

Duo Public Speaking: Development and Pilot Evaluation of a Collaborative Public Speaking Format and Assessment Rubric

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking competitions have always favoured individual speakers and thus failed to consider relational abilities such as listening and working as a team. This disparity was first seen in the classroom setting, where those students who could not give their individual speeches were seen giving better performances after they formed pairs to come up with and deliver a speech. This classroom experience led to the creation of a new format of public speaking known as the DUO Public Speaking Format. It is an innovation in teaching and learning that was executed publicly for the first time during the International Intervarsity Public Speaking Competition (IIPSC) 2026, where duos are given three minutes to prepare and five minutes to deliver a speech together. Its centrepiece is an assessment and evaluation tool that is a specially crafted 148-point scoring sheet. It is the first such scoring tool created for paired speaking where scores for team and individual performance are measured separately and a balanced participation criterion is included in it. The entrance-exit survey data for this first application reveal that there has been an increase of 13.5 percentage points in criterion-score matching from 64.7% to 78.2% and a decrease in negative perception from 17.7% to 4.3%. Both the format and the scoresheet are registered with MyIPO, and together they offer commercialisation potential through licensing to schools and universities.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning; Communication Apprehension; DUO Public Speaking Format; Oral Communication Assessment; 21st-Century Skills

INTRODUCTION

Competitive public speaking has, for decades, been treated as a strictly solitary endeavour. Formats such as the prepared monologue, persuasive oratory, and impromptu speech all place a single speaker at the centre of the stage, judged on rhetorical force, vocal modulation, personal charisma, and the sheer ability to hold an audience alone. This paper presents the DUO Public Speaking Format, an innovation in teaching and learning in which contestants no longer take the stage by themselves. Instead, they prepare, construct, and jointly deliver one co-developed presentation, reframing public speaking from a broadcast model, where one person transmits to many, into a dialogue model, where two presenters engage each other while connecting with the audience together.

The format was not initiated for the competition. Instead, it began in the classroom, where students with weaker speaking ability struggled to perform an individual speech which is considered a pattern consistent with communication apprehension (Bodie, 2010; McCroskey, 1984). Pairing these students changed the picture: each partner compensated for the other, thus producing a stronger performance and significantly relieving the immense pressure the individual speakers had before. This is consistent with the studies demonstrating peer collaboration reduces anxiety and builds learners' confidence (An & Hien, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). The idea was later adapted and formalised for the International Intervarsity Public Speaking Competition 2026 (IIPSC 2026) under the name DUO Public Speaking Format. This is the point at which the format and a polished, designed scoresheet were implemented together live for the first time.

Problem Statement

Several recurring limitations of solo public speaking competitions motivate this format. First, a clear gap exists between traditional speech training and the demands of modern workplace presentations. Solo public speaking competitions continue to train contestants in isolation. However, three decades of employability research confirm that collaborative communication and teamwork are the most sought-after 21st-century skills for graduates (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). The second is simpler, where a single voice gets monotonous, since a solo presenter is stuck with one vocal register and one point of view.

Third is a blind spot in relational skill. Solo formats have no place for active listening or adaptability, and they offer no framework for recovery when a speaker stumbles. Before this innovation, no scoresheet existed to assess paired public speaking at all, as there was no formal instrument to score collaboration, balanced participation, or joint delivery in a competitive setting.

This gap can be stated more precisely. Existing public-speaking assessment rubrics, including those used in individual competitive-speech and debate contexts, typically evaluate content organisation, delivery, and language use for a single speaker performing alone (Schreiber, Paul, & Shibley, 2012). Cooperative-learning rubrics, in turn, tend to assess group process and shared outcomes without disaggregating an individual member's spoken delivery, language use, or presentation skill within a live performance (Conway, Kember, Sivan, & Wu, 1993). Neither tradition offers criteria for two speakers who jointly construct and deliver a single timed speech, for scoring team-level cohesion (e.g., transitions, shared framing) separately from each speaker's individual delivery, or for a dedicated balanced-participation criterion that discourages one partner from dominating the floor. What makes the DUO rubric unique is that it brings all three elements together in one paired-speech assessment: scores for the team, scores for each individual, and a check for balanced participation. Based on the authors' knowledge and research, no existing public-speaking rubric or cooperative-learning tool integrates all three elements within a single framework in this manner.

