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## Speaking in Public

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Growing up in Oklahoma, Josh Shipp had no intention of becoming a public speaker. Abandoned by his birth mother, Shipp bounced around the foster care system for most of his childhood. Neglected and abused, he became addicted to drugs, tried to take his own life, and ended up in jail. Then, at age 17, at his lowest point, his foster parent told him: “We don’t see you as a problem, we see you as an opportunity.”

It dawned upon Josh that his life mattered. He realized that “one caring adult” was all it took to change someone’s life. Since that time, he has devoted himself to helping the hopeless. He became an advocate for children in foster care and began working with at-risk teenagers. Today he is a nationally recognized teen expert who has been praised for his ability to help kids and parents alike work through tough situations.

How has Josh achieved all this? Partly through his determination, partly through his dedication to helping others, and partly through his passion for life. But also essential is his ability to communicate with people through public speaking.

In a TEDx Talk that has been viewed online more than 4 million times, Josh shared his story of growing up in the foster care system and of realizing that his life had meaning. But he also challenged his audience by telling them, “The difference between a statistic and a success story is you.” With this line, Josh turned his personal experience into a call for others to help improve the world.



If you had asked Josh early in his life, “Do you see yourself as an important public speaker?” he would have laughed at the idea. Yet today he has spoken in person to an estimated 2 million people. He has lectured at Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and UCLA. He has appeared on such media outlets as *CNN*, *MTV*, *Lifetime*, and *Oprah*. His message of help and hope has touched people across the country. In the words of one listener, “If his story doesn’t change the way you look at life, I don’t know what will.”

## The Power of Public Speaking

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Throughout history people have used public speaking as a vital means of communication. What the Greek leader Pericles said more than 2,500 years ago is still true today: “One who forms a judgment on any point but cannot explain” it clearly “might as well never have thought at all on the subject.”<sup>1</sup> Public speaking, as its name implies, is a way of making your ideas public—of sharing them with other people and of influencing other people.

During modern times, many women and men around the globe have spread their ideas and influence through public speaking. In the United States, the list includes Franklin Roosevelt, Billy Graham, Cesar Chavez, Barbara Jordan, Martin Luther King, Ronald Reagan, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama. In other countries, we have seen the power of public speaking employed by people such as Margaret Thatcher, Nelson Mandela, and Malala Yousafzai.

As you read these names, you may think to yourself, “That’s fine. Good for them. But what does that have to do with me? I don’t plan to be a president or a preacher or a crusader for any cause.” Nevertheless, the need for public speaking will almost certainly touch you sometime in your life—maybe tomorrow, maybe not for five years. Can you imagine yourself in any of these situations?

You are one of seven management trainees in a large corporation. One of you will get the lower-management job that has just opened. At a large staff meeting you and the other trainees will each discuss the project he or she has been developing. One by one your colleagues make their presentations. They have no experience in public speaking and are intimidated by the higher ranking managers present. Their speeches are stumbling and awkward. You, however, call upon all the skills you learned in your public speaking course. You deliver an informative talk that is clear, well reasoned, and articulate. You get the job.

One of your children has a learning disability. You hear that your local school board has decided, for budget reasons, to eliminate the special teacher who has been helping your child. At an open meeting of the school board, you stand up and deliver a thoughtful, compelling speech on the necessity for keeping the special teacher. The school board changes its mind.

You are the assistant manager in a branch office of a national company. Your immediate superior, the branch manager, is about to retire and there will be a retirement dinner. All the executives from the home office will attend. As his close working associate, you are asked to give a farewell toast at the party. You prepare and deliver a speech that is both witty and touching—a perfect tribute to your boss. After the speech, everyone

applauds enthusiastically, and a few people have tears in their eyes. The following week you are named branch manager.

Fantasies? Not really. Any of these situations could occur. In a recent survey of more than 200 employers, respondents stated that the most important skill they want from job applicants is the “ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization.” In another survey, 1,200 job recruiters reported that one skill was more important and harder to find than any other. That skill? Effective communication.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of such skills is true across the board—for accountants and architects, teachers and technicians, scientists and stockbrokers. Even in highly specialized fields such as civil and mechanical engineering, employers consistently rank the ability to communicate above technical knowledge when deciding whom to hire and whom to promote.

Businesses are also asking people to give more speeches in the early stages of their careers, and many young professionals are using public speaking as a way to stand out in today’s highly competitive job market.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the ability to speak effectively is so prized that college graduates are increasingly being asked to give a presentation as part of their job interview.

Nor has the growth of the Internet and other new technologies reduced the need for public speaking. In this age of Instagram and Twitter, businesses are concerned that college graduates are losing the ability to talk in a professional way. As career expert Lindsey Pollak states, “It’s so rare to find somebody who has that combination of really good technical skills and really good verbal communication skills. You will be head and shoulders above your colleagues if you can combine those two.”<sup>4</sup>

The same is true in community life. Public speaking is a vital means of civic engagement. It is a way to express your ideas and to have an impact on issues that matter in society. As a form of empowerment, it can—and often does—make a difference in things people care about very much. The key phrase here is “make a difference.” This is what most of us want to do in life—to make a difference, to change the world in some small way. Public speaking offers you an opportunity to make a difference in something you care about very much.

## The Tradition of Public Speaking

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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.<sup>5</sup>

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.

## Similarities Between Public Speaking and Conversation

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How much time do you spend each day talking to other people? The average adult spends about 30 percent of her or his waking hours in conversation. By the time you read this book, you will have spent much of your life perfecting the art of conversation. You may not realize it, but you already employ a wide range of skills when talking to people. These skills include the following:

1. *Organizing your thoughts logically.* Suppose you were giving someone directions to get to your house. You wouldn't do it this way:

When you turn off the highway, you'll see a big diner on the left. But before that, stay on the highway to Exit 67. Usually a couple of the neighbors' dogs are in the street, so go slow after you turn at the blinking light. Coming from your house you get on the highway through Maple Street. If you pass the taco stand, you've gone too far. The house is blue.

Instead, you would take your listener systematically, step by step, from his or her house to your house. You would organize your message.

2. *Tailoring your message to your audience.* You are a geology major. Two people ask you how pearls are formed. One is your roommate; the other is your nine-year-old niece. You answer as follows:

To your roommate: "When any irritant, say a grain of sand, gets inside the oyster's shell, the oyster automatically secretes a substance called nacre, which is principally calcium carbonate and is the same material that lines the oyster's shell. The nacre accumulates in layers around the irritant core to form the pearl."

To your niece: "Imagine you're an oyster on the ocean floor. A grain of sand gets inside your shell and makes you uncomfortable. So you decide to cover it up. You cover it with a material called mother-of-pearl. The covering builds up around the grain of sand to make a pearl."

3. *Telling a story for maximum impact.* Suppose you are telling a friend about a funny incident at last week's football game. You don't begin with the punch line ("Keisha fell out of the stands right onto the field. Here's how it started. . ."). Instead, you carefully build up your story, adjusting your words and tone of voice to get the best effect.





Many skills used in conversation also apply in public speaking. As you learn to speak more effectively, you may also learn to communicate more effectively in other situations.

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**4. Adapting to listener feedback.** Whenever you talk with someone, you are aware of that person's verbal, facial, and physical reactions. For example:

You are explaining an interesting point that came up in biology class. Your listener begins to look confused, puts up a hand as though to stop you, and says "Huh?" You go back and explain more clearly.

A friend has asked you to listen while she practices a speech. At the end you tell her, "There's just one part I really don't like—that quotation from the attorney general." Your friend looks very hurt and says, "That was my favorite part!" So you say, "But if you just worked the quotation in a little differently, it would be wonderful."

Each day, in casual conversation, you do all these things many times without thinking about them. You already possess these communication skills. And these are among the most important skills you will need for public speaking.

To illustrate, let's return briefly to one of the hypothetical situations at the beginning of this chapter. When addressing the school board about the need for a special teacher:

- You *organize your ideas* to present them in the most persuasive manner. You steadily build up a compelling case about how the teacher benefits the school.
- You *tailor your message* to your audience. This is no time to launch an impassioned defense of special education in the United States. You must show how the issue is important to the people in that very room—to their children and to the school.
- You *tell your story* for maximum impact. Perhaps you relate an anecdote to demonstrate how much your child has improved. You also have statistics to show how many other children have been helped.
- You *adapt to listener feedback*. When you mention the cost of the special teacher, you notice sour looks on the faces of the school board members. So you patiently explain how small that cost is in relation to the overall school budget.

In many ways, then, public speaking requires the same skills used in ordinary conversation. Most people who communicate well in daily talk can learn to communicate just as well in public speaking. By the same token, training in public speaking can make you a more adept communicator in a variety of situations, such as conversations, classroom discussions, business meetings, and interviews.

## Differences Between Public Speaking and Conversation

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Despite their similarities, public speaking and everyday conversation are not identical. Imagine that you are telling a story to a friend. Then imagine yourself telling the story to a group of seven or eight friends. Now imagine telling the same story to 20 or 30 people. As the size of your audience grows, you will find yourself adapting to three major differences between conversation and public speaking:

1. *Public speaking is more highly structured.* It usually imposes strict time limitations on the speaker. In most cases, the situation does not allow listeners to interrupt with questions or commentary. The speaker must accomplish her or his purpose in the speech itself. Consequently, public speaking demands much more detailed planning and preparation than ordinary conversation. When preparing his TEDx Talk on making a difference in the life of a child, Josh Shipp spent almost a full year writing, revising, and rehearsing. That's detailed planning!

2. *Public speaking requires more formal language.* Slang, jargon, and bad grammar have little place in public speeches. Whether one is delivering a classroom speech, a TED Talk, a business presentation, or a famous work such as "I Have a Dream," the language should rise to the level of the occasion. Listeners usually react negatively to speakers who do not elevate and polish their language when addressing an audience. A speech should be "special."

3. *Public speaking requires a different method of delivery.* When conversing informally, most people talk quietly, interject stock phrases such as "like" and "you know," adopt a casual posture, and use what are called vocalized pauses ("uh," "er," "um"). Effective public speakers, however, adjust their voices to be heard clearly throughout the audience. They assume a more erect posture. They avoid distracting mannerisms and verbal habits.

With study and practice, you will master these differences and expand your conversational skills into speechmaking. Your speech class will provide the opportunity for this study and practice.

## Developing Confidence: Your Speech Class

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One of the major concerns of students in any speech class is stage fright. We may as well face the issue squarely. Many people who converse easily in all kinds of everyday situations become frightened at the idea of standing up before a group to make a speech.

