

Chapter 1: The Basics of Public Speaking



Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Define public speaking, channel, feedback, noise, encode, decode, symbol, denotative, and connotative;
- Explain what distinguishes public speaking from other modes of communication;
- List the elements of the communication process;
- Explain the origins of anxiety in public speaking;
- Apply some strategies for dealing with personal anxiety about public speaking;
- Discuss why public speaking is part of the curriculum at this college and important in personal and professional life.

Chapter Preview

1.1 – What is Public Speaking?

1.2 – Anxiety and Public Speaking

1.3 – Understanding the Process of Public Speaking

1.4 – The Value of Public Speaking in Your Life

1.5 – Getting Started in Public Speaking

1.1 – What is Public Speaking?

What is your mental picture when you think about “public speaking?” The President of the United States delivering an inaugural address? A sales representative seeking to persuade clients in a board room? Your minister, priest, or rabbi presenting a sermon at a worship service? Your professor lecturing? A dramatic courtroom scene, probably from *Law & Order*? Politicians debating before an election? A comedian doing stand-up at a night club?

All of these and more are instances of public speaking. Be assured that public speaking takes many forms every day in our country and across the world. Now let’s get personal: Do you see yourself as a public speaker? And when you do, do you see yourself as confident, prepared, and effective? Or do you see a person who is nervous, unsure of what to say, and feeling as if they are failing to get their message across?

You find yourself in this Fundamentals of Speech course and probably have mixed emotions. More than likely, it is required for graduation in your major. Perhaps you have taken a formal public speaking course before. Although they are not as common in secondary education as in colleges (Education Commission of the States, 2015), public speaking instruction may have been part of your high school experience. Maybe you competed in debate or individual speaking events or you have acted in plays. These activities can help you in this course, especially in terms of confidence and delivery.

On the other hand, it might be that the only public speaking experience you have had felt like a failure and therefore left you embarrassed and wanting to forget it and stay far away from public speaking. It might have been years ago, but the feeling still stays with you. This class is not something you have been looking forward to, and you may have put it off. Maybe your attitude is, “Let’s just get it over with.” You might think that it’s just another course you have to “get through” in order to study your major—what really interests you—and start a career in your field.

These are all understandable emotions because, as you have probably heard or read, polls indicate public speaking is one of the things Americans fear the most. As Jerry Seinfeld has said in his stand-up comedy routine,

According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.

While it is a stretch to think that most people fear death less than giving a short speech, aversion toward public speaking situations and tasks is common.

Before we go any further, though, what do we mean by “public speaking?” The most obvious answer is “talking in front of a group of people.” For the purposes of this class and this book, public speaking is more formal than that. **Public speaking** is an organized, face-to-face, prepared, intentional (purposeful) attempt to inform, entertain, or persuade a group of people (usually five or more) through words, physical delivery, and (at times) visual or audio aids. In almost all cases, the speaker is the focus of attention for a specific amount of time. There still may be some back-and-forth interaction, such as questions and answers with the audience, but the speaker usually holds the responsibility to direct that interaction either during or after the prepared speech has concluded.

As Stephen A. Lucas (2015) has written, public speaking is an “enlarged conversation,” and as such it has some similarities to conversations but some major differences, too. As a conversation, it has elements of:

- awareness of and sensitivity toward your audience (in this case, more than one person);
- an exchange of explicit messages about content (facts, ideas, information) and less explicit ones about relationship (how you relate to one another, such as trust, liking, respect); [this content/relationship dichotomy will come up again in this book and is characteristic of all communication];
- a dependence on feedback to know if you are successful in being understood (usually nonverbal in public speaking, but still present);
- the fact that the public speaking communication is (almost always) face-to-face rather than mediated (through a computer, telephone, mass media, or writing).

As an “enlarged conversation” public speaking needs to be more purposeful (to entertain, inform, or persuade); highly organized with certain formal elements (introduction and clear main points, for example); and usually dependent on resources outside of your personal experience (research to support your ideas).

