



Course    Mesa Community College

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During a talk to schoolchildren on “Animal Attack and Defense” at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Hassan Mohamed, a student at Colgate University, explains how mountain goats defend themselves against predators. By volunteering to be a museum educator, this student demonstrates that public speaking is an excellent way to contribute to one’s community.

# Introduction to Public Speaking

# 1 chapter

## OUTLINE

### Benefits of a Public Speaking Course

#### The Speech Communication Process

Elements of the Process

Overview of the Process

#### The Speaker's Responsibilities

Maintain High Ethical Standards

Enrich Listeners' Lives

Take Every Speech Seriously

### Speech Introducing Yourself or a Classmate

Sample Self-Introduction Speech

Sample Speech Introducing a Classmate

#### Quick Guide to Public Speaking

Preparation

Delivery

## OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain at least three benefits of a public speaking course.
2. Identify and explain the seven elements of the speech communication process.
3. Describe the main responsibilities that speakers have toward their listeners.
4. Prepare a speech introducing yourself or a classmate.

**Part 1** Foundations of Effective Communication

**When Meggan Carter** enrolled in a public speaking class as a freshman at the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, she—like many other students—assumed that she would never need public speaking skills in “the real world.”

But events proved her wrong. During her senior year, as part of a statewide antismoking campaign, she stepped forward to testify at a hearing of the North Dakota Senate. There were over 200 people in the hearing room. Television cameras recorded her remarks, which were telecast on the evening news to thousands of state residents. Her comments were also reported in newspapers and TV news programs across the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Carter’s goal was to persuade the legislators to ban smoking in all public buildings in North Dakota. As part of her argument, she said that to earn money for school expenses, she had worked as a server at a restaurant that permitted smoking. “I would wake up the next day after work,” she said, “and I would be coughing up a lot of junk.” She also reported what she had learned from interviews with a lung disease specialist and other physicians about the long-term harm caused by tobacco.<sup>2</sup>

Meggan Carter waits to address a hearing of the North Dakota Senate.





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Unfortunately for her, a few days after she spoke, the North Dakota Senate rejected the proposed ban. It was a bitter disappointment for Carter, but she believes that she “possibly changed the lives of some people for the better.” If she got at least one person to quit smoking or persuaded one person to abstain from trying tobacco, she says, her efforts were successful.

Carter credits her public speaking class with enabling her to prepare and deliver her presentation. For example, right before she began speaking, she was nervous, but she controlled her jitters by applying what she had learned in class: “Be thoroughly prepared and know all the in’s and out’s of the topic.” A videotape of her presentation shows her speaking with confidence and conviction, displaying strong gestures and good eye contact.<sup>3</sup>

As Meggan Carter discovered, a public speaking class can bolster your self-confidence, as you develop your abilities to prepare and present a spoken message in college, career, and community. A bonus is the chance to make a contribution to others. You can touch lives—whether you are training new employees, demonstrating a useful product, or advocating a worthwhile cause.

## Benefits of a Public Speaking Course

Many college graduates look back on all the courses they took in college and say that public speaking was one of the most valuable.<sup>4</sup> Here are some of the reasons why this course is considered so important.

**1. You learn how to speak to a public audience.** Knowing how to stand up and give a talk to a group of people is a rewarding skill you can use throughout your life. Imagine yourself in these public speaking scenarios:

- In one of your college classes, you must give a 30-minute presentation on a research project.
- To 50 colleagues at work, you give a brief speech appealing for contributions to the United Way charity drive.
- In court you explain to a jury why a traffic accident was not your fault.
- To a gathering of neighbors, you explain your ideas for curbing crime in the neighborhood.

You will encounter many such occasions that require public speaking ability.

**2. You learn skills that apply to one-on-one communication.** Although the emphasis of this course is on speaking to groups, the principles that you learn also apply to communication with individuals.<sup>5</sup> Throughout your lifetime you will be obliged to talk in situations such as these:

- In a job interview, a human resources manager says, “We’ve got 50 well-qualified applicants for this job. Why should we hire you?” If you know how to give a reply that is brief, interesting, and convincing, you obviously

## Part 1 Foundations of Effective Communication

improve your chances of getting the job. In a public speaking course, you learn how to organize and present persuasive messages.

- You sit down with a bank executive to ask for a loan so that you can buy a new car. The skills of nonverbal communication (such as eye contact and facial expression) that you learn in a public speaking course should help you convey to the banker that you are a trustworthy and reliable person who will repay the loan.

After taking a public speaking course, many students report that their new skills help them as much in talking to one person as in addressing a large audience.

**3. You develop the oral communication skills that are prized in the job market.** When you go to a job interview, which of the following is most likely to influence the employer when he or she decides whether to hire you?

- The reputation of your school
- Your grade-point average
- Letters of reference
- Technical knowledge in your field
- Oral communication skills—speaking and listening
- Written communication skills—reading and writing

Research shows that “oral communication skills” is the correct answer—a finding that surprises many students.<sup>6</sup> Surely “technical knowledge in your field” is the most important factor for jobs in science and technology, isn’t it? Not according to employers. You can be brilliant in your field, says one executive, but if you can’t communicate successfully with co-workers and the public, your brilliance is of little value.<sup>7</sup>

Once you have a job, being a good communicator can help you win promotions. “If a dozen equally skilled technicians are competing for the job of manager, the winner is most likely to be the one with the best communication skills,” says Cristina Silva, human resources manager of a plant in Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup>

**4. You work in an ideal environment for gaining experience and building confidence.** The classroom is a perfect place to practice and develop your skills because it is an unthreatening setting. (No one will deny you a job or a raise on the basis of your classroom speeches.) Your audience is friendly and sympathetic—all your classmates are going through the same experience.

The critiques given by your instructor (and, in some cases, by fellow students) are valuable parts of the course. If, for example, you say “um” or “uh” so often that it distracts your listeners, you are probably unaware of this unconscious habit. Being told of the problem is the first step toward correcting it.

If you are like most students, your public speaking class will cause you to gain self-confidence. You will enjoy the pride that comes from meeting a challenge and handling it successfully.

**5. You can make a contribution to the lives of other people.** While attending a funeral service for a beloved aunt, Karen Walker heard the minister give a brief eulogy and then say, “Would anyone like to say a few words at our ‘open mike?’” A few people went to the microphone and shared some reminiscences, but most audience members were silent. “I wanted to pay tribute to my aunt, but I was too scared,” said Walker. “I felt really bad because there were a lot of important things about my aunt and her life that were never said.” A few years later, Walker took a public speaking class, and a year or so afterward, she



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attended another funeral—for her grandfather. “This time I vowed that I would not pass up the opportunity to honor a wonderful person. I asked to be part of the service, and I spoke about my childhood memories of my grandfather.”

The eulogy, said Walker, was appreciated by her family members, who told her that she had expressed beautifully what they would have said if they had possessed the courage and the skills to stand up and speak. “It gave me a good feeling to know that I could represent the family in this way,” she said.

