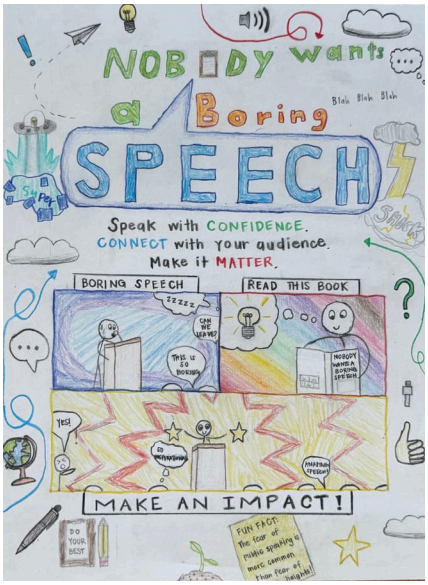
Nobody Wants a Boring Speech: Connect and Make It Matter

Joel Sakakihara, Russell Hong, and David A. Hamilton

De Anza College

Social Sciences





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

Program Page

Accessibility Statement

AI Usage

Preface

About the Book

About the Authors

Licensing

1: Intro To Public Speaking

1.1: The Importance of Public Speaking

1.2: Public Speaking and Rhetoric

1.3: Public Speaking and The Communication Models

1.4: Glossary

1.5: Discussions Questions

1.6: References

1.7: Alternative Text

2: Communication Apprehension

2.1: What Is Communication Apprehension?

2.2: Sources of Communication Apprehension

2.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension

2.4: Glossary

2.5: Disussion Questions

2.6: References

3: Audience Analysis

3.1: The Importance of Audience Analysis

3.2: Three Types of Audience Analysis

3.3: Conducting Audience Analyses

3.4: Connecting with the Audience

3.5: Glossary

3.6: Discussion Questions

3.7: References

3.8: Alternative Text

4: Listening

4.1: What is Listening and Why Listening is Important

4.2: The Listening Process

4.3: Barriers to Effective Listening

4.4: How to Become a Better Listener
4.5: Glossary
4.6: Discussion Questions
4.7: References
4.8: Alternative Text

5: Ethics in Public Speaking

5.1: Ethics in Public Speaking
5.2: Free Speech
5.3: Glossary
5.4: Discussion Questions
5.5: References

6: Finding a Purpose and Selecting a Topic

6.1: Purpose in a Speech
6.2: Selecting A Topic
6.3: Narrowing your Topic
6.4: Thesis Statement and Putting it all together
6.5: Glossary
6.6: Discussion Questions
6.7: References

7: Research and Evidence

7.1: Introduction
7.2: Types of Research and Resources
7.3: AI in Research
7.4: Confirmation Bias in Research
7.5: Evaluating Research
7.6: Citing Sources
7.7: Glossary
7.8: Discussion Questions
7.9: References

8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions

8.1: The Introduction
8.2: The Body
8.3: The Conclusion
8.4: Putting it all Togehter
8.5: Glossary
8.6: Discussion Questions
8.7: References

9: Delivering the Speech

9.1: Delivery that Connects

9.2: Adapting Delivery to the Setting
9.3: Using Notes Effectively
9.4: Practice - From Prepared to Natural
9.5: Glossary
9.6: Discussion Questions
9.7: References

10: Presenting Visual Aids

10.1: The Power of Visual Aids
10.2: Types of Visual Aids
10.3: Effective Power Points
10.4: How to Use Videos
10.5: Glossary
10.6: Discussion Questions
10.7: References

11: Informative Speaking

11.1: Speaking to Inform
11.2: Informative Speaking Goals
11.3: Types of Informative Speeches
11.4: Glossary
11.5: Discussion Questions
11.6: References

12: Persuasive Speaking

12.1: An Overview of Persuasion
12.2: Types of Persuasion
12.3: Organizing Persuasive Speeches
12.4: Building Persuasive Power- Appeals, Canons, and Culture
12.5: Glossary
12.6: Discussion Questions
12.7: References

13: Special Occasion Speaking

13.1: Speaking to Entertain
13.2: Ceremonial and Inspirational Speaking
13.3: Keynote Speaking
13.4: Glossary
13.5: Discussion Questions
13.6: References

14: Mediated Communication and Remote Learning

14.1: Synchronous and Asynchronous
14.2: Guidelines for Online Speeches

14.3: Glossary
14.4: Discussion Questions
14.5: References

Index

Glossary

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Program Page



De Anza College sits in the heart of Silicon Valley, where innovation and opportunity are part of daily life, and also has one of the highest costs of living in the country. For our students, that makes every dollar count, and the price of a textbook can be the difference between staying enrolled or dropping a class. Our Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) program closes that gap by giving students full access to high-quality, faculty-created course materials at no cost from the first day of class.

De Anza is proud of its diverse student community, and we hold our ZTC materials to the same standard of excellence that defines the college. Faculty across departments write, adapt, and review these resources themselves, keeping them accurate, current, and grounded in the perspectives of the students who use them, with accessibility and inclusive design built in from the start.

This program reflects the time and care our faculty invest in their students. If you have questions, feedback, or come across any issues with a ZTC resource, contact De Anza College's ZTC Grants Coordinator, Shagun Kaur.

Learn more about De Anza ZTC Program [www.deanza.edu/academic-services/oer/]

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Accessibility Statement

Accessibility

De Anza College is dedicated to creating learning materials that are accessible and benefit all students. Our materials follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA. Our authors and contracted accessibility specialists checked all resources using this ASCCC OERI checklist, the accessibility tool in LibreTexts, WAVE, JAWS, and other more detailed checks for complex materials such as interactive components.

We selected LibreTexts as our preferred platform because of its commitment to accessibility. In addition to the platform's inherent accessibility, we collaborated with the LibreTexts team to fix any accessibility issues we found.

Our Accessibility Review Process

Accessibility was built into the resource as it was written. This resource went through the following stages of review:

1. **Template check.** The project coordinator and instructional designers checked the first chapter for accessibility as a model to ensure later chapters meet accessibility standards.
2. **Progress checks.** The manuscript was checked at approximately 40%, 60%, and 80% completion to catch and correct accessibility issues in production.
3. **Specialist review.** Once the manuscript was complete, an accessibility expert conducted an accessibility check.
4. **Remediation.** The author and the project manager who conducted the earlier progress checks worked together to remediate the issues identified by the accessibility expert.
5. **Final check.** The resource underwent another full check by the accessibility expert before the book was deemed ready for publication.

This process combines ongoing checks during writing with a final specialist review, so issues are caught early and confirmed fixed before publication.

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- The name of the resource
- The location of the problem (a web address or page/chapter description)
- A description of the problem you encountered
- The device, browser, and any assistive technology you were using (e.g., Windows 11, Google Chrome, JAWS screen reader)

Contact us: De Anza ZTC team

This statement was last updated August 2026

This resource was project-managed by **Shagun Kaur**, overseeing scope, budget, and schedule; stakeholder coordination via monthly meetings; training and platform support (LibreTexts, troubleshooting, technical support); QA/accessibility check scheduling; and licensing and copyright governance.

A Note on Known Limitations

No accessibility check is perfect. We've made a genuine, sustained effort to catch and fix issues throughout the writing and review process described above, but some barriers may remain, especially in complex or interactive content. We'd rather be upfront about that than claim a standard of perfection we can't guarantee.

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AI Usage

AI Use in Course Development – Transparency & Standards

This Open Educational Resource (OER) was developed using a collaborative process that combined faculty expertise with the responsible use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) as a supportive educational tool. Throughout the development of this textbook, AI assisted with idea generation, brainstorming, organizational planning, editing, proofreading, image creation, accessibility support, and developing early drafts of selected instructional materials.

AI served as a writing and productivity assistant, not as an author or replacement for scholarly expertise. The human authors determined the instructional design, pedagogical decisions, learning outcomes, examples, assessments, chapter organization, and final content. AI-generated material functioned for concept elaboration and was extensively reviewed, verified, revised, expanded, reorganized, or rewritten before inclusion in this textbook.

We did not accept any AI-generated content without substantial human review. We independently verified references, citations, terminology, examples, and instructional recommendations whenever appropriate. Because generative AI systems may produce inaccuracies, omissions, or outdated information, the authors assumed full responsibility for evaluating and approving every element included in this resource.

AI also helped develop openly licensed illustrations, conceptual graphics, alternative text descriptions, and accessibility features where appropriate. The authors also reviewed and modified these materials to ensure they accurately represented the intended concepts and met accessibility expectations.

The use of AI in this project is disclosed in the interest of transparency and reflects current best practices for responsible and ethical integration of artificial intelligence into educational resource development. Ultimately, the human authors are fully responsible for the content, accuracy, educational quality, and pedagogical integrity of this textbook.

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Preface

This textbook was developed to support students enrolled in introductory Public Speaking and Oral Communication courses within the Communication Studies curriculum. Communication Studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines how people create, share, interpret, and respond to messages across personal, professional, public, and mediated contexts.

The Public Speaking course serves as a foundational component of many degree and transfer pathways, helping students develop essential communication competencies that are valued across academic disciplines and career fields. Through the study and practice of public speaking, students learn to analyze audiences, organize ideas, conduct research, evaluate evidence, deliver effective presentations, and communicate ethically in diverse settings.

The Communication Studies program is committed to fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, cultural awareness, and effective communication. Students are encouraged to become thoughtful consumers of information, ethical advocates for their ideas, and respectful participants in public discourse. The skills developed through communication coursework support success in higher education, the workplace, community leadership, and lifelong learning.

This Open Educational Resource was created to align with the learning outcomes commonly found in introductory public speaking courses while providing students with free and equitable access to high-quality instructional materials. The text emphasizes practical application, contemporary communication challenges, and the development of confidence through preparation, practice, and reflection.

We hope this resource supports your growth as a communicator and helps you discover the power of your voice in academic, professional, and civic life.

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About the Book

About The Book

Public speaking is one of the most valuable skills students can develop, regardless of their academic major, career path, or personal goals. Whether speaking in a classroom, workplace, community setting, or online environment, effective communication empowers individuals to share ideas, build relationships, advocate for change, and contribute meaningfully to society.

This Open Educational Resource (OER) was created to provide students with an accessible, practical, and engaging introduction to public speaking. Designed for introductory college-level communication courses, the text combines foundational communication theory with real-world applications to help students become confident, ethical, and audience-centered speakers.

The book guides students through the entire speech-making process, beginning with an introduction to communication and public speaking, managing communication apprehension, analyzing audiences, and developing effective listening skills. Students will learn how to select and refine speech topics, conduct research, evaluate evidence, organize ideas, and create compelling introductions and conclusions. Additional chapters focus on speech delivery, visual aids, informative speaking, persuasive speaking, special occasion speaking, mediated communication, and the ethical responsibilities of public speakers.

Recognizing the evolving communication landscape, this text also addresses contemporary topics such as artificial intelligence in research, online and remote presentations, information literacy, and ethical decision-making. Throughout the book, students are encouraged to think critically about their roles as both speakers and listeners in diverse and interconnected communities.

Each chapter includes key terminology, discussion questions, references, and supplementary materials designed to reinforce learning and promote classroom engagement. The organization of the text allows instructors flexibility in course design while providing students with a clear and structured path toward communication competence.

Ultimately, this book is built on the belief that effective communication is a learned skill, not an innate talent. With practice, preparation, and reflection, every student can develop the ability to communicate with clarity, confidence, credibility, and purpose.
- David, Joel, and Russell

About the Cover Illustrators

The unique visual personality of Nobody Wants a Boring Speech: Connect and Make it Matter comes from its original cover artwork, created by Jace and Kenton Sakakihara, one of the author's children. Invited to interpret the core themes of public speaking, communication, confidence, creativity, and connection, they developed the hand-drawn illustrations and doodles featured on the cover. Rather than using a traditional commercial textbook cover, the authors wanted the artwork itself to reflect one of the central ideas of this OER: everyone brings a different voice, perspective, and way of communicating to the world. Like public speaking, Kenton and Jace's hand-drawn illustrations and doodles remind readers that communication does not need to be perfect to be meaningful, it needs to be authentic, creative, and capable of connecting with others.

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About the Authors

About the Authors

Author	Biography
	**Joel Sakakihara** is a communication studies educator and entrepreneur who believes that the true value of education is measured by what students can apply throughout their lives. He teaches at De Anza College and his teaching philosophy centers on bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world practice, helping students develop communication skills that foster confidence, build meaningful relationships, strengthen leadership, and create opportunities long after the course has ended. Joel earned a Master of Arts in Communication Studies from California State University, Long Beach where he was a debate coach for the nationally ranked forensics team. In addition, his graduate research study examined intercultural communication, Extra Class Communication (ECC), cultural constructs, and the role of student-professor interactions in student success, engagement, and mentorship. His research highlights the need for inclusive classrooms that value student diversity and provide practical tools for future achievement. Beyond academia, Joel founded multiple companies and led a successful start up as CEO, providing firsthand experience in leadership, entrepreneurship, public speaking, negotiation, team development, and strategic communication. These real-world experiences reinforce his belief that effective communication is one of the most important skills students can develop, regardless of their career goals.

Author	Biography
	**Russell Hong** teaches Public Speaking and Interpersonal Communication at De Anza College in Silicon Valley. A product of the California community college system, he believes people learn communication less from textbooks and more from everyday life: customer service jobs, group chats, workplace conflict, public mistakes, and the challenge of connecting with other human beings. Before becoming a college instructor, Russell taught ESL in a correctional facility, was an oral communication teacher in Japan, substituted in K–12 classrooms, and worked a variety of jobs, from cashier and customer service representative to aspiring screenwriter and Boy Scout dropout. Along the way, he learned that communication is often messy, human, and best learned through experience. Russell earned Communication Studies degrees from UCLA and San José State University and discovered his passion for teaching at West Valley College under the mentorship of Randy Fujishin. He also credits his mother, Gladys Hong, who taught fifth grade for nearly forty years, for passing along the teaching DNA that eventually led him into the classroom. He still believes some of the best communication lessons happen outside the classroom, is a huge advocate of international travel, and loves to communicate most with dogs.

Author	Biography
	**David A. Hamilton** holds a Master of Arts in Communication Studies from San José State University and a Master of Divinity from Western Theological Seminary. He has taught communication courses at Oxford Teachers College at Reach University, within the Foothill–De Anza Community College District, and as an adjunct instructor at several colleges throughout Silicon Valley. His academic interests center on critical thinking, argumentation, debate, and public speaking. He was a former co-captain of a nationally competitive speech and debate team that finished second and fourth-place nationally. He also served as a speech and debate tournament judge, giving him extensive experience in evaluating effective communication and reasoning. Before entering higher education, he worked in the private business sector, providing him with practical experience that shapes his teaching. He emphasizes real-world applications of communication and critical thinking, demonstrating how these skills strengthen relationships, improve workplace effectiveness, and support better decision-making in everyday life. Outside the classroom, he is an avid outdoorsman. Nicknamed "Daniel Boone" by his family, he spends time each year exploring wilderness areas such as Alaska, British Columbia, the Colorado Rockies, the Trinity Alps, and, most notably, California's Sierra Nevada Mountains, where he often embarks on one- to two-week horseback expeditions into the backcountry.

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1: INTRO TO PUBLIC SPEAKING

Introduction to Public Speaking

Public speaking might sound intimidating at first, but it's one of the most powerful tools you'll ever learn to use. When you speak clearly and confidently, people listen and that's how leaders, influencers, and change makers are made. When you're giving a class presentation, interviewing for a job, or leading a team, strong speaking skills can set you apart. Public speaking also helps you grow by pushing you to overcome fears, organize your thoughts, and connect with others in meaningful ways. You'll learn how to use both verbal (what you say) and nonverbal (how you say it) communication to strengthen your message.

A major component in the foundation of public speaking is rhetoric, the art of using language to inform, influence, and inspire. This tradition goes all the way back to Ancient Greece, where speaking well was seen as a key to being an active citizen. In this course, you'll also explore communication models, which show how messages are sent and received between speakers and audiences. You'll break down the key parts of the communication process, such as the sender, message, channel, and feedback. In doing so, you will become more aware of how communication works in real life. Learning public speaking isn't just about giving speeches but it's about building confidence, critical thinking, and connection with others.



Figure 1.1: Public Speaking Microphone. (CC BY 2.0; MicJohnsonLP via Flickr)

Learning Objectives

- Describe and differentiate the purposes of informative, persuasive, and entertaining speeches and analyze how public speaking skills benefit individuals in everyday life, education, and professional contexts.
- Explain the historical foundations of rhetoric, including Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals, and demonstrate how to apply these appeals when crafting or evaluating speeches.
- Interpret and compare communication models (interactional, transactional, and dialogical) and evaluate their relevance to inclusive, effective public speaking in real-world scenarios.

1.1: The Importance of Public Speaking

1.2: Public Speaking and Rhetoric

1.3: Public Speaking and The Communication Models

1.4: Glossary

1.5: Discussions Questions
1.6: References
1.7: Alternative Text

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1.1: The Importance of Public Speaking

The Importance of Public Speaking

When someone gives a powerful presentation, records a social media post, presents a school project, or leads a team at work, what are they really doing? They're using public speaking skills even if they're not standing at a podium in front of a huge crowd. In today's society, public speaking takes place in Zoom meetings, social media videos, classroom discussions, job interviews, podcasts, and community events. The ability to communicate clearly and confidently is valuable in any career, including business leadership, teaching, healthcare, content creation, and the skilled trades. Communication skills and public speaking are key factors employers consider when looking to hire or even promote an individual. However, many students leave high school or even college without much real-world experience speaking in front of others.

Public speaking isn't just about giving speeches. It's about sharing ideas in ways that others understand, trust, and remember. That could mean making a case for a new policy, explaining a project to your boss, telling your personal story, or simply speaking up when something matters to you. Good public speaking helps people lead, persuade, teach, connect, and inspire. Lastly, public speaking plays a key role in helping us organize and share our ideas effectively in both personal and professional settings. To understand the value of public speaking, first, we'll explore **informative speaking**, **persuasive speaking,** and **entertaining speaking**, the three main types of speeches based on their purpose. Then we'll look at how public speaking occurs in everyday life and how it can benefit you personally through influencing the world around you, critical thinking and leadership.

Informative Speaking

In today's fast-paced, information-heavy world, the ability to organize facts and deliver them effectively is more valuable than ever. One of the most common types of public speaking is informative speaking. The primary purpose of informative presentations is to share one's knowledge of a subject with and imparting information to an audience. When you're explaining how climate change affects your city, teaching classmates how to manage stress, or breaking down how AI is changing our world, you're using informative speaking to educate your audience. Informative speaking is integrated into many different occupations. Physicians often lecture about their areas of expertise to medical students, other physicians, and patients. Teachers find themselves presenting to parents as well as to their students. Firefighters give demonstrations about how to effectively control a fire in the house. By learning informative speaking you'll gain a skill that applies in school, your career, and everyday life.

Persuasive Speaking

A second common reason for speaking to an audience is to persuade others. In our everyday lives, we are often called on to convince, motivate, or otherwise persuade others to change their beliefs, take an action, or reconsider a decision. Advocating for music education in your local school district, convincing clients to purchase your company's products, or inspiring high school students to attend college all involve influencing other people through public speaking. According to the National Communication Association (2015), persuasive skills are among the top competencies valued by employers because they show leadership and decision-making ability. In a digital world where misinformation spreads easily, learning how to ethically argue your point using logic, evidence, and emotion is more important than ever (Pennycook and Rand, 2019). Persuasive speaking gives you the tools to make a real impact such as to raise awareness, promote change, or inspire action. Motivational authors and speakers, such as Mel Robbins make millions of dollars each year from people who want to be motivated to do better in their lives. Brian Tracy, another professional speaker and author, specializes in helping business leaders become more productive and effective in the workplace. Whether public speaking is something you do every day or just a few times a year, persuading others is a challenging task. If you develop the skill to persuade effectively, it can be personally and professionally rewarding.

Entertaining Speaking

Entertaining speaking involves an array of speaking occasions ranging from introductions to wedding toasts, to presenting and accepting awards, to delivering eulogies at funerals and memorial services in addition to after-dinner speeches and motivational speeches. Speeches to entertain are a style of public speaking designed to engage, celebrate, amuse, or emotionally connect with an audience. Entertaining speaking has been important since the time of the ancient Greeks, when Aristotle identified epideictic

speaking (speaking in a ceremonial context) as an important type of address. As with persuasive and informative speaking, there are professionals, from religious leaders to comedians, who make a living simply from delivering entertaining speeches. As anyone who has watched an awards show on television or has seen an incoherent best man deliver a wedding toast can attest, speaking to entertain is a task that requires preparation and practice to be effective

Developing Critical Thinking Skills

One of the very first benefits you will gain from your public speaking course is an increased ability to think critically. **Critical thinking** is the ability to carefully evaluate information, question assumptions, and make reasoned decisions based on evidence. For example, when someone shares a claim on a social media platform, critical thinkers don't just accept it, they ask, "Is this credible?" or "What evidence supports this?". In fact, research shows that students who develop strong critical thinking skills are better at solving problems and making informed decisions in academic and real-world situations (Abrami et al., 2015). Being able to think through problems and analyze the potential costs and benefits of solutions is an essential part of critical thinking and of public speaking aimed at persuading others. These skills will help you not only in public speaking contexts but throughout your life as well. According to a study by sociologist Andrew Zekeri (Zekeri, 2004), oral communication skills were the number one skill that college graduates found useful in the business world. The second most valuable skill they reported was problem-solving ability, so your public speaking course is doubly valuable!

Influencing the World around You

Public speaking has the power to change minds, inspire action, and shape the world around you. If you don't like something about your local government, then speak out about your issue! One of the best ways to get our society to change is through the power of speech. In our connected world, one speech can go viral and reach millions, giving everyday people a platform to influence global conversations. Public speaking allows you to raise awareness, stand up for what you believe in, and mobilize others around shared goals. From protests and political campaigns to community meetings and social media advocacy, the spoken word remains one of the most powerful tools for change. One of the amazing parts of being a citizen in a democracy is the right to stand up and speak out, which is a luxury many people in the world do not have. So if you don't like something, be the force of change you're looking for through the power of speech.

Developing Leadership Skills

Strong leaders are often strong speakers. When you're leading a team project, starting a business, or organizing a community event, public speaking is a key **leadership** skill. Have you ever thought about climbing the corporate ladder and eventually finding yourself in a management or other leadership position? If so, then public speaking skills are very important. Research shows that individuals who develop strong public speaking and communication skills are more likely to be viewed as experts and innovators in their profession (Zhang, 2017). In addition, Hackman and Johnson assert that effective public speaking skills are a necessity for all leaders (Hackman and Johnson, 2004). If you want people to follow you, you have to communicate effectively and clearly what followers should do. According to Bender, "Powerful leadership comes from knowing what matters to you. Powerful presentations come from expressing this effectively. It's important to develop both" (Bender, 1998). One of the most important skills for leaders to develop is their public speaking skills, which is why executives spend millions of dollars every year going to public speaking workshops; hiring public speaking coaches; and buying public speaking books and programs. Public speaking develops leadership skills and helps you practice thinking on your feet, making persuasive arguments, and connecting with different audiences. As you develop your speaking abilities, you're also learning how to lead with clarity, empathy, and purpose.

Example

When Jordan saw that his school didn't have enough mental health resources for students, he decided to take action. He organized a student forum and spoke passionately about the need for more counseling support, sharing research, personal experiences, and a clear plan for improvement. He followed up by posting updates and resources on social media, which gained attention from both students and school staff. His leadership and communication inspired others to join the cause and start meaningful conversations about mental health on campus. Jordan's efforts showed how strong public speaking skills can lead to real change and positively influence the world around you.

Key Takeaways

- People have many reasons for engaging in public speaking, but the skills necessary for public speaking are applicable whether someone is speaking for informative, persuasive, or entertainment reasons.
- Taking a public speaking class will improve your speaking skills, help you be a more critical thinker, and enhances your ability to educate, motivate, and emotionally connect with others.
- Effective public speaking skills have many direct benefits for the individual speaker, including influencing the world around you, developing leadership skills, and becoming a go-to person for ideas and solutions.

Exercises

- Interview someone in a leadership role (manager, coach, teacher, community organizer, someone working in your career of choice) and ask how they use public speaking in their work. What challenges do they face? What advice would they give to someone learning public speaking? Summarize your findings in one page.
- Locate a claim on social media or the news that seems questionable and write a short critique evaluating the claim's credibility. Use critical thinking to analyze the claim: What is the source? What evidence is provided? Are there logical fallacies?
- Talk to people who are currently working in the career you hope to pursue. Of the three types of public speaking discussed in the text, which do they use most commonly use in their work?

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1.2: Public Speaking and Rhetoric

History

Leading a school project, expressing your ideas at a community meeting, or sharing a video online all involve public speaking, a powerful form of communication that has shaped society for thousands of years. The origins of public speaking trace back to **Ancient Greece**, where it was known as **rhetoric**. In ancient Athens, citizens used rhetoric to debate laws, make political decisions, and deliver messages to large audiences. Public speaking was so important that it became a core part of education. One of the most influential thinkers of that time was **Aristotle**, a philosopher who studied how people communicate and persuade others. His ideas still shape how we understand speeches today. Aristotle identified three key tools of persuasion, ethos, pathos, and logos. Each of these appeals are still used today in speeches, commercials, and everyday communication. Understanding these ancient ideas will help you become a more effective, ethical, and confident speaker.

Aristotle's Rhetorical Appeals

Aristotle's rhetorical appeals are essential to strong public speaking. **Ethos** is about credibility. If your audience believes you are trustworthy and knowledgeable, they are more likely to listen. For example, if a doctor gives a speech about nutrition, their medical background builds ethos. **Pathos** appeals to emotions. A speaker might share a personal story or use vivid language to make people feel empathy or excitement. For example, a commercial for an animal shelter that shows abandoned pets may create an emotional response within yourself and pull at your heart. Finally, **logos** is the use of logic and evidence. Citing statistics, facts, or logical reasoning supports your argument and makes you more supportive. A student presenting on climate change might include data from NASA or NOAA to strengthen their message.

Public speaking is not just about standing in front of a crowd, it's about connecting with people and sharing ideas that matter. Ancient Greeks believed that public speaking empowered citizens to participate in **democracy** and create change. Today, public speaking still helps us lead, inspire, and inform. When convincing your classmates to recycle more, advocating for a local cause, or delivering a speech on social media, you're using tools that date back over 2,000 years. Aristotle's theory remains a foundation because it helps speakers balance emotion, logic, and character to build meaningful connections with their audience (Aristotle, trans. 2007).

Understanding rhetoric and public speaking from its ancient Greek origins not only gives you historical knowledge, it gives you the power to influence, advocate, and lead in your own life. When you apply ethos, pathos, and logos, you learn to create influential messages applicable not only to public speaking but everyday communication as well. Aristotle's rhetorical appeals lives on in classrooms, courts, boardrooms, and online spaces where people aim to make a difference.

Example 1.2.1

A strong example of rhetoric in action is Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign to fight childhood obesity. In her speeches, she used ethos by drawing on her role as a mother and First Lady, showing she had both personal and national experience with the issue. She connected with audiences using pathos, sharing stories about wanting her daughters and all children to grow up healthy and happy. This emotional appeal helped parents and educators relate to her message. She also supported her argument with logos, citing research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on how regular physical activity and better nutrition can reduce obesity and improve health outcomes. Her clear, balanced communication helped make "Let's Move" a successful campaign across schools, communities, and even food companies. Michelle Obama's use of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals made her message powerful, trustworthy, and persuasive.

Key Takeaways

- Public speaking began as rhetoric in Ancient Greece and was essential for civic life and democracy.
- Aristotle's rhetorical appeals ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic) are still used today to persuade and influence audiences.
- Modern speakers who understand these classical tools are better prepared to engage, inspire, and lead in diverse settings.

Exercises

- Think of a time someone persuaded you (a friend, teacher, parent, ad, etc.). Write a brief journal entry answering: What were they trying to persuade you to do or believe? Which rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) did they use most? Why do you think their message worked (or didn't)?
- Watch a short speech (TED Talk or commercial) and identify examples of ethos, pathos, and logos. Write a brief paragraph explaining how each is used.
- Choose a topic you care about. Write a 1-minute mini persuasive speech using all three rhetorical appeals.
- In a short journal entry, reflect on a time someone persuaded you. What rhetorical appeals did they use? How did they affect your response.

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1.3: Public Speaking and The Communication Models

Introduction to Communication Models

When we share ideas, solve problems, or simply have a conversation, communication is the way we connect with one another. In public speaking, understanding how communication works helps us become better speakers and listeners. You may have the best ideas in the world, but if you do not possess basic public speaking skills, you're going to have a problem getting anyone to listen. So, people are more likely to pay attention to what you are saying when you are speaking in a clear and coherent fashion.

To examine this further, scholars have developed models to explain the communication process and the public speaking process. These models will give you a basic understanding of the communication process and show us the steps involved in sending and receiving messages. In addition, they help us understand the challenges that you may face as a speaker or when we try to communicate.

A basic model of human communication is one of the first topics that most communication teachers start with in any class. For our focus on public speaking, we will introduce two widely discussed models in communication: interactional and transactional.

Interactional Model

The **interactional model of communication** developed by Wilbur Schramm (Schramm, 1954) builds upon the Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's linear model. The interactional model builds on the simple idea of sender and receiver by adding feedback. This means that the listener is not just a passive receiver but someone who can respond, making communication a two-way process (West and Turner, 2020).

In the interaction model of public speaking, Schramm added three major components to the Shannon and Weaver model. First, Schramm identified two basic processes of communication: encoding and decoding. **Encoding** is what the source does when "creating a message, adapting it to the receiver, and transmitting it across some source-selected channel" (Wrench, McCroskey, and Richmond, 2008, p. 17). It is the process of turning thoughts or ideas into words, symbols, or gestures. For example, when a student prepares a class speech, they think about what they want to say and then choose the words, images, and tone that best express their message (West and Turner, 2020).

The second major process is **decoding**, which involves "sensing (for example, hearing or seeing) a source's message, interpreting the source's message, evaluating the source's message, and responding to the source's message" (Wrench, McCroskey, and Richmond, 2008, p. 17). Decoding is relevant in the public speaking context when, as an audience member, you listen to the words of the speech, pay attention to nonverbal behaviors of the speaker, and attend to any presentation aids that the speaker uses. In this process of interpreting that message, each listener in the audience uses their own background, experiences, and knowledge to make sense of what the speaker is saying. Misunderstandings can happen if the speaker's message is unclear or if the audience interprets it differently than intended. You must then interpret what the speaker is saying.

The last part of decoding and third major component is "responding to a source's message," often referred to as **feedback**. Feedback is the message sent back from the receiver to the speaker, helping the speaker understand how the message is being interpreted and whether it was successful. This process allows communication to be adjusted in real time and is a critical component of effective interaction.

Wrench, McCroskey, and Richmond (2008) describe responding as part of the decoding process, where listeners not only sense and interpret a message but also evaluate and respond to it. This response can be verbal, like asking a question, or nonverbal, such as facial expressions, gestures, or eye contact. For example, in a classroom presentation, students may indicate interest and understanding by nodding, smiling, or taking notes or look confused, prompting the speaker to clarify their points.

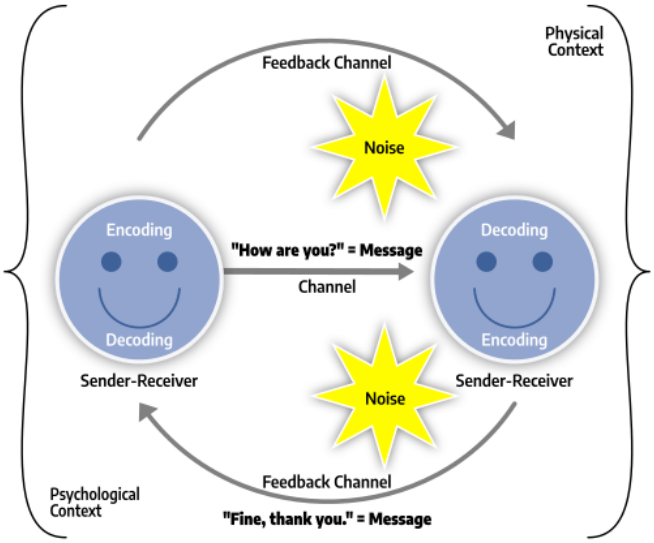


Figure 1.3.1: Interaction Model of Communication. (CC BY-SA 4.0; University of Minnesota via Wikimedia Commons) Read Fig 1.3.1 long description.

As referenced in Figure 1.3.1, the **interactional model of communication** views communication as a two-way process where messages are exchanged between a sender and a receiver. The **sender** is the person who creates and encodes the message, while the **receiver** is the person who decodes and interprets it. After the receiver decodes the message and then encodes a message back to the sender, the receiver then becomes sender. Unlike the linear model, this approach acknowledges that both parties take turns sending and receiving messages, creating a more dynamic exchange. The **channel** in the above figure refers to the medium used to send the message such as spoken words, text messages, or video calls. **Noise** includes any interference that can distort or block the message, such as background sounds, poor internet connection, or misunderstanding due to language barriers.

Lastly, feedback in the figure's feedback channel is the receiver's response to the message and helps the sender know whether the message was understood. Feedback can be immediate, like nodding during a conversation, or delayed, like replying to an email. This means that the listener is not just a passive receiver but someone who can respond, making communication a two-way process (West and Turner, 2020).The interactional model emphasizes that communication is ongoing and influenced by context, such as culture, relationships, and physical setting. By recognizing that both participants affect the communication process, this model highlights the shared responsibility in creating effective understanding.

Transactional Model

In order to handle situations where multiple sources are interacting at the same time, Dean Barnlund proposed a transactional model of communication (Barnlund, 2008). The **transactional model** is the most complex and realistic. It views communication as a continuous process where both people are senders and receivers at the same time. In public speaking, the speaker acts as the source when delivering messages to the audience, but during feedback, the roles reverse as the audience becomes the source, and the speaker becomes the receiver. In an **interpersonal communication** encounter, a face-to-face conversation with a friend includes talking, nodding, reacting, and adjusting your message based on their responses. This transactional communication in action assumes that the meanings of the messages are mutually understood by both senders and receiver based on a concept called the "Field of experience". According to West and Turner, a field of experience involves "how a person's culture, experiences, and heredity influence his or her ability to communicate with another" (West and Turner, 2010). Effective communication depends on having some shared experiences (culture, education, beliefs, and past experiences) between the speaker and the audience. Without these shared elements, it becomes more difficult to ensure the message is understood as intended. Public speakers must recognize and build upon these shared experiences to connect with their audience and make their message meaningful.

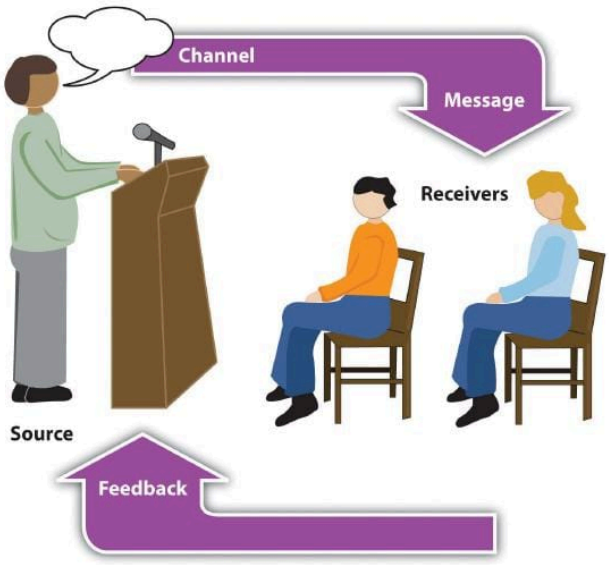


Figure 1.3.1: Types of Presentation Aids (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 via Communication transactional model)

As referenced in Figure 1.3.1, in public speaking, the **source** is the person who is giving the speech, the channel is the speaker's use of **verbal** and **nonverbal communication**, and the receivers are the audience members listening to the speech. So, the source encodes the message to the audience members and the audience members as receivers, decode the message and provide feedback depending on the encoded response sent either verbally or nonverbally. At this point, the audience members or receivers, become the source and the source becomes the receiver.

Dialogic Theory of Public Speaking

The dialogic theory of public speaking sees communication as a two-way, interactive process where meaning is co-created between speaker and audience. Instead of viewing a speech as a one-sided performance, this theory emphasizes that effective public speaking feels like a conversation, even with a large audience (Barge and Little, 2008). Based on the work of numerous philosophers, Ronald Arnett and Pat Arneson proposed that all communication, even public speaking, could be viewed as a dialogue (Arnett and Arneson, 1999). The **dialogic theory** is based on three overarching principles including dialogue vs monologue, meanings in people, and context/social situations.

First, dialogue is more natural than monologue means that human communication typically happens through dialogue of two or more people interacting naturally. Public speaking becomes more effective when it mimics conversation, even if only one person is speaking. For example, a TED Talk often feels conversational because the speaker uses personal stories, rhetorical questions, and direct address ("you") to create a sense of interaction with the audience. This approach helps listeners feel included and keeps them engaged.

Second, meanings are in people not words means that words don't carry meaning by themselves; people interpret words based on their own backgrounds, experiences, and values. For instance, the word "freedom" can mean different things to different people depending on their cultural or personal context. A speaker must consider these differences and define key terms or give examples that relate to the audience's experiences. This ensures that the intended message is actually understood by the audience.

Last, contexts and social situations impact perceived meanings (Bakhtin, 2001a; Bakhtin, 2001b). Where and how communication takes place greatly affects how a message is received. A joke that works in a casual setting may fall flat in a formal speech. Similarly, a political comment may be accepted or rejected based on the audience's social norms or current events. For example, a graduation speech during a time of national crisis might need a more serious tone than in a normal year. Effective speakers adapt their message and delivery to the specific context and audience they are addressing.

Understanding dialogic theory helps speakers move beyond simply delivering information as it guides them to connect, adapt, and build mutual meaning with their audience. This approach leads to more ethical, inclusive, and impactful communication.

Example 1.3.1

- Business Presentation (Interactional Model): During a team meeting, a project manager presents quarterly results using a PowerPoint and verbal explanation. As she speaks, team members nod, ask questions, or take notes. This feedback helps the speaker adjust her tone and pace. This illustrates the interactional model, where communication flows two ways and audience reactions shape the speaker's delivery.
- Town Hall Meeting (Transactional Model):At a local town hall, a city official discusses upcoming policy changes. Community members interrupt with questions, give applause, or show concern through body language. The official modifies their message in real time, considering the shared field of experience (community concerns, past policies). This ongoing exchange reflects the transactional model, where both speaker and audience act as senders and receivers, shaping meaning together.

Key Takeaways

- Effective communication is more than just speaking, it involves encoding your message, considering the audience's field of experience, and responding to their feedback in real time.
- The interactional model helps us understand basic communication as a two-way process, while the transactional model shows how meaning is co-created through shared experiences and simultaneous roles.
- Dialogic theory emphasizes that public speaking should feel like a dialogue, adapting language and content to the audience's experiences and the context in which the speech occurs.

Exercises

- Draw the major models of communication on a piece of paper and then explain how each component is important to public speaking.
- Write a short reflection (150–200 words) on your own personal experiences. Consider how your culture, language, education, or past experiences affect the way you understand and communicate messages. Then, describe how this awareness can help you better connect with an audience that may have a different field of experience. (Optional: Share with a classmate and discuss differences in how you might interpret the same message.)
- Pair up with a classmate. One person will deliver a short 1-minute talk (on any topic such as favorite food, a current event, etc.). The other person will only respond with nonverbal cues (nodding, frowning, eye contact, etc.). Then switch roles. Afterward, discuss: What types of feedback did you notice? How did the feedback affect how you delivered your message? What did this activity teach you about being both a speaker and a listener?

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- **Ancient Greece:** A civilization (circa 8th century BCE to 6th century CE) known for its contributions to philosophy, politics, and education, including the development of rhetoric and democratic public discourse.
- **Aristotle**: A Greek philosopher (384–322 BCE) whose writings on rhetoric and persuasion, including ethos, pathos, and logos, remain foundational in the study of public speaking.
- **Channel:** The medium through which a message is sent, such as spoken words, written text, video, or digital platforms.
- **Critical thinking**: The process of actively and skillfully analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information to form reasoned judgments and make effective decisions.
- **Decoding:** The process by which the receiver interprets and makes sense of the sender's message.
- **Democracy**: A system of government in which citizens have the power to participate in decision-making, often through elected representatives; closely linked to the origins of civic rhetoric in Ancient Greece.
- **Dialogic theory:** A communication approach that emphasizes dialogue as a collaborative, respectful exchange between speaker and audience, rather than one-way transmission of information.
- **Encoding:** The process of transforming thoughts or ideas into a message that can be sent to a receiver.
- **Entertaining speaking**: A type of public speaking aimed at engaging, amusing, or inspiring an audience, often using humor, storytelling, or creative language.
- **Ethos**: A rhetorical appeal based on the speaker's credibility, character, and trustworthiness.
- **Feedback:** The receiver's verbal or nonverbal response to the message, which helps the sender know whether the message was understood.
- **Informative speaking:** A type of public speaking designed to increase the audience's knowledge or understanding of a topic.
- **Interactional model of communication:** A model that views communication as a two-way process in which messages are exchanged between sender and receiver, incorporating feedback and context.
- **Interpersonal communication**: The process of exchanging messages between two or more people to create and share meaning, typically in face-to-face or personal contexts
- **Leadership:** The ability to guide, inspire, and influence others toward achieving a common goal.
- **Logos**: A rhetorical appeal based on logic, evidence, and reasoning.
- **Noise:** Any interference that distorts or disrupts the message, such as background sounds, technical issues, or misunderstandings.
- **Nonverbal communication**: The process of conveying meaning without words, using body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and other cues.
- **Pathos**: A rhetorical appeal that seeks to influence an audience's emotions, values, or beliefs.
- **Persuasive speaking:** A type of public speaking intended to influence the audience's beliefs, attitudes, or actions.
- **Receiver:** The person or audience who receives, interprets, and responds to the message.
- **Rhetoric**: The art of effective or persuasive communication, traditionally associated with public speaking.
- **Sender:** The person who creates and delivers the message to the receiver.
- **Source:** The originator of a message who initiates the communication process by encoding ideas into a form that can be transmitted to a receiver
- **Transactional model of communication:** A model that views communication as a simultaneous, continuous process in which all participants are both senders and receivers, constantly encoding, decoding, and providing feedback in a shared context
- **Verbal communication:** The use of spoken or written words to convey meaning.

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1.5: Discussions Questions

1. Why do you think employers consistently rank oral communication as one of the most important skills for success in the work place? Can you give an example from your own experience or observations where strong speaking skills made a difference?
2. How can Aristotle's rhetorical appeals Ethos, Pathos, and Logos be applied in modern settings such as social media campaigns, workplace presentations, or community activism? Provide a specific example.
3. Between the interactional, transactional, and dialogic models of communication, which do you think is most relevant to public speaking today? Explain your reasoning with examples.
4. Public speaking is often linked to leadership. In your opinion, what makes an effective speaker a strong leader, and can you think of a leader (past or present) whose speaking skills inspired change?
5. Public speaking can be informative, persuasive, or entertaining. Which type do you feel is the most challenging to deliver effectively, and why? How might the purpose of the speech influence your preparation and delivery?

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1.7: Alternative Text

Interaction Model of Communication: Diagram of the interactional communication model showing a sender encoding a message through a channel to a receiver, who decodes and responds back, with arrows indicating two-way exchange. Includes noise, such as distractions or interference, that can disrupt the process.

Transactional Model of Communication: Diagram of the transactional communication model showing a speaker encoding a message with verbal and nonverbal cues to an audience, who decode and give feedback. Arrows indicate simultaneous exchange where speaker and audience alternate roles as source and receiver.

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2: COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

Introduction to Communication Apprehension

It's completely normal to feel nervous before speaking in front of others. Presenting in class, giving a wedding toast, recording a video, or speaking up in a Zoom meeting can all trigger some level of **communication apprehension**, a fear or anxiety linked to real or expected speaking situations. In fact, surveys show that up to 77% of people experience anxiety about public speaking (Dwyer and Davidson, 2012). This fear can lead to shaky hands, a racing heart, or even forgetting what to say. However, this is a fear that one can overcome by using modern tools like video practice apps, supportive peer groups, and breathing techniques to help reduce nervousness and build confidence. For example, students who practice giving short videos on their phones often report feeling more prepared for in-class speeches. Public speaking isn't just about standing at a podium, it's about clearly and confidently sharing your voice, whether online, in-person, or through media. Learning to manage these fears is the first step to becoming a powerful communicator in school, work, and everyday life.



Figure 2.1: You Got This. (Licensed under the Unsplash license; Sydney Rey via Unsplash)

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the psychological and physiological causes of communication apprehension such as fear of failure, fear of rejection, cognitive distortions, and fight or flight responses, and understand that these are normal, manageable reactions.
- Understand the four types of communication apprehension, trait, context, audience, and situational and how to manage each with appropriate strategies.
- Use speech preparation, mindset shifts, and stress management techniques such as deep breathing, growth mindset, positive self-talk, skills training, and physical preparation to enhance communication effectiveness and reduce anxiety.

2.1: What Is Communication Apprehension?
2.2: Sources of Communication Apprehension
2.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension
2.4: Glossary
2.5: Disussion Questions

2.6: References

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2.1: What Is Communication Apprehension?

Introduction to Communication Apprehension

Many students feel nervous when they think about speaking in front of an audience or about a communication encounter, and this anxiety is known as **communication apprehension (CA)** and is a normal part of public speaking. Even experienced teachers and speakers feel anxiety before presenting, especially when they are advocating for ideas or engaging an audience that may or may not be receptive. Two common sources of this apprehension are the fear of failure and the fear of rejection, both of which are heightened by past experiences, lack of preparation, or self-doubt. According to scholars at the University of Wisconsin, Stout (2015), this fear can be intensified by cognitive distortions such as all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, and fortune telling, where speakers expect the worst regardless of how well they prepare.

New speakers also often compare themselves to expert communicators and wonder if they are good enough or credible enough to be heard. This internal doubt, combined with the mistaken belief that intelligence and skill are fixed traits, causes some students to give up on learning how to speak effectively. Just as some might say, "I'm not good at math," others assume they're simply not natural at public speaking. These false beliefs prevent growth and create unnecessary fear. It's important to understand that public speaking is a learnable skill that improves with practice and education.

Public speaking is a uniquely embodied experience. Unlike writing a paper, you must deliver your message using your whole body in front of others. This physical aspect adds to the discomfort and anxiety, but also offers an opportunity for growth and self-expression. Learning how to manage communication apprehension means retraining your thoughts, your body, and your expectations. With support, feedback, and practice, you can build both your confidence and competence as a speaker.



Figure 2.1.1:Anxious student (OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (Aug 14 version) [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com/chat)

Definition of Communication Apprehension

According to James McCroskey, **communication apprehension (CA)** is the broad term that refers to an individual's "fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 2001). When we experience communication apprehension, the fear starts in the mind but quickly triggers a physical response. The body reacts to this perceived threat with a fight or flight response, releasing stress hormones and preparing for physical action, even though all we're doing is speaking and not running or fighting (Sapolsky, 2004). Because the body cannot distinguish between emotional and physical threats, this reaction often produces excess energy that interferes with effective public speaking. Symptoms like a

racing heart, trembling, or sweating are not harmful but can make speaking more difficult. However, by understanding how the body responds to stress, we can learn to manage these reactions and reduce anxiety.

While public speaking is one of the most common triggers, apprehension can also occur in small groups, interviews, or interpersonal conversations. Research shows that approximately 70-77% of people experience some level of public speaking anxiety, making it one of the most widespread social fears (Dwyer and Davidson, 2012). This fear can negatively impact performance, self-esteem, and willingness to participate in academic or professional settings. Communication apprehension is not a sign of poor ability but it is a response that can be understood, managed, and reduced through practice and support. By learning strategies to cope with this fear, students can become more confident, effective communicators across a variety of contexts.

Physiological Symptoms of Communication Apprehension

When people experience communication apprehension, the body often reacts with a variety of **physiological symptoms** that can feel overwhelming or even alarming. These physical responses are part of the body's natural stress reaction, often called the **fight or flight response**, which prepares the body to respond to a perceived threat (Sapolsky, 2004). There are a number of common physical sensations associated with communication apprehension that can feel overwhelming or even alarming. We might notice our heart pounding or our hands feeling clammy. We may break out in a sweat, get sweaty palms, get a dry mouth, shortness of breath and experience muscle tension. We may have stomach butterflies or even feel nauseated. Our hands and legs might start to shake, or we may begin to pace nervously. Our voices may quiver, and we may have a dry mouth sensation that makes it difficult to articulate even simple words. Breathing becomes more rapid and, in extreme cases, we might feel dizzy or light-headed. Anxiety about communicating is profoundly disconcerting because we feel powerless to control our bodies. Furthermore, we may become so anxious that we fear we will forget our name, much less remember the main points of the speech we are about to deliver. For many students, these symptoms appear just before giving a class presentation or speaking up during a group discussion. While it might feel like something is wrong, these sensations are actually normal biological reactions to stress.

The physiological changes produced in the body at critical moments are designed to contribute to the efficient use of muscles and expand available energy. Circulation and breathing become more rapid so that additional oxygen can reach the muscles. Increased circulation causes us to sweat. Adrenaline rushes through our body, instructing the body to speed up its movements. It is important to understand that your body cannot always tell the difference between being chased by danger and standing in front of your peers. When you're preparing to give a speech, your brain perceives a potential threat such as the fear of failure, judgment, or embarrassment and your body responds as if you are in physical danger (Beatty, 1988). This adrenaline rush can cause your voice to shake or your legs to feel weak. For example, a student might notice their hands trembling while holding note cards or feel their voice crack when introducing themselves on the first day of class.

The important thing to understand is that these reactions do not mean you're incapable of speaking well. In fact, these symptoms show that your body is ready for action. When we learn to accept and manage our emotional and physiological symptoms you can turn that nervous energy into a focused performance through deep breathing, preparation, or visualization. As researcher James McCroskey (1977) pointed out, communication apprehension becomes more manageable when speakers understand both the causes and the physical manifestations of their fear. Over time and with practice, students can reduce these symptoms and become more comfortable in public speaking settings.

Example 2.1.1

Maria is a first-year college student who has always been nervous about speaking in front of others. When her public speaking professor assigns a 3-minute introductory speech, Maria immediately feels her heart race and her stomach tighten. The night before her speech, she keeps thinking,"If I mess this up, everyone will think I'm stupid." This is an example of fortune telling which involves predicting a negative outcome before it happens. She also compares herself to her classmate Jordan, who speaks confidently and seems "born for the stage," reinforcing her false belief that good speakers are just naturally talented.

On the day of the presentation, Maria notices her palms are sweaty, her mouth is dry, and her hands are shaking. These physical changes are classic physiological symptoms of communication apprehension triggered by the **fight or flight response**. But instead of giving up, Maria takes three deep breaths, reminds herself that nervousness is normal, and begins her speech. Her voice trembles at first, but she finishes strong, and several classmates compliment her effort.

Afterward, Maria reflects on what helped her succeed: practicing out loud, breathing exercises, and changing her inner dialogue from"I can't do this" to "I've prepared and I'm improving." Like many students, Maria realizes that public speaking is a learnable skill, and her confidence grows with each experience.

Key Takeaways

- Communication apprehension refers to the fear or anxiety people experience at the thought of being evaluated by others. Some anxiety is a normal part of the communication process and is rooted in psychological and physiological responses.
- The psychological threat individuals perceive in the communication situation prompts physiological changes designed to help the body respond. These physical reactions to stress create the uncomfortable feelings of unease called speech anxiety and may include sweaty palms, shaking, butterflies in the stomach, and dry mouth.
- Public speaking is a learnable skill, and anxiety can be managed through preparation and self-awareness.

Exercises

- Create an inventory of the physiological symptoms of communication apprehension you experience when engaged in public speaking. Which ones are you most interested in learning to manage?
- Close your eyes and imagine yourself walking confidently to the front of the room, delivering your speech smoothly, and receiving applause. Then write a one-paragraph script of what you visualized and how it made you feel.
- Form a small group with 2–3 classmates. Each person gives a short 1-minute talk (on any topic), followed by supportive feedback from the group. Focus on identifying aspects of communication apprehension and celebrating signs of progress, not perfection. Track how your comfort level changes with repetition.

