21st Century COMMUNICATION A Reference Handbook

SAGE reference

Public Speaking

In everyday language, **public speaking** refers to the communication practice of a speaker sharing ideas with an audience primarily through speech. The term encompasses a great many communication contexts, including events as different as delivering an oral report on company profits to a closed meeting of a board of trustees, addressing millions of listeners around the globe during a U.S. presidential inauguration ceremony, and giving a toast at a wedding. The fundamental notion underlying **public speaking** as a form of communication is that it is an embodied and oral act. Associated expectations that signal that a communication interaction is an example of **public speaking** are that the oral communication is shared with more than one listener and there is one person in the interaction who does most of the communicating. Like written communication, **public speaking** is complicated because sharing meanings with others through language is difficult. The challenges of **public speaking** are heightened, however, since the speaker shares meaning not only through words but also through body, voice, and visuals. Furthermore, the **public**-**speaking** experience, traditionally, is transitory; a speaker has only one opportunity to accomplish his or her goal—to be understood by the listeners. While readers can re-read documents until they understand the gist of the message, listeners, typically, cannot hear a speech again. Another challenge particular to the **public**-**speaking** experience is anxiety. In fact, 70% to 75% of the U.S. population report experiencing **public**-**speaking** anxiety (McCroskey, 2000; Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). Challenges such as these make **public speaking** a communication practice that continues to interest researchers and everyday practitioners and have made **public**-**speaking** classes a common requirement for undergraduate degrees and **public**-**speaking** titles popular in the self-help sections of bookstores.

It isperhaps surprising that the demand for **public** speakers persists in our increasingly mediated age. While information can be shared through many other means and persuasive appeals are pervasive on television, billboards, and the Internet, there remains a significant role for **public speaking** as a means for sharing ideas and motivating others. Political **speaking** is particularly visible in U.S. culture as we watch candidates participate in debates and see legislators and citizens **speak** about civic affairs on news shows, C-Span, community access television, and Internet sites such asYouTube. **Public speaking** also happens at pep assemblies; in board rooms; during parents' night at **public** schools; in assembly halls and civic centers; at state fairs and trade shows; as part of award shows such as the Oscars; at commencements; at religious gatherings, inaugurations, and weddings; in classrooms, prisons, and legislatures; and even during meetings of 4-H or Rotary Clubs. U.S. culture is rife with contexts that call for **public speaking**.

Organizations such as the All American Speaker's Bureau arrange for celebrities and professional speakers to address audiences at corporate meetings, trade shows, conventions, and major community events. Though sometimes these appearances may include a chance to shake hands or get an autograph, their central purpose is to arrange to have someone with significant understanding of an issue, someone with a deep passion for a cause, or someone with a fascinating experience to share **speak** before an audience. The speakers' bureau understands the potential impact of this **speaking** situation for listeners and for the organization arranging the event and knows its market value. Groups will pay **speaking** fees ranging from around $5,000, to hear, for example, Amy Henry from NBC's *The Apprentice*, to more than $200,000, to hear Donald Trump himself. Another organization, TED, originally devoted to sharing ideas about Technology, Entertainment, and Design, meets annually to showcase 50 speakers, who address a crowd of 1,000 for about 18 minutes each. These speakers share their exceptional ideas on topics ranging from open-source textbooks for college classrooms to

innovations in wind power, to how the mind works, to the nature of romantic love. The 4-day conference regularly sells out a year in advance, but the speeches are digitally captured and the best are posted at www.ted.com. The organizers adopted the slogan "ideas worth spreading" and devote significant resources to their goal of "giving everyone on-demand access to the world's most inspiring voices." Such examples underscore the fact that **public speaking** remains a significant mode of communication in contemporary culture.

