



Chapter 1

Understanding Public Speaking



Part I

Introducing Public Speaking

1. A single remark makes a country prosper. (一言可以兴邦。)

—Confucius

2. Words have magical power. They can bring either the greatest happiness or deepest despair; they can transfer knowledge from teacher to student; words enable the orator to sway his audience and dictate the decisions.

—Sigmund Freud

Communications in their multiple forms pervade today's international context. With numerous job interviews, conference calls, meetings, product presentations, workshops, and public events, more and more leaders realize the importance of developing good interpersonal communication skills. Whether our goal is to enhance professional growth, or inspire, persuade and motivate other people to follow our lead, we will have to learn how to convey our ideas in front of a group of people in a clear, structured and captivating manner.

Arguably, improving the ability to speak in front of others and learning to talk about who we are and what we do with natural grace and authenticity can go a long way in expanding our social circles, building strong relationships with successful, like-minded people and making new friends.

Developing communication skills and learning to speak in the public can:

- increase our self-confidence;
- improve our communication skills;

- enhance our persuasion ability;
- open up new opportunities for career advancement;
- help us to easily assume leadership and train others;
- prepare us for spontaneous speaking challenges (e.g., delivering a speech at short notice);
- make us a desirable guest on regional, national and international conferences, seminars and public speaking events;

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1.1 What Is Public Speaking?

Public speaking, as a language communication behavior by which people express their views of a particular topic or event, plays an essential role in people's daily life. Public speaking is not only a simple oral conversation skill; instead it is a comprehensive quality involving language knowledge and skills, appropriate expression and adaptation ability.

1.1.1 Defining the Term

Public speaking is a social activity in which a speaker announces oneself, states one's opinions, or persuades people to do things, etc, using verbal and nonverbal language in front of an audience, in a set time or space. Simply put, public speaking is a way of making our ideas public—a way of sharing them with other people and of influencing other people.

1.1.2 Key Elements of Public Speaking

The speech communication process can be broken down into several basic elements, usually expressed as “**Who** is saying **What** to **Whom** in **What Context** using **What Medium** with **What Effects**?”

1) **Who—the speaker**

The speech communication process starts with the speaker—the person who is delivering, or presenting the speech. The success of the talk will be based on the credibility, preparation, and knowledge of the speaker about the topic. Thus, these qualities and strategies do matter for a successful speaker: positive moral character; exhausted research and analysis of the topic; strong self-confidence and self-control; appropriate physical appearance and use of verbal and non-verbal languages;

effective delivery skills, etc. When we are able to successfully communicate our message, that is, when the audience can decode what we are conveying, then we have become a successful communicator.

When preparing the speech, the speaker is supposed to consider these questions:

Am I interested in the topic?

Do I have enough knowledge on the topic?

Have I chosen the most effective language to express what I intend to convey?

Do I look confident when rehearsing?

2) What—the message

Another crucial element in the speech process is the message. The message is what the speaker is discussing or the ideas that he/she is presenting to the audience as he/she covers a particular topic. The word “message” comes from the Latin *mittere*, “to send”. The message is fundamental to communication. With regard to public speaking and speech communication, our speech is our message. However, we may have other intentions for the speech as well: the message behind the message. Perhaps we have a singular goal, point or emotion we want the audience to feel and understand. Every single word that we use to craft our speech then works to achieve that singular goal, point or emotion.

Messages can be sent both verbally and nonverbally. The actual words that we say certainly influence our speech. Do remember that the non-verbal communication is equally as important as the words we have to say. The body stance, posture and eye contact can also be crucial in building up bonds with the audience as well. For example, we are supposed to keep an assertive body posture—stand up straight and maintain eye contact when we can. In addition, be mindful of gestures—don’t overdo it, but don’t stand there rigidly, either. Gesture and movement build visual interest for the audience. In other words, it’s important to consider all aspects of our overall message, from verbal to non-verbal to the meaning and message behind the message when crafting your speech.

