THIS CHAPTER WILL HELP YOU

1. Appreciate how this course can help you
2. Understand what this course asks of you in return
Whenever you speak, you define a character for yourself and for at least one other—your audience—and make a community at least between the two of you.

—JAMES BOYD WHITE,
WHEN WORDS LOSE THEIR MEANINGS

Jason was more than a little upset about having to take public speaking. He just wanted to major in nursing—what did this course have to offer him? “Just quit worrying and go to class,” said his weary roommate. At the first class meeting, Jason saw twenty-five others who looked about as uncomfortable as he felt. But he decided to stick it out.

His first oral assignment was a speech of self-introduction. As he prepared his speech, it dawned on him why a career in nursing was so important to him. When he spoke, his enthusiasm for his topic helped relieve his nervousness. Although the speech was far from perfect, he had begun to build credibility for his later informative and persuasive speeches on the critical need for improved health programs.

As he listened to his classmates, Jason began to care about them and to take pleasure in their successes. As he researched his later speeches, he discovered facts, expert opinions, examples, and stories that deepened his awareness and made his listeners think. Toward the end of the term, it dawned on him: He was, in the words of one classmate, “finding his voice.” He was becoming a speaker!
What does it mean to “find your voice”? Clearly, the phrase goes far beyond merely opening your mouth and making sounds. Rather, Jason’s experience suggests at least three levels of meaning.

The first has to do with technical competence: To “find your voice” you have to learn how to make a speech. Despite the commonplace notion to the contrary, speakers are made, not born. They have to learn—through study, practice, and experience—the art and principles that go into speech-making. Every chapter in this book elaborates an important dimension of this knowledge.

The second level of meaning involves self-discovery: As you “find your voice” you become more confident in yourself. You develop self-esteem and your own style as a speaker. You also develop an increased understanding of why you are speaking. As he spoke successfully, Jason found not only his voice but a renewed appreciation for the career goals he had set for himself.

At a third level of meaning, “finding your voice” means finding your place in society, learning the value of the views and contributions of others, and discovering your ethical obligation to listeners. As you listen to others and as they respond to your words, you develop a sense of your mutual dependency. You learn, as the conservative intellectual Richard Weaver once noted, that “ideas [and the words that convey them] have consequences,” and that what you say (or don’t say) can be important.¹ We do live in a social world, and our speech or our silence can improve or degrade our surroundings.

“Finding your voice” is a quest that deserves your commitment. This chapter will explain further what this course has to offer and what it asks of you in return.

What Public Speaking Has to Offer You

The ability to communicate well in public settings will help establish your credentials as a competent, well-educated person. Learning to present yourself and your ideas effectively can help prepare you for some of the more important moments in
your life: times when you need to speak to protect your interests, when your values are threatened by the action or inaction of others, or when you need approval to undertake some vital project.

The principles you will learn in this class should also make you a more astute consumer of public messages. They will help you sort through the barrage of information and misinformation that bombards us on a daily basis.

Beyond these important considerations, the public speaking course offers other essential practical and personal benefits. This chapter will describe them, and also will introduce you to the tradition and processes of public communication.

**Practical Benefits**

Your public speaking course should help you develop an array of basic communication skills, ranging from controlling your communication anxiety to expressing your ideas with power and conviction.

Developing these skills should help you succeed both in school and in your later professional life. Each year, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveys hundreds of corporate recruiting specialists. According to this organization,

Employers responding to NACE’s Job Outlook 2007 survey named communication ability and integrity as a job seeker’s most important skills and qualities.

“Communication skills have topped the list for eight years.” NACE advises:

“Learn to speak clearly, confidently, and concisely.”

In 2009 NACE repeated its survey, during a time when the job market was much tougher. Again, as employers sought the “perfect” job candidate, the thing they prized most was communication skills. Paul Baruda, who serves as an employment expert for the jobs site Monster.com, agrees that “articulating thoughts clearly and concisely will make a difference in both a job interview and subsequent job performance.”

The point is, you can be the best physicist in the world, but if you can’t tell people what you do or communicate it to your co-workers, what good is all of that knowledge? I can’t think of an occupation, short of living in a cave, where being able to say what you think cogently at some point in your life isn’t going to be important.

So unless you plan to live in a cave, what you learn in this course can be vital to your future.

