1   Becoming a Public Speaker

Whether in the classroom, workplace, or community, the ability to speak confidently and convincingly before an audience is empowering. This pocket guide offers the tools you need to create and deliver effective speeches, from brief presentations to fellow students, co-workers, or fellow citizens to major addresses. Here you will discover the basic building blocks of any good speech and acquire the skills to deliver presentations in a variety of specialized contexts — from the college psychology class to business and professional situations.

Gain a Vital Life Skill

The ability to speak confidently and convincingly in public is a valuable asset to anyone who wants to take an active role in the world. Now, more than ever, public speaking has become both a vital life skill and a secret weapon in career development.[1] Recruiters of top graduate school students report that what distinguishes the most sought-after candidates is not their "hard" knowledge of finance or physics, but the "soft skills" of communication.[2] Dozens of surveys of managers and executives reveal that ability in oral and written communication is the most important skill they look for in a college graduate. In a recent survey of employers, for example, oral communication skills ranked first in such critical areas as teamwork, interpersonal competence, and analytical skills.

SKILLS EMPLOYERS SEEK
1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Strong work ethic
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others)
4. Initiative
5. Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)

Source: Job Outlook 2009, a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2009.

Learn Practical and Transferable Knowledge

Perhaps more than any other course of study, public speaking offers extraordinarily useful practical knowledge and skills that lead to satisfying personal and professional development. For example, public-speaking training sharpens your ability to reason and think critically. As you study public speaking, you will learn to construct claims and then present evidence and reasoning that logically support them.

As you practice organizing and outlining speeches, you will

become skilled at structuring ideas and identifying and strengthening the weak links in your thinking. These skills are valuable in any course that includes an oral-presentation component, from engineering to art history, or in any course that requires writing, researching topics, analyzing audiences, supporting and proving claims, and selecting patterns for organizing ideas. These skills will also serve you well throughout your career and beyond.

QUICK TIP

Public Speaking Leads to Career Success

According to a report titled What Students Must Know to Succeed in the 21st Century, *"Clear communication is critical to success. In the marketplace of ideas, the person who communicates clearly is also the person who is seen as thinking clearly. Oral and written communication are not only job-securing, but job-holding skills."*[3]

Find New Opportunities for Engagement

While public speaking skills contribute to both career advancement and personal enrichment, they also offer you ways to enter the public conversation about social concerns and become a more engaged citizen.

Climate change, energy, social security, immigration reform—such large civic issues require our considered judgment and action. Yet today too many of us leave it up to politicians, journalists, and other "experts" to make decisions about critical issues such as these. Today, only about 35 percent of people in the United States regularly vote. When citizens speak up in sufficient numbers, change occurs. Leaving problems such as pollution and global warming to others, on the other hand, is an invitation to special interest groups who may or may not act with our best interests in mind.

As you study public speaking, you will have the opportunity to research topics that are meaningful to you, consider alternate viewpoints, and if appropriate, choose a course of action.[4] You will learn to distinguish between argument that advances constructive goals and uncivil speech that serves merely to inflame and demean others. You will learn, in short, the "rules of engagement" for effective public discourse.[5]

Build on Familiar Skills

Learning to speak in public can be less daunting when you realize that you can draw on related skills that you already have. In several respects, for example, planning and delivering a speech resemble engaging in a particularly important conversation. When speaking with a friend, you automatically check to make certain you are understood and then adjust your meaning accordingly. You also tend to discuss issues that are appropriate to the circumstances. When a relative stranger is involved, however, you try to get to know his or her interests and attitudes before revealing any strong opinions. These instinctive adjustments to your audience, topic, and occasion represent critical steps in creating a speech. Although public speaking requires more planning, both the conversationalist and the public speaker try to uncover the audience's interests and needs before speaking.