When preparing the speech, the speaker is supposed to consider these questions:

Is the subject or theme an appropriate one for me?

How does the message relate to the audience?

How does the message relate to the situation?

Is the message written effectively?

3) Whom—the audience

The audience refers to people who receive the message. There will be no public

speaking without the audience. The audience receives the information a speaker transmits such as his/her knowledge, experience, goals, values and attitudes. The audience generally forms an opinion as to the effectiveness of the speaker and the validity of the speaker's message is based on what they see and hear during the speech. The audience may be represented by a variety of distinguishing characteristics and commonalities, often referred to as demographics. It is important to remember that we should not stereotype or make assumptions about the audience based on their demographics; however, we can use these elements to inform the language, context, and delivery of the speech.

Whatever the occasion is, the speech must always be targeted at our audience. If we are familiar with our audience, for example, if the occasion is a large family gathering, then the speech should acknowledge and build upon our existing intimacy with the audience. The use of names and personal details of members of our audience can help engage our listeners. If the speech is delivered to an unfamiliar audience, then an early goal of our speech must serve to build a degree of trust with the listeners. We must know who our audience is in order to best decide how to get our message across. In public speaking, what is suitable for one group of the audience may not be appropriate for another. Analyzing the audience before composing the speech will enable us to give a more acceptable speech, and enable the audience to follow our message more easily.

When crafting the speech, the speaker is supposed to consider these questions:

Who will be the audience? What are their age, gender, occupation, educational or cultural background?

What does the audience have in common?

What will be the audience's attitude towards the topic?

Is the audience there voluntarily?

When listening to the speech, the audience is supposed to think about these questions:

Who is the speaker?

What are the speaker's qualifications and background?

Why is the speaker addressing the audience?

Do you know anything about the speaker before the speech? If yes, what?

What do you know about the speaker by the end of the speech?

4) Context

(1) Physical context

Physical context refers to the physical space in which the speech is delivered.

For example, we may find ourselves speaking in a classroom, a corporate board room, or a large amphitheater. Each of these real environments will influence our ability to interact with our audience. Larger physical spaces may require us to use a microphone and speaker system to make ourselves heard or to use projected presentation aids to convey visual materials.

How the room is physically decorated or designed can also impact our interaction with the audience. If the room is dimly lit or is decorated with interesting posters, audience members' minds may start wandering. If the room is too hot, we'll find people becoming sleepy. As speakers, we often have little or no control over our physical environment, but we always need to take it into account when planning and delivering our messages.

(2) Temporal context

The temporal context has to do not only with the time of day and moment in history but also with where a particular message fits into the sequence of communication events. The time of day can have a dramatic effect on how alert one's audience is. Don't believe that? Try giving a speech in front of a class around 12:30 p.m. when no one has had lunch. It's not surprising how impatient audience members get once hunger sets in.

In addition to the time of day, we often face temporal dimensions related to how our speech will be viewed in light of societal events. Imagine how a speech on the importance of campus security would be interpreted on the day after a safety incident occurred on campus.

Another element of the temporal dimension is how a message fits with what happens immediately before it. For example, if another speaker has just given an intense speech on death and dying and you stand up to speak about something more trivial, people may downplay your message because it doesn't fit with the serious tone established by the earlier speech. You never want to be the funny speaker who has to follow an emotional speech where people cried. Most of the time in a speech class, we probably will have no advance notice as to what the speaker before us will be talking about. Therefore, it is wise to plan to be sensitive to previous topics and be prepared to ease our way subtly into the message if the situation dictates.

(3) Cultural and gender context

When considering both gender and cultural contexts, we often encounter bias, both intentional and unintentional, and implicit or explicit. We may have presumptive judgments or opinions about those cultures and races that differ from our own, which are often the result of our own upbringing. In addition as much as we might be biased toward or against certain gender and cultural groups, our

audience will have just as much bias as us, in different ways. As such, it is radically important to know exactly to whom we are speaking when giving our speech. It's helpful for us to anticipate not only the biases we might bring to the podium but also those biases of our audience towards us as well.

