In a recent issue of the *National Forensic Journal*, John Murphy has thoughtfully outlined what he perceives to be the ills of competitive rhetorical criticism, also known as communication analysis. According to Murphy, the event suffers from a rigid obsession with methodology in the speech, from the requirement to add to rhetorical theory at the end of the speech, and from evaluative criteria that often have more to do with history than with analysis of the artifact.

To eliminate many of the complaints about competitive rhetorical criticism, Murphy suggests a focus on the text of the rhetorical artifact. In fact, he urges: "The standards of the event need to change to reflect an increasing concern with the texts we study."

While we wholeheartedly agree with many of Murphy's arguments about the problems in rhetorical criticism, we disagree with his solution. In short, we fear that moving away from methodology will produce rhetorical criticisms that are as vacuous and shallow as the methodology-heavy speeches that Murphy decries. To be sure, Murphy does not suggest abandoning methodology; but his claim that "novice critics simply do not have the time nor the ability to create theory in these short speeches" misses the point of the role of theory in competitive rhetorical criticism.

Rhetorical theory must provide the foundation of a rhetorical criticism, yet also be supplemented by the criticism. Ideally then, the text and theory mutually inform one another during the process of and as a result of criticism. Thus, the goal of criticism—as Murphy aptly argues—is not to prove a method's utility. Nor should the goal be to focus exclusively on a text.

To explicate our claim concerning the goal of criticism we first explore the two extremes of criticism identified above and explain how the rules of forensics organizations encourage each extreme. The methodology-heavy approach we term the "scholarly analogue"; the text-heavy approach, the "popular media" analogue.

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Then, in an effort to bridge the two extremes, we propose a new set of rules for competitive rhetorical criticism. The need for a new, more definite set of rules is noted not only by Murphy, but by Rosenthal as well: "One of the primary reasons rhetorical criticism is viewed with confusion by many members of the forensic community is the lack of an adequate definition of the theoretical purpose and function of the event." The philosophy behind the new set of rules we propose is explained in terms of the literature and illustrated in practice by excerpts from a student rhetorical criticism dealing with arguments used by the Institute for Historical Review in their denial of the Holocaust.

The Two Extremes of Criticism

A common element of tournament after-dinner speaking and coaches parties is the infamous and frequently tasteless rhetorical criticism joke. Rhetorical criticism, known in some circles as communication analysis, has in its short history emerged as the most maligned speaking event, and perhaps for good reason. Plato, through Socrates in his dialogue *Gorgias*, likened rhetoric to mere cookery, "only an experience and a routine." If Plato were alive today to observe tournament rhetorical criticism speeches, he would be less than impressed with the rather bizarre recipes for success concocted by many students and savored by as many judges. Students dressed up in their contest finery serve up topics including Harlequin romances, the Jerry Lewis Telethon, and inspirational room decorations. Mix the presentation with heaping helpings of humor, blend in Burke, Bormann, or Bitzer, add a dash of sophistic salt, sprinkle conservatively with critical insight, cook over high heat until hearty laughter results. Yield—a winning rhetorical "criticism."

Although the preceding may seem hyperbolic, there are serious problems with tournament rhetorical criticism, most all of which flow from one fatal flaw: the lack of adequate rules and standards for the event. Put bluntly, there seem to be nearly as many conceptions of rhetorical criticism as there are students, coaches, and judges. Each of us has an idea of what should be included in a complete tournament rhetorical criticism, but there seems to be little agreement on a specific standard for preparing and judging this type of speech. Rules set by the American Forensic Association (AFA) and the National Forensic Association (NFA) provide some guidance, but ultimately contribute to, rather than alleviate, the problem. Each organization's rules suggest inappropriate analogies to the event, creating two types of criticism,
both of which limit the potential educational value of the event. The AFA rules suggest a popular media analogue approach, while the NFA rules mandate a scholarly analogue approach.

