



2023-24

DISCUSSION OUTLINE

Communication Breakdown: Can We Communicate Effectively In Our Modern World

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Overview of Discussion

“Problem-solving Discussion is an effort on the part of a small group to reach a solution to a problem through informal interchange of facts, inferences, and judgments. This method of discussion seeks consensus rather than majority rule. The focus of this event should be the encouragement of cooperation and critical thinking to arrive at the collective goal of better understanding and problem solving.”

This statement from the *Minnesota State High School League Speech Rules and Policies Manual* reflects the true spirit of this event. As discussion participants prepare and research, the goal should be to collect information and develop collaborative skills that will maximize their ability to make valuable contributions as members of a variety of contest groups. In rounds, all discussants should cooperate to achieve group consensus through both substantive—adding valuable information, perspectives, and analysis—and procedural—enhancing the group process, full participation, and positive exchange of ideas—contributions to the process. The category is not intended to be adversarial.

Overview of This Year’s Topic

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” – George Bernard Shaw

In May 2022, Michael Hannon, an instructor at Nottingham University (UK) noted the following: “It is widely believed that open and public speech is at the heart of the democratic ideal. Public discourse is instrumentally valuable for identifying good policies, as well as necessary for resisting domination (e.g. by vocally challenging decision-makers, demanding public justifications, and using democratic speech to hold leaders accountable). But in our highly polarized and socially fragmented political environment, an increasingly pressing question is: Do actual democratic societies live up to the ideal of inclusive public speech?”

This year’s topic will explore in-depth the concerns about the current state of our public/personal discourse, and how while we may be great at *talking at* each other, are we really *communicating with* each other? Challenges that exist in traditional means of media, the growth of new/digital media, how interpersonal communication has been altered, and the uncertain impacts of technology such as AI, will be examined for how they contribute to breakdowns in communication we experience in our modern discourse.

TASK INFORMATION

Tasks at Invitational Tournaments

While the Minnesota State High School League does not limit the use of topic areas used for Discussion at invitational speech tournaments, the Discussion Committee recommends the following schedule to give students experience with all parts of the outline:

- **Start of Regular Invitational Season – February 17: Areas I & II, Subsection Topics**
- **February 19 – Last Regular Season Invitational: Areas III & IV, Section Topics**
- **State Tournament Tasks – Students should be prepared for tasks from all areas of the outline.**

Tournament Managers Please Note: Whether or not you choose to follow the above schedule, it is vital that you communicate to your participating schools which part(s) of the outline you will use and how you will be organizing your Discussion rounds.

Tasks at Subsection and Section Tournaments

Tasks for subsection and section tournaments will follow the procedure instituted in the 2016 season – Tournaments will no longer receive a full slate of tasks from which to choose. Instead, they will receive a set of four or five tasks for those tournaments. Those tasks will be date specific (unique to one or two sets of tournaments) and will not be repeated at other tournaments.

The tasks themselves **shall not** be shared beforehand with teams competing at subsection or section tournaments.

Rather, the specific outline sub-points used will be sent with the sets and – following procedure established in 2018 – **must** be communicated to all coaches in your sub and/or section within a time frame that affords adequate preparation for participating teams. For example: “Our [subsection/section] tournament will use Area 1, Sub-points A, C, D, J.”

Tasks at State Tournament

State tournament tasks will follow the same procedure as previous seasons. Separate sets will be written for each day and chosen at random for each round of competition. Participants should be prepared for tasks from all four areas of the outline and be mindful that some subpoints may be combined for more expansive tasks.

Communication Breakdown: Can we communicate effectively in our modern world?

2023 - 2024 MSHSL Discussion Topic Outline

The subpoints are intended to (hopefully) generate in-depth examinations of the issues relating to how our modern discourse seems to be struggling. It is vital that coaches, students, and judges maintain an open mind when it comes to evaluating the many aspects of this overall topic. *For questions, email contacts for the Discussion Committee can be found at the bottom of this document.*

I. Legacy Media and Its Impacts (Subsection Topic)

- A. Relevance of “legacy” media.
- B. The roles, responsibilities, and challenges of print media in fostering open communication (book bans, global “rag” magazines, corporate fiscal concerns).
- C. The role and challenges of televised media (all forms) in fostering communication.
- D. The future of terrestrial radio and similar in public communication (Digital Audio Broadcasting vs FM transmission, need for AM/shortwave radio, corporate fiscal concerns).
- E. The challenges facing traditional advertising (reaching clientele, monetization, “cancel culture”).

II. New/Digital Media and Its Impacts (Subsection Topic)

- A. Impacts of “new” media in fostering open communication (validity of sources, fact-checking, confirmation bias, accuracy, online safety concerns).
- B. The role of local, state, and federal agencies in regulating digital communication.
- C. Bridging cultural and language communication barriers (globalization, universal acceptance (UA)).
- D. Accuracy and fallacies of digital media (“zombie” information, confirmation bias, deep fakes or similar).
- E. Word choice in new media (generational divides, oversimplification of language, charged language, changes in terminology usage/meaning).

III. The Challenges Of Interpersonal Communication (Section Topic)

- A. Censorship and self-segregation of ideas and information (echo chambers, mob mentality/bystander effect).
- B. Evolving norms in communication methods (video, face-to-face, messaging, generational differences in usage).
- C. Demographic differences and biases in communication (gender, racial, socioeconomic, political).
- D. Current and future needs in communication education.
- E. Lost/missing meanings, uncertain tones, use of emojis.

IV. The Challenges Of Artificial Intelligence & Emerging Technologies (Section Topic)

- A. Control over content (creation, false representation, removal of personal content, fake source citations).
- B. Use and abuse of images and likenesses (deep fake videos, data scraping for facial recognition).
- C. The Value/Dangers of Algorithms (targeted advertising, targeted content).
- D. Positive and negative elements of AI-based communication (ex – Chatbots).
- E. The racial/ethnic challenges posed by AI usage (cultural erasure, incorrect perceptions, adding to systemic racism, red-teaming).

Bibliography

The bibliography is a starting point for those desiring direction in researching this topic. This list is not meant to be exhaustive and presents only a small number of the resources that could be used to prepare for Discussion tasks.

Area I – Legacy Media & Its Impacts (Subsection Topic)

A. Relevance of “legacy” media.

1. Legacy Media Needs to Be Transformed, Not Discarded. *Nieman Reports*, 23 February 2023. <https://niemanreports.org/articles/legacy-media-local-news/>
2. How younger voters will impact elections: How legacy media and social media impact old and young voters. *Brookings Institution*, 15 May 2023. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-younger-voters-will-impact-elections-how-legacy-media-and-social-media-impact-old-and-young-voters/>
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C. The role and challenges of televised media (all forms) in fostering communication.

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D. The future of terrestrial radio and similar in public communication.

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1. Broadcast and cable make up less than half of TV usage for the first time ever. *CNBC Media*, 15 August 2023. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/08/15/traditional-tv-usage-drops-below-50percent-for-first-time-ever.html>
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Area II – New/Digital Media and Its Impacts (Subsection Topic)

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Area III – The Challenges of Interpersonal Communication (Section Topic)

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Area IV – The Challenges of Artificial Intelligence & Emerging Technologies (Section Topic)

- A. Control over content.
1. Davenport, Thomas H. and Mittal, Nitin. "How Generative AI is changing creative work." *Harvard Business Review*, 14 November 2022. <https://hbr.org/2022/11/how-generative-ai-is-changing-creative-work>
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