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2.2: Sources of Communication Apprehension

Introduction to Types of Communication Apprehension

Experiencing some form of anxiety is a normal part of the communication process. For public speaking, most people are anxious about being evaluated by an audience. Interestingly, many people assume that their nervousness is an experience unique to them. They assume that other people do not feel anxious when confronting the threat of public speaking (McCroskey, 2001). Although anxiety is a widely shared response to the stress of public speaking, not all anxiety is the same. Many researchers have investigated the differences between apprehension grounded in personality characteristics and anxiety prompted by a particular situation at a particular time (Witt, et. al., 2006). McCroskey argues there are four types of communication apprehension: anxiety related to **trait**, **context**, **audience**, and **situation** (McCroskey, 2001)**.** Each type stems from different causes and may require different strategies for managing fear. Some students may feel nervous in nearly every speaking situation, while others may only struggle when presenting to authority figures or in formal settings. Recognizing these differences helps speakers better understand themselves and their reactions. It also allows educators to tailor support and guidance. For example, one student might need help managing long-term anxiety, while another simply needs to prepare better for one specific event. Understanding your personal triggers is the first step in overcoming communication fear. These types of apprehension do not reflect intelligence or ability as they are normal, manageable human responses. With the right tools and mindset, anyone can grow more confident and capable as a speaker.

Trait Communication Apprehension

Trait communication apprehension is a general tendency to feel anxious about communication in nearly all situations. People with this form of CA experience ongoing fear regardless of the audience, situation, or context. While trait anxiety is not the same as shyness, those with high trait anxiety are more likely to avoid exposure to public speaking situations, so their nervousness might be compounded by lack of experience or skill (Witt, et. al., 2006). In addition, individuals with high trait CA tend to avoid communication altogether, which can impact academic, social, and career success (McCroskey, 1984). They may feel just as nervous speaking to a friend as they would to a large audience. In class, a student with trait CA might dread group discussions, asking questions, or even introducing themselves. This persistent anxiety can lead to avoidance behavior and low self-confidence. However, it is important to know that even trait-based CA can be managed through practice, being proactive, positive reinforcement, and support. Communication training, supportive instructors, and gradual exposure to communication encounters and speaking tasks can significantly reduce long-term anxiety (Richmond and McCroskey, 1998). With time and consistent effort, students with trait CA can build speaking confidence, communication confidence and perform effectively.

Context Communication Apprehension



Figure 2.2.1: Student Spekaer Maricar Adefuin Pascal (CC BY-NC 2.0; McGeorge School of Law via Flickr)

Context communication apprehension refers to anxiety prompted by specific communication contexts and settings. Some of the major context factors that can heighten this form of anxiety are formality, uncertainty, and novelty. Many people feel confident speaking in casual conversations or small groups but become anxious when the setting shifts to a more formal environment, such as a courtroom, press conference, or public presentation. This increased formality raises the perceived stakes and can lead to nervousness, even among experienced speakers. One reason is that formal settings often imply adversarial dynamics, where the speaker feels they are being judged or challenged by the audience.

In addition to formality, uncertainty plays a major role in context anxiety. When speakers are unsure how the audience will respond or what the flow of the event will be, they feel less in control, which increases tension. For example, students often feel more anxious during the first week of class because they don't yet know the instructor or the course expectations. As they become more familiar with the environment, their anxiety typically decreases.

Novelty is another factor that contributes to context-based apprehension. High-stakes or unfamiliar settings such as speaking at a conference or being interviewed on camera can provoke anxiety simply because they're new experiences. Even students who are generally comfortable speaking may struggle when placed in a novel or unpredictable situation. However, research and experience show that repeated exposure and practice help reduce anxiety over time. In a classroom setting, the supportive and non adversarial environment allows students to build comfort gradually. As they become more familiar with the format, expectations, and audience, the feelings of novelty and uncertainty fade, making public speaking feel more manageable and less intimidating.

Audience Communication Apprehension

Audience communication apprehension is rooted in who you are speaking to, rather than where or what you're speaking about. These characteristics that can make us anxious include similarity, subordinate status, audience size, and familiarity. For example, students may feel confident practicing a speech with friends but become extremely nervous when delivering it in front of a professor or panel of judges. This anxiety is often tied to a fear of negative evaluation or rejection (Richmond and McCroskey, 1998). The perception that the audience is smarter, more powerful, or more critical increases pressure. Studies have shown that subordinate status can also contribute to speaking anxiety (Witt, et. al., 2006). Audience size can also play a role as some people get nervous in front of large groups, while others struggle in intimate one-on-one conversations. This type of CA is common in academic and professional settings where speakers feel they must prove themselves. Finally, familiarity can be a factor. Some of us prefer talking to strangers rather than to people we know well. Others feel more nervous in front of an audience of friends and family because there is more pressure to perform well. Techniques like audience analysis, mental rehearsal, and visualization can reduce audience anxiety. Speakers can also benefit from re-framing the audience as supportive rather than threatening. With

experience, the fear of specific audiences can diminish and eventually disappear.

Situational Communication Apprehension

Situational communication apprehension is temporary and triggered by a specific moment or condition. As McCroskey explains, it is the communication apprehension created by "the unique combination of influences generated by audience, time and context" (McCroskey, 2001). It can happen even to experienced speakers when the stakes are high or the context is unfamiliar. For example, a student who has delivered confident presentations all semester may suddenly feel nervous when speaking at a final graded presentation or in front of a larger audience. The situation created by a given audience, in a given time, and in a given context can coalesce into situational anxiety. According to Bodie (2010), this anxiety arises from a combination of time, audience, and context pressures. Situational CA is the most common and often the most manageable type. Because it is short-term, students can often reduce it through targeted strategies like preparation, breathing techniques, and positive self-talk. External factors such as illness, lack of sleep, or last-minute changes can also contribute to it. For example, arriving late to class and having to present immediately may create unexpected stress. Understanding that this type of anxiety is not a permanent condition can bring relief. Once the situation is over, the anxiety usually disappears. Learning to recognize and manage situational CA builds resilience for future speaking challenges.

Example 2.2.1

Elijah, a first-generation college student and aspiring graphic designer, felt confident presenting his creative work during club meetings but froze during a graded speech in his communications class. Despite practicing in front of friends, his anxiety skyrocketed when he had to present to the professor. He felt out of place, unsure how formal to be, and intimidated by the perceived authority in the room. Elijah didn't realize that what he was experiencing was audience based and situation communication apprehension, a temporary spike in anxiety caused by a specific context and the pressure of being evaluated. Over time, Elijah learned to manage his fear by preparing thoroughly, visualizing success, and re-framing the audience as supportive rather than judgmental. He also discovered that others in his class shared similar fears. By understanding the four types of communication apprehension, Elijah was able to identify the root of his anxiety and use targeted strategies to grow more comfortable and confident with each presentation.

Key Takeaways

- Communication apprehension stems from many sources, including the speaker's personality characteristics, communication context, nature of the audience, or situation.
- Many factors exaggerate communication apprehension. Formality, familiarity, novelty, perceived similarity, and subordinate status are a few of the factors that influence our tendency to feel anxious while speaking. Understanding your personal triggers is the first step toward building speaking confidence.
- With practice, preparation, and supporting strategies, anyone can reduce anxiety and become a more effective communicator.

Exercise

- Make a list of sources of your communication apprehension. What factors contribute most to your anxiety about public speaking?
- Write a short journal entry (150–200 words) reflecting on a time you felt nervous while speaking. Try to identify whether the cause was related to trait, context, audience, or situation. How did you respond? What might you try differently next time? Share strategies you think could help in that specific type of anxiety.
- In small groups, discuss what types of situations or audiences make you most nervous when speaking. Compare your experiences and note similarities and differences. Then, brainstorm a list of strategies that could help manage each type of communication apprehension.

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2.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension

silhouette of four people jumping

Figure 2.3.1: Sunset Beach Group Jump. (CC0 1.0; anonymous via Pickpik)

Introduction to Reducing Communication Apprehension

One of the primary reasons students fear public speaking is the fear of rejection of either their ideas or of themselves as individuals. According to the University of Wisconsin-Stout (Public Speaking Anxiety, 2015), this fear is often compounded by cognitive distortions such as all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, and fortune-telling. These mental patterns can lead students to believe that unless they perform perfectly, they are failures, or they may predict failure regardless of preparation. Such unrealistic beliefs often stem from fixed mindsets, where individuals assume skills like public speaking are innate rather than developed (Dweck, 2008).

New college students frequently fall into the trap of comparing themselves to seasoned speakers or assuming intelligence is fixed. This leads to self-defeating attitudes like, "I'm not a good speaker and never will be." Yet, research emphasizes the importance of **growth mindset** which suggests that with effort and practice, public speaking is a learnable skill (Dweck, 2008) and will improve with practice and the right attitude. Applying this mindset to speaking encourages students to practice, seek feedback, and persist despite mistakes. Simply adding the word "yet" as in, "I'm not good at public speaking yet" can shift your thinking and foster improvement (Dweck, 2014). Many students who began fearful and hesitant grew into confident speakers within a semester of consistent practice. Research supports that practice and mindset changes can reshape how students perceive and perform public speaking (Dweck, 2008). Instead of focusing on perfection, aim for progress and connection. Confidence develops most effectively when students combine a growth mindset with anxiety-reduction strategies, progressively challenging speaking experiences, and constructive support from instructors, classmates, support groups, and video feedback. Together, these experiences create a supportive learning environment that helps students gradually reduce communication apprehension and become more confident, competent public speakers.

Experiencing some nervousness about public speaking is normal. The energy created by this physiological response can be functional if you harness it as a resource for more effective public speaking. In this section, we suggest a number of steps that you can take to channel your stage fright into excitement and animation. We will examine some of the more general anxiety management options available but first we will begin by exploring stress.

The Benefits of Stress

While stress is often seen as something to avoid, research shows that your interpretation of stress is what matters most. Health psychologist Kelly McGonigal (2015) explains that physical signs of stress such as a racing heart and quickened breath are not harmful by themselves. In fact, when viewed positively, these responses can prepare you to perform at your best. This reframing allows the body to react constructively, delivering more oxygen to the brain and improving focus and alertness. Athletes, performers, and successful speakers often interpret stress as energy and readiness, not weakness. Reframing nervousness as excitement has been shown to improve public performance, confidence, and vocal delivery (Seery, 2011). For example, instead of thinking “I’m scared,” you can say, “I’m energized and ready to go.” When you change your mindset about stress, it widens blood vessels instead of constricting them, leading to better health outcomes (McGonigal, 2015). Rather than eliminating stress, successful speakers learn to channel it toward their goals. Stress, when embraced rather than feared, can become a source of strength.

Another powerful insight is that stress can build social connection. When you feel stress, your body doesn’t just release adrenaline, it also releases **oxytocin**, often referred to as the “bonding hormone” (McGonigal, 2015). Oxytocin motivates you to seek support and helps you connect emotionally with others. This explains why public speaking students often report feeling closer after going through the speech process together. According to McGonigal, oxytocin is not only a bonding chemical, it also protects the cardiovascular system by reducing inflammation and helping blood vessels relax. In other words, stress may actually help your heart if you respond by reaching out to others. Additionally, encouraging others when you are anxious can trigger a self-healing process by helping both you and the person you support. This means hugging a friend, calling a loved one, or talking to a peer before your speech may have genuine biological benefits. Far from being purely negative, stress builds community and

resilience when we allow it to drive us toward connection. So next time you're nervous before a speech, recognize that your body is helping you prepare and connect with others.

Cognitive Restructuring and Coping Skills

As we mentioned earlier, communication apprehension begins in the mind as a psychological response. This underscores the importance of a speaker's psychological attitude toward speaking. To prepare yourself mentally for a successful speaking experience, we recommend using a technique called **cognitive restructuring**. Cognitive restructuring is simply changing how you label the physiological responses you will experience. Rather than thinking of public speaking as a dreaded obligation, make a conscious decision to consider it an exciting opportunity. The first audience member that you have to convince is yourself, by deliberately replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. If you say something to yourself often enough, you will gradually come to believe it.

We also suggest practicing what communication scholars Metcalfe, Beebe, and Beebe call **positive self-talk** rather than **negative self-talk** (Metcalfe, 1994; Beebe, 2000). The things you say to yourself matter as your brain listens closely. If you find yourself thinking, "I'm going to forget everything when I get to the front of the room," turn that negative message around to a positive one. Tell yourself, "I have notes to remind me what comes next, and the audience won't know if I don't cover everything in the order I planned." The idea is to dispute your negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones, even if you think you are "conning" yourself. In addition, saying phrases like "I've got this" or "I am excited" can shift your mindset from fear to focus. Replacing "I'm nervous" with "I'm excited" is especially powerful, as it reframes the stress response in a more productive way (Seery, 2011). This small language shift changes your interpretation of physical symptoms and boosts confidence (Witt, Wheeless, and Allen, 2006). By monitoring how you talk about yourself, you can unlearn old patterns and change the ways you think about things that produce anxiety.

Skills Training

Public speaking is often listed as one of the most common social fears, but the good news is that it can be managed and reduced through **skills training** and practice. Research shows that communication apprehension is something that can be changed through intentional exposure and training (McCroskey, 1977). When students repeatedly practice speaking, they strengthen both their practical skills and their brain's ability to handle discomfort.

Neuroscientists have found that the **midcingulate cortex (MCC)**, an area of the brain linked to handling stress and regulating willpower, grows stronger when people repeatedly immerse themselves in challenging or uncomfortable tasks (Tang, Tang, and Posner, 2016). Just like lifting weights builds muscle, stepping into situations that feel awkward to you personally such as giving a class speech, helps strengthen the brain pathways that manage anxiety and self-control.

The more you speak in front of others, the more resilient you become. This is why communication instructors emphasize skills training, which also includes practical techniques like deep breathing, visualization, rehearsal, and audience analysis. These tools help speakers gain confidence while rewiring the brain's response to stress. Over time, speaking becomes less intimidating because the MCC and related brain networks have been trained to interpret stress as manageable rather than overwhelming (Tang et al., 2016).

Regular, real world practice in class discussions, group projects, or low-stakes presentations gives students a chance to build mental strength and communication skill together. Every time you step up to speak, you are not just delivering a message, you are rewiring your brain's tolerance for uncertainty and proving to yourself that you can grow. By combining scientific understanding with practical communication strategies, students can transform public speaking from a source of fear into a tool for connection and leadership.

Systematic Desensitization

One proven way to reduce communication apprehension is through a psychological and physiological approach called **systematic desensitization**. Systematic desensitization is a behavioral modification technique that helps individuals overcome anxiety disorders. People with phobias, or irrational fears, tend to avoid the object of their fear. For example, people with a phobia of elevators avoid riding in elevators and this only adds to their fear because they never learn that riding in elevators is usually perfectly safe. Systematic desensitization changes this avoidance pattern by gradually exposing the individual to the object of fear until it can be tolerated. This approach is a gradual process that helps individuals replace feelings of fear and anxiety with

feelings of calm and control (McCroskey, 1977). Originally developed by psychologist Joseph Wolpe in the 1950s for treating phobias, this method has been adapted by communication scholars to help students manage the fear of public speaking (Wolpe, 1958). Systematic desensitization works not only on the mind but also on the body by reducing the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as rapid heartbeat and muscle tension. By pairing relaxation with gradual exposure, speakers retrain their body's stress response to stay calm under pressure. Over time, this helps transform the fight-or-flight feeling into steady focus and control.

In the context of public speaking, systematic desensitization involves pairing relaxation techniques with gradual exposure to speaking situations. For example, a student might begin by practicing deep breathing and muscle relaxation while imagining themselves giving a calm, successful speech. Over time, they move from imagining the speech to practicing it alone, then in front of a small group, and finally in front of a larger audience.

The idea is that repeated, controlled exposure to what makes you anxious, combined with relaxation trains your brain to respond with confidence instead of fear (McCroskey, 1977). This method works well for speakers who feel frozen by anxiety and want to retrain their physical and mental reactions. Common solutions include guided imagery, mindfulness breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and low-pressure practice rounds.

To reduce stress hormones like **cortisol**, try **belly breathing**, light exercise, or laughter before your speech. According to *Psychology Today*, physical activity, meditation, and social interaction are all effective at reducing cortisol levels, which helps calm the body and restore focus (Psychology Today, n.d.). Try breathing in deeply through your nose, filling your belly with air, and exhaling slowly through your mouth. Or use "nostril switch" breathing to increase oxygen and reduce tension (Ayres and Hopf, 1993).

One breathing technique count that is very effective for systematic desensitization and relaxing a tense body before public speaking, is a 4-7-8 breath pattern developed by Dr. Andrew Weil. In this variation, you inhale gently through your nose for a count of 4 seconds, hold for a count of 7 seconds and exhale for a count of 8 seconds while feeling your shoulders drop and your body soften. This longer exhale activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which calms the body and signals it's safe to relax (Symington, 2015). This pattern is especially good right before you speak because it slows your heart rate, releases muscle tension, and helps reduce adrenaline's impact (Wolpe, 1958). Many speakers use this to "reset" if they feel a surge of nerves backstage or right before stepping up.

Research shows that students who use systematic desensitization and skills training together tend to have lower CA levels and report greater confidence in public speaking situations (McCroskey, 1977). Over time, what once seemed terrifying becomes more manageable and sometimes even enjoyable. Like any skill, the key is consistent, low-stress practice combined with calm breathing and realistic self-talk. When students stay patient with themselves and stick with the process, they build real resilience that carries into every future presentation.

Stress Management Techniques

Even when we employ positive thinking and are well prepared, some of us still feel a great deal of anxiety about public speaking. When that is the case, it can be more helpful to use stress management than to try to make the anxiety go away.

One general technique for managing stress is **positive visualization**. Visualization is the process of seeing something in your mind's eye; essentially it is a form of self-hypnosis. Frequently used in sports training, positive visualization involves using the imagination to create images of relaxation or ultimate success. Essentially, you imagine in great detail the goal for which you are striving, say, a rousing round of applause after you give your speech. You mentally picture yourself standing at the front of the room, delivering your introduction, moving through the body of your speech, highlighting your presentation aids, and sharing a memorable conclusion. This vivid mental imagery of yourself giving a successful speech, activates many of your brain's neural pathways that are engaged during the real experience (Driskell, Copper, and Moran, 1994). This mental rehearsal strengthens connections in the brain's motor cortex, helping your body feel more prepared and calm when you actually step up to speak.

Visualization also affects the body by lowering heart rate and muscle tension, creating a physical sense of readiness and control (Holmes and Collins, 2001). Athletes and performers have long used this technique to improve performance because the body often responds to imagined actions as if they were real. If you imagine a positive outcome, your body will respond to it as through it were real. Such mind-body techniques create the psychological grounds for us to achieve the goals we have imagined.

As we discussed earlier, communication apprehension has a psychological basis, so mind-body techniques such as visualization can be important to reducing anxiety. It's important to keep in mind, though, that visualization does not mean you can skip practicing your speech out loud. Just as an athlete still needs to work out and practice the sport, you need to practice your speech

in order to achieve the positive results you visualize.

Speech Preparation

Understanding the context in which you will speak can significantly reduce communication apprehension. Whether it's a classroom, a job interview room, or a community center, the more familiar you are with the setting, the more comfortable and confident you'll feel. For example, a student preparing for a scholarship interview toured the conference room the day before her talk and discovered the room had no projector. This information allowed her to adjust her presentation in advance and reduce last-minute stress. Arriving early to a speech also allows you to test equipment, engage with your audience informally, and settle into the space. All this prep work can improve your delivery and perceived credibility (Finn, Sawyer, and Schrodt, 2009). Beyond context, practice is key.

Unlike pulling an all nighter to finish a paper, procrastinating a speech until the last minute can seriously backfire. Public speaking requires more than just good ideas, it demands rehearsed delivery and physical presence. If a student is still editing their outline at 3:00 a.m. before a 9:00 a.m. speech, they're likely to arrive tired, unfocused, and unprepared to engage the audience. Practicing your speech with a timer, out loud, standing up, in your speaking shoes, and with visual aids is essential. For example, one student believed their speech was five minutes long, but during rehearsal, it ran almost ten. Another student who practiced multiple times with a roommate's feedback reported feeling more confident and less anxious by speech day. Rehearsal helps reduce anxiety and allows for adjustments to timing, tone, and body language (Finn, Sawyer, and Schrodt, 2009). Recording yourself and reviewing your body language (from the hips up) can highlight gestures, facial expressions, eye contact or nervous habits. Practicing this way may feel awkward at first, but it strengthens delivery and builds confidence when it matters most.

Lastly, remember that you never look as nervous as you feel. Audiences often perceive a speaker's anxiety as much lower than what the speaker experiences internally. Social psychologist Amy Cuddy (2015) reinforces that acting confident such as using power poses can shift your mindset and increase performance. Finally, as an audience member, you play a role too: attentive listening, smiling, and eye contact can ease the speaker's nerves and improve the overall speaking environment. Being respectful of others' speaking moments is not just polite, it directly supports their success.

Physical Speech Preparation

Physical preparation plays a critical role in managing communication apprehension and ensuring strong performance during public speaking. Adequate sleep is essential for mental clarity, emotional regulation, and alertness, which are qualities every speaker needs. Studies show that a lack of sleep impairs memory, focus, and learning, which can hinder your ability to deliver an effective speech (Mitru, Millrood, and Mateika, 2002; Walker, 2017). For instance, a student who stayed up all night finishing their outline may find themselves forgetting key points or stumbling over their words during delivery. In addition to sleep, proper nutrition can stabilize energy levels and support cognitive function. Eating protein-rich foods like Greek yogurt, eggs, or peanut butter on toast before a speech helps sustain energy, while high-sugar or heavily caffeinated options, such as energy drinks and donuts, can lead to shaky hands and sudden crashes. While some believe dairy causes mucus and should be avoided, research shows no significant evidence to support this claim (Lai and Kardos, 2013). It's also important to wear comfortable, appropriate clothing, especially shoes that support good posture. For example, a student who wears new high heels to a speech day may later report focusing more on foot pain than the actual message. Finally, gentle stretching, deep yawns, or breathing techniques can release nervous energy stored in the limbs or throat. This is particularly helpful if you experience symptoms like sweaty palms or tight muscles right before speaking. Overall, physical preparation ensures that your body supports, rather than sabotages, your performance.

Example 2.3.1

Jasmine, a new sales manager at a tech company, was asked to deliver a quarterly report to the executive team. Despite knowing the data well, she felt paralyzed with fear. Her heart raced, her hands trembled, and she found herself stumbling through the presentation. Afterward, her manager encouraged her to try skills training and visualization. Jasmine began practicing short updates during team meetings and used a 4-7-8 breathing pattern before each one. Over time, her anxiety diminished, and by the next quarter, she delivered a confident, well-paced presentation. Jasmine's story shows how consistent effort, cognitive reframing, and physiological techniques can transform fear into strength.

Key Takeaways

- Communication apprehension is common and often intensified by fear of failure, negative self-talk, and unrealistic expectations. Recognizing that these fears are manageable is the first step toward growth.
- Cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization and skills training are evidence based methods that reduce CA through gradual expose, breathing techniques, cognitive restructuring and positive visualization.
- Physical, mental, and contextual preparation are essential in reducing public speaking CA. Getting enough sleep, eating well, rehearsing in the actual space, and arriving early all contribute to reduced anxiety and improved performance.

Exercises

- Create a two-column chart. In the left column, list 5 negative thoughts you've had about public speaking. In the right column, rewrite each one using a growth mindset or positive self-talk strategy. (e.g., "I always mess up" → "Each time I speak, I get better.")
- Try the 4-7-8 breathing technique before practicing a speech. Afterward, journal how your body and mindset changed during and after the exercise. Reflect on how this technique could help before a real presentation.
- Make a plan for managing your anxiety before and during your speech that includes specific techniques you want to try before your next public speaking assignment.

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- **Audience communication apprehension**: Audience communication apprehension is anxiety caused by who you are speaking to, such as a professor, boss, or large group. It can be triggered by factors like audience size, power differences, or familiarity.
- **Belly breathing**: A deep breathing technique that focuses on expanding the abdomen instead of the chest. It helps relax the body and reduce stress by activating the parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Cognitive restructuring**: A strategy that involves changing negative thoughts into more helpful or positive ones. It helps speakers manage anxiety by replacing fearful thinking with supportive inner dialogue.
- **Communication apprehension: The fear or anxiety people feel before or during communication with others. It can occur in public speaking, small groups, or one-on-one conversations.**
- **Context communication apprehension**: Context communication apprehension is fear triggered by the specific setting or situation, such as formal events, interviews, or unfamiliar environments.
- **Cortisol**: A hormone released by the body during stress. High levels of cortisol can cause physical symptoms like a racing heart, but managing stress helps keep it in balance.
- **Fight or flight response**: A natural reaction by the body to a perceived threat or stress. It prepares you to either confront (fight) or escape (flight) the situation by increasing heart rate, speeding up breathing, and releasing stress hormones like adrenaline. In public speaking, this response can cause symptoms such as shaky hands, dry mouth, or a racing heart, even though there's no physical danger.
- **Growth mindset**: The belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence. A growth mindset encourages individuals to view challenges and failures as opportunities for growth rather than as indicators of fixed ability.
- **Midcingulate Cortex (MCC)**: A region of the brain involved in regulating stress, motivation, and self-control. The MCC helps manage emotional and physical responses to challenging situations, such as public speaking. Research shows that repeated exposure to uncomfortable tasks, like giving speeches, can strengthen this area of the brain, making it easier to handle anxiety and build resilience over time.
- **Negative self-talk**: Inner thoughts or messages that are critical, discouraging, or self-defeating, such as "I'll mess up" or "I'm not good at this." It can increase anxiety and lower confidence.
- **Novelty**: The feeling of something being new or unfamiliar. In public speaking, novelty can increase anxiety because the situation feels unpredictable or unknown.
- **Oxytocin**: A hormone released during stress that encourages bonding and connection with others. It supports heart health and helps reduce anxiety when we seek social support.
- **Physiological**: Relating to the body's physical processes. In public speaking, physiological symptoms include a racing heart, sweating, or shaking is normal reactions to stress.
- **Positive self-talk**: Supportive inner messages that build confidence, like "I've got this" or "I'm prepared." It can replace anxiety-producing thoughts with calming, encouraging ones.
- **Positive visualization**: A mental strategy where you imagine yourself giving a successful speech. It helps prepare the mind and body by building confidence and lowering stress.
- **Situation communication apprehension**: Situational communication apprehension happens in specific moments, such as speaking in front of a large audience for the first time. It is usually short-term and manageable.
- **Skills training**: Practicing communication techniques such as breathing, rehearsal, and eye contact. With consistent practice, skills training helps reduce fear and improve performance.
- **Systematic desensitization**: A method for reducing fear by gradually exposing yourself to the thing that causes anxiety. In public speaking, it involves slow, repeated practice combined with relaxation techniques.
- **Trait communication apprehension**: Trait communication apprehension is a general tendency to feel anxious in most or all communication situations. It is based on personality but can improve with support and experience.

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2.5: Disussion Questions

1. What are some of the most common psychological and physical symptoms of communication apprehension, and why do our bodies react this way when speaking in public?
2. Which of the four types of communication apprehension, trait, context, audience, or situational do you identify with most, and why?
3. How can adopting a growth mindset change your approach to public speaking, and what are some practical strategies for shifting your thinking from fear to opportunity?
4. What role does preparing both physically and mentally play in managing public speaking anxiety, and which preparation strategies do you find most helpful?
5. Think about a time when you felt nervous about speaking. What were the triggers, and which techniques (such as systematic desensitization or cognitive restructuring) might have helped in that situation?

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3: AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Introduction to Audience Analysis

Public speaking is not just about what you want to say but it is equally about the people who will be listening. While the First Amendment protects your right to speak freely, focusing only on your message can cause you to overlook the needs of your audience. Effective speeches succeed when speakers connect their ideas to listeners' lives, interests, and values. Public speaking is therefore a shared activity, where meaning is created through interaction between speaker and audience. As Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary (2010) explain, "Speakers do not give speeches to audiences; they jointly create meaning with audiences." When speakers fail to consider their listeners, their message may sound "canned" or irrelevant. Even worse, ignoring audience expectations can lead to missteps such as offensive jokes or confusing language. **Audience analysis** reduces these risks by helping you understand your listeners' beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. By gathering this information, you can shape your speech so that it resonates with your audience rather than alienates them. This chapter will explain why audience analysis is essential, describe its three main types, and show how to apply it both in preparing and delivering your speech.



Figure 3.1: Viet Thanh Nguyen speaking to Diverse Audience. (CC BY 2.0; Cabin Events via flkickr)

Learning Objectives

- Identify and explain different methods of audience analysis, including direct observation, interviews, surveys, focus groups, and existing data.
- Evaluate how demographic, psychographic, situational, and diversity factors influence how audiences receive and interpret messages.
- Apply strategies such as finding common ground, practicing respectful communication, and building credibility to connect effectively with diverse audiences.

3.1: The Importance of Audience Analysis

3.2: Three Types of Audience Analysis

3.3: Conducting Audience Analyses

3.4: Connecting with the Audience

3.5: Glossary

3.6: Discussion Questions
3.7: References
3.8: Alternative Text

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3.1: The Importance of Audience Analysis

Why conduct an audience analysis

Edit section

One of the most important lessons in public speaking can be summed up in five words, "It is not about you". Too often, speakers approach their speech with the mindset that their role is to share what they know, when in reality, the focus should be on what the audience needs. A successful speech provides listeners with information, inspiration, or celebration that they find valuable. As Chris Anderson, curator of TED Talks, notes, if an audience cannot see how a speaker's truth applies to them, they will quickly tune out (Anderson, 2016). Vivian Buchan (as cited in Anderson, 2016) similarly reminds us that audiences give their time voluntarily, and speakers should not abuse that gift by making listeners feel captive. Instead, speakers must practice audience before content (ABC), meaning they design their message around what they can offer rather than what they want to say. Some professionals even visualize handing out one hundred dollar bills to remind themselves to provide value with every sentence. This principle is reinforced by examples like game designer Jane McGonigal, who opens her talk by promising her audience seven and a half extra minutes of life, framing her message as a gift to them. Public speaking should therefore be an act of service, not self-promotion. Ginger Public Speaking (2019) calls this "servant speaking," which shifts the focus from personal validation to community building. Ultimately, every speech should give the audience something worth remembering and something that matters to them.

To provide this value, speakers must get into the mind of their audience. Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary (2010) emphasize that speakers do not simply deliver messages but they jointly create meaning with audiences. This requires research into who the audience is, what they already know, and what motivates them. Communication consultant Frank Luntz (2007) explains that no matter how correct or brilliant a message may be, listeners interpret it through the lens of their own emotions, beliefs, and experiences. Therefore, effective communication requires imagining yourself in your audience's shoes and tailoring your words to their worldview. Practical examples illustrate this principle: community club members may need to feel connected and inspired, sorority members may need to feel recognized and proud, and corporate clients may need clear, practical information to make confident decisions. Each group arrives with both tangible and emotional needs, from wanting to learn and be inspired to simply feeling respected and included. Effective speakers also demonstrate rhetorical sensitivity by recognizing and responding to audience diversity in ways that promote equity, inclusion, belonging, and accessibility. Rather than assuming audiences share the same experiences or perspectives, speakers should recognize that differences in culture, identity, ability, language, education, and life experience shape how messages are interpreted. Likewise, communication both reflects and influences diversity by either reinforcing stereotypes or fostering understanding and inclusion. Nancy Duarte (2010) recommends asking questions about audience lifestyle, knowledge, motivations, values, and sources of influence to guide preparation. By considering these factors, speakers can move beyond simply informing and instead create speeches that resonate deeply. The ultimate goal, as motivational speaker Jim Rohn suggests, is for audiences to respond with "Me too!" instead of "So what?" In this way, audience analysis transforms speeches from one sided monologues into shared experiences of connection and meaning.

Example 3.1.1

Ashley was invited to speak at a local high school about her career as a graphic designer. Initially, she planned to showcase her portfolio and talk about her personal journey. However, after learning that the students were mostly juniors considering creative careers, she shifted her approach. Instead of focusing on her achievements, Ashley asked herself what these students needed: guidance, inspiration, and clarity about the design field. She included tips on building a portfolio with free tools, how to find internships, and what a day in her job really looks like. She ended with a Q&A and stayed afterward to chat with interested students. Several students later said her advice helped them feel more confident pursuing creative paths. By putting the audience's needs first, Ashley turned a self-focused talk into a meaningful, shared experience.

Key Takeaways

- Effective public speaking is audience centered, not speaker centered. The goal is to offer something valuable that resonates with the audience's needs, not just to share what you know.
- Understanding your audience helps to tailor your message based on your audience's background, beliefs, motivations, and

expectations leads to stronger engagement, connection and impact.
- When you view your speech as a gift to your listeners, you shift from seeking validation to building community and connection.

Exercises

- Write a short paragraph from the speaker's perspective on a topic (e.g., "I want to tell you about my experience with study abroad."). Then rewrite it from the audience's perspective (e.g., "You'll learn how study abroad can expand your career options and change how you see the world.").
- Choose a speech topic and create a mind map centered on your audience. Include branches for their values, beliefs, knowledge level, goals, and concerns. Use this to shape the structure and tone of your message.
- Take a paragraph from a speech or presentation you've given or written. Then, rewrite it focusing on what the audience needs to hear rather than what you want to say. Compare the two versions with a partner or classmate.

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3.2: Three Types of Audience Analysis

While audience analysis does not guarantee against errors in judgment, it will help you make good choices in topic, language, style of presentation, and other aspects of your speech. The more you know about your audience, the better you can serve their interests and needs. There are certainly limits to what we can learn through information collection, and we need to acknowledge that before making assumptions, but knowing how to gather and use information through audience analysis is an essential skill for successful speakers.



Figure 3.2.1: Diversity. (Content; Geralt via Pixabay)

Demographic Analysis

One of the most common ways to understand an audience is through **demographic analysis**. Demographic information typically includes age, gender, marital status, race and ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, education, occupation, and group membership (Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary, 2010). For example, knowing that your audience consists of first year college students suggests they may share certain generational perspectives, such as growing up in the post-9/11 era with a heightened awareness of global security issues. By contrast, an audience of individuals in their fifties may have lived through the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, giving them very different frames of reference.

Cultural and religious demographics are also significant. The United States has shifted from the “melting pot” metaphor toward a multicultural model, emphasizing the persistence of cultural identities and traditions rather than complete assimilation. For instance, members of Native American, African American, Asian American or immigrant communities bring diverse values, histories, and perspectives that shape how they engage with public messages. Religion adds another dimension. Within faith traditions, diversity is vast: Roman Catholics in the United States may differ in beliefs and practices depending on region, culture, or personal commitment. Group memberships, such as belonging to fraternities, political organizations, or volunteer groups, also influence values and priorities. Finally, education and occupation shape both knowledge levels and worldviews. An audience of software engineers, for instance, will likely approach information differently than an audience of healthcare workers, whose experiences with patients and ethics may dominate their perspectives. Understanding these demographic dimensions does not mean stereotyping, but rather recognizing that shared backgrounds can influence how messages are received. Speakers who respect privacy, avoid assumptions, and seek demographic insights ethically are better prepared to connect with their audience in meaningful ways.

In addition to audience demographics, **diversity** is an essential factor in audience analysis and goes beyond race or ethnicity. While audiences may include racial and ethnic minorities, they are also diverse in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, culture, beliefs, and experiences. Being mindful of diversity means avoiding assumptions such as racism, sexism, ethnocentrism,

elitism, or even chronocentrism, the belief that people today are superior to those in the past (Russell, 1991). Research shows that U.S. neighborhoods are increasingly diverse, with influences from Asian, Latin American, African American, and European American cultures, each with its own internal variety (Logan and Zhang, 2010). Even within one culture or group, individuals may hold very different preferences, values, and perspectives.

Speakers must also recognize less visible aspects of diversity. An affluent audience may still include unemployed individuals, renters, or service workers. Similarly, members of the same group such as military families or business students should not be assumed to share identical views on issues like national security or ethics. Each audience member brings a unique frame of reference shaped by personal experiences and motivations. By respecting this diversity, speakers avoid stereotyping and instead treat listeners as individuals with unique values, beliefs, and needs. Ultimately, embracing diversity in audience analysis strengthens credibility and reflects a broader responsibility to respect people in all forms of human interaction.

Psychographic Analysis

While demographic analysis helps you understand who your audience is, **psychographic analysis** goes deeper by exploring values, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. Grice and Skinner (2009) describe values as the foundation of a pyramid, shaping the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that follow. Values are essentially judgments about what is right, wrong, good, or undesirable. For example, many audiences may share values such as justice, equality, honesty, or family, but how those values are defined can differ widely. One person who values equal educational opportunity may believe it means government funded college for all, while another interprets it as fair access to K–12 resources. Similarly, when people say they "don't eat junk food," one may mean avoiding soda and chips, while another may include fast-food salads under that label. These differences highlight how psychographics provide a more nuanced understanding than demographics alone. Values are often influenced by family upbringing, cultural traditions, religion, and life experiences, making them highly individualized. A student raised in a collectivist culture, for example, may value family loyalty and group harmony more strongly than a peer raised in an individualist culture who prioritizes independence and self-expression (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, 2010).

Psychographic analysis also uncovers preexisting notions that audiences bring to both the topic and the speaker. Audiences often rely on oversimplifications shaped by media or cultural stereotypes. For example, a student might dismiss with negative connotations without recognizing their role in sparking today's sustainable food, renewable energy, and wellness movements. Knowing these preconceptions allows speakers to define terms carefully and ethically, rather than reinforcing misconceptions. Likewise, the sophistication of an audience's knowledge matters. A college audience hearing a talk on civil rights likely understands both the progress made and the challenges that remain, requiring a more nuanced approach than an audience with little background knowledge. Speakers should tailor complexity to audience readiness, deciding when to simplify and when to engage with gray areas. Additionally, audiences form impressions of the speaker before a word is spoken. Just as students quickly form opinions about professors based on appearance or tone, audiences might label a speaker as "too young," "too formal," or "too casual." While you cannot fully control these perceptions, you can earn credibility by focusing on audience needs, offering evidence-based arguments, and delivering your message in a way that builds trust. Ultimately, psychographic analysis helps speakers anticipate how values, attitudes, and impressions shape audience reception, making communication more adaptive, ethical, and impactful.

Situational Analysis

Another important type of audience analysis is **situational analysis**, which focuses on the specific context in which a speech takes place. This analysis involves assessing why the audience is there and the physical conditions of the speaking environment (Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary, 2010). Audiences vary in size, purpose, voluntariness, and setting, all of which affect how speakers should prepare and deliver their message.

Audience size influences style and formality. For example, in a typical college classroom of 25 students, you can maintain a conversational tone while still keeping your remarks structured. By contrast, a keynote address at a professional conference with 500 attendees requires a more formal delivery, careful organization, and possibly amplification or large-scale visual aids so those at the back of the room remain engaged. Larger audiences demand more energy and a stronger stage presence, since personal interaction is harder to achieve (O'Hair, Stewart, and Rubenstein, 2020).

Occasion also shapes expectations. A eulogy requires compassion and sensitivity, while a wedding toast calls for warmth and celebration. In civic contexts, leaders often adapt speeches to current events. For example, President Barack Obama's 2011 State of the Union address emphasized jobs and economic recovery in response to the Great Recession, while President George W. Bush's 2003 address centered on the "war on terror" and the case for invading Iraq (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2003;

2011). These examples highlight how situational analysis helps speakers prioritize the issues most relevant to their audience at a given moment.

Another factor is the voluntariness of the audience. Voluntary audiences attend because they are interested, such as participants at a TED Talk or fans at a book reading. Captive audiences, on the other hand, may be required to attend, such as students in a class or employees in a mandatory training. Captive audiences are often less motivated, which makes it even more important to show them why your topic is relevant. For instance, a mandatory corporate cybersecurity briefing may initially seem dull, but if framed in terms of protecting employees' personal data and job security, it becomes meaningful to them.

Finally, the physical setting can make or break a presentation. A noisy outdoor environment, a poorly lit room, or malfunctioning technology can distract from even the strongest speech. Good speakers adapt by visiting the venue ahead of time, checking microphones, and testing visuals to ensure smooth delivery. For example, a graduation speaker who rehearses in the stadium beforehand will know how to project their voice, where to stand to avoid wind noise, and how to engage a large crowd spread across a wide space. Arriving early allows adjustments to lighting, temperature, and seating that help create an environment where the audience is comfortable and attentive (Lucas, 2020).

Situational analysis reminds us that effective public speaking requires more than just knowing your message but requires understanding the immediate circumstances that shape how your message will be received.

Example 3.2.1

Imagine you are invited to give a presentation on mental health resources at a university. If you analyze the demographics, you'll notice your audience is primarily 18–22-year-old students, many of whom may be living away from home for the first time. From a psychographic perspective, some students may strongly value independence, while others value community support. Considering diversity, you'll also recognize that international students may view mental health differently based on cultural norms. Finally, through situational analysis, you realize the event is scheduled in the evening after a long day of classes, meaning your audience may be tired and less motivated. By tailoring your approach by using relatable examples, clear definitions, inclusive language, and an engaging activity, you can connect with your listeners more effectively than if you delivered a generic lecture.

Key Takeaways

- Demographic analysis (age, gender, culture, occupation, etc.) provides important context, but must be used ethically without stereotyping.
- Psychographic analysis reveals underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes that drive audience responses, often more influential than surface-level traits.
- Situational analysis ensures speakers adapt to the immediate context, including audience size, occasion, voluntariness, and setting, all of which shape how the message is received.

Exercises

- Choose a real or hypothetical audience (e.g., local parents, high school students, or business professionals). List at least three demographic factors and explain how they might shape the way you adapt your speech.
- Take a common value such as "education" or "freedom" and identify at least two different beliefs or attitudes that might stem from that value. Share how a speech on the same topic could be tailored to each audience subgroup.
- List the voluntary (political party, campus organization, etc.) and involuntary (age, race, sex, etc.) groups to which you belong. After each group, write a sentence or phrase about how that group influences your experience as a student

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3.3: Conducting Audience Analyses

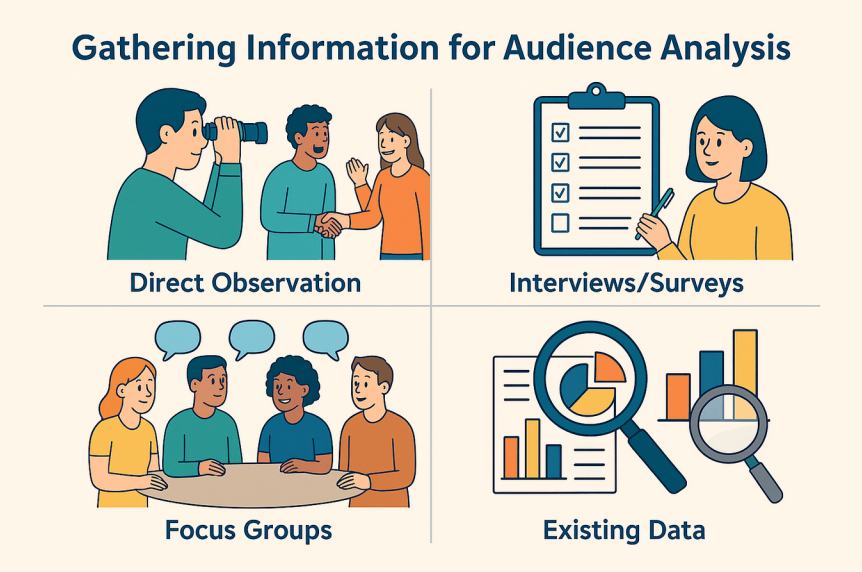


Figure 3.3.1: Gathering Information for Audience Analysis. (OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (August 26 version) [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com/chatLinks to an external site)

Direct Observation

One way to learn about people is to observe them. **Direct observation** is one of the simplest yet most effective ways to gather information about an audience before giving a speech. By paying attention to people's nonverbal behaviors, speakers can identify cultural patterns, comfort levels, and social norms that shape how an audience may respond. For example, noticing whether individuals greet each other with a handshake, a hug, or a simple nod provides insight into the formality of the group. Observing whether the environment itself suggests conservative versus casual behavior, can help a speaker adapt their tone and style appropriately. Beyond gestures, direct observation also involves listening carefully to the topics people discuss in public settings. For instance, students talking in a campus center about Pell Grant funding or international politics might indicate issues that resonate with them. However, ethical considerations are crucial when using observation as an analytical tool. There is a difference between overhearing an open conversation in a public space and intruding into a private or sensitive discussion without consent. Responsible speakers use observation to understand interests and concerns without crossing personal boundaries. This balance allows the speaker to collect valuable insights while still respecting audience members' rights to privacy. Ultimately, direct observation helps speakers tailor their message by connecting with what their audience values, notices, and discusses in their everyday lives (Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary, 2010).

Interviews and Surveys

Interviews and surveys are valuable tools for gathering direct information about an audience, complementing demographic data with deeper insights into beliefs, attitudes, and interests. An **interview** allows for a one-on-one conversation that can uncover nuanced perspectives through follow-up questions, though it is time consuming. For example, a student preparing a persuasive speech on renewable energy might interview classmates to learn not only whether they support clean energy but also why they hold their views. By contrast, **surveys** are efficient for collecting responses from larger groups, especially when conducted online through platforms like SurveyMonkey, which can provide anonymity and increase honesty in answers. A survey could quickly reveal, for instance, that 70% of an audience supports local recycling initiatives, while 30% remain skeptical of their effectiveness. However, both methods must be carefully designed as questions should be directly relevant to the speech topic, standardized for consistency, and respectful of privacy. To maintain consistency, use a standard set of questions so that responses can

be accurately compared. Keep interviews and surveys brief, explain their purpose clearly, and emphasize that participation is voluntary. In addition, researchers warn that interviews and surveys can be skewed by socially desirable responding, where people give answers they think are more acceptable rather than truthful (Lalwani, 2009). For instance, asking "Do you think body piercing is attractive?" is likely to produce more accurate responses than probing into the personal details of someone's piercings asking "How many piercings do you have and where on your body are they located?"(Vavra, 2009). When used thoughtfully, interviews and surveys not only enhance audience analysis but also help speakers avoid assumptions and build speeches that resonate with their listener.

Focus Groups

A **focus group** is a small gathering of people who provide feedback about their perceptions, making it a useful method for uncovering audience beliefs, attitudes, and values related to a speech topic. Like interviews and surveys, focus groups require a carefully prepared set of questions, but they differ by allowing participants to interact with each other, often revealing insights that might not emerge in one-on-one settings (Krueger and Casey, 2015). For example, a student planning a persuasive speech on campus sustainability might hold a focus group with peers from different majors. In discussion, one student may emphasize cost concerns about green initiatives, while another highlights environmental responsibility which together illustrate diverse viewpoints the speaker should address. Effective facilitation requires balancing open conversation with keeping the discussion on track, while also ensuring that all participants feel respected and included. Importantly, the goal of a focus group is not to confirm a speaker's assumptions but to listen openly to audience perspectives, even if they differ from what was expected. By using focus groups in audience analysis, speakers gain a richer understanding of the range of opinions and values in their audience, which helps them craft more relevant and inclusive messages.

Using Existing Data

Sometimes the most efficient way to understand your audience is to rely on **existing data** that has already been collected. For example, if you are preparing a speech for a group of students, you may be able to learn their academic majors, class standing, or level of investment in their education. Some seniors, for instance, may demonstrate stronger commitment to completing their degree compared to some sophomores, who are still early in their academic journey. Beyond schools, information about audiences can often be drawn from membership in organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), veterans' associations, or civic groups like the Lions Club, all of which suggest particular values and interests that may guide how they respond to a message. Publicly available demographic resources also provide useful insights. The U.S Census Bureau's American Community Survey offers data on age, gender, education, and other factors across states and communities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). More localized data, down to the level of individual zip codes, can be accessed through private companies like Nielsen, Sperling's Best Places, or Point2Homes, which are often used in marketing research. For example, a speaker giving a talk on home energy efficiency could use neighborhood-level census and housing data to tailor the message to whether the audience primarily rents apartments or owns single-family homes. Using these existing sources allows speakers to approach their audience more strategically, aligning their message with the listeners' real concerns and circumstances.

Example 3.3.1

You are scheduled to give a speech on financial literacy for your professionals at a community center. Before the event, you arrive early and use direct observation, noticing that many attendees are networking over coffee and discussing student loans while suggesting debt is a shared concern. You also send out a short online survey ahead of time, where respondents indicate interest in budgeting apps, saving for a first home, and managing credit card debt. To gain more nuanced insights, you hold a focus group with a small group of participants. Some emphasize the stress of paying off student loans, while others want guidance on long-term investing. Finally, you review existing data from the U.S. Census Bureau and local workforce reports, which show that this area has a high percentage of residents in their 20's and 30's working in entry-level jobs. By combining these methods, you tailor your talk to emphasize practical budgeting strategies, accessible investment options, and resources for managing debt which are topics that align directly with the needs and values of your audience.

Key Takeaways

- Direct observation reveals nonverbal behaviors, conversations, and environmental cues that help speakers gauge formality, interests, and group norm.

- Interviews, surveys, and focus groups use structured questions, whether one-on-one, online, or in group discussions that reveal audience values, beliefs, and attitudes while highlighting differences within the group.
- Using existing data gives demographic and community-level context that helps speakers align their messages with audience realities

Exercises

- Spend 15 minutes in a student union, coffee shop, or public park. Write down 3–4 things you notice about people's interactions or topics of conversation. Reflect on how these observations could inform a speech topic.
- In small groups, simulate a focus group on a topic like "improving campus sustainability." Assign one student as facilitator and others as participants, then discuss how the interaction revealed more than a survey alone.
- Design a 5-question online survey (e.g., Google Forms) about a campus issue. Share results with your class and discuss how you would tailor a speech based on the findings.

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3.4: Connecting with the Audience

Audience Needs

Public speaking is not just about what you say but also about how, when, and where you say it. A strong message can lose its impact if the **situational needs** of your audience are not taken into account. For instance, giving a long, data-heavy speech immediately after lunch may cause listeners to lose focus simply because they are tired. Similarly, an audience that has already listened to several presentations may need a quick break, a chance to stretch, or an interactive moment before they are ready to engage again. As a speaker, you can acknowledge these conditions by showing appreciation for your audience's time and by adapting your delivery, such as asking listeners to briefly turn to a neighbor to discuss a point or by using humor to reset attention (Lucas, 2020).

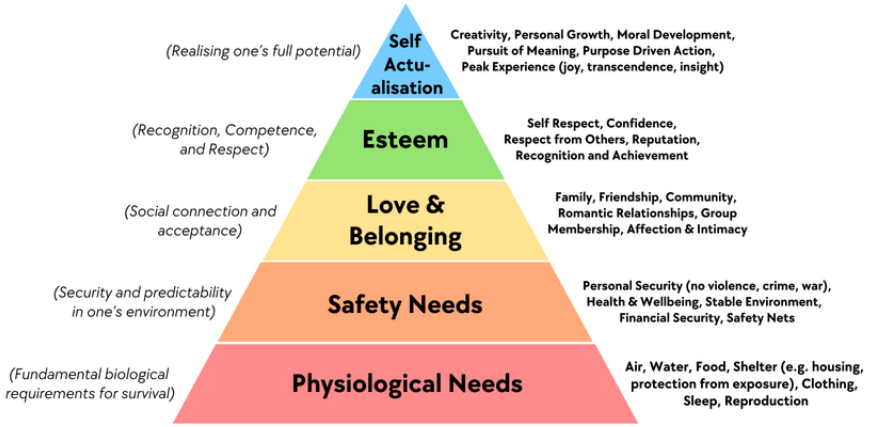


Figure 3.4.1: Diagram of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Harmish.croker via Wikimedia Commons) Read Fig 3.4.1 long description.

Leadership expert John Maxwell reminds us, "People don't remember what we think is important. They remember what they think is important" (Maxwell, as cited in O'Hair, Stewart, and Rubenstein, 2020). To meet audience needs, speakers can use **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** as a guide (Maslow, 1943). Maslow proposed that people are motivated to satisfy needs in a progression: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, cognitive, and self-actualization. For example, if you are persuading people to take a self-defense course, you might address multiple levels of need: improving sleep (physiological), enhancing safety in the community (safety), encouraging participation with friends (belonging), boosting self-confidence (esteem), learning new techniques (cognitive), and reaching life goals without fear (self-actualization). By identifying how your message connects to different levels of need, you make it more persuasive and relevant.

Audience Common Ground and Connection

Finding common ground is not just about politeness, it is rooted in neuroscience. Princeton researcher Uri Hasson (2012) found that when a speaker and listener share common experiences through story, their brain activity synchronizes. This suggests that building connections is not only emotional but also biological. Toastmasters competitor Julie Miyeon Sohn (2019) noted that her story about learning English resonated deeply with Korean audiences but fell flat in an international setting. She later realized that adapting to universal themes such as resilience, belonging, or personal growth would have connected better across cultures. Similarly, Nancy Duarte (2010) reflects on moments when her references to niche companies or cultural practices alienated some audiences, reminding us to test whether our examples are truly relatable.