If you are worried about stage fright, you may feel better knowing that you are not alone. A 2014 survey by researchers at Chapman University asked 1,500 participants from across the country to name their greatest fear. Public speaking

### stage fright

Anxiety over the prospect of giving a speech in front of an audience.

topped the list. A 2012 study produced similar results, with 62 percent of respondents being terrified by the prospect of speaking in public. In comparison, only 43 percent said they were afraid of dying.<sup>6</sup>

In a different study, researchers concentrated on social situations and, again, asked their subjects to list their greatest fears. More than 9,000 people were interviewed. Here is the ranking of their answers:<sup>7</sup>

**Greatest Fear**

Public speaking

Speaking up in a meeting or class

Meeting new people

Talking to people in authority

Important examination or interview

Going to parties

Talking with strangers

Again, speechmaking is at the top in provoking anxiety.

## **NERVOUSNESS IS NORMAL**

If you feel nervous about giving a speech, you are in very good company. Some of the greatest public speakers in history have suffered from stage fright, including Abraham Lincoln, Margaret Sanger, and Winston Churchill. The famous Roman orator Cicero said, “I turn pale at the outset of a speech and quake in every limb and in my soul.”<sup>8</sup>

Jennifer Lawrence, Conan O’Brien, and Oprah Winfrey all report being anxious about speaking in public. Early in his career, Leonardo DiCaprio was so nervous about giving an acceptance speech that he hoped he would not win the Academy Award for which he had been nominated. Eighty-one percent of business executives say public speaking is the most nerve-wracking experience they face.<sup>9</sup> What comedian Jerry Seinfeld said in jest sometimes seems literally true: “Given a choice, at a funeral most of us would rather be the one in the coffin than the one giving the eulogy.”

Actually, most people tend to be anxious before doing something important in public. Actors are nervous before a play, politicians are nervous before a campaign speech, athletes are nervous before a big game. The ones who succeed have learned to use their nervousness to their advantage. Listen to legendary tennis player Roger Federer, speaking after his 2017 Wimbledon title match. No matter how much you practice, he said, you have to be able to perform “when the pressure comes of matches, the nerves, the stomach, when you’re not free and you’re tense.” Putting his butterflies to good use, Federer beat Marin Cilic in straight sets to win his eighth Wimbledon crown and his nineteenth Grand Slam championship.

Much the same thing happens in speechmaking. Most experienced speakers have stage fright before taking the floor, but their nervousness is a healthy sign that they are getting “psyched up” for a good effort. Novelist and lecturer I. A. R. Wylie once said: “I rarely rise to my feet without a throat constricted with terror and a furiously thumping heart. When, for some reason, I *am* cool and self-assured, the speech is always a failure.”



### adrenaline

A hormone released into the bloodstream in response to physical or mental stress.

### positive nervousness

Controlled nervousness that helps energize a speaker for her or his presentation.

In other words, it is perfectly normal—even desirable—to be nervous at the start of a speech. Your body is responding as it would to any stressful situation—by producing extra adrenaline.

This sudden shot of adrenaline is what makes your heart race, your hands shake, your knees knock, and your skin perspire. Every public speaker experiences all these reactions to some extent. The question is: How can you control your nervousness and make it work for you rather than against you?

## DEALING WITH NERVOUSNESS

Rather than trying to eliminate every trace of stage fright, you should aim at transforming it from a negative force into what one expert calls positive nervousness—“a zesty, enthusiastic, lively feeling with a slight edge to it. . . . It’s still nervousness, but it feels different. You’re no longer victimized by it; instead, you’re vitalized by it. You’re in control of it.”<sup>10</sup>

Don’t think of yourself as having stage fright. Instead, think of it as “stage excitement” or “stage enthusiasm.”<sup>11</sup> It can help you get focused and energized in the same way as it helps athletes, musicians, and others get primed for a game or a concert. Jane Lynch, talking about her gig hosting *Saturday Night Live*, said that she got through it with “that perfect cocktail of nervousness and excitement.” Think of that cocktail as a normal part of giving a successful speech.

Here are six time-tested ways you can turn your nervousness from a negative force into a positive one.

### Acquire Speaking Experience

You have already taken the first step. You are enrolled in a public speaking course, where you will learn about speechmaking and gain speaking experience. Think back to your first day in kindergarten, your first date, your first day at a new job. You were probably nervous in each situation because you were facing something new and unknown. Once you became accustomed to the situation, it was no longer threatening. So it is with public speaking. For most students, the biggest part of stage fright is fear of the unknown. The more you learn about public speaking and the more speeches you give, the less threatening speechmaking will become.

Of course, the road to confidence will sometimes be bumpy. Learning to give a speech is not much different from learning any other skill—it proceeds by trial and error. The purpose of your speech class is to shorten the process, to minimize the errors, to give you a nonthreatening arena—a sort of laboratory—in which to undertake the “trial.”

Your instructor recognizes that you are a novice and is trained to give the kind of guidance you need to get started. In your fellow students you have a highly sympathetic audience who will provide valuable feedback to help you improve your speaking skills. As the class goes on, your fears about public speaking will gradually recede until they are replaced by only a healthy nervousness before you rise to speak.<sup>12</sup>

### Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

Another key to gaining confidence is to pick speech topics you truly care about—and then to prepare your speeches so thoroughly that you cannot help but be successful. Here’s how one student combined enthusiasm for his topic with thorough preparation to score a triumph in speech class:



The need for public speaking arises in many situations. Here U.S. Army General John Nicholson speaks during a press conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

©Dursun Aydemir/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Jesse Young was concerned about taking a speech class. Not having any experience as a public speaker, he got butterflies in his stomach just thinking about talking in front of an audience. But when the time came for Jesse's first speech, he was determined to make it a success.

Jesse chose Habitat for Humanity as the topic for his speech. He had been a volunteer for three years, and he believed deeply in the organization and its mission. The purpose of his speech was to explain the origins, philosophy, and activities of Habitat for Humanity.

As Jesse spoke, it became clear that he was enthusiastic about his subject and genuinely wanted his classmates to share his enthusiasm. Because he was intent on communicating with his audience, he forgot to be nervous. He spoke clearly, fluently, and dynamically. Soon the entire class was engrossed in his speech.

Afterward, Jesse admitted that he had surprised even himself. "It was amazing," he said. "Once I passed the first minute or so, all I thought about were those people out there listening. I could tell that I was really getting through to them."

How much time should you devote to preparing your speeches? A standard rule of thumb is that each minute of speaking time requires one to two hours of preparation time—perhaps more, depending on the amount of research needed for the speech. This may seem like a lot of time, but the rewards are well worth it. One professional speech consultant estimates that proper preparation can reduce stage fright by up to 75 percent.<sup>13</sup>

If you follow the techniques suggested by your instructor and in the rest of this book, you will stand up for every speech fully prepared. Imagine that the day for your first speech has arrived. You have studied your audience and selected a topic you know will interest them. You have researched the topic thoroughly and practiced the speech several times until it feels absolutely comfortable. You have even tried it out before two or three trusted friends. How can you help but be confident of success?

## Think Positively

Confidence is mostly the well-known power of positive thinking. If you think you can do it, you usually can. On the other hand, if you predict disaster and doom, that is almost always what you will get. This is especially true when it comes to public speaking. Speakers who think negatively about themselves and the speech experience are much more likely to be overcome by stage fright than are speakers who think positively. Here are some ways you can transform negative thoughts into positive ones as you work on your speeches:

### Negative Thought

I wish I didn't have to give this speech.

I'm not a great public speaker.

I'm always nervous when I give a speech.

No one will be interested in what I have to say.

### Positive Thought

This speech is a chance for me to share my ideas and gain experience as a speaker.

No one's perfect, but I'm getting better with each speech I give.

Everyone's nervous. If other people can handle it, I can, too.

I have a good topic and I'm fully prepared. Of course they'll be interested.

Many psychologists believe that the ratio of positive to negative thoughts in regard to stressful activities such as speechmaking should be at least five to one. That is, for each negative thought, you should counter with a minimum of five positive ones. Doing so will not make your nerves go away completely, but it will help keep them under control so you can concentrate on communicating your ideas rather than on brooding about your fears and anxieties.

## Use the Power of Visualization

Visualization is closely related to positive thinking. It is used by athletes, musicians, actors, speakers, and others to enhance their performance in stressful situations. How does it work? Listen to Jamie Anderson, who, during the 2014 Winter Olympics, won the first-ever gold medal in the women's slopestyle event. Afterward, she talked about how she used visualization to settle her nerves before the winning ride:

### visualization

Mental imaging in which speakers vividly picture themselves giving a successful presentation.

There was so much anticipation leading up to this event, I just had to calm my mind and have the trust and faith that I was capable of doing what I really wanted to do. At the top of the course, I took a moment, took a deep breath, and saw everything I wanted to see happen. . . . I was visualizing it, seeing it to the end, and knowing that I was going to land everything perfectly with as much style as possible.

Of course, visualization doesn't mean that Anderson wins every competition she enters. But research has shown that the kind of mental imaging she describes can significantly increase athletic performance.<sup>14</sup> It has also shown that visualization can help speakers control their stage fright.<sup>15</sup>

The key to visualization is creating a vivid mental blueprint in which you see yourself succeeding in your speech. Picture yourself in your classroom rising to

speak. See yourself at the lectern, poised and self-assured, making eye contact with your audience and delivering your introduction in a firm, clear voice. Feel your confidence growing as your listeners get more and more caught up in what you are saying. Imagine your sense of achievement as you conclude the speech knowing you have done your very best.

As you create these images in your mind's eye, be realistic but stay focused on the positive aspects of your speech. Don't allow negative images to eclipse the positive ones. Acknowledge your nervousness, but picture yourself overcoming it to give a vibrant, articulate presentation. If one part of the speech always seems to give you trouble, visualize yourself getting through it without any hitches. And be specific. The more lucid your mental pictures, the more successful you are likely to be.

As with your physical rehearsal of the speech, this kind of mental rehearsal should be repeated several times in the days before you speak. It doesn't guarantee that every speech will turn out exactly the way you envision it—and it certainly is no substitute for thorough preparation. But used in conjunction with the other methods of combating stage fright, it is a proven way to help control your nerves and to craft a successful presentation.