Of course, the delivery would have to be “enlarged” or “projected” as well—louder, more fluid, and more energetic, depending on the size and type of room in which you are speaking—and you will be more conscious of the correctness and formality of your language. You might say, “That sucks” in a conversation but are less likely to do in front of a large audience in certain situations. If you can keep in mind the basic principle that public speaking is formalized communication with an audience designed to achieve mutual understanding for mutual benefit (like a conversation),

Public speaking

an organized, face-to-face, prepared, intentional (purposeful) attempt to inform, entertain, or persuade a group of people (usually five or more) through words, physical delivery, and (at times) visual or audio aids.

rather than a “performance,” you will be able to relate to your audience on the human and personal level.

1.2 – Anxiety and Public Speaking

Why are so many people afraid of public speaking? This is a complex question, and the answer is tied to many personal and psychological factors such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, past experience, training, culture, and context. The term “**glossophobia**,” combining the two Greek words for “tongue” and “fear or dread,” has been coined to refer to

Glossophobia

a severe fear of public speaking

...a severe fear of public speaking. People who suffer from glossophobia tend to freeze in front of any audience, even a couple of people. They find their mouth dries up, their voice is weak and their body starts shaking. They may even sweat, go red and feel their heart thumping rapidly. (“Do You Suffer From Glossophobia?,” 2015)

This fear may be in situations such as responding to a professor in class or having to interact with a stranger, not just giving formal speeches as this book is addressing.

For many people, fear of public speaking or being interviewed for a job does not rise to the level of a true “phobia” in psychological terms. A phobia is defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV* as a state where someone experiences “significant and persistent fear when in the presence of, or anticipating the presence of, the object of fear, which may be an object, place or situation” (Grohol, 2013). They are just uncomfortable in public speaking situations and need strategies for addressing the task.

Why Anxiety and Public Speaking?

Scholars at the University of Wisconsin-Stout (“Public Speaking Anxiety,” 2015) explain that anxiety in public speaking can result from one of several misperceptions:

- “all or nothing” thinking—a mindset that if your speech falls short of “perfection” (an unrealistic standard), then you are a failure as a public speaker;
- overgeneralization—believing that a single event (such as failing at a task) is a universal or “always” event; and
- fortune telling—the tendency to anticipate that things will turn out badly, no matter how much practice or rehearsal is done.

Likewise, many new college students operate under the false belief that intelligence and skill are “fixed.” In their minds, a person is either smart or skilled in something, or she is not. Some students apply this false belief to math and science subjects, saying things like “I’m just no good at math

and I never will be,” or even worse, “I guess I am just not smart enough to be in college.” As you can tell, these beliefs can sabotage someone’s college career. Also unfortunately, the same kind of false beliefs are applied to public speaking, and people conclude that because public speaking is hard, they are just not “natural” at it and have no inborn skill. They give up on improving and avoid public speaking at all costs.



Modern research by Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck (2007) and others shows that intelligence and related skills are “malleable,” meaning that they are open to change and growth. Understanding and accepting that your intelligence and skill in different areas is not fixed or “stuck,” but open to growth, will have a significant influence on your success in life. It will also help you see that just because learning a subject or task is hard does not mean you are not good at it. Obstacles and barriers that make learning hard are opportunities for growth, not “getting off places.”

There is more to Dr. Dweck’s research. I would recommend her book *Mindset*. Many students enter a public speaking class thinking “I’m just not good at this and never will be,” just like some students feel about college algebra or science. Dr. Dweck and other learning psychologists show that learning a new skill might be hard work, but the difficulty is not a sign that learning is impossible.

Along with the wrong way of thinking about one’s learning and growth, two other fears contribute to anxiety in public speaking. The first is fear of failure. This fear can result from several sources: real or perceived bad experiences involving public speaking in the past, lack of preparation, lack of knowledge about public speaking, not knowing the context, and uncertainty about one’s task as a public speaker (such as being thrown into a situation at the last minute).

It is not the goal of this book to belittle that fear. It is real and justified to some extent, because you might lack understanding of the public speaking task or lack good speaking experiences upon which to build. One of the goals and fringe benefits of this course is that you are not just going to learn about public speaking, but you are going to do it—at least four or five times—with a real audience. You will overcome some of your fears and feel that you have accomplished something of personal benefit.