The popular media analogue likens rhetorical criticism to various forms of media commentary, such as the instantaneous commentary offered by newscasters following a presidential debate. Such commentary, while reflecting the personal impressions of the critic, tends to be devoid of critical standards of judgment which are carefully thought out and applied. In particular, the popular media analogue is marked by a conspicuous absence of at least one of three fundamental components of rhetorical criticism: a significant artifact, evaluation of the artifact, and the artifact's role in rhetorical theory. The AFA rules, in particular, encourage criticism in the mode of the popular media:

An original speech by the student designed to offer an explanation and/or evaluation of a communication event such as a speech, speaker, movement, poem, poster, film, campaign, etc., through the use of rhetorical principles. Audio-visual aids may or may not be used to supplement and reinforce the message.

Noticeably absent from these rules is any mention of whether the artifact need be significant, resulting in such questionable topics as wrestling, Harlequin romances, children's books, etc. Second, evaluation is deemed optional by the AFA rules, creating the all-too familiar criticism which merely accepts the artifact at face value. Finally, the vague term, "rhetorical principles" allows students to devise nearly any kind of analytical scheme—schemes that frequently do not inform rhetorical theory. Although rhetorical criticism speeches falling victim to the popular media analogue may be shallow and impressionistic, they avoid the other undesirable extreme: "cookie-cutter" speeches adhering to the scholarly analogue.

The scholarly analogue suggests that students engaging in tournament rhetorical criticism ought to mimic the efforts of rhetorical criticism scholars housed in departments of speech communication. Coaches encourage students to select a speech or group of speeches, find a neatly-packages set of labels from a criticism published in a scholarly journal or book (calling it a method), and then begin preparing the criticism.

The NFA rules, with their mention of "critical rhetorical methodology," suggest the scholarly analogue approach:
Contestants will deliver an original critical analysis of any significant rhetorical artifact. The speaker should limit quotations from or summary of paraphrase of the analyzed artifact to a minimum. Any legitimate critical rhetorical methodology is permissible as long as it serves to open up the artifact for the audience.\textsuperscript{8}

Although this approach is more desirable than the popular media analogue, it also presents the student with a host of difficulties. Suddenly, the competitor with little or no background in rhetorical criticism is forced to synthesize the complex ideas of eminent scholars. One of two outcomes usually occurs: the student, confronted by a bewildering corpus of scholarly literature, abandons the effort entirely or resorts to the "cookie cutter" approach. Generally, the cookie cutter approach entails reducing the critical methodology to a set of ill applied key terms and then forcing the rhetoric to conform. In short, the student will find exactly what the key terms of the method suggest will be found; neither the text nor the methodology sufficiently enhances the other. Consequently, "rhett crits are generally less concerned with finding out something about the speech than they are in proving the speech fits the methodology chosen."\textsuperscript{9}

While both popular media and scholarly approaches exist at tournaments across the country, we contend that neither is appropriate. Speeches influenced by these approaches often contain the following: description and interpretation of the artifact without evaluation. If evaluation occurs, the student equates the task solely with demonstrating the effects of the rhetoric—effects that are often overclaimed by the student; emphasis on popular and titillating subjects, and abuse and misuse of the ideas of rhetorical scholars. Most distasteful of all, students following one of the two analogues may well leave the activity without a proper understanding of the purpose and process of criticism.

To make tournament rhetorical criticism a more appetizing prospect for students and judges (even those unfamiliar with criticism), we propose a set of rules that make clear to both participants and critics the goal and function of tournament rhetorical criticism. The rules we suggest contain three standards. First, the event should be governed by a social significance standard: the speaker must provide independent insight into understanding the symbolic/language strategies that link us together or tear us apart as a society. Second, the standard of methodology should be replaced with perspective taking: the student should offer a critical perspective developed from the ideas of rhetorical scholars to pro-
vide a theoretical foundation for his or her ideas. Third, the standard of evaluation is mandated: the speech must persuasively describe, interpret, and evaluate the symbols I language found in the rhetorical artifact.10 We believe students attempting to meet these rules will learn to think more independently and will gain a better understanding of the purpose and process of rhetorical criticism.

Social Significance as a Standard

The speaker must provide independent insight into understanding the symbolic/language strategies that link us together or tear us apart as a society.