These practical benefits also extend to your civic engagement throughout your life. All of us feel compelled to “speak out” from time to time to defend our vital interests and core values. Finding your voice as a speaker will help you do just that. For instance, you might find yourself wanting to speak at a school board meeting about a proposal to remove “controversial” books such as the Harry Potter series or The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn from reading lists or the school library. Or you may wish to speak at a city council meeting in favor of or against attempts to rezone your neighborhood for commercial development.
On campus, you might find yourself speaking for or against attempts to alter your college’s affirmative admissions policy, the firing of a popular but controversial professor, or allowing religious groups to stage protests and distribute literature on school grounds. In your class, you might speak for or against stronger immigration laws, government domestic surveillance policies, allowing gay people to marry or serve openly in the military, or the right of “hate” groups such as the Ku Klux Klan to stage public rallies. As you speak on such topics, you will be enacting the citizenship role envisioned for you by those who framed the Constitution of the United States:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. (First Amendment to the Bill of Rights)

The political system of the United States is built on faith in open and robust public communication. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson emphasized the importance of allowing, even encouraging, the broadest range of expression as vital to the health and survival of a democratic society. He reasoned that if citizens are the repositories of political power, then our understanding must be nourished by a full and free flow of information and exchange of opinions so that we can make good decisions on matters such as who should lead us and which public policies we should support.

Public speaking classes therefore become laboratories for the democratic process. Developing, presenting, and listening to speeches should help you develop your citizenship skills. Preparation for your role as citizen is a practical benefit that serves not just you but the society in which you live.

**Personal Benefits**

Other benefits of this course are more personal in nature. These include learning more about yourself and expanding your cultural horizons.

**Learning More about Yourself.** In a very real sense, we are the sum of our communication experiences with other people. As you put together speeches on topics that you care about, you will explore your own interests and values, expand
your base of knowledge, and develop your skills of creative expression. In short, you will be seeking your own voice as a unique individual, a voice distinct from all other voices. As Roderick Hart has put the matter: “Communication is the ultimate people-making discipline... To become eloquent is to activate one’s humanity, to apply the imagination, and to solve the practical problems of human living.”

As you adapt to diverse audiences, you will also develop a heightened sensitivity to the interests and needs of others—what one might call an “other-orientation.” The public speaking class invites us to listen to one another, to savor what makes each of us unique and valuable, and to develop an appreciation for the different ways people live. Your experiences should bring you closer to meeting one of the major goals of higher education: “to expand the mind and heart beyond fear of the unknown, opening them to the whole range of human experience.”

Finally, as you learn to speak and listen, you will gain a richer and more sophisticated appreciation of the world around you. You will be encouraged to seek out and consider multiple perspectives on controversial issues before committing yourself. Public speaking classes are unique in that they make you an active participant in your own education. You don’t just sit in class, absorbing lectures. You communicate. And as you communicate, you help your class become a learning community. It is no accident that the words communication and community are closely connected.

Expanding Cultural Horizons. Today’s typical public speaking class offers a sampling of different races, religions, and cultural backgrounds from which you can learn.

What barriers might stand in the way of expanding your cultural horizons as you listen to others in classroom speeches? One such barrier could be ethnocentrism, our tendency to presume that our own cultural ways of seeing and doing things are the proper standard and that other such world views and behaviors are at best suspect and at worst inferior. There is nothing inherently wrong with being a proud American or a proud Native American or a proud New Yorker. But when we allow
this pride to harden into arrogance, condescension, and hostility toward others, it becomes a formidable barrier to intercultural communication.

If you had attended college a few decades ago, you might have encountered the unquestioned assumption that our country is a “melting pot” that fuses the cultures of immigrant peoples into a superior alloy called “the American character.” The melting pot idea may seem harmless, but the “ideal American” it suggests often had a white male face. Historically, women and certain minority groups were excluded from the public dialogue that shaped values and policies. Moreover, the idea of a melting pot does not prepare us for the diversity of audiences we encounter both in classes and in later life. Elizabeth Lozano summarizes the shortcomings of the melting pot image and proposes an alternative view of American culture:

The “melting pot” is not an adequate metaphor for a country which is comprised of a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds . . . . [W]e might better think of the United States in terms of a “cultural bouillabaisse” in which all ingredients conserve their unique flavor, while also transforming and being transformed by the adjacent textures and scents.8

A public speaking class is an ideal place to savor this rich broth of cultures. As we hear others speak, we may discover the many flavors of the American experience. And as you examine your own identity and that of the people around you, you may well discover that most of us in this country are indeed “multicultural,” a blend of many voices and backgrounds. If you want to speak effectively and ethically before American audiences, a sensitivity toward and appreciation for cultural diversity is truly necessary.

A second barrier rises in the form of stereotypes, those generalized assumptions that supposedly represent the essential nature of races, genders, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, and so on. Before we get to know the individual members of our audience, we may invoke stereotypes to anticipate how they will react to our words. Even seemingly positive stereotypes—Asian Americans are good at math, Mexican Americans have a strong devotion to family—can be hurtful if they block us from experiencing the unique humanity of someone who just happens to be an Asian American or Mexican American. As a general rule, nobody likes to feel that he or she is being addressed as an “other” by another “other.” So pack your stereotypes away as you enter the public speaking class. You may discover that they are not very useful after all.