Public speaking has evolved as a form of communication, and it overlaps many of the other types of communication discussed in this handbook. Individuals engaged in the specific tasks of interviewing, deliberating, debating, mediating conflict, demonstrating, or communicating with visuals are likely to engage in **public speaking** as well. This chapter, therefore, will focus on the fundamental concepts of **public speaking** as a type of communication. While **public**-**speaking** theory and pedagogy are deeply rooted in the classical period, it is important to recognize how cultural developments, ways of understanding communicative processes, and even theories of language have revitalized and complicated the classical concepts. Even as U.S. cultural expectations have expanded such that today there is a belief that all citizens should be prepared to express themselves through **public speaking**, the ideas about how **public speaking** functions have grown increasingly complex. As a result, it has become clear that **public speaking**, like other complex skills, is one that can continue to develop across a lifetime. Though technological developments bring new challenges as well as opportunities, there are a handful of primary concepts that can guide **public** speakers to success in the 21st century.

Public-Speaking Goals

Public speaking is a form of communication that seeks an outcome; **public** speakers seek not simply to express themselves but to have an effect on their listeners. Humans have long sought to understand more about the ways language can shape circumstances and help them accomplish their goals. The first formal discussions on communication and **public speaking** in the Western tradition emerged in the 5th century BCE in Greece, though more ancient texts of Chinese and Jewish origin as well as the works of Homer indicate an even earlier interest in effective speech making. In Western cultures, **public**-**speaking** instructors were among the first people to be paid to share their knowledge with others. Early legal systems required citizens to **speak** on their own behalf when presenting arguments on issues such as property ownership. Those who listened to these speeches and saw their varying levels of effectiveness began to codify the strategies that were most successful in particular situations. In Greece, ancient teachers of what was commonly known as "rhetoric" included well-known figures such as Gorgias and Aristotle in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, respectively. In Rome, the first systematic rhetoric handbook, the *Ad Herennium*, dates to the 1st century BCE.

These early texts identify three central goals related to the different contexts for **public speaking**: to persuade judges to support your position in a court of law (known as forensic discourse, as in "I am not guilty of murder"); to persuade decision makers to support your position about what action should be taken by the community or state (known as deliberative discourse, as in "We should build a new wall for the city"); and to persuade people with arguments that a person or event is worthy of either praise or blame (known as epide-ictic discourse, as in "Helen of Troy's beauty is beyond all comparison"). These goals were related by their common goal or outcome: the persuasion of a listener.

According toAristotle, the differences among these goals emerged in large part due to the specific context within which the speech took place and the role played by the audience during the exchange. Forensic discourse referred to the speeches given in legal settings where listeners would judge whether someone was guilty of a crime or whether a wrong was done in the past that required redress. Deliberative discourse was the discourse that took place in the senate, within bodies of decision makers for the state, who argued for certain policies, inviting listeners to judge whether such policies should be implemented in the future. Epideictic discourse took place in **public** spaces before popular audiences who made judgments about the object of praise or blame and

also rendered judgments about the talents of the speakers. The situation within which speakers shared their ideas determined the kinds of materials, arguments, vocabulary, and delivery that were appropriate. For this reason, early rhetoric handbooks often divided their guidelines into chapters devoted to each different context.

In the 100 years preceding and following the beginning of the Common Era, debate about the goals of **public speaking** was vigorous. As the Roman theorist Quintilian summarized the issue in his landmark work the *Institutes of Oratory* (95 CE), which is the most detailed account of the education of a **public** speaker from the ancient world, what began as a debate about whether a speech of praise was significantly different from a speech of blame soon developed into claims that the goals of **speaking** were innumerable:

Indeed, if we distinguish praising and blaming in the third part of oratory, in what kind of oratory shall we be said to employ ourselves when we complain, console, appease, excite, alarm, encourage, direct, explain obscure expressions, narrate, entreat, offer thanks, congratulate, reproach, attack, describe, command, retract, express wishes or opinions, and **speak** *in a thousand other ways? (Quintillian, 2006, Book 3, chap. 4, para. 1)*

But if the goals of speakers were as numerous as the goals any individual speaker might set for himself or herself, there would be no way to generalize about the skills needed by a speaker, and it would become impossible to teach others to be successful in addressing audiences.

