



The Basics of Public Speaking

Chapter 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you 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;
- **UNDERSTAND** why public speaking is part of the curriculum at this college and important in personal and professional life.

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 boardroom? Your minister, priest, or rabbi presenting a sermon at a worship service? Your professor lecturing? All of these are instances of public speaking. Be assured that public speaking takes many forms every day 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 nervous, unsure of what to say, and feeling as if you are failing to get your message across?

You find yourself in this public speaking course and probably have mixed emotions. More than likely, this course 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 they are in college,¹ 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, all of which are activities that 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 was embarrassing or you believe it was a failure. It might have been years ago, but the feeling stayed with you. This class is probably not something you have looked forward to, and you may have put it off. You might think that it's just another course you have to get through in order to study your major and start a career in your field, and you just want to get it over with.

These are all understandable emotions, and you are not alone. 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. Lucas² has written, public speaking is an “enlarged² conversation,” and as such it has some similarities to conversations but some major differences, too. As a conversation, it has elements of:

- an 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);
- a dependence on feedback to know if you are successful in being understood (usually nonverbal in public speaking, but still present);
- a face-to-face type of communication 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. You will also be more conscious of the correctness and formality of your language—you might say “that sucks” in a conversation but not 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), rather than a “performance,” you will be able to relate to your audience on the human and personal level.

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

“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.”³

This fear may be in other situations, as well, 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 does not rise to the level of a true “phobia” in psychological terms, which is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV as experiencing “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.”⁴ These people are just uncomfortable in public speaking situations and need strategies for addressing the task.

Scholars at the University of Wisconsin-Stout⁵ 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, you are either smart or skilled in something, or you’re 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.” Unfortunately, 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, and they give up.

Modern research by **Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck**⁶ 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 (**Figure 1**). 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.”



Figure 1. Having a growth mindset means you believe you can learn what it takes to create your own success at work and in life.

So, we can see that anxiety in public speaking is related to more than just one situation. There are fears and false assumptions involved, and we'll now spend time discussing two specific fears you may have: fear of failure and fear of rejection.

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.

Glossophobia: a severe fear of public speaking

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 with a real audience. You will overcome some of your fears and feel that you have accomplished something of personal benefit.

Fear of Rejection of Self or 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 will also have to 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*.

One of the core attitudes an effective and ethical public speaker must have is respect for and empathy with the audience (**Figure 2**). 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. They want 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.



Figure 2. Having respect for your audience can reduce your fears about speaking in public.

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.

Mental Preparation

If your neighbor's house were on fire, getting to the phone to call the fire department would be your main concern. While on the phone, 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. However, very often we make situations far worse in our minds than they actually are, and we can lose perspective. Know that you have probably been in many situations that are much worse than public speaking! Also, 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 to get 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.⁷ As far as public speaking is concerned, your energy level and ability to be mindful 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 (**Figure 3**). Some traditionalists also discourage the drinking of milk because it is believed to stimulate mucus production, but this has not been scientifically proven.⁸



Figure 3. Eating a healthy breakfast is one way to physically prepare for your presentation.

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 (**Figure 4**). 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 the talk.

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,” you will be able to create a good first impression and thus enhance your credibility before the actual speech.



Figure 4. Learn about the venue you will be speaking in.

Speech Preparation

Procrastination, like lack of sleep, seems to 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. 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 the only way that you will be assured that your speech meets the context’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 two minutes!

Your practicing should be out loud, standing up, with shoes on, with someone to listen (other than your dog or cat), and with your visual aids. If you can record yourself and watch it, that is even better. 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.

Communication Anxiety

Let's look at some concluding thought on good old "stage fright," a term we prefer not to use in preference to "communication anxiety" or "apprehension."

First, 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, your anxiety will decrease throughout the class.⁹ In this **Ted Talk video** Harvard Business School social psychologist Amy Cuddy discusses nonverbal communication and suggests that instead of "faking it until you make it," you can, and should, "fake it until you become it," because research shows that 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.

Finally, if you are an audience member, you can help the speaker with his/her anxiety, at least a little bit (**Figure 5**). 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 beginning. 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.



Figure 5. As an audience member, your behavior can help reduce the speaker's anxiety.

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.

Elements of Communication

Regardless of the form, 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.

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 it. 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.

Context

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.
- **Cultural**, which usually refers to the country where someone was born and raised but can also include ethnic, racial, religious, and regional cultures or co-cultures.
- **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. As Beavin, Watzlawick, and Jackson¹⁰ state, communication relationships can be about equality in power or differences in power, depending on the situation.
- **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).

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

Message

Third, human communication of any kind involves a message. That message may be informal and spontaneous, such as striking up a conversation with a seatmate on a plane 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 several chapters will be devoted to the creation of that formal message, but that does not diminish the importance of the other elements, because the message is a product of all of them.

Channel

Fourth, public speaking, like all communication, requires a **channel**. We may think of channel in terms of television or something like a waterway (The English Channel). In communication 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.

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 or negatively. It also means that public speaking is linear in time and we do not get a “do-over.” This element of channel influences structure, transitions, and language choices, which are discussed later in the book.