One of our favorite ways of depicting the complex culture of the United States was introduced in the conclusion of Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural address, as Lincoln sought to hold the nation together on the eve of the Civil War:

The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.9

Lincoln’s image of America as a harmonious chorus implied that the individual voices of Americans will create a music together far more beautiful than any one voice alone.

Have students identify film or television characters that stereotype race, ethnicity, or gender. What is accurate and inaccurate in these stereotypes? Might they be damaging if applied to individuals? “Stereotypes and Human Communication” in Chapter One, IRM, offers interesting exercises that can illuminate the subject. Ask ESL students how Americans are stereotyped in their cultures.
Lincoln’s vision holds forth a continuing dream of a society in which individualism and the common good not only will survive but will also enhance each other.

In your class and within this book, you will hear many voices: Native Americans and new Americans, women and men, conservatives and liberals, Americans of all different colors and lifestyles. Despite their many differences, all of them are a part of the vital chorus of our nation. Public speaking gives you the opportunity to hear these voices and add yours to them.

Introduction to Communication

The study of public speaking also offers an entrance into the larger subject of how people communicate, both to the tradition of the study and to the elements that interact within the communication process.

The Tradition of the Study. Some people are surprised to learn that the study and practice of public speaking rests upon a rich intellectual history that extends back over two thousand years to the ancient Greeks—the same people credited with introducing democracy to Western civilization. In an age long before the printing press, Internet, and 24-hour cable-news service, public speaking served as the major means of disseminating ideas and information, resolving legal disputes, and debating political issues.

In those long-ago years, there were no professional lawyers, and citizens were expected to speak for themselves in legal proceedings and as active participants in the deliberations that shaped public policy. Most of all, the Greeks considered the power and eloquence of the spoken word as necessary to virtuous behavior.10 One of their greatest leaders, Pericles, reflects this attitude in a much-celebrated speech:

For we alone think that a man that does not take part in public affairs is good for nothing, while others only say that he is “minding his own business.” We are the ones who develop policy, or at least decide what is to be done, for we believe that what spoils action is not speeches, but going into action without first being instructed through speeches. In this too we excel over others: ours is the bravery of people who think through what they will take in hand, and discuss it thoroughly; with other men, ignorance makes them brave and thinking makes them cowards.11

We are heirs to this tradition of “participative democracy” enabled by “participative communication.”12 When citizens gather today in virtual or actual rooms to
discuss and debate together the policies that shall govern their lives, they are re-enacting Pericles’ dream of an empowered citizenship. Not only do they exercise their individual voices, but they also seek together to find and create what the National Issues Forums Institute has called “the Public Voice,” a collective position that represents an informed majority position on issues of the day.13 We may feel compelled to speak out about an issue in our communities or on campus, or we may join the national debate about health care or the environment. As we communicate with others, either face-to-face or on the Internet, we learn what techniques work or don’t work in different situations. We explore ideas together, and often enrich our options. We learn what causes are important to us and what messages we want to convey. “Finding your voice” remains as relevant today as it was in the time of Pericles.

Throughout this book, we shall draw upon the classic rhetorical tradition to help us understand both how to communicate and how we ought to communicate. In short, the ancients should help us grasp both the techniques and ethics of speaking in public, whether in the marketplace or in cyberspace.

Pericles’ speech left a vital question unresolved: What is the well-rounded communicator, the citizen ready to perform his or her vital role in self-government and in society? The Greek philosopher who stepped up to the challenge of this question was Aristotle, who first explored systematically the study of public speaking. In his Rhetoric, Aristotle implies that the well-rounded communicator reasons with listeners in full knowledge of our communication natures (read the Rhetoric online at http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.html). We like to think we are creatures of reason: The able speaker offers us arguments based upon evidence and logic. We are also moral beings who commit ourselves to private, public, and often religious values: The able speaker must prove to our satisfaction that certain courses of action will respect and advance these values while other options would subvert or defeat them. We are also creatures of strong self-interest: What’s in it for us is a powerful consideration, and able speakers must show exactly that. Moreover, we are creatures of feeling and affection for others: The able speaker must appeal to this emotional side of our nature as part of an overall communication strategy. Finally, we are cautious creatures who judge the motives and character of those who speak to us: we trust or distrust them in light of their perceived abilities, character, and personalities—whether they seem stable, likable, and attractive people who have our interests at heart. In short, Aristotle makes it abundantly clear that “finding your voice” means not only finding yourself but also grasping the complexities of those with whom we communicate. He also recognized that unlike pure logic, reasoning on public problems usually involves uncertainties and—at best—probabilities. In the murky waters of everyday problems, absolute certainty can be hard to come by. But the constructive public speaker helps listeners arrive at an informed judgment on troublesome issues. When considering issues on which reasonable people can differ, well-informed listeners are in a better position to evaluate the different options that are open to them.