Being able to speak in public—offering a toast, sharing information, providing encouragement, attempting persuasion—can bring pleasure and joy to yourself and to others. Walker said that her success was possible because of what she had learned in her public speaking class.<sup>9</sup>

### Your Thoughts ?

Who is the most engaging public communicator (politician, teacher, minister, etc.) you have ever encountered? What are the reasons for his or her success?



## The Speech Communication Process

When a speaker gives a speech, does communication take place?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. The reason for the lack of universal success is that *speaking and communicating are not the same thing*. You can speak to a listener, but if the listener does not understand your message in the way you meant it to be understood, you have failed to communicate it.<sup>10</sup> Here’s an example:

A job recruiter coached one young woman on how to present herself at a job interview. She was told to “dress your best.” On the day of the interview, she showed up wearing a prom dress.

The recruiter had meant “wear your best business attire,” but the young woman had interpreted the advice as “wear the fanciest clothes you own.”<sup>11</sup>

This incident illustrates that speaking and communicating are not synonymous. A speaker can give information, but true, effective communication fails to take place if listeners misinterpret the message. According to Hitachi, Ltd., of Japan: “Communication is not simply sending a message. It is creating true understanding—swiftly, clearly, and precisely.”<sup>12</sup>

To help you give a speech that truly communicates, it is helpful to understand the process of speech communication, as shown in Figure 1.1. Studying this process can yield valuable insights—not only into speechmaking, but also into your daily interactions with other people.

### Elements of the Process

The speech communication process has seven distinct components.

#### Speaker

When you are a **speaker**, you are the source, or originator, of a message that is transmitted to a listener. Whether you are speaking to a dozen people or 500, you bear a great responsibility for the success of the communication. The key question that you must constantly ask yourself is not “Am I giving out good information?” or “Am I performing well?” but, rather, “Am I getting through to my listeners?”

#### speaker

the originator of a message sent to a listener

#### Listener

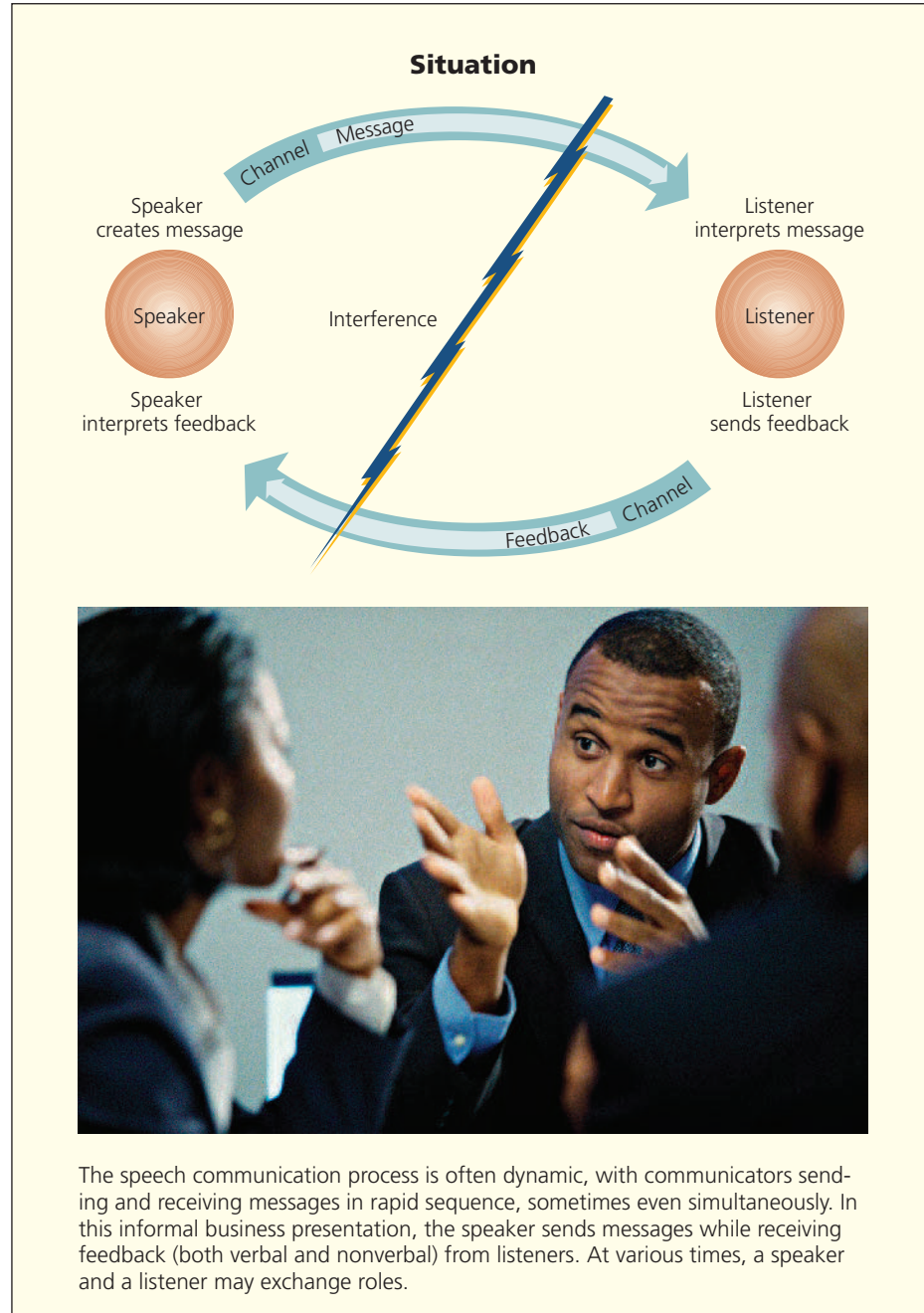
The **listener** is the recipient of the message sent by the speaker. The true test of communication is not whether a message is delivered by the speaker but whether

#### listener

the receiver of the speaker’s message

### Figure 1.1 The Speech Communication Process

In this model of the speech communication process, a **speaker** creates a **message** and sends it via a **channel** to the **listener**, who interprets it and sends **feedback** via a channel to the speaker. **Interference** is whatever impedes accurate communication. The **situation** refers to the time and place in which communication takes place.



it is accurately received by the listener. “A speech,” says management consultant David W. Richardson of Westport, Connecticut, “takes place in the minds of the audience.”<sup>13</sup>

If communication fails, who is to blame—the speaker or the listener? Depending on the situation, the blame could be placed on either, or both. Although speakers share part of the responsibility for communication, listeners also must bear some

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of the burden. They must try hard to pay attention to the speaker, fighting off the temptation to daydream or think about personal concerns. They must listen with an open mind, avoiding the tendency to prejudge the speaker or discount a speaker's views without a fair hearing.

### Message

The **message** is whatever the speaker communicates to the listeners. The message is sent in the form of *symbols*—either *verbal* or *nonverbal*.

Verbal symbols are words. It's important for you to recognize that words are not things; they are *symbols* of things. If you give me an apple, you transfer a solid object from your hand to mine. But if you're making a speech and you mention the word "apple," you are no longer transferring a concrete thing. You are transferring a symbol.