Some agreement about the genres of discourse became necessary as a way to identify what **public** speakers needed to know and what they needed to be able to do in order to be successful. The categories of forensic, deliberative, and epideictic speech remain salient today; but they fail to encompass other essential functions of **public** discourse within a culture. By the 5th century, rhetoric handbooks, such as Book IV of Augustine's (1958) *On Christian Doctrine*, encouraged teachers and students of rhetoric to accept a broad set of three goals for **public speaking**: to teach, to please, and to persuade. Today the majority of **public speaking** textbooks concentrate on the same three central goals of **public speaking** to inform, to entertain and to persuade an audience. Persuasive **speaking** is the most complex of the goals and remains an umbrella term for diverse discourses such as those aiming to change belief, to move to action, to inspire, to sell, to convert, and to motivate. In response to recent critiques of the fundamentally coercive nature of these kinds of persuasive speeches, whose aim is to change listeners, some theorists are exploring a new genre called "invitational **speaking**." This alternative goal for **public** speakers aims to initiate dialogues with listeners about issues and aims to share perspectives. The goal is to invite consideration of change rather than **speaking** with the intention of changing audience members (Foss & Griffin, 1995; Griffin, 2009).

Identifying the genre or the general goal of a speech within a particular situation helps a speaker understand a great deal about the strategies available to achieve the outcome for that kind of **speaking** situation. Informative speeches rely on clarity and thoroughness so that listeners can remember the information. Persuasive speeches are built on the speaker's credibility, the use of evidence and reasoning, as well as engaging the emotions of the audience to produce change. Invitational speeches aim to establish and sustain conditions of equality, value, and self-determination with listeners. Speeches to entertain rely on strategies that use humor to make their point. While these broadly defined goals govern the study of the discipline of **public speaking**, each speaker also needs to determine his particular goal within a particular speech situation. Those goals, like the long list developed by Quintilian, are innumerable, and identifying those goals requires careful consideration of many factors. While technology has expanded the potential impact of **public speaking** and added complications to the communicative process, the fundamental concerns and resources of the **public** speaker have remained remarkably consistent over time.

Fundamental Principles: The Dynamic Process of Public Speaking

Mid-20th-century efforts to visualize the components and processes of communication were dominated by what is called the transmission model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). This was an information transfer model that

seemed to suggest that communicators send information across some medium (such as telephone wires) to a receiver, who takes in the information as sent unless some kind of noise interferes to make the transmission problematic. This understanding of the **public** communication model has changed over time and is currently being influenced by postmodernists, who point out the indeterminacy of each of the parts of the model. Nevertheless, most teachers and **public**-**speaking** practitioners continue to find value in thinking about the distinct parts of the communication process to better accomplish their communicative goals. There are seven essential parts to the model: speaker, audience, message, channel, feedback, interference, and context.

Speaker

The speaker is perhaps the most obvious part of the **public**-**speaking** transaction, but there are complexities in the role that must not be overlooked. Communication begins within the mind of the speaker as he or she perceives and processes his or her own experiences and learning and makes decisions about the goal(s) of a speech and the strategies best suited to accomplishing those tasks. In fact, Aristotle does not define rhetoric as a product. It is not a speech or a specific strategy; it is not the outcome or effect a speaker has on an audience. Rhetoric, he says, is "the faculty of observing, in any given case, the available means of persuasion." Developing one's rhetorical skill, then, is about training the mind to see all the possibilities for persuasion or, in contemporary theory, to see all the possibilities for engaging audiences. Much of the work of a successful **public**-**speaking** interaction is the mental work of the speaker, who must sift through the possible goals, materials, information, and organizational and delivery strategies to select the best for a particular **speaking** context.

In addition, from the listener's point of view, the presence of the speaker is meaningful even before the speaker begins a presentation. The very fact that a presidential candidate chose to **speak** at a particular event conveys a message about the value of that event to that audience and to the listener as well as to those looking at the event from outside the immediate situation. The reputation of the speaker, his ethos or credibility, may also be known to the listener before the start of the speech. Announcements about the speech, the speech of introduction before a presentation or audience knowledge about earlier speeches, books or appearances by the speaker all serve to help listeners construct ideas about the speaker before the talk. These preexisting attitudes about the speaker can support or interfere with the speaker's goals depending on the listener.

