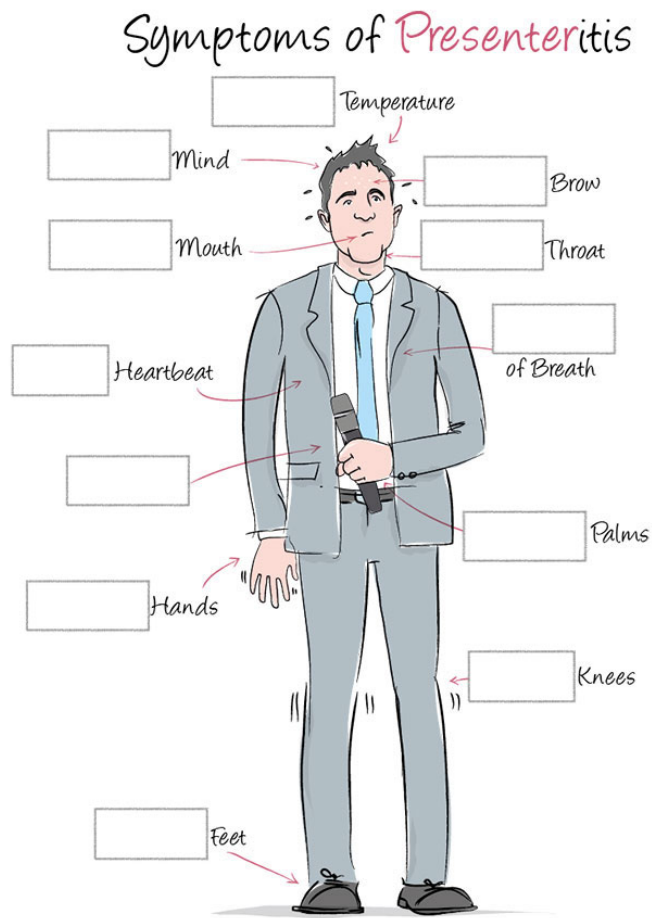


Understanding Public Speaking

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The Tradition of Public Speaking

Source: *The Art of Public Speaking* by Stephen E. Lucas

Given the importance of public speaking, it's not surprising that it has been taught and studied around the globe for thousands of years. Almost all cultures have an equivalent of the English word "orator" to designate someone with special skills in public speaking. The oldest known handbook on effective speech was written on papyrus in Egypt some 4,500 years ago. Eloquence was highly prized in ancient India, Africa, and China, as well as among the Aztecs and other pre-European cultures of North and South America.

In classical Greece and Rome, public speaking played a central role in education and civic life. It was also studied extensively. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, composed during the third century b.c., is still considered the most important work on its subject, and many of its principles are followed by speakers (and writers) today. The great Roman leader Cicero used his speeches to defend liberty and wrote several works about oratory in general.

Over the centuries, many other notable thinkers have dealt with issues of rhetoric, speech, and language—including the Roman educator Quintilian, the Christian preacher St. Augustine, the medieval writer Christine de Pizan, the British philosopher Francis Bacon, and the American critic Kenneth Burke. In recent years, communication researchers have provided an increasingly scientific basis for understanding the methods and strategies of effective speech.

Your immediate objective is to apply those methods and strategies in your classroom speeches. What you learn, however, will be applicable long after you leave college. The principles of public speaking are derived from a long tradition and have been confirmed by a substantial body of research. The more you know about those principles, the more effective you will be in your own speeches—and the more effective you will be in listening to the speeches of other people.

The Tide of Fortune: Cicero

A huge rusty nail pierced the forehead which had thought thousands of great thoughts; pallid and shrunken, closed were the lips that had voiced more sweetly than any others the resonant words of the Latin language; closed were the eyelids to hide the eyes which for sixty years had watched over the Republic; powerless were the hands that had written the most beautiful epistles of the time.

The Dialogues

In Plato's dialogues the conversational form is employed to convey the feeling of corporate research into complicated abstract questions, progressing towards the truth but not attaining it with sufficient certainty and completeness to justify its being expounded dogmatically; the positive results, so far as any can be elicited, are merely tentative.

In Cicero's dialogues on the contrary the facts in respect to the matter under consideration are regarded as already ascertained; doctrines are expounded as dogmatic truths, the dialogue form being adopted as a vivid method of exhibiting the many-sided nature of the subject and the departments into which a systematic treatment of it falls. If differing opinions about it are introduced, the parts of them that are valid are accepted and put together in a single system.

The Echo of Greece: Aristotle

He wanted to know what the world actually was, this natural world which no one had ever looked at before with the eyes of the mind, and he had an unequalled power to bring every bit of knowledge into connection with every other bit, to create order in all that came before him.