Objectives

This study aimed to develop and conduct a preliminary evaluation of the DUO Public Speaking Format and its purpose-built assessment rubric for collaborative public speaking. It specifically sought to:

1. develop a structured competition format for paired public speaking; and
2. conduct a preliminary evaluation of the clarity and usability of the proposed assessment rubric during its pilot implementation.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION & METHODOLOGY

This study follows a Design-Based Development approach with a Pilot Evaluation, comprising four phases: (1) Development, (2) Expert Validation, (3) Pilot Implementation, and (4) Reliability. All four phases were carried out for this first deployment, as detailed below.

Phase 1: Development

The DUO Public Speaking Format grew out of a practice-to-formalisation approach due to an informal classroom intervention that was converted, across two connected phases, into a fully scored competition format. After observing some students struggling with public speaking individually over the semesters for a course, the idea of a duo speech came about for rectification. In the first phase, students with weaker individual speaking skills were paired during lessons and asked to build and deliver a speech together, on the premise that peer collaboration reduces public speaking anxiety and increases confidence (An & Hien, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). A simple unofficial scoring tool was already designed at this stage to see whether paired delivery outperformed individual delivery. The second phase was to formalise the idea for the IIPSC 2026 through two linked design tasks: the competition procedure and the official assessment instrument.

In the competition, each duo gets three minutes to prepare and five minutes to deliver a speech on a randomly drawn topic, announced to the judges before they begin. Teams cannot consult any other person or outside source

(i.e. no devices, no internet) so that the response comes solely from the pair. A timekeeper marks the delivery with a bell: once at the start, once with 30 seconds left, and twice at time-out. Every team stays in the room until all teams have presented, and the adjudicators' decision is final. Teams are coached to build genuine dialogue, humour, and a clear closing resolution, so the format reads as a real two-person conversation rather than two solo speeches delivered side by side.

Phase 2: Expert Validation

Prior to deployment, the scoresheet underwent expert validation by a panel of three practitioners with relevant credentials in language education and competitive public speaking, drawn from teacher-training, state-level language-coaching, and school-based public-speaking coaching backgrounds. Across three successive rounds of discussion and review between the authors and the panels, the initial pool of items was evaluated for relevance, clarity, completeness, appropriateness, and alignment with collaborative public speaking; item wording, scoring bands, and the team/individual scoring split were revised iteratively based on their feedback. This process took the instrument from its initial draft to the finalised version administered at IIPSC 2026. A structured statistical content-validation index was not computed, and this is noted as a direction for future refinement of the instrument.

Phase 3: Pilot Implementation

Grounded in research, the rubrics improve the reliability of the assessment (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007) and it employs an analytic, criterion-referenced approach. The 148-point scoresheet is divided into four core domains: Content (50), Delivery (59), Language & Articulation (30), and Values & Attitudes (9). The rubrics enable adjudicators to assess both dimensions of the presentation through teamwork and individual performance criteria. Teamwork criteria focus on the extent to which speakers collaboratively develop and deliver the presentation, while the individual criteria evaluate each speaker's oral clarity, language proficiency, and enthusiasm in presenting the topic. This distinction allows for more comprehensive and specific evaluation and feedback, which Van Ginkel et al. (2017) emphasise as essential for developing oral presentation competencies. Additionally, a proprietary balanced-participation scoring criterion avoids any one of the parties hogging the speaking. When deployed initially at IIPSC 2026, the practical feasibility of the rubric was piloted with pre-/post- event surveys of participating speakers.

