." "Loud room..." "...hard to focus with the other people presenting at the same time."
Peer grading	"Peer grading is very critical." "Some peer feedback wasn't as reliable."
Fewer Visuals	"Lack of visual efforts." "...harder to use visual representation to capture audience attention."
Trouble	"Materials required to build board and takes more time."
Expense	"Posterboard[s] are expensive."
Less Professional	"Harder to make look professional."

Students perceived that the positives of the poster format included that the format was more personal due to smaller audience groupings, encouraged more audience engagement, made them less nervous, and reduced the reliance on the slides. The format itself included 3-5 students standing 1-2 feet away from the presenter; this discouraged a student's tendency to stare at their poster and merely read their "slides." However, while this increased eye contact in general, extremely shy students could still read from their poster. This was evaluated through peer grading on the quantitative rubric that included "eye contact" and "delivery." Additionally, students were instructed to follow the "6x6" rule, which emphasized reducing the amount of text on their poster to encourage better eye-contact. See Appendix C for the full Quantitative Rubric.

In terms of topic selection, students liked being able to choose a topic they were familiar with, they felt the Q&A session tested their expertise, and they perceived that the back-to-back presentation format offered immediate feedback and improvement opportunities. Students reported several downsides of the poster style format, including room distractions such as noise (i.e., others presenting at the same time), skepticism toward their classmates' peer grading, limitations of the poster in terms of visual opportunities, more difficult to make the poster look professional, and the expense of purchasing a poster.

As described above in the procedures section, students in the poster sessions were required to present the presentation twice, back-to-back; **76%** of students reported making adjustments between their first and second poster presentation delivery, and **24%** reported that they did not make adjustments between presentations.

Next, students were asked to rate the helpfulness (1-5) of peer grading their classmates' poster presentations, and students overall evaluated this activity as helpful (average rating = 4.05/5.00). Qualitatively, students were asked to describe what they learned from the peer-grading portion of the assignment. Five common themes emerged from the data regarding peer grading. These included a greater ability to self-critique, how to identify good quality communication, a better understanding of grading expectations, higher level of engagement, and the ability to give and receive feedback. Representative quotes are listed in Table 2.

By putting on the instructor hat, students were forced to consider more deeply the qualitative differences in a poor versus a good presentation. Unlike a traditional PPT presentation, in which they sat passively while listening, the poster and peer-grading format forced them to stand up and be alert and engaged. Students also received feedback from peers, which has been shown to be less threatening and, in some cases, more helpful than instructor feedback (Tullis and Goldstone, 2020; Versteeg et al. 2019; Ye et al. 2021).

Table 2: Student Learning from Peer Grading Others' Presentations

THEME	REPRESENTATIVE COMMENT
Self-Application	"I learned ways to improve my presentation from being critical of others' projects." "Seeing it from the other side...gave useful insights for presenting" "...able to catch ...stuff they did wrong so I would not make the same mistakes."
Presentation Exemplar	"Helped show me what works well and what doesn't" "What to look for in a good presentation" "What a good presentation had vs what a bad presentation didn't have"
Grading Expectations	"I learned why grades are the way they are" "Gave me an idea of what is expected and how to present my poster" "How other students will grade my presentation"
Engagement	"It made me focus on their presentation more" "I paid more attention to detail" "All the types of things we need to look out for"
Delivering & Receiving Feedback	"People are more honest when its anonymous" "I learned how to give and accept immediate feedback" "I wanted to give positive feedback but also be constructive"

Discussion

There are several key takeaways from this study for improving verbal communication skills and making use of peer feedback. This research has filled important gaps in the literature, including uncovering creative ways to assign presentations without monopolizing multiple weeks of classroom time (Calcich and Weilbaker 1992). The study has demonstrated the feasibility of a single instructor implementing this method, as opposed to requiring multiple instructors and administrative support to achieve (Metcalf et al. 2016). This project has also revealed the multi-dimensional benefits of peer feedback from peers at the same educational level, something that has rarely been explored in the marketing education literature. Finally, this work has also demonstrated a creative way for students to learn verbal communication skills that simulate real-world business scenarios.

Faculty often face the twin challenges of large class sizes and time limitations. This can lead to limited presentations or the use of group presentations, which offer less feedback and time-on-task (Godwin et al. 2021) practice for individuals. Verbal presentation skills are important for all business majors, and this is particularly true in marketing and sales. Instructors are often attempting to help marketing students learn how to communicate their ideas effectively, regardless of the channel (i.e., phone, PPT, in-person). The findings from this study demonstrate an effective way to provide students individualized feedback while being economical in terms of using minimal class time.