One concept that will help create common ground with the audience is using techniques for **listenability.** Scholar D. L. Rubin (1990) explains that "listenable discourse" uses language and structure that reduce the cognitive burden on audiences. In plain terms, this means making your speech easy to follow, using simple and clear phrasing, and always giving the audience a reason to care. Techniques for listenability include:

- Finding common ground: Referencing shared experiences, such as a local sports team, a campus landmark, or a community issue, builds rapport and credibility (Duarte, 2010). For example, a speaker at a university might mention the school mascot or a well-loved local restaurant to connect with students.
- Referencing people in the group: Acknowledging someone you spoke to beforehand ("As Derek mentioned to me earlier...") immediately draws attention and personalizes your message.
- Showing relevance: Explicitly answer "So what? Who cares?" by telling the audience why the topic matters to them. For example, Laura Tempesta, in her TED Talk on sports bras, cleverly engaged both women and men by highlighting shared familiarity with the topic.
- Using audience language: William Butler Yeats once said, "Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people." Avoid jargon, define terms, and adapt your word choice to the knowledge level of your listeners. Scientists who participate in the "Flame Challenge" (Alda Center for Communicating Science) demonstrate this skill by explaining complex concepts in ways that 11-year-olds can understand.
- Using inclusive language: Speak in ways that invite the audience to see themselves in your message. Instead of saying, "I know most people worry about their food," you might say, "Like many of us, you may sometimes wonder what really goes into your food."

By considering situational needs, psychological motivations, and strategies for listenability, speakers can create presentations that not only inform but also connect. As presentation designer Ken Haemer (2011) once said, "Designing a presentation without an audience in mind is like writing a love letter and addressing it: To Whom it May Concern."

Controversial Topics and Respectful Communication

Some of the most compelling public speaking topics are also the most controversial. Issues such as nuclear energy, immigration, gun control, or climate change spark debate because they connect to deeply held values and beliefs on multiple sides. For example, nuclear energy can be praised as a clean and reliable alternative to fossil fuels, criticized for its environmental risks and waste storage challenges, or evaluated primarily through economic or national security concerns. Engineers might emphasize modernization of the energy grid, while others focus on reducing reliance on foreign oil. Each perspective carries merit, which is why controversy makes these topics both risky and engaging. Choosing such topics requires careful audience analysis and a commitment to acknowledging diverse concerns rather than dismissing opposing views (Lucas, 2020). Audiences are more receptive when treated as thoughtful individuals, even when their knowledge of the issue is incomplete.

Respectful communication also requires avoiding offensive language, humor, or assumptions about groups of people. Offense can be caused indirectly through stereotypes, such as implying that all scientists are men, that all elderly people are frail, or that all relationships are heterosexual. These assumptions not only alienate listeners but also undermine speaker credibility. Scholars Samovar and McDaniel (2007) recommend four guidelines for ethical language which includes being accurate, considering emotional impact, avoiding hateful or belittling words, and being sensitive to preferred identifiers (e.g., "Native American" instead of "Indian," "women" instead of "girls"). When speakers fail to respect diversity, audiences may disengage or even become hostile. By contrast, when controversial issues are handled ethically and inclusively, speakers foster trust, credibility, and genuine dialogue.

Credibility and Audience Connection

Every time you speak, you are either building, maintaining, or diminishing credibility. Credibility, or ethos, is not determined by what you think of yourself but by how your audience perceives you (Sheets, 2020). Listeners form impressions based on your knowledge, sincerity, and trustworthiness, as well as on external factors such as how you dress, your body language, and how you address them. For example, a speaker who appears prepared, respectful, and engaged is more likely to earn audience trust than someone who seems distracted or insincere. Ultimately, credibility is inseparable from the audience's opinion of whether you genuinely care about them and their needs.

One way to both improve credibility and reduce speaking anxiety is to shift focus away from yourself and toward your audience. Thinking of a speech as an opportunity to provide something valuable rather than as a performance helps reduce nerves and increase connection. Instead of worrying, "I am so nervous," speakers can reframe their mindset to, "This information will help my audience." When a topic is meaningful and the speaker is passionate about it, nervousness often fades because

the focus shifts to improving lives or offering insights that matter. As Ambrose Redmoon once wrote, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear” (as cited in Lucas, 2020). Similarly, Marianne Williamson has noted that “playing small does not serve the world,” reminding speakers that sharing knowledge is both a responsibility and a privilege. Students and professionals alike have found that preparation, belief in their message, and audience-centered delivery strengthen confidence. The more speakers view their role as serving an audience’s needs, the less room anxiety has to take hold and the more likely their credibility will shine through.

Example 3.4.1

A nonprofit director is invited to speak to a diverse audience about expanding a community food bank. By observing that the event follows a long city council meeting, the director shortens their prepared remarks and begins with humor to reenergize the room. Using Maslow’s Hierarchy, they frame the food bank as meeting basic physiological needs (hunger), promoting safety (food security), and strengthening belonging (neighbors helping neighbors). To establish common ground, they reference a beloved local grocery store that donates surplus food. Knowing the topic is sensitive, they avoid stereotyping recipients and instead emphasize dignity and respect. By focusing on audience needs, adapting to the situation, and speaking inclusively, the director builds credibility and delivers a persuasive, meaningful message.

Key Takeaways

- Audience needs include both situational factors (time of day, setting, prior events) and psychological motivations (values, relevance, connection), which shape how well your message is received.
- Techniques such as finding common ground, showing relevance, and using inclusive language make your speech more listenable and engaging.
- Speakers build credibility when they treat audiences with respect, handle controversial issues ethically, and focus on serving the audience’s needs rather than their own anxieties

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Exercises

- Imagine you are giving a 10-minute presentation after lunch. List three adjustments you would make to your delivery or content to keep your audience engaged.
- Choose a persuasive topic (e.g., joining a campus club, using public transit). Write one sentence for each level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to show how your topic could appeal to that need.
- Pair up with a classmate and find two shared experiences (e.g., both like music, both live in the same town). Create a short introduction for a speech that uses those shared experiences to build rapport.

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- **Audience analysis:** The process of gathering and interpreting information about an audience's characteristics, values, beliefs, needs, and expectations in order to adapt a speech effectively and create a meaningful connection between the speaker and listeners.
- **Direct observation:** A method of audience analysis that involves observing nonverbal behaviors, cultural patterns, and conversations to gather insights.
- **Interviews:** One-on-one conversations designed to gather detailed insights into audience members' beliefs, values, and attitudes.
- **Surveys:** Questionnaires distributed to multiple respondents to collect information about audience demographics, values, and opinions.
- **Focus group:** A small group discussion facilitated by a speaker or researcher to uncover shared and differing perspectives among audience members.
- **Existing data:** Previously collected information, such as census statistics or organizational reports, that provides insight into an audience.
- **Demographic analysis:** A study of audience characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, education, occupation, and group membership.
- **Listenability**: The quality of a speech that makes it easy for an audience to understand and follow, achieved through clear structure, simple language, relevant examples, and techniques that reduce the audience's cognitive burden.
- **Diversity:** The range of differences among audience members, including race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, beliefs, and experiences.
- **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**: A psychological model developed by Abraham Maslow (1943) that explains human motivation as a progression of needs, beginning with physiological needs and moving through safety, belonging, esteem, cognitive growth, and self-actualization.
- **Psychographic analysis:** Audience analysis that explores values, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions to understand deeper motivations.
- **Situational analysis:** An assessment of the specific speaking context, including audience size, purpose, voluntariness, and physical setting.
- **Situational needs**: The immediate conditions and context that affect how an audience receives a message, such as the time of day, physical environment, audience fatigue, or the sequence of events leading up to the speech.

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3.6: Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to prioritize “audience before content” in speech preparation?
2. How can Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs be used to tailor a persuasive speech?
3. What ethical considerations should speakers keep in mind when using direct observation, interviews, or surveys to learn about an audience?
4. How does recognizing diversity and psychographic differences help avoid stereotyping in public speaking?
5. What role does credibility play in shaping audience perception, and how can speakers strengthen it before and during a presentation?

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3.8: Alternative Text

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, based on his original 1943 Paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" and later clarifications. It depicts the five levels as: Level 1: Physiological. Air, Water, Food, Shelter (e.g. Housing, protection from exposure), Clothing, Sleep, Reproduction; Level 2: Safety Needs. Personal Security, Financial Security, Health and Wellbeing, Safety Nets (laws, insurance, emergency services), Stable Environment; Level 3: Love and Belonging. Family, Friendship, Romantic Relationships, Community, Group Membership, Affection and Intimacy; Level 4: Esteem. Self Respect, Respect from Others, Confidence, Recognition of Achievement, Reputation; Level 5: Self Actualisation. Creativity, Personal Growth, Moral Development, Pursuit of Meaning, Purpose Driven Action, Peak Experiences (intense moments of joy, insight, or transcendence)

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4: LISTENING

Introduction to Listening

"Most people don't listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." Steven R. Covey

Listening is one of the most important yet often overlooked skills in communication. While many people think of communication as mainly speaking, research shows that students spend about 55% of their communication time listening (Wolvin and Coakley, 1996). In today's world, good listening is essential in classrooms, on Zoom calls, at work, and even when scrolling through social media where we filter out key information from podcasts, videos, and livestreams. For example, a student who actively listens during a science lecture is more likely to understand the material and perform better on exams. Likewise, professionals who listen carefully during team meetings or customer conversations are more likely to solve problems and build trust.

Active listening is more than just hearing words, it involves paying attention, interpreting meaning, and responding thoughtfully. Modern technology can make listening harder, since multitasking on phones or laptops reduces our ability to retain information, with studies showing that listening effectiveness drops by up to 40% when distracted (Rosen et al., 2013). In public speaking, listening is just as important as speaking, because speakers must adapt to audience feedback, both verbal and nonverbal. For example, noticing that listeners look confused allows a speaker to clarify their message. By strengthening listening skills, students not only become better learners and friends but also more effective public speakers who connect with their audiences in meaningful ways.



Figure 4.1: Audience members, some staring intently at the speaker or writing notes, listen to a lecture. (CC BY 2.0; Robert Scoble via flickr)

Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between hearing and listening and explain why listening is an active, intentional process that includes receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding.
- Analyze how listening improves outcomes across contexts (academic, professional, interpersonal, and public speaking) and identify behaviors that demonstrate active listening (e.g., paraphrasing, clarifying questions, nonverbal feedback).
- Apply strategies to overcome common barriers to listening (e.g., attention limits, receiver bias, receiver apprehension, and types of noise) in real or simulated communication scenarios.

4.1: What is Listening and Why Listening is Important

4.2: The Listening Process
4.3: Barriers to Effective Listening
4.4: How to Become a Better Listener
4.5: Glossary
4.6: Discussion Questions
4.7: References
4.8: Alternative Text

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4.1: What is Listening and Why Listening is Important

What is Listening

Take a moment to think about your closest relationships such as family members, friends, colleagues, classmates, or even people you regularly interact with online. What makes these relationships meaningful? If you reflect carefully, you may realize that one common factor is the ability to communicate openly and to feel heard. Listening is at the heart of this process. But are people truly listening, or are they simply hearing while doing something else? Before we can answer that, we need to define what listening really is.

At first, **listening** may seem easy to define, but it is often more complex than we think. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines listening as "to pay attention to sound, to hear something with thoughtful attention, to be alert to catch an expected sound" (*Listen*, 2020, n.p.). While useful, this definition oversimplifies listening because it does not fully include verbal and nonverbal dimensions or the active, cognitive processes involved.

Communication scholars have long debated how to define listening. Some emphasize the listener's role in making interaction effective, while others highlight the importance of both verbal and nonverbal communication (Barker and Fitch-Hauser, 1986; Glenn, 1989; Wolvin and Coakley, 1996; Worthington and Bodie, 2018). Major communication organizations have also provided definitions. The International Listening Association (ILA, 1995) defines listening as "the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages." Similarly, the National Communication Association (1998) describes listening as a process that includes comprehension, evaluation, empathy, and appreciation.

Despite differences in wording, both definitions stress that listening is active and intentional, not passive. Although many people use the terms interchangeably, **hearing** and **listening** are not the same thing. Hearing is an accidental and automatic brain response to sound that requires no effort. We are surrounded by sounds constantly such as airplanes overhead, lawn mowers running, dishes clattering in the kitchen. Most of the time, we hear these incidental noises without giving them much attention, and our brains filter them out unless they signal something important, like the ring of a cell phone. In other words, hearing is accidental, involuntary, and effortless.



Figure 4.1.1: Listening Vs. Hearing. (CC BY NC SA 3.0(opens in new window); Attias, Johnson, Goding, & Wrenchvia via Stand Up, Speak Out)

Listening, on the other hand, is purposeful and requires concentration. It is focused, voluntary, and intentional. Listening means actively paying attention to verbal and nonverbal messages in order to understand meaning. Unlike hearing, listening demands motivation and effort. For example, when you listen closely to a friend share their feelings, or when you focus during a lecture, you are engaging in active listening. Because listening is not automatic, it can vary in quality. Later in this chapter, we will explore why

we sometimes fail to listen effectively and how we can strengthen our ability to become active, critical listeners.

The Importance of Listening

Listening is important because it is the communication skill we use most often in our daily lives. In one of the earliest studies on communication, Rankin (1926) found that adults spend about 42% of their communication time listening, compared with 32% speaking. More recent studies confirm that people spend at least half their day listening, whether to other people or to media (Janusik and Wolvin, 2009).

Listening also matters because it helps us avoid misunderstandings. If you misinterpret a friend's request, a teacher's assignment, or a supervisor's instruction, your response may be ineffective. Yet many of us sometimes "fake" listening by nodding along, rehearsing responses instead of paying attention, or drifting in and out of conversations.

Research has shown that listening affects almost every type of interpersonal relationship. For example, listening plays an important role in how students learn from teachers (Imhof, 2008), how friends connect (Bodie, 2012), how romantic partners maintain healthy relationships (Hoskins, Woszidlo, and Kunkel, 2016), and how employees interact with supervisors (Kristinsson, Jonsdottir, and Snorrason, 2019). Strong listening improves trust, reduces conflict, and deepens understanding across personal, academic, and professional contexts.

As mentioned prior, listening is more than simply hearing words, it is an active process of understanding, interpreting, and responding. Strong listening skills are essential for success in many areas of life, from the classroom to the workplace to personal relationships. Scholars argue that listening is the most frequently used communication skill, yet also the one most often taken for granted (Brownell, 2012). Below, we explore the importance of listening across four key areas: academic success, professional benefits, personal benefits, and public speaking.

Academic Success

In academic settings, listening is crucial for learning and achievement. Research has shown that students spend nearly half of their communication time listening, making it the most dominant skill in education (Wolvin and Coakley, 1996). For example, when a student listens carefully to a lecture or class discussion, they are better able to retain and apply knowledge on exams and assignments. Active listening strategies such as note taking, asking clarifying questions, and summarizing what was heard, help students engage more deeply with course material.

Furthermore, studies show a link between listening skills and GPA. Imhof and Janusik (2006) found that students with stronger listening abilities reported higher academic performance. In collaborative classroom environments, listening also builds respect among peers, as students who listen attentively to others' ideas contribute to more productive group projects and discussions.

Professional Benefits

Listening is one of the most valued skills in the workplace. Employers consistently rank oral and listening skills among the most sought-after competencies in employees. In professional contexts, listening enables employees to understand instructions, resolve conflicts, and provide better customer service. For example, a healthcare worker who listens closely to a patient's symptoms is more likely to deliver accurate and empathetic care. Similarly, managers who listen actively to their teams foster trust, improve morale, and increase productivity. Research also suggests that effective listening is positively related to leadership effectiveness, with leaders who listen well being rated higher by their employees (Brownell, 2012).

Personal Benefits

Listening is equally important in personal relationships, where it helps build trust, empathy, and connection. Poor listening can create misunderstandings, while attentive listening strengthens bonds. For example, when a friend shares a problem, being fully present and listening without interrupting communicates care and support.

Research shows that active listening contributes to relationship satisfaction. Bodie et al. (2012) found that people perceive greater relational closeness when their partners demonstrate strong listening behaviors. Listening also enhances emotional intelligence, helping individuals manage conflicts more effectively and respond to others with empathy. In everyday life, good listening skills

improve interactions with family, friends, and communities, making relationships more meaningful and resilient.

Public Speaking Benefits

Listening is not only essential for audiences but also for speakers. Public speaking is a two way process in which the audience provides feedback through facial expressions, body language, or questions that guides the speaker's delivery. For example, if a speaker notices listeners looking confused, they can slow down or clarify their points.

Research supports this interactive view of communication. Barnlund (2008) emphasized that communication is transactional, meaning both sender and receiver influence each other throughout the process. Skilled public speakers listen before, during, and after their presentations: they listen to audience analysis data to prepare, listen to feedback during delivery, and listen to evaluations afterward. By improving their listening, speakers strengthen their ability to connect with audiences, adapt messages, and inspire action.

Example 4.1.1

A high school basketball coach is giving instructions during practice. The coach calls out plays, but the gym is noisy with bouncing balls, sneakers squeaking, and teammates talking. Players who only hear the noise may miss important cues, while players who listen carefully, focusing on the coach's words, watching gestures, and remembering past drills can run the play successfully. If a player misunderstands the directions, the entire team may struggle. This example shows how listening, not just hearing, is essential for success in real-world situations.

Key Takeaways

- Listening is an active and intentional process while hearing is passive, involuntary and effortless.
- Strong listening skills are linked to academic success, workplace effectiveness, personal relationship satisfaction, and public speaking performance.
- Unlike hearing, which is automatic, listening requires focus, effort, and feedback to create mutual understanding.

Exercises

- Think of a recent time when you misunderstood someone because you were distracted. Write a short paragraph about what you missed and how better listening could have changed the outcome.
- Pair with a classmate. One person shares a short story about their weekend while the other practices active listening (eye contact, nodding, paraphrasing). Switch roles and discuss how it felt to be listened to attentively.
- In groups, have one person read aloud a short list of 10 items. After hearing them once, each group member writes down as many items as they can remember. Compare results and discuss strategies to improve listening memory.

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4.2: The Listening Process

Stages of Listening: Receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, responding.

Figure 4.2.1: Stages of Listening: Receiving, Understanding, Remembering, Evaluating, Responding (CC BY NC SA; Hollingsworth, Linsenmeyer, Elwood, Hanrahan, & Walker, edited by Weinland et al. via OKS Library) Read Fig 4.2.1 long description.

Active Listening and the Listening Process

A key distinction in listening is the difference between active and passive listening. **Passive listening** occurs when someone hears the words but does not fully engage with the message, often resulting in minimal retention or thoughtful response. For example, a student may "hear" a lecture while scrolling through their phone, but may later struggle to recall or apply the information. In contrast, **active listening** is intentional and involves giving full attention to the speaker, interpreting meaning, and offering appropriate feedback. It requires effort and presence, often using techniques such as paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, or using body language to show interest (Brownell, 2012). Active listening improves understanding, reduces conflict, and enhances relationships in both academic and professional settings (Hargie, 2011). Becoming a skilled listener means engaging each stage of the process with mindfulness and purpose, rather than simply letting words pass by.

Listening is not a single act but a complex process that involves multiple components working together. As Figure 4.2.1 illustrates, this varied multi-part process involving several stages.... can happen in a nanosecond. Communication researchers also describe five major stages: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding (Wolvin and Coakley, 1996). Each stage is active and interconnected, shaping how we interpret and respond to messages in both personal and professional contexts.

Receiving

The first step of the listening process is **receiving**, also called perception. At this stage, listeners become aware of sounds and select which auditory and nonverbal cues to focus on. For example, when you walk into a noisy party, you may hear background music, laughter, and clinking glasses, but you instinctively tune in to your friends' voices. This selective focus allows you to absorb the conversation while filtering out irrelevant noise. Without this ability, communication would be overwhelming, as every sound would compete equally for your attention.

Understanding

The second step is **understanding**, which involves attending to and making sense of the speaker's message. This stage is where cultural background and prior knowledge influence interpretation. For instance, a coach telling an athlete to "push harder" may be understood as encouragement by one person but as criticism by another. Research shows that listeners use both context and prior experiences to interpret meaning accurately (Imhof, 2008).

In addition, meaning is created by placing sounds and words into context, and it requires active concentration. For instance, putting away your phone and telling a colleague, "Go ahead, I'm listening," signals intentional focus. Interpretation also occurs at this stage, where listeners assign meaning based on both verbal and nonverbal cues. Ambiguous messages can complicate understanding. If a supervisor says, "We should meet sometime next week," without specifying a day or time, the message can be interpreted in multiple ways. Listening fidelity, the degree to which the listener's understanding matches the speaker's intended meaning, is essential to effective communication (Mulanax and Powers, 2001; Powers and Bodie, 2003).

Remembering

Remembering refers to the ability to retain information after receiving and understanding it. This step is essential for learning and decision-making. For example, a healthcare worker must remember a patient's symptoms to provide proper care. Memory strategies, such as taking notes or repeating information, help reinforce listening accuracy. Studies indicate that memory plays a central role in academic and workplace listening, where retaining details is often linked to success (Bodie, Worthington, Imhof,

and Cooper, 2008).

In addition, this step demonstrates that the listener has internalized the message and can recall it later. However, memory is selective, and what people recall may differ from what was originally said (Tyagi, 2013). Short term memory processes immediate information, such as recalling points from a lecture, but it can fade quickly, often within 30 seconds if not reinforced. Long-term memory allows for storage over weeks, months, or years, and stronger memories are easier to retrieve. For example, many people vividly remember where they were during major historical events like September 11, 2001. In contrast, they may struggle to remember what they had for lunch last week. Wolvin and Coakley (1996) note that the most common reason for forgetting is that the message was never fully learned in the first place.

Evaluating

Evaluating is the stage where listeners critically assess the message's credibility, logic, and emotional impact. At this point, listeners decide how much they agree with the speaker or whether the information is useful. For example, while listening to a political debate, you might evaluate whether a candidate's arguments are supported by evidence or shaped by bias. Critical evaluation helps listeners separate facts from opinions and avoid misinterpretation. Research shows that careful evaluation leads to more accurate communication and decision-making (Burbules and Rice, 1991).

Responding

Responding is the final stage, where listeners provide feedback through verbal and nonverbal signals. This stage either demonstrates attentiveness and understanding or reveals confusion. Listeners often use backchannel cues such as "uh-huh," "right," or nodding their heads to indicate they are following along. Nonverbal signals like eye contact, leaning forward, or smiling can also encourage the speaker to continue. For example, in a classroom discussion, students who ask clarifying questions or paraphrase a teacher's point show they are actively engaged. Responding completes the listening process by confirming the exchange of meaning.

Listening, then, is not a passive act but a dynamic process that requires attention and effort. By becoming aware of each stage, individuals can strengthen their listening skills, leading to better relationships, learning, and communication.

Example 4.2.1

A nurse in a hospital gives handoff information about a patient to the incoming nurse. If the incoming nurse only hears the words without actively listening, they might miss that the patient has a medication allergy. By practicing active listening, making eye contact, paraphrasing key points back ("So the patient cannot have penicillin, correct?"), and asking clarifying questions, the nurse ensures accuracy and prevents medical errors. This example shows how active listening in high-stakes settings can literally save lives.

Key Takeaways

- Active listening is intentional and requires attention, interpretation, memory, evaluation, and response, while passive listening often leads to misunderstanding.
- Listening is a multistage process (receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, responding) where each stage builds toward meaningful communication.
- Strong listening skills improve academic performance, workplace effectiveness, personal relationships, and public speaking success.

Exercises

- In pairs, one student shares a 2-minute story while the other deliberately multitasks (scrolling, doodling, etc.). Then repeat with full attention. Discuss how each version felt and compare how much was remembered.
- Listen to an ambiguous statement like, "We should meet sometime soon." Each student writes down their interpretation.

Compare answers and discuss how listening fidelity and clarification questions can reduce confusion.
- Play a short video clip of a political or persuasive speech. Students evaluate the credibility of the arguments and provide verbal/nonverbal feedback. Debrief on how evaluation shapes response.

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4.3: Barriers to Effective Listening

At times, everyone has difficulty staying completely focused during a lengthy presentation. We can sometimes struggle to remain attentive even during relatively brief messages. This is because listening is not a passive act; it requires effort, focus, and cognitive engagement. Some of the factors that interfere with good listening may be outside our control, such as environmental distractions or speaker related issues, but others such as our own biases or mindset are within our ability to manage. It's helpful to be aware of these barriers so that they interfere as little as possible with our ability to receive and understand a message.

Many distractions are the fault of neither the listener nor the speaker. However, speakers who are aware of common sources of listening interference, also known as **noise**, can proactively minimize those barriers to help their audience stay engaged and absorb their message (Wolvin and Coakley, 1996).

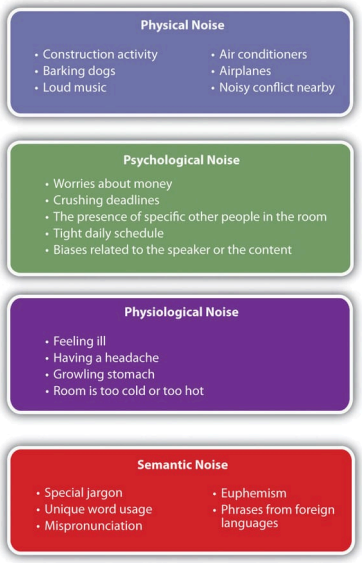


Figure 4.3.1: Types of Noise. (CC BY NC SA 3.0; Attias, Johnson, Goding, & Wrenchvia via Stand Up, Speak Out). Read Fig 4.3.1 long description.

Noise refers to anything that interferes with the ability to listen effectively, and scholars typically classify it into four categories: psychological, physiological, physical, and semantic (Wolvin and Coakley, 1996). **Psychological noise** occurs when mental distractions prevent us from focusing. For example, a student going through a break up with their partner may have a hard time focusing and miss key points during a lecture because their thoughts keep wandering. **Physiological noise** stems from the body, such as hunger, fatigue, or illness, which can make it hard to concentrate. For example, trying to pay attention during a meeting while having an empty and growling stomach may draw more attention than the speaker's words. **Physical noise** comes from the environment, like loud construction, text pings, ringing phones, or side conversations in the classroom. These external sounds compete for our attention and make it harder to receive the message accurately. **Semantic noise** happens when listeners are confused by the language a speaker uses. For instance, a computer science professor who mentions "asymptotic complexity" without explanation may lose students unfamiliar with the term.

In practice, these types of noise often overlap; a tired listener (physiological) sitting in a noisy café (physical) may also struggle to understand unfamiliar jargon (semantic). Recognizing different kinds of noise helps both speakers and listeners take steps to reduce barriers. Teachers can define technical terms, managers can minimize environmental distractions, and listeners can work to manage their own biases and fatigue. By addressing noise, communicators strengthen listening, reduce misunderstandings, and create clearer connections (Brownell, 2012).

Attention Span

One of the most common challenges for both speakers and listeners is **attention span**. A person can only maintain focused

attention for a limited time. Neil Postman (1985) argued that modern audiences who are conditioned by television and, more recently, digital media, struggle with sustained attention. Nicholas Carr (2010) echoes this concern, suggesting that frequent internet use encourages surface level scanning rather than deep listening. While the research is ongoing, most educators agree that attention must be actively maintained and refreshed throughout a presentation.

For example, a teacher lecturing for 50 minutes straight may notice students zoning out around the 15-minute mark. As many classroom instructors know, listeners will readily renew their attention when the presentation includes frequent breaks in pacing (Middendorf and Kalish, 1996). For example, a fifty to seventy five minute class session might include some lecture material alternated with questions for class discussion, visual aids, video clips, handouts, and demonstrations. Instructors who are adept at holding listeners' attention also move about the front of the room, writing on the board, drawing diagrams, and intermittently using slide transparencies or slide shows. Similarly, in a workplace presentation, a speaker could use storytelling or a surprising statistic to regain audience attention. By breaking the flow into varied segments, speakers can combat attention fatigue and help listeners stay engaged.

Receiver Biases

Listening with an open mind is an essential part of ethical and effective communication. However, **receiver bias** occurs when listeners bring preconceived judgments about the speaker or topic that block their ability to truly hear the message. This bias is a form of psychological noise that distorts or filters the speaker's intent (Beebe, Beebe, and Ivy, 2020). Biased listening is characterized by jumping to conclusions; the biased listener believes, "I don't need to listen because I already know what I think." Receiver biases can refer to two things: biases with reference to the speaker and preconceived ideas and opinions about the topic or message. Both can be considered noise.

For instance, a student may tune out a peer presenting on climate change simply because they hold opposing political views, or they might dismiss a classmate's speech because of personal dislike. Similarly, a manager might disregard an employee's input because the employee is young or new to the company. These assumptions limit not only our understanding but also our ability to build respectful, inclusive environments. Overcoming bias requires self-awareness and the willingness to temporarily suspend judgment.

To counteract this, listeners can remind themselves to evaluate the message, not the messenger, and reflect on whether personal opinions are preventing them from receiving the full value of the communication. Speakers, in turn, should be mindful of potential audience biases and work to build common ground, clarify their credibility, and approach sensitive topics with empathy.

Listening or Receiver Apprehension

Another internal barrier to effective listening is **receiver apprehension,** the fear of not being able to understand or process the message (Wheeless, 1975). This can happen when a listener feels unqualified to follow the topic, such as a non-science major attending a talk on physics. When the material seems "too hard," listeners may disengage before giving themselves a chance to learn.

In educational contexts, students sometimes avoid registering for challenging subjects due to fear of failure, which limits intellectual growth. In public speaking, this fear may also manifest when speakers use overly technical language without defining terms. For instance, using the phrase "colligative properties" without explanation can increase anxiety among listeners unfamiliar with chemistry. But when a speaker says, "Colligative properties refer to how much solute is in a solution, not what kind," and follows up with a relatable example (like melting driveway ice), they reduce confusion and empower the audience to stay engaged.

Speakers can further alleviate receiver apprehension by using visuals, analogies, and inclusive language. Simple tools like repetition and preview statements ("First, I'll explain…") help audiences organize information cognitively, making it easier to understand complex content.

Example 4.3.1

In a large lecture hall, a professor is explaining an important theory for the upcoming exam. A student who stayed up too late studying the night before struggles to focus because of fatigue (physiological noise). Another student is preoccupied with a recent argument with a roommate and can't stop replaying it in their mind (psychological noise). Meanwhile, construction

outside the building and students whispering in the back rows create distractions that make it harder to hear (physical noise). Finally, the professor introduces technical terms without defining them, leaving several students confused by the vocabulary (semantic noise). Each of these barriers reduces the students' ability to fully understand the lecture, demonstrating how multiple types of noise can overlap in academic settings. By addressing these factors by resting well, managing stress, reducing environmental distractions, and clarifying language, students and professors can improve listening effectiveness.

Key Takeaways

- There are four types of noise, physical, psychological, physiological, and semantic. Each can interfere with listening, but awareness helps listeners and speakers manage them.
- Audience attention spans are limited, requiring varied delivery techniques to maintain engagement.
- Receiver biases and apprehension distort understanding, but they can be reduced through open-mindedness, clear definitions, and inclusive communication.

Exercises

- For one day, keep a log of moments when noise (physical, psychological, physiological, or semantic) interferes with your listening. Identify which type occurred and how you responded.
- During a 20-minute class session, note when your attention drifts. Share strategies with classmates on how you brought your focus back.
- Take a 10-minute section of lecture material (or pick a textbook passage). Redesign it to include one "change-up" strategy (discussion, activity, video, or example) to help maintain audience attention.

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4.4: How to Become a Better Listener

The Foundations of Effective Listening

Listening is a multidimensional process that includes receiving, understanding, evaluating, and responding to messages (Wolvin and Coakley, 1996). Active listeners focus their attention, suspend judgment, and use feedback to confirm understanding. According to Brownell (2012), effective listeners integrate three components: cognitive (mental focus and comprehension), behavioral (observable feedback), and affective (motivation and attitude toward listening).

For example, imagine you are in a conversation with a friend who shares a difficult experience. A passive listener might nod or say "uh-huh" while mentally thinking about something else. An active listener, by contrast, maintains eye contact, paraphrases to confirm understanding, and asks clarifying questions like, "So you're feeling frustrated because it seemed unfair?" This level of engagement demonstrates empathy and creates psychological safety.

Listening is more than just hearing. It is an active, intentional process of making meaning from spoken and nonverbal messages. Becoming a better listener can enhance your relationships, improve your ability to resolve conflicts, and help you connect with others in personal, academic, and professional contexts. It is also a vital skill for public speakers, who must listen to their audiences in order to adapt and respond effectively.

Lastly, listening is also a critical thinking skill. Effective listeners evaluate the quality and credibility of information, consider multiple perspectives, and adapt their listening style to fit the speaker's purpose and cultural context. In a democratic society, critical listening helps individuals make informed decisions, engage in respectful dialogue, and provide constructive feedback. By reflecting on their own listening habits and evaluating feedback from others, students can strengthen their communication skills and become more thoughtful, ethical, and culturally aware communicators.This section outlines research-based strategies for improving listening and offers practical examples for daily life and public speaking situations.

Tips for Becoming a Better Listener in Daily Life

- Eliminate distraction: Turn off your phone, mute notifications, and remove physical or mental distractions when listening to someone. This demonstrates respect and allows you to focus on the speaker's message.
- Practice mindful listening: Be fully present in the moment. Try not to rehearse your response while the other person is speaking. Instead, concentrate on their words, tone, and body language (Janusik, 2017).
- Use verbal and nonverbal feedback: Active listening involves both verbal cues (e.g., "I see," "Tell me more") and nonverbal behaviors like nodding, open posture, and appropriate eye contact (Bodie et al., 2012).
- Paraphrase and repeat: Repeat back what you heard in your own words to confirm understanding. For example, "It sounds like you're overwhelmed with school and work. Is that right?"
- Ask sophisticated questions: These are questions that reflect understanding while seeking clarification. For example, "I hear you saying that the meeting didn't go well. Was that because of the team's feedback or something else?"
- Show empathy: Try to see the situation from the speaker's point of view. Empathetic listening builds trust and deepens relationships.
- Provide constructive feedback: Focus on specific behaviors or ideas rather than personal criticism. Offer feedback that is respectful, balanced, and includes clear suggestions for improvement. For example, "Your introduction grabbed my attention. Slowing down during your main points would make your message even clearer."
- Listen to understand before evaluating: Before offering feedback or disagreeing, suspend judgement and make sure you fully understand the speaker's message. Ask clarifying questions if needed so your response is accurate, fair, and helpful.
- Accept feedback openly: Listen to feedback without becoming defensive, ask follow-up questions when appropriate, and use constructive suggestions as opportunities to improve your communication skills.

Cultural Awareness in Listening

Becoming a better listener also means becoming more culturally aware. Nonverbal behaviors like eye contact, head nodding, and silence carry different meanings across cultures. For instance, while direct eye contact is considered respectful in many Western cultures, it may be perceived as disrespectful or confrontational in some Asian cultures (McCarthy et al., 2008). Effective listeners

adapt their behaviors accordingly and remain open to cultural differences in communication styles.

Improving Listening as a Public Speaker

Listening is not just for audience members as great public speakers are also great listeners. By observing your audience's nonverbal cues during a speech, you can adapt your message in real time to better connect with listeners.

- Read the room: Watch your audience's facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and note-taking behavior. If people look confused, slow down or clarify. If they seem disengaged, increase your vocal variety or ask a rhetorical question.
- Invite feedback: Use audience polling tools or ask reflective questions. For example, "How many of you have experienced this situation before?" or "What would you do differently in this case?"
- Paraphrase questions: During Q and A sessions, restate questions before answering. This ensures you understand the question and shows the audience you are listening.
- Stay flexible: If an audience member challenges your point or brings in new information, respond respectfully and adapt. Listening to feedback strengthens credibility and rapport.
- Practice empathetic speaking: Frame your message in ways that acknowledge audience needs and perspectives. As Anderson (2016) notes, a great speech is a gift to the audience and one that meets them where they are.

Listening as Audience Members

Audience listening plays a critical role in enhancing a speaker's performance and shaping the overall communication experience. When listeners give their full attention through eye contact, nodding, and engaged facial expressions, they offer the speaker valuable nonverbal feedback that builds confidence and improves delivery (Bodie et al., 2012). Conversely, distracted audience members can cause the speaker to feel uncertain or discouraged, leading to rushed speech or forgotten points. To become a better audience listener, individuals should practice active listening behaviors, such as sitting upright, minimizing distractions, and responding appropriately when prompted. For example, in a classroom setting, students who take notes, ask thoughtful questions, or smile during peer presentations help create a supportive atmosphere that encourages better speaking. Research shows that perceived partner responsiveness enhances relational and performance outcomes in both interpersonal and public settings (Reis and Gable, 2015). Additionally, being aware of receiver biases and making an intentional effort to listen openly, especially when the topic or speaker challenges our expectations can improve mutual understanding and respect (Imhof and Janusik, 2006). In short, effective audience listening doesn't just benefit the speaker, it transforms communication into a shared, collaborative act.

Listening is a learnable skill that enhances communication, builds trust, and improves your effectiveness as both an interpersonal communicator and a public speaker. By integrating strategies like mindful listening, feedback, cultural sensitivity, and audience analysis, you can become a more engaged listener and a more compelling speaker. The next time you are in a conversation or preparing a speech, remember: listening is not a passive act but an active investment in connection.

Example 4.4.1

Imagine a workplace team meeting where a project manager introduces a new deadline. One employee, distracted by checking their phone, only hears part of the instructions and assumes the due date is next week. Another employee listens attentively, asks clarifying questions, and paraphrases the plan back to the manager. When the project is submitted, the attentive listener's group delivers on time, while the distracted employee's portion is late. This example shows how effective listening can directly influence professional performance and credibility.

Key Takeaways

- Listening is an active, intentional process that goes beyond hearing, involving focus, comprehension, evaluation, and response.
- Cultural awareness is essential for effective listening, as nonverbal behaviors like eye contact or silence may carry different meanings across cultures.
- Both speaker and audiences benefit from active listening, which fosters clarity, connection, and stronger communication outcomes.

Exercises

- Write about a recent conversation where you realized afterward that you were not truly listening. What distracted you, and how could you have improved your listening in that moment?
- Pair up with a classmate. Partner A talks for two minutes about a current challenge, while Partner B practices active listening (eye contact, paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions). Switch roles and discuss what behaviors made you feel heard.
- Watch a short recorded speech or TED Talk. Take notes on both the speaker's content and your own responses as a listener. Afterward, evaluate whether your listening helped you fully understand the speaker's purpose and how your feedback might influence the speaker's delivery.

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- **Active Listening**: An intentional process of fully focusing, understanding, and responding to a speaker's message using techniques such as paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, and providing verbal or nonverbal feedback.
- **Attention Span**: The length of time a person can maintain focused attention on a message before becoming distracted or disengaged.
- **Evaluating**: The step in which a listener critically assesses the credibility, logic, and emotional impact of a message to decide whether it is valid, useful, or trustworthy.
- **Hearing**: The passive, physiological process of perceiving sound through the ears without necessarily making meaning from it.
- **Listening**: The active process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and nonverbal messages.
- **Noise (Barrier to effective listening)**: Anything that interferes with or distorts the ability to listen effectively, including external sounds, internal thoughts, physical conditions, or confusing language.
- **Passive Listening**: Hearing words without fully engaging, paying attention, or responding thoughtfully to the message.
- **Physical Noise**: External environmental sounds or distractions, such as construction, traffic, or side conversations, that interfere with listening.
- **Physiological Noise**: Biological factors, such as hunger, fatigue, or illness, that make it difficult to concentrate on a message.
- **Psychological Noise**: Mental distractions, such as stress, biases, or preoccupation with other thoughts, that prevent full attention to a message.
- **Receiver Apprehension:** The fear or anxiety of not being able to understand, process, or respond to a message, often leading to disengagement.
- **Receiver Bias:** Preconceived judgments about a speaker or topic that block the listener's ability to accurately hear and evaluate the message.
- **Remembering:** The ability to retain and recall information from a message for future use, aided by strategies such as note-taking and repetition.
- **Responding:** The stage where listeners provide feedback, verbally or nonverbally, to show attentiveness, clarify understanding, or encourage the speaker.
- **Semantic Noise:** Confusion caused by unfamiliar, technical, or ambiguous language that makes it difficult to interpret a message.
- **Understanding:** The step in which a listener interprets and makes sense of the message by connecting it with context, prior knowledge, and nonverbal cues.
- **Receiving:** The initial step in the listening process, where a listener perceives and selects sounds and nonverbal signals to focus on.

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4.6: Discussion Questions

1. Your chapter notes that students spend a large portion of their communication time listening. Where do you think your own listening time is highest (classroom, online, work, relationships), and what specific habits help or hurt you there?
2. The text distinguishes hearing (automatic) from listening (focused, voluntary, intentional). Describe a recent situation where you were “hearing” but not “listening.” What changed when you shifted to active listening behaviors?
3. Considering the five stages (receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, responding), which stage do you find most challenging and why? What concrete steps could you take this week to strengthen that stage?
4. In public speaking, how can a speaker listen to the audience in real time? Give two tactics (e.g., reading nonverbal cues, paraphrasing questions) and explain how each tactic would change your delivery.
5. Biases and anxiety can derail listening. Identify one bias or apprehension trigger you’ve experienced. What language choices or structural choices (definitions, previews, visuals) from a speaker would help you stay engaged—and what listener strategies can you use on your end?

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4.8: Alternative Text

Stages of listening include receiving (intentional focus on hearing a speaker's message), understanding (we attempt to learn the meaning of the message), remembering (improve your memory of a message by processing it meaningfully), evaluating (judging the value of the message), and responding (sometimes referred to as feedback).

Types of Noise include Physical Noise includes (but not limited to): construction activity, barking dogs, loud music, air conditioners, airplanes, and noisy conflict nearby; Psychological Noise: worries about money, crushing deadlines, the presence of specific other people in the room, tight daily schedule, and biases related to the speaker or the content; Physiological Noise: feeling ill, heaving a headache, growling stomach, and room is too cold or too hot; Semantic Noise: special jargon, unique word usage, mispronunciation, euphemism, and phrases from foreign languages

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5: ETHICS IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

Ethics Matters: Understanding the Ethics of Public Speaking

Ethical communication starts with honesty. When you speak to an audience, you are asking them to trust you, even if it is only for a few minutes. Your voice has influence, and the messages you share can shape opinions in a classroom, inspire action in your community, and eventually guide decisions in your workplace. That influence is built through clear information, honest sources, and respect for your listeners. Ethical speaking helps reduce misinformation, encourages open discussion, and supports healthier conversations in a world that often struggles to communicate across differences.

As a college student, you will face real choices about what to share, what to cite, and how to respond to viewpoints that challenge your own. These moments are part of using your voice responsibly. Ethical communication is not just a classroom expectation but a life skill that builds credibility, strengthens relationships, and creates space for people to learn from one another. This chapter will introduce tools such as the ethics pyramid (Tilley, 2005) and the National Communication Association's principles for ethical communication (National Communication Association, 2018) to help you communicate with honesty, fairness, and respect in college and beyond, so you can use your voice to make a positive difference in the world.



Figure 5.1: Transparent sign displaying the word "Ethics." (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; Dan Mason via Flickr)

Learning Objectives

- Explain the ethical principles and responsibilities in public speaking.
- Analyze real communication situations for ethical and unethical choices.
- Apply ethical guidelines when preparing and delivering a speech.

5.1: Ethics in Public Speaking

5.2: Free Speech

5.3: Glossary

5.4: Discussion Questions

5.5: References

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5.1: Ethics in Public Speaking

Ethics in Public Speaking

Ethical public speaking matters now more than ever. Every day, people are influenced by speeches, social media posts, campaign messages, viral videos, campus discussions, and global events. From debates on immigration and climate action to conversations about equity, artificial intelligence, and public health, messages can spread faster than they can be corrected. When a speaker communicates without honesty or care, misinformation can divide communities and damage trust. When a speaker communicates ethically, audiences are more likely to feel respected, informed, and open to listening.

College students experience this dynamic all the time. Maybe you have seen a viral TikTok that turned out to be false, watched a heated city council clip online, or heard someone in class confidently cite statistics that sounded questionable. Ethical speaking helps prevent those problems. When you double-check facts, respect different perspectives, and communicate with a clear purpose, your voice becomes more credible and persuasive. Whether you are preparing a classroom presentation, advocating for students on campus, or getting ready for a future career, ethical communication shows that you can be trusted to lead, collaborate, and make a positive impact.

Ethical public speaking is grounded in honesty, respect, and responsibility. In 1999, the National Communication Association created the **Credo for Ethical Communication** to guide communicators in classrooms, communities, and public life (National Communication Association, 2018). These principles encourage speakers to value truth, respect diverse perspectives, and take responsibility for the impact of their messages. Ethical speakers share truthful information, cite their sources, and avoid language that harms or degrades others. Ethical listeners also play a role by giving speakers a fair chance to be heard and evaluating messages thoughtfully instead of reacting based on assumptions or stereotypes (Borchers & Hundley, 2021). Research shows that trust in communication increases when speakers demonstrate transparency and respect and that ethical listening reduces conflict and strengthens community.

Applying the NCA Credo to Public Speaking

Ethical communication is a shared responsibility. Speakers make choices about evidence, language, and how they represent other perspectives. Audiences make choices about how carefully they listen, evaluate evidence, and respond.

1. Be truthful and accurate. Check your evidence, represent it honestly, and cite your sources rather than exaggerating information to strengthen your argument.
2. Represent other perspectives fairly. You can strongly disagree with someone without misrepresenting their position. Address what people actually argue, not a weaker version that is easier to attack.
3. Choose language responsibly. Consider how wording, labels, stereotypes, and emotional language might influence how an audience views an issue or group.
4. Allow room for disagreement. Ethical communication does not require everyone to agree. Listen to competing perspectives, evaluate their reasoning, and make space for thoughtful disagreement.
5. Consider the consequences**.** Before speaking or sharing information, ask what your message might cause people to believe, feel, share, or do.

How Perspective Shapes Our Choices

Imagine two students discussing college affordability. One works full-time while attending school and pays most of their own expenses. The other has tuition and living expenses covered by family. Neither perspective is automatically more valid, but their experiences may influence what each considers a “reasonable” solution.

Ethical communication involves more than telling the truth. Speakers and audiences bring their own experiences, assumptions, values, and perspectives to communication. These can influence what information we notice, which sources we trust, how we interpret evidence, and which experiences we consider important.

Bias refers to assumptions or tendencies that can shape how we understand people, ideas, and information. Bias is not always

intentional. A speaker's bias might influence which evidence they select, which perspectives they include, or how they describe an opposing viewpoint. An audience member's bias might affect whether they trust a speaker or give an unfamiliar argument a fair hearing.

Power and **privilege** can shape communication too. Power refers to a person's ability to influence decisions, conversations, or whose voices are heard, while privilege can provide greater access to resources, opportunities, authority, or public platforms. A college president, professor, student leader, and first-year student, for example, may all speak about the same campus issue, but their voices may not carry the same influence. Ethical communicators consider not only who is speaking and what they are saying, but also who has the power to be heard, whose perspectives may be missing, and how those differences shape the conversation (Allen, 2023).

Our experiences can give us valuable insight, but they can also create blind spots. Recognizing bias and privilege does not mean eliminating every influence on our thinking. Instead, it means asking better questions: What assumptions am I bringing to this? What might I be overlooking? Whose perspective haven't I considered?

For speakers, this might mean seeking credible evidence, representing opposing views fairly, avoiding stereotypes, and acknowledging information that complicates an argument. For audiences, it means listening critically, examining our own assumptions, and considering evidence before reaching a conclusion. The National Communication Association's *Credo for Ethical Communication* emphasizes this shared responsibility through truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, reason, and respect for other perspectives (National Communication Association 2018).

Ultimately, ethics involves **choice**. Speakers choose what evidence to include, what to leave out, which words to use, and how to represent other people. Audiences choose what to believe, question, share, or reject. Being aware of those choices can help all of us communicate more thoughtfully and responsibly.

Example 14.1.1 When the Facts Are Technically True

Jordan is giving a persuasive speech about rising textbook costs. Jordan finds a statistic showing that some college textbooks cost more than $200 and plans to say, "College students regularly pay more than $200 for a single textbook."

The statistic is real, but Jordan knows that many textbooks cost less and some courses use free OER materials. Should Jordan use the statistic because it supports the argument? Include additional context even if it weakens the point? Find better evidence?

Ethical communication is not always about choosing between a truth and a lie. Sometimes the harder question is whether we are presenting true information in a fair and accurate way.

Key Takeaways

- Ethical communication requires truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason. Speakers should use evidence responsibly and represent information fairly.
- Ethics applies to speakers and audiences. Speakers make choices about evidence and language, while audiences decide how carefully they listen, evaluate, question, and share messages.
- Bias, experience, power, and privilege can shape communication. Recognizing our assumptions and considering other perspectives can help us make more thoughtful communication choices.

Exercises

- True but Misleading**:** Think of a statistic, headline, advertisement, or social media post that could be technically true but still misleading. What important context might be missing?
- Check Your Perspective: Choose an issue you care about. Identify one assumption you bring to the issue and one perspective you might not have considered.
- The Ethical Choice: Imagine you find evidence that weakens your persuasive speech but comes from a credible source. What should you do with it? Explain your decision.

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5.2: Free Speech

Free Speech

Free speech is a core part of public speaking in the United States. The First Amendment protects the right to express ideas and opinions, including controversial or unpopular viewpoints (U.S. Courts, 2024). According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law, free speech is "the right to express information, ideas, and opinions free of government restrictions based on content," with only limited exceptions such as preventing violence or serious harm (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This principle is especially important for public speakers because sharing information and perspectives is central to the communication process. It also matters for listeners, who need access to many viewpoints in order to think critically and make informed decisions.

Free speech has been protected since the founding of the United States and is part of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights, which guarantees freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion, and petition (National Archives, 2011). These freedoms were designed as safeguards against government abuse and to allow citizens to challenge authority, debate public policy, and participate in democracy. Today, debates around immigration, climate change, racial justice, and global conflict show why free speech remains essential. Without it, people would not be able to protest, organize, or advocate for change in their communities or campuses.

At the same time, free speech is not unlimited. The First Amendment does not protect **incitement**, direct threats, or targeted harassment. For example, in the Supreme Court case Morse v. Frederick (2007), a school was allowed to discipline a student whose banner promoted illegal drug use. This ruling reinforced that speech encouraging unlawful acts is not protected. On college campuses, this balance is often tested. Universities like UC Berkeley and Stanford have become national examples when controversial speakers were met with protests, counter-protests, or calls to cancel events. Supporters argued that even offensive ideas should be heard and challenged in open debate, while opponents feared that some messages could reinforce **stereotypes** or create real harm (Schildkraut, 2022). These real moments show that free speech is not just a legal concept, but a lived challenge in public communication.

Ethical communicators recognize two important truths about free speech. First, people have the right to speak, protest, and challenge ideas. Second, free speech does not remove responsibility for impact. A speech can be legal but still unethical if it spreads **misinformation**, encourages hate, or shuts down dialogue (Lukianoff & Schlott, 2023). Practicing free speech responsibly means asking not only "Can I say this?" but also "Should I say it this way?" and "Will this move the conversation forward?"

Free Speech and Public Speaking

1. Free speech protects expression. People can share ideas that others disagree with or find offensive.
2. Listeners also have rights. Protest, counter-speech, and peaceful disagreement are protected forms of expression as long as they do not silence others.
3. Speech has consequences. A message can be legal but still unethical if it harms others or reduces understanding.

Example 14.2.1

A controversial activist is invited to speak at a university. Some students attend and challenge the message during Q&A. Others organize a peaceful protest outside. Another group writes an op-ed responding to the speech. In this scenario, everyone uses free speech without shutting anyone down, which encourages discussion instead of silence.

Key Takeaways

- Free speech protects diverse and uncomfortable ideas, not just popular ones.
- Ethical communication goes beyond legality and considers impact, honesty, and respect.
- The strongest response to speech we dislike is often more speech, not censorship.

