



Presidential Debate Scorecard



Presidential Debate

September 26, 2008

Oxford, Mississippi

Moderator: Jim Lehrer

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.

Obama

Best Moment-

Sen. Obama appeared more organized and comfortable talking about the economic troubles facing the country, allowing him to get off to a good start. Like Sen. McCain, he was the most forceful and passionate when responding directly to charges made by his opponent - which happened often during foreign policy questions.

McCain

Best Moment-

Sen. McCain appeared to gain momentum and confidence as the debate unfolded into questions of foreign policy. He seemed the most comfortable and at his best when giving personal anecdotes about his travels abroad and meetings with foreign leaders.

Not Best Moment -

No major gaffes by either candidate in the first debate. Sen. Obama was so diplomatic he may have hurt his answers by agreeing with his opponent on key points. We also question his strategy of always referring to his opponent by his first name, John.

Messaging-

Sen. Obama seemed well-prepared for this debate with 2, 3, and 4-point answers ready for some of the key topics pitched to the candidates by Jim Lehrer. Sen. Obama's key themes throughout the questioning: linking Sen. McCain to the Bush policies of the past eight years, and citing the need for change. By our count, more than half a dozen answers included the phrases "As president, I will..."

Delivery-

Many of the answers were delivered directly into the camera in an attempt to connect to the millions of viewers. Sen. Obama's speaking style may be better suited to a formal speech, but he did a good job balancing counter points to Sen. McCain's answers and getting to his own prepared talking points.

Demeanor-

Sen. Obama is a thoughtful, controlled speaker coming across as businesslike but less personable. He interrupted Sen. McCain more often than he was interrupted, especially during the foreign policy discussions. Sen. Obama obviously wanted to project strength and toughness on foreign policy, becoming the most animated during discussion on Iraq and Russia.

Memorable Lines-

Not Best Moment-

Humor is always a tricky element in a serious setting. Sen. McCain is known for a terrific sense of humor and he made some attempts to enter a little humor into the debate. However, asking the moderator if he was afraid that he "couldn't hear" his opponent as well as a reference to a bear/DNA example of misused funds fell flat.

Messaging-

Sen. McCain's key messages were clear throughout the evening: He's prepared to be commander-in-chief, and his opponent is not. Several times throughout the evening Sen. McCain said his opponent "didn't understand" an issue or was naive in his outlook. Sen. McCain was also eager to point out his support for the "surge" in Iraq - an issue he uses to not only highlight his military expertise, but also his image as a maverick lawmaker willing to embrace unpopular stances.

Delivery-

Sen. McCain enjoys the give-and-take of a debate and it showed during the more animated exchanges on foreign policy issues. He ended one answer responding to Sen. Obama's policy on meeting with foreign leaders by exclaiming "Oh, please." Sen. McCain's speaking style can often come across as choppy. He is at his best when telling stories, not explaining policy.

Demeanor-

Often the most revealing moments during a debate are when the candidates are listening, not talking. Sen. McCain spent most of his listening time not looking at his opponent but staring down at the lectern with a grin or a grimace. His impatience showed during moments he shifted his weight from foot to foot waiting for his time to respond.

Memorable Lines-

One of the more memorable moments was when Sen. Obama attacked Sen. McCain for his positions on Iraq, repeating each time: "You were wrong." The cadence made him appear strong and confident.

One of the memorable moments came during Sen. McCain's closing remarks when he talked about the advantages to "experience and knowledge and judgment" and "I don't think I need any on the job training."



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 or Alaina Goldense at (202)463.0505 agoldense@thecommunicationcenter.com



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