The second fear is fear of rejection of one's self or one's ideas. This one is more serious in some respects. You may feel rejection because of fear of failure, or you may feel that the audience will reject your ideas, or worse, you as a person. Knowing how to approach the public speaking task and explain your ideas can help. However, you should ask yourself deep and probing questions as to why you believe that your audience will reject you *because this fear is rooted in a belief*. You should ask yourself what possibly false belief is causing your anxiety.

One of the core attitudes an effective and ethical public speaker must have is respect for and empathy with the audience. Your audience in this class is your peers who want to learn and want to get through the class successfully (just like you do). Your audience also includes your instructor who wants to see you succeed in the course as well. Believe me, public speaking teachers get a lot of pleasure from hearing successful student speeches! Your audience wants you to succeed if for no other reason than a good speech is much easier and pleasant to listen to than a poor one! Again, gaining practice in this class with a real, live audience can help you work through the roots of your fear of rejection.

Beyond dealing with the root fears that may cause you to have a “fright or flight” response when it comes to public speaking, there are some practical answers to dealing with fears about public speaking. Of course, fear responses can be reduced if you know how public speaking works, as you will see throughout this textbook. But there are some other strategies, and all of them have to do with preparation.

Addressing Public Speaking Anxiety

Mental Preparation

If your neighbor's house were on fire, getting to the phone to call the fire department would be your main concern. You would want to get the address right and express the urgency. That is admittedly an extreme example, but the point is about focus. To mentally prepare, you want to put your focus where it belongs, on the audience and the message. Mindfulness and full attention to the task are vital to successful public speaking. If you are concerned about a big exam or something personal going on in your life, your mind will be divided and add to your stress.

The main questions to ask yourself are “Why am I so anxiety-ridden about giving a presentation?” and “What is the worst that can happen?” For example, you probably won’t know most of your classmates at the beginning of the course, adding to your anxiety. By midterm, you should be developing relationships with them and be able to find friendly faces in the audience. However, very often we make situations far worse in our minds than they actually are, and we can lose perspective. One of the authors tells her students, “Some of you have been through childbirth and even through military service . That is much worse than public speaking!” Your instructor will probably try to help you get to know your classmates and minimize the “unknowns” that can cause you worry.

Physical preparation

The first step in physical preparation is adequate sleep and rest. You might be thinking such a thing is impossible in college, where sleep deprivation and late nights come with the territory. However, research shows the extreme effects a lifestyle of limited sleep can have, far beyond yawning or dozing off in class (Mitru, Millrood, & Mateika, 2002). As far as public speaking is concerned, your energy level and ability to be alert and aware during the speech will be affected by lack of sleep.

Secondly, you would be better off to eat something that is protein-based rather than processed sugar-based before speaking. In other words, cheese or peanut butter on whole grain toast, Greek yogurt, or eggs for breakfast rather than a donut and soft drink. Some traditionalists also discourage the drinking of milk because it is believed to stimulate mucus production, but this has not been scientifically proven (Lai & Kardos, 2013).

A third suggestion is to wear clothes that you know you look good in and are comfortable but also meet the context’s requirements (that is, your instructor may have a dress code for speech days). Especially, wear comfortable shoes that give you a firm base for your posture. Flip-flops and really high heels may not fit these categories.

A final suggestion for physical preparation is to utilize some stretching or relaxation techniques that will loosen your limbs or throat. Essentially, your emotions want you to run away but the social system says you must stay, so all that energy for running must go somewhere. The energy might go to your legs, hands, stomach, sweat glands, or skin, with undesirable physical consequences. Tightening and stretching your hands, arms, legs, and throat for a few seconds before speaking can help release some of the tension. Your instructor may be able to help you with these exercises, or you can find some on the Internet.

Contextual preparation

The more you can know about the venue where you will be speaking, the better. For this class, of course, it will be your classroom, but for other situations where you might experience “communication apprehension,” you should check out the space beforehand or get as much information as possible. For example, if you were required to give a short talk for a job interview, you would want to know what the room will be like, if there is equipment for projection, how large the audience will be, and the seating arrangements. If possible, you will want to practice your presentation in a room that is similar to the actual space where you will deliver it.