Phase 4: Reliability

The same three-member expert panels served as the panel of judges for the competition itself, independently scoring every participating pair against all scoresheet criteria at both the semi-final and final stages. The final score of each pair was the average of the three judges' independent scores, and rankings were derived from these averaged scores. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC(3,k)) and Cronbach's alpha across the three judges. Reliability was excellent at the semi-final stage (ICC(3,k) = .93, 95% CI [.82, .97]; α = .93, n = 15) and good at the final stage (ICC(3,k) = .85, 95% CI [.61, .95]; α = .85, n = 12). The modest decline between stages is consistent with a restriction-of-range effect, as weaker teams have already been eliminated before the final, compounded by one judge's comparatively stricter scoring. A full domain-level and component-level reliability analysis is reported in a companion manuscript focused specifically on the scoresheet's psychometric properties.

POTENTIAL FINDINGS & COMMERCIALISATION

Empirical Findings

Entrance-exit survey results back up the scoresheet's usability in a competitive setting. At the entrance point (n = 17), 64.7% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were already familiar with the scoresheet criteria after several mock practices, against 17.7% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Agreement rose sharply after the scoresheet briefing and small-group practice: at the exit point (n = 23), 87.0% agreed the briefing had clarified how presentations would be assessed, 82.6% agreed the small-group practice let them explore the new duo format, and 78.2% agreed they could now focus on specific scoresheet criteria to score better.

That is a 13.5 percentage-point rise in criterion-alignment agreement (64.7% to 78.2%), and the negative-perception rate dropped from 17.7% to 4.3% over the same period. Because the entrance group ($n = 17$) and the exit group ($n = 23$) were not the same matched respondents, this percentage-point difference should be read as a shift in aggregate perception across the event rather than a true paired pre-post comparison. Drawn from a single pilot deployment, these are preliminary findings, but they suggest the format and its scoresheet can be learned within a short briefing and practice session.

Commercialisation Potential

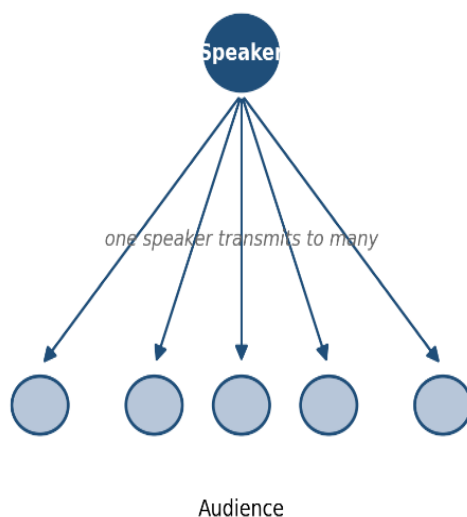
The DUO Public Speaking Format's name, its delivery method, and its purpose-built scoresheet are all registered as original works with the Intellectual Property Corporation of Malaysia (MyIPO). Since it is the first instrument built (three elements together in one paired-speech assessment:) specifically to score paired public speaking, complete with a ready-made, pilot-tested set of rules, scoresheet, and briefing protocol, it is well positioned for licensing to schools and universities looking to introduce a new inter-school or inter-varsity speaking category. Institutions that adopt it can present their competitions as pioneering platforms, while producing graduates whose combined communication and teamwork skills answer three decades of consistent employability demand (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023).

Impact on Students and Institutions

For students, the structure changes the concept of peer learning and mentorship. The preparation process is no longer held in isolation, as students are able to brainstorm, script, edit, and rehearse together. The act of being on stage with another person helps reduce their anxiety. Hence, it enables students to feel more encouraged and confident to compete. This echoes findings showing that peer-supported speaking practice lowers reported anxiety (An & Hien, 2024). Along the way, students get real practice in dynamic dialogue and collaboration under pressure, skills that will be carried over directly into boardrooms, policy forums, and cross-functional teams.

In the case of universities, using the format will allow them to frame a competition in the context of looking ahead by creating a new speech competition concept for the modern era and reducing the distance between theory and practice, concerning the need for skills in both communication and teamwork, which are among the top employability skills requested from job applicants in the last three decades (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). It will also allow students with different majors, origins, and language skills to be matched. This supports inclusivity and cross-cultural exchange on campus.