Ask your students to nominate a contemporary speaker who represents a “well-rounded communicator.” What particular gifts or skills does this speaker possess?

Raphael’s painting shows The School of Athens where rhetorical skills were part of the basic curriculum.
As he explored the versatility required of the speaker, Aristotle described three prominent forms of speaking: political, legal, and ceremonial, which we encounter, respectively, when we gather to decide on future policy, judge the past, and celebrate the moment. We may “find our voice” in any or all these arenas of public speaking.

Aristotle’s Rhetoric laid the groundwork for the Romans, who would further develop the education of speakers. Cicero, one of the most celebrated orators of antiquity, described rhetoric as “an art made up of five great arts.” In his De Oratore, he concentrated on how to think through and defend positions, how to arrange and organize arguments, how to use language effectively, how to store ideas in the mind.
for recall during speaking, and how to present a speech effectively.\textsuperscript{15} He stressed that ideal speakers should be broadly educated and should understand the culture and values of their audiences.

Much of this ancient knowledge focused on how to communicate, teaching the art and techniques of public speaking. The second major theme that developed in classical writings concerned how we ought to communicate, which considers the power of communication and how it might be managed ethically. The Greek philosopher Plato wrote two dialogues that deal specifically with the power of the public oration. The first, \textit{Gorgias}, offers Plato’s dark vision of the subject (read the \textit{Gorgias} at http://philosophy.eserver.org/plato/gorgias.txt). He charged that the public speakers of his time pandered to the ignorance and prejudices of the masses instead of advancing their own visions of what was right. These orators too often told their listeners what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear.\textsuperscript{16} Sound familiar?

In the second dialogue, \textit{Phaedrus}, Plato paints his ideal of the virtuous speaker, one whose words will help listeners become better citizens and people (read the \textit{Phaedrus} at http://philosophy.eserver.org/plato/phaedrus.txt).\textsuperscript{17} Such speakers are able to be both ethical and effective, even though Plato observed—somewhat cynically—that this balance may be hard for many speakers to achieve. Nevertheless, you may be able to think of successful examples of those who have hit near the target, depending on your political orientation. Many, for example, describe Ronald Reagan’s rhetoric as both virtuous and effective, while others may point to the rhetoric of Barack Obama during the political campaign of 2008. Indeed, effective speaking that is not ethical may quickly lose its influence, while ethical rhetoric that is not effective may simply be futile. Plato’s goal of being both ethical and effective may be quite realistic, even though hard to achieve. His vision of the ideal speaker would remain a challenge for the ages of communicators that would follow.

The Roman scholar Quintilian, perhaps the greatest speech teacher of all time, offered an answer to this challenge. He insisted that immediate effects and gratifications fade quickly, and that those who build their careers on the shifting sands of public popularity will soon fall into disfavor. To be a good speaker whose influence endures, he argued, one must be a good person.\textsuperscript{18}

These two themes from antiquity—“What works?” and “What’s right?”—will occupy us throughout this book as you seek your own voice as a speaker.

Knowledge of the Communication Process. Contemporary scientists and philosophers continue to enrich our understanding of the communication process: how communication works as an interactive and dynamic force in shaping lives.

Public Speaking as an Interactive Process. A speech is not an art object produced for the admiration of onlookers. Instead, a speech is an interactive process that attempts to do important work: to introduce the speaker to listeners, to share knowledge with them, to convince them of the rightness or wrongness of certain attitudes and actions, or to celebrate with them some special moments. A speech is an action performed with the help of listeners, and gets its job done when the audience learns, accepts the speaker’s point of view, and/or joins the celebration. In short, the meaning of speeches is a joint production, a collaborative process that requires the work of both speakers and listeners. As others respond to your words, they will help you find your voice.

Examining a public speech closely, we can identify six elements that are critical to its nature: speaker, message, occasion, audience, interference, and feedback.

Speaker. There can be no speeches without speakers, those who present oral messages for public consumption. Because the fate of speeches turns especially on
how listeners respond, speakers are audience-centered. Ethical speakers believe that their messages will improve listeners, and help them think critically, creatively, and constructively about issues.

Whether listeners accept a speaker as credible is clearly crucial to the interaction: If listeners think a speaker is competent, likable, and trustworthy, and shares their interests and goals, they will be more likely to accept the speaker’s message. We discuss establishing yourself as a credible speaker in Chapter 3.

Message. A speech must have a message, a clear conception of what it wishes to accomplish. To establish its message, a speech follows a design and a strategy. To make its message clear and attractive, a speech uses words artfully and often employs presentation aids such as graphs, charts, or photographs projected on a large screen. To make its message credible, a speech will offer convincing evidence and reasoning. To make its message forceful and impressive, a speech will call upon all the speaker’s presentational skills—his or her voice, body language, and platform presence. How to convey messages successfully is the major business of this book.