Nonverbal symbols are what you convey with your tone of voice, eyes, facial expression, gestures, posture, and appearance.

So far, the process sounds simple and obvious, but now we enter a danger zone. As a speaker transmits verbal and nonverbal symbols, the listeners must interpret them. Unfortunately, listeners may end up with a variety of interpretations, some of them quite different from what the speaker intended. Consider a simple word like *apple*. One listener may think of a small green fruit, while another conjures an image of a big red fruit. One listener may think of crisp tartness, while another thinks of juicy sweetness. If a simple word can evoke a variety of images, imagine the confusion and misunderstanding that can arise when abstract words such as *imperialism*, *patriotism*, and *ensorship* are used. The term *ensorship* may mean "stamping out filth" to some listeners, but it may mean "total government control of the news media" to others.

As a speaker, strive to use symbols that will cause the listener to arrive at a meaning that is as close as possible to the one in your mind. Don't say, "Smoking may cause you a lot of trouble." The vague verbal symbols at the end of the sentence—"a lot of trouble"—might be interpreted by some listeners to mean "coughing," by others to mean "stained teeth," or by still others to mean "cancer." Be specific: "Smoking may cause lung cancer."

Sometimes a speaker's verbal symbols contradict his or her nonverbal symbols. If you say to an audience, "I'm delighted to be here tonight," but your face has a mournful expression and your tone of voice is regretful, the listeners are getting a mixed message. Which will they believe: your words or your nonverbal behavior? Listeners usually accept the nonverbal behavior as the true message. In this case, they will believe that you are *not* delighted to be there.

The solution to this problem is to make sure the nonverbal part of your message reinforces, rather than contradicts, the verbal part. In other words, smile and use a friendly tone of voice when you say, "I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you tonight."

### Channel

The **channel** is the medium used to communicate the message. A speech can reach an audience by means of a variety of channels: radio, television, the Internet, a public-address system, or direct voice communication.

### message

whatever is communicated verbally and nonverbally to the listener

### Your Thoughts ?

When nonverbal and verbal messages are contradictory, why do you think listeners tend to accept the nonverbal as the true message?



### channel

the pathway used to transmit a message

For public speaking in the classroom, your primary channel is auditory (your voice), accompanied by a visual channel (gestures, facial expressions, visual aids).

For some speeches in the workplace, you may have a public-address system. This channel can be very effective (if the system works well and the acoustics in the room are good), because it enables you to speak in an easy, conversational style without having to raise your voice.

### Feedback

**Feedback** is the response that the listeners give the speaker. Sometimes it is *verbal*, as when a listener asks questions or makes comments during a lecture. In most public speeches and certainly in the ones you will give in the classroom, listeners refrain from giving verbal feedback until the question-and-answer period at the end of the speech.

Listeners also give *nonverbal* feedback. If they are smiling and nodding their heads, they are obviously in agreement with your remarks. If they are frowning and sitting with their arms folded, they more than likely disagree with what you are saying. If they are yawning and looking at you with a glazed expression, they are probably bored or weary. (“A yawn,” wrote English author G. K. Chesterton, “is a silent shout.”)

If you receive negative feedback, try to help your listeners. If, for example, you are explaining a concept, but some of your listeners are shaking their heads and giving you looks that seem to say, “I don’t understand,” try again, using different words, to make your ideas clear.

### Interference

**Interference** is anything that blocks or hinders the accurate communication of a message. There are three types:

- *External* interference arises outside the listener: someone coughing, a baby crying, people talking loudly in the hall, or an air-conditioning breakdown that leaves the listeners hot and sticky and preoccupied with their discomfort.
- *Internal* interference comes from within the listener. Some listeners might be daydreaming or worrying about a personal problem. Some might be too tired to expend mental energy on listening. As a speaker, you can help listeners overcome internal distractions by making your speech so lively and interesting that the audience feels compelled to listen to you.
- *Speaker-generated* interference occurs when the speaker uses words that are unfamiliar to the audience, or that are interpreted in a way that the speaker did not intend. If the speaker wears bizarre clothing, some listeners might scrutinize the attire instead of concentrating on the speech.

Sometimes listeners will strive to overcome interference—for example, straining to hear the speaker’s words over the noise of a truck roaring down the street outside. At other times, though, some listeners will fail to make the extra effort, and no communication takes place.

When you are a speaker, watch for any signs of interference and, if possible, take steps to overcome the problem. If a plane roars overhead, causing your listeners to lean forward to hear your words, you can either speak louder or pause until the plane’s noise has subsided.

#### feedback

verbal and nonverbal responses made by a listener to a speaker

#### interference

anything that obstructs accurate communication of a message



Interference can be caused by a daydreaming listener.

## Tips for Your Career

### Tip 1.1 Seek Feedback\*

Probably unaware of what he was doing, one college professor during his lectures would roll his tie all the way up to his collar, release it, and then roll it up again. Students in the class were distracted by this habit. One day they made bets on how many times he would roll the tie up during class.

Such distracting mannerisms and foibles can mar your speechmaking, and you may not even be aware of what you're doing. You may, for example, develop the unconscious habit of smoothing your hair or straightening your clothes as you talk. The best way to discover and discard these quirks is to get feedback (in the form of an evaluation) from your listeners.

Although feedback is valuable for pinpointing delivery problems, it is even more important as a way to assess the *content* of your speech: Are your remarks enlightening or confusing to the listeners?

You don't need an evaluation of every speech in your career, but you should seek feedback occasionally. Strive to get both positive and negative input, so that you can keep the good while eliminating the bad. Here are four good methods:

1. **Ask several friends or colleagues for a critique of your speech.** Don't make an imprecise request like "Tell me how I do on this" because your evaluators will probably say at the end of your speech, "You did fine—good speech," regardless of what they thought of it, to avoid hurting your feelings. Instead give them a specific

assignment: "Please make a note of at least three things that you like about the speech and my delivery, and at least three things that you feel need improvement." Now your listeners know they can be frank and not worry about hurting your feelings; as a result, you are likely to get helpful feedback.

2. **Pass out evaluation forms to all your listeners.** Ask them to make comments anonymously and then drop the forms in a box near the exit. The form can contain the requests mentioned above, or you can create your own items.
3. **Invite a small group of listeners to sit down with you after a meeting to share their reactions.** This is especially useful in finding out whether the listeners understood and accepted your message. Try to listen and learn without becoming argumentative or defensive.
4. **Have a presentation videotaped.** Invite colleagues to watch the tape with you and help you evaluate it. Because many people are *never* pleased with either themselves or their speeches on videotape, colleagues often can provide objectivity. For example, an introduction that now seems dull to you might strike your colleagues as interesting and captivating.

\*The sources for Tips are cited in the Notes section at the end of the book.

### Situation

The **situation** is the context—the time and the place—in which communication occurs. Different situations call for different behaviors by both speaker and listener. A speaker who delivers a eulogy in the stately hush of a cathedral would not crack jokes, but in an entertaining after-dinner speech at a convention, jokes would be appropriate. In some settings, listeners can cheer and clap, but at other times, they must remain silent.