Listener/Audience

The presence of an audience is essential to the **public**-**speaking** situation. Philosophers may debate the nature of "sound" when arguing about whether a tree falling in the forest makes a sound if no one is there to hear it, but theorists agree that the communicative act of **public speaking** requires the presence of a listener to be meaningful. Listeners bring their own experiences, languages, expectations, and ways of making meaning into the **public**-**speaking** interaction. The meanings taken away from a **public**-**speaking** presentation depend on the audience member's work in creating them. The more researchers investigate the ways people learn, the more it becomes clear that complex biological and social processes are at work as audience members construct their own meanings in communication contexts. **Public** communication is a participatory process; a speaker cannot make himself or herself understood without the willing participation of the listener in the process. The complexities of the mental landscapes of audience members—individually and as groups—is part of what makes **public speaking** a creative challenge that is never fully mastered.

Message

A third complex feature of the **public**-**speaking** process is the message itself. By definition, the message is the meaning received and understood by the members of the audience. In general, the closer the message received is to the message intended by the speaker, the more effective the presentation. For this reason, **public**-**speaking** instruction is typically focused on the construction of the speaker's message—such as the content, the structure, the word choices, but it is also the case that audience members are actively engaged in

constructing their own sense of the message. The messages from which they construct meanings are intentional and unintentional, verbal and nonverbal. As individuals, listeners have varying degrees of attentiveness; still, the speaker must assume that audience members are constructing impressions of the speaker's character, beliefs, age, class, race, gender, and even sexual orientation even before the speaker begins to address them orally. Contemporary **public** speakers are increasingly aware of this and work to manage these impressions to the best of their ability.

Channel

The intended and unintended messages projected by speakers come to listeners through some line of communication that we typically call a channel or medium. In the **public**-**speaking** context, air is the typical carrier of our verbal cues, and lines of sight carry nonverbal cues. These channels can be complicated by the presence of something that amplifies the sound, such as a microphone (as in a presidential state-of-the-union address) or a bull horn (as when President Bush stood in the rubble of the 9/11 attacks and addressed the rescue workers). Even poor stage lighting or a podium too large for the speaker can make it more difficult to "read" the visual cues. In recent decades, **public** speeches have become increasingly mediated, such that one speech may be available through various channels. Today, not only are speech texts, such as the Gettysburg Address, available to new readers who are separated from the context by many years, but complete recordings of speeches are available to be viewed by individuals and groups around the globe. New technologies have also expanded the kinds of channels available to speakers to share their messages; whether using PowerPoint and embedding videos in presentations or publishing presentations via YouTube or blogs, today's speakers have new challenges and opportunities when considering the media through which their messages are created and shared.

Feedback

Feedback is the element of the communication process that makes it a transactional experience. Rather than messages running only one way, from speaker to listener, theorists conceptualize **public**-**speaking** interactions as having a feedback loop. Parallel to the messages speakers communicate, feedback messages can be verbal and nonverbal, intentional and unintentional. Successful **public** speakers must be able to take in these messages and adapt to them. Audience members may communicate their enthusiasm or anger, the trouble they are having hearing or understanding, their agreement or disagreement, their willingness to give their attention or to ignore, and they may show their appreciation of the presentation with applause. Responding to feedback by restating, rephrasing, or elaborating a point; **speaking** up; slowing down; or even moving to an interactive moment of the speech to regain audience attention are all marks of the mature **public** speaker who is aware of the importance of audience feedback as a way to gauge whether an audience is continuing to work with the speaker to create shared meanings.