The best advice for contextual preparation is to be on time, even early. If you have to rush in at the last minute, as so many students do, you will not be mindful, focused, or calm for the speech. Even more, if you are early, you can make sure equipment is working, and can converse with the audience as they enter. Professional speakers often do this to relax themselves, build credibility, and gain knowledge to adapt their presentations to the audience. Even if you don’t want to “schmooze,” being on time will help you create a good first impression and thus enhance your credibility before the actual speech.



Speech preparation

Procrastination, like lack of sleep, seems to just be part of the college life. Sometimes we feel that we just don’t get the best ideas until the last minute. Writing that essay for literature class at 3:00 a.m. just may work for you. However, when it comes to public speaking, there are some definite reasons you would not want to do that. First, of course, if you are finishing up your outline at 3:00 a.m. and have a 9:00 speech, you are going to be tired and unable to focus. Second, your instructor may require you to turn in your outline several days ahead of the speech date. However, the main reason is that public speaking requires active, oral, repeated practice before the actual delivery.

You do not want the first time that you say the words to be when you are in front of your audience. Practicing is the only way that you will feel confident, fluent, and in control of the words you speak. Practicing (and timing yourself) repeatedly is also the only way that you will be assured that your speech meets the assignment's time limits, and speaking within the expected time limits is a cardinal rule of public speaking. You may think your speech is five minutes long but it may end up being ten minutes the first time you practice it—or only two minutes!

Your practicing should be out loud, standing up, with shoes on, with someone to listen, if possible (other than your dog or cat), and with your visual aids. If you can record yourself and watch it, that is even better. If you do record yourself, make sure you record yourself from the feet up—or at least the hips up—so you can see your body language. The need for oral practice will be emphasized over and over in this book and probably by your instructor. As you progress as a speaker, you will always need to practice but perhaps not to the extent you do as a novice speaker.

As hard as it is to believe,

YOU NEVER LOOK AS NERVOUS AS YOU FEEL.

You may feel that your anxiety is at level seventeen on a scale of one to ten, but the audience does not perceive it the same way. They may perceive it at a three or four or even less. That's not to say they won't see any signs of your anxiety and that you don't want to learn to control it, only that what you are feeling inside is not as visible as you might think. This principle relates back to focus. If you know you don't look as nervous as you feel, you can focus and be mindful of the message and audience rather than your own emotions.

Also, you will probably find that your anxiety decreases throughout the class (Finn, Sawyer, & Schrod, 2009). [In her Ted Talk video](#), Harvard Business School social psychologist Amy Cuddy discusses nonverbal communication and suggests that instead of “faking it until you make it,” that you can, and should, “fake it until you become it.” She shares research that shows how our behavior affects our mindsets, not just the other way around. Therefore, the act of giving the speech and “getting through it” will help you gain confidence. Interestingly, Dr. Cuddy directs listeners to strike a “power pose” of strong posture, feet apart, hands on hips or stretched over head to enhance confidence.

Final Note: If you are an audience member, you can help the speaker with his/her anxiety, at least a little bit. Mainly, be an engaged listener from beginning to end. You can imagine that a speaker is going to be more nervous if the audience looks bored from the start. A speaker with less anxiety is going to do a better job and be more interesting. Of course, do not walk into class during your classmates' speeches, or get up and leave. In addition to being rude, it pulls their minds away from their message

and distracts the audience. Your instructor will probably have a policy on this behavior, too, as well as a dress code and other expectations on speech days. There are good reasons for these policies, so respect them.

1.3 - Understanding the Process of Public Speaking

Earlier it was stated that public speaking is like an enlarged or projected conversation. Conversation and public speaking are two forms of human communication, of which there are also small group communication, organizational communication, mass communication, and intercultural communication. All human communication is a process composed of certain necessary elements:

- People (often referred to as senders and receivers);
- context;
- message;
- channel;
- noise;
- feedback; and
- outcome.

