Introduction

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As you study public speaking, you will learn and practice strategies for effective delivery and critical listening. You will discover new applications for skills you may already have, such as focusing and organizing ideas and gathering information from print and electronic sources. In addition to learning and applying these fundamental skills, you will gain long-term advantages related to *empowerment* and *employment*.

The ability to speak with competence and confidence will provide *empowerment*. It will give you an edge that other, less skilled communicators lack—even those who may have superior ideas, training, or experience.

Perhaps an even more compelling reason to study public speaking is that the skills you develop may someday help you get a job. In a nationwide survey, prospective employers of college graduates said they seek candidates with “public speaking and presentation ability.”¹ Surveys of personnel managers, both in the United States and internationally, have confirmed that they consider communication skills the top factor in helping college graduates obtain employment. (See Table 1.1.)

**The Rich Heritage of Public Speaking**

When you study public speaking, you are also joining a long history with many traditions, including the following:

Fourth century BCE Golden age for rhetoric in the Greek Republic, where the philosopher Aristotle formulated guidelines for speakers that we still follow today.
Nineteenth century Students of public speaking practiced the arts of declamation—the delivery of an already famous address—and of elocation—the expression of emotion through posture, movement, gestures, facial expression, and voice.

Twenty-first century A new era of speechmaking that draws on age-old public-speaking traditions and expands the parameters of public speaking, summoning public speakers to meet some of the most difficult challenges in history.

**TABLE 1.1 Top Skills Valued by Employers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Results of Survey of Personnel Directors</th>
<th>Results of Survey done by College Career Department</th>
<th>Results of Survey of Prospective Employers</th>
<th>Compiled Results from Several Research Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spoken communication skills</td>
<td>Communication and interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Written communication skills</td>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>Honesty and integrity</td>
<td>Analytical/Research skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Listening ability</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Technical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Flexibility/Adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Technical competence</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Motivation/Initiative</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**QUICK CHECK**

**Become an Effective Public Speaker**

- Plan your speech.
- Focus and vocalize your thoughts.
- Adapt your speaking to your listeners.
- Use standard English vocabulary and grammar.
- Use more formal nonverbal communication.
Public Speaking and Conversation

Public speaking has much in common with conversation. Public speaking also differs from conversation in the following key ways.

Public Speaking Is Planned
Public speaking is more planned than conversation. A public speaker may spend hours or even days planning and practicing his or her speech.

Public Speaking Is Formal
Public speaking is also more formal than conversation. The slang or casual language you often use in conversation is not appropriate for most public speaking. Audiences expect speakers to use standard English grammar and vocabulary.

The nonverbal communication of public speakers is also more formal than nonverbal behavior in ordinary conversation. People engaged in conversation often sit or stand close together, gesture spontaneously, and move about restlessly. The physical distance between public speakers and their audiences is usually greater than that between people in conversation. And although public speakers may certainly use extemporaneous
gestures while speaking, they also plan and rehearse some gestures and movements to emphasize especially important parts of their speeches.

The Roles of Speakers and Audiences Are Clearly Defined

Public speaking is less fluid and interactive than conversation. People in conversation may alternately talk and listen, and perhaps even interrupt one another; but in public speaking the roles of speaker and audience are more clearly defined and remain stable. Rarely do audience members interrupt or even talk to speakers.

The Communication Process

Even the earliest communication theorists recognized that communication is a process. The models they formulated were linear, suggesting a simple transfer of meaning from a sender to a receiver.

Communication as Action

- A public speaker is a source of information and ideas for an audience.
- The job of the source or speaker is to encode, or translate, the ideas and images in his or her mind into verbal or nonverbal symbols (a code) that an audience can recognize. The speaker may encode into words (for example, “The fabric should be two inches square”) or into gestures (showing the size with his or her hands).
- The message in public speaking is the speech itself—both what is said and how it is said.
- If a speaker has trouble finding words to convey his or her ideas or sends contradictory nonverbal symbols, listeners may not be able to decode the speaker’s verbal and nonverbal symbols back into a message.
- A message is usually transmitted from sender to receiver via two channels: visual and auditory. Audience members see the speaker and decode his or
her nonverbal symbols—eye contact (or lack of it),
facial expressions, posture, gestures, and dress. If
the speaker uses any visual aids, such as graphs or
models, these too are transmitted along the visual
channel. The auditory channel opens as the speaker
speaks. Then the audience members hear words
and such vocal cues as inflection, rate, and voice
quality.

The receiver of the message is the individual audi-
ence member whose decoding of the message will
depend on his or her own particular blend of past
experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and values. An effec-
tive public speaker should be receiver- or audience-
centered.

Anything that interferes with the communication of
a message is called noise. External noise is physical,
such as the roar of a lawn mower or a noisy air
conditioner. Internal noise may stem from either
physiological or psychological causes and may
directly affect either the source or the receiver. A bad
cold (physiological noise) may cloud a speaker’s
memory or subdue his or her delivery. An audience
member who is worried about an upcoming exam
(psychological noise) is unlikely to remember much
of what the speaker says. Noise interferes with the
transmission of a message.

Communication as Interaction

One way in which public speaking differs from casual
conversation is that the public speaker does most or all
of the talking. But public speaking is still interactive.
Without an audience to hear and provide feedback,
public speaking serves little purpose. Skillful public
speakers are audience-centered. They depend on the
nods, facial expressions, and murmurings of the audi-
ence to adjust their rate of speaking, volume, vocabu-
lary, type and amount of supporting material, and other
variables to communicate their message successfully.
The context of a public-speaking experience is the environment or situation in which the speech occurs. It includes such elements as the time, the place, and the speaker’s and audience’s cultural traditions and expectations.

The person whose job it is to deliver an identical message to a number of different audiences at different times and in different places can attest to the uniqueness of each speaking context. If the room is hot, crowded, or poorly lit, these conditions affect both speaker and audience. The audience that hears a speaker at 10 AM is likely to be fresher and more receptive than a 4:30 PM audience. A speaker who fought rush-hour traffic for 90 minutes to arrive at his or her destination may find it difficult to muster much enthusiasm for delivering the speech.

We send and receive messages concurrently, adapting to the context and interpreting the verbal and nonverbal feedback of others as we speak. (See Figure 1.1 for an interactive model of communication.)
TO PUT THIS CHAPTER INTO ACTION . . .

Think About These Questions

1. How do you, as a speaker, fit into the interactive model described in this chapter and shown in Figure 1.1?

2. Declamation is defined as “the delivery of an already famous address.” Is it ethical to deliver a speech that was written and/or already delivered by someone else? Explain your answer.

Tap These Online Resources

➤ Visit this chapter of MySpeechKit (www.myspeechkit.com) to see more models of communication.

➤ The publisher of this book offers a wealth of resources for public speakers at wps.ablongman.com/ab_public_speaking_2/