The standard of social significance contains two parts. First, the student critic must demonstrate that the artifact is socially significant. Secondly, the original insight the student provides must also possess social significance. As Brock and Scott aptly note, "Part of the task of rhetorical criticism is to find a focus, to pick products that will be fruitful to criticize."11

The Artifact. Frequently, judges must endure contest speeches in which the student has chosen an artifact whose message, purpose, and function are merely trivial. Even more frequently, students with a priori significant topics fail to provide a justification in their own words for the analysis of their topic. Thus, the judge writes on the ballot something similar to, "This seems like a reasonable topic, but you really never tell us why it is worthy of analysis." Clearly, students must not only choose significant topics, but also provide solid reasoning explaining the significance. If we are to teach criticism, then we must surely emphasize the critique of "things that matter." Already, the forensics community demands significance in other events; we should demand significance in all events.

The NFA has recognized the need for a significant topic, but its rules need to be more specific in spelling out this need. As we suggest, the speech should provide insight into understanding the symbolic/language strategies that link us together or tear us apart as a society. While our preference is to limit the event to language strategies, we recognize that students may develop speeches which provide insight into how symbols are utilized in the linking together or tearing apart of society (for example, a speech in the final round of the 1987 Individual Events Nationals illuminated how Iranian postage stamps enhance social cohesion in that country). Let us emphasize, however, that to be socially significant, the
influence of the artifact on social unity or disunity must be clearly explained by the student critic.

EXAMPLE-ARTIFACT'S SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE
The student establishes social significance of the artifact by linking it to one of the darkest moments in human history. "The mere mention of such names as Auschwitz, Buchenwald, or Dachau invokes horror at the thought that a modern civilization could have had the capacity for such brutality. And yet, today, an extremist think-tank known as the Institute for Historical Review, would have us believe not only that the Holocaust never occurred, but that it is the invention of what the Institute describes as a conniving race of subhumans, the Jews."

The Insight. In addition to demonstrating the significance of the artifact, the student must also prove that his or her findings are also socially significant. Criticism is valuable because it teaches us something we did not previously know, not because it tells us something we expect to happen. Little is learned from a criticism of a Democratic convention speech, for example, that concludes that the speaker appealed to traditional Democratic values. Such a conclusion does not illuminate or provide insight; it simply tells us what we already know. A criticism ideally should result in "achieving a greater understanding of the event and the importance of rhetoric to society in general."12

EXAMPLE-SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS
The student demonstrates the social significance of his findings by pointing out that the rhetoric attempts to destroy the credibility of a group of people and a nation. The Institute's "basic premise," says the student," is that the United States and the western world support the nation of Israel because of a gross exaggeration, if not an outright lie. The group advances this notion by attempting to establish a thread of doubt in the audience about the very existence of the Holocaust. In so doing, the Institute hopes to eliminate the reason for our support of Israel which, it suggests, is collective guilt about the Holocaust."

Obviously, we cannot expect a student critic to provide a lasting contribution to rhetorical theory in a ten-minute speech. If we do not expect some insight or new understanding into symbolic/language strategies, however, we are not fulfilling the true educational potential of the event and of the participating students. Students can and do analyze texts while informing rhetorical the-
ory. Consequently, the rules for contest rhetorical criticism should also mandate that student critics provide original ideas and analysis about the artifact.

**Replacing Methodologies with Perspectives**

*The student should offer a critical perspective developed from the ideas of rhetorical scholars to provide a theoretical foundation for his or her ideas.*

We believe students attempting to meet this standard of our proposed set of rules will learn to think more independently and thus gain a better understanding of the purpose and process of rhetorical criticism. Providing original ideas and insight can be difficult for student critics when they are hampered by the artificial constraints of a methodology. We maintain that the use of methodologies hurts, rather than helps, student efforts to provide original insight. The method tells students what to find and how it should be presented—a recipe in all senses of the word. Thus, we find a proliferation of the dreaded "cookie cutter" speeches in which the student takes the method steps in hand, raises the method above the artifact, then presses down to provide us with "insight" that the method presumes to exist. As Murphy explains, such a process encourages "classification rather than argumentation." This process does not teach students or audience members anything new about the symbolic/language strategies, society, the artifact, or standards for criticism. However, if we abandon the idea of theoretical foundation entirely, we find ourselves without standards following the atheoretical popular media analogue. A more reasonable approach is to teach students standards through two "critical" principles—impulse and perspective.