According to students, the peer-feedback mechanism helped keep the audience engaged, provided individual feedback for presenters, and helped students learn in situ and make corrections on the fly between presentations. Forcing students to grade others' work also gave them a picture of what a good presentation looked like and helped them critique their own presentations. Students were also more engaged with their peers' poster presentations than during the PPT version. Instead of sitting, getting distracted, or being tempted to look at their cellphone, the poster session format forced student audience members to stand, listen, and critique.

Posters were effective at creating a smaller, more intimate setting that is common in many business presentations (meeting with clients, expo demonstrations, etc.). Even the noise, which some students complained about, mimicked the ambient noise often present during a conference or expo setting. Posters also allowed multiple presentations to be delivered at once and kept non-presenting students engaged.

In terms of the limitations of the approach, some students were skeptical of their peers' feedback. Additionally, peer graders did not catch all the mistakes that the instructor might during a grading observation. Lastly, while not a central focus of this study, students' peer-graded scores were in general higher than instructor-graded scores.

Other student comments that were written in favor of the poster format presented here could be applied to a PPT presentation, even if they are a little more

challenging. These include having students peer grade one another, allowing students to choose their own topic relevant to their work life, and allowing them to present twice back-to-back. However, the poster may be more conducive to some of these advantages. Allowing students to present back-to-back in a traditional PPT would double the class time required. Also, having each student peer grade the other 30+ student presentations would require either a lot of paper and tabulating or a tool and software that could organize the scores.

Students learned in multiple ways with this presentation format and by participating in multiple roles. They learned from their peers who provided them feedback, they learned by having the opportunity to present a second time back-to-back, and they learned by observing and grading others. It is unclear from the data whether one or more of these three roles was the most valuable. Students were observed applying feedback from their peers, and they also reported making adjustments in their second presentation. At the same time, some students viewed their peers' notes as too critical or unreliable. For these students, it could be that the role as peer evaluator might be the most valuable learning opportunity. Future research would have to tease out these variables.

In terms of practical application, it may seem that the poster format is being put forth as the only way to teach verbal communication skills; however, this is not the case. PPT presentations can still be very effective at helping students practice effective slide design, confront stage fright, and use technology. The specific goal of this research was not to critique PPT presentations as much as find ways to reduce barriers for faculty when it comes to the challenges of teaching verbal communication. This study has demonstrated that the poster format allows substantial time savings, immediate feedback for students, increased time-on-task practice for presenters, increased audience participation and engagement, and additional learning through peer grading. Some of these benefits are unique to posters, but others, such as peer grading, can be incorporated with PPT presentations as well. Because the business world involves a mix of presentation formats, instructors should incorporate a variety of presentation modes when possible. As Calcich and Weilbaker (1992) demonstrated, having two

presentations in a semester course is advantageous for gaining and applying feedback. Future research could explore additional combinations of presentation modes.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are limitations to this study and several interesting possibilities for future research. This study has focused on the benefits of a poster format for teaching communication skills. While there was initial evidence to suggest that students preferred presenting a poster when compared to a traditional PPT, future research could control for semester variables and create a comparative study to explore learning outcomes. While not the focus of this study, one fruitful avenue for research could be to explore in more depth whether students learned more from the feedback they received from their peers or from participating in the peer-grading process itself. Future research could follow a method like the jigsaw peer technique (Ye et al. 2021) to create the effect where student mentors are motivated to close the gaps in their own understanding (Burnett and Pettijohn 1999). One strength of this method was that a single instructor can implement this approach. However, one tradeoff is that the instructor must be willing to give up his or her authority as "grader" in exchange for students to have this type of expo-style experience. Instructors may be reluctant to become the "guide on the side" and allow students a larger role in the co-production of the course (Foster et al. 2016). When instructors are willing to decentralize the knowledge transfer, they are able to offer students a variety of unique and experiential sales activities (Alvarez et al. 2015; Dockery et al. 2021).

Additional future research could explore the other types of communication skills employers are looking for, such as listening and conversational skills (Brink and Costigan 2015). Sales instructors might also consider using sales role plays (Calcich and Weilbaker 1992; Carroll 2006) as an efficient way to harness all three communication elements of listening, conversing, and presenting. Given the recent rise of tools such as generative AI and Zoom that are being widely adopted, future pedagogical studies could consider ways to leverage these technologies to provide feedback or record conversations for self-analysis.