Exercises

- Write two sentences about a controversial issue: one expressing your opinion and one expressing an ethical response to someone who disagrees.
- Create a two-column list with the labels “Protected” and “Not Protected.” List three examples in each.
- Write a 3–4 sentence mini-speech about a current event, focusing on expressing your view without insulting or attacking others

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- **Accuracy:** Presenting information that is factually correct, current, and supported by reliable evidence.
- **Bias:** Assumptions or tendencies that can influence how we interpret people, ideas, evidence, and information.
- **Censorship:** The suppression, restriction, or removal of speech, expression, or information by a government, organization, or authority.
- **Choice:** The decisions speakers and audiences make about what to say, include, believe, question, share, or reject.
- **Civil Discourse:** Respectful and constructive communication about controversial issues, even when people disagree.
- **Credo for Ethical Communication:** A set of principles created by the National Communication Association that promotes honesty, respect, fairness, and responsibility in human communication.
- **Defamation:** A false statement presented as fact that harms a person's reputation. Defamation is not protected by the First Amendment.
- **Disinformation:** False or misleading information that is intentionally created or shared to deceive others.
- **Ethical Communication:** Communication that demonstrates honesty, fairness, respect, responsibility, and concern for the well-being of others.
- **Ethical Listening:** Listening thoughtfully, fairly, and respectfully while considering a speaker's ideas before judging or responding.
- **Ethics:** The study and practice of determining what is right, fair, and responsible in human behavior and communication.
- **Fairness:** Treating people and ideas with impartiality, respect, and consideration, even when disagreements exist.
- **First Amendment:** Part of the U.S. Constitution that protects freedoms related to speech, press, religion, assembly, and petition, including the right to express opinions without government punishment.
- **Free Speech:** The right to express ideas, opinions, and beliefs without government censorship or punishment, subject to certain legal limitations.
- **Hate Speech:** Communication that attacks, demeans, or discriminates against individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.
- **Incitement:** Speech that encourages or calls for immediate unlawful action; this type of expression is not protected by the First Amendment.
- **Manipulation:** The use of deceptive, misleading, or unfair communication tactics to influence others for personal gain.
- **Misinformation:** False, misleading, or inaccurate information that is spread without fully verifying its accuracy or truthfulness.
- **Plagiarism:** Using someone else's words, ideas, or work without giving proper credit and presenting it as your own.
- **Power:** The ability to influence people, decisions, conversations, or whose voices are heard and taken seriously.
- **Privilege:** Advantages or access to resources, opportunities, or influence that may shape a person's experiences and perspective.
- **Protected Speech:** Forms of expression that are safeguarded by the First Amendment, even if the ideas expressed are unpopular, controversial, or offensive.
- **Respectful Communication:** Communication that recognizes the dignity, value, and perspectives of others, even during disagreement.
- **Responsibility:** The obligation to consider the potential effects and consequences of one's communication choices.
- **Stereotypes:** Oversimplified, generalized, and often harmful beliefs about a group of people that can reinforce prejudice or discrimination.
- **Transparency:** Being open and honest about sources, intentions, affiliations, and potential biases in communication.
- **True Threat:** A serious statement expressing an intent to commit violence or harm against a person or group. True threats are not protected by the First Amendment.
- **Truthfulness:** The practice of communicating honestly and accurately without deception, exaggeration, or distortion.
- **Unprotected Speech:** Categories of speech that receive limited or no First Amendment protection, including incitement, true threats, defamation, and certain forms of obscenity.

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5.4: Discussion Questions

1. When does free speech cross the line from expressing an opinion to causing real harm? Share a current example from social media, a college campus, or the news, and explain where you believe the ethical line should be.
2. Should colleges allow controversial speakers on campus, even if some students feel offended or unsafe? What is the fairest balance between open dialogue and community well-being?
3. If someone spreads misinformation by accident, are they still responsible for the impact of their message? Where is the line between a mistake and unethical communication?
4. Think of a speaker or activist you admire. What made their message feel honest, respectful, or inspiring, and how did it bring people together instead of dividing them?
5. Do you think ethical speaking can make real change in society? Describe an issue you care about and how ethical communication could help your campus, community, or future profession.

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6: FINDING A PURPOSE AND SELECTING A TOPIC

Introduction to Finding a Purpose and Selecting a Topic

Every effective speech begins with a clear purpose, to demonstrate, inform, persuade, or entertain. Once the speaker knows why they are speaking, the next essential step is to decide what they will speak about by choosing a topic that fits that purpose. Selecting a topic requires balancing many factors: the professor's directions, the time available, the type of speech, the audience, and the subject area. Students can also draw on personal experiences, areas of interest, credible online sources, and even tools like AI to help generate and refine ideas. This chapter will guide you through the process of moving from purpose to topic, showing how to narrow broad subjects into focused, audience-centered topics that work within the limits of a short classroom speech.



Figure: "With dart in hand, man plans his hand alignment to accurately throw the dart in the center of the Dart Board". (OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (September version) [Large language model]. chat.openai.com/chat)

Learning Objectives

- Describe the relationship between a speech's purpose (to demonstrate, inform, persuade, or entertain) and the process of selecting a topic.
- Explain how factors such as professor's directions, time limits, type of speech, audience, and subject area influence the narrowing of a topic into a specific purpose.
- Interpret how tools like personal experiences, online recourses, and AI prompting can help transform a broad subject into a focused, audience-centered speech topic.

6.1: Purpose in a Speech

6.2: Selecting A Topic

6.3: Narrowing your Topic

6.4: Thesis Statement and Putting it all together

6.5: Glossary

6.6: Discussion Questions

6.7: References

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6.1: Purpose in a Speech

Purpose in a Speech

In relation to public speaking, purpose refers to the reason a speech is being delivered. It answers the question, "Why am I giving this speech?" and serves as the guiding focus for both the speaker and the audience. A clear purpose keeps the speech organized and ensures that the content supports the speaker's goals.

General Purpose

The general purpose is the broad, overall goal of a speech.

Specific Purpose

The specific purpose narrows the general purpose into a precise statement of what the speaker intends to achieve with this particular audience, in this particular speech. It combines the general purpose with the exact topic and audience outcome (Beebe & Beebe,2018).

Examples:

- Beginning Financial Planning
  - General Purpose: To inform my audience about the importance of financial planning.
  - Specific Purpose: To inform my classmates about three basic financial planning strategies, budgeting, saving, and managing credit that can help college students avoid debt.
- Study Habits
  - General Purpose: To inform my audience about effective study strategies.
  - Specific Purpose: To inform my classmates about three proven study habits, creating a schedule, using active recall, and minimizing distractions that lead to better test performance.
- Communication Helps
  - General Purpose: To persuade my audience that good communication skills are essential in life.
  - Specific Purpose: To persuade my classmates that improving communication skills through active listening, clear expression, and nonverbal awareness can strengthen relationships and increase success in college and future careers.

The Purpose is Directed by the Type of Speech

Aristotle, Cicero, and St. Augustine each described "types" of speeches that help speakers clarify their purpose. **Aristotle** identified three classical types: deliberative (to argue about future action and persuade toward a decision), forensic (to address past actions, often defending or accusing), and epideictic,to praise, blame, or inspire in the present (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010). **Cicero** focused on the goals of the speaker with his three purposes: to inform (docere), to delight (delectare), and to persuade or move to action (movere). **St. Augustine of Hippo**, adapting rhetoric to religious teaching, offered three related purposes: to teach (instruct the audience in truth), to delight (engage and hold attention), and to move (inspire moral or spiritual action). Together, these frameworks highlight that a speech can aim to inform, inspire, or persuade and that identifying the type helps a speaker sharpen their purpose by deciding not just what to say, but why they are saying it.

Drawing from Aristotle, Cicero, and St. Augustine, we can coalesce their ideas into four modern categories of speech that align with today's classroom purposes. A **speech to demonstrate** grows from the classical idea of teaching or instructing (Augustine's to teach and Cicero's to inform), where the goal is to show the audience how to do something step by step. A **speech to inform** reflects Aristotle's deliberative and Cicero's to inform, focusing on sharing knowledge, explaining concepts, or increasing understanding. A **speech to persuade** comes directly from Aristotle's deliberative and forensic types, Cicero's to move, and Augustine's to move, aiming to influence attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. Finally, a **speech to entertain** connects with Aristotle's epideictic and Cicero's to delight, using humor, stories, or creative expression to engage and captivate an audience. Together, these four categories give speakers practical ways to define their purpose while echoing the foundations of classical rhetoric.

Demonstration Speech

A speech to demonstrate is a type of informative speech where the speaker shows the audience how to do something step by step, often including visual aids or examples so the audience can follow along and apply the process themselves. The purpose is not just to explain but to show and guide.

Examples of Demonstration Speech Topics:

- College Finance: How to create a simple monthly budget using a free budgeting app.
- Health: How to do a 10-minute stretching routine to reduce stress between classes.
- Study Habits: How to use flashcards and active recall to prepare effectively for exams.

Informative Speech

A speech to inform is a type of speech designed to increase the audience's understanding by explaining, describing, or defining a subject. Unlike a demonstration speech, it focuses on providing knowledge and clarity rather than showing step-by-step actions. The purpose is to make the audience more aware or knowledgeable about a specific topic.

Examples of Informative Speech Topics:

- College Finance: Explaining the differences between student loans, grants, and scholarships.
- Health: Informing classmates about the mental health benefits of regular exercise.
- Study Habits: Describing the science behind why studying in shorter, spaced sessions improves memory retention.

Persuasive Speech

A speech to persuade is a type of speech intended to influence the audience's attitudes, beliefs, or actions. The speaker uses reasoning, evidence, and emotional appeals to convince listeners to agree with a viewpoint or take a specific step. The purpose goes beyond informing—it seeks to create change in thinking or behavior.

Examples of Persuasive Speech Topics:

- College Finance: Convincing students to start saving a small portion of their income each month to build long-term financial stability.
- Health: Persuading classmates to limit energy drink consumption because of its negative effects on sleep and concentration.
- Study Habits: Arguing that students should avoid last-minute cramming and instead adopt consistent study routines for better academic performance.

Speech to Entertain

A **speech to entertain** is a type of speech designed primarily to engage, amuse, or inspire the audience through stories, humor, or creative expression. While it may also inform or persuade in subtle ways, the main purpose is to capture attention and provide enjoyment, often leaving the audience with a memorable experience or insight.

Examples of Entertaining Speech Topics:

- College Finance: Sharing funny and relatable stories about the struggles of living on a tight student budget.
- Health: Telling humorous anecdotes about trying and failing different fitness trends before finding one that works.
- Study Habits: Creating a lighthearted narrative about the "adventures" of pulling an all-nighter versus preparing ahead of time.

Once you determine the type of speech, **to demonstrate, to inform, to persuade, or to entertain**, it becomes much easier to craft your **specific purpose** because the category gives you a clear direction for your goal (Beebe & Beebe, 2018). If it's a demonstration, your purpose will focus on teaching the audience how to do something step by step. If it's informative, your

purpose will be to increase understanding or share knowledge. If it's persuasive, your purpose will aim to influence what the audience thinks, believes, or does. If it's entertaining, your purpose will be to capture attention and provide enjoyment through stories or humor. In short, identifying the type of speech acts as a framework that guides you in narrowing your broad intention into a precise, audience-focused statement of what you want to accomplish.

Example 6.1.1

- Workplace Training: A manager gives a demonstration speech showing new employees how to use time-tracking software (general purpose: to demonstrate; specific purpose: to show step-by-step how to log hours).
- Community Event: A volunteer delivers a persuasive speech urging neighbors to support a local recycling program (general purpose: to persuade; specific purpose: to convince the audience to sign up for weekly recycling pickup).
- College Orientation: A student success counselor gives an informative speech explaining campus support services to new students (general purpose: to inform; specific purpose: to explain how tutoring, academic advising, and counseling services can help students succeed in college).

Key Takeaways

- Every speech has a general purpose (broad goal) and a specific purpose (precise audience outcome).
- The type of speech to demonstrate, inform, persuade, or entertain guides the focus of your specific purpose.
- Clear purpose statements make speeches more effective because they give both the speaker and the audience direction.

Exercises

- Write a general purpose and specific purpose for a speech about managing stress as a student.
- Identify which type of speech (demonstrate, inform, persuade, entertain) best fits a talk on healthy eating.
- Convert the broad topic "technology in college" into a specific purpose for an informative speech.

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6.2: Selecting A Topic

Selecting a Topic

In the previous section, we learned that every speech begins with a clear purpose, to demonstrate, to inform, to persuade, or to entertain. Once you understand your purpose, the next step is to select a topic that matches that purpose. Purpose and topic go hand in hand: the purpose gives your speech direction, and the topic provides the specific subject matter that allows you to achieve that purpose (Beebe & Beebe, 2018) . For example, if your purpose is to persuade, your topic should naturally lend itself to presenting arguments and evidence that could influence your audience's attitudes or actions. If your purpose is to inform, your topic should allow you to explain or describe in a way that increases your audience's understanding. By linking purpose and topic, you can ensure your speech has both clarity and focus.

How to Select a Topic

Based on the Professor's Direction

Sometimes your professor will provide clear guidelines for the type of speech or the range of acceptable topics. For example, you may be asked to give a demonstration speech on a process, an informative speech about a current event, or a persuasive speech on a social issue. In these cases, your topic must meet the assignment's criteria, and following these instructions is the first step toward success.

Based on Time Constraints

Not every topic fits the time you are given. A five-minute speech can't cover the entire history of climate change, but it could cover "three effects of climate change on California agriculture." Narrowing your topic to fit the time limit ensures that you can deliver a clear, well-organized speech without overwhelming your audience (Lumen Learning, n.d.)

Based on the Type of Speech

The category of speech, demonstrative, informative, persuasive, or entertaining, shapes what kinds of topics will work best. A demonstration speech requires a process that can be shown step-by-step; an informative speech should center on explaining concepts; a persuasive speech should lend itself to debate; and an entertaining speech should allow for humor or storytelling.

Based on the Type of Audience

Your audience matters. A group of classmates may connect better with topics related to student life, while a professional audience may prefer industry related subjects. Ask: What does my audience already know? What will interest them? What might they resist? Tailoring your topic to your audience makes your speech more effective.

Based on Subject Area

Finally, think about your own interests and areas of knowledge. A topic you care about will be easier to research, prepare, and deliver with enthusiasm. Choosing from subject areas you are already familiar with such as finance, health, study skills, or hobbies will not only make the process more enjoyable but also allow you to connect authentically with your listeners.

Together, these factors, professor's direction, time, speech type, audience, and subject area help narrow down broad possibilities into a focused, purposeful topic that supports both your goals and your audience's needs (LibreTexts, 2022).

Finding a Topic Through Personal Resources and Tools

Selecting a speech topic does not have to be difficult if you know where to look. Beyond the professor's directions, time limits, type of speech, and audience, you can also draw on your own life and modern tools to help you narrow down the possibilities.

Personal Experiences

Your own life can be one of the richest sources for speech topics. Experiences such as working a part-time job, traveling, playing on a sports team, or overcoming a personal challenge can all provide meaningful topics. Audiences often connect more strongly with real stories because they feel authentic and relatable. For example, a student who has worked in food service might give a demonstration speech on "how to improve customer service skills."

Areas of Interest

A topic that genuinely interests you will be easier to research and present with energy. Think about your hobbies, passions, or academic strengths. If you love technology, you might inform your audience about new apps that help with studying. If you enjoy health and wellness, you could persuade your audience to adopt a healthier habit. Interest fuels enthusiasm, and enthusiasm makes a speech more engaging.

Using the Internet

The internet provides endless topic ideas, from trending news stories to specialized blogs and databases. Online resources can help you identify current issues, common student concerns, or exciting new developments. For example, browsing educational websites might spark an idea for a study-habits speech, while health organizations can inspire topics on fitness or wellness. Always be sure to evaluate sources for credibility before building your speech on them.

Using AI Tools

Artificial intelligence can be a powerful brainstorming partner (Bozkurt, 2024). Tools such as **ChatGPT** can generate lists of possible topics, suggest ways to narrow broad ideas, or show you examples of how others have presented on similar subjects. For instance, if you type in "speech topics about saving money," AI can provide multiple directions, like budgeting apps, cutting daily expenses, or building credit. The key is to use AI as a starting point to spark ideas, then apply your own critical thinking and research to refine the topic into something original and effective.

By combining personal experiences, interests, internet resources, and AI tools, students can expand their pool of possible topics and then refine those ideas into a speech that is purposeful, engaging, and appropriate for the assignment.

Example 6.2.1

- Classroom Assignment: A student asked to give a 5-minute informative speech chooses the topic "Three ways to save money on textbooks" by combining the professor's direction (informative speech), time limits, and personal experience.
- Campus Event: A student preparing to speak at a wellness workshop selects "How to manage stress during finals week" after reflecting on their own struggles, researching online strategies, and refining the topic with AI prompts
- Student Organization Meeting: A student asked to speak at a campus club meeting chooses the topic "How to create a simple monthly budget as a college student" by drawing from personal financial experiences, reviewing online budgeting resources, and tailoring the topic to the interests of fellow students.

Key Takeaways

- Effective topic selection requires balancing the professor's directions, time constraints, type of speech, audience, and subject area.
- Personal experiences, areas of interest, internet resources, and AI tools are valuable starting points for brainstorming meaningful topics.

- A strong topic is both manageable for the speaker and engaging for the audience.

Exercises

- Write one potential speech topic that comes from your own personal experience.
- Identify one subject you are interested in and turn it into a possible speech topic.
- Ask an AI tool (like ChatGPT) to suggest three topics on “college life” and choose one that interests you most.

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6.3: Narrowing your Topic

Narrowing Your Topic

One of the most common challenges students face is having too much information for the time allowed. A five to ten minute speech cannot cover everything about a broad subject like “student finance,” but it can focus on one or two important parts of that subject. Narrowing your topic means deciding which aspects of your research are most important for your audience and your purpose (Lumen Learning, n.d.). The key is to remember: your goal is not to tell your audience everything you know, but to select the ideas that best support your purpose and fit the time frame (Beebe & Beebe, 2018).

Steps to Narrow a Topic

Narrowing your topic is about **focus,** deciding what matters most for your audience, your purpose, and your time. A well-narrowed topic makes it possible to give enough detail to be meaningful without overwhelming your audience.

- Identify the **Core** Purpose
  - Ask: “Am I trying to inform, persuade, demonstrate, or entertain?”
  - Example: If your purpose is to inform, your speech might focus on explaining three ways college students can start saving money.
- Select the Most Relevant Subtopics
  - Break down the big topic into smaller pieces and choose the ones most useful for your audience (LibreTexts, 2022).
  - Example: From the broad topic of “student finance,” you could select budgeting apps, cutting everyday costs, and opening a savings account.
- Limit the Number of Main Points
  - For a short speech, three main points is usually enough.
  - Example: Instead of covering “all aspects of student finance,” you might focus on how to set up a budget, how to save small amounts weekly, and how to avoid common money mistakes.
- Decide What to Leave Out
  - Ask: “What information is interesting, but not necessary?”
  - Example: Detailed explanations of student loan structures may be useful for research but are too complex for a short speech on basic saving strategies.
- Think About Time per Point
  - Divide your time realistically: with a 7-minute speech and three points, you have about two minutes per point plus an introduction and conclusion.
  - Example: You might spend 2 minutes explaining how to use a budgeting app, 2 minutes on easy ways to cut costs, and 2 minutes on starting an emergency savings fund.

Using AI Prompts to Narrow your Topic

Artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT can be extremely helpful when moving from a general topic to a specific speech topic (Bozkurt, 2024). The way you write your prompt, he question or request you type into the **AI**, determines the quality and usefulness of the response. A clear, focused prompt produces more helpful ideas, while a vague prompt may result in broad or unfocused answers. This is why learning how to use **prompts** matters: it allows you to move from brainstorming possibilities to shaping a well-defined topic for your speech.

Basic Prompts

A basic prompt is short and simple. It can be useful when you are just starting to explore a subject and want a wide range of ideas.

Example Basic Prompt: “Give me some speech topics about students and money.”

Possible Response: Saving money on textbooks, budgeting weekly expenses, using credit responsibly, or finding part-time jobs.

This type of prompt is helpful for generating general categories but may still leave you with topics that are too broad.

In-Depth Prompts

An in-depth prompt is more detailed. It narrows the focus by including the type of speech, audience, or specific outcome you want. This helps the AI provide targeted and practical suggestions.

Example In-Depth Prompt:"Suggest three specific persuasive speech topics for college students about how to get started with saving money, keeping in mind limited budgets and common student expenses."

Possible Response: Persuading students to set aside $5 a week into a savings account.

Convincing students to use free budgeting apps to track daily spending.

Encouraging students to cut back on coffee shop purchases and redirect that money into an emergency fund.

This type of prompt not only generates specific speech topics but also tailors them to your audience and purpose.

From Basic to In-Depth

Think of prompting as a process: start broad to explore, then narrow your requests until you find a focused, workable topic. For example:

Basic Prompt: "Give me topics about students and money."

Refined Prompt: "Give me informative speech topics about how students can manage their finances."

In-Depth Prompt: "Create three demonstration speech topics for college students on how to start saving money, with step-by-step actions they can take this semester."

By moving from a basic to an in-depth prompt, you go from a general idea ("students and money") to a clear, purposeful topic ("how to start saving money this semester").

Main Idea: The prompt you use matters because it directs the **AI**. The more specific and detailed your prompt, the more useful and relevant the results will be for selecting a focused speech topic.

Example 6.3.1

- Too Broad: "How to manage student finances."
- Still Broad: "How to budget, save, invest, pay off loans, build credit, and plan for retirement as a student."
- Narrowed for 5–10 minutes: "Three simple ways college students can start saving money this semester: using a free budgeting app, setting aside $5 a week, and cutting down on unnecessary daily expenses."

Key Takeaways

- Narrowing a topic ensures that it fits the time limit and allows for enough depth without overwhelming the audience.
- AI prompts can help refine a broad idea into a clear, specific speech topic when used thoughtfully.
- Moving from basic prompts to in-depth prompts mirrors the process of moving from broad subjects to focused, audience-centered topics.

Exercises

- Take the broad topic "technology" and narrow it into a specific 5-minute informative speech topic.
- Write a basic AI prompt for the topic "student life" and note the general ideas it produces.

- Rewrite your prompt to be more in-depth, specifying the type of speech and audience.

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6.4: Thesis Statement and Putting it all together

Selecting a speech topic is more than simply picking something that "sounds interesting"(Beebe & Beebe,2018). It is a deliberate process that begins with understanding your **purpose**, whether you are demonstrating a process, informing your audience, persuading them to take action, or entertaining them with stories and humor. Once the **purpose** is established, the challenge becomes **narrowing** the subject so that it fits the time available and remains meaningful to the audience. Too broad a topic will overwhelm both you and your listeners; to narrow a topic may lack depth. By carefully choosing and refining, you strike the balance that allows you to cover your subject clearly and effectively.

Several strategies make this process easier. Start by following your professor's guidelines, which set the boundaries for what kind of speech you are expected to give. Then consider practical constraints: How much time do you have? What type of speech will you give? Who is your audience, and what will they care about? Finally, reflect on your own resources: your personal experiences, your areas of interest, and the wealth of information available through the internet and **AI** tools. Each of these sources can generate possibilities, but your task is to filter them into focused, specific topics that connect with your audience and support your **purpose**.

In the end, purpose and topic are inseparable: one gives direction, and the other gives substance. When you know why you are speaking and what you will focus on, you can craft a speech that is clear, engaging, and meaningful to your audience. By mastering the process of moving from broad ideas to narrowed topics, you not only set yourself up for success in your speeches but also practice a valuable life skill: taking large amounts of information and distilling it into what matters most.

The Thesis Statement

Now that you have picked a topic, narrowed it down to a specific idea, you need to complete the process by making a simple thesis statement. A thesis statement is a single sentence that identifies the central idea of a speech and tells the audience what the speech will be about. It serves as a roadmap for both the speaker and the audience by clearly stating the topic and the main points that will be discussed. A strong thesis statement is specific, focused, and directly connected to the speech's purpose.

One helpful way to create a thesis statement is to ask two questions:

What is it about? (The topic)
What about it? (The main points or key message)

For example, suppose your topic is beginning financial planning for college students.

What is it about?
Beginning financial planning for college students.
What about it?
Students can improve their financial future by creating a budget, building savings, and managing credit responsibly.

Combining these answers creates a thesis statement:

Beginning financial planning can help college students achieve greater financial stability through budgeting, saving money, and responsible credit management.

Notice how the thesis statement tells the audience both the topic (beginning financial planning) and the main points (budgeting, saving, and credit management). As a result, listeners know what to expect, and the speaker has a clear guide for organizing the speech.

Example 6.4.1

- Example 1: Informative Speech
  - Purpose: To inform
  - Topic: Study habits for college students

    - Narrowed Topic: Three study techniques that improve exam performance
    - Thesis Statement: Effective study habits can improve exam performance through time management, active recall, and spaced practice.
- Example 2: Demonstration Speech
    - Purpose: To demonstrate
    - Topic: Beginning financial planning for college students
    - Narrowed Topic: How to create a simple monthly budget
    - Thesis Statement: College students can create a simple monthly budget by tracking income, categorizing expenses, and setting savings goals.
- Example 3: Persuasive Speech
    - Purpose: To persuade
    - Topic: Exercise for college students
    - Narrowed Topic: Why students should exercise regularly during the semester
    - Thesis Statement: Regular exercise can help college students reduce stress, improve concentration, and maintain better overall health.

Key Takeaways

- A successful speech topic begins with a clear purpose and is narrowed to fit the audience, assignment, and time available.
- Personal experiences, interests, internet resources, and AI tools can help generate topic ideas, but the speaker must refine them into a focused subject.
- A thesis statement serves as a roadmap by clearly identifying the topic and the main points that will be discussed.

Exercises

- Purpose to Topic Exercise: Choose one speech purpose (demonstrate, inform, persuade, or entertain) and create a topic that matches that purpose; then explain why the topic fits the speech type.
- Topic **Narrowing** Exercise: Start with a broad topic such as finance, health, or technology and narrow it into a specific topic that could realistically be covered in a 5–10 minute speech.
- Thesis Statement Exercise: Select a narrowed topic, answer the questions "What is it about?" and "What about it?", and use your answers to write a one-sentence thesis statement for a speech.

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- **AI (Artificial Intelligence):** Computer systems designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as generating ideas, answering questions, or suggesting speech topics.
- **Areas of Interest:** Personal hobbies, passions, or fields of study that can serve as inspiration for speech topics.
- **Aristotle:** A Greek philosopher who defined three classical types of speeches: deliberative (future action), forensic (past actions), and epideictic (praise/blame in the present).
- **Basic Prompts:** Simple, broad AI queries that generate general topic ideas but may lack focus.
- **ChatGPT:** An AI tool that uses natural language processing to generate text, answer questions, and help refine or narrow speech topics.
- **Cicero:** A Roman rhetorician who outlined three purposes of speech: to inform (*docere*), to delight (*delectare*), and to move (*movere*).
- **Core:** The central purpose or main idea of a speech that guides what information is most important.
- **Demonstration Speech:** A type of speech where the speaker shows the audience how to do something step by step.
- **Entertain Speech:** A speech designed to amuse, engage, or inspire the audience through stories, humor, or creativity.
- **General Purpose:** The broad overall goal of a speech: to demonstrate, inform, persuade, or entertain.
- **In-Depth Prompts:** Detailed AI queries that specify purpose, audience, or type of speech, generating more focused and usable topic suggestions.
- **Informative Speech:** A type of speech designed to increase the audience's knowledge or understanding of a subject.
- **Internet:** A resource for finding current, trending, or credible information that can inspire or support speech topics.
- **Main Points:** The primary divisions of a speech's body, usually limited to two or three in a short speech.
- **Narrowing:** The process of refining a broad subject into a specific, focused topic that fits within time, audience, and purpose.
- **Personal Experience:** Individual life events or firsthand knowledge that can provide authentic and relatable speech topics.
- **Prompts:** The questions or requests typed into an AI tool to generate ideas or information.
- **Purpose:** The reason for giving a speech, answering the question "Why am I speaking?"
- **Relevant:** Information or examples that directly support the purpose and topic of the speech.
- **Specific Purpose:** A precise statement that combines the general purpose with the exact topic and audience outcome.
- **St. Augustine:** An early Christian thinker who adapted rhetorical theory into three purposes of speech: to teach, to delight, and to move.
- **Subtopics:** Smaller, focused parts of a larger subject that help organize a speech.
- **Topic:** The subject matter of a speech, chosen and narrowed to match the purpose, audience, and time available.

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6.6: Discussion Questions

1. How does identifying the general purpose of a speech (to demonstrate, inform, persuade, entertain) help a speaker decide on a more precise specific purpose?
2. Aristotle, Cicero, and St. Augustine each described different “types” or “purposes” of speeches how do their ideas connect to the four modern categories of speeches we use today?
3. Why is it important to consider factors like professor’s directions, time limits, type of speech, and audience when selecting a topic?
4. In what ways can personal experiences and areas of interest lead to stronger, more engaging speech topics?
5. How can the internet be both a helpful and potentially unreliable tool when brainstorming or researching topics for a speech?

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7: RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

Research and Evidence

Research and **evidence** form the foundation of effective public speaking because they allow you to build messages that are accurate, credible, and meaningful to your audience. Whether you are exploring a new topic, supporting a claim, or explaining an idea, the strength of your speech depends on the quality of the information you gather and how thoughtfully you use it. In this chapter, you will learn how to conduct research, evaluate sources, recognize bias, use AI responsibly, and integrate evidence into outlines, presentations, and verbal citations. You will also practice distinguishing trustworthy information from weak or misleading sources so you can communicate with confidence, clarity, and ethical responsibility. By mastering research and evidence, you become a stronger speaker and a more informed and critical thinker in everyday life.



Figure 7.1: Sherlock Holmes (CC0; OpenAI. (2025) via ChatGPT (December version) [Large language model].

Learning Objectives

- Describe the research process and the role of credible resources in developing clear, accurate, and ethical public speaking content.
- Explain how to evaluate sources including websites, articles, social media, and AI-generated content for credibility, bias, and reliability.
- Interpret research findings and evidence in order to integrate them effectively into outlines, visual aids, verbal citations, and presentations.

7.1: Introduction

7.2: Types of Research and Resources

7.3: AI in Research

7.4: Confirmation Bias in Research

7.5: Evaluating Research

7.6: Citing Sources

7.7: Glossary

7.8: Discussion Questions
7.9: References

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7.1: Introduction

Understanding Research in Public Speaking

Research is the process of gathering information to better understand a topic, solve a problem, or make an informed decision (Harvard University Library, 2022). It involves asking questions, seeking credible answers, evaluating what we find, and using that knowledge to guide our choices. Although many people hear the word "research" and think of academic papers or scientific studies, the truth is that we all conduct research every day often without realizing it. Whenever you compare prices before buying a new phone, read restaurant reviews, plan a vacation, look up how-to videos, or evaluate what classes to take next semester, you're researching. You are gathering evidence, weighing options, and using information to make choices that matter to you.

How We Use Research in Everyday Life

- Comparing prices for textbooks, laptops, meal plans, streaming services, or apartment rentals.
- Reading reviews before buying products, choosing restaurants, or selecting online services.
- Planning travel, including comparing flights, checking hotel ratings, researching transportation, and finding things to do.
- Selecting classes by researching instructors, course difficulty, prerequisites, and scheduling options.
- Managing finances, such as searching for scholarships, comparing bank accounts, learning about budgeting, or reading about credit scores.
- Exploring career options by researching majors, internships, job requirements, salaries, and professional expectations.
- Solving everyday problems, like learning how to fix something, cook a meal, organize a schedule, or improve study habits.
- Checking facts when hearing rumors, social media claims, or information that seems questionable.
- Deciding on entertainment, such as researching movie trailers, game reviews, concert details, or event options..
- Learning new skills through YouTube tutorials, how-to guides, or step-by-step articles.
- Comparing viewpoints, such as researching multiple sides of a debate, social issue, or topic before forming an opinion.
- Supporting academic work, including researching articles, books, and evidence for assignments, speeches, and presentations.

Research In Public Speaking

In public speaking, research serves the same essential purpose: it strengthens your ideas, supports your arguments, and increases your credibility with an audience. Strong speakers do not rely on opinions alone they build their messages on **accurate**, relevant, and trustworthy information. Whether you are delivering an informative speech about mental health resources, a persuasive speech about financial literacy for college students, or a special-occasion speech that celebrates a person or event, research helps you speak with authority and confidence. It allows you to clarify complex ideas, anticipate audience questions, and present evidence that is grounded in facts rather than assumptions or guesses.

This chapter will guide you through the research process from start to finish. You will learn how to find quality sources, evaluate **credibility**, organize your information, and ethically use evidence in your speeches. By the end, you will see that research is not only a foundation of strong public speaking, but also a practical life skill, one you already use every day and can continue to improve as a communicator, student, and decision-maker.

Example 7.1.1

- Example 1: Research in Everyday Life, Planning a Trip
  - Jordan wants to take a weekend trip during spring break. To plan it well, Jordan starts researching without even thinking of it as "research." They compare flight prices on different travel sites, check hotel reviews, look up public transportation options, and read articles about local attractions. Jordan also searches for budget-friendly restaurants and finds YouTube videos that show what the city looks like and what activities other travelers recommend. By gathering information, evaluating credibility (such as ignoring overly dramatic one-star reviews), and comparing choices, Jordan uses everyday research skills to make smart, informed decisions about their trip.
- Example 2: Research in Public Speaking, Preparing a Speech

- Aaliyah is preparing an informative speech on financial stress among college students. To build a credible speech, she begins by researching the topic. She reads articles from her campus library database, checks statistics from government and nonprofit websites, and finds credible studies that explain why financial stress affects academic performance. Aaliyah also looks for real examples and quotes that help humanize the issue. Once she gathers her research, she evaluates which sources are trustworthy, organizes her evidence into clear main points, and uses the information to support her speech. Just like with everyday research, she asks questions, compares sources, checks accuracy, and uses reliable information to make her message stronger.

Key Takeaways

- Research is a normal part of everyday life, helping us make informed decisions about everything from travel and shopping to school and finances.
- In public speaking, strong research strengthens your credibility, supports your ideas, and helps you communicate clearly and ethically.
- Learning how to find, evaluate, and use reliable information is an essential skill that improves both your speeches and your daily decision-making.

Exercises

- Everyday Research Log: Choose one recent everyday decision (buying something, planning an outing, selecting a class) and write a brief reflection on what information you gathered, where they found it, and how it influenced your decision.
- Speech Topic Research Mini-Search: Pick a possible speech topic and spend 10 minutes finding three credible sources, then write one to two sentences explaining why each source is trustworthy.
- Compare-and-Check Exercise: Use one credible source and one questionable online source on a similar topic, and identify at least two differences in credibility, clarity, or accuracy between the two.

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7.2: Types of Research and Resources

Understanding Research and Resources

Research is the process of asking questions, gathering information, evaluating what you find, and using that knowledge to better understand a topic or support a claim. In public speaking, research helps you build credibility, clarify ideas, and provide your audience with accurate, trustworthy information. It turns your speech from personal opinion into informed communication backed by evidence.

Resources are the tools, materials, and sources of information you use during the research process. These can include books, academic journals, credible websites, interviews with experts, government reports, videos, and even carefully used AI tools (Roose, K., 2023). Each resource contributes pieces of information that help you develop a complete and well-supported message.

Finding quality resources is essential because not all information is reliable, accurate, or unbiased. High-quality resources strengthen your speech, help you avoid misinformation, and ensure that your audience receives clear and trustworthy insights. When you choose strong resources, you demonstrate responsibility as a speaker and respect for your listeners by giving them evidence they can depend on.

Different Resources for Finding Evidence

- **Primary Sources**: These are original, firsthand accounts or direct evidence related to a topic.
  - Example: A recorded interview with a civil rights activist, a scientific study reporting new experimental findings, or a diary entry from a World War II soldier.
- Books: Often secondary sources that provide background, context, and expert interpretation.
  - Example: A history book analyzing the causes and consequences of the Great Depression.
- Academic Journals: Peer-reviewed publications that include both primary research articles and secondary literature reviews.
  - Example: A study in the New England Journal of Medicine presenting new clinical trial results on a medication.
- Websites: Online platforms that vary in credibility; best used when they come from reputable organizations.
  - Example: Data from the U.S. Census Bureau or policy analysis from a university research center.
- News Articles: Report current events and may include interviews, data, or expert commentary.
  - Example: A Washington Post article covering the recent Supreme Court decision and its social impact.
- Interviews and Expert Testimony: Direct statements from knowledgeable individuals can be valuable primary sources.
  - Example: A climate scientist explaining the results of their research in a podcast interview.
- Documentaries and Videos: Can be primary or secondary, depending on the content; they provide visual and narrative evidence.
  - Example: A frontline documentary showing real-time footage from war zones or healthcare systems.
- Surveys and Polls: Quantitative primary data showing public opinion or behavior.
  - Example: A Pew Research Center survey showing trends in social media use among teens.
- Databases: Organized collections of academic and professional resources, often a mix of primary and secondary sources.
  - Example: JSTOR for scholarly articles or Statista for statistics and charts.

The Internet: The good, the bad, the ugly

The internet has transformed the way students research and prepare speeches. With just a few clicks, you can access government reports, academic studies, news articles, expert opinions, videos, and AI-generated summaries from around the world (Pew Research Center, 2023). This makes the internet an incredibly powerful tool for finding information, learning about unfamiliar topics, and gathering evidence to support your ideas. However, the internet is also filled with misinformation, **biased** content, outdated information, and sources that may appear credible but lack expertise or evidence (Bergstrom & West, 2020). In some cases, information is intentionally misleading, designed to persuade rather than inform. As a result, successful researchers must learn to evaluate sources carefully rather than accepting everything they find online. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different types of websites helps you separate reliable information from questionable content and become a more informed and critical thinker.

The internet can be viewed as having the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good includes reliable sources such as government

websites, educational institutions, scholarly publications, and reputable news organizations that provide evidence-based information. The bad includes sources that may contain errors, **bias**, incomplete information, or weak evidence, even when the authors have good intentions. The ugly includes misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, manipulated content, and sensationalized material designed to attract attention rather than provide accurate information. As a public speaker and researcher, your responsibility is not only to find information but also to **evaluate** its quality, credibility, and usefulness before sharing it with an audience.

- Government Websites (.gov): Description: Official websites of federal, state, or local governments.
  - Examples: CDC.gov, Census.gov, EPA.gov
  - They provide verified data, statistics, legal information, and public policy updates.
- Educational/Academic Websites (.edu): Run by colleges, universities, and research institutions.
  - Examples: Harvard.edu, Stanford.edu, Purdue OWL
  - Often contain scholarly articles, research, and educational resources authored by experts.
- Reputable News Outlets: Professional journalism organizations with editorial standards.
  - Examples: NPR, Reuters
  - These outlets strive for accuracy, though some may have editorial bias. Cross-check facts with other sources.
- Nonprofit and Think Tank Organizations (.org): Often advocacy, policy, or research-based organizations.
  - Examples: PewResearch.org, Brookings.edu, WHO.int
  - They offer in-depth research but may reflect a particular mission or viewpoint, check for transparency.
- Blogs: Personal or informal commentary, sometimes by experts, sometimes not.
  - Examples: Medium.com, personal websites
  - May include opinion and anecdote. Only reliable if written by a credentialed expert and backed by evidence.
- Special Interest or Advocacy Sites: Promote specific causes, beliefs, or ideologies.
  - Examples: NRA.org, Greenpeace.org
  - May selectively present facts to support their agenda. Good for understanding viewpoints but not as sole evidence.
- Commercial Websites (.com): For-profit businesses, including news, product, and content sites.
  - Examples: WebMD.com, History.com
  - Some, like WebMD or History.com, are generally reliable. Others may prioritize clicks or sales over accuracy.
- User-Generated Content Sites: Platforms where content is posted by the general public.
  - Examples: Wikipedia, Quora, Reddit, TikTok
  - Content can be edited or posted by anyone. Use for background or leads, verify elsewhere.

Critical analysis of historical and contemporary public discourse

Comparative rhetoric broadens and deepens our understanding of public discourse by examining how communication differs across cultures. When conducting research, speakers should compare diverse Western and non-Western philosophies and approaches to public speaking. For example, traditional Western approaches often emphasize informative and persuasive speaking, while other cultural traditions may place greater value on storytelling, narrative, collective wisdom, and shared experiences. Evaluating a variety of cultural perspectives helps speakers select more inclusive resources, recognize different ways of presenting knowledge, and communicate more effectively with diverse audiences.

Using Podcasts, YouTube, and Social Media

Podcasts, YouTube videos, and social media platforms can be valuable research tools when used carefully. They often provide expert interviews, demonstrations, current events, and diverse perspectives that may not be available in traditional sources. However, because anyone can create and publish content online, it is important to evaluate the credibility of the creator before relying on the information. Look for content produced by recognized experts, universities, professional organizations, government agencies, established journalists, or reputable media outlets. Check whether claims are supported by evidence, statistics, or references to reliable sources. Use podcasts, YouTube videos, and social media posts as starting points for learning about a topic or finding ideas, but verify important information through scholarly articles, government websites, academic institutions, or other trusted sources before including it in a speech. Remember: popularity, views, likes, and followers do not guarantee accuracy.

When in doubt, cross-reference the information with multiple trusted sources, and check for authorship, citations, and publication date to ensure credibility.

Example 7.2.1

- Example 1: College Student Preparing a Presentation
  - Tiana is giving an informative speech in her public speaking class about the impact of part-time work on college success. She begins her research by exploring credible resources through the campus library database, government education statistics, and reputable nonprofit organizations. She avoids blogs with unclear authors and social media posts that lack evidence. By gathering strong data, such as GPA trends, national employment surveys, and expert studies, Tiana builds a well-supported speech that helps her audience understand the issue clearly and trust the information she presents.
- Example 2: Professional Preparing a Business Presentation
  - Marcus, a marketing manager, must present a proposal to his company's leadership about expanding into a new target demographic. He researches industry reports, market analysis studies, and consumer behavior data from credible business research firms. He also reviews financial forecasts and compares competitors' strategies using verified sources. By relying on high-quality, professional resources instead of assumptions or unverified online claims, Marcus strengthens his proposal, increases his credibility, and provides decision-makers with accurate information to guide the company's next steps.

Key Takeaways

- Research is a purposeful process of gathering and evaluating information to support clear, credible, and well-informed communication.
- Resources are the tools and sources of information such as books, scholarly articles, expert reports, and credible websites that strengthen the quality of your research.
- Choosing high-quality, trustworthy resources is essential for creating speeches and presentations that your audience can rely on and respect.

Exercises

- Source Hunt Exercise: Find one high-quality resource and one low-quality resource on the same topic, then write a brief comparison explaining what makes one credible and the other questionable.
- Resource Mapping Activity: Choose a speech topic and create a list of at least five types of resources they could use (e.g., government data, scholarly articles, expert interviews), explaining how each resource would strengthen the research.
- Quality Check Reflection: Select one source they plan to use for a future assignment and briefly evaluate it for accuracy, author credibility, bias, and relevance, summarizing whether it is appropriate for academic research.

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7.3: AI in Research

Using AI in the Research Process

Artificial intelligence (AI), including tools like ChatGPT, refers to computer systems designed to analyze information, recognize patterns, and generate helpful responses based on large amounts of training data. AI can be a powerful partner during the research process because it can help you brainstorm topics, summarize complex ideas, generate search terms, or explain difficult concepts in simpler language (Roose, K., 2023). However, AI is not perfect, its information is not always accurate, up-to-date, or complete. Because AI generates responses based on patterns rather than verifying facts, it can occasionally produce errors, outdated information, or confident-sounding answers that may not be true.

For public speaking, the most responsible way to use AI is as a creative partner, not a replacement for real research. AI can help you get started by providing ideas, outlines, or examples, but it should never be your only source. You must still find and **cite** credible evidence from books, articles, experts, and reputable websites. AI can support your thinking, but your role as the speaker is to evaluate accuracy, confirm facts, and build your message with trustworthy sources that you have checked yourself. Strong speakers use AI to enhance their research, not to avoid it.

Examples of How to Use AI as a Research Partner

- Brainstorming Topics: Ask AI to generate a list of possible speech topics based on your interests, major, or assignment guidelines, helping narrow your choices more efficiently.
- Creating Search Terms: Use AI to develop keywords and phrases they can use when searching library databases, Google Scholar, or credible websites.
- Clarifying Complex Ideas: When encountering a difficult academic article or concept, AI can explain it in simpler language so you can better understand what you are reading (while still citing the original source, not the AI).
- Outlining a Speech: AI can help generate a preliminary speech outline, which you can refine, expand, and support with credible research you find on your own.
- Evaluating Perspectives: Ask AI to list multiple viewpoints on a topic so you can see the larger conversation before confirming those perspectives with real sources.
- Practicing Explanations: You can “teach” your topic to an AI tool by explaining it and asking follow-up questions, helping to identify gaps in understanding.
- Generating Examples: AI can provide everyday examples, analogies, or scenarios that you can use to illustrate a point, again, only after you verify accuracy and adjusts the examples for your audience.

Using Quality Prompts in AI for Better Research

AI tools can be helpful research partners when students know how to communicate with them clearly. In public speaking, students often use AI to brainstorm topics, explain difficult ideas, create outlines, find examples, or organize information for a speech. However, the quality of the AI’s response depends heavily on the quality of the prompt. A vague prompt often produces a vague answer, while a clear and detailed prompt can produce information that is more focused, useful, and connected to the speaker’s purpose. Learning how to write strong prompts helps students move from general questions to specific, researchable ideas while still remembering that AI should be used as a starting point, not as a final authority (Roose, K., 2023).

What is a Prompt

A prompt is the question, instruction, or request you give to an AI tool to guide its response. In other words, a prompt is how you tell the AI what you want. The clearer and more detailed your prompt, the more accurate and useful the information the AI can provide.

Levels and Types of Prompts (From General to Specific)

AI prompts can range from very broad to extremely precise. As prompts become more specific, the AI can give more focused,

relevant, and accurate responses.

- General Prompt (Broad, Basic): These provide a simple topic but lack detail.
  - Example: “Tell me about anxiety.”
- Guided Prompt (Adds Direction or Focus): These give the AI a general topic plus a direction for the response.
  - Example: “Explain anxiety in college students.”
- Detailed Prompt (Adds Purpose and Context): These include the goal of the information and who it is for.
  - Example: “Explain anxiety in college students for an informative speech and include three major causes.”
- Highly Specific Prompt (Adds Format, Tone, Length, and Constraints): These give the AI clear expectations for how the information should appear.
  - Example: “Explain anxiety in college students for an informative speech. Include three causes, two statistics from credible sources, and a brief example. Write at a college freshman reading level in one paragraph.”
- Expert/Custom Prompt (Role-Based Prompting): These ask the AI to take on a specific role or perspective.
  - Example: “Act as a speech coach. Create a 3-point outline for a speech on anxiety in college students, including evidence types I should look for and questions my audience may have.”

Steps to Improve Your Prompting

- Start with Your Purpose: Know what you’re trying to learn
- Are you exploring a new topic?, Gathering examples?, Summarizing complex information?
- Add Context: Tell the AI who you are and what you need
- “I am a college student preparing a 5-minute informative speech…”
- Specify Format and Length: Tell the AI how to organize the answer
- “Write in bullet points,” “Create a 3-point outline,” “Use simple language.”
- Include Constraints or Requirements: Mention what must be included
- Number of examples, Statistics, Definitions, Audience type, Reading level
- Ask Follow-Up Questions: Treat prompting as a conversation
- “Give me more examples”, “Rewrite this at a lower reading level”, “What evidence should I look for to support these points?”
- Verify Information
- Always double-check facts with credible sources, AI is a thinking partner, not a final authority.
- Refine and Revise: If the answer isn’t quite right, adjust the prompt
- “Make this more concise”, “Add a comparison”, “Remove technical terms.”

Example 7.3.1

- Example 1: Using AI as a Partner When Researching for a Speech
  - Maria is preparing a persuasive speech on why college students should build an emergency savings account. Before diving into databases and articles, she uses AI to help her get started. She asks a highly specific prompt: “Act as a financial educator. Create a 3-point outline on why emergency savings matter for college students, and list keywords I should search in library databases.”
  - The AI gives her a strong starting structure and useful search terms like “financial resilience,” “emergency fund statistics college students,” and “unexpected expenses higher education.” Maria then uses these terms to find credible sources, verify data, and build a stronger, evidence-based speech. AI helped her brainstorm and organize but the actual research and fact-checking came from her.
- Example 2: Using AI as a Partner When Preparing for an Interview
  - Jamal has an upcoming interview for a part-time campus job and wants to feel confident about answering common questions. He uses AI as a practice tool by giving a clear prompt: “Pretend you are a hiring manager. Ask me five common interview questions for a campus student job, one at a time, and give feedback after each answer.”
  - AI walks him through realistic questions and provides suggestions on how to clarify his strengths, describe past experiences, and improve his confidence. Jamal still prepares his own stories, examples, and qualifications, but the AI helps him rehearse effectively and identify areas where he needs stronger explanations.

Key Takeaways

- AI tools can be valuable research partners that help students brainstorm ideas, organize information, and clarify complex

concepts.
- Because AI is not always fully accurate, students must confirm facts with credible sources and avoid using AI as a substitute for real research.
- Effective prompting, using clear, specific instructions significantly improves the quality, usefulness, and reliability of AI-generated responses.

Exercises

- Prompt Improvement Activity: Use a basic prompt (e.g., “Explain credit scores”) and revise it into a more specific, detailed prompt, then compare the quality of the AI responses.
- AI + Credible Source Check: Use AI to brainstorm three research ideas for a speech topic, then locate and verify at least one credible source for each idea.
- Role-Based AI Practice: Create a role-based prompt (e.g., “Act as a financial advisor…”) to generate initial guidance, then write a short reflection explaining how AI helped and what information still required independent research.

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7.4: Confirmation Bias in Research

Introduction to Bias in Research

Bias is a natural part of being human, every one of us sees the world through our own experiences, values, and assumptions (Kahneman, 2011). These mental shortcuts help us make quick decisions in everyday life, but they can also shape how we interpret information without us realizing it. Bias doesn't only influence us as readers and researchers; it also affects the people who create the information we rely on. Authors of research papers, journalists, content creators, organizations, and even professors can include bias intentionally or unintentionally in the way they explain, support, or frame ideas. This means that every piece of information we encounter, an article, a study, a speech, a class lecture, comes from someone with a perspective.

In the research process for public speaking, recognizing bias is essential. Bias can shape which facts are highlighted or ignored, how evidence is presented, and even which sources are chosen (Bergstrom & West, 2020). Understanding your own biases helps you avoid searching only for information that supports what you already believe. Being aware of potential bias in sources helps you evaluate credibility, question assumptions, and build stronger, more balanced speeches. In this section, we will explore different types of bias, including **confirmation bias** and **information bias**, and learn strategies to identify and reduce their influence on your research and your communication.

We See What We Want To See

The phrase "we see what we want to see" illustrates how confirmation bias leads us to notice and remember information that supports our existing beliefs while ignoring or dismissing evidence that contradicts them (Kahneman, 2011). . This selective perception reinforces our opinions, making it harder to consider opposing viewpoints or change our minds.

The Misconception: Your opinions are the result of years of rational, objective analysis.

The Truth: Your opinions are the result of years of paying attention to information which confirmed what you believed while ignoring information which challenged your preconceived notions.

What is Confirmation Bias:

It is a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions.

We actively seek out and assign more weight to evidence that confirms our hypothesis, and ignore or under weigh evidence that could disconfirm our hypothesis.

When we have an idea, we start to reason about that idea, we are going to mostly find arguments for our own idea. We are going to come up with reasons why we're right, we're going to come up with justifications for our decisions.

We're not going to challenge ourselves.

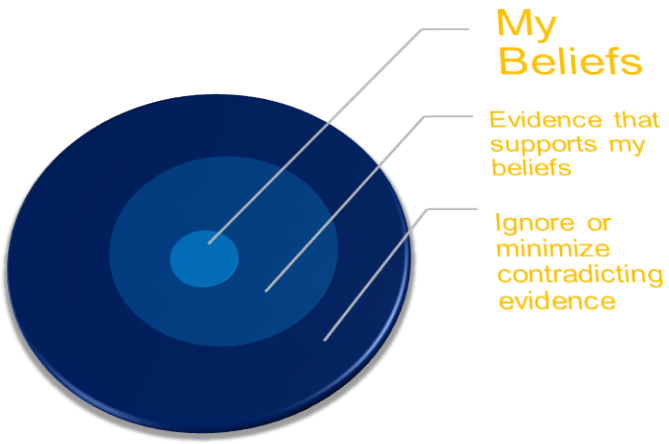


Figure: Model that presents layered multiple circles to convey connection: the center circle represents “My beliefs”; surrounding the center circle is a larger circle, “Evidence that supports my beliefs; and finally the larger circle “ignore or minimize contradicting evidence. (OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (September version) [Large language model]. chat.openai.com [chat.openai.com])

Confirmation bias occurs when an individual looks for and uses the information to support their own ideas or beliefs. It also means that information not supporting their ideas or beliefs is disregarded (Kahneman, 2011).

Confirmation bias often happens when we want certain ideas to be true. This leads individuals to stop gathering information when the retrieved evidence confirms their own viewpoints, which can lead to preconceived opinions (prejudices) that are not based on reason or factual knowledge. Individuals then pick out the bits of information that confirm their prejudices.

Example of Confirmation Bias:

Consider the debate over gun control. Let's say Sally is in support of gun control. She seeks out news stories and opinion pieces that reaffirm the need for limitations on gun ownership. When she hears stories about shootings in the media, she interprets them in a way that supports her existing beliefs.

Henry, on the other hand, is adamantly opposed to gun control. He seeks out news sources that are aligned with his position. When he comes across news stories about shootings, he interprets them in a way that supports his current point of view.

These two people have very different opinions on the same subject and their interpretations are based on their beliefs. Even if they read the same story, their bias tends to shape the way they perceive the details, further confirming their beliefs.