### **Know That Most Nervousness Isn't Visible**

Many novice speakers are worried about appearing nervous to the audience. It's hard to speak with poise and assurance if you think you look tense and insecure. One of the most valuable lessons you will learn as your speech class proceeds is that only a fraction of the turmoil you feel inside is visible on the outside. "Your nervous system may be giving you a thousand shocks," says one experienced speaker, "but the viewer can see only a few of them."<sup>16</sup>

Even though your palms are sweating and your heart is pounding, your listeners probably won't realize how tense you are—especially if you do your best to act cool and confident on the outside. Most of the time when students confess after a speech, "I was so nervous I thought I was going to die," their classmates are surprised. To them the speaker looked calm and assured.

Knowing this should make it easier for you to face your listeners with confidence. As one student stated after watching a videotape of her first classroom speech, "I was amazed at how calm I looked. I assumed everyone would be able to see how scared I was, but now that I know they can't, I won't be nearly so nervous in the future. It really helps to know that you look in control even though you may not feel that way."

### **Don't Expect Perfection**

It may also help to know that there is no such thing as a perfect speech. At some point in every presentation, every speaker says or does something that does not come across exactly as planned. Fortunately, such moments are usually not evident to the audience. Why? Because the audience doesn't know what the speaker *plans* to say. It hears only what the speaker *does* say. If you momentarily lose your place, reverse the order of a couple of statements, or forget to pause at a certain spot, no one need be the wiser. When such moments occur, just proceed as if nothing happened.

Even if you do make an obvious mistake during a speech, that is no catastrophe. If you have ever listened to Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream," you may recall that he stumbles twice during the speech. Most likely, however, you don't remember. Why? Because you were focusing on King's message rather than on the fine points of his delivery.

One of the biggest reasons people are concerned about making a mistake in a speech is that they view speechmaking as a performance rather than an act of communication. They feel the audience is judging them against a scale of absolute perfection in which every misstated word or awkward gesture will count against them. But speech audiences are not like judges in a violin recital or an ice-skating contest. They are not looking for a virtuoso performance, but for a well-thought-out address that communicates the speaker's ideas clearly and directly. Sometimes an error or two can actually enhance a speaker's appeal by making her or him seem more human.

As you work on your speeches, make sure you prepare thoroughly and do all you can to get your message across to your listeners. But don't panic about being perfect or about what will happen if you make a mistake. Once you free your mind of these burdens, you will find it much easier to approach your speeches with confidence and even with enthusiasm.<sup>17</sup>

Besides stressing the six points just discussed, your instructor will probably give you several tips for dealing with nervousness in your first speeches. They may include:

- Be at your best physically and mentally. It's not a good idea to stay up until 3:00 A.M. partying with friends or cramming for an exam the night before your speech. A good night's sleep will serve you better.
- As you are waiting to speak, quietly tighten and relax your leg muscles, or squeeze your hands together and then release them. Such actions help reduce tension by providing an outlet for your extra adrenaline.



## checklist

### Speaking with Confidence

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Am I enthusiastic about my speech topic?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Have I thoroughly developed the content of my speech?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Have I worked on the introduction so my speech will get off to a good start?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Have I worked on the conclusion so my speech will end on a strong note?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Have I rehearsed my speech orally until I am confident about its delivery?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Have I worked on turning negative thoughts about my speech into positive ones?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Do I realize that nervousness is normal, even among experienced speakers?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Do I understand that most nervousness is not visible to the audience?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Am I focused on communicating with my audience, rather than on worrying about my nerves?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Have I visualized myself speaking confidently and getting a positive response from the audience?





Like many well-known public figures, Adele often experiences stage fright before taking the stage. Here she accepts the 2017 Grammy Award for Record of the Year.

©Christopher Polk/Getty Images

- Take a couple of slow, deep breaths before you start to speak. When they are tense, most people take short, shallow breaths, which only reinforces their anxiety. Deep breathing breaks this cycle of tension and helps calm your nerves.
- Work especially hard on your introduction. Research has shown that a speaker's anxiety level begins to drop significantly after the first 30 to 60 seconds of a presentation.<sup>18</sup> Once you get through the introduction, you should find smoother sailing the rest of the way.
- Make eye contact with members of your audience. Remember that they are individual people, not a blur of faces. And they are your friends.
- Concentrate on communicating with your audience rather than on worrying about your stage fright. If you get caught up in your speech, your audience will, too.
- Use visual aids. They create interest, draw attention away from you, and make you feel less self-conscious.

If you are like most students, you will find your speech class to be a very positive experience. As one student wrote on her course evaluation at the end of the class:

I was really dreading this class. The idea of giving all those speeches scared me half to death. But I'm glad now that I stuck with it. It's a small class, and I got to know a lot of the students. Besides, this is one class in which I got to express *my* ideas, instead of spending the whole time listening to the teacher talk. I even came to enjoy giving the speeches. I could tell at times that the audience was really with me, and that's a great feeling.

Over the years, thousands of students have developed confidence in their speechmaking abilities. As your confidence grows, you will be better able to stand before other people and tell them what you think and feel and know—and

to make them think and feel and know those same things. The best part about confidence is that it nurtures itself. After you score your first triumph, you will be that much more confident the next time. And as you become a more confident public speaker, you will likely become more confident in other areas of your life as well.

## Public Speaking and Critical Thinking

### critical thinking

Focused, organized thinking about such things as the logical relationships among ideas, the soundness of evidence, and the differences between fact and opinion.

That guy at the party last night really owned me when we were talking about the economy. I know my information is right, and I'm sure his argument didn't make sense, but I can't put my finger on the problem.

I worked really hard on my term paper, but it's just not right. It doesn't seem to hang together, and I can't figure out what's wrong.

Political speeches are so one-sided. The candidates sound good, but they all talk in slogans and generalities. It's really hard to decide who has the best stands on the issues.

Have you ever found yourself in similar situations? If so, you may find help in your speech class. Besides building confidence, a course in public speaking can develop your skills as a critical thinker. Those skills can make the difference between the articulate debater and the pushover, the A student and the C student, the thoughtful voter and the coin tosser.

What is critical thinking? To some extent, it's a matter of logic—of being able to spot weaknesses in other people's arguments and to avoid them in your own. It also involves related skills such as distinguishing fact from opinion, judging the credibility of statements, and assessing the soundness of evidence. In the broadest sense, critical thinking is focused, organized thinking—the ability to see clearly the relationships among ideas.<sup>19</sup>

If you are wondering what this has to do with your public speaking class, the answer is, quite a lot. As the class proceeds, you will probably spend a good deal of time organizing your speeches. While this may seem like a purely mechanical exercise, it is closely interwoven with critical thinking. If the structure of your speech is disjointed and confused, odds are that your thinking is also disjointed and confused. If, on the other hand, the structure is clear and cohesive, there is a good chance your thinking is, too. Organizing a speech is not just a matter of arranging the ideas you already have. Rather, it is an important part of shaping the ideas themselves.

What is true of organization is true of many aspects of public speaking. The skills you learn in your speech class can help you become a more effective thinker in a number of ways. As you work on expressing your ideas in clear, accurate language, you will enhance your ability to think clearly and accurately. As you study the role of evidence and reasoning in speechmaking, you will see how they can be used in other forms of communication as well. As you learn to listen critically to speeches in class, you will be better able to assess the ideas of speakers (and writers) in a variety of situations.

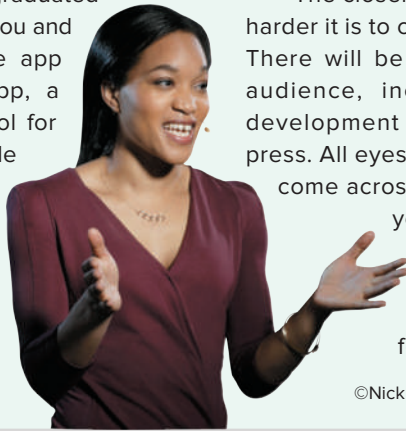
To return to the examples at the beginning of this section:

The guy at the party last night—would well-honed critical thinking skills help you find the holes in his argument?

The term paper—would better organization and a clear outline help pull it together?

## Using public speaking in your **CAREER**

It's been three years since you graduated from college, and one year since you and your friends launched a mobile app development company. The app, a note-taking and collaboration tool for college students, has taken a while to create, but now you're ready to unveil it at a regional technology conference. Although you have given a few brief talks since your speech class in college, the conference will be your first major presentation to a large audience.



The closer you get to the day of the speech, the harder it is to control the butterflies in your stomach. There will be approximately 200 people in your audience, including potential investors, rival development companies, and members of the press. All eyes will be on you. It's important that you come across as confident and well informed, but you're afraid your stage fright will send the opposite message. What strategies will you use to control your nerves and make them work for you?

©Nick David/Getty Images

Political speeches—once you get past the slogans, are the candidates drawing valid conclusions from sound evidence?

If you take full advantage of your speech class, you will be able to enhance your skills as a critical thinker in many circumstances. This is one reason public speaking has been regarded as a vital part of education since the days of ancient Greece.<sup>20</sup>

## The Speech Communication Process

As you begin your first speeches, you may find it helpful to understand what goes on when one person talks to another. Regardless of the kind of speech communication involved, there are seven elements—speaker, message, channel, listener, feedback, interference, and situation. Here we focus on how these elements interact when a public speaker addresses an audience.

### **SPEAKER**

Speech communication begins with a speaker. If you pick up the telephone and call a friend, you are acting as a speaker. (Of course, you will also act as a listener when your friend is talking.) In public speaking, you will usually present your entire speech without interruption.

Your success as a speaker depends on *you*—on your personal credibility, your knowledge of the subject, your preparation of the speech, your manner of speaking, your sensitivity to the audience and the occasion. But successful speaking also requires enthusiasm.

You can't expect people to be interested in what you say unless you are interested yourself. If you are truly excited about your subject, your audience is almost sure to get excited along with you. You can learn all the techniques of effective speechmaking, but before they can be of much use, you must first have something to say—something that sparks your own enthusiasm.

### **speaker**

The person who is presenting an oral message to a listener.

## message

Whatever a speaker communicates to someone else.

## MESSAGE

The message is whatever a speaker communicates to someone else. If you are calling a friend, you might say, “I’ll be a little late picking you up tonight.” That is the message. But it may not be the only message. Perhaps there is a certain tone in your voice that suggests reluctance, hesitation. The underlying message might be “I really don’t want to go to that party. You talked me into it, but I’m going to put it off as long as I can.”

Your goal in public speaking is to have your *intended* message be the message that is *actually* communicated. Achieving this depends both on what you say (the verbal message) and on how you say it (the nonverbal message).