The critical impulse, put simply, allows students to examine the rhetoric on their own, without "benefit" of methodological blinders, before drawing any conclusions. Brock and Scott describe the critical impulse as a "vague feeling that cannot be defined with precision":

> Every day our experiences make us aware of circumstances that seem to cry out for explanations. What we feel moving within us at these moments of special questioning may be called "the critical impulse." But what is this impulse? It is difficult to pinpoint. Perhaps it is a queasy feeling or the urge to run or to strike out. Often it manifests itself by verbalizing agreement or disagreement. At other times the critical impulse is formed into a guarded intellectual statement.
Within every human being lies the innate or learned desire—the critical impulse—to explain and evaluate phenomena. The student of rhetorical criticism, of course, also possesses this impulse. To explain and evaluate, the student must immerse himself or herself in the artifact and discover "what's there" by digging around. Historian Robert Lifton calls this process the "use of the self as one's research instrument."\(^{15}\) In digging, the student may unearth an overarching metaphor, recurring language strategies, improper use of evidence, strategies similar to those used on other occasions, or any other basic standards of criticism which the student critic has been taught prior to his or her rhetorical expedition.

**EXAMPLE-DIGGING INTO THE ARTIFACT**

By choosing a perspective rather than a set of labels, the student forces an independent analysis of language strategies rather than merely searching for snippets of language that fit the predetermined labels. This process of digging into the artifact results in the student's discovering three major language strategies employed by the Institute. "Initially, the Institute attempts to undermine the credibility of the Jewish people. Second, they attack assumptions regarding Nazi intentions. Finally, they pose questions indicating that the Holocaust was technically impossible." The student's research and analysis is more than a process of matching phrases and labels; it is a critical investigation in which the student discovers the language strategies used in the artifact.

In particular, the student can and should consider the following questions articulated by Kathleen German:

1. Is there a prominent element or several elements in the artifact which dominate it?
2. Is the rhetoric an expression of its cultural milieu?
3. Is there an interaction of elements in this artifact which accounts for its unique character?
4. When compared to other artifacts, does this rhetoric reveal unique characteristics it possesses or which characterize a group of similar artifacts?
5. Does the rhetorical theory of the historical period lend understanding to the rhetorical artifact?\(^{16}\)

After digging around the artifact, the student should be able, in his or her own words, to explain the symbolic/language strategies at work—the textual analysis of which Murphy writes. This approach avoids the pitfalls of the scholarly approach by forcing the student to develop his or her own ideas rather than forcing the
rhetoric into the ideas of another. To avoid the dangers of the popular media approach, though, another step must be taken—the incorporation of theory. We suggest employing a critical perspective, rather than methodology, to accomplish this task.

Our call for replacing the standard usage of methodology is certainly not new. Thompson, earlier this decade, decried the misuse of methodologies by students, noting that they often have "a superficial, even mistaken, grasp of the chosen methodology." More recently, Rosenthal highlighted the need for more creativity in choosing a tool to illuminate the artifact. He suggested developing a tool based upon more than one methodology. Hahn and Gustainis take an even more liberal approach, correctly pointing out that "it may well be the student who develops his/her own methodology for criticism has learned more, and can teach more to observers, than can the student who offers the 999th reading of the Burkean pentad." While we applaud the notion of the above authors, we cannot wholeheartedly agree with either Rosenthal or Hahn and Gustainis. Instead, we take more of a middle ground by recognizing the need and desirability of both an established theoretical approach and independent student insight. Thus, we suggest a "critical perspective."