“Thanks to Google, we can instantly seek out support for the most bizarre idea imaginable. If our initial search fails to turn up the results we want, we don’t give it a second thought, rather we just try out a different query and search again.” Justin Owings

How to Overcome Confirmation Bias

- Notice Your Bias in Action: Pay attention to moments when you're only drawn to information that supports what you already believe.
- Pause and Question Your Assumptions: Before accepting something as true, ask yourself: Am I believing this just because it aligns with my view?
- Actively Challenge Your Beliefs: Look for evidence that contradicts your opinion, make it your goal to try to prove yourself wrong.
- Seek Discomfort in Opposing Views: Read, watch, or discuss credible arguments from the other side and sit with the discomfort rather than dismissing them.
- Balance the Evidence: Weigh supporting and opposing information equally, applying the same standard of scrutiny to both.
- Ask Better, Neutral Questions: Frame questions like “What’s the strongest case against my view?” rather than “Why am I

right?”
- Reflect and Revise: Keep track of what you believed, what challenged it, and how your thinking evolved to encourage ongoing reflection.

Information Bias

Information bias occurs when the information we receive, search for, or rely on is distorted, incomplete, or misleading, which affects how we understand a topic and the conclusions we draw. It often happens because of how information is selected, presented, or emphasized, sometimes intentionally, but often unintentionally.

Information bias can come from the source itself, from the way data is collected, or from how we interpret what we read.

Examples of Information Bias

- Selective Presentation of Facts
  - An article about student loans highlights only the success stories of students who paid off debt quickly but does not include examples of students who struggled, creating a misleading impression of how easy repayment is.
- Overgeneralizing From Limited Data:
  - A blog post claims “most college students don’t use a budget” based on a small survey of friends or followers, which does not represent the larger student population.
- Misleading Statistics
  - A website states that “80% of students overspend each month” without explaining how “overspending” was defined or measured, making the statistic unreliable or misleading.
- Ignoring Important Context
  - A study reports that students who work full-time have lower GPAs, but the summary leaves out critical context—such as socioeconomic factors—that could influence both work hours and academic performance.
- Biased Source Selection
  - A persuasive blog uses only sources from financial companies trying to sell credit cards, leaving out nonprofit or government resources that might provide more balanced guidance for students.
- Sensationalized Headlines
  - A news article exaggerates a small finding (e.g., “College Students Are Terrible With Money!”) even though the actual research shows only a minor trend.
- Missing or Cherry-Picked Evidence
  - A video about meal-prepping claims students can always save $200 a month, but it only includes examples of students who cook every meal and ignores those with limited time or resources.
- Influencer-Driven Misinformation
  - A TikTok or YouTube creator posts a short video claiming that “you can raise your credit score by 100 points in one week” but leaves out important details or uses incorrect information, giving viewers an unrealistic or misleading understanding of how credit scores actually work.

What About Scholarly Articles?

Even research, scholarly articles, and expert reports can contain information bias because they are created by people who make choices about what information to include, how to present it, and which methods to use. Researchers decide which questions to ask, which data to collect, which results to highlight, and how to interpret their findings and each of these choices can unintentionally shape or distort the information (Bergstrom & West, 2020). Funding sources, institutional pressures, personal assumptions, or limited sample sizes can also influence what appears in a study. Even when written by experts, research is not free from bias, which is why critical thinking and careful evaluation are essential parts of the research process.

In the following section, we will explore how to recognize the difference between strong, credible research and weak or misleading information. You’ll learn practical strategies for evaluating sources, identifying red flags, and determining whether evidence is reliable enough to support a college-level speech.

Example 7.4.1

- Example 1: Bias in an Internet Source
  - Sofia is researching financial literacy for her speech and finds a popular blog claiming that "college students should always use credit cards to build credit." The article features testimonials and links to several credit card applications, but it leaves out important risks such as high interest rates, late fees, and credit misuse. Because the website benefits financially from credit card sign-ups, the information is selectively presented, creating information bias that pushes a one-sided message.
- Example 2: Bias in a Scholarly Article
  - Ramon is reading a peer-reviewed study about stress and academic performance. The article concludes that students who attend tutoring programs have significantly higher GPAs, but the study never mentions that the tutoring center funded the research. The funding source may have influenced what questions were asked, which data were emphasized, or how the results were interpreted. Even though the article is scholarly, this potential conflict of interest introduces bias that Ramon must consider when deciding how much weight to give this evidence.

Key Takeaways

- Bias can appear in our own thinking as well as in the articles, videos, and research created by others, so recognizing it is essential for strong, ethical research.
- Information bias influences how facts are selected, framed, or interpreted, which can distort our understanding of a topic if we are not careful.
- Evaluating sources for accuracy, balance, and credibility helps speakers avoid biased evidence and build more trustworthy, audience-centered speeches.

Exercises

- Compare Two Sources: Find one internet article and one scholarly article on the same topic, then identify at least two potential biases in each and explain how those biases might influence the message.
- Bias Spotting in Media: Watch a short YouTube or TikTok video explaining a financial or college-related topic and write a brief reflection describing any missing information, selective facts, or biased framing they noticed.
- Self-Bias Check: Choose a topic you already have an opinion about and write a short paragraph identifying your own potential confirmation biases and how those biases could shape the way you search for or interpret information.

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7.5: Evaluating Research

Why Evaluating Resources Matters

Evaluating resources is one of the most important steps in producing high-quality research (Harvard University Library, 2022). In a world where information is everywhere online articles, videos, social media posts, podcasts, blogs, and even AI tools not all sources are accurate, reliable, or trustworthy. Some information may be outdated, misleading, biased, or simply incorrect, and using weak sources can weaken your arguments, confuse your audience, and damage your credibility as a speaker.

Strong public speaking requires strong research, and strong research begins with knowing how to judge the quality of the information you find. By learning to evaluate resources effectively, you can identify credible authors, verify facts, recognize bias, and select evidence that truly supports your message. This skill helps you become a more careful researcher, a more confident speaker, and a more informed consumer of information both inside and outside the classroom.

Website Evaluation Checklist

Authority: Who is responsible for the site?

- Who is the author or organization behind the site? Is the author clearly named? Is there an institutional affiliation (university, research center, government agency)?
- What are the author's credentials or expertise? Are degrees, job titles, or professional experience listed and relevant to the topic?
- Is there clear contact information? Can you find a name, email, phone number, or physical address for verification?
- Does the URL suggest a reputable affiliation? .edu (educational), .gov (government), .org (nonprofit), .com (commercial), .mil (military), .net (ISP)—generally, .edu and .gov are the most reliable.

Objectivity: Is the purpose of the site clear?

- Is the site's purpose or mission stated? Look for a 'Mission,' 'About Us,' or 'Purpose' section.
- Who is the intended audience? Is the tone professional, academic, general public, or persuasive?
- Is the content factual or opinion-based? Are statements supported with evidence, or are they emotionally charged and opinion-driven?
- Is the site transparent about content selection? Are criteria for including information or sources explained?
- Are sponsors or affiliations disclosed? Look for funding sources, advertisers, or affiliations that may bias the content.

Accuracy: Is the information trustworthy and well-supported?

- Are facts and claims documented with sources? Are citations, footnotes, or references included?
- Can information be verified with other sources? Do facts match those from credible print or academic sources?
- Are quality links provided? Are external links to respected, relevant sources (not broken or spammy)?

Currency: Is the information up to date?

- Is there a publication or last-updated date? Check for a date stamp at the top or bottom of the page.
- Is the information current for the topic? For fast-changing fields (e.g., technology, health), is the info less than 1–2 years old?

Usability: Is the site user-friendly and reliable?

- Is the site easy to navigate? Are menus, search features, and layout intuitive and organized?
- Is the content readable and appropriate for the audience? Avoid overly technical jargon unless it's intended for experts.
- Are there noticeable spelling or grammar errors? Poor writing may indicate a lack of professionalism.
- Can you easily find the home page? Look for a link to the homepage or parent organization.
- Is the site stable and accessible? Does it load quickly? Do all pages and links work reliably?

Checklist for Evaluating Social Media Sources (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, X, etc.)

Author / Creator

- Can you identify who created the content (name, credentials, background)?
- Does the creator have expertise or real experience related to the topic?
- Has this creator shared credible content in the past?

Purpose and Intent

- Is the content meant to inform, persuade, entertain, or sell something?
- Is there a financial motive (sponsored content, affiliate links, ads)?
- Does the creator appear to be presenting balanced information or pushing a single viewpoint?

Accuracy of Information

- Does the creator cite any credible sources, data, or research?
- Can the claims be verified through reputable, independent sources?
- Are facts presented clearly, or are they oversimplified or exaggerated?

Bias and Framing

- Does the content leave out important context or opposing viewpoints?
- Is emotional or sensational language used to influence the audience?
- Are images, clips, or statistics being edited in a misleading way?

Quality and Professionalism

- Is the information well-organized and clearly presented?
- Does the creator correct mistakes or update old videos/posts?
- Are comments, duets, stitches, or follow-up videos raising credible concerns?

Impact

- After watching/reading, do you understand the topic better, or do you feel confused?
- Would this content strengthen a college-level speech once verified, or is it too unreliable?

Article Evaluation Checklist

Currency: The Timeliness of the Information

- When was the information published or posted? Check the date of publication to ensure the content is recent enough for your topic.
- Has the information been revised or updated? Look for update notices or revision dates to confirm the information is current.
- Are the links functional? Test all links, broken links may indicate outdated or poorly maintained content.

Relevance: The Importance of the Information for Your Needs

- Who is the intended audience? Determine whether the article is written for experts, students, or the general public.
- Is the information at an appropriate level? Ensure the content is not too basic or overly technical for your research needs.
- Would you be comfortable using this source for a research paper? Ask yourself whether the quality and tone of the article meet academic standards.

Authority: The Source of the Information

- Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor? Identify the individual or organization responsible for the content.
- Are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given? Check for professional or academic affiliations that establish

expertise.
- What are the author's qualifications to write on the topic? Look for degrees, experience, or publication history relevant to the subject.
- Is there contact information, such as a publisher or e-mail address? Reliable sources usually provide a way to contact the author or publisher.
- Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? Domains like .edu, .gov, or .org often indicate more trustworthy sources.

Accuracy: The Reliability, Truthfulness, and Correctness of the Content

- Is the information supported by evidence? Citations, data, and references to other credible sources help verify accuracy.
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed? Check whether the article has been **peer-reviewed** or professionally edited.
- Can you verify any of the information in another source? Cross-reference the facts with other reliable sources.
- Does the language or tone seem biased and free of emotion? Objective writing avoids extreme or emotional language.
- Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors? Frequent errors may signal lack of professionalism or credibility.

Purpose: The Reason the Information Exists

- What is the purpose of the information? Determine whether the goal is to inform, persuade, entertain, or sell.
- Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?

Transparency about motives or goals indicates trustworthiness.

- Is the information fact? opinion? propaganda? Understand the nature of the content to assess bias or reliability.
- Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?

Balanced presentations are more credible than one-sided arguments.

- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases? Recognize underlying influences that might shape the content.

Checklist for Evaluating AI-Generated Research (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, etc.)

Accuracy and Verification

- Have you checked all facts, statistics, and examples through credible, independent sources?
- Does the AI provide references and can those references be verified as real and correct?
- Does the information sound plausible but may be oversimplified or lacking context?

Bias and Completeness

- Is the AI presenting one viewpoint or giving a balanced explanation?
- Did the AI leave out key information, nuances, or limitations of a topic?
- Could the AI be reflecting common biases found in online data?
- Clarity and Understanding

Does the AI explanation make sense for your speech, audience, or assignment?

- Is the language appropriate (reading level, tone, accuracy)?
- Does the response help you understand the topic enough to find real sources?

Prompt Quality

- Was your prompt clear, specific, and detailed?
- Would improving your prompt (adding context, length, or purpose) lead to a better response?
- Did you ask follow-up questions to refine the results?

Use and Ethical Considerations

- Are you treating AI as a partner, not a substitute, for research?
- Are you avoiding citing the AI directly and instead using it to guide you to real, credible sources?
- Can you explain how you used AI in your research process if asked?

Reliability

- After verification, does the AI-generated information hold up as accurate and useful?
- Does the final product reflect your own understanding, analysis, and judgment?

Example 7.5.1

- Example 1: College Student Evaluating Resources for a Presentation
  - Naomi is preparing an informative speech on how social media influences spending habits among college students. She finds a popular TikTok video that claims "most students buy things impulsively because of influencer pressure." Before using this in her speech, she evaluates the source: she checks whether the creator has expertise (they don't), examines whether evidence is cited (none is provided), and notices that the video uses dramatic language to attract views. Naomi decides the video is not a credible resource. Instead, she examines a scholarly article from her campus library database that includes actual survey data and clear methodology. Because the study provides transparent research, reliable statistics, and balanced conclusions, Naomi uses that evidence to support her main points.
- Example 2: Professional Evaluating Resources for a Business Presentation
  - Elena, a project manager, is preparing a presentation proposing new software for her company. She begins researching by reviewing industry blogs, vendor websites, and promotional videos, but she recognizes these sources may be biased toward selling a product. To evaluate quality, she checks who authored the information, looks for independent reviews, and compares claims with reports from reputable business research firms. She also examines cost analyses from neutral consulting groups to verify savings projections. By prioritizing independent, data-driven sources over marketing materials, Elena builds a balanced, well-supported business presentation her leadership team can trust.

Key Takeaways

- Evaluating resources helps ensure that the information you use in a speech is accurate, credible, and trustworthy.
- Not all sources, whether social media, websites, scholarly articles, or AI tools are equally reliable, so careful analysis is essential.
- Strong speakers and professionals build their arguments on well-evaluated, high-quality evidence that audiences can depend on.

Exercises

- Evaluate Three Resource Types: Locate one social media post, one website, and one scholarly article on the same topic, then use the evaluation checklists to determine which source is strongest and why.
- AI Verification Practice: Generate a short explanation of a topic using AI, then verify each claim using independent credible sources and write a brief reflection on what was accurate, inaccurate, or missing.
- Credibility Ranking Exercise: Provide students with four different sources about the same issue (e.g., a blog, a sponsored article, a research study, and a government report). Students rank them from most to least reliable and explain their reasoning in two to three sentences.

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7.6: Citing Sources

Why Citing Sources Is Essential

Citing sources is a crucial part of responsible and ethical research (American Psychological Association, 2020). When you use information, ideas, statistics, or quotations from others, you must give proper credit to the original authors. Citations show your audience where your evidence comes from, allowing them to check the accuracy of your information and trust the claims you make. In public speaking, citing sources verbally and in written outlines strengthens your credibility, demonstrates academic honesty, and shows that your ideas are supported by reliable research rather than personal opinion alone.

Citing sources also protects you from plagiarism, using someone else's work without acknowledgment which is a serious academic violation. Beyond avoiding penalties, proper citation helps you become a more transparent and trustworthy communicator. It allows your audience to see the depth of your research and understand that your message is built on evidence, not assumptions. When you cite sources, you show respect for the work of others and contribute to a culture of integrity in academic and professional communication.

How to Cite Sources in Your Outline

In your speech outline, citations should be written in APA-style parenthetical references or as full references in a reference list at the end. In the body of the outline, include enough information for your instructor (and you) to know exactly where your evidence came from. This usually includes the author's last name, the year, and sometimes the title if needed for clarity.

How to Cite in the Body of the Outline

- Place the citation at the end of the sentence where you used the information.
- Keep it brief, APA style is standard for public speaking classes.

Examples:

- College students with a budget are more likely to feel in control of their finances (Smith, 2022).
- Emergency savings can reduce stress and improve academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).
- Influencer-driven marketing increases impulse spending among young adults (Nguyen, 2021).

How to Cite in the Reference List (end of outline)

Include the complete APA citation.

Examples:

- Smith, J. (2022). Financial literacy among first-year students. Journal of College Finance, 18(2), 45–59.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2023). Financial wellness and academic performance report. ed.gpv [www.ed.gov]
- Nguyen, L. (2021). The psychology of impulse buying in Gen Z. Marketing Insights Press.

How to Cite Sources in Your Presentation (Verbal Citations)

When speaking, you won't read APA citations aloud. Instead, you give the audience the key information they need to know the source is credible:

- Author or organization
- Date
- Type of source or publication
- Relevance to your point

A verbal citation should sound natural, conversational, and informative not like reading a bibliography.

Examples of **Verbal Citations**

- “According to a 2022 study by financial researcher Jessica Smith…”
- “The U.S. Department of Education reported in 2023 that students with emergency savings experience lower stress levels.”
- “A 2021 article in Marketing Insights Press by psychologist Linh Nguyen explains how social media increases impulse buying.”

How to Put Together a Reference or Bibliography Sheet

Putting together a reference sheet is simple if you follow consistent steps and gather all necessary information as you research.

Collect full source information as you go: Write down the author, title, date, publisher, URL (if online), and other details each time you use a source. This prevents mistakes later and ensures accurate citations.

Format your references in APA style. APA is the most common style used for public speaking classes. Each entry should include:

- Author(s)
- Year of publication
- Title of the work
- Source type (journal, website, book, etc.)
- Publisher or URL

List sources alphabetically, Arrange all entries by the first author's last name. If no author is listed, alphabetize by the organization or the title of the work.

Include only sources you actually used. If you read something but did not use it for evidence, it does not belong on your reference sheet.

Match your reference sheet with your outline. Every in-text citation or verbal reference in your outline should appear on your **reference page** and nothing extra.

Use proper formatting. APA reference lists use hanging indents and double spacing. Your instructor may have a preferred format, so follow the assignment guidelines carefully.

Example (APA Style Reference Entries)

- Smith, J. (2022). Financial habits of first-year college students. Journal of Student Finance, 14(3), 112–125.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2023). Student budgeting and academic performance report. ed.gov [www.ed.gov]
- Nguyen, L. (2021). Impulse buying among young adults. Marketing Research Group.

How to Cite Sources on Visual Slides

When using visuals in a presentation, such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Canva, it’s important to cite your sources so your audience knows where your information, images, or statistics came from. Visual citations should be brief, readable, and placed neatly on the slide, usually at the bottom in smaller text. They do not need to follow full APA format because that would overwhelm the slide. Instead, keep them short but identifiable.

How to Cite on a Slide (Short-Form Citation)

A short citation includes the author or organization and the year, enough to connect the slide to your full reference list at the end.

Examples:

- Source: Smith, 2022
- Data from U.S. Department of Education, 2023
- Image: CDC, 2021

- Chart adapted from Lee & Carter, 2020

Tips for Citing on Slides

- Keep citations small but readable (e.g., 10–12 pt font).
- Place them in a consistent location, usually bottom-left or bottom-right.
- If multiple items on the slide come from different sources, list them separated by commas or on separate lines.
- For images, always include a source, even for free-use images (e.g., Unsplash, Pixabay).

How to Create a Reference Slide

A reference slide (or slides) appears at the end of your presentation and includes full APA citations for every source you used in your research, visuals, and evidence. This functions like a bibliography and shows your instructor and audience that your work is supported by credible sources.

Steps for Creating a Reference Slide

- Title the slide “References” or “Sources.”
- List your sources in alphabetical order by the author’s last name or organization.
- Use full APA format exactly as you would on a written reference page.
- Use a readable font size, usually 18–24 pt, depending on the amount of content.
- If you have many sources, create multiple reference slides rather than crowding one.

Example Reference Slide (APA Style)

References

- Smith, J. (2022). Financial habits of first-year students. Journal of College Finance, 14(3), 112–125.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2023). Student budgeting report. ed.gov [www.ed.gov]
- Nguyen, L. (2021). Impulse buying among young adults. Marketing Research Group.

Image Reference Slide Example

Image Sources

- CDC. (2021). Healthy habits infographic. ed.gov [www.cdc.gov]
- Unsplash. (2023). Student budgeting photo by M. Green. ed.gov [unsplash.com]

Citing Sources When Using AI

When using AI tools such as ChatGPT for research, it is important to remember that AI is not the original source of information. Instead, AI helps generate ideas, summarize concepts, and point you toward topics for further investigation. Any facts, statistics, quotations, or evidence that you include in a speech should be traced back to and cited from the original source where the information was published. If you use AI to help brainstorm, organize, or refine your ideas, follow your instructor's guidelines regarding whether the use of AI should be acknowledged. As a general rule, cite the original articles, books, reports, or websites that provide the information—not the AI tool that helped you find or understand it.

Example 7.6.1

- Example 1: College Student Presenting
  - Ari is giving an informative speech about the benefits of emergency savings for college students. On one of her PowerPoint slides, she presents a chart showing that students with at least $500 saved report lower stress levels. To cite her source, she places a short citation in the bottom-right corner of the slide: Source: U.S. Department of

Education, 2023. At the end of her presentation, she includes a full reference slide listing the complete APA citation for that report along with all other sources used in her research. This process shows her instructor that her data is credible and properly documented.

- Example 2: Professional Business Presentation
  - Daniel, a financial analyst, is presenting a proposal to company executives about shifting budget priorities. One of his slides includes a graph adapted from a market research firm's 2024 industry report. To avoid copyright and credibility issues, he adds a small citation at the bottom of the slide: Data adapted from Gartner Research, 2024. His final slide deck ends with two reference slides that list all full citations in APA format, including the Gartner report, government financial forecasts, and internal company data. By citing his sources clearly, Daniel strengthens his professional credibility and ensures his recommendations are supported by transparent, verifiable information.

Key Takeaways

- Citing sources in both your outline and your presentation strengthens your credibility by showing your audience exactly where your information and evidence come from.
- Verbal and slide citations should be brief and clear, while full APA citations belong on a reference sheet or reference slide at the end of your presentation.
- Using proper citations demonstrates academic honesty, avoids plagiarism, and ensures that your speech is grounded in reliable, transparent research.

Exercises

- Verbal Citation Practice: Choose one source and practice turning the full APA citation into a natural-sounding verbal citation you could use during a speech.
- Slide Citation Activity: Create one sample PowerPoint slide with an image, statistic, or chart and include a correct short-form citation placed neatly on the slide.
- Reference Page Check: Provide students with five sample sources and ask them to create a complete APA reference slide, then trade with a partner to check for formatting accuracy.

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- **Accuracy:** The degree to which information is correct, precise, and supported by verified facts.
- **AI-Generated Content:** Information produced by artificial intelligence tools that must be verified for accuracy, bias, and completeness before use in a speech.
- **Bias:** A personal, cultural, or organizational influence that shapes how information is selected, interpreted, or presented.
- **Citation:** A brief acknowledgment of a source within a speech or outline that gives credit to the original author of the information.
- **Confirmation Bias:** The tendency to search for, interpret, or favor information that supports what you already believe while ignoring contradictory evidence.
- **Credibility:** The audience's perception that the speaker is trustworthy, knowledgeable, and using reliable information.
- **Evidence:** Facts, examples, statistics, expert testimony, or other information used to support a claim in a speech.
- **Evaluation:** The process of judging the quality, accuracy, and reliability of research sources.
- **Information Bias:** A distortion that occurs when information is incomplete, misleading, or presented without necessary context.
- **Multimedia Learning Principles:** Research-based guidelines that explain how audiences process visual and spoken information together during a presentation.
- **Outline Citation:** A short APA-style reference included within a speech outline to show exactly where supporting information came from.
- **Peer-Reviewed Source:** A scholarly article that has been evaluated by experts before publication, making it one of the most credible forms of evidence.
- **Primary Source:** An original, firsthand account such as an interview, study, dataset, or historical document used to support a speech.
- **Reference Page:** A list of full APA citations for every source used in a speech, placed at the end of an outline or presentation.
- **Research:** The systematic process of gathering, evaluating, and using information to develop and support ideas in a speech.
- **Resource:** Any tool or source of information, such as books, articles, websites, videos, or AI tools, used to support a speech.
- **Social Media Source:** Information from platforms like YouTube, TikTok, X, or Instagram that must be carefully evaluated for accuracy and bias.
- **Source Credibility:** The perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the person, organization, or publication providing information.
- **Verbal Citation:** A spoken acknowledgment of a source during a presentation that identifies the author or organization and the date.
- **Website Evaluation:** The process of determining whether an online source is reliable by checking its author, purpose, accuracy, currency, and bias.

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7.8: Discussion Questions

1. How does the quality of your research influence your credibility as a speaker, and what responsibilities do you have to your audience when selecting evidence?
2. In what ways can AI tools be helpful partners in the research process, and what limitations or risks should students be aware of when using them for academic work?
3. Why is it important to recognize both personal bias and the potential bias within sources, and how can bias, intentional or unintentional, shape the message of a speech?
4. What strategies do you use to determine whether a website, social media post, scholarly article, or video is a reliable source, and how might evaluating these differ across platforms?
5. How do proper citations, both verbal and written, contribute to ethical communication, and what challenges do students face when learning to cite sources accurately in speeches?

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7.9: References

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8: OUTLINES, INTRODUCTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction to Outlining

Outlining a speech is one of the most critical steps in the speech preparation process, serving as the blueprint for effective communication. Just as an architect wouldn't construct a building without a solid plan, a speaker should not deliver a speech without an organized structure. A clear outline helps ensure the message is logically ordered, guiding both the speaker and the audience through the **main points** with clarity and purpose. It forces the speaker to define a central idea and arrange supporting details in a way that builds understanding and impact. Without an outline, a speech can easily drift off-topic, become repetitive, or lose the audience's attention altogether. Outlining also encourages thorough research and thoughtful development of content, making the speech more informative and credible. It allows speakers to anticipate potential questions or objections and address them effectively. Moreover, a strong outline makes **transitions** between sections smoother, helping the audience follow along without confusion. For students or novice speakers, it provides a sense of confidence and control during **delivery**, reducing anxiety and increasing fluency. Outlining also enables better time management, ensuring the speech fits within the allotted timeframe without rushing or dragging. Ultimately, an outline is not just a preparatory tool, it is a strategic framework that elevates the quality, clarity, and persuasiveness of a speech.



A persons hands typing an outline on a laptop. OpenAI. (2025). *ChatGPT* (June 14 version) [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com

Learning Objectives

- **Describe** the key elements and techniques of an effective speech introduction that engage the audience, establish tone, and build credibility.
- **Explain** the importance of a well-structured speech body, including organization, supporting evidence, and transitions, while analyzing how various speech topics can be presented to show multiple perspectives.
- **Interpret** the role of effective speech conclusions in reinforcing key messages, enhancing audience recall through techniques like the recency effect, and providing clear closure to the speech.

8.1: The Introduction

8.2: The Body

8.3: The Conclusion

8.4: Putting it all Togehter
8.5: Glossary
8.6: Discussion Questions
8.7: References

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8.1: The Introduction

The Why of an Introduction

Imagine sitting in a classroom, a graduation ceremony, or watching a video online. What grabs your attention first? Most likely, it's the speaker's opening words. A strong introduction is vital because it sets the tone, captures attention, and gives the audience a reason to keep listening. For example, in his TED Talk on motivation, Simon Sinek starts with a simple question: "Why do you get out of bed in the morning?" immediately pulling his audience in with curiosity and relevance (TED, 2009). In today's fast-paced world, where attention spans are short, speakers have only about 30 seconds to make a strong first impression (Gallo, 2014). This is especially true on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, where engaging intros often determine whether viewers keep watching. A well-crafted introduction also previews the message and purpose of the speech, helping the audience understand why it matters. Whether you're presenting a project in class or pitching an idea at work, knowing how to start a speech effectively is a powerful tool. Learning how to create clear, engaging introductions prepares students not only for academic success but also for real-world communication. Public speaking isn't just for politicians and actors, it's a skill used in everyday life, job interviews, social activism, and leadership roles.

An introduction to a speech is vital because it grabs the audience's attention and sets the stage for what's to come. It helps the speaker establish credibility and connect with the audience right from the beginning. A clear introduction also previews the main points, so listeners know what to expect. Without a strong opening, the audience may quickly lose interest or become confused about the purpose of the speech. The introduction creates a first impression that can influence how the entire message is received. In short, it's the foundation that supports the rest of the speech.

Step One: The Attention Getter

Grabbing the audience's attention at the start of a speech is crucial because it sets the tone and determines whether people will stay engaged. An effective opening creates curiosity, sparks interest, and makes the audience want to hear more. It also helps establish a connection between the speaker and the listeners, making the message feel relevant and worth their time. Without a strong opening, even a well-prepared speech can lose impact before it really begins.

Creative Ways to open the speech

- Short Story
  - Begin with a brief, relatable narrative that draws listeners in and connects emotionally to your topic (e.g., "When I was 12, I watched my neighborhood lose its only library, and that moment changed how I see education.").
- Illustration
  - Use a vivid verbal description or analogy to paint a mental picture that highlights your main idea (e.g., "Imagine your mind as a garden, what you plant is what grows.").
- Picture
  - Display an image that visually represents your topic to immediately grab attention and spark curiosity (e.g., a photo of a melting glacier to introduce a speech on climate change).
- Video
  - Play a short, relevant clip that sets the tone, introduces the issue, or provokes thought around your speech theme (e.g., a 30-second clip of a teen speaking about mental health for a talk on youth wellness).
- Asking a rhetorical question
  - This immediately gets the audience thinking and personally involved (e.g., "How would you feel if you couldn't access clean water every day?").
- Using a surprising fact or statistic
  - A shocking or unexpected piece of information can instantly capture interest (e.g., "Did you know that the average person checks their phone 96 times a day?").
- Quoting someone relevant or famous
  - A strong, relevant quote can add credibility and set the theme (e.g., "Nelson Mandela once said, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.'").
- Telling a joke or using humor

    - When appropriate, humor can break the ice and make the audience feel more relaxed (e.g., “I used to be indecisive. Now I’m not sure.”).
- Making a bold statement
    - Starting with a confident or provocative claim can spark attention and curiosity (e.g., “Social media is the most powerful and dangerous tool of our generation.”).
- Engaging the audience with a poll or quick activity
    - Interactivity can energize the room and create a sense of participation (e.g., “Raise your hand if you’ve ever forgotten someone’s name two seconds after hearing it.”).
- Using a prop or object
    - A physical item can provide a visual anchor and make your message more memorable (e.g., holding up a plastic bottle to start a speech about ocean pollution).

Step Two: The "What" and the "Why"

As a speaker, one of the first things you must clearly communicate in your introduction is the topic of your speech and why it matters. This sets the foundation for your audience to understand what they are about to hear and why they should care. When you state your topic early, you give your audience a clear focus and help them mentally prepare to engage with your message. Explaining why the topic is important builds relevance—it shows the audience how the subject connects to their lives, concerns, or interests. Without this context, listeners may lose interest or fail to see the value in your message. Giving this information up front also establishes your purpose and direction, which enhances the speech's clarity and impact. In an academic or professional setting, this part of your introduction signals that you are organized, thoughtful, and respectful of your audience's time. Ultimately, naming and justifying your topic helps you earn your audience's attention and trust from the very beginning.

Step Three: The Main Points

Stating the main points in the introduction gives your audience a roadmap of where your speech is headed, which helps them follow along more easily. It sets clear expectations and allows listeners to mentally organize the information as you present it. This structure also strengthens your credibility by showing that you are well-prepared and purposeful. Without previewing your main points, your audience may become confused or miss key parts of your message.

Format of the introduction to an outline

- **Attention Getter** (write it out in a few sentences)
- The What and Why (write out what you are speaking on and why it is important)
- **Preview** of Main Points (write it out as a complete sentence with *signposting*: i.e.: “today I’ll be going over I, II and III”. You are simply telling us what your main points will be)

Example 8.1.1

- Attention Getter: Imagine graduating from college not just with a degree, but also with a growing investment portfolio that’s already earning money for you. What if instead of waiting until you’re older, you could start building wealth today while you’re still a student?
- The What and Why: Today I’m talking about beginning investing for college students, what it is, how to start, and why now is the best time to begin. It’s important because the earlier you invest, the more time your money has to grow, and developing smart financial habits now can shape your future success.
- Preview of Main Points: Today I’ll be going over three key points: I) why starting early gives you a major advantage, II) simple and accessible ways to begin investing as a student, and III) common mistakes to avoid and how to stay consistent.

Key Takeaways

- A strong introduction sets the tone and gives your audience a clear reason to listen.
- Attention-getting strategies like stories, questions, or surprising facts can immediately engage your audience.
- A clear and engaging introduction should preview your main points and establish your speech’s purpose

Exercises

- On the topic of "beginning investing for a college student", fill in the appropriate information for an introduction: Attention Getter, The What and the Why, Preview the main points.
- Introduction Swap Activity: Students write a short introduction for a given speech topic and then swap with a partner. Each partner evaluates whether the introduction grabs attention, clearly states the topic, and previews the main points, offering constructive feedback for improvement.
- Hook Writing Practice: Students are given a list of topics and must write three different attention-getters for each, such as a question, a statistic, and a short story. This helps them practice using various strategies to engage an audience right from the start.

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8.2: The Body

The Why of the Body of an Outline

The body of a speech is where the speaker builds their case, explains their ideas, and delivers the evidence that supports their message. While the introduction grabs attention and the **conclusion** leaves a lasting impression, it's the body that carries the weight of the speech. Think of it like the middle of a sandwich, without it, you're left with just the bread. For example, when Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson gave his 2020 graduation speech online, he used the body of his talk to tell personal stories about failure and perseverance, helping students connect with his message in a real and emotional way (MTV News, 2020). A strong body is organized with clear main points, logical reasoning, and supporting **facts**, which helps the audience follow along and understand complex topics. According to communication scholars, well-structured speeches improve comprehension and audience retention (Lucas, 2020). Whether explaining climate change, presenting a business pitch, or sharing a personal story, the speaker's message must be developed clearly and with purpose. Learning how to outline and organize the body of a speech teaches students to think critically, speak logically, and communicate more effectively. These are important skills not only for school but also for careers, leadership, and everyday conversations.

The body of a speech is vital because it contains the main content and core message the speaker wants to deliver. It provides structure and detail through organized main points and supporting evidence, helping the audience understand and retain the information. A well-developed body builds credibility by showing the speaker's knowledge and preparation. It also keeps the audience engaged through examples, stories, and clear explanations. Without a strong body, the speech lacks depth and substance, making it difficult to persuade or inform effectively. In short, the body is where the speech's purpose truly comes to life.

The Body of the Speech

Important note – complete the body of your speech before developing the **introduction** and conclusion!

Completing the body of your speech outline first is essential because it helps you clearly organize your main ideas and supporting points, which are the core of your message. Once the body is fully developed, it becomes much easier to craft an introduction that accurately previews what you'll cover and a conclusion that effectively summarizes and reinforces those points. This approach also ensures better logical flow and coherence throughout your speech. Without a well-structured body, your introduction and conclusion may feel disconnected or lack focus.

Main Points and Sub-points

Main points in a speech outline are the key ideas or arguments that support your overall message or purpose. They serve as the backbone of your speech, organizing the content into clear, manageable sections for both the speaker and the audience. Main points are important because they provide structure, help maintain focus, and guide the audience through your message in a logical and impactful way. Without well-defined main points, a speech can feel scattered and hard to follow.

Sub-points in a speech outline are the specific details, examples, or evidence that support and develop each main point. They add depth and clarity by breaking down the broader ideas into more understandable and convincing parts. Sub-points are important because they help strengthen your argument, keep your speech organized, and make your message more engaging and credible. Without sub-points, your main ideas may seem vague or underdeveloped.

Here are 15 types of sub-points you can use in a speech outline to develop and support your main points:

- Examples
  - Specific instances that clarify or prove your point (e.g., "For instance, schools that offer free lunch programs see higher student attendance.").
- Statistics
  - Numerical data that provides factual support (e.g., "According to the CDC, 1 in 5 teens experiences a mental health disorder each year.").

- Expert Testimony
  - Insights or statements from credible authorities (e.g., “Dr. Lisa Damour, a clinical psychologist, states that anxiety can be a normal and healthy part of adolescent development.”).
- Definitions
  - Clarifying key terms or concepts for better understanding (e.g., “Resilience is defined as the ability to recover quickly from difficulties.”).
- Anecdotes
  - Brief, engaging personal or relevant stories (e.g., “I’ll never forget the first time I spoke in front of a crowd—it was a total disaster, but I learned more from that moment than any textbook could teach.”).
- Descriptions
  - Sensory details that help paint a vivid picture (e.g., “The classroom buzzed with nervous energy, and the scent of dry erase markers filled the air.”).
- Comparisons
  - Showing similarities to explain or strengthen a point (e.g., “Just like a battery needs recharging, so do our minds after a long week of stress.”).
- Contrasts
  - Highlighting differences to show distinctions or oppositions (e.g., “Unlike traditional lectures, interactive discussions keep students actively involved and improve learning.”).
- Historical References
  - Events from the past that relate to your topic (e.g., “The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s shows how collective action can lead to powerful social change.”).
- Quotations
  - Powerful or relevant statements from known figures (e.g., “As Maya Angelou once said, ‘People will forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.’”).
- Analogies
  - Comparisons between two things to explain a concept (e.g., “Learning to speak in public is like learning to ride a bike—it takes practice, balance, and a few falls.”).
- Cause and Effect
  - Showing how one event or action leads to another (e.g., “When students sleep less than six hours, their ability to focus and retain information drops significantly.”).
- Problem and Solution
  - Identifying an issue and proposing a way to address it (e.g., “Teen vaping is on the rise, but increasing education and regulation can help reverse the trend.”).
- Visual Aids/Descriptions of Visuals
  - Describing or referencing images, charts, or graphs (e.g., “As shown in this pie chart, over 40% of energy consumption comes from fossil fuels.”).
- Personal Experience
  - Sharing your own story to build connection and authenticity (e.g., “As someone who grew up in a bilingual household, I know how language can shape identity and understanding.”).

Transitions

A transition is simply a complete sentence summarizing previous main point and introduction next main point. But why is it essential to a speech?

Transitions between main points are essential because they guide the audience smoothly from one idea to the next, helping maintain clarity and flow throughout the speech. Without effective transitions, a speech can feel disjointed or confusing, making it harder for listeners to follow and stay engaged. Examples of strong transitions include phrases like “Now that we’ve covered the causes, let’s look at the effects,” or “Next, I’ll explain how this solution works in real life.”

Format of the body of the outline

I. First Main Point (write it out as a complete sentence)

1. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
   a. Supporting Material
   b. Supporting Material

2. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
    a. Supporting Material
    b. Supporting Material

Transition: A complete sentence summarizing previous main point and introduction next main point (i.e. I just talked about I and now I will talk about II)

II. Second Main Point (Write it out as a complete sentence)

1. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
    a. Supporting Material
    b. Supporting Material
2. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
    a. Supporting Material
    b. Supporting Material

Example 8.2.1

I. Starting early gives college students a powerful advantage when it comes to investing.

1. **Subpoint:** Compound interest allows your investments to grow significantly over time.
    a. Supporting Material: According to the SEC (2021), starting at age 20 with just $50/month could grow to over $115,000 by retirement.
    b. Supporting Material: Waiting even 10 years to start could cut your total by more than half, even if you invest more later.
2. **Subpoint:** Beginning early builds discipline and long-term financial habits.
    a. Supporting Material: Learning to invest with small amounts builds confidence and reduces risk.
    b. Supporting Material: Early experience with investing can lead to smarter financial decisions later in life

Transition: I just talked about the long-term benefits of starting early, and now I will talk about simple and accessible ways college students can begin investing today.

II. College students can begin investing using simple. beginner friendly tools.

1. **Subpoint:** Investing apps and platforms make it easy to start with small amounts.
    a. Supporting Material: Apps like Acorns, Robinhood, and Fidelity allow students to invest with as little as $5.
    b. Supporting Material: Many platforms offer educational content and automatic investing features.
2. **Subpoint:** Index funds and ETFs are smart choices for beginners.
    a. Supporting Material: Index funds spread your money across many companies, lowering your risk.
    b. Supporting Material: Warren Buffett recommends index funds for most investors because they are low-cost and diversified.

Key Takeaways

- A well-developed speech body is essential for clearly communicating your main message to the audience.
- Strong organization, including clear main points and transitions, makes your speech easier to follow and more impactful.
- Supporting material such as facts, examples, and expert testimony strengthens your argument and adds credibility.

Exercises

- Main Point Mapping: Students choose a topic and create a speech body outline with three main points, each supported by at least two subpoints and pieces of evidence. They then trade outlines with a peer for feedback on clarity, organization, and logical flow.
- Evidence Builder Workshop: Students are given a sample main point and must brainstorm different types of supporting material examples, statistics, expert quotes, and anecdotes to strengthen it. This activity helps them understand how to

develop and support arguments effectively in the body of a speech.
- From General to Specific Exercise: Students choose one main point from a speech and develop it by adding two subpoints and at least two specific examples, facts, or explanations. This activity helps students practice turning broad ideas into clearly developed sections that provide the audience with meaningful information

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8.3: The Conclusion

The Why of a Conclusion

Think about the last time you heard a memorable speech, chances are, it ended with a powerful message that stuck with you. Conclusions are just as important as introductions because they leave the final impression on the audience. A strong conclusion reminds listeners of the main points, reinforces the message, and gives a clear call to action or takeaway. For example, in Malala Yousafzai's speech to the United Nations, she ends by stating, "One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world," a line that continues to be quoted (United Nations, 2013). A recent study highlights the importance of strong speech conclusions, emphasizing the "recency effect", the psychological phenomenon where individuals better recall the last items presented. This effect underscores the significance of crafting impactful endings in speeches to enhance audience retention. In the article, Willingham discusses how the recency effect influences memory retention, particularly in educational settings, reinforcing the idea that conclusions play a pivotal role in how information is remembered (Willingham, 2015).

A conclusion to a speech is vital because it leaves the audience with a lasting impression. It reinforces the main points and helps listeners remember the key message. A strong conclusion provides closure, signaling that the speech is coming to an end in a clear and confident way. It also offers the speaker a final chance to inspire, persuade, or motivate the audience. Without a clear conclusion, the speech may feel incomplete or unfocused. In short, a well-crafted conclusion brings everything together and strengthens the overall impact of the speech.

The Conclusion

The great thing about the conclusion is that it is simply the introduction in reverse. This is because it reinforces your message and leaves a lasting impression on your audience. It gives you the opportunity to summarize your key points and remind listeners why your topic matters. A strong conclusion also helps provide a sense of closure, signaling that the speech is coming to an end in a thoughtful, organized way. Without a clear conclusion, your message may feel unfinished or forgettable, weakening the overall impact of your presentation.

Format of the conclusion to an outline

Summary (write it out as a complete sentence or paragraph)

Why important (remind audience why the topic is important)

Clincher (i.e. end with something interesting or simply "thank you for listening")

Effective techniques for creating impactful clinchers to conclude a speech

- Call to Action
  - Encourage the audience to take a specific step or apply what they've learned (e.g., "So next time you see someone struggling, don't hesitate to lend a hand.").
- Memorable Quotation
  - End with a powerful quote that reinforces your message (e.g., "As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'The time is always right to do what is right.'").
- Thought-Provoking Question
  - Leave the audience thinking with a deep or reflective question (e.g., "What kind of world do you want to help create?").
- Vivid Image or Metaphor
  - Use a strong image or metaphor that ties back to your speech (e.g., "Let's be the spark that ignites a wave of change.").
- Repetition of a Key Phrase
  - Repeat a central phrase or theme for emphasis and rhythm (e.g., "We can make a difference. We will make a difference.").
- Personal Story or Anecdote
  - Conclude with a short, meaningful story that brings your message full circle.
- Humor

    - Leave them smiling with a light, appropriate joke or funny insight related to your topic.
- Vision for the Future
    - Paint a hopeful or inspiring picture of what could happen if your message is embraced.
- Powerful Statistic or Fact
    - Close with a surprising or impactful statistic that reinforces your message.
- Simple Gratitude
    - A sincere “Thank you for listening” can be effective when paired with a confident and heartfelt tone.

Example 8.3.1

- Summary: In this speech, I explained why it’s important to start investing early, how college students can get started with simple tools, and how to avoid mistakes while building consistent habits.
- Why Important: Investing doesn’t have to wait until you have a high-paying job starting now, even with just a little, can lead to significant growth and financial independence.
- **Clincher:** So the next time you buy a $7 coffee, ask yourself, what if I invested that money instead? Your future self might just thank you.

Key Takeaways

- An effective conclusion reinforces your main message and leaves the audience with a lasting impression.
- Using powerful clincher techniques, such as quotes, calls to action, or vivid imagery can make your speech more memorable.
- A well-structured conclusion brings closure to your speech and helps the audience understand why your message matters.

Exercises

- On the topic of "beginning investing for a college student", fill in the appropriate information for a conclusion: Summary, Why Important, Clincher.
- Conclusion Rewrite Exercise: Students are given the body of a sample speech and must write their own conclusion, including a summary, the significance of the topic, and a strong clincher. They then compare their versions with peers to evaluate which conclusions are most impactful and why.
- Clincher Challenge: Students brainstorm and write three different types of clinchers, a quote, a call to action, and a thought-provoking question for the same topic. This helps them practice ending a speech memorably and reinforces the different strategies available for strong conclusions

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8.4: Putting it all Togehter

In Summary

The phrase "80 percent of a successful speech is the outline, only 20 percent is the actual presentation" highlights how crucial preparation is to effective public speaking. A well-crafted outline helps organize your thoughts, ensuring your message is clear and logical. It also boosts confidence by providing a solid structure to follow, reducing the chances of forgetting key points. Ultimately, a strong outline is the foundation that supports every successful delivery.

Here is a sample format of an outline and the complete sample outline:

The Format

Introduction

Attention Getter (write it out in a few sentences)

The What and Why (write out what you are speaking on and why it is important)

Preview of Main Points (write it out as a complete sentence with *signposting*: i.e.: “today I’ll be going over I, II and III”. You are simply telling us what your main points will be)

Body

I. First Main Point (write it out as a complete sentence)
   A. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
      1. Supporting Material
      2. Supporting Material
   B. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
      1. Supporting Material
      2. Supporting Material

Transition: A complete sentence summarizing previous main point and introduction next main point (i.e. I just talked about I and now I will talk about II)

II. Second Main Point (write it out as a complete sentence)
   A. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
      1. Supporting Material
      2. Supporting Material
   B. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
      1. Supporting Material
      2. Supporting Material

Transition: A complete sentence summarizing previous main point and introduction next main point (i.e. I just talked about I and now I will talk about II)

III. Third Main Point (write it out as a complete sentence)
   A. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
      1. Supporting Material
      2. Supporting Material
   B. **Subpoint:** (write it out as a complete sentence)
      1. Supporting Material
      2. Supporting Material

Conclusion

Summary (write it out as a complete sentence or paragraph)

Why important (remind audience why the topic is important)

Clincher (i.e. end with something interesting)

The Outline in Action

Introduction

Attention Getter: Imagine graduating from college not just with a degree, but also with a growing investment portfolio that's already earning money for you. What if instead of waiting until you're older, you could start building wealth today while you're still a student?

The What and Why: Today I'm talking about beginning investing for college students, what it is, how to start, and why now is the best time to begin. It's important because the earlier you invest, the more time your money has to grow, and developing smart financial habits now can shape your future success.

Preview of Main Points: Today I'll be going over three key points: I) why starting early gives you a major advantage, II) simple and accessible ways to begin investing as a student, and III) common mistakes to avoid and how to stay consistent.

Body

I. Starting early gives college students a powerful advantage when it comes to investing.

1. **Subpoint:** Compound interest allows your investments to grow significantly over time.
   a. Supporting Material: According to the SEC (2021), starting at age 20 with just $50/month could grow to over $115,000 by retirement.
   b. Supporting Material: Waiting even 10 years to start could cut your total by more than half, even if you invest more later.
2. **Subpoint:** Beginning early builds discipline and long-term financial habits.
   a. Supporting Material: Learning to invest with small amounts builds confidence and reduces risk.
   b. Supporting Material: Early experience with investing can lead to smarter financial decisions later in life.

Transition: I just talked about the long-term benefits of starting early, and now I will talk about simple and accessible ways college students can begin investing today.

II. College students can begin investing using simple, beginner-friendly tools.

1. **Subpoint:** Investing apps and platforms make it easy to start with small amounts.
   a. Supporting Material: Apps like Acorns, Robinhood, and Fidelity allow students to invest with as little as $5.
   b. Supporting Material: Many platforms offer educational content and automatic investing features.
2. **Subpoint:** Index funds and ETFs are smart choices for beginners.
   a. Supporting Material: Index funds spread your money across many companies, lowering your risk.
   b. Supporting Material: Warren Buffett recommends index funds for most investors because they are low-cost and diversified.

Transition: I just explained how students can get started with investing easily and safely. Now I will talk about common pitfalls to avoid and how to stay consistent.

III. Avoiding mistakes and staying consistent is key to long-term investing success.

1. **Subpoint:** New investors often panic during market dips or chase high-risk trends.
   a. Supporting Material: A study by Dalbar Inc. shows the average investor underperforms the market due to emotional decisions.
   b. Supporting Material: Long-term investors who stay the course typically earn higher returns over time.
2. **Subpoint:** Staying consistent, even with small contributions, builds momentum.

a. Supporting Material: Setting up automatic contributions ensures you continue investing without having to think about it.
b. Supporting Material: Consistency matters more than perfection—investing regularly, even in small amounts, is more effective than trying to time the market.

Conclusion

Summary: In this speech, I explained why it's important to start investig early, how college students can get started with simple tools, and how to avoid mistakes while building consistent habits.

Why Important: Investing doesn't have to wait until you have a high-paying job starting now, even with just a little, can lead to significant growth and financial independence.

Clincher: So the next time you buy a $7 coffee, ask yourself, what if I invested that money instead? Your future self might just thank you.

Example 8.4.1

When Steve Jobs introduced the first iPhone in 2007, his speech followed a clear outline that built anticipation, starting with context, moving through key product features, and ending with a bold vision for the future. This structured approach helped keep the audience engaged and made the message memorable, turning a product launch into a historic moment in technology.

Key Takeaways

- A strong speech outline is essential for organizing ideas clearly and delivering a logical, effective message.
- Preparing a detailed outline builds speaker confidence and reduces the risk of forgetting important points during the presentation.
- The majority of a successful speech depends on preparation, with the outline serving as the foundation for impactful delivery.

Exercises

- Using the outline format, create an outline on a subject matter that you are interested in. Think about your hobbies, interests, school projects or something new you would like to learn.
- Reverse Outlining Exercise: Students watch a short speech or TED Talk and create an outline based on what they heard, identifying the introduction, main points, and conclusion elements. This reinforces how outlines function in real speeches and improves their ability to model effective structure.
- Peer Topic Outline Workshop: Each student selects a speech topic and creates a full-sentence outline including an introduction, three body points with subpoints, and a conclusion. They then present their outline to a partner for feedback on organization, clarity, and logical progression.

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- **Attention Getter**: A sentence or technique used at the start of a speech to immediately grab the audience's interest.
- **Body (in relation to a speech outline)**: The central part of a speech where main points and supporting materials are fully developed.
- **Clincher (in relation to a speech outline)**: A memorable final statement or phrase that effectively ends the speech and leaves a lasting impression.
- **Conclusion**: The final part of a speech that summarizes key points and brings the message to a close.
- **Credibility**: The quality of being trusted or believed, often established by the speaker's knowledge, experience, or honesty.
- **Delivery (in relation to a speech outline)**: The way a speaker presents their speech through voice, tone, gestures, eye contact, and pacing.
- **Examples**: Specific instances or scenarios used to clarify or support a speaker's points.
- **Expert Testimony**: A statement or quotation from a qualified professional used to strengthen a speech's argument.
- **Facts**: Verified pieces of information or data that can be proven true and are used to support claims in a speech.
- **Hook (in relation to a speech introduction)**: A compelling opening device meant to draw the audience in and make them want to listen.
- **Introduction**: The beginning section of a speech that includes an attention getter, topic explanation, and a preview of main points.
- **Main Point**: A major idea or argument in a speech that supports the overall thesis or purpose.
- **Outline**: A structured plan that organizes a speech's content into main points, subpoints, and transitions.
- **Preview**: A sentence in the introduction that briefly states the main points the speaker will cover.
- **Subpoint**: A supporting detail or explanation that helps develop and clarify a main point in a speech.
- **Summary (in relation to a speech outline)**: A brief recap of the main points, typically found in the conclusion.
- **Supporting Material**: The facts, examples, statistics, and expert testimony used to reinforce the speech's points.
- **Transition**: A sentence or phrase that connects ideas and moves the audience smoothly from one part of the speech to another.

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8.6: Discussion Questions

1. How can outlining a speech help improve everyday communication, such as giving instructions, resolving conflicts, or persuading others?
2. In what ways does speech outlining prepare you for job interviews, business presentations, or team meetings?
3. How can outlining a speech help you become a more persuasive communicator in business and leadership settings?
4. Why is being able to organize your ideas clearly and concisely valuable in the workplace and in your personal relationships?
5. How does learning to outline speeches strengthen long-term life skills like time management, planning, and critical thinking?

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9: DELIVERING THE SPEECH

Introduction: Why Delivery Matters

A few semesters ago, a student stepped to the front of the classroom clutching her notecards like a lifeline. Her outline was well structured and her research was strong, but at first she kept her eyes glued to the page. Then something shifted. She paused, looked up, made eye contact with one person in the room, and kept going. Her voice steadied, her pacing slowed, and the class leaned in. Later she said she barely changed her script. What changed was her delivery. Moments like this remind us that effective speaking is not just about what you write. It is about how you bring those words to life.