Within the immediate **speaking** situation, feedback is simultaneous with the delivery of the speaker's message. However, in colloquial use, feedback also refers to information solicited by **public** speakers after **public**-**speaking** events. In classrooms, peers and instructors may offer feedback to a speaker about a presentation, asking questions or commenting on the **public**-**speaking** choices made. Mediated **public** messages, such as a speech posted on YouTube, will collect feedback by way of comments posted. Audience researchers can use new technologies to measure the feedback responses of listeners. During a presidential debate, focus groups may press triggers to indicate their level of agreement or how much they like a candidate at any particular moment in the debate. Processing such data helps political advisers and speech writers capture a glimpse of the meaning-making process at work within listeners so that later efforts to communicate similar messages can be made more successful.

Interference

When something prevents our messages from reaching those with whom we are communicating, interference is the culprit. In the transmission model of communication, this idea is typically conceived of as literal noise. For

example, a **public** speaker's message might not get through to listeners if there was a baby crying in the room, a bus passing by the rally at the park, or a conversation being carried on among some members of the audience. This part of the model is based on the analogy that compares such noise with the kind of static that can interfere with a phone connection. Certainly such noise can make it hard for a speaker's message to be heard, thus, at a very fundamental level, preventing meanings from being shared with audiences.

As our conceptualization of speech making has shifted from the simplistic notion of transmitting sound from one person to an audience, so has the understanding of interference become much more complex. Hearing, listening, and understanding are different physiological and psychological tasks that we ask of audiences, and while **public** speakers are rightly concerned about being heard, they are also deeply concerned with being understood. An expanded notion of interference for the 21st-century speaker can include a wide range of possible distractions for audiences that can block, or make it harder for, messages to be understood. Today's speakers continue to be concerned about external distractions, such as noisy **speaking** venues or cell phone interruptions. In addition, new research about brain processing demonstrates the special challenges facing a speaker who is addressing listeners experiencing a sugar low or audience members who are present but are preoccupied with worries about needing to catch a plane, finish a project, or repair a relationship strained by an argument earlier that day. These internal distractions are usually outside the control of speakers, but the challenges they present to the success of a presentation are real and demand creative responses. Some points of internal interference in listeners can be unwittingly encouraged by speakers. Speakers who commit a faux pas, whether it be dressing inappropriately for the occasion, mispronouncing the name of the person who introduced them, or using terms unfamiliar to the audience, can send unintentional messages that interfere with the audience's ability or willingness to construct the meaning intended by the speakers. Similarly, speakers who incorporate poor visual aids, weak evidence, or a provocative word choice can invite listeners in whole or in part to disregard the rest of the presentation or to engage in a mental debate that interferes with their ability to understand what follows.

Context

In its most specific sense, context refers to the situation within which the **public**-**speaking** exchange occurs. This situation involves the reason the group constituting the audience is called together, whether it is a political convention where the room is filled with credentialed delegates, a monthly meeting of the Rotary club, or a rally to protest a decision to cut funding for a university program. It also involves the actual setting for the speech—a comfortable, climate-controlled board room; an overheated, crowded schoolboard meeting running late into the night; or an outdoor rally where it is hoped that the audience will grow during the presentation. Within the setting, speakers also consider the size of the audience, the arrangement of space, the presence or absence of means of amplification, the visual aid support available, and even whether there will be other speakers at the event. Understanding the situation is paramount for the speaker to make decisions that will lead to a successful presentation.

Context issues, however, extend beyond the specifics of the particular **speaking** situation. Cultural and institutionalized differences will affect the norms of the speaker-audience relationship. U.S. senators know that their presentations on the floor of Congress will be listened to politely, though sometimes by only a handful of fellow senators. Members of the British Parliament, in contrast, can expect colleagues to make their agreement and disagreement clear throughout the speech with shouts, feet stomping, or hisses. The conventions governing delivery and language use vary widely among cultures and subcultures, complicating the challenge facing speakers as they aim to adapt to those norms. Professional speakers know that every new **speaking** situation requires some adjustment if their message is to be successful.