Time of day plays a part in how receptive an audience is. Many listeners, for example, tend to be sluggish and sleepy between 3 and 5 P.M. If you give a presentation during that period, make it lively. Perhaps you could use colorful visual aids and involve listeners in a hands-on project to keep them engaged. If your speech is a long one, you might invite listeners to stand up and stretch at the halfway point to shake off their sleepiness.

When you prepare a speech, find out as much as possible about the situation: Where will the speech be given, indoors or outdoors? What is the nature of the

### situation

the setting in which communication takes place

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For an interactive exercise on the speech communication process, visit Chapter 1 on *Connect Public Speaking*.

occasion? How many people are likely to be present? By assessing these variables in advance, you can adapt your speech to make it appropriate to the situation.

## Overview of the Process

Look once again at Figure 1.1. The diagram at the top of the page is deliberately simplified to help clarify the different components. Don't interpret the diagram as meaning that speakers and listeners ordinarily take turns at communicating. As suggested by the photo below the figure, communicators often send and receive messages at the same time. Thus, communication is not a ball tossed back and forth between speaker and listener, but two (or more) balls tossed simultaneously. For example, you go into your boss's office to ask for a raise. As you start your (verbal) message, she is giving you a friendly, accepting smile, a (nonverbal) message that seems to say that she is glad to see you. But as your message is spelled out, her smile fades and is replaced by a grim expression of regret—negative feedback. "I wish I could give you a big raise," she says, "but I can't even give you a little one." As she is saying these last words, she interprets your facial expression as displaying disbelief, so she hastily adds, "Our departmental budget just won't permit it. My hands are tied." And so on . . . a lively give-and-take of verbal and nonverbal communication.

## The Speaker's Responsibilities

A speaker who stands before an audience has certain responsibilities that a conscientious person should accept. Here are some guidelines.

### Maintain High Ethical Standards

The standards of conduct and moral judgment that are generally accepted by honest people in our society are called *ethics*. In public speaking, ethics focuses on how speakers handle their material and how they treat their listeners.<sup>14</sup> Speakers should be honest and straightforward with listeners, avoiding all methods and goals that are deceitful, unscrupulous, or unfair.

Because ethics is such an important concern, the icon in the margin of this page will appear throughout this book at points where ethical issues are discussed. Let's examine three important ethical responsibilities of the speaker.

Ethical Issue

### Never Distort Information

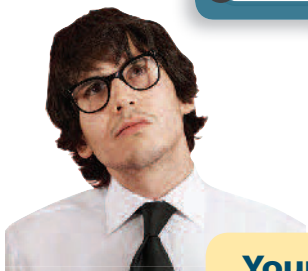
As an ethical speaker, you should always be honest about facts and figures. Distorting information is not only dishonest—it's foolish. Let's say that in your career, you persuade some colleagues to take a certain course of action but it is later discovered that you got your way by distorting facts and statistics. Henceforth your colleagues will distrust everything you propose—even if you have sound logic and impeccable evidence on your side. "A liar will not be believed," said the Greek fabulist Aesop, "even when he [or she] speaks the truth."<sup>15</sup>

### Respect Your Audience

Some speakers show disrespect for their listeners, talking down to them as if they were ignorant or foolish. Speaking in a scolding, condescending tone, one speaker told an audience of young parents, "I know you people

### Your Thoughts

If you are crusading for a good cause, is it okay to falsify a few minor statistics to advance your argument? Defend your answer.





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don't believe me, but you are wasting your time and your money if you buy instructional videos on how to be a good mother or father.”

Speakers who are disdainful and arrogant might adopt a more respectful attitude if they heed the wisdom contained in two observations by the American humorist Will Rogers: “Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects” and “There is nothing as stupid as an educated man if you get him off the thing he was educated in.”<sup>16</sup> When you are the expert on a subject, remember that your “ignorant” listeners, on other topics, can reverse roles with you.

### Reject Stereotyping and Scapegoating

Do you agree with the following statement?

Psychiatrists are therapists who can cure mental illness in about one week. Their primary method is to hypnotize their patients and delve into repressed memories from childhood.

This image is badly distorted and exaggerated, but it is accepted as true by millions of Americans because it is the way psychiatrists are portrayed in many Hollywood films.<sup>17</sup>

Psychiatrists are victims of the common practice of stereotyping. A **stereotype** is a simplistic or exaggerated image that humans carry in their minds about groups of people. For example, “Lawyers are shrewd and dishonest” is a popular stereotype.

#### stereotype

an oversimplified or exaggerated image

Stereotyping can occur in public speaking classes. When trying to choose a speech topic, some males think that women are uninterested in how to repair cars, while some females think that men are uninterested in creative hobbies such as knitting and needlepoint.

You should reject stereotypes because they are “mental cookie cutters,” forcing all people in a group into the same simple pattern. They fail to account for individual differences and the wide range of characteristics among members of any group. Some lawyers are dishonest, yes, but many are not. Some women are uninterested in repairing cars, yes, but some are avid mechanics.

While avoiding stereotyping, you also should reject its close cousin, scapegoating, which is the creation of a **scapegoat**—a person or a group unfairly blamed for some real or imagined wrong. For example, some people blame recent immigrants to the United States and Canada for every imaginable problem in society. Because many immigrants are Hispanic, the most frequently targeted scapegoats today are Hispanics (whether or not they are immigrants). As a result, the FBI reports that hate crimes against Hispanics have increased in recent years, surpassing 900 per year.<sup>18</sup>

#### scapegoat

an individual or a group that innocently bears the blame of others

*Note:* The preceding advice does not mean that you should disregard differences among your listeners. As we will see in Chapter 4, you should be sensitive and responsive to the needs and interests of listeners of different ages, cultures, and backgrounds. What is being condemned here is the use of unfair, exaggerated, or simplistic notions about individuals or groups.

### Enrich Listeners' Lives

Before a speech, some speakers make remarks such as these to their friends:

- “I hope not many people show up.”
- “When I ask for questions, I hope no one speaks up.”
- “I want to hurry and get this over with.”

Often these comments are made because the speaker is nervous. As you will discover in Chapter 2, I am sympathetic to speakers who experience stage fright. Nevertheless, I dislike hearing such remarks, because it's obvious that the speaker is focused on his or her own emotions rather than upon the audience.

Instead of viewing a speech as an ordeal, consider it an opportunity to make a contribution to the lives of your listeners. One of my students, Mary Crosby, gave a classroom speech on poisonous spiders—what they look like, how to avoid them, what to do if bitten, and so on. She had spent 6 hours researching the topic. If the 17 of us in the audience had duplicated her research, spending 6 hours apiece, we would have labored for 102 hours. Thus, Crosby saved us a great deal of time and effort and, more importantly, enriched our lives. (Most of us, of course, probably never would have taken the time to do this research, so her speech was all the more valuable.)

### Take Every Speech Seriously

Consider two situations that some speakers erroneously assume are not worth taking seriously: classroom speeches and small audiences.