Getting the verbal message just right requires work. You must narrow your topic down to something you can discuss adequately in the time allowed for the speech. You must do research and choose supporting details to make your ideas clear and convincing. You must organize your ideas so listeners can follow them without getting lost. And you must express your message in words that are accurate, clear, vivid, and appropriate.

Besides the message you send with words, you send a message with your tone of voice, appearance, gestures, facial expression, and eye contact. Imagine that one of your classmates gets up to speak about student loans. Throughout her speech she slumps behind the lectern, takes long pauses to remember what she wants to say, stares at the ceiling, and fumbles with her visual aids.

Her intended message is “We must make more money available for student loans.” But the message she actually communicates is “I haven’t prepared very well for this speech.” One of your jobs as a speaker is to make sure your nonverbal message does not distract from your verbal message.

## CHANNEL

## channel

The means by which a message is communicated.

The channel is the means by which a message is communicated. When you pick up the phone to call a friend, the telephone is the channel. Public speakers may use one or more of several channels, each of which will affect the message received by the audience.

Consider a speech to Congress by the President of the United States. The speech is carried to the nation by the channels of radio and television. For the radio audience the message is conveyed entirely by the President’s voice. For the television audience the message is conveyed by both the President’s voice and the televised image. The people in Congress have a more direct channel. They not only hear the President’s voice as amplified through a microphone, but they also see him and the setting firsthand.

In a public speaking class, your channel is the most direct of all. Your classmates will see you and hear you without any electronic intervention.

## LISTENER

## listener

The person who receives the speaker’s message.

The listener is the person who receives the communicated message. Without a listener, there is no communication. When you talk to a friend on the phone, you have one listener. In public speaking you will have many listeners.

Everything a speaker says is filtered through a listener’s frame of reference—the total of his or her knowledge, experience, goals, values, and attitudes. Because a speaker and a listener are different people, they can never have exactly the same frame of reference. And because a listener’s frame of reference can never be exactly



The powers of critical thinking you develop in researching and organizing your speeches can be applied in many forms of communication, including meetings and group projects.

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the same as a speaker's, the meaning of a message will never be exactly the same to a listener as to a speaker.

You can easily test the impact of different frames of reference. Ask each of your classmates to describe a chair. If you have 20 classmates, you'll probably get 20 different descriptions. One student might picture a large, overstuffed easy chair, another an elegant straight-backed chair, yet another an office chair, a fourth a rocking chair, and so on.

Even if two or more envision the same general type—say, a rocking chair—their mental images of the chair could still be different. One might be thinking of an Early American rocker, another of a modern Scandinavian rocker—the possibilities are unlimited. And “chair” is a fairly simple concept. What about “patriotism” or “freedom”?

Because people have different frames of reference, a public speaker must take great care to adapt the message to the particular audience being addressed. To be an effective speaker, you must be audience-centered. You will quickly lose your listeners' attention if your presentation is either too basic or too sophisticated. You will also lose your audience if you do not relate to their experience, interests, knowledge, and values. When you make a speech that causes listeners to say “That is important to *me*,” you will almost always be successful.

## FEEDBACK

When the President addresses the nation on television, he is engaged in one-way communication. You can talk back to the television set, but the President won't hear you. Most situations, however, involve *two-way* communication. Your listeners don't simply absorb your message like human sponges. They send back messages of their own. These messages are called feedback.

In public speaking there is plenty of feedback to let you know how your message is being received. Do your listeners lean forward in their seats, as if paying close attention? Do they have quizzical looks on their faces? Do they shuffle their feet and gaze at the clock? The message sent by these reactions could be “I am fascinated,” “I am bored,” “I agree with you,” “I don't agree with you,” or any number of others. As a speaker, you need to be alert to these reactions and adjust your message accordingly.

### frame of reference

The sum of a person's knowledge, experience, goals, values, and attitudes. No two people can have exactly the same frame of reference.

### feedback

The messages, usually nonverbal, sent from a listener to a speaker.



Like any kind of communication, feedback is affected by one's frame of reference. How would you feel if, immediately after your speech, all your classmates started to rap their knuckles on the desks? Would you run out of the room in despair? Not if you were in a European university. In many parts of Europe, students rap their knuckles on their desks to show admiration for a classroom lecture. You must understand the feedback to be able to deal with it.

## INTERFERENCE

### interference

Anything that impedes the communication of a message. Interference can be external or internal to listeners.

Interference is anything that impedes the communication of a message. When you talk on the telephone, sometimes there is static, or wires get crossed so that two different conversations are going on at once. That is a kind of interference.

In public speaking there are two kinds of interference. One, like the static or crossed wires in a phone conversation, is *external* to the audience. Many classrooms are subject to this kind of interference—from traffic outside the building, the clatter of a radiator, students conversing in the hall, a room that is stifling hot or freezing cold. Any of these can distract listeners from what you are saying.

A second kind of interference is *internal* and comes from within your audience. Perhaps one of your listeners has a toothache. She may be so distracted by the pain that she doesn't pay attention to your speech. Another listener could be worrying about a test in the next class period. Yet another could be brooding about an argument with his girlfriend.

As a speaker, you must try to hold your listeners' attention despite these various kinds of interference. In the chapters that follow you will find many ways to do this.

## SITUATION

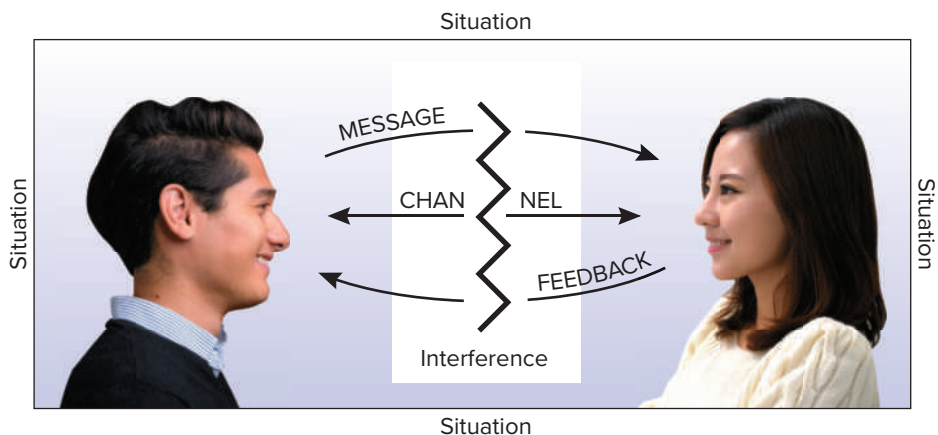
### situation

The time and place in which speech communication occurs.

The situation is the time and place in which speech communication occurs. Conversation always takes place in a certain situation. Sometimes the situation helps—as when you propose marriage over an intimate candlelight dinner. Other times it may hurt—as when you try to speak words of love in competition with blaring music. When you have to talk with someone about a touchy issue, you usually wait until the situation is just right.

Public speakers must also be alert to the situation. Certain occasions—funerals, church services, graduation ceremonies—require certain kinds of speeches. Physical setting is also important. It makes a great deal of difference whether a speech is presented indoors or out, in a small classroom or in a gymnasium, to a densely packed

FIGURE 1.1



(male) ©Ranta Images/Shutterstock;  
(female) ©Lan Images/Shutterstock

crowd or to a handful of scattered souls. When you adjust to the situation of a public speech, you are only doing on a larger scale what you do every day in conversation.

**THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION PROCESS:  
EXAMPLE WITH COMMENTARY**

The following example shows how the various components of the speech communication process interact:

<i>Situation</i>	It was 5:15 P.M., and the Midwest Food Festival and Expo had been going on all day. Gourmet food vendors from across the Great Lakes region were presenting their products to distributors and restaurant owners, but the presentations had taken much longer than expected.
<i>Speaker</i>	Jason Cruz, owner and operator of a gourmet salsa company, was worried. As the last speaker of the day, he knew he faced a tough situation. He had been allotted 30 minutes, but the festival was scheduled to end in 15 minutes, and the success of his products depended in large part on his presentation.
<i>Channel</i>	Jason stepped to the microphone and began to speak. He could see members of the audience looking at their watches, and he knew they were eager to get to dinner after a long day of meetings.
<i>Adapting to Interference</i>	“Good afternoon,” Jason said, “and thanks for your attention. I know everyone is ready to relax after a long day—I certainly am. I was given 30 minutes to tell you about my salsa, but I’ll do my best to finish in 15. I think you’ll find the time well worth your while, because your customers are going to love my products.” Jason was relieved to see people smiling as they settled back in their seats.
<i>Message</i>	Now that he had the audience’s attention, Jason presented each of his products as briefly as he could. He streamlined his planned remarks to emphasize the salsas that would be most appealing to grocery shoppers and restaurant diners. He ended by handing out samples of two new salsas that had won awards in recent food shows.
<i>Feedback</i>	As promised, Jason finished in 15 minutes. “So, that’s it!” he concluded. “Thanks for your attention after such a long day.” The festival organizer came up to Jason after his presentation. “Great stuff—both the talk and the salsa,” she said. “Next year I think we’ll try to make all the presentations as concise and efficient as yours.”

**Public Speaking in a Multicultural World**

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MODERN WORLD**

The United States has always been a diverse society. By the middle of the 19th century, it contained so many people from so many lands that novelist Herman Melville

exclaimed, “You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world.”<sup>21</sup>

One can only imagine what Melville would say today! The United States is the most diverse society on earth. That diversity can be seen in cities and towns, schools and businesses, community groups, and houses of worship all across the land.

Globally, we live in an age of international multiculturalism. The Internet allows for instant communication. CNN is broadcast to more than 2 billion people around the world. Social media connect people across ancient boundaries. Despite political, social, and religious differences, all nations are part of a vast global network. For example:

- There are 60,000 transnational corporations around the world, and they account for half of all international trade.
- China has 1,000 more KFC restaurants than the United States; Apple sells close to 70 percent of its iPhones abroad.
- There are more languages spoken in the borough of Queens in New York City than anywhere else on the planet.

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SPEAKING

Speechmaking becomes more complex as cultural diversity increases. Part of the complexity stems from the differences in language from culture to culture. Nothing separates one culture from another more than language. Language and culture are so closely bound that “we communicate the way we do because we are raised in a particular culture and learn its language, rules, and norms.”<sup>22</sup>

The meanings attached to gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal signals also vary from culture to culture. Even the gestures for such basic messages as “hello” and “goodbye” are culturally based. The North American “goodbye” wave is interpreted in many parts of Europe and South America as the motion for “no,” while the Italian and Greek gesture for “goodbye” is the same as the U.S. signal for “come here.”<sup>23</sup>

Many stories have been told about the fate of public speakers who fail to take into account cultural differences between themselves and their audiences. Consider the following scenario:<sup>24</sup>

The sales manager of a U.S. electronics firm is in Brazil to negotiate a large purchase of computers by a South American corporation. After three days of negotiations, the sales manager holds a gala reception for all the major executives to build goodwill between the companies.