Occasion. The occasion of a speech is the reason why speakers and listeners gather in certain places at certain times for certain purposes. Some occasions are obvious: You will be speaking at certain times and places because your class requires it of you. On the job, you may speak at certain meetings because you have ideas to contribute or have been asked to report on an issue.

At other times, arranging the occasion for a speech may be far more challenging. One of your authors, while managing an election campaign, wanted to use the “free speech” platform on a nearby university campus as the dramatic setting for his candidate’s speech on education reform. To make this happen he (1) had to obtain permission from university officials for an “outsider” to use the platform, (2) arrange for sound equipment so that the candidate might be heard, (3) decorate the platform so that it would be visually appealing, (4) ask some colleagues to announce the event in their classes to assure a “live” audience, and (5) urge local media—especially television stations—to “cover” the event, thereby providing access to the much larger, intended audience for the speech. In this case, arranging for the speech occasion was itself an exhausting, difficult challenge.

This example suggests that the setting for a speech can be an important part of the occasion. The setting often affects how messages are constructed, presented, and received. The physical setting includes such factors as the actual place where the speech is presented, the time of day, and the size and arrangement of the audience. The open and outdoor physical setting of the free speech platform called for a speech with a simple structure of ideas, vivid and concrete language, colorful examples that would catch and hold attention from passersby, and good sound amplifiers. Similarly, but on a much grander scale, when Martin Luther King, Jr., described his “dream” of people of color participating fully in the promise of America, he spoke under the watchful eyes of Lincoln’s statue to a vast audience gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The very setting of the speech entered its text and affected profoundly how these listeners—hundreds of thousands of them in the actual audience and millions more listening on radio or watching on television—would respond.

Speeches can also have a psychological setting that includes such considerations as the inclinations that listeners bring to the speaking situation and the context of recent events. For instance, if you have planned a speech attacking oppressive campus security measures, and right before your speech a frightening and well-publicized crime is committed on your campus, the psychological setting for your speech may suddenly be less receptive. We shall say more about the occasion and setting of a speech in Chapter 5.
Audience. Questions concerning the audience for speaking—those who hear but don’t really listen, those whom the speaker would like to listen, and those who actually do listen—can quickly become complicated. For example, in planning the free speech platform occasion, it was necessary to arrange for a live audience as the excuse for having the speech to begin with. But this apparent audience of a few students was not the actual target audience for the speech. Rather, the intended audience was the much larger group of viewers who might catch a few sound bites from the speech on the evening news.

Similarly, in our time, “speakers” may broadcast their overheated messages on YouTube, hoping to engage a portion of the global audience that congregates on the world wide web. They cast their speeches like nets into that vast undifferentiated sea of listeners, and occasionally enjoy spectacular catches. Rep. Alan Grayson (D-FL) reproduced on YouTube his congressional speech accusing Republicans of offering one health plan on the theme “Don’t get sick,” and another plan for the sick: “Die quickly.” Ten thousand viewers offered a total of more than $250,000 to his re-election campaign after that effort. According to Time, Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN) wondered whether health reform “would allow a 13-year-old girl to use a school ‘sex clinic’ to get a referral for an abortion and ‘go home on the school bus that night.’” She raised the question of whether President Obama “may have anti-American views” and accused him of creating a “gangster government.” She received a cascade of contributions after these rhetorical efforts.19

Such speakers obviously hope to carve out audiences for themselves from the limitless possibilities offered on the Internet. They offer an unconscious parody of the words offered by John Milton as he presented his great epic poem, Paradise Lost: “Fit readers find, though few.” Rather, their implied mantra is “Unfit viewers find, though many.”

Questions about the nature of the audience—who are the actual, virtual, and intended listeners and what ethical constraints should govern listening—abound. Even when those actually present are the intended audience, ethical questions persist. All teachers know that students can sometimes feign listening, while absorbing little of what they are hearing. Are they an audience, just because they are seated in front of the speaker? Occasionally, speakers may “perform” a speech. They seem to care little about whether others are actually listening or might benefit from what they are saying. So do these speakers constitute their own audience?

Finding your voice as a speaker can also require that you discover your ears as an audience member. If you want others to give you encouragement and a fair hearing, you must be a good listener in return. What are others saying that you can use? How can you help them grow as a speaker by being a good listener? We shall say more about what constitutes a fit audience later in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

Interference. Occasionally, the flow of a message can be interrupted by distractions. These distractions function as interference that can disrupt the communication process.

Outside the classroom, in cyberspace or in community meetings, interference in the form of relentless heckling and even verbal abuse has become an occasional but appalling feature of the communication practices of our time. Such lack of civility is an enemy of the free and open flow of communication that is essential to democratic forms of government.