Public speaking is a radically situated communicative act. Delivered to a particular audience at a particular time in a particular space, speeches have been recognized as among the most transitory of the arts. Prior to the invention of recording technologies, a speech might persist as a written text, but that text represented a mere

shadow of the experience of the speech as delivered. Though a speech can now experience an extended life span through recording, it remains, in the nature of **public speaking**, fundamentally linked to the context that called it into being, what Lloyd Bitzer (1968) called the rhetorical situation. Though listeners around the world continue to view Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" address, their understanding of the speech and the meanings they construct are not identical to those constructed by the listeners at the march or by people watching television coverage of the event. While some of the meanings of the speech persist over time and are shared by the millions of listeners who experience the speech today through various channels and in many different contexts, each listener lends his or her own life experiences and interpretive lenses to the meaning-making process. When listeners have the opportunity to add a deep understanding of the historical context within which the speech was given, their interpretive lenses change and new possible meanings of the text begin to emerge. Context persists as one of the most powerful influences on the **public** communication process, and our understanding of its significance continues to evolve.

Fundamental Principles: Effective Characteristics of Speakers

Speakers have various tools with which to respond to the dynamic complexities of the parts of the **public**-**speaking** interaction. Significantly, the skills required to respond effectively have not changed dramatically since the earliest theories of **public speaking** were being set forth. When today's students are asked what **public** speakers need to know in order to succeed, their responses are very similar to the ideas set forth in what communication educators call the Roman rhetorical canon. These five areas of instruction for **public** speakers have governed the topics studied in classrooms and mastered by remarkable speakers across the centuries. They include invention (creating the materials of the speech), arrangement (creating the order of the ideas in the speech), style (creating the expression of the ideas of the speech), delivery (embodying and **speaking** the ideas of the speech), and memory (strategies for recalling the ideas of the speech during delivery). In addition, today's students will often list more abstract concepts such as "confidence" as essential for the successful **public** speaker. **Public**-**speaking** instruction is typically founded on the assumption that mastery of the elements in the rhetorical canon added to experience will support the development of speaker confidence.

Invention, Arrangement, and Style Generate Ideas to Foster Connections With Audiences

While often treated as distinct areas of study, these first three parts of the rhetorical canon are coming to be understood as integrated because each of them lends generative power to the speaker. Invention includes tasks such as setting goals for a speech, identifying the major ideas the speaker hopes to convey, doing the research work necessary to select and develop those ideas, creating lines of thought and reasoning to powerfully attach the main ideas to the evidence at hand, considering ways to engage the particular audience to be addressed, and imagining points of opposition or confusion and ways to overcome those challenges. In other words, invention has long been recognized as the area of study concerned with creating and identifying the heart of the **public** speaker's message.

Arrangement, in contrast, has often been understood to involve the somewhat mechanical task of outlining the ideas and materials gathered and created in the inventional process. Distinct tasks such as structuring the main points; connecting the main ideas to one another; and understanding the conventions necessary to develop a good introduction, body, and conclusion for a particular situation are often taught as the fundamental aspects of this canon. In practice, the work of arrangement is dynamically linked with invention. For any particular speech topic, the consideration of strategies for organizing the speech to enhance its impact on listeners will lead to insights about engaging those listeners, responding to objections, or refining the goal of the presentation. A speaker addressing recycling efforts in the community would produce a very different speech if he or she used a chronological structure (which would require addressing the steps in the process or offering a historical perspective) than if a topical structure was used (which might lead to an exploration of current options for local

citizens or addressing the advantages and disadvantages of competing proposals). In this way, arrangement becomes more than putting together the pieces in the puzzle of a speech; it becomes a way to determine the very shape and look of the puzzle in its final form.