As is the custom on such occasions, time is set aside during the reception for an exchange of toasts. When it is the sales manager’s turn to speak, he praises the Brazilian firm for its many achievements and talks eloquently of his respect for its president and other executives. The words are perfect, and the sales manager can see his audience smiling in approval.

And then—disaster. As the sales manager closes his speech, he raises his hand and flashes the classic U.S. “OK” sign to signal his pleasure at the progress of the negotiations. Instantly the festive mood is replaced with stony silence; smiles turn to icy stares. The sales manager has given his Brazilian audience a gesture with roughly the same meaning as an extended middle finger in the United States.

The next day, the Brazilian firm announces that it will buy its computers from another company.



Public speaking is a vital mode of communication in cultures around the world. South Korean president Moon Jae-in speaks about international relations during a press conference in Seoul.

©Jung Yeon-Je/AFP/Getty Images

As this story illustrates, public speakers can ill afford to overlook their listeners' cultural values and customs. The methods of effective speech explained throughout this book will be helpful to you when addressing culturally diverse audiences. Here we need to stress the importance of avoiding the ethnocentrism that often blocks communication between speakers and listeners of different cultural backgrounds.

## AVOIDING ETHNOCENTRISM

Ethnocentrism is the belief that our own group or culture—whatever it may be—is superior to all other groups or cultures. Because of ethnocentrism, we identify with our group or culture and see its values, beliefs, and customs as “right” or “natural”—in comparison to the values, beliefs, and customs of other groups or cultures, which we tend to think of as “wrong” or “unnatural.”<sup>25</sup>

Ethnocentrism is part of every culture, and it can play a positive role in creating group pride and loyalty. But it can also lead to prejudice and hostility toward different racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural groups. To be an effective public speaker in a multicultural world, you need to keep in mind that all people have their special beliefs and customs.

Avoiding ethnocentrism does not mean that you must agree with the values and practices of all groups and cultures. At times you might try to convince people of different cultures to change their traditional ways of doing things—as speakers from the United Nations seek to persuade farmers in Africa to adopt more productive methods of agriculture, or as delegates from the United States and China attempt to influence the other country's trade policies.

If such speakers are to be successful, however, they must show respect for the cultures of the people they address. They need to adapt their messages to the values and expectations of their listeners.

When you work on your speeches, be alert to how cultural factors might affect how listeners respond. Try to put yourself in their place and to hear your message

### **ethnocentrism**

The belief that one's own group or culture is superior to all other groups or cultures.

through their ears. If there is a language difference, avoid words or phrases that might cause misunderstanding. When researching the speech, keep an eye out for visual aids and other materials that will relate to a wide range of listeners. When delivering the speech, be alert to feedback that might indicate the audience is having trouble grasping your ideas.

It is also important to avoid ethnocentrism when listening to speeches. When you listen to a speaker from a different cultural background, be on guard against the temptation to judge the speaker on the basis of his or her appearance or manner of delivery. No matter what the cultural background of the speaker, you should listen to her or him as attentively as you would want your audience to listen to you.<sup>26</sup>

## Summary

Public speaking has been a vital means of personal empowerment and civic engagement throughout history. The need for effective public speaking will almost certainly touch you sometime in your life. Your speech class will give you training in researching topics, organizing your ideas, and presenting yourself skillfully. This training is invaluable for every type of communication.

There are many similarities between public speaking and daily conversation, but public speaking is also different from conversation. First, it usually imposes strict time limitations and requires more detailed preparation than ordinary conversation. Second, it requires more formal language. Listeners react negatively to speeches loaded with slang, jargon, and bad grammar. Third, public speaking demands a different method of delivery. Effective speakers adjust their voices to the larger audience and work at avoiding distracting physical mannerisms and verbal habits.

One of the major concerns of students in any speech class is stage fright. Your class will give you an opportunity to gain confidence and make your nervousness work for you rather than against you. You will take a big step toward overcoming stage fright if you think positively, prepare thoroughly, visualize yourself giving a successful speech, keep in mind that most nervousness is not visible to the audience, and think of your speech as communication rather than as a performance in which you must do everything perfectly.

A course in public speaking can also help develop your skills as a critical thinker. Critical thinking helps you organize your ideas, spot weaknesses in other people's reasoning, and avoid them in your own.

The speech communication process includes seven elements—speaker, message, channel, listener, feedback, interference, and situation. The speaker is the person who initiates a speech transaction. Whatever the speaker communicates is the message, which is sent by means of a particular channel. The listener receives the communicated message and provides feedback to the speaker. Interference is anything that impedes the communication of a message, and the situation is the time and place in which speech communication occurs. The interaction of these seven elements determines the outcome in any instance of speech communication.

Because of the diversity of modern life, many—perhaps most—of the audiences you address will include people of different cultural backgrounds. When you work on your speeches, be alert to how such factors might affect the responses of your listeners and adapt your message accordingly. Above all, avoid the ethnocentric belief that your own culture or group is superior to all others. Also keep in mind the importance of avoiding ethnocentrism when listening to speeches. Accord every speaker the same courtesy and attentiveness you would want from your listeners.



## Key Terms

stage fright (8)	channel (18)
adrenaline (10)	listener (18)
positive nervousness (10)	frame of reference (19)
visualization (12)	feedback (19)
critical thinking (16)	interference (20)
speaker (17)	situation (20)
message (18)	ethnocentrism (23)

## Review Questions

After reading this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways is public speaking likely to make a difference in your life?
2. How is public speaking similar to everyday conversation?
3. How is public speaking different from everyday conversation?
4. Why is it normal—even desirable—to be nervous at the start of a speech?
5. How can you control your nervousness and make it work for you in your speeches?
6. What are the seven elements of the speech communication process? How do they interact to determine the success or failure of a speech?
7. What is ethnocentrism? Why do public speakers need to avoid ethnocentrism when addressing audiences with diverse cultural, racial, or ethnic backgrounds?

## Exercises for Critical Thinking

1. Think back on an important conversation you had recently in which you wanted to achieve a particular result. (*Examples:* asking your employer to change your work schedule; explaining to a friend how to change the oil and filter in a car; attempting to talk your spouse or partner into buying the computer you like rather than the one he or she prefers.) Work up a brief analysis of the conversation.  
In your analysis, explain the following: (1) your purpose in the conversation and the message strategy you chose to achieve your purpose; (2) the communication channels used during the conversation and how they affected the outcome; (3) the interference—internal or external—you encountered during the conversation; (4) the steps you took to adjust to feedback; (5) the strategic changes you would make in preparing for and carrying out the conversation if you had it to do over again.
2. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. Label one column “Characteristics of an Effective Public Speaker.” Label the other column “Characteristics of an Ineffective Public Speaker.” In the columns, list and briefly explain what you believe to be the five most important characteristics of effective and ineffective speakers. Be prepared to discuss your ideas in class.
3. On the basis of the lists you developed for Exercise 2, candidly evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses as a speaker. Identify the three primary aspects of speechmaking you most want to improve.

# 2

## Ethics and Public Speaking

The Importance of Ethics

Guidelines for Ethical Speaking

Plagiarism

Guidelines for Ethical Listening

When the rumors started, Brian Pertzborn, chief financial officer for a prominent charity in the southwest United States, called a press conference. Dozens of reporters showed up. Brian looked directly into the cameras and said, “I assure you that no one at this charity has taken money away from the children and families we work so hard to serve. Embezzlement is illegal and a serious breach of trust. I would never let either happen.”

Brian’s presentation was highly convincing, and for a time it quieted the rumors. Unfortunately, his statements were false. Two months later, he was indicted by the federal government for stealing more than \$2.5 million from the charity.

At the trial, it became clear that Brian was guilty as charged. It also came out that on the very day of his press conference, he had tried to cover his tracks by transferring some of the embezzled money to an overseas bank account.

When the judge sentenced Brian to a stiff prison sentence, she made clear that she was influenced partly by Brian’s lies at the press conference. Had he told the truth, his pleas for leniency might have been better received.

This is not a happy story, but it shows why public speaking needs to be guided by a strong sense of integrity. Brian Pertzborn was persuasive when speaking to the press, but he was unethical in lying to cover his illegal activities. As a result, he hurt people who relied on the charity, destroyed his reputation, and ended up with a long jail sentence. Perhaps if he had confessed before the cameras that day, he would have received a fine and a reprimand instead of the harshest sentence the judge could impose.

GOALS



The goal of public speaking is to gain a desired response from listeners—but not at any cost. Speechmaking is a form of power and therefore carries with it heavy ethical responsibilities. As the Roman rhetorician Quintilian stated 2,000 years ago, the ideal of speechmaking is the good person speaking well. In this chapter, we explore that ideal by looking at the importance of ethics in public speaking, the ethical obligations of speakers and listeners, and the practical problem of plagiarism and how to avoid it.

## The Importance of Ethics

### ethics

The branch of philosophy that deals with issues of right and wrong in human affairs.

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that deals with issues of right and wrong in human affairs. Questions of ethics arise whenever we ask whether a course of action is moral or immoral, fair or unfair, just or unjust, honest or dishonest.

We face such questions daily in almost every part of our lives. The parent must decide how to deal with a child who has been sent home from school for unruly behavior. The researcher must decide whether to shade her data “just a bit” to gain credit for an important scientific breakthrough. The shopper must decide what to do with the \$5 extra change mistakenly given by the clerk at the grocery store. The student must decide whether to say anything about a friend he has seen cheating on a final exam.

Questions of ethics also come into play whenever a public speaker faces an audience. In an ideal world, as the Greek philosopher Plato noted, all public speakers would be truthful and devoted to the good of society. Yet history tells us that the power of speech is often abused—sometimes with disastrous results. Adolf Hitler was unquestionably a persuasive speaker. His oratory galvanized the German people, but his aims were horrifying and his tactics despicable. He remains to this day the ultimate example of why the power of the spoken word needs to be guided by a strong sense of ethical integrity.

As a public speaker, you will face ethical issues at every stage of the speechmaking process—from the initial decision to speak through the final presentation of the message. And the answers will not always be easy. Consider the following example:

Felicia Robinson is running for school board in a large eastern city. Her opponent is conducting what Felicia regards as a highly unethical campaign. In addition to twisting the facts about school taxes, the opponent is pandering to racial prejudice by raising resentment against African Americans and recently arrived immigrants.