A critical perspective differs from a methodology in that no concrete step-by-step instructions are laid out; a perspective is basically a theoretical foundation from which the student can build his or her own ideas within the province of rhetoric. Students borrow the basic ideas of rhetorical scholars to make their own ideas clearer and more complete. For example, students utilizing critical perspectives would discuss the basics of metaphor or generic criticism rather than Ivie on metaphors in prowar discourse or Ware and Linkugel on apologia. In so doing, student critics will find themselves asserting less and arguing more, a valuable goal since, as Murphy claims, "The state of argument in rhetorical criticism is not good." Methodologies naturally give rise to assertions because the student cannot see beyond the fact that the rhetoric "fits" the methodology. On the other hand, following the critical impulse and perspective route forces the student critic to discover his or her own lines of analysis, and consequently the student is better equipped to reasonably argue his or her position. The organization of the speech would follow the ideas of the student instead of the steps of the method laid out by the scholar. Original thinking would replace fill-in-the-blank thinking during the preparation of the speech.
EXAMPLE-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Rather than merely pulling labels out of some published critique, for instance, the student relies on a perspective of political myths he discovered in a book written by Henry Tudor. "In addition to explaining our world view, Tudor suggests that myths also aim to either advocate a certain course of action or justify the acceptance of an existing state of affairs. Tudor further suggests that the mythmaker constructs myths in retrospect, including events which would disprove the myth. Therefore, myths serve a rationalizing function and are constructed in a manner which enhances the position of the mythmaker." The student justifies this choice of perspective by noting that the Holocaust, as currently perceived, fits Tudor's definition of political myth. Thus, the student's goals is to shed light on the "alternative myth" espoused by the Institute.

Mandating the Standard of Evaluation

The speech must persuasively describe, interpret, and evaluate the symbols/language found in the rhetorical artifact.

While preparing the criticism, the student should take to heart the words of Brock and Scott: "The primary purposes of rhetorical criticism are to describe, to interpret, and to evaluate. These purposes tend to merge into one another. One purpose prepares for the next; the one that follows reflects back on the one that has been explicated." These three purposes constitute the process of rhetorical criticism, a process which is inherently persuasive. As Brock and Scott succinctly note: "The critic says implicitly, 'See as I see, know as I know, value as I value.'" Assertions and classifications, as noted earlier, are not persuasive. Arguments are persuasive, and student critics should employ them when describing, interpreting, and evaluating. The late rhetorical scholar Wayne Brockriede wrote an article that should be required reading for every rhetorical critic, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," in which he outlined the five characteristics of a complete argument: (1) an inferential leap from existing beliefs to the adopting of a new belief or the reinforcement of an old one; (2) a perceived rationale to justify that leap; (3) a choice among two or more competing claims; (4) a regulation of uncertainty in relation to the selected claim—since someone has made an inferential leap, certainty can be neither zero nor total; (5) a willingness to risk a confrontation of that claim with one's peers. Criticism by argument is not only necessary to demonstrate how a critic makes an inferential leap, it is necessary for two pragmatic
reasons noted by Brockriede: such arguments are generally more informative, and they also invite "confrontation that may begin or continue a process enhancing an understanding of a rhetorical experience or of rhetoric." In short, arguments help us learn more about communication.

EXAMPLE-DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION:

Description and interpretation are interrelated steps. The first illustrates what is happening on the surface of the rhetoric, while the second identifies the symbolic consequences of the rhetoric. In other words, the critic must both explain "what is there" and "how it works." For example, the student describes one aspect of the Institute's rhetoric: "The link between the Holocaust and aid to Israel is stated overtly when the Institute claims 'the main theme for Jewish fund-raising is the Holocaust, and has been for 38 years. When they don't use the Holocaust, the money collection sharply drops off.'" The student then follows up with interpretation: "By establishing a Jewish motive for the perpetration of a Holocaust lie, the Institute hopes to plant seeds of doubt. Moreover, the Institute carefully constructs the rhetoric in an attempt to avoid disrupting the audience's sense of history, thus protecting the believability of the myth."

Student critics learning about communication and criticism often forget or overlook the need for argumentation, especially if they choose to evaluate. When they do evaluate, student critics often make incomplete or faulty arguments, mainly because they equate evaluation solely with an external examination of the effects of the artifact, or they attempt to tie their evaluations to the method and conclude by saying, "It was good; it fulfilled all the requirements of the methodology." Since the latter problem is eliminated with the replacement of methodologies with perspective, we will focus on the problem of evaluation by effects.