Similarly, current work at the intersection of linguistics, psychology, and communication identifies the deep impact that stylistic choices—speakers' ways of expressing themselves, or their use of style—are often constrained by habits of the mind and worldviews that have dramatic effects on the inventional process. Theorists such as Michael Osborn (1967) have identified the important ways in which metaphor functions not simply as a stylistic device that is used to clothe the thoughts of speakers but as a mode of thought that shapes our ideas and ways of thinking. Kenneth Burke (1966) explored the notion of terministic screens, arguing that a choice of terminology is "a selection of reality" and so, in some way, also functions to deflect us from some other perspective on reality (p. 45). **Public** speakers have long been aware that the connotations words carry have great power. The terms *prolife* and *antichoice* ostensibly refer to the same social movement, but the use of one term or the other offers an important insight into the attitudes of the speaker and may attract or repel listeners as a result. Linguists such as George Lakoff (2004) press the point further, arguing that connotations of words are not just suggestive but can constrain the ways in which we see the world. One example he offers is the phrase *tax relief*. When people hear the word *relief*, he argues, a mental frame is triggered. This frame, or way of understanding the world, sees relief as something good, something necessary for one to escape an affliction. When the frame of relief is brought together with the word *tax*, then that word is understood to be the source of the affliction and whoever can bring tax relief is understood to be a hero. Lakoff argues that discussions about tax policies would be significantly different if the term *tax* triggered a frame related to paying dues or to making an investment. Debates over the nature of language and its effects on the brain are ongoing, but successful **public** speakers of the 21st century must become increasingly aware of the power of language choices and the ways they influence not only audiences but the speakers' own ways of understanding the world.

Delivery and Memory Guide Nonverbal Connections With Audiences

The canons of delivery and memory address what, for many, are the most anxiety-provoking aspects of **public speaking**. The dynamic communication process relies on the speaker prompting the interaction by orally and visually sharing the ideas generated through the processes of invention, arrangement, and stylistic considerations. Giving an embodied presence to these ideas is the only way **public** speakers have to initiate the meaning-making process with their audience, and it hasan impact onthe audience's ability and willingness to share in that process. Since a large part of the **public** speaker's success depends on the speaker's ability to use his or her voice and body and visual aids to project the message, teachers of **public speaking** have long invested energy in identifying and offering training in the factors that contribute to successful delivery. Eye contact, gesture, stance, facial expression, posture, appearance, volume, rate, pitch, and inflection all play significant roles in the delivery of the presentation and affect the success of the message. Indeed, if listeners cannot hear the message because the speaker is too soft or cannot understand the message because the speaker rushes, no appropriate meaning can be shared. Besides a few fundamental guidelines such as doing nothing that will prevent the audience from hearing and understanding the message, there are few delivery rules that enjoy universal application. Even direct eye contact between speaker and audience, which in mainstream U.S. culture is typically considered an essential feature of successful **public speaking**, would be considered inappropriate in some other cultures. Since there is no one-size-fits-all practice of delivery suitable for all speakers in all situations, wise speakers take constant note of the successful choices of the speakers they see and work to integrate those behaviors into their own repertoire, reinterpreting a choice to fit their own style and so expanding the possibilities for their delivery in future presentations.

Likewise, strategies for recall during delivery vary widely from speaker to speaker. While there has always been a tradition of impromptu **speaking**—training speakers to competently deliver ideas with little or no time for preparation, the classical tradition emphasized the need for the orator to develop a knack for memorizing speeches and reciting them as planned. In the United States, writing speeches and committing them to memory

or delivering them from a manuscript remained a common practice well into the 20th century. While those kinds of preparation behaviors persist—most often supported by technology such as a teleprompter, other strategies such as outlining and focusing on key words and ideas have a strong following today. Current communication norms put a high premium on the authenticity of speakers. A conversational delivery style supported by brief notes, a rarely consulted outline, and, in some situations, a PowerPoint slide show that blends words and visuals is the most commonly implemented set of delivery and memory strategies.

Evolutions of Public Speaking in the 21st Century

Conceptualizations of **public speaking** have evolved over time. Today's speakers recognize that they do not simply transfer words and ideas to listeners but rather are engaged in a complex process of attempting to share meanings among diverse members of an audience. This collaborative process means that **public** speakers must surrender the belief that they exercise entire control over the meanings constructed by audience members. The greatest challenge facing the contemporary **public** speaker is to adapt to the changing expectations and needs of their audiences. Emerging technologies are creating new opportunities for speakers to adapt to audiences, but they may also be changing the way audiences process information and create meanings.

