



# Final Presidential Debate Scorecard



## Presidential Debate

October 15, 2008

Hofstra University

Moderator: Bob Schieffer

A non-partisan evaluation from  
The Communication Center, Washington, D.C.

As we enter the home stretch of the Presidential campaign, the public is paying particular attention to the communication styles of Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates.

The Communication Center has steadfastly maintained a non-partisan approach to our communication consulting throughout our 25-year history, but we offer our "Candidate Communication Scorecard" as our way of participating in the excitement of the Presidential race.

It's our hope that by highlighting the communication triumphs and challenges of two talented communicators at the top of each party ticket, we can continue to offer counsel and encouragement to individuals interested in improving their abilities to become compelling communicators.

## Barack Obama

### Demeanor/ Delivery-

Sen. Obama is a calm and restrained communicator. In close quarters, such as last night's tableside debate, it can be difficult to remain focused on the answers as the questions come quickly and the issues get personal. Bob Schieffer did a great job as moderator, knowing exactly when to restate the questions and keep the

## John McCain

### Demeanor/ Delivery-

Senator McCain was obviously eager for the final debate, beginning the evening with high energy and becoming aggressive as the questions began. After Bob Schieffer told the candidates at the beginning "we've heard all the talking points, so let's try to tell people tonight some things that they haven't heard," Sen.

debate on the topic at hand, and when to let the two candidates go at it. Sen. Obama's demeanor seemed a bit flat at the beginning of the debate, but as the debate unfolded he gained confidence and appeared to be stronger in his final answers. And, as in previous debates, Sen. Obama demonstrated excellent listening skills.

### **Best Moments-**

Some of Sen. Obama's best moments were during the roughest criticism of his campaign. In the exchanges about his past associations or the negativity of his campaign, Sen. Obama skillfully redirected the discussion: "the American people have become so cynical about our politics, because all they see is a tit-for-tat and back-and-forth. And what they want is the ability to just focus on some really big challenges that we face right now."

### **Not So Best Moments-**

The issues facing this country are large and complicated, but in a debate format with quick exchanges and follow ups, long multi-pointed answers are not always necessary. Sen. Obama may have missed opportunities to connect more forcefully on a few issues by beginning with a mini lecture on his proposals. Every once in a while an anecdote, a startling statistic, or a recent conversation with a voter (i.e.: "Joe the plumber") can be an engaging way to address topics in ways that resonate with audiences.

### **Memorable Lines-**

While Sen. McCain was quick to point out he is not President Bush, Sen. Obama was ready for a comeback: "The fact of the matter is, is that if I occasionally mistake your policies for George Bush's policies, it's because on the core economic issues that matter to the American people, you have been a vigorous supporter of President Bush."

McCain complied and introduced the world to "Joe the plumber," a man who wanted to start his own business. Sen. McCain seemed to learn his lesson from previous debates about his listening demeanor because at first, he looked directly at his opponent. Unfortunately, as the debate wore on, he often looked down at his notes which did not play well on split screen shots.

### **Best Moments-**

"Joe the plumber" was the 4th person at the debate table. Kudos to Sen. McCain for putting a face (or at least a name) on the economic concerns being felt by Americans across the country. Complicated issues can be expressed in simple terms if done the right way. "Joe the Plumber" quickly became an economic touchstone for both candidates, offering a way to see the difference in their philosophies.

### **Not So Best Moments-**

Sen. McCain's sarcastic comments sometimes looked petty and distracted from the issues being discussed. We count two occasions where Sen. McCain could not resist the angry jab: (free trade) "Free trade with Columbia is something that's a no-brainer. But maybe you ought to travel down there and visit them and maybe you could understand it a lot better." (school vouchers) "Because there's not enough vouchers, therefore, we shouldn't do it, even though it's working. I got it."

### **Memorable Lines-**

Sen. McCain must have been waiting for just the right moment to utter this memorable line: "Senator Obama, I am not President Bush. If you wanted to run against President Bush, you should have run four years ago. I'm going to give a new direction to this economy in this country."

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Led by Susan Peterson, a veteran network correspondent for CBS and NBC News, The Communication Center is a nationally recognized leader in communication coaching and consulting since 1983. Our expert team of coaches and consultants deliver highly interactive, custom-designed media and presentation coaching across the country.

For more details, Susan Peterson is available for interviews. Contact: Jeff Strei at [jstrei@comcast.net](mailto:jstrei@comcast.net) or Alaina Goldense at (202)463.0505 [agoldense@thecommunicationcenter.com](mailto:agoldense@thecommunicationcenter.com)



**The  
Communication  
Center®**

**The Communication Center**  
1612 K Street, NW  
Washington, District of Columbia 20006  
202-463-0505