Before giving the speech, the speaker is supposed to consider these questions:

What is the occasion for the speech?

Where will the speech take place?

When will the speech take place?

Do I speak to a domestic or international audience?

Do I use some kind of language that may offend some audience?

5) Medium—the channel

The channel is the means by which the message is sent or transmitted. Different channels are used to deliver the message, depending on the communication type or context. For instance, in mass communication, the channel utilized might be a television or radio broadcast. A cell phone is an example of a channel that we might use to text a friend in interpersonal communication. However, the channel typically used in public speaking is the speaker's voice, or more specifically, the sound waves to carry the voice to those listening. We could watch a prerecorded speech or one accessible on the internet, and we might say the channel is the television or our computer. This is partially true. However, the speech would still have no value if the speaker's voice was not present. Therefore, in reality, the channel is now a combination of the two, i.e., the speaker's voice broadcast through an electronic source.

6) Effects—the feedback

The final component of the speech process is feedback. While some might assume that the speaker is the only one who sends a message during a speech, the reality is that the listeners in the audience are sending a message of their own, called feedback. Often this is how the speaker knows if he/she is sending an effective message. Occasionally the feedback from listeners comes in verbal form—questions from the audience or an response of agreement/disagreement from a listener about a key point presented. However, in general, feedback during a speech is typically non-verbal: an audience nodding his/her head in agreement or a confused look from an audience member. An observant speaker will scan the audience for these forms of feedback. For example, As we look around, are people returning our gaze? If so, we have an engaged audience, attentively listening to our speech. If we see half-closed or closed eyes, we have to try adjusting our tone and volume, or add some interesting points to lift them up.



1.2 Traditions of Public Speaking

1.2.1 Public Speaking in the West

The roots of the tradition of public speaking can be traced back to the ancient Greek period when scholars elaborated and developed novel techniques of public speaking. About 2,500 years ago, four ancient Greek scholars developed and mastered the art of rhetoric in public speaking. These scholars are also known as the “fantastic four”—Aspasia, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Aspasia is often regarded as the “mother of rhetoric” and believed to have taught rhetoric to Socrates. Socrates greatly influenced the thought during the Classical Period (500BC–400BC). Later, the writings of his student—Plato are the main source of Socrates’ teachings. Plato wrote about rhetoric in the form of dialogues with Socrates as the main character. In that period, the emphasis was on the best ways to write and deliver speeches, with a great amount of focus on the importance of truth and ethics in public speaking. Afterwards, the tradition was taken to new heights by Aristotle, Plato’s student and whose contribution to the field of public speaking and rhetoric is unparalleled. Aristotle defined “rhetoric” as “the art of identifying and using the best available means in a given situation to ethically persuade an audience”. Aristotle divided the “means of persuasion” into three parts, or three artistic proofs necessary to persuade others: logical reason (logos), human character (ethos), and emotional appeal (pathos). Logos is the presentation of logical consistency in reasons or arguments that support a speaker’s talk. Ethos refers to the speaker’s credibility or trustworthiness. Pathos occurs when a speaker evokes particular emotion in the audience.

After the Greeks, Romans scholars such as Quintilian and Cicero made a momentous contribution to the study of rhetoric and oratory. Quintilian’s masterpiece *Speakers’ School* is called the “syllabus for cultivating public speech talents”. Like Aristotle, Cicero saw the relationship between rhetoric and persuasion and its applicability to the political sphere. Cicero is well known for creating the five canons of rhetoric, a five-step process for developing a persuasive speech. This five-step process is comprised of **invention** which contains collecting and making the analysis of facts and evidence; **arrangement**, which is also called organization; **style**, which is the eloquent and effective language use; **memory**, which is the recollection of the public speaking to deliver; and **delivery**.

The above orators such as Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian promoted classic rhetoric throughout periods of Renaissance, reforms in England and revolutionaries in colonial America, during which a number of eloquent politicians, such as

Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, applied ancient speaking principles to a more ethical and political course of action for their nations. The spirit of rhetoric is fitting into the political system and social cultural values, especially in the United States where democracy and individual voice are valued.