With all these elements working together, the act of communication can be very complex. The famous German philosopher Johann Goethe said that if we understood how complex communication really is, we probably would not attempt it! Perhaps here we can demystify some of it. Communication is a process, not a singular event. Later we will look at models of communication, which can be helpful for understanding communication but are basically snapshots because a model cannot capture the dynamic process of communication. A simple, basic definition of **communication** is “sharing meaning between two or more people.” Beyond a definition, we can break it down into its part or components and examine each.

Communication

sharing meaning
between two or more
people

Human communication first involves **people**. That is pretty obvious, but we do not want to be so focused on the message or channel that we forget that people are at the center of communication. In public speaking it is common to call one person (the speaker) the “sender” and the audience the “receiver(s),” but in the real world it is not always as simple as that. Sometimes the speaker initiates the message, but other times the speaker is responding to the audience’s initiation. It is enough to say that sender and receiver exchange roles sometimes and both are as necessary as the other to the communication process.

Human communication and public speaking secondly requires **context**. Context has many levels, and there are several “contexts” going on at the same time in any communication act. These contexts can include:

- Historical, or what has gone on between the sender(s) and receiver(s) before the speech. The historical elements can be positive or negative, recent or further back in time. In later chapters we will see that these past events can influence the speaker's credibility with the audience, as well as their understanding.
- Cultural, which sometimes refers to the country where someone was born and raised but can also include ethnic, racial, religious, and regional cultures or co-cultures. Culture is defined (Floyd, 2017) as “the system of learned and shared symbols, language, values, and norms that distinguish one group of people from another.”
- Social, or what kind of relationship the sender(s) and receiver(s) are involved in, such as teacher-student, co-workers, employer-employee, or members of the same civic organization, faith, profession, or community.
- Physical, which involves where the communication is taking place and the attributes of that location. The physical context can have cultural meaning (a famous shrine or monument) that influences the form and purpose of the communication, or attributes that influence audience attention (temperature, seating arrangements, or external noise).

Culture

the system of learned and shared symbols, language, values, and norms that distinguish one group of people from another

Each one of these aspects of context bears upon how we behave as a communicator and specifically a public speaker.

Third, human communication of any kind involves a **message**. That message may be informal and spontaneous, such as small talk with a seatmate on a plane, conversing for no other reason than to have someone to talk to and be pleasant. On the other hand, it might be very formal, intentional, and planned, such as a commencement address or a speech in this course. In this textbook all the chapters will be devoted to the creation of that formal message, but that does not diminish the importance of the other elements. The message is a product of all of them.

Fourth, public speaking, like all communication, requires a **channel**. We think of channel in terms of television or something like a waterway (The English Channel). Channel is how the message gets from sender to receiver. In interpersonal human communication, we see each other and hear each other, in the same place and time. In mediated or mass communication, some sort of machine or technology (tool) comes between the people—phone, radio, television, printing press and paper, or computer.

Channel

the means through which a message gets from sender to receiver

The face-to-face channel adds to the immediacy and urgency of public speaking, but it also means that physical appearance and delivery can affect the receiver(s) positively and negatively. It also means that public speaking is linear in time and we do not always get a “redo” or “do-over.” This element of channel influence structure, transitions, and language choices, which are discussed later in the book.

Feedback

direct or indirect messages sent from an audience (receivers) back to the original sender of the message

The fifth element of human communication is **feedback**, which in public speaking is usually nonverbal, such as head movement, facial expressions, laughter, eye contact, posture, and other behaviors that we use to judge audience involvement, understanding, and approval. These types of feedback can be positive (nodding, sitting up, leaning forward, smiling) or less than positive (tapping fingers, fidgeting, lack of eye contact, checking devices).

Can you think of some others that would indicate the audience is either not engaged in, confused about, or dis-approving of the message or speaker? Feedback is important because we use it in all communication encounters to evaluate our effectiveness and to decide the next step to take in the specific communication interaction. For example, a quizzical expression may mean we should explain ourselves again. Someone's turning away from us is interpreted as disapproval, avoidance, or dismissal.