Finally, an interesting research question could compare undergraduate students' perception of what a "real world" business presentation looks like and compare that perception to business professionals' typical presentation requirements. Some student comments indicated that they thought a real business presentation would automatically be in front of a large crowd with a PPT, but the author's own conversations with business professionals over the years have indicated that the most common applications of verbal communication skills occur through daily interactions across multiple channels: phone, Zoom, business lunches, etc. Future research could explore the skills needed for each of these areas.

This research extended our understanding of how to teach verbal communication in an efficient and sustainable way that saves instructor time and increases student engagement. This project has demonstrated that two tools are effective at achieving these outcomes: poster presentations and peer-grading. Poster presentations enable multiple presenters at once, and peer-grading increases student engagement and offers relatable feedback. These strategies provide creative ways to provide students time-on-task communication practice and quick feedback in an efficient and sustainable way for instructors.

In sum, this research has demonstrated a creative way that instructors can assign presentations in marketing and sales classes, save class time, increase learning outcomes, and create higher engagement through a peer-feedback mechanism. Students need feedback on their persuasive communication skills to be successful in today's business world, and the current research has presented a feasible way for instructors to effectively teach these skills without creating an undue burden of class time or grading time.

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Appendix A: Verbal Presentation Questionnaire

Demographic Info

Age: _____

Male / Female

Freshman / Sophomore / Junior / Senior

1. Please rate how helpful the 1st presentation (**PowerPoint**) was for developing and practicing your presentations skills.

1. Extremely Unhelpful
2. Unhelpful
3. Neutral
4. Helpful
5. Extremely Helpful

2. Please rate how helpful the 2nd presentation (**POSTER PRESENTATION**) was for developing and practicing your presentations skills.

1. Extremely Unhelpful
2. Unhelpful
3. Neutral
4. Helpful
5. Extremely Helpful

3. Which **presentation format** helped you improve your presentation skills the most?

Poster / PowerPoint

4. Describe why you answered the way you did on question 3.

5. Did you make adjustments to improve your presentation between your (1st) Poster Presentation and your (2nd) Poster Presentation?

a. Yes/No

b. Please describe any adjustments you made after your 1st Poster Presentation:

6. How useful was **observing/grading** other students' poster presentations in helping you learn about what effective presentations look like?

1. Extremely Unhelpful
2. Unhelpful
3. Neutral
4. Helpful
5. Extremely Helpful

7. What did you learn from peer grading other student presentations?

8. Describe the advantages & disadvantages of the PPT presentation for helping you learn?

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

9. Do you get the chance to practice verbal presentations in other classes? Yes / No

10. What do you feel like you need more help with regarding presentations?

Appendix B: Instructions for Presentations 1 & 2

Presentation 1: PowerPoint (PPT)

- Build a PPT or Prezi to practice effective slide design
- Content: Your self-analysis and introspection results
- Length:
 - 4-5 Minutes total
 - 4-8 Slides
- Format:
 - Use an attention getter at the very beginning (story, quote, cartoon)
 - Generate a preview slide with 2-4 main points you will cover
 - At the end, generate a review slide reminding us of the 2-4 points you covered
- Use effective slide design, including
 - Minimal text on PPT slides (6x6 rule) or less!
 - Fade in bullets one at a time
 - Use images/visuals when possible
- Dress: Business Casual
 - (no gum, hats, sunglasses; avoid keys or lanyards dangling out of pockets)

Presentation 2: Poster Presentation

- POSTER DESIGN
 - Design a poster to visualize your project. You may print out a PPT to paste on to the 24x36 poster board. You can purchase a poster cheaply at Walmart or Dollar Tree. *Avoid the Tri-Fold posters; they do not look as polished.
 - Print in Color.
 - Use at least 1 graph/chart.
 - Typo/error free.
 - Font should be large and easy to read (*24-36 point font*)
 - At minimum, follow the 6x6 rule. Recommended: no more than 1-4 words per PPT line, save definitions)
 - Make it look professional. Not sloppy.
- DELIVERY
 - Use a story attention getter, introduction, preview, transitions, and conclusion & recap.
 - Maintain 5-7 minute time limit

Appendix C: Quantitative Peer-Grading Rubric

Presenter: _____ **[Poster Presentation Rubric]**

Please mark an "X" by the level of score the speaker achieved and total the score at the bottom out of 25.

	Exceptional	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Points
	5	4	3	2	1	
Story or Quote Attention Getter Preview of Main Points Review of Main Points						
Persuasive: data/evidence; convincing Pro & Cons						
Organization presentation/visual aids/typos 6x6 rule						
Delivery Confidence/eye contact Speaks clearly/good tone						
Professionalism						

Total Score: _____