1.2.2 Public Speaking in China

Although the term “public speaking”, known for rhetoric as a Latin word, is generally considered to be born in Western civilization, the Chinese roots of rhetoric could go back the same further. As early as more than two thousand years ago, numerous philosophical schools had emerged in ancient China, bringing up rhetorical significance. Public speaking was greatly valued during the ancient times. The school of logicians in the late Han Dynasty, founded by Deng Xi (546BC–501BC) was recognized to share Aristotelian logic in speech production and created the notion of “argumentation”. At that time, the speech was highly valued and encouraged. Argumentation and debates were common among philosophers and disputers (called *bian shi* 辩士). There have been periods in Chinese history when oral persuasion has been prevalent, most notably during the period of the Warring States (475BC–221 BC). This was a time when central control collapsed and China comprised several competing fiefdoms when kings and lords recruited learned individuals (*you shi* 游士) to form advisory boards.

An important figure in the history of rhetoric and persuasion who lived sometime during this period (481BC–221BC), and was thus more or less contemporaneous with Aristotle, was the philosopher Gui Guzi, whose name means “The Ghost of the Valleys”. As a philosopher of the Warring States period, Gui Guzi clearly understood the importance of the relative power of the speaker and listener in such persuasion. As the founder of the Zong Heng (纵横) school, Gui Guzi understood that the persuader needed to know how he related to the audience. He held that the ideal persuader requires several further key qualities: he is quick and perceptive; he is in control of himself and the situation; he is resourceful; he can assess people well; he can look after himself, and he can shepherd people.

Perhaps the most famous essay on the persuasion of the Warring States period was written by the legalist philosopher Han Feizi (280BC–233BC), who was born towards the end of the Warring States period. He has a privileged background, that is, he was a royal prince of the State of Han (one of the Warring States) and was a student of the Confucian philosopher, Xunzi. His book on political strategy, *the Han Feizi*, was read by the Prince of Qin over whom it exerted a significant influence. He was remembered for applying persuasion to suit political ends.

In addition, another outstanding rhetoric school in ancient China is represented by Confucius (551BC-479 BC) who is very influential in the Chinese communication style. Within the framework of Confucian ethics, public speaking is defined as Confucian argumentation which provides ethical disciplines for people's speech.

During Tang Dynasty, several new persuasive genres were introduced by Chinese Buddhists like sermons. Even in the last century, public speaking seemed to be a beneficial and powerful weapon to fight against imperialism and feudalism during the "May Fourth Movement". Nowadays, as one outcome of the information era and socialist democratic process, public speaking is more frequently used in cross-cultural exchanges and international corporations. Society attaches great importance to the proper and efficient use of language in public speech.



1.3 Classification of Public Speaking

1) By styles of delivery

The three most common styles of speeches that we encounter in today's business and social world are **impromptu**, **manuscript** and **extemporaneous**.

Impromptu speech is prompted by the occasion rather than being planned in advance. Some examples of impromptu speech could be our employer asking us to bring the rest of the team up to date, or a group of friends urging us to say a few words on a special occasion.

Manuscript speech is a type of speech written like a manuscript and is meant to be delivered word for word. Manuscript speeches are used on many political and social occasions when every word carries a lot of weight and should not be misquoted. One of the most common examples of a manuscript speech is a political figure delivering a speech that has been written in advance.

Extemporaneous speech is the most commonly used type of speech that helps to establish an emotional connection with the audience. It is built around key points, but the material can be presented freely, allowing the speaker to make changes in their speech based on the listeners' reactions.

2) By goals intended to achieve

As far as goals or functions are concerned, public speaking can be divided into **speaking to inform**, **speaking to persuade**, and **speaking on special occasions**.

Informative speech provides the listener with a particular state of affairs. The information helps the audience to acquire awareness, understanding, and preparation