These examples are all of nonverbal feedback, which is most common in public speaking. There are times when verbal feedback from the audience is appropriate. You may stop and entertain questions about your content, or the audience may fill out a comment card at the end of the speech. You should stay in control of the verbal feedback, however, so that the audience does not feel as if they can interrupt you during the speech.

Noise

anything that disrupts, interrupts, or interferes with the communication process

The sixth element of human communication is **noise**, which might be considered interruptions or interference. Some amount of noise is almost always present due to the complexity of human behavior and context. There are just so many things that can come into the communication process to obscure the messages being sent. Some of the ways that noise can be classified include:

- Contextual – something in the room or physical environment keeps them from attending to or understanding a message
- Physical – the receiver(s)' health affects their understanding of the message, or the sender's physical state affects her ability to be clear and have good delivery.
- Psychological – the receiver(s) or sender(s) have stress, anxiety, past experience, personal concerns, or some other psychological issue that prevents the audience from receiving an intended message.

This short list of three types of noise is not exhaustive, but it is enough to point out that many things can “go wrong” in a public speaking situation, enough to make us agree with Mr. Philosopher Goethe. However, the reason for studying public speaking is to become aware of the potential for these limitations or “noise” factors, to determine if they could happen during your speech, and take care of them. Some of them are preventable; for example, ones related to physical context can be taken care of ahead of time. Others can be addressed directly; for example, if you know the audience is concerned about a recent event, you can bring it up and explain how it relates to your topic.

The final element of the communication process is **outcome** or result, which means a change in either the audience or the context. For example, if you ask an audience to consider becoming bone marrow donors, there are certain outcomes. They will either have more information about the subject and feel more informed; they will disagree with you; they will take in the information but do nothing about the topic; and/or they will decide it's a good idea to become a donor and go through the steps to do so. If they become potential donors, they will add to the pool of existing donors and perhaps save a life. Thus, either they have changed or the social context has changed, or both. This change feeds back into the communication process.

It is common for textbooks on public speaking and communication to provide models of the communication process, depicting the relationship of these factors. There are several varieties of such models, some of which are considered foundational to the field of communication (such as Shannon and Weaver's original linear, transmissional model from 1949) and some more recent ones. One model that focuses more on the process is the transactional model of communication. In it, the emphasis is more on the relationship between the communicators and co-meanings created between them. This textbook depends on a transactional model. If you go to Google images and search for “models of communication,” you will find many. You can also see an example of a communication model specific to public speaking in Figure 9.2 of this book.

What these models have in common is the idea of process in time. They also will often use the word **encode** to express the process of the sender

Encode

the process of the sender putting his/her thoughts and feelings into words or other symbols

Decode

the process of the listener or receiver understanding the words and symbols of a message and making meaning of them

putting his/her thoughts and feelings into words or other symbols. Models also use the word **decode** to express the process of the listener or receiver understanding those words and symbols and making meaning of them for him- or herself personally. Models of communication attempt to show the interplay of the many elements that take place in the communication act.

Em Griffin (1987), a professor of communication at Wheaton College and author of several textbooks, compares the communication process to three games, dependent on one's theory of how it works. Some think of communication like bowling, where the speaker throws a message at an audience in order to knock them down. The audience does not really respond or have very much to say about the act; they only react. Some think of communication like table tennis (ping-pong); there is back and forth between the participants, but the goal is to win. Griffin says the better game metaphor is charades, or Pictionary®, where a team together tries to understand meaning and one player has to make many attempts to get the team to guess the right answer. It is collaborative and involves trial and error. Models of communication that show the value of feedback in recalibrating the message are like the image of charades. An ethical speaker sees public speaking as more than attacking the audience and more than winning.

Symbol

a word, icon, picture, object, or number that is used to stand for or represent a concept, thing, or experience

Denotative

the objective or literal meaning shared by most people using the word

Additionally, communication is referred to a symbolic process. In this context, a **symbol** is a word, icon, picture, object, or number that is used to stand for or represent a concept, thing, or experience. Symbols almost always have more than one specific meaning or concept they represent. A flag, for example, is a symbol of a country or political unit, but it also represents the history, culture, and feelings that people in that country experience about various aspects of the culture.