Five days before the election, Felicia, who is slightly behind in the polls, learns that the district attorney is preparing to indict her opponent for shady business practices. But the indictment will not be formally issued until after the election. Nor can it be taken as evidence that her opponent is guilty—like all citizens, he has the right to be presumed innocent until proven otherwise.

Still, news of the indictment could be enough to throw the election Felicia’s way, and her advisers urge her to make it an issue in her remaining campaign speeches. Should Felicia follow their advice?



There are creditable arguments to be made on both sides of the ethical dilemma faced by Felicia Robinson. She has tried to run an honest campaign, and she is troubled by the possibility of unfairly attacking her opponent—despite the fact that he has shown no such scruples himself. Yet she knows that the impending indictment may be her last chance to win the election, and she is convinced that a victory for her opponent will spell disaster for the city’s school system. Torn between her commitment to fair play, her desire to be elected, and her concern for the good of the community, she faces the age-old ethical dilemma of whether the ends justify the means.

### ethical decisions

Sound ethical decisions involve weighing a potential course of action against a set of ethical standards or guidelines.

“So,” you may be asking yourself, “what is the answer to Felicia Robinson’s dilemma?” In complex cases such as hers there are no cut-and-dried answers. As the leading book on communication ethics states, “We should formulate meaningful ethical guidelines, not inflexible rules.”<sup>1</sup> Your ethical decisions will be guided by your values, your conscience, and your sense of right and wrong.

But this does not mean such decisions are simply a matter of personal whim or fancy. Sound ethical decisions involve weighing a potential course of action against a set of ethical standards or guidelines. Just as there are guidelines for ethical behavior in other areas of life, so there are guidelines for ethical conduct in public speaking. These guidelines will not automatically solve every ethical quandary you face as a speaker, but knowing them will provide a reliable compass to help you find your way.

## Guidelines for Ethical Speaking

### MAKE SURE YOUR GOALS ARE ETHICALLY SOUND

Several years ago, I spoke with a former student—we’ll call her Melissa—who had turned down a job in the public relations department of the American Tobacco Institute. Why? Because the job would have required her to lobby on behalf of the cigarette industry. Melissa did not believe she could ethically promote a product that she saw as responsible for thousands of deaths and illnesses each year.

Given Melissa’s view of the dangers of cigarette smoking, there can be no doubt that she made an ethically informed decision. On the other side of the coin, someone with a different view of cigarette smoking could make an ethically informed decision to *take* the job. The point of this example is not to judge the rightness or wrongness of Melissa’s decision (or of cigarette smoking), but to illustrate how ethical considerations can affect a speaker’s choice of goals.

Your first responsibility as a speaker is to ask whether your goals are ethically sound. During World War II, Hitler stirred the German people to condone war, invasion, and genocide. More recently, we have seen politicians who betray the public trust for personal gain, business leaders who defraud investors of millions of dollars, preachers who lead lavish lifestyles at the expense of their religious duties. There can be no doubt that these are not worthy goals.

But think back for a moment to the examples of speechmaking given in Chapter 1. What do the speakers hope to accomplish? Help disadvantaged kids. Improve the quality of education. Pay tribute to a fellow worker. Support Habitat for Humanity. Few people would question that these goals are ethically sound.



As with other ethical issues, there can be gray areas when it comes to assessing a speaker's goals—areas in which reasonable people with well-defined standards of right and wrong can legitimately disagree. But this is not a reason to avoid asking ethical questions. If you are to be a responsible public speaker, you cannot escape assessing the ethical soundness of your goals.

## BE FULLY PREPARED FOR EACH SPEECH

“A speech,” as Jenkin Lloyd Jones stated, “is a solemn responsibility.” You have an obligation—to yourself and to your listeners—to prepare fully every time you stand in front of an audience. The obligation to yourself is obvious: The better you prepare, the better your speech will be. But the obligation to your listeners is no less important. Think of it this way: The person who makes a bad 30-minute speech to an audience of 200 people wastes only a half hour of her or his own time. But that same speaker wastes 100 hours of the audience's time—more than four full days. This, Jones exclaimed, “should be a hanging offense!”

At this stage of your speaking career, of course, you will probably not be facing many audiences of 200 people. And you will probably not be giving many speeches in which the audience has come for the sole purpose of listening to you. But neither the size nor the composition of your audience changes your ethical responsibility to be fully prepared. Your speech classmates are as worthy of your best effort as if you were addressing a jury or a business meeting, a union conference or a church congregation, the local city council or even the United States Senate.

Being prepared for a speech involves everything from analyzing your audience to creating visual aids, from organizing your ideas to rehearsing your delivery. Most crucial from an ethical standpoint, though, is being fully informed about your subject. Why is this so important? Consider the following story:

Victoria Nuñez, a student at a large state university, gave a classroom speech on suicide prevention. Victoria had learned about the topic from her mother, a volunteer on a suicide-prevention hotline, but she also consulted her psychology textbook, read several articles on the warning signs of suicide, and interviewed a crisis-intervention counselor at the campus health service.

In addition to her research, Victoria gave a lot of thought to planning and delivering her speech. She created a handout for the class listing signs that a person might attempt suicide and providing contact information for local mental-health resources. On the day of her speech, Victoria was thoroughly prepared—and she gave an excellent presentation.

Only a few days later, one of Victoria's classmates, Paul Nichols, had a conversation with his roommate that raised a warning flag about whether the roommate might be depressed and in danger of suicide. Based on the information in Victoria's speech, Paul spoke to his roommate, got him to talk about his worries, and convinced him to seek counseling. Paul might have saved his roommate's life, thanks to Victoria's speech.

This is an especially dramatic case, but it demonstrates how your speeches can have a genuine impact on your listeners. As a speaker, you have an ethical



Questions of ethics arise whenever a speaker faces an audience. Here Ecuadorian national representative Lourdes Tibán speaks on behalf of indigenous peoples.

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responsibility to consider that impact and to make sure you prepare fully so as not to communicate erroneous information or misleading advice. If Victoria had not done such a thorough job researching her speech, she might have given her classmates faulty information—information that might have had tragic results.

No matter what the topic, no matter who the audience, you need to explore your speech topic as thoroughly as possible. Investigate the whole story; learn about all sides of an issue; seek out competing viewpoints; get the facts right. Not only will you give a better speech, you will also fulfill one of your major ethical obligations.

## BE HONEST IN WHAT YOU SAY

Nothing is more important to ethical speechmaking than honesty. Public speaking rests on the unspoken assumption that “words can be trusted and people will be truthful.”<sup>2</sup> Without this assumption, there is no basis for communication, no reason for one person to believe anything that another person says.

Does this mean *every* speaker must *always* tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”? We can all think of situations in which this is impossible (because we do not know the whole truth) or inadvisable (because it would be tactless or imprudent). Consider a parent who tells his two-year-old daughter that her screeching violin solo is “beautiful.” Or a speaker who tells a falsehood in circumstances when disclosing the truth might touch off mob violence. Few people would find these actions unethical.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, think back to the case of Brian Pertzborn at the start of this chapter. Brian knew he had embezzled money from the charity. Yet he denied that he had done so, even as he was profiting at the expense of people who depended on the charity's services. There is no way to excuse Brian's behavior.

Such blatant contempt for the truth is one kind of dishonesty in public speaking. But more subtle forms of dishonesty are just as unethical. They include juggling statistics, quoting out of context, misrepresenting sources, painting tentative findings as firm conclusions, citing unusual cases as typical examples, and substituting innuendo and half-truths for evidence and proof. All of these violate the speaker's duty to be accurate and fair in presenting information.

While on the subject of honesty in speechmaking, we should also note that ethically responsible speakers do not present other people's words as their own. They do not plagiarize their speeches. This subject is so important that we devote a separate section to it later in this chapter.

## **AVOID NAME-CALLING AND OTHER FORMS OF ABUSIVE LANGUAGE**

### **name-calling**

The use of language to defame, demean, or degrade individuals or groups.

"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." This popular children's chant could not be more wrong. Words may not literally break people's bones, but they can leave psychological scars as surely as sticks and stones can leave physical scars. As one writer explains, "Our identities, who and what we are, how others see us, are greatly affected by the names we are called and the words with which we are labeled."<sup>4</sup> This is why communication ethicists warn public speakers to avoid name-calling and other forms of abusive language.

Name-calling is the use of language to defame, demean, or degrade individuals or groups. When applied to various groups in America, it includes such epithets as "redskin," "fag," "kike," "nigger," "honkey," "wop," "jap," "chink," and "spic" that have been used to label people because of their sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or ethnic background. Such terms are ethically suspect because they stereotype and devalue the people in question.

Name-calling is also a destructive social force. When used repeatedly and systematically over time, it helps reinforce attitudes that encourage prejudice, hate crimes, and civil rights violations.<sup>5</sup> The issue is not one of political correctness, but of respecting the dignity of diverse groups in contemporary society.

In addition, name-calling and abusive language pose ethical problems in public speaking when they are used to silence opposing voices. A democratic society depends upon the free and open expression of ideas. In the United States, all citizens have the right to join in the never-ending dialogue of democracy. As a public speaker, you have an ethical obligation to help preserve that right. This obligation is the same regardless of whether you are black or white, Christian or Muslim, male or female, gay or straight, liberal or conservative.

Like other ethical questions in public speaking, name-calling raises some thorny issues. Although name-calling can be hazardous to free speech, it is still protected under the free-speech clause of the Bill of Rights. This is why broadly worded codes against hate speech on college campuses—and in society at large—have not survived legal challenges.<sup>6</sup>

### **Bill of Rights**

The first 10 amendments to the United States Constitution.



Questions of ethics arise whenever a speaker faces an audience. Of all the ethical obligations facing a speaker, none is more important than honesty in order to maintain the bond of trust with speakers.

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But regardless of the legal issues, they do not alter the ethical responsibility of public speakers to avoid name-calling and abusive language. Legality and ethics, though related, are not identical. There is nothing illegal about falsifying statistics in a speech, but there is no doubt that it is unethical. The same is true of name-calling. It may not be illegal to cast racial, religious, sexual, or religious slurs at people in a speech, but it is still unethical. Not only does it demean the dignity of the groups or individuals being attacked, but it undermines the right of all groups in the United States to be fairly heard.<sup>7</sup>

## PUT ETHICAL PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

It is easy to pay lip service to the importance of ethics. It is much harder to act ethically. Yet that is just what a responsible public speaker must do. As one popular book on ethics states, “Being ethical means behaving ethically *all the time*—not only when it’s convenient.”<sup>8</sup>

As you work on your speeches, you will ask yourself such questions as “Is my choice of topic suitable for the audience?” “Are my supporting materials clear and convincing?” “How can I phrase my ideas to give them more punch?” These are *strategic* questions. As you answer them, you will try to make your speech as informative, as persuasive, or as entertaining as possible.