While we agree with Thompson that effectiveness "is the distinctive dimension of rhetoric," we are even more in agreement with his statement that "evidence of effectiveness is seldom conclusive." The student critic may collect published opinions about effectiveness, but he or she must remember that "judgments of effects rely on historical information extrinsic to the speech" and do not equal proof. Discovering such proof is incredibly difficult when dealing with a rhetorical artifact, and we have heard far too often a claim of effect unwarranted by the stated opinions and evidence. If the student critic insists on demonstrating effect (and
judges insist on hearing it), we urge following the complete argument form.

More important, we stress the reality that evaluation can also occur internally; that is, the critic can evaluate what is done well and what is done poorly within the symbolic/language strategies. If the strategies are employed unethically or for unethical ends, the critic should also point this out. Evaluation should also include what the critic believes were alternative strategies available and why they were not used, for better or worse.

EXAMPLE-EVALUATION

The student's evaluation of the Institute's rhetoric does not focus on what other people get from the rhetoric—an effect orientation—so much as it does focus on what the student sees in the rhetoric. This internal evaluation procedure requires the student to truly function as the critic. Judging the rhetoric is the student's responsibility, not the responsibility of pollsters or newsmagazine writers. Thus, the student turns to the rhetoric and evaluates it from an ethical viewpoint. "The suggestion that the Nazis had good intentions contradicts a vast corpus of documented Nazi rhetoric establishing extermination as a goal. Other factual misrepresentations are present as well, such as ignoring the existence of a process whereby Zyklon B can be made to become instantly gaseous. Moreover, the challenging of Jewish motives brings into question the Institute's own motives. . . . Though they try to secure academic credibility, the myth advanced by the Institute is little more than a thinly disguised effort at anti-Semitism without substance, and it must be condemned as such.

As with description and interpretation, evaluation should attempt to provide unique insight and complete arguments about the rhetorical artifact.

Conclusion

Caught between the two worthy desires of teaching students independent thinking and rhetorical theory—classical functions of forensics—we have formulated two extreme types of rules for competitive rhetorical criticism. Unfortunately, each extreme neglects the valuable insights offered by the other. Our goal as forensics educators should be to bridge the two extremes. Students can learn about rhetorical theory, and their criticisms, if informed by a critical perspective, can reflect back on that theory. The key to teaching students about this self-reflexive process is not to blind them with methodology or coddle them with atheoretical approaches.
We realize that much has been written about the uniquely valuable event of rhetorical criticism. Yet, despite, despite these writings and the practical experience of the forensic community with the event in the last ten years, rhetorical criticism is still a much maligned event. No doubt, improvements have occurred, but there is equally little doubt that tournament rhetorical criticism can still stand improvement. Much of the improvement will occur if students and coaches understand the purpose and standard of the event as well as they understand those of the other individual events. Hopefully, our rules and standards can make the event more educationally valuable, understood, interesting, well-done, and popular. That is the kind of reputation tournament rhetorical criticism deserves.
Notes

2Murphy, 9.
3Murphy, 9.
5The sample speech we use was written by Greg R. Coffee of the University of Nebraska. The speech, "Revisionist Rhetoric: Claims Denying the Holocaust by the Institute for Historical Review," advanced to the quarterfinals at the 1988 NFA National Speech Tournament.
7Taken from the rules for the 1988 American Forensic Association National Individual Events Tournament.
8Taken from the rules for 1988 I.E. Nationals, sponsored by the National Forensic Association.
10Rosenthal suggests a standard similar to our third standard on 134.
14Brock and Scott, 13.
19Hahn and Gustainis, 17.
21Brock and Scott, 19.
22That rhetorical criticism should be a persuasive effort is also acknowledged by Christine D. Reynolds, "Coaching Strategies in Contest Rhetorical Criticism," a paper presented at the 1985 Speech Communication Association Convention in Denver, CO.
23Brock and Scott, 19.
26Hahn and Gustainis, 15.
27Thompson, 18.
28Murphy, "Theory and Practice," 5.