**Classroom speeches.** Contrary to what some students think, your classroom speeches are as important as any speeches that you may give in your career or community, and they deserve to be taken seriously. They deal with real human issues and they are given by real human beings. As a teacher, I look forward to classroom speeches because I learn a lot from them. In recent years, I have learned how to save the life of a person choking on food, how to garden without using pesticides, and how to set up a tax-free savings account for my children.

**Small audiences.** Some speakers mistakenly think that if an audience is small, or a great deal smaller than they expected, they need not put forth their best effort. You should try as hard to communicate with an audience of 5 as you would with an audience of 500. James “Doc” Blakely of Wharton, Texas, tells of a colleague who traveled to a small town in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan to give a speech and found that only one person had shown up to hear him. He gave the lone listener his best efforts, and later that listener started a national movement based on the speaker’s ideas.<sup>19</sup>



### Speech Introducing Yourself or a Classmate

A speech introducing yourself or a classmate to the audience is often assigned early in a public speaking class. The speech gives you an opportunity to use an easy topic to gain experience. It also gives you and other members of the class a chance to learn key information about one another—so that future classroom speeches can be tailored to the needs and interests of the audience.

Strive to show your audience what makes you or your classmate interesting and unique. Unless your instructor advises otherwise, you can use the following checklist. Depending upon your time limits, you may not be able to include all items.

#### *Background Information*

- Name
- Marital status
- Hometown

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- Family information
- Work experience
- Academic plans
- Post-graduation goals

*Unique Features*

- Special interests (hobbies, sports, clubs, etc.)
- One interesting or unusual thing about yourself or your classmate
- One interesting or unusual experience

The last three items are especially important because they give the audience a glimpse into the qualities, interests, and experiences that make you or your classmate unique.

## Sample Self-Introduction Speech

Robert Schnitzhofer introduces himself to a public speaking class.

### With a Name Like This . . .

#### INTRODUCTION

I'm Robert Schnitzhofer, and yes, I know, Schnitzhofer is a strange name. When I was a kid, I wished I had a name like Brad Pitt—short and tough-sounding. But now I see my name as an advantage, which I will explain in a few minutes.

#### BODY

I am enrolled in the culinary program, and after I graduate, I hope to open a bakery that specializes in wedding and birthday cakes. Not ordinary cakes—I want to offer sophisticated and elegant desserts.

I like a lot of different types of music. Some of my favorites are Gnarl Barkley, the White Stripes, Erykah Badu, and Drive-By Truckers. My favorite Web site is [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com). My favorite movie of all time is *Jerry Maguire*.

Going back to my name: I was teased as a child, but now I enjoy having an odd name that people have never heard before. It's a good conversation starter. I tell people about my great-great grandfather Albert Schnitzhofer, who emigrated from Switzerland. I found out that he owned a bakery in Zurich. It's kind of intriguing to think that my interest in baking might be genetic. From a business point of view, I think having an unusual name will be an advantage. It will catch people's attention—stand out in the crowd.

#### CONCLUSION

Smucker's is a company that makes jams and jellies, and they have a slogan that you have probably heard on TV: "With a name like Smucker's, it has to be good." Someday when I open my business, I will call it Schnitzhofer Bakery, and I already have a slogan: "With a name like Schnitzhofer, we have to be good."

## Sample Speech Introducing a Classmate

In this speech, Sara Newton introduces classmate Elizabeth Hernandez.

### A Life-Changing Gift

#### INTRODUCTION

When Elizabeth Hernandez graduated from high school, she received a present that changed her life. It was a digital camera system, with several different lenses—including a zoom telephoto lens.

#### BODY

Elizabeth began going to soccer games, tennis matches, and other sports events, taking pictures with the telephoto lens. Some of her pictures were so good, she submitted them to the local newspaper. To her surprise, the paper printed all of them. The photo editor at the paper told Elizabeth that she ought to consider a career in photojournalism.

That's exactly what Elizabeth has decided to do. She is a photojournalism major, and she makes money on the side with freelance photography. Last summer she landed an assignment taking publicity pictures for a basketball camp.

Elizabeth loves to hike in wilderness areas, and of course she always takes her camera with her. Her other special interests are chatting with friends on Facebook and searching the Internet for—you guessed it—interesting photos.

#### CONCLUSION

Thanks to a wonderful high school graduation gift, Elizabeth Hernandez has found her passion and her career.



## Quick Guide to Public Speaking

To help you with any major speeches that you must give before you have had time to study this entire book, we will take a look at the key principles of preparation and delivery.

The guide below assumes that you will use the most popular method of speaking—extemporaneous—which means that you carefully prepare your speech but you don't read or memorize a script. Instead you look directly at your listeners and talk in a natural, conversational way, occasionally glancing at notes to stay on track.

The extemporaneous style and three other methods of speaking—manuscript (reading a document), memorization (speaking from memory), and impromptu (speaking with little or no time to prepare)—will be fully discussed in Chapter 14.

### Preparation

**Audience.** The goal of public speaking is to gain a response from your listeners—to get them to think, feel, or act in a certain way. To reach the listeners, find out as much as you can about them. What are their ages, gender, racial

## Chapter 1 Introduction to Public Speaking

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and ethnic backgrounds, religion, and educational level? What are their attitudes toward you and the subject? How much do they already know about the subject? When you have completed a thorough analysis of your listeners, adapt your speech to meet their needs and interests.

**Topic.** Choose a topic that is interesting to you and about which you know a lot (either now or after doing research). Your topic also should be interesting to the listeners—one they will consider timely and worthwhile. Narrow the topic so that you can comfortably and adequately cover it within the time allotted.

**Purposes and central idea.** Select a general purpose (to inform, to persuade, etc.), a specific purpose (a statement of exactly what you want to achieve with your audience), and a central idea (the message of your speech boiled down to one sentence). For example, suppose you want to inform your audience about fraud and abuse in the U.S. government's student-aid program. You could create objectives such as these:

*General Purpose:* To inform

*Specific Purpose:* To tell my listeners what happens when some unscrupulous schools abuse the federal student-aid program

Next, ask yourself, "What is my essential message? What big idea do I want to leave in the minds of my listeners?" Your answer is your central idea. Here is one possibility:

*Central Idea:* By manipulating the student-aid program, some schools cheat both taxpayers and students.

This central idea is what you want your listeners to remember if they forget everything else.

**Finding materials.** Gather information by reading books and periodicals (such as magazines and journals), searching for information on the Internet, interviewing knowledgeable people, or drawing from your own personal experiences. Look for interesting items such as examples, statistics, stories, and quotations. Consider using visual aids to help the audience understand and remember key points.

**Organization.** Organize the body of your speech by devising two or three main points that explain or prove the central idea. To continue the example from above, ask yourself this question: "How can I get my audience to understand and accept my central idea?" Here are two main points that could be made:

- I. Some schools resort to fraud and abuse of the student-aid program to scoop millions of dollars from the federal treasury.
- II. Despite an investment of time and money, many students receive little or no useful training and end up saddled with debt.

