Speech Reflection

Imagine- you are speaking in front of a large crowd that is riveted, listening intently to every word you are saying. You’re not nervous- you know exactly what you will say. You are eloquently, passionately driving home your point. You are sending your message out to the world, and it is being heard. You finish, and the audience erupts in applause. (pause) Some of the greatest leaders of our time were seasoned public speakers. John F. Kennedy, the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King, Jr. Let’s watch a short clip of Obama’s final white house correspondents’ dinner speech. **(show video)** In this speech, Obama was able to speak conversationally with his audience. He used great tone, pace, and had good eye contact. His gestures emphasized what he was saying. He delivered an important message to his audience- that the only way to move forward as a country is to seek truth and uncover distortions in a world where facts and evidence are in danger. Obama has had a lot of practice. We have had the opportunity to practice, as well.

We’ve all put in a lot of hard work in this class. Many of us, including myself, have ventured into areas of discomfort, and we’ve grown from our experiences. I’d like to tell you a little about how I’ve grown. **(next- Preview Slide)**

In this speech, I will speak about what I’ve done. I will show you what I’ve learned from this course, and finally, I will tell you how I think this all fits in for the upcoming year ahead of us.

Throughout this course, I’ve tried my best to be creative, original, and to the point in my speeches. Sometimes I met success. Other times, I failed.

**(next- Introduction Speech)**

In the first speech, I was extremely nervous. When I got up to the front of the room, I was shaking from all the adrenaline running through my body. I gave it my best shot, and I did okay. My eye contact was shabby, my tone didn’t inflect as much enthusiasm as it could have, but I did alright. As my first speech, it wasn’t as bad as it could have been. It was a chance for me to learn, and to grow.

**(next- Demonstration Speech)**

In the second speech, I picked a topic I was passionate about- meditation. I was fairly unsure of how demonstrating and then having the class practice meditation would be like. This time, I gave myself a little more space to prepare. I was more invested in the topic, and brought materials with me. When it came to presenting, I got up and, like before, gave it my best shot. This speech went better. I had better eye contact. My content was solid. My tone of voice and pace reflected enthusiasm. I got good feedback.

In between my two speeches, I had space to reflect and grow. I realized I needed to be better prepared, so I scheduled more time for it.

**(next slide- Quote)**

Our textbook, *The Art of Public Speaking*, by Stephen E. Lucas, gives some very solid advice when it comes to preparation and rehearsal( =P )- “Don’t wait until the night before your speech to begin working on delivery. A single practice session- no matter how long- is rarely enough.” (259). I’ve found practice is the strongest factor when it comes to how well I will deliver a speech. **(next- Nervousness Graph)**

**Here is a graph showing my nervousness before, during, and after my two speeches. The red line represents the first introduction speech. The blue line represents the second demonstration speech.** Because of my preparation and previous experience, when it came time for the second demonstration speech, I was less nervous- way less nervous.

I had a chance to familiarize myself with the process, and felt that I was in a safe environment to practice. Nervousness wasn’t even on my mind. I felt completely involved in speaking to you and letting you know about my topic.

(pause)

I’ve also had some fun experimenting with different introductions. **(next slide- Introductions)**. One solid point made in our textbook, which I took to heart, was that, “In most speech situations, the introduction has four objectives: -Get the attention and interest of your audience.; -Reveal the topic of your speech.; -Establish your credibility and goodwill.; and -Preview the body of the speech.” (186). The introduction is one of the key points of any presentation. It defines whether or not you have your audience’s attention from the start.

(pause) **(next slide- blank)**

As I’ve reflected, I’ve realized that I’m much more of a perfectionist than I originally thought. I think perfectionism, for me, is about control. I want to have a say in what happens in my future, and I want to control it as much as I can. Even though I got a good grade on my first speech, I still wasn’t satisfied with my performance. The truth is, however, that I have much less control over my end results than I think I do- and that’s okay.

Throughout this course, I’ve become a little more comfortable with ambiguity- with not really knowing how things will turn out. It can be a relief- I don’t need to hold onto my expectations or let my expectations hold me down. As long as I’m putting in the effort and giving whatever I’m doing my best shot, then I can let the chips fall where they may. It means less worrying about things that are out of my control, and more energy to put towards the things I do have control over- like preparation.

I tend to be very critical of myself. In my first speech, I felt that if I was not at my best in everything, then I had, in some way, failed. This course has been a chance for me to strengthen my self-confidence. I can’t always be at my best, and that is okay. There’s an old saying- “perfect is the enemy of good enough”. I put in the effort that I was capable of at the time, and have done well enough.

The process of preparing for a speech and then giving it is much like the rest of our academics. Throughout this course, I have found that the important thing is not perfection, but that I make the effort to do the work and then show up to class and be present. The rest does not matter. Frankly, I haven’t always been able to say that I’ve done these things.

This upcoming school year, to me, is not about getting the best grades. It’s not about working myself ragged at the detriment of my health. It is about being present in the process of academic life, and slowly growing as an individual. It is about not being afraid to ask for help when I need it, and keeping my mind and body healthy.

Much like speech preparation was for me, I feel this school year will be an exercise in choice. Sometimes this will mean choosing sleep over a better prepared speech or essay, and sometimes it will mean choosing homework over binge-watching Netflix.

I have to admit, when I first saw the SAIL points, I thought they were cheesy and superficial, but I’ve found the message it sends out is important. School, and life, is not separated into success and failure, into good grades and bad grades. It is much more fluid than that. As in SAIL, there are many different areas to academic life. We have strengths in some, and room for improvement in others. Rather than reaching for and only focusing on the best grade, as I was trying to do, I’ve found it’s much more important to look at where I was a day, a week, a year ago and compare that to where I am now. Even if I’m not reaching the top of my potential for every assignment- if I can honestly say that I’ve grown over this time, then I can say that I have been successful. Life does not consist of huge leaps of achievement. It consists of tiny little shifts in the way we view the world and ourselves- in the way we interact with the world around us.

**(final slide- Take-aways)**

In conclusion, the greatest speakers have often been the people who have made the largest impact on our society. Professional speaking is a useful tool, both in our personal and professional lives. The skills we use when we speak professionally can be used in day to day interactions. Organizing our thoughts logically and tailoring our message to our audience can impact how our message is received in conversations. But these same skills can also impact our society on a much greater scale. Having the ability to inspire and inform others is a skill that can be learned, and this class is the first step in that direction.

(Pause) All of our trials and tribulations are chances for us to grow, and for us to learn. As author Samuel Beckett once said, “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”