The word “car” or “automobile” represents a machine with four tires, windows, metal body, internal combustion engine, and so on, but it also represents personal, individual experiences and associations with cars. We call this difference **denotative** (the objective or literal meaning shared by most people using the word) and the **connotative** (the subjective, cultural, or personal meaning the word evokes in people together or individually). One of the authors and her husband recently visited the National Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Nothing like a car museum shows that “car” has deep and broad cultural meanings beyond metal, rubber, and glass.

Connotative

the subjective or personal meaning the word evokes in people together or individually

Now that we have looked at the process of communication, let's apply it to public speaking. The speaker originates and creates a structured message and sends it through the visual/oral channel using symbols and nonverbal means to the audience members as a group, who provide (mostly nonverbal) feedback. The speaker and audience may or may not be aware of the types of interference or noise that exist, and the speaker may try to deal with them. As a result of the public speaking, the audience's minds, emotions, and/or actions are affected, and possibly the speaker's as well.

Public speaking as an art form and a social force has been around a long time. Marcus Cicero (106-43 B.C. E.) was the most renowned politician, orator, and advocate of rhetoric in the late Roman Republic. For centuries he was considered the role model for aspiring public speakers. He discussed the process of public speaking in a unique way, proposing that a speaker go through the “canons (laws) of rhetoric” to create a speech. These steps are:

1. invention (creating content),
2. disposition (organization and logic of arguments),
3. style (choosing the right level and quality of vocabulary),
4. memory (actually, memorizing famous speeches to learn good public speaking technique), and
5. delivery (nonverbal communication).

This book will take this same basic approach as the canons of rhetoric in helping you walk through the process of constructing a presentation.

1.4 – The Value of Public Speaking in Your Life

Despite the long history of public speaking, dating back to at least 500 BCE, it is not unusual for students to question why this course is included in the curriculum of their major. You might have put it off or be taking it in your first semester. You might believe that it will have little use in your future career. The actual experience of completing the course may change your mind, and we would encourage you to do some research on our own about the question of how public speaking fits into your career. Perhaps you could talk to some professionals in your future career field, or perhaps your instructor will discuss this in class or assign a short speech about it.

However, here are three reasons why you can benefit from this course. First, public speaking is one of the major communication skills desired by employers. Employers are frequently polled regarding the skills they most want employees to possess, and communication is almost always in the top three (Adams, 2014). Of course, “communication skills” is a broad term and involves a number of abilities such as team leadership, clear writing in business formats, conflict resolution, interviewing, and listening. However, public speaking is one of those sought-after skills, even in fields where the entry-level workers may not do much formal public speaking. Nurses give training presentations to parents of newborn babies; accountants advocate for new software in their organizations; managers lead team meetings.

If you are taking this class at the beginning of your college career, you will benefit in your other future classes from the research, organizational, and presentational skills learned here. According to the National Survey on Student Engagement, college freshmen tend to think they will not be giving many presentations in college classes, but that is wishful thinking. Different kinds of presentations will be common in your upcoming classes.

Another reason for taking a public speaking course is the harder-to-measure but valuable personal benefits. As an article on the USA Today College website states, a public speaking course can help you be a better, more informed and critical listener; it can “encourage you to voice your ideas and take advantage of the influence you have;” and it gives you an opportunity to face a major fear you might have in a controlled environment (Mas-sengale, 2014). Finally, the course can attune you to the power of public speaking to change the world. Presentations that lead to changes in laws, policies, leadership, and culture happen every day, all over the world.

1.5 – Getting Started in Public Speaking

To finish this first chapter, let’s close with some foundational principles about public speaking, which apply no matter the context, audience, topic, or purpose.

Timing is everything

We often hear this about acting or humor. In this case, it has to do with keeping within the time limits. As mentioned before, you can only know that you are within time limits by practicing and timing yourself; being within time limits also shows preparation and forethought. More importantly, being on time (or early) for the presentation and within time limits shows respect for your audience.