The mental landscape of today's audience members has been shaped by regular interaction with a wide range of electronic technologies that may be altering their expectations of **public** speakers. In industrialized nations, a generation of multitaskers with fragmented attention spans that embrace distractions has come of age; it is also a generation accustomed to easy electronic information access and sophisticated visuals. This is a group whose members have constructed their own homepages and social networking pages with personalized links and in doing so have exercised great power in determining the information, communication styles, and worldviews they see. There is research to suggest that developing strong multitasking skills has both costs and benefits and that immersion in technology affects how people access and process information. For example, a recent study (Adam, Edmonds, & Quinn, 2007) looked at news-reading habits and discovered that today's consumers of online news read as much as the traditional newspaper reader, but they read very differently. The online readers gravitated to innovative structures of information; they were more apt to read a question-and-answer column or a set of bullet points; they also tended to jump from place to place on the screen and follow links. In this way, they created their own narratives from the information rather than taking in the narrative structures created by the reporters. These new habits of mind may mean that speakers need new organizational skills to adapt to listeners who want to, and who have learned to, process information less linearly.

Public speakers also need to develop new strategies for gaining and maintaining audience attention. Integrating more visual elements and more audience interaction into their presentations will help **public** speakers accomplish their goals. Instead of just talking about the structure of the pyramids of ancient Egypt, today's speakers can offer something like a guided tour to audiences by using a series of images along with oral descriptions. In his lectures on global warming, Al Gore doesn't use a long list of statistics to indicate the historical relationship between carbon in the atmosphere and temperature changes; instead, he illustrates a suggestive relationship with animated lines that are drawn on a screen before the very eyes of his listeners. Anyone with an MP3 player and speakers can incorporate sound to help an audience of naturalists learn to distinguish between the calls of the barred owl and the great horned owl. Asking for a show of hands, using call-and-response strategies, or having listeners participate in other ways will help speakers engage audiences, increasing the likelihood that the message they are trying to share will be understood.

With so many avenues for gathering information and for communicating ideas open to the citizens of the 21st century, the central questions for an aspiring speaker must be “What is the added value of using **public speaking** as the means of communication for a particular message? What is it that **public speaking** can offer that would be absent from a documentary, a narrated PowerPoint slide show, an e-mail, or a blog or vlog posting?” The answer, of course, is the presence of the speaker. There is high demand for the opportunity to experience firsthand the ideas, voice, facial expressions, gestures, energy, and, in a sense, the character of a

speaker through the **public**-**speaking** context. The physical presence of a speaker conveys a level of attention of the speaker for that particular audience, which is a gift every bit as desired as is the attention that audience is offering to the speaker. The possibility of an authentic connection continues to bring audiences together. In professional contexts, the possibility of interaction with the speaker, through comments or a question-and-answer session, adds value to the presentations of a sales or research team. In civic contexts, the transitory moment of **public speaking**, though changing somewhat with the advent of recordings and rebroadcasts, remains a real thing for the audience present in the room, who, by sharing the physical space with the speaker and other listeners at that moment, experience something that cannot be re-created. Live **public speaking** is no more likely to disappear than live music concerts or movie theaters. Despite YouTube, concert videos, DVDs, and home theater systems, the community-building exercise of sharing the experience of a speech, music, or a film is likely to persist.

Technology has and will continue to influence the choices of **public** speakers and the impact potential of **public speaking** in various ways. Whether using technology to engage audiences or eschewing it entirely to stand out as a different and still compelling presenter, speakers will continue to exercise a wide range of rhetorical choices. With audience research tools, demographic data, online surveys, and even opinion polling data all at the fingertips of the contemporary **public** speaker, there have never been more opportunities to "know" things about the audience a speaker intends to address. But making use of this information continues to depend both on training in the fundamental skills of the rhetorical canon and on developing what Aristotle called the faculty of mind that can see the various options for building bridges of meaning between speakers and listeners.

—Amy Slagell

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