We see examples of this everywhere. Comedians like Ali Wong can take everyday situations and make them unforgettable through timing, **facial expressions**, and vocal energy. Coaches motivate entire teams not because their words are complicated but because their delivery communicates belief and urgency. Even in everyday contexts like a group project presentation or a heartfelt story you tell at the gym or at a family gathering, people respond to how you sound, how you move, and how present you are. **Delivery** is the bridge between your message and your audience. It helps listeners stay focused, understand your point, and feel connected to you as a speaker (Beebe & Beebe, 2023; Lucas, 2024).

This chapter will help you build that bridge. You will learn the four main methods of delivery (manuscript, memorized, impromptu, and extemporaneous) and explore how eye contact, vocal expression, gestures, movement, posture, and facial expressions influence audience connection. You will also learn how to adapt your delivery to different settings, use notes effectively, and practice in ways that help you sound prepared without sounding scripted. These skills do more than prepare you for class assignments. They prepare you for real situations in your future career, your community, and your personal life whenever you are asked to share an idea, lead a conversation, or speak on behalf of others. Delivery is not about performing. It is about learning how to communicate with confidence so your message truly lands.



Figure 9.1: Street Performance. (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; Calvin Lee via Flickr)

Learning Objectives

- Explain and demonstrate how different methods, vocal techniques, and nonverbal delivery choices influence audience engagement, clarity, and speaker credibility.
- Adapt delivery to different audiences, settings, technologies, and speaking situations.
- Apply effective strategies for using speaker notes and practicing a speech to create a prepared but conversational delivery.

9.1: Delivery that Connects
9.2: Adapting Delivery to the Setting
9.3: Using Notes Effectively
9.4: Practice - From Prepared to Natural
9.5: Glossary
9.6: Discussion Questions
9.7: References

Thumbmail: Street Performance. (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; Calvin Lee via Flickr)

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9.1: Delivery that Connects

Four Methods of Delivery

Speakers generally use four methods of delivery: manuscript, memorized, impromptu, and extemporaneous. The best method depends on the situation, audience, and purpose.

Manuscript delivery means reading a speech word for word from a prepared text. This approach is useful when wording needs to be precise, such as an official statement, legal testimony, or major announcement. The challenge is maintaining connection with the audience while reading.

Memorized delivery involves committing the entire speech to memory. This can allow for strong eye contact and movement, but speakers may sound overly rehearsed or struggle if they forget a line.

Impromptu delivery happens with little or no preparation. You might be asked to introduce yourself at a meeting, answer a question in class, or say a few words at an event. Even without much preparation, briefly organizing your thoughts before speaking can make a big difference.

Extemporaneous delivery is carefully prepared and practiced but delivered from brief notes rather than a written script. The speaker knows the ideas without memorizing every sentence. This approach usually creates a more natural, conversational connection with the audience and is the method you will use most often in a public speaking course.

Most real-world speaking does not fit perfectly into one category. A speaker might deliver most of a presentation extemporaneously while reading an important quotation or carefully worded statement from a manuscript. The goal is not to follow one method rigidly, but to choose the approach that best fits the situation.

Nonverbal Delivery

Many students who began fearful and hesitant grew into confident speakers within a semester of consistent practice. Research supports this: practice and mindset changes can reshape how students perceive and perform public speaking (Dweck, 2008). Instead of focusing on perfection, aim for progress and connection.

Eye Contact: Connection, Not Tricks Eye contact is essential for connection. Yet, students often receive unhelpful advice: "look at their foreheads," "scan the back wall," or "imagine your audience naked." These suggestions tend to create distance, awkwardness, or distraction. Instead, communication scholars like Beebe (1974) found that eye contact increases speaker **credibility**.

Rather than applying rigid formulas like the "3-second rule" or the "lighthouse method," focus on finding friendly faces and engaging them naturally (Anderson, 2013). Eye contact helps gauge audience engagement, build trust, and enhance retention. In virtual settings, eye contact means looking into the webcam, not the screen (Anderson, 2013).

It's also important to remember cultural differences. In some cultures, direct eye contact is discouraged. Adjusting based on context and audience is key to respectful, effective connection.

Gestures: Your Body Speaks

Many speakers ask, "What do I do with my hands?" The answer is simple: let them move naturally. Gestures often arise from emotion, involvement, and intention (Buchan, 1991). Research also suggests that gestures can support speech production and reduce cognitive load, helping speakers express their ideas more fluently (Alibali, Kita, and Young, 2000).

Effective gestures should feel purposeful rather than rehearsed. Your hands can emphasize an important word, illustrate size or direction, compare two ideas, or reinforce the emotion behind what you are saying. Gestures that are open, visible, and varied generally work better than repetitive or distracting movements. Watch for nervous habits such as fiddling with clothing, gripping your hands together, or repeatedly making the same motion.

You do not need to choreograph your hands or force yourself to gesture more. The goal is to become comfortable enough with your material that your body can respond naturally to what you are saying.

Movement: Have a Reason to Move

Movement can also add energy and meaning to a speech, but more movement is not necessarily better. Pacing back and forth can distract an audience just as much as standing completely frozen.

Instead, move with a purpose. You might step to a new position when transitioning to another main point, move closer to the audience during an important moment, or use different parts of the speaking space to distinguish between ideas. When you reach your new position, stop and continue speaking rather than immediately moving again.

You do not need to use the entire room or stage. Sometimes staying in one place is the strongest choice. Think of movement as another communication tool: use it when it helps your audience follow or feel your message.

Vocalics

Vocalics refers to how your voice communicates meaning. Audiences do not just hear your words. They also hear your energy, confidence, seriousness, and emotion through your voice. Vocalics includes volume, rate, pitch, pauses, variety, and pronunciation (Burgoon et al., 2016).

Volume
You need to be heard by everyone, including people in the back and people who may have hearing differences. In a classroom, speaking “louder than feels normal” is often the correct volume. In a small room, that same volume can sound like shouting. Adjust to the space.

Rate
If you speak too fast, you lose clarity. If you speak too slowly, the audience may drift. A useful rule is to slow down at transitions and key points, then return to a natural pace. Many students rush when they are nervous. Practicing with a timer helps.

Pitch and vocal variety
Pitch changes help prevent **monotone** delivery. **Vocal variety** is the mix of changes in pitch, rate, volume, and pauses that keeps your speech sounding alive. A simple way to build variety is to choose two or three moments where you deliberately slow down, pause, or shift tone to highlight importance, then let the rest sound natural.

Pauses
Pauses are not mistakes. They are tools. A short pause before a key point can build attention. A pause after a statistic gives the audience time to process. If silence feels awkward, that is normal. With practice, it becomes one of your strongest delivery tools.

Pronunciation
Mispronouncing a key term can hurt credibility or confuse the audience. If you are unsure, check a reputable dictionary audio clip or ask someone. If you are an English-language learner, remember this: having an accent means you speak more languages than many people in the room. Clarity matters more than sounding “perfect.”

Posture and Facial Expression

Your body communicates before you even begin speaking. Posture and facial expressions can influence how an audience interprets your confidence, energy, and connection to the topic.

Posture

Starting with upright posture signals readiness. Slouching, leaning, or collapsing into the podium can make you appear uncertain, even if your content is strong. A helpful approach is to plant your feet and feel grounded, especially right before you begin.

Facial Expression

Your face should generally match your message. A serious topic with a constant smile can confuse the audience, while a positive topic delivered with a blank expression can feel disconnected. Recording yourself is often the fastest way to notice what your face

is doing.

Example 9.1.1

During a group presentation, one student explains a point while staring at the floor and gripping their hoodie strings. The room feels flat. Another student speaks next, looks up to a few classmates, and lets their hands move naturally as they explain the same type of idea. Nothing about the topic is more interesting, but the second speaker feels easier to follow. Their eye contact signals confidence, and their gestures help organize the explanation. The difference isn't personality or talent. It's nonverbal delivery working quietly in the background.

Key Takeaways

- Speakers can use manuscript, memorized, impromptu, or extemporaneous delivery depending on the situation, audience, and purpose.
- Effective delivery uses eye contact, gestures, movement, posture, facial expressions, and vocal variety to help audiences connect with and understand a message.
- Strong delivery should feel natural rather than choreographed. The goal is not perfection, but purposeful choices that fit the speaker, audience, culture, and setting.

Exercises

- Practice explaining a short idea for 30–45 seconds while focusing on one listener at a time, then reflect on how eye contact affected your comfort level and your partner's attention.
- Deliver a brief explanation twice, once keeping your hands still and once allowing natural gestures, and note which version felt clearer, more fluent, and easier to deliver.
- Record a 30-second explanation on Zoom or your phone, watch it once with the sound off and once with the video off, and identify one nonverbal habit and one vocal habit you would adjust for clearer delivery.

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- 3.4: Reducing Communication Apprehension by Anonymous is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 3.0. Original source: https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/public-speaking-practice-and-ethics.

9.2: Adapting Delivery to the Setting

Public speaking always happens somewhere, and that “somewhere” shapes how your message lands.

A clear example of delivery shaped by context is Steve Jobs’s 2005 commencement address at Stanford University. Jobs stood at a lectern outdoors, speaking to thousands of graduates and families. His delivery was calm, conversational, and personal. He relied on storytelling rather than hype, and his pacing allowed the audience time to reflect. That approach worked because the moment called for meaning, not spectacle. The same delivery style would have felt flat at a product launch or a concert. Context matters.

Most community college students will move between very different speaking environments: classrooms, meetings, ceremonies, outdoor events, screens, and everyday situations that may not even feel like “public speaking” at first. Effective speakers do not rely on one default delivery style. They adapt.

For example, a student might explain a group project to a class while standing at the front of the room, then later that same day describe a scheduling issue to a supervisor at work, and later still hop on Zoom to speak during an online class. The message may be clear in all three situations, but the delivery should not be identical. Tone, posture, pacing, and eye contact all shift depending on the setting and audience.

Using Lecterns

Lecterns are common in formal settings such as conferences, lectures, and commencement ceremonies.

Students encounter lecterns in more familiar ways too. Think about giving a presentation in a classroom where the podium holds your laptop or notes. The temptation is to stay planted behind it. A stronger approach is to use it briefly, then step to the side when you are explaining ideas in your own words. Audiences tend to read this movement as confidence rather than nervousness (Beebe & Beebe, 2023).

Room and Audience Size

Room size affects everything from volume to movement.

For large venues, consider Bad Bunny performing in sold-out stadiums. His gestures are broad, his movements are expansive, and his energy is scaled to reach fans in the highest seats. Subtle expressions would be lost in that space, so everything is intentionally bigger.

In contrast, comedian Jo Koy often performs in theaters where storytelling, facial expression, and timing matter more than sheer volume. His delivery relies on connection and pacing that fits the space rather than overwhelming it.

Students experience this difference when moving between rooms on campus. A speech delivered in a large lecture hall requires more projection and slower pacing than the same speech delivered in a small classroom or study room. Adjusting delivery is not about changing who you are as a speaker, but about making sure your audience can fully receive your message.

Speaking Outdoors

Outdoor speaking environments introduce distractions that speakers cannot fully control.

Students encounter outdoor speaking at campus events, rallies, or club fairs. In these settings, attention is divided. Clear structure, slightly stronger projection, and a focused message help keep listeners engaged despite distractions.

Using a Microphone

Microphones change how speakers manage their voices.

Watch Taylor Swift speak to stadium audiences between songs. She maintains consistent distance from the microphone, articulates clearly, and uses pauses to let audience reactions rise and fall. The microphone amplifies her voice, but clarity comes from pacing and enunciation.

Students may use microphones for campus panels, performances, or ceremonies. The key is remembering that microphones amplify sound, not clarity. Rushed speech, filler words, and dropped volume become more noticeable, not less (Lucas, 2024).

Audience Size

Audience size shapes tone and formality.

For very large audiences, consider Gabriel Iglesias, often known as Fluffy. When performing in arenas, his delivery is intentionally big. He uses exaggerated facial expressions, full-body movement, and strategic pauses so laughter can travel across the room. Subtle delivery would disappear in a space that large.

Smaller audiences allow for more intimacy and flexibility. Classroom-sized audiences benefit from a balance between preparation and approachability. Many students notice they feel more nervous in small groups because everyone feels close. In reality, those settings often allow for more conversational and forgiving delivery.

Speaking on Zoom and Digital Platforms

Digital speaking environments are now part of academic and professional life.

A strong example is Valkyrae, whose communication depends almost entirely on camera presence and vocal delivery. Because physical movement is limited, she relies on eye contact with the camera, vocal variety, pacing, and conversational tone to stay engaging.

Students experience this when giving speeches on Zoom or recording presentations. Looking at the camera, sitting at eye level, and managing distractions matter just as much as content. Online audiences form impressions quickly, which makes preparation especially important (Bailenson, 2021).

Example 9.2.1

Imagine Kenton is giving an informative speech for this class. In the classroom, he stands near the front, projects his voice to reach the back row, uses open hand gestures, and pauses briefly when transitioning between main points. Later, he explains the same information to a friend at the student center, lowering his volume, sitting or leaning casually, and responding to questions in a more conversational way. The next day, he records the speech on Zoom, keeping his eyes on the camera, limiting movement, speaking slightly slower, and relying more on vocal emphasis since gestures are harder to see. The content stays the same, but Kenton's delivery changes to fit each setting.

Key Takeaways

- Speaking contexts include physical spaces and digital platforms, each with distinct delivery demands.
- Lecterns, room size, outdoor settings, microphones, audience size, and screens all shape how a message is received.
- Effective speakers adapt delivery rather than relying on a single speaking style.

Exercises

- Watch one large-venue speech and one Zoom-based presentation. How does delivery change across settings?
- Imagine your next classroom speech moving outdoors or online. What three delivery adjustments would you make, and why?
- Choose a speaker, performer, or streamer you follow and analyze how their delivery adapts to different contexts.

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9.3: Using Notes Effectively

Preparing a speech takes real effort, and delivery is where that effort either pays off or falls flat. One of the most common challenges students face is figuring out how to use notes without sounding robotic, distracted, or overly dependent on them.

In this course, you will be encouraged to speak **extemporaneously**. That means you are prepared, practiced, and organized, but you are not reading word for word. Instead of a full manuscript, you rely on brief notes that guide you while leaving room for eye contact, natural language, and responsiveness to your audience. Even professional speakers who use teleprompters rely on cues rather than scripts. The notes support the speaker, not the other way around.

Why Speaker Notes Matter

Using notes effectively increases your credibility. Audiences tend to trust speakers who appear knowledgeable and present rather than glued to a script. Reading from a manuscript limits eye contact and often flattens vocal delivery, making it harder for listeners to stay engaged (Lucas, 2024).

Think about explaining a project to a supervisor or coworker. If you read directly from your phone, the explanation often feels less confident than if you glance at a few key points and speak naturally. The same principle applies to speeches. Notes should help you remember what to say, not replace your voice.

You can see this in digital spaces as well. Streamers, podcasters, and content creators often work from topic lists or brief prompts rather than full scripts. That flexibility allows them to stay conversational and responsive. While your speech is more structured, the goal is similar: be prepared without sounding read.

The Five-Card Approach

For a typical classroom speech with three main points, five notecards often work well: one for the introduction, one for each main point, and one for the conclusion.

This approach mirrors how people communicate in professional settings. In a meeting or interview, you do not bring a script. You bring a clear sense of what you want to cover. Notecards serve the same purpose by reinforcing structure rather than memorization.

What to Put on Your Cards

Your notes should include key words and short phrases, not full sentences. These words act as recall triggers. When you glance down, they remind you of ideas, examples, and transitions without pulling your attention away from the audience.

For example, a student giving an informative speech about campus mental health resources might write “drop-in hours,” “wait times,” or “crisis support” instead of full explanations. Each phrase cues a section of the speech.

There is one reasonable exception. If your speech includes a short quotation, statistic, or definition that must be stated precisely, you may place it on a separate card with the citation clearly noted. Research suggests that audiences respond positively when speakers balance accuracy with conversational delivery rather than sounding scripted (Beebe & Beebe, 2023).

Holding and Using Notes Naturally

Notes are a normal part of public speaking. You do not need to hide them. Hold your cards comfortably and avoid waving, folding, tapping, or constantly adjusting them. Practice with your notes beforehand so using them feels natural rather than distracting.

This is also where questions about using a phone often come up.

Using a Phone as Notes

Many students wonder whether using a phone instead of notecards is acceptable. Some instructors discourage this, and it is helpful to understand why. Phones are strongly associated with texting, scrolling, and multitasking. When a speaker looks down at a phone repeatedly, audiences may assume distraction or lack of preparation, even if the notes themselves are solid. Research on classroom and presentation settings supports this concern. Visible phone use during speaking has been shown to lower perceived credibility and attentiveness, particularly in academic and professional contexts where phones signal divided attention (Kuznekoff & Titsworth, 2013; Dennen & Hao, 2014).

For this course, notecards are recommended because they reduce distraction, encourage concise cueing, and help you develop habits that transfer well to professional speaking situations. If you do use a phone in other contexts, treat it exactly like a notecard: airplane mode on, large text, no scrolling, and minimal glancing. The goal stays the same regardless of format. Notes should support your delivery, not compete with it.

Creating Effective Note Cards

Effective notes are personal. The words that trigger recall for one speaker may not work for another. For one student, the word “deadline” might trigger a full explanation about accountability and time management. For another, a phrase like “missed shift” might cue a workplace example.

Your notes should also be easy to read with a quick glance. Write large, leave plenty of white space, and avoid clutter. If you find yourself shrinking your handwriting to fit more information, that is usually a sign you are scripting rather than cueing. Less is more.

Practice aloud with your actual cards and revise them based on what helps you remember your ideas naturally.

Using Notes When Things Go Wrong

Even experienced speakers lose their place. Good notes make recovery easier. With numbered cards and clear structure, you can quickly find where you are and continue without drawing attention to the mistake.

Notes also give you flexibility. If you forget a phrase or example, you can **paraphrase** naturally rather than feeling pressure to reproduce exact wording. Audiences respond to meaning more than perfection.

Example 9.3.1

Judy is giving an informative speech in class. Judy brings five notecards with short phrases like “definition,” “campus example,” and “impact,” and practices glancing down only at transitions. During the speech, Judy maintains eye contact, gestures naturally, and recovers easily after briefly losing their place by checking the next card. Now imagine Judy giving the same talk but reading full sentences from a phone screen. Even if the content is accurate, the delivery feels flatter, eye contact drops, and the audience becomes less engaged. The difference is not preparation, but how the notes are used. As a class, consider which version would make you feel more confident as a speaker and which would you rather listen to as an audience member.

Key Takeaways

- Effective notes prevent reading and support confident delivery.
- Strong notes rely on key words and phrases that trigger recall.
- Thoughtful note use enhances credibility and audience engagement.

Exercises

- Create a 4 × 6 notecard for your introduction that includes your attention-getter, thesis, and preview. Practice using it while

standing as you would during the speech.

- Identify one situation at work, home, or school where you already speak without a script. What cues help you remember what to say, and how can you adapt that approach to your speech notes?
- Practice once using notecards and once using a phone set up in airplane mode with large text. Reflect on which method better supports eye contact and delivery.

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9.4: Practice - From Prepared to Natural

There is no single “perfect” way to deliver a speech. People have different personalities, different voices, and different comfort levels being in front of a group. Even when your content is strong on paper, it is normal to feel unsure about how it will sound out loud. The good news is that delivery is a skill. You can build it through practice that is intentional, realistic, and repeated over time.

What is good delivery

Good delivery helps your audience understand your ideas without being distracted by how you present them. Many public speaking researchers describe effective delivery as clear, engaged, and conversational enough to feel human, but structured enough to feel prepared (Lucas, 2024). In other words, you want to sound like a real person who practiced, not a robot reading a script.

Conversational style and conversational quality

Conversational style is the ability to sound natural and expressive. Conversational quality means your speech still sounds spontaneous even though you practiced it. This is one of the hardest parts of public speaking because it requires a balance. You want to rehearse enough that you feel steady, but not so much that you sound memorized.

If you have ever watched a stand-up special from Gabriel Iglesias, you can hear this balance. The set is clearly practiced, but it feels like it is happening in the moment. Your informative speech is not a comedy set, but the principle applies. When a speech sounds overly memorized, audiences tune out. When it sounds like you are thinking with them, audiences lean in.

Practice Effectively

Practice is where a prepared speech starts to sound natural. The goal is not to memorize every word or rehearse until you sound robotic. Instead, practice enough that you know your ideas, feel comfortable with your material, and can focus on connecting with the audience.

Practice Out Loud

Reading your outline silently is not the same as practicing a speech. You need to hear yourself explain your ideas out loud. Speaking reveals awkward wording, unclear transitions, difficult pronunciations, and places where you may rush or lose your train of thought.

Practice Ideas, Not Exact Sentences

Practice your speech idea-first rather than sentence-first. Know what you want to communicate, but allow the exact wording to change slightly each time. This helps you sound prepared without sounding memorized. If you can explain the same idea naturally in several different ways, you probably know your material well.

Practice in Short Rounds

You do not always need to practice the entire speech from beginning to end. Work on difficult sections separately. Practice your introduction three times. Repeat a difficult transition several times. Practice your conclusion until you can finish confidently without searching for your final words. Short, focused rounds can help you improve specific parts before putting everything together.

Use the Real Setup

Practice under conditions that resemble the actual presentation. Stand up, use your real notecards, and practice with your slides or other visual aids. If you will use a microphone, practice with one if possible. If you are presenting on Zoom, rehearse on Zoom. The fewer surprises you encounter during the actual speech, the easier it is to focus on your audience.

Record Yourself

Recording yourself can reveal habits you may not notice while speaking. Watch one practice and identify one thing that is working and one thing you want to improve. You do not need to critique every gesture, pause, or word. Focus on a few changes you can realistically make before your speech.

Get Specific Feedback

If someone watches you practice, ask specific questions rather than simply, “Was it good?” Ask: Could you hear me? Did I rush anywhere? Was anything confusing? Did I look at my notes too much? Were there any distracting habits? Specific questions usually lead to more useful feedback.

Time Your Speech

Always complete at least one timed rehearsal. A speech that looks like five minutes on paper may take seven minutes out loud, or only three. Timing also helps you notice where you may be rushing or spending too much time on one section.

Finish With Full Runs

Once the individual parts are working, practice the entire speech from beginning to end. Try not to stop every time you make a small mistake. During the actual presentation, you will need to recover and keep going, so your final rehearsals should work the same way. Aim for a complete, natural delivery rather than a perfect one.

Good delivery is a habit

Delivery improves through repetition. The goal is not to become someone else. The goal is to become a clearer, more confident version of yourself in front of an audience. Each speech gives you data. Each practice session builds habits. Over time, your delivery becomes less about nerves and more about connection.

Example 9.4.1

Imagine Lou is told to rehearse his speech five times. During his first rehearsal, he relies too heavily on his notes and finishes 90 seconds short. For his second rehearsal, he works on his transitions and reduces his dependence on notes. During his third, he records himself and notices that he is rushing. By his fourth rehearsal, Lou completes the speech naturally within the time limit. For his final rehearsal, he puts everything together and feels confident for speech day.

Key Takeaways

- Effective practice focuses on ideas rather than exact sentences, helping speakers sound prepared but conversational.
- Practice should be realistic and intentional. Rehearse out loud with your actual notes and technology, and use recording, timing, and feedback to improve.
- Strong delivery develops through repeated practice, not perfection.

Exercises

- Practice one section of your speech three times. Instead of repeating the exact wording, focus on communicating the same main idea naturally each time. What changed?
- Record a full practice session and write a brief self-critique. Identify one strength to keep and one specific improvement goal for your next practice.
- Complete one timed rehearsal using the notes, visual aids, and setup you plan to use during your actual speech. Identify one adjustment you need to make before presenting.

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- **Audience engagement:** The level of attention, interest, and involvement listeners show during a speech
- **Camera presence:** How a speaker appears and connects with an audience through a webcam during online presentations.
- **Clarity:** How easily an audience can understand a speaker's message based on vocal delivery, organization, and articulation.
- **Conversational quality:** The ability to sound spontaneous and natural even after extensive practice.
- **Conversational style:** A delivery approach that resembles effective everyday communication while maintaining structure and professionalism.
- **Credibility:** The degree to which an audience perceives a speaker as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and confident.
- **Cues:** Brief words or phrases used in notes to prompt memory rather than full sentences.
- **Delivery:** How a speech is presented, including voice, body language, eye contact, pacing, and overall presence.
- **Delivery style:** A speaker's typical approach to presenting, shaped by personality, context, and audience.*
- **Enunciation:** Clear pronunciation of words so they are easily understood.
- **Eye contact:** Looking at audience members, or the camera in virtual settings, to create connection and inclusion.
- **Extemporaneous speaking:** A method of delivery that relies on preparation and brief notes rather than memorization or full scripts.
- **Facial expression:** Movements of the face that convey emotion, emphasis, and meaning during a speech.
- **Filler words:** Habitual sounds or words such as "um," "uh," or "like" that can distract listeners.
- **Fluency:** Smooth, confident flow of speech without excessive pauses or hesitations.
- **Gestures:** Purposeful movements of the hands and arms that reinforce meaning and emphasize ideas.
- **Lectern:** A stand or podium used to hold notes or materials during a speech.
- **Manuscript:** A full, word-for-word written version of a speech, typically discouraged for live delivery.
- **Mindset:** A speaker's beliefs about their ability to improve, often influencing confidence and performance.
- **Natural language:** Speech that sounds authentic and unscripted rather than memorized.
- **Nonverbal delivery:** Communication through voice, facial expression, posture, gestures, and movement.
- **Nonverbal immediacy:** Behaviors such as eye contact and expressive delivery that increase perceived closeness with the audience.
- **Notecards:** Small cards, often 4 × 6 inches, used to hold concise speaking notes.
- **Physical delivery:** How posture, movement, gestures, and facial expression support a speech.
- **Stage presence:** The confidence and composure a speaker projects while presenting.
- **Vocalics:** The study and use of vocal elements such as volume, rate, pitch, pauses, variety, and pronunciation.

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9.6: Discussion Questions

1. How did a speaker's delivery, rather than their content, affect your attention, understanding, or engagement in a recent presentation, conversation, or online video?
2. How would your delivery change if you presented the same message in a classroom, a workplace conversation, and on Zoom, and which elements would need the most adjustment?
3. How does a speaker's use of notecards, notes, or a phone influence your perception of their credibility and preparedness, and when do notes become distracting?
4. Which part of nonverbal delivery, such as eye contact, gestures, posture, facial expression, or movement, is most challenging for you right now, and what is one realistic way you could improve it?
5. Based on this chapter, what does effective practice look like for speech delivery, and which practice strategy would most improve your own performance?

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10: PRESENTING VISUAL AIDS

Introduction to Visual Aids

In today's communication landscape, effective speakers do more than just use words, they also engage their audiences visually. **Visual aids** are an essential part of successful speech presentations because they help clarify complex ideas, capture attention, and make messages more memorable. A strong visual, whether it's a slide, chart, prop, image, or short video can reinforce your key points and provide concrete support for abstract or data-heavy material. The use of visual aids transforms a presentation from a passive listening experience into an active learning one. Audiences are more likely to retain information when they can both see and hear it. Visuals appeal to multiple senses, supporting diverse learning styles and helping listeners follow the speaker's structure and reasoning. In essence, visual aids are not just "add-ons" to a speech; they are a core component of modern communication. They bridge the gap between words and understanding, transforming a good presentation into an impactful and memorable one.



Figure: Chess Pawn looks in mirror, and sees its reflection as the Chess King piece. (OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (September version) [Large language model]. chat.openai.com [chat.openai.com])

Learning Objectives

- Describe the major types of visual aids and explain how each enhances audience understanding and engagement during a presentation.
- Explain how to design and deliver effective PowerPoint or slide presentations using the principles of clarity, simplicity, and consistency.
- Interpret the ethical and contextual considerations involved in using videos and other multimedia elements to ensure accurate and credible communication.

10.1: The Power of Visual Aids

10.2: Types of Visual Aids

10.3: Effective Power Points

10.4: How to Use Videos

10.5: Glossary

10.6: Discussion Questions

10.7: References

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10.1: The Power of Visual Aids

The Power of Visual Aids

In today's world, audiences expect to see as well as hear information. Visual aids such as slides, images, graphs, props, or short **video clips** play a vital role in speech presentations because they make ideas clearer, more engaging, and more memorable. A well chosen visual can communicate meaning instantly, help the audience grasp complex data, and keep their attention focused on the message. For example, a simple graph can show trends that might take several sentences to explain, while a powerful image can evoke emotion and emphasize a key point far more effectively than words alone.

The Visual Generations

Visual aids are also necessary for today's "visual generation." Most college students have grown up surrounded by technology scrolling through social media, watching short videos, and consuming information that is fast, colorful, and visual. Because of this, audiences are accustomed to processing ideas through both sight and sound at the same time. Incorporating visual aids in a speech acknowledges this shift and helps speakers connect with how modern audiences learn and pay attention. A strong visual presence not only meets these expectations but also enhances understanding and retention by reinforcing the speaker's message through multiple sensory channels.

The Visual Story

The power of visual aids lies in their ability to tell a visual story that complements the spoken word. Just as good storytelling brings a topic to life, effective visuals can turn abstract concepts into vivid, relatable images that stay with the audience long after the speech ends. A timeline can show progress, a photograph can humanize an issue, and a demonstration can make a process come alive. Together, the words and visuals work as partners the speech provides **context** and explanation, while the visuals provide **clarity**, emotion, and impact.

When used thoughtfully, visual aids transform a presentation from something the audience simply listens to into something they experience. They are not decorations or distractions but powerful storytelling tools that help the speaker guide the audience through an idea, one image at a time.

Example 10.1.1

- Example 1: College Student Presentation
  - Imagine a student giving a speech on the benefits of creating a personal budget while in college. Instead of simply listing budgeting tips, the student uses a slide showing a pie chart of a typical college student's monthly expenses, including housing, food, transportation, and entertainment. The presentation also includes a simple graph comparing spending habits before and after following a budget for six months. These visuals help the audience quickly understand where money goes and how small financial changes can lead to significant savings. By combining clear visuals with spoken explanations, the student transforms financial concepts into a visual story of responsibility and financial growth.
- Example 2: Professional Workplace Presentation
  - Now picture a human resources manager presenting employee retention data to company leadership. Rather than reading statistics from a report, the manager uses a series of visuals, including a bar graph showing turnover rates over the past five years, an infographic highlighting the most common reasons employees leave, and a timeline illustrating the impact of recent workplace initiatives. These visuals help the audience identify trends and understand the relationship between company policies and employee satisfaction. By using clear, organized visuals alongside thoughtful explanations, the presenter turns a collection of statistics into a compelling story about workplace improvement and future opportunities.
- Example 3: Using Visual Aids to Transform Data into Insight

- Now picture a marketing professional presenting a quarterly sales report to a team of executives. Instead of reading long lists of numbers, the presenter uses a clean, visually appealing slide deck that includes graphs showing sales growth by region, pie charts breaking down product performance, and a brief animation illustrating customer engagement trends over time. These visuals make complex data instantly understandable and help the audience quickly see patterns and results. The presenter uses consistent colors, clear labels, and minimal text, allowing the visuals to guide the discussion naturally. By combining spoken explanation with well-designed visuals, the professional not only conveys credibility and preparedness but also tells a visual story of progress and opportunity, turning data into insight.

Key Takeaways

- Visual aids enhance understanding and retention by turning complex or abstract ideas into clear, memorable images that reinforce the speaker's message.
- Today's audiences are visually oriented, making the effective use of visuals essential for maintaining attention and connecting with listeners accustomed to technology and multimedia.
- Visual aids tell a visual story, working alongside spoken words to add emotion, clarity, and impact, transforming a speech into a more engaging and meaningful experience.

Exercises

- Visual Story Practice: Choose a simple topic (such as "the importance of recycling" or "how sleep affects learning") and find or create one image that visually represents your message. Explain in one or two sentences how that image helps tell your story more effectively than words alone.
- Slide Design Comparison: Find two sample presentation slides online, one that is cluttered and one that is visually effective. Compare them in a short paragraph, explaining what makes one slide clear and engaging and the other confusing or distracting.
- Create a Mini Visual Aid: Design one short visual (a chart, image, or prop) to support a main point from a past or upcoming class speech. Practice presenting that section aloud while referring to your visual, focusing on how the visual strengthens your message and keeps your audience engaged.

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10.2: Types of Visual Aids

Types of Visual Aids and How and When to Use Them

Visual aids come in many forms, each with its own strengths, purposes, and best practices. Choosing the right type of visual aid depends on your topic, audience, and speaking situation. The most effective visuals enhance understanding, emphasize key points, and make your presentation more engaging and memorable. Below are several types of visual aids, their importance, examples, and how and when to use them effectively.

Pictures and Photographs

- Importance
  - Images can evoke emotion, clarify information, and make abstract concepts concrete. A well-chosen picture can immediately capture attention and make your message more relatable.
- Example
  - In a speech about managing college finances, a student might show a picture comparing a cluttered desk full of unpaid bills to an organized workspace with a clear monthly budget sheet. The contrasting images visually highlight the difference between financial stress and financial control, reinforcing the importance of good money management
- How to Use Effectively
  - Choose high-quality, relevant images. Display them long enough for the audience to absorb their meaning, and explain how they connect to your message. Avoid using images just to fill space, each one should have a clear purpose.

Charts, Graphs, and Data Visuals

- Importance
  - Charts and graphs simplify complex information, helping the audience quickly grasp trends, comparisons, and relationships.
- Example
  - A business presentation might include a bar chart showing sales growth or a pie chart representing customer demographics.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Keep visuals simple and uncluttered. Label data clearly and explain what the audience should notice. Don't overload slides with numbers, highlight only what's most relevant to your point.

Objects, Props, and Demonstrations

- Importance
  - Physical items make ideas tangible. Demonstrations can show how something works, making your speech dynamic and memorable.
- Example
  - In a "How-To" demonstration speech about guitar maintenance, the speaker could hold up a guitar and show how to restring it.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Practice handling the object smoothly so it doesn't become a distraction. Make sure it's visible to everyone in the room. Keep the focus on how the object supports your message, not on the object itself.

Volunteers or Audience Participation

- Importance
  - Inviting a volunteer to assist can increase engagement and make the audience part of the learning process.
- Example
  - In a speech on stress management, a speaker might ask a volunteer to demonstrate a breathing exercise.

- How to Use Effectively
  - Select volunteers respectfully and ensure the task is simple and comfortable. Thank them afterward. This technique adds energy and interaction but should always serve a clear purpose.

Videos and Video Clips

- Importance
  - Short video clips can powerfully illustrate a point, evoke emotion, or provide expert testimony. However, videos must be used carefully, context determines meaning, and without it, audiences might misinterpret what they see.
- Example
  - A speaker discussing media bias might show two different news clips covering the same story to highlight how framing changes perception.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Keep clips brief (under one minute when possible).

Key Note: Always provide context:

Before showing: Introduce the video by explaining what to watch for and why it matters.

After showing: Summarize what the audience just saw and connect it directly to your main point.

This framing ensures the video supports your argument rather than distracting or confusing your audience.

Memes and Humor-Based Visuals

- Importance
  - Memes, when used appropriately, can capture attention, connect with younger audiences, and lighten a serious topic. They can make your speech relatable and reflect cultural awareness.
- Example
  - In a speech about procrastination, a humorous meme about “starting assignments at midnight” can make the point engaging and familiar.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Choose memes that are relevant, inoffensive, and easy to understand. Avoid overusing them or relying on inside jokes that not everyone will get. Humor should enhance, not overshadow, your message.

Animation and Motion Graphics

- Importance
  - **Animations** can show change, process, or transformation over time helping audiences visualize what static images cannot.
- Example:
  - A student presenting on the solar system might use an animation showing planets orbiting the sun to illustrate relative motion.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Use motion sparingly, too much movement distracts the audience. Make sure the animation plays smoothly, and time your explanation with what the audience sees.

AI-Generated Visuals

- Importance
  - With tools like ChatGPT or AI image generators, speakers can now create customized visuals for unique or hard-to-find topics. AI visuals can make presentations stand out and tailor imagery directly to the speaker’s ideas.
- Example
  - For a speech on “Future Cities,” a student could use AI to generate images of eco-friendly, futuristic urban designs.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Always check for accuracy and realism. AI-generated visuals can sometimes include errors or unrealistic details. Give

credit if required, and ensure the image genuinely supports your message rather than serving as decoration.

Handouts and Printed Materials

- Importance
  - Handouts provide lasting information for audiences to review later. They are useful for detailed data, charts, or resources that might be too dense for slides.
- Example
  - A speaker presenting research findings might distribute a one-page summary with references and key statistics.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Distribute handouts after your presentation or at a designated time so they don't distract from your speech. Keep them concise and well-organized.

PowerPoint or Slide Presentations (The next section will cover this in detail)

- Importance
  - PowerPoint or digital slides are the most common visual aid used in presentations today. They help organize and structure information while allowing the speaker to combine text, images, and data in one place.
- Example
  - A student presenting on "The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health" might use slides that include a brief definition, a graph showing statistics on social media usage, and one compelling image per point.
- How to Use Effectively
  - Use simple design minimal text, clear **fonts**, and contrasting colors. Avoid reading directly from your slides; instead, speak naturally and let the visuals reinforce your words. Limit slides to key ideas or data you want the audience to remember.

Choosing the Right Visual Aid

The best visual aid is the one that enhances your message, not competes with it. Consider your audience, the room setup, and your speaking goals. Whether you're using a photo, video, prop, or AI-generated image, remember that every visual tells part of your story. Introduce, explain, and connect each one thoughtfully so your audience not only sees your message they understand and remember it.

Example 10.2.1

A marketing manager is giving a quarterly performance presentation to company executives. The goal is to show progress and suggest future strategies. The speaker uses a variety of professional visual aids to make the data meaningful:

- The presentation begins with a clean PowerPoint slide deck, featuring simple line and bar graphs showing sales growth over the past three quarters. The visuals are labeled clearly, and each slide focuses on only one key metric.
- To make the data more relatable, the manager shows a short 20-second video clip of customer testimonials. Before playing it, the speaker says, "Listen for the recurring theme our customers mention most trust." This helps the audience understand what to focus on.
- The speaker then introduces a memorable image of the company's new product displayed in a customer's home, illustrating how the brand fits into everyday life.
- Finally, an animated graphic demonstrates the next quarter's marketing plan, showing how new advertising channels will expand customer reach.

By combining data visuals, emotional storytelling, and professional design, the presentation balances logic and persuasion transforming raw information into a compelling visual narrative that informs and inspires decision-making.

Key Takeaways

- Each visual aid serves a specific purpose choosing the right type (such as images, videos, charts, props, or slides) depends

on your message, audience, and speaking context.
- Visual aids are most powerful when explained clearly introducing or concluding visuals like video clips with context ensures the audience understands exactly what they are seeing and why it matters.
- Effective visual aids enhance, not replace, your speech should simplify complex ideas, support your key points, and help tell a visual story that reinforces your spoken message.

Exercises

- Visual Aid Match-Up: Choose a topic you might give a speech on and list three main points. For each point, identify which type of visual aid (photo, chart, video, object, etc.) would best support it and explain why that visual would strengthen your message.
- Video Context Practice: Find a short video clip (under one minute) related to your speech topic. Write out how you would introduce the video (what the audience should watch for) and how you would conclude it (what the audience just saw and how it connects to your main idea).
- Slide Design Challenge: Create one PowerPoint or Google Slide for a specific point in your upcoming speech. Focus on clarity, limit text, include one meaningful image or graphic, and make sure your visual reinforces your spoken explanation rather than repeating it.

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10.3: Effective Power Points

Effective Power Points

Introduction

Slides are not the speech, they're support for it. The best decks make ideas easier to see, reduce mental effort, and keep attention on your spoken message. Research on multimedia learning shows that audiences learn and remember more when visuals are clear, relevant, and free of extra clutter (e.g., coherence, signaling, and redundancy principles (Mayer, 2020).

PowerPoint slides are tools to help your audience see what you're saying. They are not meant to be the speech itself, just a visual guide that makes your message easier to follow and remember. Good slides keep the audience focused on your ideas instead of reading blocks of text. The best PowerPoints are clear, simple, and consistent so your message stands out.

BIG: Make text and visuals easy to see

What It Means:

Your audience should be able to read your slides easily from anywhere in the room. If the words or visuals are too small, people will stop listening and start squinting.

- Use large type. Headings and key phrases should be big enough to read from the back of the room; avoid thin/condensed fonts. Guidance for "glanceable" reading recommends larger sizes and non-condensed fonts for content that must be read quickly at a distance (Nielsen Norman Group, 2016).
- Prioritize contrast. Ensure text stands out from the background; follow accessibility advice (e.g., meet WCAG-aligned contrast ratios) so slides remain readable in various rooms and projectors (Microsoft Support, n.d.).
- Design for scanning. Keep line lengths reasonable and chunk information so it can be grasped at a glance (Nielsen Norman Group, 2015).

How to Do It:

- Use large fonts (at least 28-point for main text and 36-point for titles).
- Choose bold, easy-to-read fonts like Arial, Calibri, or Verdana.
- Make sure there is strong contrast between text and background (dark text on a light background or vice versa).
- Don't overload slides with small text or too many images, less is more.

Why it matters:

If people can't read it instantly, they stop listening while they struggle to decode your slide. In other words, if your audience can't see what's on the slide, they won't hear what you're saying. Big, readable slides help everyone stay focused on your message.

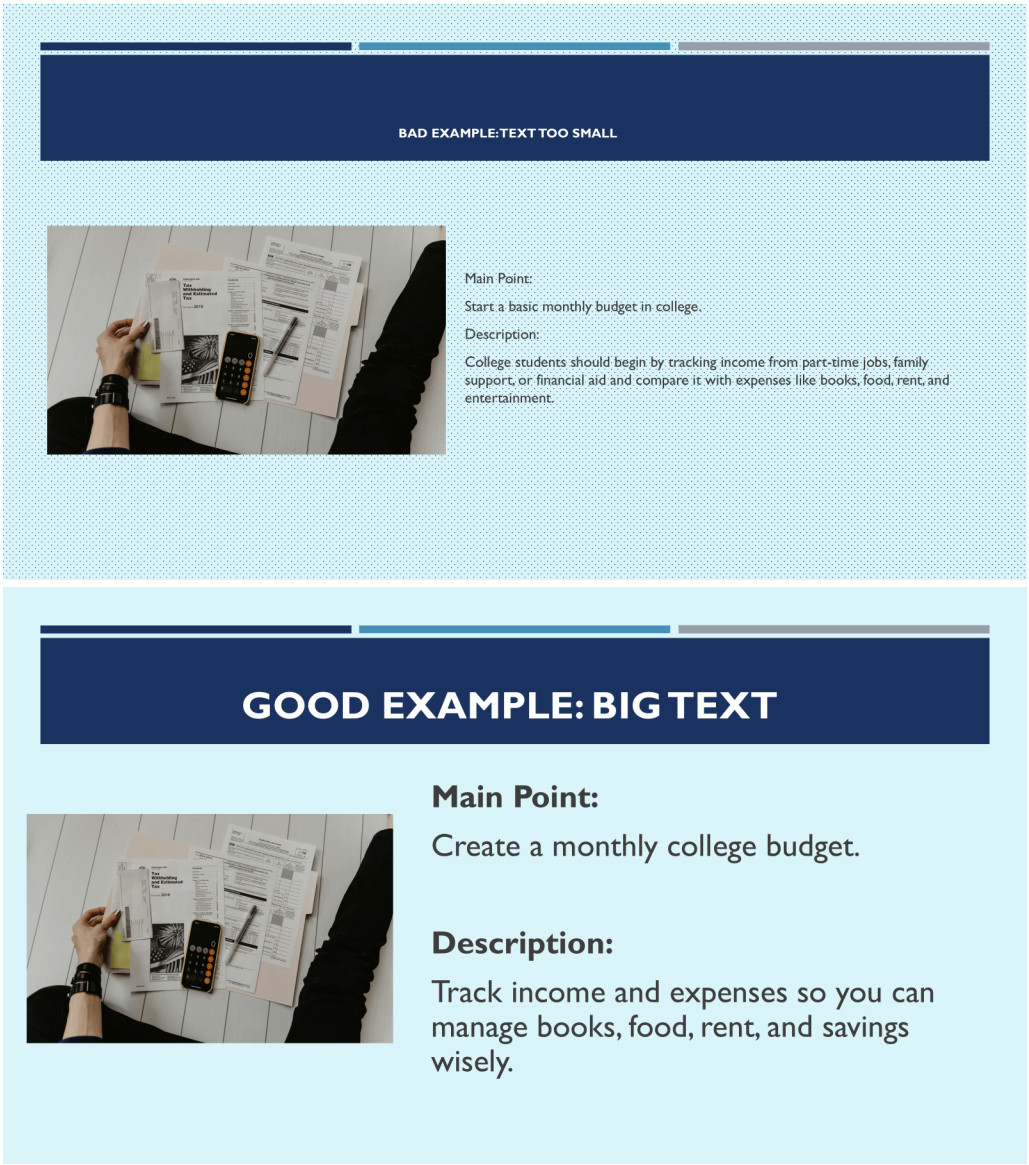


Figure: PowerPoint Slide Bad and Good Example of Big Text. Bad Example, Text title and text content is 12 point font, which is difficult to read. Good Example, Text title and text content is 28 point font, which is very easy to read, especially from the back of a room (OpenAI. (2026). ChatGPT (April version) [Large language model] (chat.openai.com [chat.openai.com])

SIMPLE: Show less so the audience learns more

What it Means:

Each slide should show one main idea. Too much information can overwhelm your audience and make them tune out.

- Cut clutter. Remove decorative text, busy backgrounds, and off-topic graphics; audiences learn better when extraneous material is excluded (the coherence principle). Use visual cues (arrows, bolding, highlights) to direct attention (the signaling principle) (University of Hartford, n.d.).
- Don't duplicate full sentences. Pair a visual with your narration rather than reading paragraphs on screen (the redundancy principle) (University of Hartford, n.d.).
- One idea per slide. Follow expert presentation guidance: increase the slide-to-idea ratio, avoid "slideuments," and keep a high signal-to-noise ratio (Reynolds, n.d.).
- Be consistent. Use a stable layout, alignment, and hierarchy from slide to slide; consistent styling improves readability and

comprehension (Cleveland Web Works, n.d.).

How to Do It:

- Use short bullet points instead of long sentences or paragraphs.
- Avoid reading directly from the slide. Talk about what's on it.
- Use visuals like charts or photos to explain ideas faster than words.
- Keep the same style, font, and layout on all slides for a clean look.
- Cut out anything that doesn't directly support your point.

Why it matters:

Overloaded slides increase cognitive load; audiences read instead of listening and quickly disengage. Nielsen Norman Group. Put simply, when slides are simple and focused, your audience can easily follow along and remember the key ideas you want them to take away.



Figure: PowerPoint Slide Bad and Good Example of Simple. Bad example PowerPoint has the title 'Save Money for Emergencies' in size 25-point font and a multiple-line block of supporting text in size 15. Good example PowerPoint has the title 'Save Money for Emergencies' in size 30-point font and one summative simple sentence supporting text in size 28. (OpenAI. (2026). ChatGPT (April version) [Large language model] (chat.openai.com [chat.openai.com])

ATTRACTIVE: Make it clean, cohesive, and accessible

What It Means:

Attractive slides look neat, balanced, and easy on the eyes. A well-designed slide helps your audience feel confident in your preparation and credibility.

- Readable fonts & limited variety. Choose clear, screen-friendly typefaces; use no more than 2 to 3 fonts (weights/styles included) to maintain hierarchy without chaos. Keep ample white space. (See general typography guidance.) (Nielsen Norman Group, 2016).
- Color done right. Use high-contrast color pairs, avoid relying on color alone for meaning (e.g., not just red vs. green), and prefer built-in accessible themes (Microsoft Support, n.d.).
- Images that match the message. Use relevant, high-quality visuals that reinforce your point; avoid generic or decorative images that add noise (again, coherence/signal-to-noise) (University of Hartford, n.d.).
- Visual hierarchy & layout. Make the most important element the most prominent; align elements to a simple grid; keep margins generous; test the “3-second rule” (can a viewer recall the key message after a 3-second glance?) (Duarte, 2020).
- Accessibility features. Check contrast, reading order, and link text; caption videos; and run the accessibility checker before presenting (Microsoft Support, n.d.).

How to Do It:

- Stick to 2 to 3 fonts total. Too many fonts look messy.
- Pick colors that go well together and are easy to read (for example, dark blue text on a light background).
- Use high-quality images that match your message, not random or funny pictures that distract from it.
- Keep your design consistent from slide to slide, same title placement, font sizes, and color scheme.
- Use animations or transitions only when they add to your message, not just for decoration.

Why it matters:

Attractive, accessible slides project professionalism, build credibility, and help everyone in the room follow your story. digitalaccessibility.unc.edu

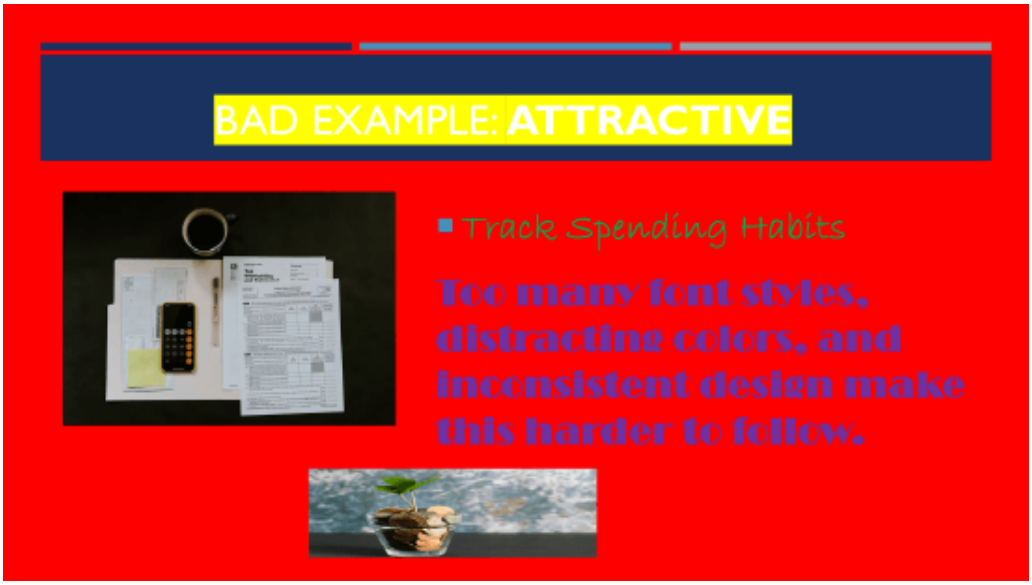




Figure: PowerPoint Slide Bad and Good Example of Attractive. Bad example PowerPoint has multiple different sized images, and PowerPoint lacks proper color contrast between the background and the multiple text colors and size, thus decreasing readability. Good example PowerPoint has one large image, and adequate color contrast between background and text colors. (OpenAI. (2026). ChatGPT (April version) [Large language model] (chat.openai.com [chat.openai.com])

In Summary

- Big enough to read at a glance; strong contrast.
- Simple: one idea per slide; minimal text; clear cues.
- Attractive and consistent: limited fonts/colors, purposeful images, accessible theme, captions/alt text as needed.
- These practices keep attention on you while your slides do their job: making your message visible, memorable, and easy to understand.

Example 10.3.1

A student is giving an informative speech on “Building and Maintaining Good Credit in College.” The student designs a PowerPoint that follows the “Big, Simple, Attractive” principles:

- Big: Each slide uses large, clear fonts (no smaller than 28-point for text) with bold headings like “Credit Scores Matter” and “How Interest Works.” The student ensures all text is visible from the back of the classroom.
- Simple: Instead of paragraphs, each slide features 3 to 4 short bullet points and one relevant visual, such as a bar graph comparing interest rates or a simple diagram showing how credit utilization affects a score. There are no unnecessary animations or crowded text boxes.
- Attractive: The student uses a clean, consistent blue-and-white color scheme across all slides. The background is light with dark text for contrast, and only two fonts are used throughout, one for headings, one for body text. Each image (like a credit card or bank app screenshot) is high-quality and clearly connected to the topic.

By keeping slides visually consistent and easy to read, the student keeps the audience’s attention on the message, not the slides, and reinforces key ideas about financial responsibility in a visually appealing way.

Key Takeaways

- Big: Use large, readable text and clear visuals so every audience member can easily see and understand the information at a glance.

- Simple: Keep slides uncluttered with one main idea per slide, minimal text, and visuals that reinforce, not distract from your spoken message.
- Attractive: Maintain a consistent, professional design with easy-to-read fonts, high-contrast colors, and relevant images that enhance audience engagement and comprehension.