The next step is to develop each main point with support material such as examples, statistics, and quotations from experts. Underneath the first main point, these two items could be used to illustrate the misuse of tax dollars:

- To expand student enrollment, some schools have rounded up homeless people and enrolled them for classes that they never attend, says James Thomas, the U.S. Department of Education inspector general.



If you love them, hot air balloons would make a good topic.



For handy guidelines, see "Checklist for Preparing and Delivering a Speech."

## Tips for Your Career

### Tip 1.2 Avoid the Five Biggest Mistakes Made by Speakers

In a survey by the author, 64 business and professional speakers were asked to cite the most common mistakes made by public speakers in the United States today. Here are the mistakes that were listed most often.

1. **Failing to tailor one's speech to the needs and interests of the audience.** A *poor* speaker bores listeners with information that is stale or useless. A *good* speaker sizes up the listeners in advance and gives them material that is interesting and useful.
2. **Being poorly prepared.** A good speech does not just happen. The speaker must spend hours researching the topic, organizing material, and rehearsing the speech before he or she rises to speak. Therese Myers, head of Quarterdeck Office Systems, says, "I've learned that slapping together a presentation during an hour on the plane the day before doesn't cut it. Now I take at least two weeks to prepare a talk."
3. **Trying to cover too much in one speech.** Some speakers are so enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their topic that they try to cram a huge amount of material into a single speech. As Arnold "Nick" Carter, a corporate executive in Chicago, puts it: "They try to put ten pounds of information in a one-pound bag."  
Covering too much material causes the listeners to suffer from "information overload." They simply cannot absorb huge quantities of information in one sitting.
4. **Failing to maintain good eye contact.** Listeners tend to distrust speakers who don't look them in the eye. Yet some speakers spend most of their time looking at their notes or at the floor or at the back wall.  
Myers offers this advice: "Instead of addressing the room, talk for a few seconds to one person, then another, then another, then another." This not only helps with eye contact, but also makes you feel more at ease "because it's like having a one-on-one conversation."
5. **Being dull.** A speech can be made boring by poor content or by poor delivery. To avoid being dull, you should (a) choose a subject about which you are enthusiastic, (b) prepare interesting material, (c) have a strong desire to communicate your message to the audience, and (d) let your enthusiasm shine forth during your delivery of the speech.

- Three Texas schools received \$7.4 million in student-aid payments for training security guards, but security experts testified that the training time had been inflated and that \$260,000 would have been a reasonable cost, according to an investigation by *U.S. News & World Report*.

**Transitions.** To carry your listeners smoothly from one part of the speech to another, use transitional words or phrases, such as "Let's begin by looking at the problem," "Now for my second reason," and "Let me summarize what we've covered."

**Introduction.** In the first part of your introduction, grab the attention of the listeners and make them want to listen to the rest of the speech. Attention-getters include fascinating stories, intriguing questions, and interesting facts or statistics. Next, prepare listeners for the body of the speech (by stating the central idea and/or by previewing the main points). Give any background information or definitions that the audience would need in order to understand the speech. Establish credibility by stating your own expertise or by citing reliable sources.

**Conclusion.** Summarize your key points, and then close with a clincher (such as a quotation or a story) to drive home the central idea of the speech.

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**Outline.** Put together all parts of the speech (introduction, body, conclusion, and transitions) in an outline. Make sure that everything in the outline serves to explain, illustrate, or prove the central idea.

**Speaking notes.** Prepare brief speaking notes based on your outline. These notes should be the only cues you take with you to the lectern.

**Practice.** Rehearse your speech several times. Don't memorize the speech, but strive to rehearse ideas (as cued by your brief speaking notes). Trim the speech if you are in danger of exceeding the time limit.

## Delivery

**Self-confidence.** Develop a positive attitude about yourself, your speech, and your audience. Don't let fear cripple you: nervousness is normal for most speakers. Rather than trying to banish your jitters, use nervousness as a source of energy—it actually can help you to come across as a vital, enthusiastic speaker.

**Approach and beginning.** When you are called to speak, leave your seat without sighing or mumbling, walk confidently to the front of the room, spend a few moments standing in silence (this is a good time to arrange your notes and get your first sentences firmly in mind), and then look directly at the audience as you begin your speech.

**Eye contact.** Look at all parts of the audience throughout the speech, glancing down at your notes only occasionally. Avoid staring at a wall or the floor; avoid looking out a window.

**Speaking rate.** Speak at a rate that makes it easy for the audience to absorb your ideas—neither too slow nor too fast.

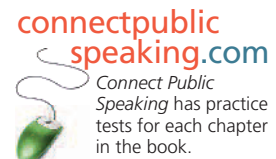
**Expressiveness.** Your voice should sound as animated as it does when you carry on a conversation with a friend.

**Clarity and volume.** Pronounce your words distinctly and speak loud enough so that all listeners can clearly hear you. Avoid verbal fillers such as *uh, ah, um, er, okay, ya know.*

**Gestures and movement.** If it's appropriate, use gestures to accompany your words. Make them naturally and gracefully, so that they add to, rather than distract from, your message. You may move about during your speech, as long as your movements are purposeful and confident—not random and nervous. Refrain from jingling keys or coins, riffling note cards, or doing anything that distracts the audience.

**Posture and poise.** Stand up straight. Try to be comfortable, yet poised and alert. Avoid leaning on the lectern or slouching on a desk.

**Use of notes.** Glance at your notes occasionally to pick up the next point. Don't read them or absentmindedly stare at them.



Stand up straight, look at your listeners, and use gestures.



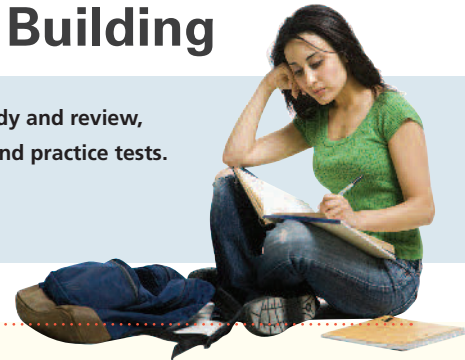
**Enthusiasm.** Don't simply go through the motions of "giving a speech." Your whole manner—eyes, facial expression, posture, voice—should show enthusiasm for your subject, and you should seem genuinely interested in communicating your ideas.

**Ending and departure.** Say your conclusion, pause a few moments, and then ask—in a tone that shows that you sincerely mean it—"Are there any questions?" Don't give the appearance of being anxious to get back to your seat (by pocketing your notes or by taking a step toward your seat).

## Resources for Review and Skill Building



*Connect Public Speaking* provides resources for study and review, including sample speech videos, an Outline Tutor, and practice tests.



### Summary

A public speaking course helps you develop the key oral communication skills (speaking well and listening intelligently) that are highly prized in business, technical, and professional careers. You gain both confidence and experience as you practice those skills in an ideal environment—the classroom—where your audience is friendly and supportive.