Fortunately, you will experience little if any such hostile interference in your classroom presentations. But what if you have just started your speech, and you are drowned out by laughter in the hall? What if the classroom door opens, and

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**audience** Includes those whom speakers would like to listen, as well as others who actually listen.

**interference** Distractions that can disrupt the communication process.
someone late for class walks up to a seat on the front row? Whatever happens, don’t let such thoughtless interference disturb your composure. Usually, if you pause and smile, the distractions will fade. Often a little impromptu humor will disarm the situation, and show that you are still in control. We discuss interference problems in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Feedback. As you speak, you should be picking up cues from your audience that will help you adjust to the ongoing situation. These cues constitute feedback that helps you monitor the immediate effectiveness of your message. The need for feedback is one reason why you should maintain eye contact with listeners and not be focusing on your notes or gazing out the window or up at the ceiling.

What if listeners are straining forward in their seats? This suggests they may not be able to hear you. You may have to increase the loudness of your voice and raise the energy level of your presentation. What if they look puzzled? You may need to provide an example to clarify your point. What if they are frowning or shaking their heads? Offer additional evidence to convince them.

On the other hand, suppose they are smiling and nodding in agreement. You are on the right track! Sometimes you will sense that listeners are so caught up in what you are saying that you know you are getting through to them. That’s the moment when you know you are finding your voice! We discuss feedback further in Chapter 12.

These six elements—speaker, message, occasion, audience, interference, and feedback—all interact in the adventure of public speaking.

Public Speaking as a Dynamic Process. Kenneth Burke, one of the major communication theorists of our time, suggested that speakers are constantly confronting the problem of listeners who feel powerless and who don’t see themselves as members of a community. A basic challenge that speakers must meet is to bring these listeners together so that they can recognize their common interests and realize what they can accomplish together.

The first day you enter your public speaking class, you encounter a group of other students. Perhaps a few of them know each other, but most are strangers. Many are frightened about the “ordeal” they believe they will soon have to endure. Have students describe a speaker they have heard (perhaps another instructor in a lecture class) who neglected audience feedback and did not make needed adjustments. Discuss how such insensitivity to feedback can impair understanding. “The Importance of Feedback” in Chapter One, IRM, offers a related interesting exercise.

Encourage your students to think less about themselves and more about how they might build bridges to their listeners. What specific techniques might help them?

FINDING YOUR voice Framing a Model of the Six Elements

You have been asked to give an informative speech explaining the six elements that make up the public speaking experience. Develop a visual model that displays the relationships among these elements. Compare these in class. What might be the advantages of using your model in your hypothetical speech? Might there be any disadvantages?

feedback Speaker’s perception of audience reactions to the message.
They may feel isolated and vulnerable. So when you first stand to speak, a major task may be to tear down the invisible walls that separate you from listeners and listeners from each other. Can you tell them stories that will remind them of shared experiences? Can you help them laugh together? If so, you will have begun Burke’s work of identification, creating the feeling that audience members share with you and with each other experiences, values, fears, desires, and dreams—that they are, in effect, a community.

Successful public speaking is a dynamic process that changes people and the relationships among them. Burke’s concept of identification is a concept we draw upon throughout this book, because it helps explain so much. For example, it helps explain the power of the appeal offered in Anna Aley’s speech protesting slum housing in her campus town of Manhattan, Kansas:

What can one student do to change the practices of numerous Manhattan landlords? Nothing, if that student is alone. But just think of what we could accomplish if we got all 13,600 off-campus students involved in this issue! Think what we could accomplish if we got even a fraction of those students involved! [See Anna Aley’s speech in Appendix B.]

Anna, a Kansas State University student, helped her listeners realize that they were victims of slum housing. In other words, she pointed out their identity. And she offered a new, dynamic vision of themselves acting together to correct these abuses.

Identification also helps explain the power of public speaking on the wider stage of public affairs. When Martin Luther King, Jr., strove to change racial practices in America, he offered an answer for the legacy of humiliation and segregation that continued to divide Americans. In his celebrated speech “I Have a Dream,” King offered a vision of identification as an answer to the old racial divisions:

> I have a dream that... one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

As his leadership emerged, King’s own image seemed to grow and expand. And his followers also became heroic figures as they marched through one ordeal after another. These transformations indicate how people can grow and enlarge when they interact in ethical communication that inspires and encourages them. Plato told us long ago in the Phaedrus about ethical communication that nourishes listeners by expanding...
their horizons of knowledge. In your modest way, you too can contribute to this process through your classroom speeches. The connection between Kenneth Burke and Plato, identification and ethical communication, leads into our next section.