Preparing a speech also has much in common with writing. Both depend on having a focused sense of who the audience is.[6] Both speaking and writing often require that you research a topic, offer credible evidence, employ effective transitions to signal the logical flow of ideas, and devise persuasive appeals. The principles of organizing a speech parallel those of organizing an essay, including offering a compelling introduction, a clear thesis statement, supporting ideas, and a thoughtful conclusion.

Develop an Effective Oral Style

Although public speaking has much in common with everyday conversation and with writing, it is, obviously, "its own thing." More so than writers, successful speakers generally use familiar terms, easy-to-follow sentences, and transitional words and phrases. Speakers also routinely repeat key words and phrases to emphasize ideas and help listeners follow along; even the briefest speeches make frequent use of repetition.

Spoken language is often more interactive and inclusive of the audience than written language. The personal pronouns *we*, *I*, and *you* occur more frequently in spoken than in written text. Audience members want to know what the speaker thinks and feels and that he or she recognizes them and relates the message to them. Yet, because public speaking usually occurs in more formal settings than everyday conversation, listeners generally expect a more formal style of communication from the speaker. When you give a speech, listeners expect you to speak in a clear, recognizable, and organized fashion. Thus, in contrast to conversation, in order

to develop an effective oral style you must practice the words you will say and the way you will say them.

Become an Inclusive Speaker

Every audience member wants to feel that the speaker has his or her particular needs and interests at heart, and to feel recognized and included in the message. To create this sense of inclusion, a public speaker must be able to address diverse audiences with sensitivity. No matter how passionately they believe in an issue, our most admired public speakers strive to respect differing viewpoints. When planning and delivering their speeches, they try to take audience members' sensitivities related to culture, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and other relevant characteristics into account.

Striving for inclusion and adopting an audience-centered perspective throughout will bring you closer to the goal of every public speaker—establishing a genuine connection with the audience.

Public Speaking as a Form of Communication

Public speaking is one of four categories of human communication: dyadic, small group, mass, and public speaking. **Dyadic communication** happens between two people, as in a conversation. **Small group communication** involves a small number of people who can see and speak directly with one another. **Mass communication** occurs between a speaker and a large audience of unknown people who usually are not present with the speaker, or who are part of such an immense crowd that there can be little or no interaction between speaker and listener.

In **public speaking**, a speaker delivers a message with a specific purpose to an audience of people who are present during the delivery of the speech. Public speaking always includes a speaker who has a reason for speaking, an audience that gives the speaker its attention, and a message that is meant to accomplish a specific purpose.[7] Public speakers address audiences largely without interruption and take responsibility for the words and ideas being expressed.

Shared Elements in All Communication Events

In any communication event, including public speaking, several elements are present. These include the source, the receiver, the message, the channel, and shared meaning (see Figure 1.1).
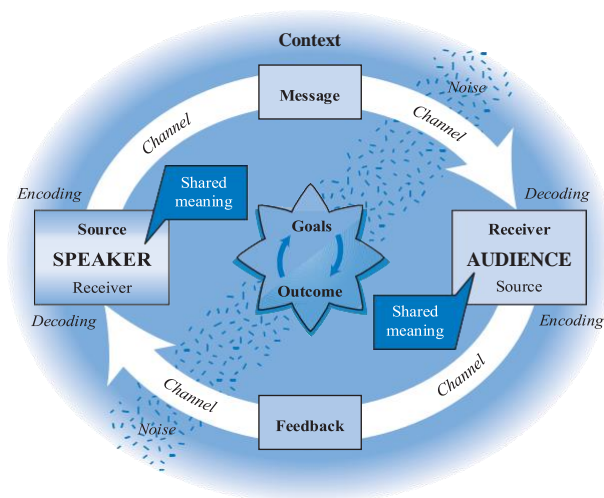
FIGURE 1.1 The Communication Process

The **source**, or sender, is the person who creates a message. Creating, organizing, and producing the message is called **encoding** — the process of converting thoughts into words.