The speech communication process consists of seven elements: speaker, listener, message, channel, feedback, interference, and situation. Communication does not necessarily take place just because a speaker transmits a message; the message must be accurately received by the listener. When the speaker sends a message, he or she must make sure that the two components of a message—verbal

and nonverbal—don't contradict each other.

Communicators often send and receive messages at the same time, creating a lively give-and-take of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Speakers should maintain high ethical standards, never distorting information, even for a good cause. They should respect their audiences and avoid taking a condescending or contemptuous attitude. They recognize the diversity to be found in today's audiences and reject stereotypes.

Good communicators don't view a speech as an ordeal to be endured, but as an opportunity to enrich the lives of their listeners. For this reason, they take every speech seriously, even if the audience is small.

### Key Terms

channel, 9

feedback, 10

interference, 10

listener, 7

message, 9

scapegoat, 13

situation, 11

speaker, 7

stereotype, 13



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## Review Questions

1. Why are communication skills important to your career?
2. Name five personal benefits of a public speaking course.
3. What are the seven elements of the speech communication process?
4. Why is speaking not necessarily the same thing as communicating?
5. If there is a contradiction between the verbal and nonverbal components of a speaker's message, which component is a listener likely to accept as the true message?
6. If communication fails, who is to blame—the speaker or the listener?
7. What two channels are most frequently used for classroom speeches?
8. What are the three types of interference?
9. What are stereotypes? Give some examples.
10. According to a survey, what is the number one mistake made by public speakers?

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## Building Critical-Thinking Skills

1. Describe an instance of miscommunication between you and another person (friend, relative, salesperson, etc.). Discuss what caused the problem, and how the interchange could have been handled better.
2. One of the elements of the speech communication process—feedback—is important for success in business. Imagine that you work in a travel agency and you have to give presentations on crime prevention to clients who have purchased overseas tours. How would you seek and use feedback?

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## Building Teamwork Skills

1. Working in a group, analyze a particular room (your classroom or some other site that everyone is familiar with) as a setting for speeches (consider size of the room, seating, equipment, and potential distractions). Prepare a list of tips that speakers can follow to minimize interference and maximize communication.
2. Taking turns, each member of a group states his or her chosen (or probable) career, and then group members work together to imagine scenarios (in that career) in which oral communication skills play an important part.



Despite a speech impediment that causes him to stutter, Jarvis McInnis is a popular speaker in the Gulf Coast region of the United States. A student at Tougaloo College, McInnis is shown addressing the Mississippi State Senate (after being honored as one of the state's top students). His secret for controlling nervousness and minimizing stuttering is to spend a great deal of time in preparation and practice. "If I don't prepare well, I stutter and stumble," he says. "But if I prepare thoroughly, my stuttering is barely noticeable, and the butterflies in my stomach are under control."

# Controlling Nervousness

## 2 chapter

### OUTLINE

Reasons for Nervousness  
The Value of Fear

Guidelines for Controlling Nervousness  
In the Planning Stage  
Immediately before the Speech  
During the Speech

### OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the four kinds of fear that engender nervousness in speechmaking.
2. Explain why controlled nervousness is beneficial for a public speaker.
3. Apply techniques that can be used before and during a speech to control nervousness.

## Part 1 Foundations of Effective Communication

**After pop singer Kelly Clarkson** won the first season of *American Idol* and became a top star, she received invitations to give speeches, but she declined them all. “I have never been nervous while singing,” she said, “but when it comes to public speaking, I stumble on my words, sweat, and pull at my clothes.”<sup>1</sup>

Only a few months after saying those words, however, she became an official spokesperson for NASCAR, giving presentations throughout the country. Not only was she speaking in public, but she was speaking with confidence and poise.

What happened?

“A good friend of mine helped me understand that when you give a speech, nothing bad is going to happen to you,” she said. “If I open my mouth and make a mistake, people won’t look down on me. Actually, they will probably like me because they will see that I’m the same as everyone else.”<sup>2</sup>

If you experience nervousness as a public speaker, you are not alone. Most people—even performers such as Clarkson—suffer from stage fright when called upon to speak in public.<sup>3</sup> In fact, when researchers ask Americans to name their greatest fears, the fear of speaking to a group of strangers is listed more often than fear of snakes, insects, lightning, deep water, heights, or flying in airplanes.<sup>4</sup>

With the tips offered in this chapter, you will be able to control your nervousness and—like Kelly Clarkson—become a confident speaker.

Thanks to the insight of a friend, singer Kelly Clarkson is able to speak in public with confidence and poise.



## Reasons for Nervousness

Is it foolish to be afraid to give a speech? Is this fear as groundless as a child's fear of the boogeyman? I used to think so, back when I first began making speeches. I was a nervous wreck, and I would often chide myself by saying, "Come on, relax, it's just a little speech. There's no good reason to be scared." But I was wrong. There *is* good reason to be scared; in fact, there are *four* good reasons.

- 1. Fear of being stared at.** In the animal world, a stare is a hostile act. Dogs, baboons, and other animals sometimes defend their territory by staring. Their hostile gaze alone is enough to turn away an intruder. We human beings have similar reactions; it is part of our biological makeup to be upset by stares. Imagine that you are riding in a crowded elevator with a group of strangers. Suddenly you realize that the other people are staring directly at you. Not just glancing. *Staring.* You probably would be unnerved and frightened because a stare can be as threatening as a clenched fist—especially if it comes from people you don't know. That is why public speaking can be so frightening. You have a pack of total strangers "attacking" you with unrelenting stares while you are obliged to stand alone, exposed and vulnerable—a goldfish in a bowl, subject to constant scrutiny.
- 2. Fear of failure.** In stressful social situations, most people are afraid of looking stupid. We say to ourselves, "What if I make a fool of myself?" or "What if I say something really dumb?"
- 3. Fear of rejection.** What if we do our best, what if we deliver a polished speech, but the audience still does not like us? It would be quite a blow to our egos because we want to be liked and, yes, even loved. We want people to admire us, to consider us wise and intelligent, and to accept our ideas and opinions. We don't want people to dislike us or reject us.
- 4. Fear of the unknown.** Throughout our lives we are apprehensive about doing new things, such as going to school for the first time, riding a bus without our parents, or going out on our first date. We cannot put a finger on exactly what we are afraid of, because our fear is vague and diffused. What we really fear is the unknown; we worry that some unpredictable disaster will occur. When we stand up to give a speech, we are sometimes assailed by this same fear of the unknown because we cannot predict the outcome of our speech. Fortunately, this fear usually disappears as we become experienced in giving speeches. We develop enough confidence to know that nothing terrible will befall us, just as our childhood fear of riding in a bus by ourselves vanished after two or three trips.

All four of these fears are as understandable as the fear of lightning. There is no reason to be ashamed of having them.

Many musicians say that fear keeps them from being flat and unenergetic.