Exercises

- Find a crowded or poorly designed PowerPoint slide online (or from a previous class) and redesign it using the principles of Big, Simple, and Attractive. Write a short paragraph explaining what changes you made and why.
- Choose one main point from your upcoming speech and create a single PowerPoint slide for it. Use large fonts, minimal text, and one relevant image or graphic that clearly supports your message.
- Exchange a short PowerPoint (3 to 4 slides) with a classmate and evaluate each other's slides for readability, simplicity, and visual appeal. Offer at least two specific suggestions for improvement based on the Big, Simple, Attractive framework.

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10.4: How to Use Videos

How to Use Videos

Introduction: The Power of Video

Video is one of the most powerful tools a speaker can use to engage an audience. It combines sight, sound, motion, and emotion, elements that can instantly capture attention, illustrate complex ideas, and make a message memorable. A well-chosen video can transport your audience to a real-world situation, provide authentic examples, or create an emotional connection that words alone cannot achieve. When used thoughtfully, video enhances understanding and adds credibility to your message.

However, video is powerful because it influences emotion and perception so strongly. This power also makes it easy to misuse. A poorly chosen or out-of-context video can confuse your audience or even damage your credibility. Effective speakers treat videos as carefully crafted evidence, never as filler or decoration.

The Importance of Context

Context determines how a video is interpreted. A clip shown without proper explanation can easily mislead the audience or send the wrong message. Even a short excerpt can take on a completely different meaning when removed from its full setting.

For example, a 10-second news clip or interview snippet can seem to support one argument when isolated but may express the opposite idea when viewed in full. This is why introducing or explaining the context of a video is essential. Before showing it, tell your audience what they are about to see and why you are showing it. Afterward, summarize what it means in relation to your message.

Tip: If your audience later discovers the full version of the video and finds that it contradicts your interpretation, your reputation as a speaker can suffer. Always preview entire videos, verify sources, and present them ethically and accurately.

Length and Focus of the Video

Attention spans are short, especially in live presentations. The ideal video length depends on your speaking time:

- Short Presentations (5–10 minutes): Use short clips, 15 to 60 seconds, that illustrate a single point or emotional moment.
- Longer Presentations (10+ minutes): You may include one or two longer clips (1–3 minutes), but only if they are central to your message and well-integrated into your speech.

Avoid showing full videos unless absolutely necessary. You are the main communicator, the video should support your speech, not replace it.

Introducing and Concluding the Video

How you frame the video determines how the audience interprets it.

Introduce Before Showing:

- Explain what to look for. (“Notice how the interviewer avoids answering directly.”)
- Explain why you’re showing it. (“This example illustrates the impact of impulsive spending on long-term savings.”)
- Prepare the audience emotionally. (“This clip may be surprising but is important to understanding financial behavior.”)

Conclude After Showing:

- Summarize the key point. (“As you saw in the clip, impulsive spending decisions often happen automatically, something financial planners call ‘fast thinking.’”)

- Connect back to your main argument. (“This supports my point that setting up automatic savings can reduce these impulsive purchases.”)

Introducing or concluding the video keeps the audience focused on your intended message rather than forming their own unrelated interpretations.

Quality and Technical Considerations

- Preview everything. Watch the entire video before your presentation to ensure there are no inappropriate, distracting, or misleading segments.
- Check technical details. Test sound, internet connection, and screen size in advance so the video plays smoothly.
- Use high-quality visuals. Blurry or poorly edited clips distract the audience and can appear unprofessional.
- Credit your source. Always cite the origin of the video (title, creator, date, and link if available) to maintain academic integrity.
- Stay within copyright and fair use. Only use brief clips or those labeled for educational or public use.

Integrating Video into the Flow of Your Speech

A well-used video feels like part of the story, not an interruption. The key is transitioning smoothly in and out of it:

- Set up the idea → play the clip → discuss what the audience saw.
- Don’t turn off the lights or stand silently in the back; maintain presence and control of the audience.
- Return to your speech immediately after the clip to interpret and connect it to your thesis.

Think of yourself as the narrator of the video, you guide your audience through what they see and help them understand why it matters.

In Summary

Use Video to Support, Not Replace, Your Voice

Videos are an extension of your message, not a substitute for it. They can inspire emotion, simplify complex topics, and make your presentation come alive but only when used purposefully, ethically, and in context. Keep them short, relevant, and clearly introduced or concluded. When you guide your audience’s attention and interpretation, video becomes a powerful storytelling tool that reinforces your credibility and deepens understanding.

Example 10.4.1

A student is giving an informative speech on “The Impact of Student Loan Debt on College Graduates.”

To make the issue more personal, the student includes a short 45-second video clip of a recent graduate discussing the emotional and financial stress of paying off student loans.

Before showing the video, the student introduces it by saying:

“As you watch this short clip, listen for how the speaker describes the emotional impact of student loan debt, not just the numbers, but how it affects everyday choices.”

After the video, the student concludes by saying:

“This graduate’s story illustrates how financial pressure influences not only career decisions but also mental health, supporting my point that understanding loan management is essential before borrowing.”

The video is short, relevant, and framed with context both before and after. The student watched the entire video beforehand, confirmed the source’s credibility, and credited it on the slide. By controlling the audience’s focus, the student avoids misinterpretation and strengthens the emotional impact of the presentation.

Key Takeaways

- Context shapes meaning: introducing or concluding a video helps your audience understand what to focus on and prevents misinterpretation that could harm your credibility.
- Length matters: use short, focused clips for brief presentations and slightly longer ones for extended speeches, always keeping the video relevant to your main point.
- Integration is key: videos should support and strengthen your spoken message, not replace it; prepare, preview, and transition smoothly so the video feels like part of your story.

Exercises

- Select a short video (30–60 seconds) related to your speech topic. Practice introducing it by telling your audience what to look for, then play the clip and conclude by summarizing what they saw and how it connects to your main point.
- Find a short video clip online that could be interpreted in different ways if shown without context. Write a short paragraph explaining how the meaning could change and how you would provide context to ensure your audience interprets it correctly.
- Choose a longer video (2–3 minutes) related to a class topic and decide which 30–45 seconds best support your speech. Explain in one or two sentences why you chose that segment and how it reinforces your message without overwhelming the audience.

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Glossary: Presenting Visual Aids

- **Accessibility:** The practice of designing visuals so that all audience members, including those with disabilities, can view and understand the material.
- **Animation:** Motion effects used in slides to emphasize key points; should be minimal and purposeful to avoid distraction.
- **Clarity:** The quality of being easily understood; the main goal of all visual aid design.
- **Color Scheme:** A coordinated selection of colors that enhances readability and maintains visual harmony throughout the slides.
- **Consistency:** The use of uniform colors, fonts, and layout across all slides to create a cohesive and professional presentation.
- **Context:** The background information or explanation that helps an audience correctly interpret a visual or video clip.
- **Contrast:** The visual difference between text and background (light vs. dark) that makes information easy to read.
- **Data Visualization:** The use of charts, graphs, and infographics to simplify and display numerical or complex information.
- **Engagement:** The level of attention and interest maintained by the audience through clear visuals and dynamic presentation style.
- **Ethical Use:** The responsible use of visuals and videos that includes proper sourcing, accuracy, and respect for intellectual property.
- **Font:** The style and size of printed text; should be clear, readable, and limited to two or three types in a presentation.
- **High-Quality Image:** A clear, well-lit, properly sized picture that enhances the message instead of distracting from it..
- **Multimedia:** The combination of text, audio, video, and images used together to communicate a message effectively.
- **Narration:** The speaker's verbal explanation that guides the audience through what they are seeing and why it matters.
- **Overload:** The mistake of including too much information or too many visuals on one slide, causing audience disengagement.
- **PowerPoint (Slide Deck):** A digital presentation composed of slides that display text, images, and media to visually support a speaker's main ideas.
- **Professionalism:** The overall impression of polish and preparation conveyed through organized, consistent, and ethical visual design.
- **Relevance:** The degree to which a visual directly supports or illustrates a specific point in the speech.
- **Simplicity:** The design principle of keeping slides free from clutter, focusing on only one main idea per slide.
- **Slide Layout:** The arrangement of text, images, and graphics on a slide, designed for readability and balance.
- **Timing:** The planned use of visuals or videos at the right moment in a speech to maximize impact.
- **Video Clip:** A short segment of video used to illustrate or support a specific point within a presentation.
- **Visual Aid:** Any physical or digital element (such as slides, charts, images, or props) used to enhance understanding and retention during a speech.

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10.6: Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think audiences today expect visual aids in most presentations, and how has technology and social media shaped those expectations? (Consider how visual culture and short attention spans influence communication.)
2. What are the risks of using a visual or video clip out of context, and how could this affect a speaker's credibility or the audience's interpretation? (Think about examples where meaning changed because of missing context.)
3. When designing PowerPoint slides, how do the principles of "Big, Simple, and Attractive" help keep the audience engaged and focused on the speaker rather than the slides? (Reflect on how design choices affect comprehension and attention.)
4. In your opinion, what makes a visual aid "ethical," and how should a speaker ensure visuals and videos are used fairly, accurately, and responsibly? (Discuss accuracy, sourcing, and respect for creators' rights.)
5. Think of a presentation you've seen (in class, online, or at work). How did the speaker's use, or misuse, of visual aids impact your understanding and engagement? (Share specific observations about what worked well or what could have been improved.)

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11: INFORMATIVE SPEAKING

Introduction

Every day, college students encounter powerful examples of **informative speaking**, from podcasts explaining scientific breakthroughs to webinars breaking down new technologies. These moments shape how we understand complex ideas. Research shows we consume around 34 gigabytes of data daily. That's like watching hundreds of short educational videos (Hilbert & López, 2011). In a world flooded with information, the ability to communicate clearly, accurately, and engagingly is essential. Mastering this skill helps you stand out, making your ideas memorable and impactful.

The power to inform an audience isn't just for professors or news anchors, it's a vital skill for students who want to share knowledge effectively. Whether presenting a project, explaining ideas to classmates, or teaching someone a new concept, clear and confident communication transforms learning and understanding. Employers highly value "effective communication," especially the ability to deliver information in ways that are accessible and persuasive (NACE, 2020). When you develop your skills in informative speaking, you not only share knowledge, you inspire curiosity and build credibility in your academic, professional, and personal life.

This unit will guide you in giving compelling informative speeches. You'll learn how to select a topic, organize your ideas logically, and speak with confidence. By the end, you'll be equipped to teach others what you know in a way that's clear, memorable, and engaging. Effective informative speaking isn't just about sharing facts; it's about cultivating connections and creating a lasting impact. These skills can open new opportunities and help you become a more confident, influential communicator.



Figure 11.1 Godzilla instructing monster students about Japan. (CC BY 4.0; WorldIslandInfo.com via Flickr)

Learning Objectives

- Explain the purpose and basic principles of informative speaking, including the importance of accuracy, clarity, and audience interest.
- Identify common types of informative speeches and select appropriate topics and development strategies for different audiences.
- Determine effective ways to organize an informative speech and apply techniques that enhance clarity, engagement, and message retention.

11.1: Speaking to Inform
11.2: Informative Speaking Goals
11.3: Types of Informative Speeches
11.4: Glossary
11.5: Discussion Questions
11.6: References

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11.1: Speaking to Inform

Basic Principles of Public Speaking

Informative speaking is the art of clearly and effectively sharing knowledge with an audience. Unlike **persuasive speaking**, the goal is not to convince others but to educate them on a topic using facts, examples, and explanations. Whether you're explaining how to make a delicious quesabirria taco or describing how a electronic music producer uses chord progression, drum beats, and synthesizers to craft an catchy dance song, your job is to make complex ideas easy to understand. In today's world, informative speaking happens everywhere, from TED Talks on YouTube to explainer videos on TikTok. Strong informative speakers use organization, clarity, and credible sources to help their audience learn something new. For example, popular science communicators like Bill Nye and Emily Graslie make science accessible by combining accurate information with relatable examples. Research shows that clear communication improves understanding and retention of information, especially when visual aids and storytelling are used (Reynolds, 2019). Mastering informative speaking is also a key part of becoming a confident public speaker. Whether you're presenting a class project, leading a student club, or preparing for a career, being able to speak clearly and confidently is a skill that opens many doors. Public speaking isn't just for politicians or actors, it's a vital tool for everyday life and future success.

Informative Goals of Public Speaking

The main goal of informative public speaking is to help the audience gain a clearer understanding of a topic without trying to influence their opinions. Good informative speakers focus on four key goals: to clarify, explain, describe, and demonstrate (Lucas, 2020). For instance, a student might give a speech on how a Las Vegas casino or Disneyland theme park attracts their guests, breaking down their hidden business strategies. Another example could be a podcast host explaining the science behind dreams and what it tells us about our subconscious mind. Informative speaking is also common in workplaces, such as when a police officer explains how to deescalate a tense situation or a new father shows the audience how to change a diaper. Research shows that audiences learn better when information is presented with structure, repetition, and visual support (Mayer, 2009). Additionally, using real-world examples can help listeners connect new information to things they already know (Lucas, 2020). A well-crafted informative speech helps people build knowledge and make informed decisions, whether in a classroom, on social media, or during everyday conversations. These goals remind us that informative speaking is not just about giving facts, it's about making those facts meaningful and easy to understand.

Types of Informative Speaking

Informative speaking can be broken into three main types: speech of description, speech of demonstration, and speech of definition. A **speech of description** helps the audience visualize something, such as a place, person, or event. For example, a student interested in the animation of Hayao Miyazaki, could describe what it's like to visit Ghibli Park in Japan. A **speech of demonstration** shows how something works or how to do something, like showing the audience how to use breath control and grounding techniques when having a panic attack or experiencing high levels of anxiety. A **speech of definition** helps the audience understand a complex idea, such as defining what cryptocurrency is and how blockchain technology functions. Each type of informative speech serves a unique purpose but all aim to expand the audience's understanding of the topic. In today's digital age, these skills are especially relevant, since people often share information through videos, presentations, and social media posts. Being able to clearly explain or describe something is a valuable skill in school, the workplace, and everyday life. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2023), oral communication is one of the top skills employers seek in new hires. Learning to organize and present information effectively can also build confidence and improve critical thinking (Lucas, 2020). By practicing all three types of informative speaking, students can become more thoughtful, effective communicators.

Examples 10.1

Speech of Description

Topic: The Amazon Rainforest
Purpose: To describe the physical and ecological features of the Amazon.

Outline:

I. Location and size of the rainforest
II. Types of plants and animals found there
III. The climate and environmental importance of the region

Speech of Demonstration

Topic: How to Make a Healthy Smoothie
Purpose: To show the steps for making a nutritious smoothie at home.

Outline:

I. Choosing ingredients (fruits, vegetables, and proteins)

II. Using a blender safely

III. Tips for customizing smoothies for different needs (energy, protein, etc.)

Speech of Definition

Topic: What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?
Purpose: To explain the concept and relevance of AI.

Outline:

I. Define AI and its key components (e.g., machine learning)

II. Common uses of AI today (Siri, ChatGPT, recommendation systems)

III. Ethical and future considerations

Key Takeaways

- Informative speaking is about clearly explaining a topic to help others understand, not to change their opinions.
- There are three main types: description, demonstration, and definition, each helping the audience learn in different ways.
- This skill is useful in everyday life, school, and careers, especially since clear communication is one of the top abilities employers look for (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2023).

Exercises

- Students pair up and take 2 minutes each to teach their partner something they know well (e.g., how to make ramen, how to use a study app, or how to change a bike tire). Practice clear, short explanation using demonstration or description.
- Students choose an app they use often (e.g., Duolingo, Grammarly, Spotify) and give a short demonstration speech showing how it works and why they like it. Practice demonstration skills using something relevant to their lives.
- Students go around the room (or in small groups) sharing a 60-second speech on their favorite book, show, hobby, or meme, then explain it so others understand what it is and why they love it. Practice concise speaking and connecting information to passion.

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11.2: Informative Speaking Goals

What Makes an Informative Speech Effective?

A strong informative speech does three things well: it's accurate, clear, and interesting (Beebe & Beebe, 2021). Whether you're explaining how to train a puppy or why mental health matters, your goal is to share credible data and relevant examples in a way that makes sense and keeps your audience engaged. You won't have time to explain everything about a big topic, so it's better to narrow your focus, like talking about how music streaming affects new artists instead of the entire music industry (Lucas, 2020).

Even if you've written about your topic before, always double-check your facts. Information can get outdated quickly, even history. For example, new research keeps changing how we understand the causes of the American Civil War. Make sure your facts are current and relevant (Sprague et al., 2019).

To be clear, organize your speech in a logical order and use simple words. Don't assume your audience knows everything you do, and explain unfamiliar terms like "AI bias" or "viral trends" clearly. Practice with a friend to find out what needs more explanation (O'Hair et al., 2020).

Making your speech interesting is key. Just because you care about something doesn't mean everyone else will, so connect it to their lives. If you talk about dogs and parasites, include how some of those parasites can affect humans too. That makes your topic more relatable (Beebe & Beebe, 2021).

Speaking to Inform (Not Persuade)

Informative speeches are designed to educate your audience by sharing knowledge, facts, and a clear understanding of a topic. Unlike persuasive speeches, which aim to influence opinions or lead audiences toward a specific action, informative speeches focus on presenting accurate, balanced, and well-organized information (Lucas, 2020). Your goal is to help listeners understand complex ideas, processes, or issues without telling them what to think or feel.

You can discuss intriguing and sometimes controversial topics, such as the rise of vegan cuisine in countries like Israel, the history and cultural significance of Italian gelato, or how sustainable tourism impacts popular destinations like Thailand or Costa Rica, while maintaining neutrality. For example, if talking about the popularity of Japanese ramen, present its origins, regional variations, and cultural importance, without advocating for or against a particular style. Or, if exploring the ecological impacts of traveling to Machu Picchu or Venice, share facts, environmental concerns, and conservation efforts instead of urging a specific viewpoint (Sprague et al., 2019).

Think of yourself like a respected newscaster or teacher: your role is to share facts, clarify concepts, and provide context, not to push personal opinions. Effective informative speaking relies on credible sources, logical organization, and clear language to empower your listeners with knowledge rather than persuasion (Beebe & Beebe, 2021; O'Hair et al., 2020). Your duty is to illuminate your topic, helping your audience become more informed and better equipped to draw their own conclusions.

How to Keep It Clear and Engaging

Good informative speeches use tools like:

- Description (e.g., painting a picture of life in Salem during the witch trials),
- Cause and effect (e.g., how one illness can lead to financial stress),
- Categories (e.g., types of savings: cash, avoiding debt, and real estate).

You also want to adjust how you speak depending on your audience. Don't use jargon unless you define it. Say "massive ash clouds from the volcano" instead of "pyroclastic flow" unless you explain it first.

Use **concrete language**: instead of saying "She was responsible," say "She led the team." Concrete words are easier to

understand and remember (Lucas, 2020).

Make Your Speech Memorable

The best speeches stick in your audience's mind. Use contrasts, stories, and vivid examples. For instance, when explaining Japanese American internment during WWII, show how life suddenly changed for families in the Bay Area after Pearl Harbor. Real stories and familiar images make facts easier to remember (Sprague et al., 2019).

Keep your speech focused, avoid adding too much, and connect new ideas to what you audience already knows. If they've used Wikipedia, explain why it's useful but not always reliable, and how they can find better sources (O'Hair et al., 2020).

Above all, make it relevant and personal. Whether you're talking about air pollution or digital privacy, connect the issue to people's real lives. Share examples involving real people, not made-up ones, so your speech feels authentic and meaningful (Beebe & Beebe, 2021).

Example 10.2.1

Informative Speech on Cybersecurity

A college student gave a speech on how to avoid phishing scams, a common form of cyber-attack. She used current data from the FTC showing over 300,000 phishing cases in 2023. To keep it clear, she defined phishing in simple terms and showed a real example of a fake email.

She told the true story of a student whose bank account was drained after clicking a phishing link, making the topic feel urgent and personal. With simple visuals and three easy steps: pause, verify, report - she gave her audience tools they could use right away. The speech was memorable because it connected directly to students' everyday experiences online (Titsworth & Mazer, 2010).

Key Takeaways

- Be Clear, Accurate, and Up-to-Date
  - Use simple language, define key terms, and verify that your information is current and factually correct.
- Engage Your Audience
  - Make your topic interesting by using relatable examples, visuals, or stories, then connect the content to your audience's lives.
- Stay Neutral and Focused
  - Present all sides fairly, avoid personal opinions, and narrow your topic to keep your message focused and easy to follow.

Exercises

- Fact Check Relay – In pairs, students pick a common "fact," quickly verify its accuracy using credible sources, and report whether it's true or false.
- Spin the Topic – Students randomly draw a topic and give a 1-minute neutral explanation, while classmates guess if they can detect any bias.
- Explain It Like I'm 10 – Students choose a topic they know and explain it in 2-3 minutes as if to a 10-year-old, focusing on clarity and simplicity.

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11.3: Types of Informative Speeches

Informing & Engaging your Audience

Informative speeches help audiences learn about a topic in a clear and engaging way. These speeches fall into four main categories: **definitional, descriptive, explanatory**, and **demonstration**. In **definitional speeches**, speakers explain the meaning of complex or abstract ideas. For example, a student might give a speech titled "What Is Artificial Intelligence?" and define how machine learning works in apps like ChatGPT or Spotify. A well-crafted definitional speech breaks down confusing terms, offers comparisons, and connects the topic to real-world applications. To make the concept relevant, the speaker might show how AI is already used in things like social media feeds and fraud protection (Lumen, 2023).

Descriptive speeches paint a picture with words, helping the audience imagine a person, place, event, or object. Imagine a speech called "Inside a SpaceX Rocket Launch," where the speaker vividly describes the roar of engines, the sterile smell of the launch bay, and the towering spacecraft. Descriptive speeches like this engage the senses and emotions. A speaker might also describe a popular music festival like Coachella, discussing the visuals, sounds, and crowds to help the audience feel like they're actually there. These speeches succeed when they use vivid language and sensory detail to create a mental image (Osborn & Osborn, 1991).

Explanatory speeches focus on clarifying how or why something happens. These are useful for explaining systems, events, or changes. A strong example would be a speech on "How Social Media Algorithms Shape Your News Feed," showing how platforms like TikTok or Instagram recommend content based on user behavior. Another could explore why the student loan crisis has grown in the U.S. by examining changes in tuition costs, wage stagnation, and policy decisions (Looney & Yannelis, 2015). These speeches help the audience make sense of larger issues by explaining their causes, history, and consequences.

Finally, **demonstration speeches** show the audience how to do something step-by-step. These are often the most interactive. A student might give a speech called "How to Practice Self Defense," including tips on body position, fist formation, and breath control. Another speech could be "How to Register to Vote Online," guiding the audience through the process with live screen sharing or props. These speeches are useful because they teach real-world skills that people can apply immediately (Lumen, 2023). Effective demonstration speeches are carefully planned, use clear visuals, and often involve the audience to keep them engaged and informed.

Example 10.3.1

Real-World Example: Fast Fashion in Everyday Life

A student wants to inform their classmates about fast fashion, the trend of making and buying cheap clothing quickly. Here's how they use each type of informative speech to do it in a way that's simple, useful, and engaging:

Definitional Speech - "What is Fast Fashion?"

- The speaker explains what fast fashion means: trendy clothes made quickly and cheaply, often copied from runway shows. They define key terms like "throwaway culture" and explain why clothes are so cheap at stores like Shein or H&M. They might say, "Fast fashion is like fast food, easy to get, but not always good for you or the world."

Descriptive Speech - "A Look Inside a Fast Fashion Factory"

- The speaker describes what it's like in a real factory that makes fast fashion clothes. They talk about the loud machines, the crowded rooms, and the long hours workers put in. One story could be about a worker sewing hundreds of shirts a day for just a few dollars. This helps the audience picture the human side of the clothes they wear.

Explanatory Speech - "Why Fast Fashion Hurts the Planet"

- The speaker explains how fast fashion leads to pollution. They break down how dye from clothes can poison rivers or how piles of clothing waste end up in landfills. They might show how one cotton t-shirt takes 700 gallons of water to make. This helps the audience connect their shopping habits to real-world effects.

Demonstration Speech - "How to Upcycle an Old T-Shirt"

- The speaker demonstrates step-by-step how to turn an old T-shirt into a reusable tote bag by cutting off the sleeves, tying the bottom, and creating a simple, no-sew bag. The audience leaves with both an awareness of clothing waste and a practical skill to give clothes a second life.

Each version helps the audience *learn something useful*, *see a clear picture*, or *try something new*. And that's what informative speaking is all about - making people smarter in ways they can use right now.

Key Takeaways:

- Informative speeches teach, not persuade.
  - They are designed to help the audience understand new concepts, see vivid images in their mind, or learn how to do something step by step.
- There are four main types of informative speeches.
  - Definitional (what something means), Descriptive (what something looks/sounds/feels like), Explanatory (how or why something happens), and Demonstration (how to do something).
- Real-world examples and sensory details make speeches powerful.
  - Whether describing a SpaceX launch or explaining how to register to vote, using relevant, concrete examples connects the content to the audience's daily lives.Exercises

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Exercises:

- "What Type Is It?" Activity (Small Groups)
  - Give each group a speech topic (e.g., "How ChatGPT works," "The Coachella Festival," "Recycling Myths," "Making Ramen in a Microwave"). Ask them to identify what type of informative speech it would be and explain why.
- Quick Outline Builder (Individual)
  - Students choose a familiar topic (e.g., favorite comfort foods, popular video games, how dogs communicate) and write a 3-point outline for one type of informative speech (e.g., Demonstration: "How to Create a Playlist on Spotify").
- Mini Speech Spring (Pairs)
  - In pairs, students pick a simple topic and give a 1-minute mini informative speech to each other, using one of the four types. Then, they give quick feedback: "Was it clear, engaging, and informative?"

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- **Accuracy:** Presenting information that is factually correct, current, and supported by credible evidence.
- **Audience Adaptation:** Adjusting a speech to match the audience's knowledge, interests, experiences, and needs.
- **Audience Engagement:** The process of capturing and maintaining audience interest, attention, and involvement throughout a speech.
- **Audience Retention:** The ability to help audience members remember and recall information after the speech is over.
- **Bias:** A preference, assumption, or perspective that can influence how information is presented or interpreted.
- **Cause-and-Effect Pattern:** An organizational pattern that explains how one event, action, or condition leads to another.
- **Categories Pattern:** An organizational pattern that groups information into related types, classifications, or categories.
- **Clarity:** Presenting information in a way that is easy for an audience to understand.
- **Concrete Language:** Specific words that describe things you can see, hear, touch, or easily imagine, making ideas clearer and easier to understand.
- **Context:** Background information that helps an audience understand the meaning, significance, or relevance of a topic.
- **Credible Evidence:** Information from trustworthy and reliable sources that supports a speaker's ideas or claims.
- **Definitional Speech:** Explains the meaning of a concept, idea, or term, often breaking down complex or abstract topics into simple, clear language.
- **Demonstration Speech:** Teaches the audience how to do something step by step, often using visuals, props, or participation.
- **Descriptive Speech:** Creates a vivid picture of a person, place, object, or event by using detailed examples and sensory language.
- **Explanatory Speech:** Clarifies how or why something happens by showing processes, systems, or cause-and-effect relationships.
- **Focused Topic:** A specific, narrowed subject that can be effectively explained within the time limits of a speech.
- **Informative Speaking:** A type of speech or communication that teaches the audience by sharing clear and accurate information about a topic without trying to change their opinions.
- **Information Overload:** Presenting so much information that the audience has difficulty understanding, processing, or remembering it.
- **Jargon:** Specialized or technical language that may be unfamiliar to a general audience.
- **Memorability:** The quality of a speech that helps audiences remember key ideas and information.
- **Neutrality:** Presenting information fairly and objectively without advocating for a particular viewpoint or position.
- **Organization:** The logical arrangement of ideas that helps an audience follow and understand a speech.
- **Persuasive Speaking:** A type of speech or communication that tries to convince the audience to believe something, feel a certain way, or take action.
- **Relevance:** The degree to which information connects to the audience's interests, experiences, needs, or goals.
- **Relatability:** The ability to connect information to the audience's everyday lives and experiences.
- **Signposting:** Words or phrases that guide listeners through a speech by highlighting transitions and organizational structure.
- **Speaker Credibility:** The audience's perception of a speaker as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and competent.
- **Storytelling:** The use of narratives, examples, or personal experiences to make information more engaging, understandable, and memorable.
- **Supporting Material:** Information such as examples, stories, statistics, definitions, testimony, or visual aids that helps explain or support a speaker's ideas.
- **Verbal Citation:** A spoken reference to the source of information used during a speech.
- **Visual Aid:** An image, chart, graph, video, object, demonstration, or other visual element used to support audience understanding.
- **Vivid Example:** A detailed and memorable example that helps audiences understand, visualize, and remember information.

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11.5: Discussion Questions

1. Think about a teacher, podcast, or online video that taught you something new. What made it effective as an informative speech?
2. Which type of informative speech (definition, description, explanation, demonstration) do you think would be the easiest or hardest for you to give in class? Why?
3. Imagine you're giving a speech to first year college students. What's one piece of practical college advice (study hacks, mental health tips, navigating campus) you could turn into a short demonstration speech?
4. How can you make a "boring" topic (like enrolling for classes, academic source citations, or time management) more engaging for a student audience?
5. If an employer asked you in a job interview to explain something you know well, what topic would you choose, and how would you make sure you explained it clearly and memorably?

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12: PERSUASIVE SPEAKING

Introduction

"I used to think persuasion was just something politicians or salespeople did. But then I realized I was using it all the time: convincing my aunt to support my decision to switch majors, talking to my boss about better shift hours, even getting my friends to show up to our club's fundraiser. Learning how to do it with purpose and respect changed everything."

- Isabella R, student at Laney College

Have you ever convinced a classmate to carpool to save gas money? Talked your best friend into attending a concert of a band they've never heard of? Tried to change your manager's mind about letting you take a Sunday shift off? Then you've already practiced **persuasive speaking**, whether you realized it or not.

Persuasion is the process of creating, reinforcing, or changing people's **beliefs** or **actions** (Albarracín et al., 2021). It's not about tricking anyone. It's about showing up with a clear, honest intention and offering a message that connects with your audience's **values**. Persuasion is not manipulation. It's communication with purpose, rooted in credibility, logic, and emotion (Frymier & Nadler, 2007; McKenna, 2025).

At De Anza College in the Bay Area, California, for example, we're surrounded by passionate voices, community organizers rallying for housing justice, students advocating for more mental health resources, small business owners pitching eco-friendly products at local farmers markets. Even everyday interactions can carry persuasive weight: asking your parents to support your decision to transfer to a UC, encouraging your coworkers to join the union, or simply persuading your friends to try the taco truck *you* swear is the best in Oakland.

Every day, we're bombarded by persuasive messages. Some come from ads telling us which shoes to buy, which mayor to vote for, or which streaming service we *must* subscribe to. Others come from people we trust, asking us to help around the house, attend a club meeting, or join the family for Sunday dinner. Whether subtle or direct, we are constantly being persuaded, while also persuading others (Tan et al., 2021).

As you learned in Chapter Three on audience analysis, understanding who you're speaking to is everything. You must consider the **attitudes**, beliefs, and values of your listeners. That means thinking not just about what *you* want to say, but what your audience needs to hear and how they need to hear it (Fransen et al., 2015).

In this chapter, we'll explore persuasion as a powerful and ethical tool for speaking. First, we'll define persuasion and understand how it works. Then, we'll break down four different types of persuasive speeches. Finally, we'll walk through three tried-and-true organizational patterns that can help structure your persuasive message so it actually sticks.

Whether you're standing at a podium, speaking up in a Zoom meeting, or just making your case around the dinner table, persuasive speaking is a skill you'll use for life. Let's get into it.



Figure 12.1: Propaganda: Power and Persuasion poster illustrates persuasion and rhetoric. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; chrisjohnbeckett via Flickr)

Learning Objectives

- Define and explain key concepts in persuasive speaking, including persuasive prepositions, inductive and deductive reasoning, and common logical fallacies.
- Analyze and apply the persuasive appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos to enhance credibility and emotional and logical impact in a speech.
- Create a well-structured persuasive speech outline using an appropriate organizational pattern that effectively supports your argument.

12.1: An Overview of Persuasion

12.2: Types of Persuasion

12.3: Organizing Persuasive Speeches

12.4: Building Persuasive Power- Appeals, Canons, and Culture

12.5: Glossary

12.6: Discussion Questions

12.7: References

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12.1: An Overview of Persuasion

What Is Persuasion?

Persuasion today looks very different than it did fifty years ago. A century ago, a speaker's competition for attention might have been a newspaper or a radio program. Today, college students navigate nonstop persuasive messages through group chats, political ads on YouTube, Netflix documentaries, campus flyers, and even the ads on BART or Muni buses. Public speakers must find ways to stand out while remaining ethical and credible (Tan et al., 2021).

Persuasion is the process of influencing an audience's attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors (Albarracín et al., 2021). Unlike informative speeches, which explain, persuasive speeches aim to motivate change.

Changing Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs

- **Attitudes** are judgments about whether something is good or bad, right or wrong. Example: Persuading classmates that proposed curfew laws for under-21 students in Los Angeles are unfair.
- **Values** reflect what we consider important. Example: California students who value sustainability may join coastal clean-ups, push for composting on campus, or support statewide plastic bag bans.
- **Beliefs** are what people accept as true. **Core beliefs** (e.g., belief in equality) are harder to change, while **dispositional beliefs** (e.g., thinking the Golden Gate Bridge is the longest in the U.S.) are easier to shift. For novice speakers, focusing on dispositional beliefs, rather than deeply held convictions, is more realistic (Albarracín et al., 2021).

Changing Behavior

Sometimes persuasion means encouraging action. For example:

- Voting in a city or campus election.
- Signing a petition to prevent tuition hikes at CSU or UC campuses.
- Using public transit instead of driving to reduce emissions.
- Choosing reusable water bottles to cut down on California's landfill waste.

These actions show how persuasion can move people from belief to behavior (Cruz et al., 2025).

Why Persuasion Matters

Frymier and Nadler (2007) highlight three reasons to study persuasion:

- To become more persuasive. Understanding persuasive strategies helps you deliver stronger, more effective speeches (Albarracín et al., 2021)
- To resist manipulation. In an age of ballot proposition ads, Instagram influencer campaigns, and political messaging around California's housing crisis, persuasive literacy helps you spot half-truths and faulty logic (Fransen et al., 2015).
- To understand the world. Analyzing why speakers like Dolores Huerta or Cesar Chavez galvanized movements, while others failed to connect, deepens your awareness of how persuasion shapes society (McKenna, 2025).

Most importantly, persuasion carries an **ethical** responsibility. Speakers should not manipulate, coerce, or mislead. Ethical persuasion relies on truth and transparency, while ethical listeners evaluate messages critically (McKenna, 2025).

Example 11.1.1

Persuasion in Action

Persuasion surrounds us every day, sometimes in serious public debates, and sometimes in fun campus campaigns. Here are a few real-life examples from California:

- Ban the Bottle at SFSU: Students at San Francisco State persuaded the administration to stop selling single-use plastic water bottles on campus. They appealed to values of sustainability and coastal protection while offering practical alternatives like refill stations and free reusable bottles.
- Taco Truck Tuesdays in LA: A community college student convinced the student government to bring a taco truck to campus by appealing to cultural pride, convenience, and humor. His slogan, “The library feeds your brain, but tacos feed your soul” won over both peers and administrators.
- Wildfire Safety Campaigns: In Northern California, local groups persuade communities to prepare “go bags” for wildfire season. By showing real stories of students displaced by fires, they connect preparedness behaviors to the value of safety and the belief that “it could happen to us.”
- Free Transit for Students in the Bay Area: Student activists persuaded local officials to expand discounted BART and Muni passes for college students. They framed it around values of equity, the belief that public transit reduces emissions, and the behavior change of leaving cars at home.

Key Takeaways

- Persuasion surrounds us in daily life, from ballot ads to campus campaigns, and speakers must learn how to connect effectively with audiences (Tan et al., 2021).
- Persuasion influences attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors, with dispositional beliefs and everyday actions being the most realistic targets for short speeches (Albarracín et al., 2021).
- Ethical persuasion relies on honest and respect, empowering audiences to critically evaluate messages without manipulation (McKenna, 2025).

Exercises

- Persuade Me in 60 Seconds: Students pair up. One student picks a random everyday topic (e.g., pineapple on pizza, cats vs. dogs, best coffee shop in town) and has one minute to persuade their partner. Then they switch roles. Partners give quick feedback on what worked - was it humor, logic, or emotional appeal?
- Ad Makeover Challenge: Students take a common product or campus issue (e.g., reusable water bottles, study groups, Taco Tuesdays) and create a 30-second "ad pitch" to persuade their classmates. The twist: they must choose a strategy: ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), or logos (logic) and classmates guess which appeal they used.
- Hashtag Persuasion: In small groups, students invent a catchy hashtag campaign to persuade peers about a lighthearted issue (e.g., #NapZonesNow for campus nap spaces, #NoWiFiNoPeace for stronger Wi-Fi, #TacoTruckTuesdays). Each group shares their hashtag and one-sentence persuasive pitch, and the class votes on the most creative.

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12.2: Types of Persuasion

Types of Persuasive Claims

Imagine you're sitting in the campus cafeteria and a classmate tries to convince you that the college should extend cafeteria hours. Another friend argues that streaming music doesn't fairly pay artists. Later that day, you see a flyer for a rally urging students to support free community college tuition in California. Each of these situations is an example of persuasion in action.

As a student, you're surrounded by persuasive messages every day, on Instagram, in group chats, at campus meetings, and even in casual conversations with friends. To be an effective public speaker, you need to know what kind of **claim** you're making. A claim is simply the main idea you want your audience to accept, whether it's, true or false, what we should do, or whether something is good or bad (Albarracín et al., 2021). Learning to recognize and craft these claims will make your speeches sharper, more engaging, and more convincing.

The four common types of persuasive claims are: **definitional, factual, policy, and value** (McKenna, 2025).

1. Definitional Claims

A **definitional claim** argues about the meaning or classification of something. In short, you're saying: "X is (or is not) a Y because it has (or doesn't have) features A, B, and C."

- Example: A student argues that thrifting and upcycling clothing should be seen as sustainable fashion, not just "cheap shopping" (Tan et al., 2021).
- Example: A classmate giving a speech on e-sports might argue that competitive gaming should be classified as a real sport because it requires strategy, training, and teamwork (Albarracín et al., 2021).

2. Factual Claims

A **factual claim** argues whether something is true or false, or whether something will happen. Some are straightforward ("Barack Obama was the first African American U.S. president"), while others are harder to prove because the evidence is uncertain or ongoing (Fransen et al., 2015).

- Example: A student speech might argue that streaming music pays artists less than the radio ever did.
- Example: Another might predict that California will face more frequent wildfires due to climate change (Gleick, 2010).

Think of a factual claim like a courtroom trial: your job as the speaker is to present evidence and convince the jury (your classmates) that your claim is most believable.

3. Policy Claims

A **policy claim** argues for a specific action or change - what should be done about a problem. These are very common in persuasive speeches because students often see problems on campus or in society that they want to fix (Cruz et al., 2025).

- Example: Our college should provide free or reduced-cost parking passes for students.
- Example: California should make community college tuition-free for all residents.
- Example: The campus cafeteria should offer more vegan and culturally diverse food options.

Policy claims can aim for **passive agreement** (just convincing the audience that your policy is good) or **immediate action** (getting your audience to do something right away, like sign a petition, scan a QR code, or attend a rally) (Albarracín et al., 2021).

4. Value Claims

A **value claim** argues whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair. These can spark debate because people's values differ, so you'll need to explain your **criteria** for making the judgment (McKenna, 2025).

- Example: It's unfair for textbooks to cost more than $200 when free OER materials exist.
- Example: It's better for students to live at home during community college than to take on high rent (Glass & Westmont, 2014).
- Example: Fast fashion is harmful and should not be supported (Tan et al., 2021).

With value claims, make your standards clear. If you say fast fashion is harmful, are you talking about environmental damage, labor practices, or consumer waste? Defining your criteria makes your claim stronger and easier to understand.

Example 11.2.1

Types of Persuasive Claims

Type of Claim	Definition	Student-Friendly Examples
Definitional	Argues what something *is* or *is not*; how something should be defined or classified.	"E-sports should be classified as a legitimate sport because it requires skill, strategy, and teamwork" (Albarracín et al., 2021). "Thrifting and upcycling clothes count as sustainable fashion, not just 'cheap shopping'" (Tan et al., 2021).
Factual	Argues whether something is true/false or whether something will happen.	"California will face more frequent wildfires due to climate change" (Gleick, 2010). "International students contribute billions to the U.S. economy each year" (Institute of International Education, 2023).
Policy	Argues what should be done; proposes a solution to a problem.	"Community colleges in California should expand free tuition programs for low-income students" (Cruz et al., 2025). "Our college should provide more affordable housing options for international students" (Glass & Westmont, 2014).
Value	Argues whether something is good/bad, right/wrong, fair/unfair.	"It's unfair for textbooks to cost more than $200 when free OER materials exist" (Albarracín et al., 2021). "Fast fashion is harmful and should not be supported by college students" (Tan et al., 2021).

Key Takeaways

- Every persuasive speech begins with a claim. Knowing whether you're defining something, debating a fact, proposing a policy, or making a value judgment shapes your approach (Example: Is fast fashion sustainable = definitional).
- Different claims need different evidence. Definitional claims use clear criteria, factual claims rely on data, policy claims need solutions, and value claims require standards for judgment (Example: Community college should be free = policy).
- Persuasive claims connect to real student issues. Framing your claim well makes it more impactful, whether you're talking about tuition hikes, housing costs, or sustainability (Example: It's unfair for textbooks to cost over $200 = value).

Exercises

- Claim Tweet: Students take a persuasive topic and write one claim as if it had to fit in a tweet (max 280 characters). Bonus if they add a hashtag (Example: Fast fashion isn't cheap - it's costly for workers and the planet. #ShopSmart).
- Perusasion Pair Challenge: In pairs, one student gives a quick 30-second persuasive claim on a fun topic (like pineapple on pizza, best boba shop, or Lakers vs. Warriors). Their partner identifies the type of claim (definitional, factual, policy, or value)

and explains why, then they switch roles.
- Fact or Opinion Flip: With a partner, one person states an **opinion** (Example: Textbooks are too expensive), and the other flips it into a factual claim with evidence (Example: The average cost of a textbook at U.S. colleges is over $100). Switch roles and repeat with new examples.

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12.3: Organizing Persuasive Speeches

Organizing Persuasive Speeches

Have you ever watched a TED Talk that left you feeling fired up to change the world, or listened to a classmate give a speech that made you see an issue in a totally new way? The difference usually isn't just the topic, it's the way the speech is organized. A clear structure helps your audience follow along, stay engaged, and actually remember what you're saying.

Around the world, persuasive organization has fueled real change. In the U.S., student activists have used well-structured arguments to win federal financial aid expansions like the Pell Grant. Globally, Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future movement spread so quickly because her speeches followed a simple pattern: describe the problem of climate change, explain the causes, and urge people to act (Wrench et al., 2012). Even closer to home, campus campaigns like improving cafeteria food, adding shuttle buses to solve parking problems, or pushing for safer transit options for international students succeed when speakers organize their ideas well.

In this section, we'll look at three practical ways to organize persuasive speeches: **Monroe's Motivated Sequence, Problem-Cause-Solution,** and **Comparative Advantages.** Each gives you a step-by-step roadmap for building arguments that are clear, engaging, and persuasive.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

One of the most widely used persuasive speech structures is **Monroe's Motivated Sequence**, developed by communication scholar Alan Monroe in the 1930s. Monroe created this five-step organizational pattern to help speakers move audiences from awareness to action. The sequence is designed to capture attention, establish a problem, propose a solution, help the audience visualize the outcome, and motivate them to take action.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence remains popular because it provides a clear and logical structure for persuasive speeches. Research suggests that it is not necessarily more persuasive than other organizational patterns, but audiences often find it easier to follow and understand because each step builds naturally on the one before it (Micciche, Pryor, & Butler, 2000).

This pattern is especially useful when advocating for a policy change, promoting a cause, encouraging healthier behaviors, or persuading an audience to support a specific solution.

The Five Steps

1. Attention: Capture the audience's interest with a story, question, surprising statistic, quotation, or personal example.

Example: "How many of you spent more time sitting in traffic this morning than eating breakfast?"

2. Need: Explain the problem and help the audience understand why it matters.

Example: "Many Bay Area students commute long distances to campus. Rising gas prices, traffic congestion, and lengthy commutes increase stress, cost students money, and leave less time for studying, working, and spending time with family."

3. Satisfaction: Present a realistic solution to the problem.

Example: "Expanding public transportation options, increasing transit subsidies, and improving carpool programs could reduce commuting costs and make getting to campus easier."

4. Visualization: Help the audience imagine what the future would look like if the solution were adopted or if nothing changes.

Example: "Imagine saving hundreds of dollars each quarter on gas and parking while spending less time stuck on Highway 85 and more time focused on school, work, friends, family, or simply getting enough sleep."

5. Action: Tell the audience exactly what you want them to do.

Example: "Support student transit initiatives by participating in campus transportation surveys and advocating for expanded transit funding."

Example: Expanding Mental Health Services

A student advocating for expanded counseling services could use Monroe's Motivated Sequence to build a persuasive case.

- **Attention:** Begin with a story about a student struggling with stress and burnout.
- **Need:** Explain rising rates of anxiety, loneliness, and mental health concerns among college students.
- **Satisfaction:** Propose hiring additional counselors and extending counseling center hours.
- **Visualization:** Help the audience imagine a campus where students can access support before reaching a crisis point.
- **Action:** Encourage students to complete a campus survey, attend a board meeting, or support increased funding for counseling services.

By moving step-by-step from problem awareness to action, Monroe's Motivated Sequence provides speakers with a practical roadmap for creating persuasive and audience-centered messages.

Problem-Cause-Solution

This pattern works well when you need to explain a problem, identify its causes, and then suggest a fix (Wrench, Goding, Johnson, & Attias, 2012).

- **Problem**: Bay Area rents make it hard for community college students to afford housing.
- **Cause**: Limited affordable housing and high local costs.
- **Solution**: Expand student housing partnerships or create rent-subsidy programs.

Example: Students at UC Berkeley have organized around affordable housing, showing how campus activism can influence local policy.

Comparative Advantages

Sometimes you need to show why one option is better than another. The **comparative advantages** pattern lets you line up two or more choices and explain why your recommendation is stronger.

Example for California students: A speech comparing **Clipper Card** student discounts on BART to paying full fare tickets. The speaker shows how the discount saves money, reduces stress, and encourages eco-friendly commuting.

Example for international students: A speech comparing U.S. student health insurance plans with buying coverage from their home country. The student highlights which option is more affordable, provides better access to local doctors, and saves time when emergencies happen.

Why Organization Matters

Well-organized speeches are not just easier to follow, they also make you sound more credible and ethical. Listeners are more likely to trust you and take you seriously when your ideas flow logically (Beebe & Beebe, 2023; Lucas, 2024). Whether your topic is parking, housing, or public transit, choosing the right organizational pattern makes your speech clearer, stronger, and more persuasive.

Example 11.3.1

Persuasive Patterns with Real-Life Student Examples

Table explains each of the above persuasive patterns with simple explanations and relevant examples.

Pattern	How It Works	Campus or Everyday Example	Global or California Example
Monroe's Motivated Sequence	Grabs attention, shows a need, offers a solution, paints the future, and ends with action	Convincing classmates to support free printing credits in the library by showing how costs add up and asking them to sign a petition	A speech urging students in wildfire-prone areas of California to create "go bags" for emergencies
Problem-Cause-Solution	Explains the problem, why it happens, and how to fix it	Showing that long cafeteria lines happen because of too few staff, then proposing mobile ordering to cut wait times	Arguing that international students struggle with housing because of high Bay Area rents, and proposing partnerships with host families
Comparative Advantages	Compares two or more options and shows why one is better	Persuading students that forming a study group is more effective than cramming alone	Comparing taking BART with a Clipper Card discount pass versus driving and paying for gas and parking in San Francisco

Key Takeaways

- Organization makes persuasion stronger. A well-structured speech is easier to follow and more convincing, whether you're talking about parking on campus, housing costs, or global issues like climate change.
- Different patterns fit different goals. Use Monroe's Motivated Sequence when you want action, Problem-Cause-Solution when you need to show why something happens, and Comparative Advantages when you're proving one choice is better than another.
- Practical, relatable examples help. Connecting patterns to real student issues, like tuition hikes, Wi-Fi problems, or public transit in California, makes your message more engaging and memorable for your audience.

Exercises

- Speech Outline Sprint: Pick a workplace or global issue, such as employee burnout or access to clean water, and write a mini-outline using the **Problem-Cause-Solution** pattern. Example: "Problem: Employees burn out from constant after-hours emails. Cause: No work-life boundaries. Solution: Adopt a 'right to disconnect' policy."
- Visualization Journal: Choose an academic or transfer goal, like getting into a UC or landing an internship, and write a short **Monroe's Motivated Sequence** style visualization. Example: "Imagine submitting one strong application for your dream internship, getting the job, and building the experience that launches your career."
- Quick Compare List: Pick two class options, in-person versus online, and make a list of three reasons why one is stronger using the **Comparative Advantages** pattern. Example: "In-person classes help build community, make it easier to ask questions, and keep students more accountable compared to online classes."

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12.4: Building Persuasive Power- Appeals, Canons, and Culture

Persuasion Through Different Lenses

More than 2,000 years ago, thinkers like Aristotle and Cicero developed influential ideas about persuasion that continue to shape how public speaking is taught today. Their appeals and canons give speakers practical tools for developing, organizing, and delivering persuasive messages.

But these classical Western traditions are only part of the story. Cultures around the world have developed different ways of thinking about credibility, argument, storytelling, relationships, and the role of the audience. Understanding several rhetorical traditions gives us a broader view of what persuasion can look like.

Aristotle's Three Appeals

More than 2,000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that effective persuasion depends on balancing three types of appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos (Beebe & Beebe, 2023). While speakers often favor one appeal over the others, the strongest persuasive messages typically combine all three. Audiences want to know that a speaker is credible, that the argument makes sense, and that the issue matters on a human level.

Imagine a student proposing a Student Wellness Initiative that includes food trucks, napping pods, exercise rooms, and meditation spaces. The speaker builds ethos by researching successful programs at other colleges, uses logos by presenting studies linking student well-being to academic success and retention, and appeals to pathos by asking the audience to imagine a campus where students feel less stressed, more connected, and excited to spend time between classes. Together, these appeals make the proposal more persuasive than relying on facts, emotions, or credibility alone.

Ethos: Credibility and Trust

Ethos refers to a speaker's credibility, character, and trustworthiness. Audiences are more likely to listen to speakers they view as knowledgeable, honest, and ethical. Ethos can come from personal experience, expertise, research, preparation, or the way a speaker presents themselves.

Example: A community college student transferring to a UC can strengthen ethos by citing accurate statistics on transfer rates and sharing their own experience navigating the transfer process. In the workplace, a young professional might build ethos by demonstrating expertise while also showing respect for colleagues' perspectives.

Importantly, ethos is not just about credentials. A speaker who appears prepared, fair-minded, and genuine can often build credibility even without formal expertise. Building ethos takes time, but it can be lost quickly if a speaker exaggerates, misrepresents evidence, or appears untrustworthy.

Logos: Logic and Evidence

Logos refers to the use of logic, evidence, and reasoning to support an argument. Speakers use facts, statistics, examples, expert testimony, and cause-and-effect reasoning to help audiences understand why a claim makes sense.

Example: A student arguing for a Student Wellness Initiative might present research showing that exercise improves academic performance, that stress is a major barrier to student success, and that colleges with wellness programs often report higher student satisfaction and retention rates.

Logos is often the foundation of persuasive speaking because audiences are more likely to accept arguments that are supported by clear evidence and sound reasoning. However, facts alone do not always motivate people to change their beliefs or behaviors. Effective speakers help audiences understand not only what the evidence says, but why it matters.

Pathos: Emotion and Human Connection

Pathos refers to appeals that connect with an audience's emotions, values, hopes, fears, and experiences. Emotional appeals help audiences understand why an issue matters and why they should care.

Example: A student advocating for a Student Wellness Initiative might ask listeners to remember a time when they felt overwhelmed, exhausted, or disconnected during a stressful quarter. They might describe students trying to balance classes, work, family responsibilities, and long commutes while struggling to find places on campus to recharge and connect with others.

Pathos is sometimes misunderstood as manipulation, but ethical emotional appeals help audiences connect with the human side of an issue. When used responsibly, pathos can make information more memorable, relatable, and meaningful.

Balancing the Three Appeals

While it can be useful to think of ethos, logos, and pathos separately, effective persuasive speakers often use all three together. A speech with only emotion may feel manipulative. A speech with only facts may feel dry or disconnected. A speech with credibility but little evidence may lack persuasive power.