Traditional Model: Broadcast



DUOPublicSpeakingFormat: Dialogue

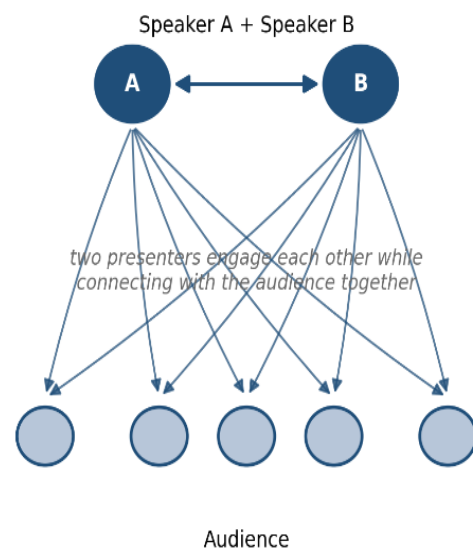


Figure 1: The DUO Public Speaking Format reframes public speaking from a broadcast model (one speaker to many) into a dialogue model (two presenters engaging with each other while connecting with the audience).

Table 1: The DUO Public Speaking Format scoresheet: domain weighting and scoring split

Domain	Weight	Team-scored elements	Individually scored elements
Content	50	Introduction; Conclusion	Body: organisation and clarity of explanation
Delivery	59	Smooth transitions and interaction; originality, balanced participation	Vocal variety; fluency and pronunciation; nonverbal communication; audience engagement; presenting without reading from text
Language & Articulation	30	Not scored at team level	Grammatical accuracy; appropriate expressions; use of connectives
Values & Attitudes	9	Time management	Appearance and attire

Novelty & Recommendations

The DUO Public Speaking Format redefines traditional oratory by integrating rhetoric with teamwork abilities and focusing on joint impact, instead of a sole endeavour. This aligns with foundational cooperative learning literature, which shows that structured interdependence produces the best academic and social results over individualistic endeavours (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). The framework's core innovation rests on its exclusive 148-point rubrics. The first assessment tool was developed specifically to analyse paired public speeches. It systematically unlinks its collaborative components (introductions, conclusions, and transitions) from individual parts (delivery, fluency, linguistic accuracy, and engagement), mandating balanced participation through a specific balanced-participation metric.

Three further strategic benefits follow. Partners can take complementary roles, producing multi-dimensional argumentation. For instance, one presents the data while the other frames the human narrative. A duo speech also demands mastery of conversational transitions, as precise timing and coordinated stage movement are required. This requires highly developed emotional intelligence, in which the speakers need to have the capacity to recognise and manage their own emotions and read their partner's (Goleman, 1995) since speakers must read a partner's energy and step in when needed in instances where a co-speaker misses a cue.

Table 2 Comparison of the traditional solo format and the DUO Public Speaking Format

Dimension	Traditional Solo Format	DUO Public Speaking Format
Focus	Individual rhetoric and delivery	Collaborative delivery and a shared thesis
Stage Dynamics	Linear: speaker to audience	Triangular: Speaker A and Speaker B interact, then reach the audience together
Cognitive Load	Internal memory and pacing oneself	Tracking one's own script and a partner's cues at once
Rhetorical Style	Monologue or linear persuasion	Dialogue, counterpoint, and synthesis of multiple perspectives
Key Skill Assessed	Self-reliance and solo charisma	Adaptability, synergy, and active listening

These findings are preliminary rather than conclusive. The entrance ($n = 17$) and exit ($n = 23$) samples come from a single-institution pilot, and 17.4% of participants remained neutral even after the briefing. Participant feedback points to a few improvements worth making in future iterations: a separate scoresheet discussion held before the briefing, a rubric cheat sheet or mock-scored video, and more facilitator time with each team during practice. Universities looking to strengthen collaborative communication among students are encouraged to adopt the format along with its scoring system and briefing process.

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