Public speaking requires muscle memory

If you have ever learned a new sport, especially in your teen or adult years, you know that you must consciously put your body through some training to get it used to the physical activity of the sport. An example is golf. A golf swing, unlike swinging a baseball bat, is not a natural movement and requires a great deal of practice, over and over, to get right. Pick up any golf magazine and there will be at least one article on “perfecting the swing.” In fact, when done incorrectly, the swing can cause severe back and knee problems over time.

Public speaking is a physical activity as well. You are standing and sometimes moving around; your voice, eye contact, face, and hands are involved. You will expend physical energy, and after the speech you may be tired. Even more, your audience’s understanding and acceptance of your message may depend somewhat on how energetic, controlled, and fluid your physical delivery. Your credibility as a speaker hinges to some extent on these matters. Consequently, learning public speaking means you must train your body to be comfortable and move in predictable and effective ways.

Public speaking involves a content and relationship dimension

You may have heard the old saying, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” According to Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967), all human communication has two elements going on at the same time: content and relationship. There are statements about ideas, facts, and information, and there are messages communicated about the relationship between the communication partners, past and present. These relationship messages have to do with trust, respect, and credibility, and are conveyed through evidence, appeals, wording (and what the speaker does not say) as well as nonverbal communication.

That said, public speaking is not a good way to provide a lot of facts and data to your audience. In fact, there are limits to how much information you can pile on your audience before listening is too difficult for them. However, public speaking is a good way to make the information meaningful for your audience. You can use a search engine with the term “Death by PowerPoint” and find lots of humorous, and too true, cartoons of audiences overwhelmed by charts, graphs, and slides full of text. In the case, less is more. This “less as more” principle will be re-emphasized throughout this textbook.

Emulation is the sincerest form of flattery

Learn from those who do public speaking well, but find what works best for you. Emulation is not imitation or copying someone; it is following a general model. Notice what other speakers do well in a speech and try to incorporate those strategies. An example is humor. Some of us excel at using humor, or some types of it. Some of us do not, or do not believe we do, no matter how hard we try. In that case, you may have to find other strengths to becoming an effective speaker.

Know your strengths and weaknesses

Reliable personality inventories, such as the Myers Briggs or the Gallup StrengthsQuest tests, can be helpful in knowing your strengths and weaknesses. One such area is whether you are an extravert or introvert. Introverts (about 40% of the population) get their psychological energy from being alone while extraverts tend to get it from being around others. This is a very basic distinction and there is more to the two categories, but you can see how an extravert may have an advantage with public speaking. However, the extravert may be tempted not to prepare and practice as much because he or she has so much fun in front of an audience, while the introvert may overprepare but still feel uncomfortable. Your public speaking abilities will benefit from increased self-awareness about such characteristics and your strengths. (For an online self-inventory about introversion and extraversion, go to <http://www.quietrev.com/the-introvert-test/>)

Remember the Power of Story

Stories and storytelling, in the form of anecdotes and narrative illustrations, are your most powerful tool as a public speaker. For better or worse, audiences are likely to remember anecdotes and narratives long after a speech's statistics are forgotten. Your instructor may assign you to do a personal narrative speech, or require you to write an introduction or conclusion for one of your speeches that includes a story. This does not mean that other types of proof are unimportant and that you just want to tell stories in your speech, but human beings love stories and often will walk away from a speech moved by or remembering a powerful story or example more than anything.

Conclusion

This chapter has been designed to be informative but also serve as a bit of a pep talk. Many students face this course with trepidation, for various reasons. However, as studies have shown over the years, a certain amount of tension when preparing to speak in public can be good for motivation. A strong course in public speaking should be grounded in the communication research, the wisdom of those who have taught it over the last 2,000 years, and reflecting on your own experience.

John Dewey (1916), the twentieth century education scholar, is noted for saying, "Education does not come just from experience, but from reflecting on the experience." As you finish this chapter and look toward your first presentation in class, be sure to give yourself time after the experience to reflect, whether by talking to another person, journaling, or sitting quietly and thinking, about how the experience can benefit the next speech encounter. Doing so will get you on the road to becoming more confident in this endeavor of public speaking.



Something to Think About

Investigate some other communication models on the Internet. What do they have in common? How are they different? Which ones seem to explain communication best to you?