But you will also face moments of *ethical* decision—similar, perhaps, to those faced by Brian Pertzborn, Felicia Robinson, and other speakers in this chapter. When those moments arrive, don’t simply brush them aside and go on your way. Keep in mind the guidelines for ethical speechmaking we have discussed and do your best to follow them through thick and thin. Make sure you can answer yes to all the questions on the Checklist for Ethical Public Speaking.<sup>9</sup>



# checklist

## Ethical Public Speaking

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Have I examined my goals to make sure they are ethically sound? a. Can I defend my goals on ethical grounds if they are questioned or challenged? b. Would I want other people to know my true motives in presenting this speech?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Have I fulfilled my ethical obligation to prepare fully for the speech? a. Have I done a thorough job of studying and researching the topic? b. Have I prepared diligently so as not to communicate erroneous or misleading information to my listeners?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Is the speech free of plagiarism? a. Can I vouch that the speech represents my own work, my own thinking, my own language? b. Do I cite the sources of all quotations and paraphrases?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Am I honest in what I say in the speech? a. Is the speech free of any false or deliberately deceptive statements? b. Does the speech present statistics, testimony, and other kinds of evidence fairly and accurately? c. Does the speech contain valid reasoning? d. If the speech includes visual aids, do they present facts honestly and reliably?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Do I use the power of language ethically? a. Do I avoid name-calling and other forms of abusive language? b. Does my language show respect for the right of free speech and expression?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. All in all, have I made a conscious effort to put ethical principles into practice in preparing my speech?

## Plagiarism

### plagiarism

Presenting another person's language or ideas as one's own.

Plagiarism comes from *plagiarius*, the Latin word for kidnapper. To plagiarize means to present another person's language or ideas as your own—to give the impression you have written or thought something yourself when you have actually taken it from someone else.<sup>10</sup> We often think of plagiarism as an ethical issue in the classroom, but it can have repercussions in other situations:

As director of education for the Toronto (Canada) School Board, Chris Spence gave numerous speeches, in addition to writing newspaper

articles and blog posts about his thoughts on education. Many people called him inspiring and his personality larger-than-life.

Then reporters discovered that portions of Spence's speeches and writings were lifted word-for-word from other people. They also noticed that passages of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto lacked proper attribution. One newspaper referred to him as a "serial plagiarist" who repeatedly published "inspirational columns and blogs and speeches that were moving and thought-provoking—but not at all his own."

As the revelations mounted, Spence faced severe criticism within the school district and had little choice but to resign from his position, putting an end to his once stellar career. "There are no excuses for what I did," he said. "I didn't give credit where credit was due."<sup>11</sup>

As this story shows, plagiarism is a serious matter. If you are caught plagiarizing a speech in class, the punishment can range from a failing grade to expulsion from school. If you are caught plagiarizing outside the classroom, you stand to forfeit your good name, to damage your career, or, if you are sued, to lose a large amount of money. It is worth your while, then, to make sure you know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

## GLOBAL PLAGIARISM

Global plagiarism is stealing your speech entirely from another source and passing it off as your own. The most blatant—and unforgivable—kind of plagiarism, it is grossly unethical.

Global plagiarism in a college classroom usually occurs because a student puts off the assignment until the last minute. Then, in an act of desperation, the student downloads a speech from the Internet or gets one written by a friend and delivers it as his or her own.

The best way to avoid this, of course, is not to leave your speech until the last minute. Most instructors explain speech assignments far enough in advance that you should have no trouble getting an early start. By starting early, you will give yourself plenty of time to prepare a first-rate speech—a speech of your own.

If, for some reason, you fail to get your speech ready on time, do not succumb to the lure of plagiarism. Whatever penalty you suffer from being late will pale in comparison with the consequences if you are caught plagiarizing.

## PATCHWORK PLAGIARISM

Unlike global plagiarism, in which a speaker pirates an entire speech from a single source, patchwork plagiarism occurs when a speaker pilfers from two or three sources. Here's an example:

Lexi Nau chose "The Benefits and Drawbacks of Autonomous Vehicles" as the topic for her informative speech. In her research, Lexi found three especially helpful sources. The first was a recent article in the journal *Science* on the ethical challenges of programming autonomous vehicles. The second was Wikipedia, and the third was the Web site of the Stanford University Center for Automotive Research.

### global plagiarism

Stealing a speech entirely from a single source and passing it off as one's own.

### patchwork plagiarism

Stealing ideas or language from two or three sources and passing them off as one's own.



Unfortunately, instead of using these materials creatively to write a speech in her own words, Lexi lifted long passages from the article, from Wikipedia, and from the university Web site and patched them together with a few transitions. When she was finished, she had a speech that was composed almost entirely of other people's words.

When Lexi's teacher read her speech outline, it did not sound authentic to him. So he plugged several phrases from the outline into Google. In less than a minute, he had found both the Wikipedia article and the Stanford University Web site. After searching on Google Scholar, he also found the journal article. Lexi was caught red-handed.

This story illustrates an important point about plagiarism. Lexi did not take her speech from a single source. She even did a little research. But copying from a few sources is no less plagiarism than copying from a single source. When you give a speech, you declare that it is your work—the product of your thinking, your beliefs, your language. Lexi's speech did not contain any of these. Instead, it was cut and pasted wholly from other people's words.

"But," you may be thinking, "not many students are experts on their speech topics. Why should they be expected to come up with new ideas that even the experts haven't thought of?"

The answer is they aren't. The key is not whether you have something absolutely original to say, but whether you do enough research and thinking to come up with your own slant on the topic.

As with global plagiarism, one key to averting patchwork plagiarism is to start working on your speech as soon as possible. The longer you work on it, the more apt you are to come up with your own approach. It is also vital to consult a large number of sources in your research. If you have only two or three sources, you are far more likely to fall into the trap of patchwork plagiarism than if you consult a wide range of research materials.

## INCREMENTAL PLAGIARISM

### incremental plagiarism

Failing to give credit for particular parts of a speech that are borrowed from other people.

In global plagiarism and patchwork plagiarism, the entire speech is cribbed more or less verbatim from a single source or a few sources. But plagiarism can exist even when the speech as a whole is not pirated. This is called incremental plagiarism. It occurs when the speaker fails to give credit for particular parts—increments—of the speech that are borrowed from other people. The most important of these increments are quotations and paraphrases.

### Quotations

Whenever you quote someone directly, you must attribute the words to that person. Suppose you are giving a speech on Malcolm X, the famous African-American leader of the 1960s. While doing your research, you run across the following passage from Bruce Perry's acclaimed biography, *Malcolm: The Life of the Man Who Changed Black America*:

Malcolm X fathered no legislation. He engineered no stunning Supreme Court victories or political campaigns. He scored no major electoral triumphs. Yet because of the way he articulated his followers' grievances and anger, the impact he had upon the body politic was enormous.<sup>12</sup>



Speakers who begin work on their speeches early and consult a wide range of sources are less likely to fall into the trap of plagiarism than are speakers who procrastinate and rely on a limited number of sources.

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This is a fine quotation that summarizes the nature and importance of Malcolm's impact on American politics. It would make a strong addition to your speech—as long as you acknowledge Perry as the author. The way to avoid plagiarism in this instance is to introduce Perry's statement by saying something like:

In *Malcolm: The Life of the Man Who Changed Black America*, historian Bruce Perry says the following about Malcolm's impact on American politics: . . .

Or,

According to historian Bruce Perry in his book *Malcolm: The Life of the Man Who Changed Black America*, . . .

Now you have clearly identified Perry and given him credit for his words rather than presenting them as your own.

## Paraphrases

When you paraphrase an author, you restate or summarize her or his ideas in your own words. Suppose, once again, that your topic is Malcolm X. But this time you decide to paraphrase the statement from Bruce Perry's biography rather than quoting it. You might say:

Malcolm X was not a politician. He did not pass any laws, or win any Supreme Court victories, or get elected to any office. But he stated the grievances and anger of his followers so powerfully that the whole nation took notice.

## paraphrase

To restate or summarize an author's ideas in one's own words.

Even though you do not quote Perry directly, you still appropriate the structure of his ideas and a fair amount of his language. Thus you still need to give him credit—just as if you were repeating his words verbatim.

It is especially important in this case to acknowledge Perry because you are borrowing his opinion—his judgment—about Malcolm X. If you simply recount basic facts about Malcolm’s life—he was born in Omaha, Nebraska; he converted to the Nation of Islam while in prison; he traveled to Mecca toward the end of his life; he was assassinated in February 1965—you do not have to report the source of your information. These facts are well known and can be found in any standard reference work.

On the other hand, there is still considerable debate about Malcolm’s views of other African-American leaders, the circumstances surrounding his death, and what he might have done had he lived. If you were to cite Perry’s views on any of these matters—regardless of whether you quoted or paraphrased—you would need to acknowledge him as your source.

As more than one speaker (and writer) has discovered, it is possible to commit incremental plagiarism quite by accident. This is less offensive than deliberate plagiarism, but it is plagiarism nonetheless. There are two ways to guard against incremental plagiarism. The first is to be careful when taking research notes to distinguish among direct quotations, paraphrased material, and your own comments. (See Chapter 7 for a full discussion of research methods.) The second way to avoid incremental plagiarism is to err on the side of caution. In other words, when in doubt, cite your source.

## **PLAGIARISM AND THE INTERNET**

When it comes to plagiarism, no subject poses more confusion—or more temptation—than the Internet. Because it’s so easy to copy information from the Web, many people are not aware of the need to cite sources when they use Internet materials in their speeches. If you don’t cite Internet sources, you are just as guilty of plagiarism as if you take information from print sources without proper citation.