What This Course Asks of You

A course that offers so much requires a great deal in return. It asks that you make a serious commitment of time and dedication to finding your voice as a speaker. It asks also that you carefully practice public speaking ethics, the search for standards

FIGURE 1.3
Credo for Ethical Communication

[As you read this code adopted by the National Communication Association, think of situations in which one or more of these principles may have been threatened or violated. Are there other ethical principles that might be added to the list?] Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live. Therefore we, the members of the National Communication Association, endorse and are committed to practicing the following principles of ethical communication.

• We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.
• We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.
• We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.
• We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of families, communities, and society.
• We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.
• We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
• We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.
• We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.
• We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.22
for judging the rightness or wrongness of public speaking behaviors, and that you apply what you learn in your speaking and listening. The National Communication Association in its “Credo for Ethical Communication” offers a list of principles that may help you begin your quest.

Specific moral questions can arise in every phase of speech-making, from topic selection to making the actual presentation. For this reason, you will encounter situation-grounded discussions and “Your Ethical Voice” features throughout this text. In this final section, we discuss three major considerations that underlie ethical public speaking: respect for the integrity of ideas and information, a genuine concern for consequences, and the shared responsibilities of listeners.

Respect for the Integrity of Ideas and Information

In an age when misinformation and outright lies often circulate unchallenged on the Internet, when passion and prejudice—loudly asserted—too often take the place of sound reasoning, and when people “tweet” more than they think, it is good to remind ourselves that respect for the integrity of ideas and information is a basic principle of better communication. This respect requires that you speak from responsible knowledge, use communication techniques carefully, and avoid a set of practices described collectively as plagiarism.

Speaking from Responsible Knowledge. No one expects you to become an expert on the topics you speak about in class. You will, however, be expected to speak from responsible knowledge. As we discuss in detail in Chapter 7, responsible knowledge of topics includes:

- knowing main points of concern about them.
- understanding what experts believe about them.
- acknowledging differing points of view on controversial topics and giving these fair treatment in speeches.
- being aware of the most recent events or discoveries concerning them.
- realizing how topics might affect the lives of listeners.

In short, responsible knowledge is not perfect or exact, but it is the best that might reasonably be expected, given the circumstances.

Consider how Stephen Huff, one of our students at the University of Memphis, acquired responsible knowledge for an informative speech. Stephen knew little about earthquakes before his speech, but he knew that Memphis was on the New Madrid fault and that this could mean trouble. He also knew that an earthquake research center was located on campus.

Stephen arranged for an interview with the center’s director. During the interview, he asked a series of well-planned questions: Where was the New Madrid fault, and what was the history of its activity? What was the probability of a major quake in the near future? How prepared was Memphis for a major quake? What kind of damage could result? How could listeners prepare for it? What readings would he recommend?

All these questions were designed to gain knowledge that would interest and benefit his listeners. Armed with what he had learned, Stephen went online and then to the library, where he found other valuable sources of information. He was well on his way to speaking from responsible knowledge.

**responsible knowledge** An understanding of the major features, issues, information, latest developments, and local applications relevant to a topic.
Responsible Use of Communication Techniques. Unethical speakers can misuse valuable techniques for communicating ideas and information in order to confuse listeners or to hide a private agenda. Consider, for instance, the practice called **quoting out of context**. In Chapter 8, we encourage you to cite experts and respected authorities to support important and controversial assertions. However, this technique is corrupted when speakers twist the meanings of such statements to support their own views and to endorse positions these respected persons would never have accepted.

Speakers sometimes invoke Martin Luther King’s “dream” of a color-blind society to roll back reforms that he helped to inspire. In his “I Have a Dream” speech, for example, King offered his vision of a world in which we would judge people “not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” One state official offered these words to justify ending scholarships targeted for minority students. A governor used the same dream to explain why he was appointing only white men to the board running the university system in his state. A well-known theater critic in New York invoked King’s vision to condemn the formation of black theatrical companies. These people applied King’s words out of the context of his speech to defeat his actual purpose.

Throughout this text, we warn you in specific situations how evidence, reasoning, language, humor, visual aids, and other powerful communication techniques can be abused to deceive audiences and undermine constructive communication.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty. In the public speaking classroom, the most disheartening form of academic dishonesty is **plagiarism**, presenting the ideas or words of others as though they were your own. Plagiarism mutates into specific forms of intellectual abuse, such as “parroting” an article or speech from a newspaper, magazine, or Internet site without crediting the source in your speech. In effect, you offer the work as though it were your own creation.

Another corrupt form is “patchwork plagiarism,” cutting passages from multiple sources and splicing them together as though they were one speech, your speech. Then there is a kind of “social plagiarism,” in which students collude to produce one speech which they then present in different sections of the public speaking course. Sadly, we must report that outside the classroom as well, speakers and writers often falsify evidence and the sources and dates of information.