They will either have more information about the subject and feel more informed, disagree with you, take in the information but do nothing about the topic, and/or decide it's a good idea to become a donor and go through the steps to do so. If they become a potential donor, they will add to the pool of existing donors. Thus, either they have changed or the social context has changed, or both. This change feeds back into the communication process.

Channel: the means through which a message gets from sender to receiver

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

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

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**, where the emphasis is more on the relationship or co-meanings created between the communicators. If you go to Google images and search for "models of communication," you will find many. **Figure 7** is an example of a communication model specific to public speaking.

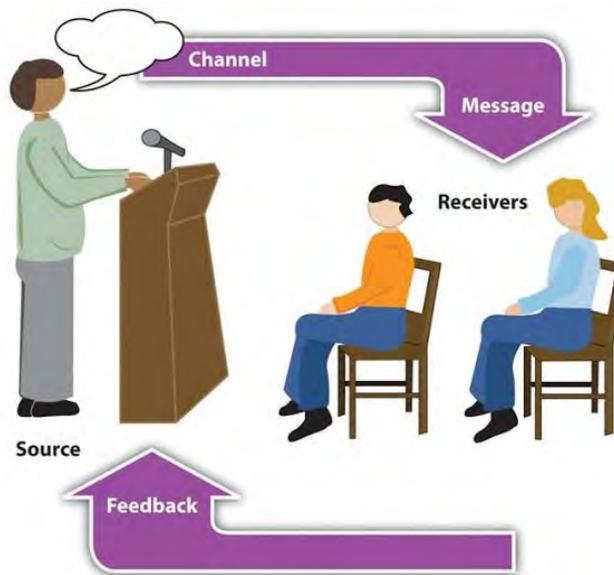


Figure 7. This communication model is specific to public speaking.

What they 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 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 himself or herself personally. Models of communication attempt to show the interplay of the many elements that take place in the communication act.

Em Griffin,¹¹ a professor of communication at Wheaton College and author of several textbooks, compares the communication process to three different games, dependent on one's theory of how the process 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 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 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.

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). For example, a car enthusiast will tell you that “car” has deep and broad cultural meanings beyond metal, rubber, and glass.

Encode: the means through which a message gets from sender to receiver

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

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

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

Canons of Rhetoric

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 or actions are affected, and possibly the speaker’s as well.

Marcus Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) was the most renowned politician, orator, and advocate of rhetoric in the late Roman Republic (**Figure 8**). 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)
5. delivery (nonverbal communication)

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



Figure 8. Marcus Tullius Cicero, a Roman philosopher and orator, developed the canons of rhetoric.

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC SPEAKING IN YOUR LIFE

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 to get it over with. 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 desired career. Perhaps you could talk to some professionals in your future 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.¹² 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 (**Figure 9**). Nurses give training presentations to parents of newborn babies; accountants advocate for new software in their organizations; managers lead team meetings.



Figure 9. Public speaking is a highly sought-after skill in many careers.

Second, 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.

A third 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.¹³ 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.

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 limit. As mentioned before, you can only know that you are within time limits by practicing and timing yourself; it shows preparation and forethought.

Timing is more than just managing the length of your speech. Perhaps more importantly, being on time (or early) for the presentation 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.

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,¹⁰ all human communication has two elements going 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.

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.

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. However, you should know your strengths and weaknesses before you try to imitate the style of another speaker. If another public speaker is good at something and you are not, their particular strategy may not work for you.

You Have Strengths and Weaknesses

We all have strengths and weakness. 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.

Reliable personality inventories, such as the **Myers-Briggs** Type Indicator 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 (**Figure 10**).

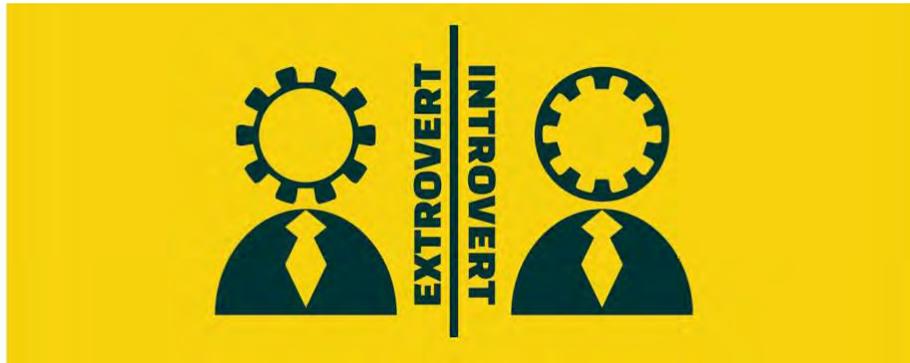


Figure 10. Various aspects of your personality can be a strength or a weakness.

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 prepare more but still feel uncomfortable. Your public speaking abilities will benefit from increased self-awareness about such characteristics. (For an online self-inventory about introversion and extraversion, go to www.quietrev.com/the-introvert-test.)

Stories Have Power

Stories and storytelling, in the form of anecdotes and narrative illustrations, are your most powerful tool as a public speaker and should be part of your speaking. 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 long after a speech's statistics are forgotten.

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,¹⁴ 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?



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