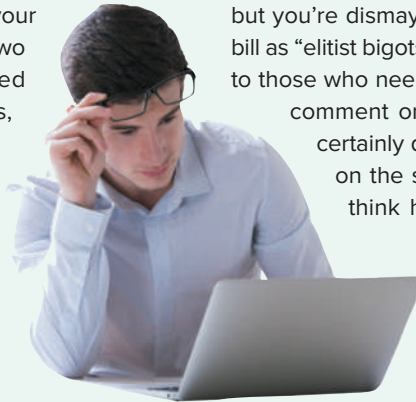
One way to avoid patchwork plagiarism or incremental plagiarism when working with the Internet is to take careful research notes. Make sure you keep a record of the following: (1) the title of the Internet document, (2) the author or organization responsible for the document, (3) the date on which the document was last updated, and (4) the date on which you accessed the site. You will need all this information for your speech bibliography.

You will also need to identify your Internet sources when you present the speech. It’s not enough to say “As I found on the Web” or “According to the Internet.” You need to specify the author and the Web site. In Chapter 8, we’ll look more closely at how to cite Internet documents. For now, keep in mind that providing such citations is one of your ethical responsibilities as a public speaker.

Another problem with regard to the Internet is the large number of Web sites that sell entire speeches or papers. In addition to being highly unethical, using material from one of these sites is extremely risky. The same technology that makes it easy to plagiarize from the Web makes it easy for instructors to locate material that has been plagiarized and the exact source from which it has been taken.

## Using public speaking in your **CAREER**

Having graduated with a degree in public administration and hoping to pursue a career in politics, you have been fortunate to receive a staff position with one of the leading senators in your state legislature. Since your arrival two months ago, you have answered phones, ordered lunch, made copies, stapled mailings, and stuffed envelopes. Finally you have been asked to look over a speech the senator will deliver at your alma mater. Surely, you think, this will be the first of many important assignments once your value is recognized.



After reading the speech, however, your enthusiasm is dampened. You agree wholeheartedly with its support of a bill to fund scholarships for low-income students, but you're dismayed by its attack on opponents of the bill as "elitist bigots who would deny a college education to those who need it most." You haven't been asked to comment on the ethics of the speech, and you certainly don't want to jeopardize your position on the senator's staff. At the same time, you think his use of name-calling may actually arouse sympathy for the opposition.

The senator would like your comments in two hours. What will you tell him?

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You should also know that almost all the speeches (and papers) offered for sale on the Web are of very low quality. If you are ever tempted to purchase one, keep in mind there is a good chance you will waste your money and get caught in the process. Here, as in other aspects of life, honesty is the best policy.

## Guidelines for Ethical Listening

So far in this chapter we have focused on the ethical duties of public speakers. But speechmaking is not a one-way street. Listeners also have ethical obligations. They are (1) to listen courteously and attentively, (2) to avoid prejudging the speaker, and (3) to maintain the free and open expression of ideas. Let us look at each.

### BE COURTEOUS AND ATTENTIVE

Imagine that you are giving your first classroom speech. You have put a great deal of time into writing the speech, and you have practiced your delivery until you are confident you can do well—especially once you get over the initial rush of stage fright.

You have worked hard on your introduction, and your speech gets off to a fine start. Most of your classmates are paying close attention, but some are not. One appears to be doing homework for another class. Another keeps sneaking glances at his cell phone. Two or three are gazing out the window, and one is leaning back in his chair with his eyes shut!

You try to block them out of your mind—especially since the rest of the class seems interested in what you are saying—but the longer you speak, the more concerned you become. “What am I doing wrong?” you wonder to yourself. “How can I get these people to pay attention?” The more you think about this, the more your confidence and concentration waver.

When you momentarily lose your place halfway through the speech, you start to panic. Your nerves, which you have held in check so far, take the upper hand. Your major thought now becomes, “How can I get this over as fast as possible?” Flustered and distracted, you rush through the rest of your speech and sit down.

Just as public speakers have an ethical obligation to prepare fully for each speech, so listeners have a responsibility to be courteous and attentive during the speech. This responsibility—which is a matter of civility in any circumstance—is especially important in speech class. You and your classmates are in a learning situation in which you need to support one another.

When you listen to speeches in class, give your fellow students the same courtesy and attention you want from them. Come to class prepared to listen to—and to learn from—your classmates’ speeches. As you listen, be conscious of the feedback you are sending the speaker. Sit up in your chair rather than slouching; maintain eye contact with the speaker; show support and encouragement in your facial expressions. Keep in mind the power you have as a listener over the speaker’s confidence and composure, and exercise that power with a strong sense of ethical responsibility.

## **AVOID PREJUDGING THE SPEAKER**

We have all heard that you can’t judge a book by its cover. The same is true of speeches. You can’t judge a speech by the name, race, lifestyle, appearance, or reputation of the speaker. As the National Communication Association states in its Credo for Ethical Communication, listeners should “strive to understand and respect” speakers “before evaluating and responding to their messages.”<sup>13</sup>

This does not mean you must agree with every speaker you hear. Your aim is to listen carefully to the speaker’s ideas, to assess the evidence and reasoning offered in support of those ideas, and to reach an intelligent judgment about the speech. In Chapter 3, we will discuss specific steps you can take to improve your listening skills. For now, it is enough to know that if you prejudge a speaker—either positively or negatively—you will fail in one of your ethical responsibilities as a listener.

## **MAINTAIN THE FREE AND OPEN EXPRESSION OF IDEAS**

As we saw earlier in this chapter, a democratic society depends on the free and open expression of ideas. The right of free expression is so important that it is protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which declares, in part, that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.” Just as public speakers need to avoid name-calling and other tactics that can undermine free speech, so listeners have an obligation to maintain the right of speakers to be heard.

As with other ethical issues, the extent of this obligation is open to debate. Disputes over the meaning and scope of the First Amendment arise almost daily in





It is vital for a democratic society to maintain the free and open expression of ideas. Here student Mya Middleton speaks at the March for Our Lives rally in Washington, D.C., after the Parkland, Florida, school shooting.

©Noam Galai/WireImage/Getty Images

connection with issues such as terrorism, surveillance, bullying, and hate speech. The question underlying such disputes is whether *all* speakers have a right to be heard.

There are some kinds of speech that are not protected under the First Amendment—including defamatory falsehoods that destroy a person’s reputation, threats against the life of the President, and inciting an audience to illegal action in circumstances where the audience is likely to carry out the action. Otherwise, the Supreme Court has held—and most experts in communication ethics have agreed—that public speakers have an almost unlimited right of free expression.

In contrast to this view, it has been argued that some ideas are so dangerous, so misguided, or so offensive that society has a duty to suppress them. Because of displays of hate speech around the country, including on college campuses, this argument has gained support in recent years. Yet free-speech advocates would ask: Who is to determine which ideas are too dangerous, misguided, or offensive to be uttered? Who is to decide which speakers are to be heard and which are to be silenced?

No matter how well intentioned they may be, efforts to “protect” society by restricting free speech usually end up repressing minority viewpoints and unpopular opinions. In U.S. history, such efforts were used to keep women off the public platform until the 1840s, to muzzle labor organizers during the 1890s, and to impede civil rights leaders in the 1960s. Imagine what American society might be like if these speakers had been silenced!

It is important to keep in mind that ensuring a person’s freedom to express her or his ideas does not imply agreement with those ideas. You can disagree entirely with the message but still support the speaker’s right to express it. As the National Communication Association states in its Credo for Ethical Communication, “freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent” are vital to “the informed decision making fundamental to a civil society.”<sup>14</sup>



## Summary

Because public speaking is a form of power, it carries with it heavy ethical responsibilities. Today, as for the past 2,000 years, the good person speaking well remains the ideal of commendable speechmaking.

There are five basic guidelines for ethical public speaking. The first is to make sure your goals are ethically sound—that they are consistent with the welfare of society and your audience. The second is to be fully prepared for each speech. The third is to be honest in what you say. The fourth is to avoid name-calling and other forms of abusive language. The final guideline is to put ethical principles into practice at all times.

Of all the ethical lapses a speaker can commit, few are more serious than plagiarism. Global plagiarism is lifting a speech entirely from a single source. Patchwork plagiarism involves stitching a speech together by copying from a few sources. Incremental plagiarism occurs when a speaker fails to give credit for specific quotations and phrases that are borrowed from other people.

In addition to your ethical responsibilities as a speaker, you have ethical obligations as a listener. The first is to listen courteously and attentively. The second is to avoid prejudging the speaker. The third is to support the free and open expression of ideas. In all these ways, your speech class will offer a good testing ground for questions of ethical responsibility.

## Key Terms

ethics (28)

ethical decisions (29)

name-calling (32)

Bill of Rights (32)

plagiarism (34)

global plagiarism (35)

patchwork plagiarism (35)

incremental plagiarism (36)

paraphrase (37)

## Review Questions

**After reading this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions:**

1. What is ethics? Why is a strong sense of ethical responsibility vital for public speakers?
2. What are the five guidelines for ethical speechmaking discussed in this chapter?
3. What is the difference between global plagiarism and patchwork plagiarism? What are the best ways to avoid these two kinds of plagiarism?
4. What is incremental plagiarism? How can you steer clear of it when dealing with quotations and paraphrases?
5. What are the three guidelines for ethical listening discussed in this chapter?

## Exercises for Critical Thinking

1. Look back at the story of Felicia Robinson on pages 28–29. Evaluate her dilemma in light of the guidelines for ethical speechmaking presented in this chapter. Explain what you believe would be the most ethical course of action in her case.
2. The issue of insulting and abusive speech—especially slurs directed against people on the basis of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation—is extremely controversial. Do you believe society should punish such speech with criminal penalties? To what degree are colleges and universities justified in trying to discipline students who engage in such speech? Do you feel it is proper to place any boundaries on free expression to prohibit insulting and abusive speech? Why or why not? Be prepared to explain your ideas in class.
3. All of the following situations could arise in your speech class. Identify the ethical issues in each and explain what, as a responsible speaker or listener, your course of action would be.
  - a. You are speaking on the topic of prison reform. In your research, you run across two public opinion polls. One of them, an independent survey by the Gallup Organization, shows that a majority of people in your state oppose your position. The other poll, suspect in its methods and conducted by a partisan organization, says a majority of people in your state support your position. Which poll do you cite in your speech? If you cite the second poll, do you point out its shortcomings?
  - b. When listening to an informative speech by one of your classmates, you realize that much of it is plagiarized from a Web site you visited a couple of weeks earlier. What do you do? Do you say something when your instructor asks for comments about the speech? Do you mention your concern to the instructor after class? Do you talk with the speaker? Do you remain silent?
  - c. While researching your persuasive speech, you find a quotation from an article by a highly respected expert that will nail down one of your most important points. But as you read the rest of the article, you realize that the author does not in fact support the policy you are advocating. Do you still include the quotation in your speech? Why or why not?