There are many good reasons for you to avoid such bad behaviors. Most colleges and universities regard them as a serious threat to the integrity of higher education, and stipulate penalties ranging from a major grade reduction to suspension or even expulsion from the university. You can probably find your university’s policy in your student handbook or on your college website. Your communication department or instructor may have additional rules regarding academic dishonesty.

So the first good reason to avoid plagiarism in its various forms is that universities take it seriously and you might get caught. Instructors are better at spotting academic dishonesty than some students may realize. Many departments keep files of speeches and speech outlines, instructors do talk to each other, and there are Internet resources that instructors can use for looking up “stock” speeches that have been lifted from the Internet. Professional associations are constantly updating speech instructors on how to detect plagiarism.

A second, even better reason for avoiding plagiarism is to realize it for what it is: an intellectual crime, the theft and/or abuse of other people’s ideas. You would not steal the property of others; is it less wrong to steal the creative products of their minds? If you credit the thinking of others in your speech by citing your sources honestly, you honor them. If you plagiarize, you abuse them.
The most compelling reason for avoiding plagiarism is that you are robbing and cheating yourself. The plagiarized voice is a fraud. When you plagiarize, you give up your search for your authentic voice, and prevent yourself from growing into the communicator you might become. When you do not prepare your own work, you likely will not speak very well anyway. You end up compromising all the benefits we have described.

Your Ethical Voice offers a number of ways to avoid plagiarism. Study them carefully, and put them to work in your speeches.

A Concern for Consequences

Finding your voice also means finding others, listeners who share interests, dreams, and concerns, as well as finding your place in the community. You can't help but be concerned about how your words will impact the lives of your audience.

A related concern is the impact of our speaking on the quality and integrity of public communication itself. That we are undergoing a crisis of quality and civility in public communication practices seems obvious: Robust and spirited debate of ideas is a dream of democracy, but perverse practices such as the verbal abuse of opponents and shrill heckling that seeks to drown out others rather than answer their arguments are democracy's nightmare. In such a corrupt age, we need to set a higher standard of more honorable communication practices.

There can be occasions that tempt us, times when the right ends might seem to justify questionable means. In the final days of a heated political campaign, for example, when we are certain that “we’re right” and “they’re wrong,” it may seem acceptable for our preferred candidates to rely on character attacks, fear-mongering, and fallacies of reasoning such as those we discuss in Chapter 15. But we need to ask ourselves whether these slips from grace are worth the long-term consequence of adding to a communication climate in which unethical practices are—as some might say—“justified under certain circumstances.” Public speaking in democratic societies should elevate, not degrade the public mind. In a world of increasing incivility, we must preserve and protect the goal of informed and rational decision-making made possible only by open, tolerant, and respectful discussion of ideas.
“Finding Your Voice: The Story of Your Quest” (p. 7) suggests that you keep a diary in which you describe your experiences during this class in finding your voice. Add a speech evaluation dimension to this diary by commenting on effective and ineffective, ethical and unethical speeches you hear both in and out of class, including local and national media, YouTube, and other sources. As you listen to speeches, ask yourself:

1. How did the speaker register in terms of credibility?
2. Was the speech well adapted to listeners’ needs and interests?
3. Did the speech take into account the cultural makeup of its audience?
4. Was the message clear and well structured?
5. Was the language and presentation of the speech effective?
6. How did listeners respond, both during and after the speech?
7. Did the setting have any impact on the message?
8. Did the speech have any interference problems to overcome?
9. Did the speech promote identification between speaker and listeners?
10. Did the speaker demonstrate responsible knowledge and an ethical use of communication techniques?
11. Did listeners meet their responsibilities as critical, constructive listeners?

Toward the end of the term, complete your personal narrative on “finding your voice,” and summarize and interpret what you have learned about the ethics and effectiveness of speech-making. Share these with your instructor.

Listeners as well as speakers carry grave responsibilities for the fate of public discourse. Often we encounter people who have grown disenchanted with the quality of public conversation and the very prospect of democracy. It is disheartening to hear them cite their cynicism as an excuse for “tuning out” and ignoring public issues altogether. Nothing does more to reinforce dishonesty and demagoguery in public discussions than when good people decide to turn the other way and abandon the public forum to those who would abuse it. If public speaking is to be ethical, then listeners must play the critical and constructive roles we assign to them in Chapter 4.

When one reflects upon it, playing an honorable role as speaker and listener is a small price to pay for the fountain of benefits described in this chapter. At the outset, therefore, we urge you to accept this role and we offer a toast: Here’s to a successful adventure as you find your voice as a public speaker!
Chapter 1

13. Learn more about this nonpartisan organization at its website http://www.nifi.org/about/index.aspx.
23. Tom Teepen, “Twisting King’s Words to Give His Antagonists Comfort,” Minneapolis Star Tribune, 14 July 1997, p. 9A.