The most effective persuasive messages answer three audience questions:

- Can I trust you? (Ethos)
- Does your argument make sense? (Logos)
- Why should I care? (Pathos)

When speakers successfully address all three questions, they are more likely to create messages that are credible, compelling, and persuasive. Here's another way of looking at it through when crafting your outline:

- Ethos: Honest, respectful, inclusive language builds credibility.
- Logos: Precise definitions, accurate wording, and clear explanations strengthen logic.
- Pathos: Vivid stories, imagery, metaphors, and emotionally resonant language help audiences care.

Cicero's Five Canons

While Aristotle focused on what makes a message persuasive, the Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero focused on how speakers create and deliver those messages. Cicero's Five Canons of Rhetoric provide a practical framework for developing effective communication, from the earliest stages of brainstorming to the final delivery of a speech (Beebe & Beebe, 2023).

The five canons are invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Although they were developed more than 2,000 years ago, they remain surprisingly relevant today. Whether you're preparing a class presentation, job interview, social media campaign, TED Talk, or business pitch, the same five steps can help you communicate more effectively.

Invention: Finding Your Ideas

Invention refers to the process of discovering what you want to say. This includes brainstorming topics, researching information, gathering evidence, and identifying the strongest arguments to support your message (Beebe & Beebe, 2023; Lucas, 2024).

Example: A student preparing a transfer application speech might ask, "What challenges did I overcome? What experiences shaped me? What makes my story unique?" A professional pitching a new project might focus on identifying a problem and explaining how their proposal provides a solution.

Strong invention requires curiosity and critical thinking. Before worrying about slides or delivery, speakers should focus on developing meaningful ideas and finding evidence that supports their message.

Arrangement: Organizing Your Message

Once you have ideas, you need to organize them in a way that audiences can easily follow. Arrangement refers to the structure of a speech and how information is sequenced.

Example: A student advocating for more internship opportunities might organize their speech using a Problem-Cause-Solution pattern. An environmental activist might begin by explaining a problem, identify contributing causes, and conclude with possible solutions.

Good arrangement helps audiences stay engaged and prevents them from feeling lost. Even strong ideas can become ineffective if they are presented in a confusing or disorganized way (Lucas, 2024; Duarte, 2012).

Style: Choosing Your Words

Style refers to the language, tone, and wording a speaker uses to communicate their message. Effective speakers adapt their style to fit their audience, purpose, and occasion.

Example: A student encouraging classmates to apply for scholarships might say, "Don't let money decide your future. Let your potential decide it." The speaker uses simple, encouraging language and repetition to create a message that is both memorable and motivating. A healthcare professional discussing the dangers of vaping might instead choose clear, factual language and relatable analogies to explain long-term health risks.

Style is not about using complicated vocabulary or sounding impressive. Often, the most effective communicators use clear, simple language that helps audiences understand and remember their message.

Effective style also means choosing language that is clear, vivid, and audience-centered. Strong speakers avoid unnecessary jargon, define unfamiliar terms, and use concrete language that helps listeners visualize ideas. They may also use rhetorical devices such as repetition, parallelism, metaphors, analogies, or rhetorical questions to make key points more memorable. The goal is not to sound sophisticated, but to make your ideas easier to understand, remember, and act upon (Lucas, 2024; Beebe & Beebe, 2023).

Memory: Knowing Your Material

Memory refers to a speaker's familiarity with their content. Historically, speakers memorized entire speeches. Today, memory is less about reciting every word and more about understanding your material well enough to speak confidently and adapt when needed.

Example: A student participating in a classroom debate who understands their evidence and key arguments can respond to questions more effectively than someone who has memorized a script. In the workplace, a manager who knows a proposal thoroughly can answer questions and handle challenges with confidence.

Many beginning speakers focus on memorizing sentences. More experienced speakers focus on mastering ideas (Lucas, 2024).

Delivery: Bringing the Message to Life

Delivery refers to how a message is presented through voice, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, movement, and overall presence. Delivery influences whether audiences perceive a speaker as confident, credible, and engaging (Beebe, 1974; Beebe & Beebe, 2023).

Example: A student interviewing for a scholarship might use strong eye contact, vocal variety, and confident posture to make a positive impression. In public life, leaders, activists, and content creators often gain influence not only because of what they say, but because of how they say it.

Think about influential speakers, TED presenters, YouTubers, or podcast hosts. Their success often depends as much on delivery as on content.

Putting the Canons Together

The Five Canons work together as a process:

- Invention helps you decide what to say.
- Arrangement helps you organize it.
- Style helps you choose how to say it.
- Memory helps you know it.
- Delivery helps you present it.

For example, a student proposing food trucks, napping pods, and meditation spaces on campus might first research student wellness needs (invention), organize their speech using Monroe's Motivated Sequence (arrangement), choose language that is positive and student-centered (style), practice until they know their material well (memory), and deliver the speech with confidence and enthusiasm (delivery).

Although communication technologies have changed dramatically since Cicero's time, the basic challenge remains the same: developing a message that audiences will understand, remember, and act upon.

Putting It All Together

Aristotle's appeals and Cicero's canons give us practical tools for creating persuasive messages. The appeals help us think about credibility, reasoning, and emotion, while the canons help us develop, organize, practice, and deliver those ideas effectively.

Table 11.4.1 shows how these classical concepts can work together in college, workplace, and global contexts. But effective persuasion also depends on something these models alone cannot fully explain: culture and context. What sounds credible, logical, emotional, or appropriate can vary across audiences and communities.

To understand persuasion more fully, we need to look beyond the classical Western tradition and consider how other rhetorical traditions approach communication.

Table 11.4.1: Appeals and Canons in Action

Concept	What It Means	Example: Community College & Transfer	Example: Workplace	Example: Global Issue
Ethos (Credibility)	The speaker's trustworthiness, knowledge, and ethics	A student cites accurate transfer statistics and shares their own transfer journey	An employee highlights past project successes to show expertise	A scientist explains climate data with a strong record of peer-reviewed research
Logos (Logic)	Using evidence, facts, and clear reasoning	A student argues for affordable textbooks by showing average costs and open-source alternatives	A manager presents productivity data to support hybrid work	A UN speaker shares statistics on rising global temperatures
Pathos (Emotion)	Appealing to values, hopes, and emotions	A student shares stories about food insecurity on campus to encourage peers to support the food pantry	A team leader uses inspiring stories to motivate staff during a tough project	An activist appeals to compassion by describing families displaced by floods
Invention	Generating ideas and arguments	Brainstorming reasons why tutoring services should be expanded on campus	Identifying solutions to reduce workplace burnout	Proposing global partnerships to improve access to vaccines

Concept	What It Means	Example: Community College & Transfer	Example: Workplace	Example: Global Issue
Arrangement	Organizing content effectively	Structuring a speech on housing insecurity as Problem-Cause-Solution	Arranging a pitch by outlining need, benefits, and cost savings	Organizing a global summit speech into causes of deforestation and solutions
Style	Choosing words, tone, and delivery style	Using encouraging language when urging peers to apply for scholarships	Using clear, professional language in a board meeting	Choosing urgent but respectful language in international diplomacy
Memory	Mastery of material so ideas flow naturally	Rehearsing key points before a class presentation	Remembering data points for a client proposal	Speaking confidently about global poverty stats without notes
Delivery	How the message is presented (voice, gestures, visuals)	Using eye contact and a confident voice in a transfer scholarship interview	Using strong visuals and steady pace in a workplace training	Delivering a speech with passion and clarity at a climate march

Persuasion Across Cultures and Traditions

Aristotle's ideas about ethos, pathos, and logos have had a major influence on how public speaking is taught in the United States. But they represent one rhetorical tradition, not the only way people have understood effective communication. Comparative rhetoric broadens our understanding of persuasion by examining rhetorical traditions across cultures rather than treating Western approaches as universal (Mao, 2014).

Different cultures and historical traditions have developed their own ideas about what makes a speaker credible, what audiences value, and how people should handle disagreement. Some Western traditions emphasize individual argument, direct claims, evidence, and debate. Other traditions may place greater emphasis on relationships, community, harmony, storytelling, listening, or indirect communication. Contemporary intercultural rhetoric also cautions against treating cultures as fixed categories. Communication changes depending on the people involved, their communities, the situation, and the larger social context (McIntosh et al., 2022).

For example, Confucian rhetorical traditions emphasize relationships, ethical character, respect, and social harmony. A speaker's credibility may depend as much on how they fulfill their responsibilities to others as on how effectively they argue a position. Indigenous rhetorical traditions often emphasize storytelling, collective knowledge and memory, relationships to community and place, and knowledge passed between generations (Gross, 2021). African and African American rhetorical traditions have also drawn upon storytelling, rhythm, repetition, audience participation, and call-and-response, making the audience an active participant in communication rather than simply a group receiving a message (Browdy & Milu, 2022).

These traditions remind us that there is no single formula for effective persuasion. Even concepts such as credibility, logic, and emotional appeal can look different across cultures and communities. A speech that sounds confident and persuasive to one audience might sound aggressive, disrespectful, or overly individualistic to another. Effective speakers consider not only what they want to say, but also the cultural experiences, expectations, and values their audiences may bring to the interaction.

Studying rhetoric across cultures also gives us another tool for critically examining public discourse. When analyzing a historical speech, political debate, protest movement, social media campaign, or contemporary controversy, don't just ask, "Was it persuasive?" Ask: Who was speaking? Who had the power to speak? Whose voices were missing? What cultural values shaped the message? What did the speaker want the audience to believe or do?

Critical analysis means looking beyond whether we agree with a message and examining how persuasion works, whose interests it serves, and what consequences it may have.

Key Takeaways

- Ethos, logos, and pathos are the three primary persuasive appeals. Effective speakers build credibility (ethos), support claims

with logic and evidence (logos), and connect to audience values and emotions (pathos).
- The Five Canons of Rhetoric provide a framework for creating effective messages. Invention, arrangement, style (effective language choices), memory, and guide speakers from developing an idea to delivering it effectively.
- Persuasion is shaped by culture, context, and audience. Studying different rhetorical traditions helps us understand how persuasion works and critically evaluate the messages we encounter.

Exercises

- Appeals Swap: One student makes a quick persuasive claim using ethos, and the partner rewrites it using logos or pathos.
- Delivery Challenge: Each partner delivers the same short pitch twice (once with flat delivery and once with strong eye contact and vocal variety), then give feedback.
- Personal Story Connection: Think of a personal experience that could connect to a larger issue (Example: missing a bus leading to a bigger point about public transit) and write two sentences linking the story to the issue.

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- **Action:** The final step in Monroe's Motivated Sequence, where the speaker calls the audience to take a specific, realistic step or adopt a proposed belief, attitude, or behavior.
- **Arrangement:** One of Cicero's Five Canons of Rhetoric, referring to the organization and structure of a speech to maximize clarity and impact.
- **Attitudes:** Judgments about whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, which can be influenced through persuasive communication.
- **Beliefs:** Ideas or statements accepted as true by an individual or audience. Core beliefs tend to be deeply held and resistant to change, while dispositional beliefs are often more flexible.
- **Comparative Advantages:** A persuasive organizational pattern that compares two or more options and explains why one is more beneficial than the others.
- **Definitional Claim:** A type of persuasive argument focused on defining or classifying something by asserting what it is or is not based on its characteristics.
- **Delivery:** One of Cicero's Five Canons of Rhetoric, referring to how a message is presented, including voice, posture, gestures, movement, and visual design.
- **Disposition (Dispositio):** The classical rhetorical term for arrangement; the organization and structure of a speech.
- **Ethical Persuasion:** The practice of influencing others with honesty, transparency, and respect while avoiding manipulation or coercion.
- **Ethos:** A rhetorical appeal based on the speaker's credibility, character, and trustworthiness.
- **Factual Claim:** A type of persuasive argument focused on whether something is true or false or whether an event will occur.
- **Five Canons of Rhetoric:** A classical framework for crafting effective messages consisting of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.
- **Invention:** One of Cicero's Five Canons of Rhetoric, referring to the process of generating ideas, evidence, and arguments during the planning stage of a speech.
- **Logos:** A rhetorical appeal based on logic, evidence, reasoning, and the internal consistency of an argument.
- **Memory:** One of Cicero's Five Canons of Rhetoric, referring to a speaker's mastery of their material and ability to adapt without relying entirely on notes.
- **Monroe's Motivated Sequence:** A five-step persuasive organizational pattern (Attention, Need, Satisfaction, Visualization, Action) designed to motivate audiences toward a specific belief or action.
- **Need:** The second step in Monroe's Motivated Sequence, where the speaker identifies a problem, issue, or unmet need that requires attention.
- **Pathos:** A rhetorical appeal that seeks to influence an audience's emotions, values, and beliefs.
- **Persuasion:** The process of influencing an audience's attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors through communication.
- **Policy Claim:** A type of persuasive argument that advocates a specific course of action or solution to a problem.
- **Problem-Cause-Solution Pattern:** A persuasive organizational pattern that identifies a problem, explains its causes, and proposes a solution.
- **Satisfaction:** The third step in Monroe's Motivated Sequence, where the speaker presents a practical solution to the problem identified in the Need step.
- **Style:** One of Cicero's Five Canons of Rhetoric, referring to language choices, tone, word selection, and pacing that shape how a message is received.
- **Value Claim:** A type of persuasive argument that makes a judgment about whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, or fair or unfair.
- **Values:** Deeply held beliefs about what is important, desirable, or worthwhile that often guide attitudes and behavior.
- **Visualization:** The fourth step in Monroe's Motivated Sequence, where the speaker helps the audience imagine the positive consequences of adopting a proposal or the negative consequences of ignoring it.

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12.6: Discussion Questions

1. Think about a speech or campaign you've seen recently, like an Apple product launch or a city council meeting about housing. What persuasive strategies stood out, and why did they work (or not)?
2. How do people's attitudes, values, and beliefs shape their reactions to messages about big issues like climate change, political activism, or voting rights?
3. Pick a real example, like a car company promoting electric cars, a global climate summit speech, or a public health campaign. Which organizational pattern (like problem-cause-solution) do you think it followed, and how did that affect its message?
4. Can you think of a time when persuasion changed your behavior, like signing a petition, switching to a new app, or buying a product after seeing an ad? What strategies influenced you most?
5. How could understanding ethos, pathos, and logos help you communicate more effectively in your future job or when advocating for change on campus or in your community?

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13: SPECIAL OCCASION SPEAKING

Introduction: Finding the Right Words for Life's Big Moments

Special occasion speeches remind us that public speaking is not just for classrooms or conferences. It is also for life. Whether it is introducing a guest speaker at a campus event, giving a toast at your cousin's wedding, or sharing a farewell message at the end of a club meeting, these moments call for words that honor, celebrate, or inspire. As college students, we often find ourselves stepping into these roles without much warning. Maybe a friend says, "Hey, can you say a few words?" and suddenly, you are the speaker. This chapter explores how to handle those occasions with confidence and authenticity. From heartfelt eulogies to funny roasts, from presenting awards at student banquets to giving commencement-style speeches at graduation, each occasion offers a chance to connect with others through stories, gratitude, and emotion (Beebe & Beebe, 2021; Lucas, 2020). Like all great communication, these speeches remind us that our voices matter, not just in classrooms, but in the meaningful transitions and celebrations that shape our communities.

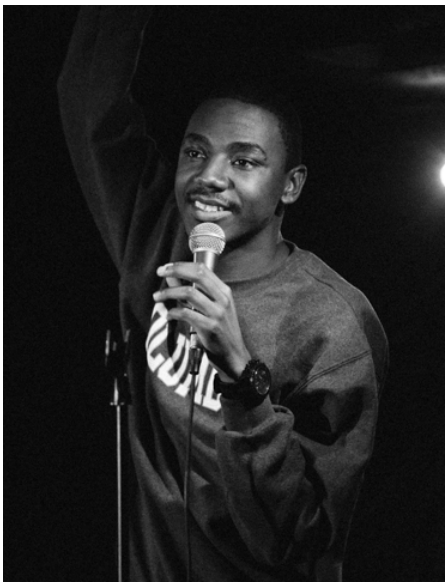


Figure 13.1 Jerrod Carmichael at the Del Monte Speakeasy (CC BY 4.0; CleftClips via Flickr)

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe different types of ceremonial and inspirational speeches given in academic, personal, and professional settings.
- Apply key principles of organization, tone, and audience awareness when preparing and delivering a special occasion speech.
- Demonstrate effective speaking techniques that create emotional connection and celebrate meaningful events within a community.

13.1: Speaking to Entertain

13.2: Ceremonial and Inspirational Speaking

13.3: Keynote Speaking

13.4: Glossary

13.5: Discussion Questions

13.6: References

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13.1: Speaking to Entertain

Speaking to Entertain

Entertaining speeches are designed to **captivate** an audience, spark emotional connection, and hold attention while delivering a clear message. Whether you are offering a toast, speaking at an awards banquet, or giving uplifting remarks at a cultural celebration, your goal is to create a shared emotional experience. Communication scholars note that entertaining speeches rely on emotional engagement, vivid language, and audience connection to sustain interest (Verderber, Sellnow, & Verderber, 2020). While many students associate entertainment with humor, the term also includes inspiration, drama, surprise, joy, and nostalgia (Frey, 2019).

Entertaining speeches often occur at **special occasions** such as graduation ceremonies, scholarship banquets, weddings, and community celebrations. In the Bay Area, you may hear them at cultural graduations, student recognition nights, internship send-offs, transfer celebrations, or tech-sponsored campus events. The primary goal is to make the audience feel something meaningful together. Even though an entertaining speech is emotional in tone, it should still have a **central message**. Research shows that effective speeches, regardless of type, are focused, clear, and adapted to audience expectations (Beebe & Beebe, 2021).

If an **informative speech** is mainly about clarity, and a **persuasive speech** is about influencing beliefs or actions, an entertaining speech is about **shared experience**. You are not trying to overwhelm listeners with data or arguments. Instead, you are trying to engage, uplift, and connect. As Lucas (2020) notes, effective public speakers plan carefully, adapt to their listeners, and choose language that fits the moment, all of which apply to entertaining speaking.

The Big Four of Speaking to Entertain

Communication scholars point to four recurring skills that shape successful special-occasion and entertaining speeches (Frey, 2019; Beebe & Beebe, 2021). These four skills help speakers create messages that feel appropriate, thoughtful, and memorable:

Prepare: Even short remarks should be outlined or practiced. Students who “wing it” often ramble or lose their message when nerves increase.

Adapt to the **occasion**: Match tone and formality to the event. A memorial demands a different tone than a student banquet.

Adapt to the **audience**: Consider who is listening and what they value. A Silicon Valley crowd may connect with references to transfer struggles, job interviews, long commutes, or tech culture.

Mind your **time**: Most entertaining speeches are short by design. A toast or award acceptance is usually 45–120 seconds; an introduction is often under two minutes; a commencement speech might range from 10–20 minutes.

These skills matter because unprepared entertaining speeches often fall flat. When speakers rely on spontaneous humor or last-minute improvisation, they risk drifting, oversharing, or misjudging the audience. Preparation improves organization, clarity, and emotional impact (Lucas, 2020).

Adapting to Audience and Occasion

Being **audience-centered** is one of the most important principles in public speaking (Beebe & Beebe, 2021). In the Bay Area, your listeners may include recent high school graduates, first-generation college students, immigrant families, international students, and Silicon Valley job-seekers. Each group brings different expectations and experiences. For example, a light joke about waiting for parking, living on boba and ramen, or taking multiple VTA buses to get to class might be relatable at a campus banquet. However, that same humor would not be appropriate during a memorial or dedication.

When speakers misjudge the room, they risk violating audience expectations, which can weaken credibility and connection. Skilled speakers read the emotional tone of the situation and choose language that fits the **rhetorical situation**, or context for communication.

Timing Expectations

Different occasions create different time expectations for speakers. As a general guide, toasts and acceptances should be brief, introductions should be concise, and longer speeches must work to sustain attention. If unsure, ask the organizer or observe common norms for that setting. Many listeners become restless if a special-occasion speech exceeds expectations, so timing is part of **situational awareness** (Lucas, 2020).

Typical ranges:

- Toasts: 45–90 seconds
- Award acceptances: 1–2 minutes
- Introductions: under 2 minutes
- Dedications or farewells: 2–4 minutes
- Commencement or keynote remarks: 10–20 minutes

Example 12.1

Choose one of the situations below and write a short entertaining speech, following the Big Four. Keep it between 60–120 seconds.

Options:
• A transfer celebration for students heading from a community college to UC or CSU campuses
• A toast at a cultural graduation (Black Grad, Latinx Grad, AAPI Grad, Pride Grad)
• Introducing a guest speaker at a student leadership summit in San José
• A short recognition speech at a Silicon Valley internship send-off

Template:
- Hook: A vivid moment or shared experience
- Connection: Why this moment matters
- Message: The value or lesson
- Close: A final, memorable line

Key Takeaways

- Entertaining speeches create shared emotional experiences. They do more than make people laugh, they connect audiences through moments of joy, inspiration, or reflection.
- Successful entertaining speeches require preparation and adaptation. Even short toasts and brief remarks are more engaging when they are planned, audience centered, and appropriate for the occasion.
- Short, focused, and well-timed messages are most memorable. Entertaining speeches should be concise, clear in theme, and delivered with attention to tone, timing, and audience expectations.

Exercises

- Type the word “roast” into YouTube and watch a few minutes of a roast. Did the speaker clearly demonstrate the four ingredients of an entertaining speech?
- Watch several toasts and acceptance speeches on YouTube. Can you identify specific ways in which each speaker adapts the speech to the occasion and the audience?
- One-Minute Mic: Students deliver a 60-second impromptu entertaining speech based on a fun prompt, such as:
  • “Bay Area commuting taught me…”
  • “Group projects made me realize…”
  • “My most chaotic finals week moment…”
  Focus: eye contact, focus on one message, and a memorable last line
  (1 minute to think, 1 minute to speak, 1–2 minutes of listener feedback)

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13.2: Ceremonial and Inspirational Speaking

Ceremonial and **inspirational** speeches are delivered during moments that carry symbolic meaning for a community. These speeches often appear at graduations, award ceremonies, weddings, memorials, retirements, cultural celebrations, political events, and public gatherings. The purpose is not to inform or persuade in a traditional sense, but to honor, celebrate, remember, or inspire. Ceremonial and inspirational speeches aim to connect people to shared values, traditions, and emotions (Lucas, 2020). Although these speeches are often brief, they require care, clarity, and sensitivity.

Ceremonial speeches mark occasions of importance. Examples include a **speech of introduction**, **speech of presentation**, **acceptance speech**, **dedication**, **toast**, **roast**, **eulogy**, or **farewell**. Listeners expect these speeches to match the **tone** and **ritual** of the moment, whether it is joyful, solemn, or reflective. For instance, a eulogy at a memorial should be compassionate and respectful, while a toast at a wedding should be warm and uplifting. Global and national ceremonies highlight how universal these moments are, from Nobel Prize acceptance speeches to Olympic opening ceremonies.

Inspirational speeches, by contrast, aim to uplift or motivate. These speeches help audiences reflect on their experiences and envision future possibilities. Well-known examples include commencement speeches, goodwill messages, or motivational remarks delivered during moments of crisis or celebration. Inspirational speeches often rely on **storytelling**, **emotional appeal**, and **vision** to help listeners feel hopeful and empowered (Frey, 2019). For example, commencement speakers at universities often share personal stories to connect with graduates and encourage resilience, curiosity, and action.

These speaking situations are more common than many students realize. At some point, you may be asked to introduce a guest speaker, give a wedding toast, accept an award, honor a colleague, deliver a farewell message, or even speak at a graduation ceremony. Unlike informative or persuasive speeches, success is often measured less by the amount of information shared and more by how well the speaker connects with the audience and captures the significance of the moment.

Research shows that audiences respond positively when speakers use inclusive language, vivid stories, and organize their remarks around a clear theme (Beebe & Beebe, 2021). The most effective ceremonial and inspirational speakers focus less on themselves and more on what the audience needs to hear. Rather than asking, "What do I want to say?" successful speakers often ask, "What does this audience need to hear right now?"

Ceremonial and inspirational speaking takes many forms. The following speech types are among the most common examples you may encounter in academic, professional, and personal settings.

Common Ceremonial Speech Types

Speech of Introduction

A short speech that warms up the audience and builds interest in the featured speaker.
Example: Michelle Obama introducing Barack Obama at the 2008 Democratic National Convention.
Student Prompt: Write a 1–2 minute introduction that builds anticipation for a guest speaker at a campus event.
(Democratic National Convention, 2008)

Speech of Presentation

A speech given to present an award or honor and highlight the achievements of the recipient.
Example: Malala Yousafzai receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, preceded by remarks from the Nobel Committee.
Student Prompt: Write a short award presentation speech recognizing someone for service, leadership, or creativity.
(Norwegian Nobel Committee, 2014)

Acceptance Speech

A speech delivered when receiving an award, focusing on gratitude and the meaning of the honor.
Example: Viola Davis's 2017 Academy Award acceptance speech for Best Supporting Actress.

Student Prompt: Write a 60–90 second acceptance speech thanking those who helped you along the way.
(Oscars, 2017)

Dedication

A speech that commemorates the opening or naming of a place, structure, or monument.
Example: President Barack Obama's 2011 dedication of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial.
Student Prompt: Write a 2–3 minute dedication speech for a new campus building, scholarship, or garden.
(Obama, 2011)

Toast

A brief celebratory speech that honors a person or group, often ending with a raised glass.
Example: Jim Halpert's heartfelt wedding toast to Pam in The Office blends humor, personal stories, gratitude, and sincere wishes for the couple's future.
Student Prompt: Write a 60–90 second toast that includes a personal story, a sincere compliment, and a hopeful wish for the future.

Roast

A humorous tribute that gently teases the honoree while ending with sincerity.
Example: The 2011 Comedy Central Roast of Charlie Sheen.
Student Prompt: Write a playful roast of a fictional character, focusing on humor without harm.
(Comedy Central, 2011)

Eulogy

A speech that honors someone who has passed away, highlighting their values and legacy.
Example: President Barack Obama's eulogy for Muhammad Ali in 2016.
Student Prompt: Write a eulogy honoring a historical figure you admire.
(Obama, 2016)

Farewell

A speech marking a transition or departure, expressing gratitude and future hope.
Example: Steve Jobs's 2011 farewell remarks to Apple.
Student Prompt: Write a farewell speech for a student transferring, graduating, or stepping down from a leadership role.
(Jobs, 2011)

Inspirational Speaking

Goodwill Speech

A speech that builds trust or reassurance and strengthens public connection.
Example: Nelson Mandela's 1990 public message encouraging unity after his prison release.
Student Prompt: Write a 1–2 minute goodwill message aimed at calming a divided audience.
(Mandela, 1990)

Commencement Speech

A speech that reflects on life lessons and inspires graduates toward the future.
Example: Conan O'Brien's 2011 commencement address at Dartmouth College uses humor, personal stories, and practical advice to encourage graduates to embrace uncertainty, work hard, and be kind.
Student Prompt: Write a short commencement message built around one theme and one personal story.
(O'Brien, 2011)

Motivational Speech

A speech that encourages action, resilience, or personal growth.
Example: Nick Vujicic's motivational addresses on overcoming adversity.
Student Prompt: Write a motivational speech encouraging listeners to overcome a common challenge.
(Vujicic, 2012)

Example

Student Practice Prompt

Write a 2–3 minute ceremonial or inspirational speech using the templates above. Choose one scenario:
- A farewell for someone leaving a school, team, or organization
- A toast at a wedding, award banquet, or major celebration
- A short inspirational message for graduates or a team reaching a milestone

Focus on tone, audience expectations, and one clear message.

Key Takeaways:

- Ceremonial and inspirational speeches honor meaningful moments and connect audiences through shared values, memory, and emotion.
- Successful ceremonial speeches match the tone of the occasion and follow clear, respectful structure.
- Inspirational speeches rely on storytelling, emotional appeal, and a central message that offers hope, meaning, or encouragement.

Exercises:

- Watch a well-known commencement speech on YouTube (for example, a university graduation speech). Identify one theme and one storytelling choice that made the speech inspirational.
- One-Word Dedication: In pairs, students choose a single word (such as courage, community, justice, or resilience) and craft a 3-4 sentence dedication speech that honors a fictional scholarship, award, or new space on campus.
- Three-Sentence Inspiration: Students write a three-sentence inspirational message to a group reaching a milestone (such as a team finishing a project or a class completing midterms). Sentence structure: 1) acknowledgment, 2) lesson, 3) hopeful message.

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13.3: Keynote Speaking

Types of Keynote Speeches

Keynote speeches are delivered at conferences, banquets, summits, and special gatherings to establish the central theme of an event or to leave an audience with a powerful final message. A keynote speaker is invited not only to speak, but to **set the tone**, **frame a message**, and **energize** listeners. Keynotes are often longer than ceremonial speeches and rely on **storytelling**, **emotional appeal**, and **vision** to create impact (Lucas, 2020). Unlike informative speeches, which focus on clarity, or persuasive speeches, which focus on influence, keynote speeches aim to inspire collective purpose.

There are two common types of keynote speeches you may encounter: **after-dinner speeches** and **motivational speeches**. After-dinner speeches are entertaining and reflective, often given at banquets or celebrations. Motivational speeches encourage people to take action, overcome obstacles, or embrace a new mindset. Both types depend on audience connection, vivid language, and messages that feel relevant to listeners' lived experiences (Beebe & Beebe, 2021).

After-Dinner Speaking

After-dinner speeches are designed to entertain while still offering a clear message. They balance light humor and meaningful content. These speeches are common at award banquets, charity galas, alumni dinners, and professional conferences.

Key features of after-dinner speaking:
- A relatable story or theme
- Light humor that includes, not excludes
- A meaningful message beneath the entertainment

Example: Wanda Sykes used humor and cultural commentary in her White House Correspondents' Dinner remarks to entertain audiences while still reinforcing the importance of a free press (Sykes, 2009).

Motivational Keynote Speaking

Motivational speeches aim to spark focus, confidence, or action. These speeches are often delivered during commencements, leadership summits, team events, or public gatherings. Effective motivational speeches acknowledge struggle, name shared values, and offer a **call to action** (Frey, 2019).

Key features of motivational speeches:
- A central theme or message
- A personal story or turning point
- Practical steps or lessons
- A clear, forward-looking close

Example: Steve Jobs delivered a well-known motivational keynote at Stanford in 2005, encouraging graduates to trust their intuition, learn from failure, and stay true to their passions (Jobs, 2005).

Example 12.3.1

- A keynote speaker, such as community college student Alia Hassan, might open a regional student leadership summit by sharing her journey as a first-generation student to set an inspiring and unifying theme for the event.
- An after-dinner speaker, like nonprofit volunteer Marco Nguyen, could entertain guests at a charity banquet with light storytelling and a meaningful message about the impact of community support.
- A motivational keynote speaker, such as small-business owner Serena Okafor, might encourage a group of young professionals to overcome setbacks by sharing a personal turning point and offering a hopeful call to action.

Key Takeaways

- Keynote speeches inspire collective focus by blending storytelling, emotion, and vision into a unified message.
- After-dinner speeches entertain while still offering a meaningful takeaway.
- Motivational speeches encourage audiences to overcome challenges, embrace values, or take purposeful action.

Exercises

- Theme in Three: Write a three-sentence theme for a fictional keynote. Sentence structure: 1) challenge, 2) message, 3) hope.
- Humor Swap: Rewrite a serious sentence from a past speech into a light, audience-friendly opening for an after-dinner speech.
- One-Minute Mission: Deliver a one-minute motivational message that ends with a call to action listeners can complete within one week.

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- **Acceptance speech:** A short ceremonial speech delivered when receiving an award, focusing on gratitude and the meaning of the honor.
- **After-dinner speech:** An entertaining keynote speech, often delivered at a banquet or celebration, that uses light humor and storytelling to express a meaningful message.
- **Audience-centered:** An approach to speaking that focuses on the needs, expectations, and backgrounds of listeners when selecting content, tone, and delivery.
- **Call to action:** A clear statement in a motivational or inspirational speech that encourages the audience to take a specific next step.
- **Captivate:**To gain and hold the attention of an audience through engaging language, delivery, or storytelling.
- **Central message:**The core idea or takeaway that a speaker wants the audience to remember.
- **Ceremonial speech:** A speech presented at a formal or symbolic occasion, such as a graduation, award ceremony, dedication, wedding, or memorial.
- **Commencement speech:** A speech delivered at a graduation ceremony that reflects on life lessons and encourages the audience to move forward with purpose.
- **Dedication:** A ceremonial speech given to honor the opening, naming, or unveiling of a building, space, object, or memorial.
- **Eulogy:** A speech that honors the life, values, and legacy of a person who has passed away.
- **Farewell speech:** A ceremonial speech delivered when someone is leaving a group or ending a chapter, expressing gratitude and hope for the future.
- **Goodwill speech:** An inspirational message designed to build trust, strengthen relationships, or reassure an audience.
- **Humor:** The use of light-hearted language or stories to entertain, connect with listeners, or ease tension in a speech.
- **Inspirational speech**: A speech that encourages, uplifts, or motivates listeners by appealing to their emotions and shared values.
- **Keynote speech:** A speech that sets the main theme for an event or leaves the audience with a final unifying message, often delivered at conferences or banquets.
- **Motivational speech:** A type of keynote or inspirational speech designed to spark confidence, perseverance, or purposeful action.
- **Occasion:** The event, context, and emotional setting surrounding a speech, which influences tone, style, and content.
- **Rhetorical situation:** The combination of audience, speaker, purpose, and context that shapes the choices made in a speech.
- **Roast:** A humorous ceremonial speech that playfully teases the honoree while still expressing admiration.
- **Shared experience:** A moment, memory, value, or emotion that an audience can relate to collectively.
- **Special occasion speech:** A speech delivered to mark a meaningful event or milestone in the life of a person or community.
- **Storytelling:** The use of narrative to engage listeners, illustrate meaning, and create emotional connection within a speech.
- **Toast:** A brief ceremonial speech that celebrates a person or group, ending with an invitation for listeners to raise a glass.
- **Tone:** The emotional quality or attitude communicated through a speaker's language and delivery.
- **Vision:** A forward-looking message in an inspirational or motivational speech that imagines a better future or goal.

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13.5: Discussion Questions

1. What makes a special occasion speech memorable? Identify one speech you have seen in real life, on television, or online. Explain what elements such as storytelling, tone, language, or structure made it effective or ineffective.
2. How should a speaker balance emotion and message in a ceremonial or inspirational speech? Is it more important to make the audience feel something or to communicate a clear takeaway? Explain your reasoning.
3. Different audiences have different expectations. Describe a moment when you or someone you know had to adapt language or tone for a specific audience. How does this connect to speaking at graduations, memorials, or celebrations?
4. Humor can build connection, but it can also cause harm if used poorly. What guidelines should speakers follow when using humor in toasts, roasts, or after-dinner speeches? Provide an example to support your answer.
5. Imagine you are asked to deliver a farewell, a toast, or a commencement message. Which type would be most challenging for you and why? Which type would be the easiest? Discuss what skills you would need to strengthen to deliver both effectively.

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13.6: References

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14: MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND REMOTE LEARNING

Mediated communication happens when people interact using technology instead of face to face conversation. Today, much of education and work relies on mediated tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Canvas, email, and discussion boards. Internet use has become widespread in modern society, with approximately 5.4 billion people, about 67% of the global population, online by 2023 (International Telecommunication Union, 2023) and about 93% of U.S. households having internet access (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital communication tools such as video conferencing expanded rapidly, accelerating adoption by several years in a short period (McKinsey & Company, 2020). At the same time, remote learning became a global necessity, with more than 1.2 billion students affected by school closures and shifting to online education (Li & Lalani, 2020).

While mediated communication allows people to connect across distances and time zones, it also brings new challenges. Nonverbal cues such as eye contact, posture, and gestures can be harder to read on a screen, which may cause misunderstandings. Students may also experience **Zoom fatigue,** a feeling of exhaustion from prolonged online interaction (Peper et al., 2021). For public speaking, this means that speakers must adapt their style by speaking with more vocal variety, pausing for audience feedback, and using visuals effectively to maintain attention in mediated spaces. In addition, mediated platforms offer exciting opportunities. A student in California can present a group project with a classmate in Japan, or a small business owner can pitch to investors across the country without traveling. Public speaking in these environments requires not only clear delivery but also strong listening, engagement, and digital presence. By learning how to communicate effectively through mediated channels, students prepare themselves for success in both academic and professional settings.



Figure 14.1: Figure 14.1: Remote learning study set up. OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (Sep 19 version) [Large language model]. Http://chat.openai.com/chat Links to an external site.

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish between synchronous and asynchronous online speeches and explain the benefits and challenges of each.
- Apply best practices for verbal and nonverbal communication in mediated environments, including strategies for lighting, camera setup, sound, and use of visual aids.
- Evaluate how mediated communication has transformed public speaking opportunities in education and professional contexts.

14.1: Synchronous and Asynchronous

14.2: Guidelines for Online Speeches
14.3: Glossary
14.4: Discussion Questions
14.5: References

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14.1: Synchronous and Asynchronous

With the growth of technology and remote learning, public speaking no longer happens only in traditional classrooms or auditoriums. Today, students and professionals often present to audiences through digital platforms. Online speeches can take several forms, but the two most common are **synchronous** and **asynchronous**. Understanding the difference between these formats is important because each requires slightly different preparation and delivery skills.

Synchronous speeches take place in real time, where the speaker and audience are present together virtually. These speeches are usually delivered through web conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. Depending on the setting, the audience may be gathered together in one physical space, like a classroom or conference room, or they may be spread out across multiple locations, tuning in from their own homes or offices. One of the biggest advantages of synchronous speeches is that they allow for immediate interaction. Speakers can see audience reactions, receive questions in the chat, or hear live feedback, which gives them the opportunity to adapt their delivery as needed.

Asynchronous speeches on the other hand, are recorded in advance and made available for the audience to watch at a later time. In this format, the speaker typically addresses the camera directly without a live audience present. While asynchronous speaking lacks the benefit of real time feedback, it offers flexibility for both the speaker and the audience. The challenge is that speakers must plan their delivery carefully by paying attention to pacing, tone, and nonverbal cues because they cannot rely on audience reactions to adjust mid speech.

In some cases, speeches can combine synchronous and asynchronous elements. For instance, TED Talks are delivered to a live audience in the moment (synchronous) but are later posted online for millions of viewers worldwide to watch on demand (asynchronous). Similarly, many professional webinars are presented live but recorded and shared afterward so participants can revisit the content. These examples show how online speaking often blends both formats to expand accessibility and reach.

Verbal Communication Online

In online public speaking, your voice becomes one of your most powerful tools. Without the physical presence of a live audience, it can be easy to fall into a monotone, speak too quickly, or forget to pause. Yet listeners rely heavily on your voice to stay engaged. Research on audio learning shows that vocal variation such as changes in pitch, rate, and volume, helps hold attention and aids comprehension (Rudolph et al., 2020).

Podcasters, audio book narrators, and radio hosts are excellent examples of professionals who use vocal variety to keep their audiences interested. For student speakers, this means slowing down slightly, pausing between key ideas, and practicing pronunciation and emphasis. The University of Melbourne (2020) suggests recording yourself ahead of time to check for clarity and variety in your delivery. This practice helps students hear how they sound and make adjustments before presenting to others.

Nonverbal Communication Online

Nonverbal communication is just as important online as it is in face-to-face settings, but it looks different through a camera. Your environment, posture, clothing, and gestures all shape how your message is received.

- Environment: Choose a quiet, uncluttered space free from distractions. A messy background can make you look unprofessional. Consider a neutral backdrop or virtual background.
- Clothing: Avoid stripes, busy prints, or bright white, as these can distort on screen. Solid, medium-tone colors generally appear best.
- Eye contact: Look directly into the webcam rather than at the screen. This creates the impression of eye contact and builds connection with your audience. Keep the camera at eye level for a natural look.
- Gestures: Use purposeful and deliberate gestures within the camera frame. Too much movement can be distracting, but controlled gestures emphasize important points.

Sitting vs. Standing

Most online speakers sit while delivering speeches because their computer is on a desk. However, standing while speaking online

can offer significant benefits. Research shows that standing increases lung capacity and vocal projection, which can improve clarity and energy in delivery (Miller et al., 2010). Standing also allows for more natural use of gestures and better posture, both of which enhance credibility and audience engagement (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2016).

If space and technology allow, standing during an online speech can help replicate the energy of face to face speaking. For instance, when giving a persuasive or inspirational speech, standing may help you convey passion and authority. On the other hand, sitting may be more appropriate for informal presentations or small-group discussions. The key is to match your physical presence to the purpose of the speech.

Example 14.1.1

During the pandemic, Michelle, a nonprofit leader presented a fundraising pitch to donors over Zoom. To keep attention, she slowed her speaking pace, used strong vocal variety, and made direct eye contact with the webcam. She also positioned herself in front of a neutral backdrop with good lighting. The pitch was recorded and later shared with donors who could not attend live, helping the organization raise more funds than in previous in-person events. This shows how adapting verbal and nonverbal communication strategies online can turn challenges into opportunities.

Key Takeaways

- Online speeches can be synchronous (live), asynchronous (recorded), or a mix of both.
- Vocal variety including changing pitch, pace, and pauses is crucial for keeping online audiences engaged.
- Nonverbal factors like environment, posture, eye contact, and gestures require extra attention in virtual settings

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Exercises

- Record a short 2-minute speech asynchronously (to your camera only). Then, deliver the same speech synchronously live on Zoom. Write a reflection comparing the challenges and benefits of each format.
- Set up your webcam and deliver a one-minute introduction speech. Pay attention to your background, clothing, and eye contact. Ask a peer to give you feedback on your nonverbal communication.
- Watch a TED Talk online. Identify how the speaker used both verbal and nonverbal communication effectively, and explain how their delivery worked both for the live audience and for you as an online viewer.

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14.2: Guidelines for Online Speeches



Figure 14.2.1: Online learning (Pexels license; Katerina Holmes via Pexels)

Presenting online requires more than simply giving the same speech you would deliver in a classroom or auditorium. Along with the usual verbal and nonverbal skills such as vocal variety, gestures, and eye contact you must also consider how technology shapes your delivery. Elements like lighting, camera angle, sound quality, and background can significantly affect how your audience perceives your message. Research shows that audience members are more likely to disengage when sound or visuals are poor, even if the speech content is strong (Anderson, 2016). The good news is that with preparation and practice, you can create an online presentation that is polished, professional, and engaging.

Technical Considerations

Lighting

Lighting plays a critical role in how professional you appear on camera. Poor lighting can turn your face into a shadow or create glare that distracts from your message. Avoid sitting with a window or bright light source behind you, as this will create backlighting and obscure your features. Instead, place yourself facing a window with natural light or use a lamp or ring light in front of you. Good lighting not only ensures your audience can see you clearly but also helps convey warmth and energy.

Camera

Your camera acts as the eyes of your audience. If you are using a built-in webcam, position it at eye level so you can make natural eye contact with your viewers. Looking into the camera, not at the screen, creates the impression of direct connection. A good framing rule is to keep yourself visible from about the waist up, with your face centered in the frame. If using a phone or tablet, place it on a tripod and record in landscape mode for a wider, more professional look. Stable camera placement avoids the distraction of shaky video.

Sound

Sound is often more important than video quality. Studies on media viewing show that audiences are more forgiving of poor visuals than poor audio (Whittington, 2021). To improve sound, use a headset, earbuds, or an external microphone when possible. These tools minimize background noise and make your voice clearer. If using a built-in microphone, test your volume settings

and practice by recording a short speech to confirm your voice is loud, clear, and consistent. Remember that if your audience cannot hear you well, they are unlikely to stay engaged.

Environment

Finally, be mindful of your surroundings. Choose a quiet, uncluttered room and eliminate distractions such as pets, phones, or background conversations. What appears behind you in the camera frame shapes audience perceptions. For example, an organized, neutral background conveys professionalism, while clutter can undermine your credibility.

Visual Aids

Presentation aids can strengthen your online speeches when used effectively. Tools such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Prezi allow you to emphasize key points, display images, or show data. However, slides should support your message, not replace it. If slides are the only thing on screen, your audience may lose connection with you as the speaker.

A strong approach is to keep your face visible while using slides sparingly for emphasis. For example, an informative speech on climate change might include a graph showing rising temperatures, but the speaker should return to the camera afterward to explain the significance in their own words. Webinars often rely heavily on slide decks, but in a public speaking class, you should aim to keep the audience focused on your presence.

Practice transitioning between your slides and the camera smoothly so the flow of your presentation remains natural. Always test your technology ahead of time to make sure you can screen share and to avoid awkward pauses or technical glitches.

Checklist for Online Presenting

Use this checklist as you prepare for your next online presentation:

- Webcam and microphone: Make sure your camera is clear and at a good angle. Test your microphone to ensure your voice is being picked up clearly.
- Presentation software: Test Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, or whichever software you'll be using. Confirm that you know how to share your screen, mute/unmute, and switch between slides and camera view.
- Presentation Aids: Double-check that slides, videos, or visuals work properly with your chosen software. Practice transitioning smoothly between them.
- Speaking notes: Use note cards or speaking notes that let you glance down briefly without losing eye contact with the webcam.
- Lighting: Present in a well-lit area with light facing you, not behind you.
- Camera setup: Keep the camera at eye level and frame yourself from about the waist up. This creates a natural, conversational presence.
- Eye contact: Look at the webcam rather than your screen. This helps simulate direct connection with your audience.
- Voice projection: Speak clearly, with more energy and articulation than you might in person. Online settings often dull vocal variety, so extra emphasis helps maintain attention.

By following this checklist, you ensure your audience can see, hear, and connect with you by allowing your message to come through with confidence and professionalism.

Example 14.2.1

A college student named Lurong was invited to present his research at a national undergraduate conference that was hosted virtually. He set up his laptop on a stack of books so his webcam was at eye level, positioned a lamp to light his face, and tested his microphone with a friend the day before. During his live talk, he alternated between showing his PowerPoint slides and returning to full camera view to summarize key points. Audience members commented afterward that his clear voice, professional setup, and ability to make "eye contact" through the webcam made his presentation one of the most engaging of the session. This example shows how small adjustments in lighting, sound, and camera presence can significantly improve online speaking.

Key Takeaways

- Online presentations require attention not only to verbal and nonverbal skills, but also to technical elements such as lighting, camera placement, sound, and background.
- Clear audio is more important than visuals as audiences will tolerate imperfect video but will disengage quickly if they cannot hear the speaker.
- Effective online speakers balance visual aids and personal presence, ensuring slides support rather than replace their delivery.

Exercises

- Record a 2–3 minute practice speech using Zoom or another platform. Review the recording and evaluate your lighting, camera angle, sound, and background. Identify at least two areas for improvement.
- Create three slides on a topic of your choice. Practice switching between slides and camera view, making sure your face is visible for part of the presentation. Reflect on how this balance affects audience connection.
- Before your next online presentation, use the provided checklist. Afterward, write a short reflection (150–200 words) on which checklist items helped you the most and what you still need to improve.

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- **Asynchronous speech**: An online speech that is recorded and made available for later viewing, without real-time interaction between the speaker and the audience.
- **Mediated communication**: Communication that occurs through technology rather than in person, such as video calls, email, or discussion boards.
- **Remote learning**: Education delivered online, often through platforms such as Zoom, Canvas, or Google Meet, allowing students and instructors to connect from different locations.
- **Synchronous speech**: A live, real-time online presentation delivered through platforms like Zoom or Teams, allowing interaction and feedback from the audience.
- **Zoom fatigue**: A sense of mental exhaustion caused by prolonged use of video conferencing platforms for communication and learning.

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14.4: Discussion Questions

- How does mediated communication expand access to education and public speaking opportunities, and what challenges does it create compared to face-to-face communication?
- In what situations might synchronous speaking be more effective than asynchronous, and vice versa? Provide examples.
- Why is vocal variety especially important in online public speaking? Can you think of times when poor audio or monotone delivery made it hard for you to stay engaged?
- How do nonverbal elements like eye contact, gestures, and environment change when speaking through a webcam compared to in person?
- Standing while presenting online has been shown to increase projection and energy. Under what circumstances would standing be preferable to sitting, and when might sitting work better?

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INDEX

A

audience
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
audience analysis
12: Persuasive Speaking
audience engagement
11: Informative Speaking
7: Research and Evidence
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions
9: Delivering the Speech
authenticity
13: Special Occasion Speaking

B

bias recognition
7: Research and Evidence

C

central idea
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions
clarity
11: Informative Speaking
college students
13: Special Occasion Speaking
communication
12: Persuasive Speaking
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions
communication skills
11: Informative Speaking
7: Research and Evidence
9: Delivering the Speech
confidence
13: Special Occasion Speaking
content development
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions
credibility
12: Persuasive Speaking
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
critical thinking
7: Research and Evidence

D

delivery
9: Delivering the Speech

E

effective communication
11: Informative Speaking
effective speaking
9: Delivering the Speech
ethical choices
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
ethical principles
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
ethics
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
ethos
12: Persuasive Speaking
eulogies
13: Special Occasion Speaking
evidence
7: Research and Evidence
eye contact
9: Delivering the Speech

F

farewell messages
13: Special Occasion Speaking

G

graduation speeches
13: Special Occasion Speaking

I

influence
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
information evaluation
7: Research and Evidence
information quality
7: Research and Evidence
informative speeches
11: Informative Speaking

L

logos
12: Persuasive Speaking

M

message retention
11: Informative Speaking
misinformation
5: Ethics in Public Speaking

O

organization
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions
organizational patterns
12: Persuasive Speaking
outlining
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions

P

pacing
9: Delivering the Speech
pathos
12: Persuasive Speaking
persuasion
12: Persuasive Speaking
persuasive speaking
12: Persuasive Speaking
persuasive speeches
12: Persuasive Speaking
posture
9: Delivering the Speech
presentation skills
11: Informative Speaking
9: Delivering the Speech
Public Speaking
11: Informative Speaking
13: Special Occasion Speaking
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
9: Delivering the Speech

R

relationships
5: Ethics in Public Speaking
research
7: Research and Evidence
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions

S

special occasion speeches
13: Special Occasion Speaking
speech development
7: Research and Evidence
speech organization
11: Informative Speaking
speech preparation
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions
storytelling
13: Special Occasion Speaking
structure
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions
supporting details
8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions

T

TED Talks
11: Informative Speaking
toasts
13: Special Occasion Speaking

V

vocal expression
9: Delivering the Speech

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GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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    - 1.5: Discussions Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.6: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.7: Alternative Text - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 2: Communication Apprehension - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.1: What Is Communication Apprehension? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.2: Sources of Communication Apprehension - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.3: Reducing Communication Apprehension - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.4: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.5: Disussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.6: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 3: Audience Analysis - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.1: The Importance of Audience Analysis - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.2: Three Types of Audience Analysis - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.3: Conducting Audience Analyses - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.4: Connecting with the Audience - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.5: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.6: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.7: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.8: Alternative Text - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 4: Listening - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.1: What is Listening and Why Listening is Important - *CC BY 4.0*
    - 4.2: The Listening Process - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.3: Barriers to Effective Listening - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.4: How to Become a Better Listener - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.5: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.6: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.7: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 4.8: Alternative Text - *CC BY 4.0*
  - 5: Ethics in Public Speaking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.1: Ethics in Public Speaking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.2: Free Speech - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.3: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.4: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 5.5: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 6: Finding a Purpose and Selecting a Topic - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

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- 6.2: Selecting A Topic - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.3: Narrowing your Topic - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.4: Thesis Statement and Putting it all together - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.5: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.6: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.7: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 7: Research and Evidence - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.1: Introduction - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.2: Types of Research and Resources - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.3: AI in Research - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.4: Confirmation Bias in Research - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.5: Evaluating Research - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.6: Citing Sources - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.7: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.8: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.9: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 8: Outlines, Introductions, and Conclusions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.1: The Introduction - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.2: The Body - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.3: The Conclusion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.4: Putting it all Togehter - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.5: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.6: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.7: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 9: Delivering the Speech - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.1: Delivery that Connects - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.2: Adapting Delivery to the Setting - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.3: Using Notes Effectively - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.4: Practice - From Prepared to Natural - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.5: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.6: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.7: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

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- 10.1: The Power of Visual Aids - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.2: Types of Visual Aids - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.3: Effective Power Points - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.4: How to Use Videos - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.5: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.6: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.7: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 11: Informative Speaking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.1: Speaking to Inform - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.2: Informative Speaking Goals - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.3: Types of Informative Speeches - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.4: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 12.2: Types of Persuasion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.3: Organizing Persuasive Speeches - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 12.5: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.6: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12.7: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

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- 13.1: Speaking to Entertain - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.2: Ceremonial and Inspirational Speaking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.3: Keynote Speaking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.4: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13.5: Discussion Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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- 14.1: Synchronous and Asynchronous - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.2: Guidelines for Online Speeches - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14.3: Glossary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
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