The recipient of the source's message is the **receiver**, or audience. The process of interpreting the message is called **decoding**. Audience members decode the meaning of the message selectively, based on their own experiences and attitudes. **Feedback**, the audience's response to a message, can be conveyed both verbally and nonverbally.

The **message** is the content of the communication process: thoughts and ideas put into meaningful expressions, expressed verbally and nonverbally.

The medium through which the speaker sends a message is the **channel**. If a speaker is delivering a message in front of a live audience, the channel is the air through which sound waves travel. Other channels include the telephone, television, computers, and written correspondence. **Noise** is any interference with the message. Noise can disrupt the communication process through physical sounds such as cell phones ringing and people talking, through psychological distractions such as heated emotions, or through environmental interference such as a frigid room or the presence of unexpected people.

Shared meaning is the mutual understanding of a message between speaker and audience. The lowest level of shared meaning exists when the speaker has merely caught the

audience's attention. As the message develops, a higher degree of shared meaning is possible. Thus listener and speaker together truly make a speech a speech — they "co-create" its meaning.

Two other factors are critical to consider when preparing and delivering a speech—context and goals. **Context** includes anything that influences the speaker, the audience, the occasion—and thus, ultimately, the speech. In classroom speeches, the context would include (among other things) recent events on campus or in the outside world, the physical setting, the order and timing of speeches, and the cultural orientations of audience members. Successful communication can never be divorced from the concerns and expectations of others.

Part of the context of any speech is the situation that created the need for it in the first place. All speeches are delivered in response to a specific **rhetorical situation**, or a circumstance calling for a public response.[8] Bearing the context and rhetorical situation in mind ensures that you remain **audience centered**—that is, that you keep the needs, values, attitudes, and wants of your listeners firmly in focus.

A clearly defined *speech purpose* or goal is a final prerequisite for an effective speech. What is it that you want the audience to learn or do or believe as a result of your speech? Establishing a speech purpose early in the speechmaking process will help you proceed through speech preparation and delivery with a clear focus in mind.

The Classical Roots of Public Speaking

Originally the practice of giving speeches was known as **rhetoric** (also called **oratory**). Rhetoric flourished in the Greek city-state of Athens in the fifth century B.C.E. and referred to making effective speeches, particularly those of a persuasive nature.

Athens was the site of the world's first direct democracy, and its citizens used their considerable skill in public speaking to enact it. Meeting in a public square called the **agora**, the Athenians routinely spoke with great proficiency on the issues of public policy, and to this day their belief that citizenship demands active participation in public affairs endures. Later, in the Roman republic (the Western world's first-known representative democracy), citizens spoke in a public space called a **forum**.

From the beginning, public speakers, notably Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), and later, the Roman statesman and orator

Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), divided the process of preparing a speech into five parts, called the **canons of rhetoric**. *Invention* refers to adapting speech information to the audience in order to make your case. *Arrangement* is organizing the speech in ways best suited to the topic and audience. **Style** is the way the speaker uses language to express the speech ideas. *Memory* and **delivery** are the methods of rehearsing and presenting the speech so that you achieve the most effective blend of content, voice, and nonverbal behavior.

Although such founding scholars as Aristotle and Cicero surely didn't anticipate the omnipresent PowerPoint slideshow that accompanies contemporary speeches, the speechmaking structure they bequeathed to us as the canons of rhetoric remain remarkably intact. Often identified by terms other than the original, these canons nonetheless continue to be taught in current books on public speaking, including this pocket guide.

QUICK TIP

Voice Your Ideas in a Public Forum

The Greeks called it the agora; *the Romans the* forum. *Today, the term* **public forum** *denotes a variety of venues for the discussion of issues of public interest, including traditional physical spaces such as town halls as well as virtual forums streamed to listeners online. Participation in forums offers an excellent opportunity to pose questions and deliver brief comments, thereby providing exposure to an audience and building confidence. To find a forum in your area, check with your school or local town government, or check online at sites such as the National Issues Forum (www.nifi.org/index.aspx).*