## The Value of Fear

In the first hour of my public speaking class, many students tell me that one of their goals is to eliminate all traces of nervousness. My response may surprise you as much as it surprises them: *You should not try to banish all your fear and nervousness. You need a certain amount of fear to give a good speech.*

You *need* fear? Yes. Fear energizes you; it makes you think more rapidly; it helps you speak with vitality and enthusiasm. Here is why: When you stand up to give a speech and fear hits you, your body goes on



**adrenaline**

a hormone, triggered by stress, that stimulates heart, lungs, and muscles and prepares the body for “fright, flight, or fight”

**positive nervousness**

useful energy

“red alert,” the same biological mechanism that saved our cave-dwelling ancestors when they were faced with a hungry lion or a human foe and had to fight or flee to survive. Though not as crucial to us as it was to our ancestors, this system is still nice to have for emergencies: if you were walking down a deserted street one night and someone tried to attack you, your body would release a burst of **adrenaline** into your bloodstream, causing fresh blood and oxygen to rush to your muscles, and you would be able to fight ferociously or run faster than you have ever run in your life. The benefit of adrenaline can be seen in competitive sports: athletes *must* get their adrenaline flowing before a game begins. The great home-run slugger Reggie Jackson said during his heyday, “I have butterflies in my stomach almost every time I step up to the plate. When I don’t have them, I get worried because it means I won’t hit the ball very well.”<sup>5</sup>

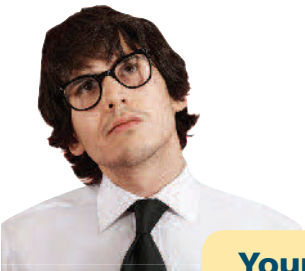
Many public speakers have the same attitude. John Farmer, a criminal trial attorney in Norton, Virginia, who has argued high-profile murder cases before the Virginia Supreme Court as well as in local courts, was asked if he still gets nervous in the courtroom. “Oh, yes,” he replied, “the day I stop being nervous is the day that I’ll stop doing a good job for my clients.”<sup>6</sup>

In public speaking, adrenaline infuses you with energy; it causes extra blood and oxygen to rush not only to your muscles but also to your brain, thus enabling you to think with greater clarity and quickness. It makes you come across to your audience as someone who is alive and vibrant. Elayne Snyder, a speech teacher, uses the term **positive nervousness**, which she describes in this way: “It’s a zesty, enthusiastic, lively feeling with a slight edge to it. Positive nervousness is the state you’ll achieve by converting your anxiety into constructive energy. . . . It’s still nervousness, but you’re no longer victimized by it; instead you’re vitalized by it.”<sup>7</sup>

If you want proof that nervousness is beneficial, observe speakers who have absolutely no butterflies at all. Because they are 100 percent relaxed and cool, they give speeches that are dull and flat, with no energy, no zest. There is an old saying: “Speakers who say they are as cool as a cucumber usually give speeches about as interesting as a cucumber.” Most good speakers report that if they don’t have stage fright before a public appearance, their delivery is poor. One speaker, the novelist I. A. R. Wylie, said, “I rarely rise to my feet without a throat constricted with terror and a furiously thumping heart. When, for some reason, I *am* cool and self-assured, the speech is always a failure. I need fear to spur me on.”<sup>8</sup>

Another danger in being devoid of nervousness: you might get hit with a sudden bolt of panic. A hospital official told me that she gave an orientation speech to new employees every week for several years. “It became so routine that I lost all of my stage fright,” she said. Then one day, while in the middle of her talk, she was suddenly and inexplicably struck with paralyzing fear. “I got all choked up and had to take a break to pull myself together.”

Many other speakers have reported similar cases of sudden panic, which always hit on occasions when they were too relaxed. I once suffered such an attack, and the experience taught me that I must get myself “psyched up” for every speech. I remind myself that I need nervous energy to keep my listeners awake and interested. I encourage my butterflies to flutter around inside, so that I can be poised and alert.

**Your Thoughts**

Many musicians make a distinction between “good nervousness” and “bad nervousness.” What does this distinction mean? How does it apply to public speakers?

## Chapter 2 Controlling Nervousness

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## Guidelines for Controlling Nervousness

We have just discussed how a complete lack of nervousness is undesirable. What about the other extreme? Is *too much* nervousness bad for you? Of course it is, especially if you are so frightened that you forget what you were planning to say, or if your breathing is so labored that you cannot get your words out. Your goal is to keep your nervousness under control so that you have just the right amount—enough to energize you, but not enough to cripple you. How can you do this? By paying heed to the following tips for the three phases of speechmaking: the planning stage, the period immediately before the speech, and during the speech.

### In the Planning Stage

By giving time and energy to planning your speech, you can bypass many anxieties.

#### Choose a Topic about Which You Know a Great Deal

Nothing will get you more rattled than speaking on a subject about which you know little. If you are asked to talk on a topic with which you're not comfortable, decline the invitation (unless, of course, it is an assignment from an instructor or a boss who gives you no choice). Choose a topic about which you know a lot (or about which you can learn by doing extensive research). This will give you enormous self-confidence; if something terrible happens (for example, you lose your notes), you can improvise because your head will be filled with information about the subject. Also, familiarity with the topic will allow you to handle yourself well in the question-and-answer period after the speech.

#### Prepare Yourself Thoroughly

Here is a piece of advice given by many experienced speakers: *The very best precaution against excessive stage fright is thorough, careful preparation.* You have heard the expression “I came unglued.” In public speaking, solid preparation is the “glue” that will hold you together.<sup>9</sup> Joel Weldon of Scottsdale, Arizona (who quips that he used to be so frightened of audiences that he was “unable to lead a church group in silent prayer”), gives his personal formula for controlling fear: “I prepare and then prepare, and then when I think I’m ready, I prepare some more.”<sup>10</sup> Weldon recommends five to eight hours of preparation for each hour in front of an audience.<sup>11</sup>

Start your preparation far in advance of the speech date so that you have plenty of time to gather ideas, create an outline, and prepare speaking notes. Then practice, practice, practice. Don't just look over your notes—actually stand up and rehearse your talk in whatever way suits you: in front of a mirror, a camcorder, or a live audience of family or friends. Don't rehearse just once—run through your entire speech at least four times. If you “give” your speech four times at home, you will find that your fifth delivery—before a live audience—will be smoother and more self-assured than if you had not practiced at all.

#### Never Memorize a Speech

Giving a speech from memory courts disaster. Winston Churchill, the British prime minister during World War II who is considered one of the greatest orators of modern times, learned this lesson as a young man. In the beginning of his

career, he would write out and memorize his speeches. One day, while giving a memorized talk to Parliament, he suddenly stopped. His mind went blank. He began his last sentence all over. Again his mind went blank. He sat down in embarrassment and shame. Never again did Churchill try to memorize a speech. This same thing has happened to many others who have tried to commit a speech to memory. Everything goes smoothly until they get derailed, and then they are hopelessly off the track.

Even if you avoid derailment, there is another reason for not memorizing: you will probably sound mechanical, like a robot. In addition to considering you dull and boring, your audience will sense that you are speaking from your memory and not from your heart, and they will question your sincerity.

### Imagine Yourself Giving an Effective Speech

Let yourself daydream a bit: picture yourself going up to the lectern, nervous but in control of yourself, then giving a forceful talk to an appreciative audience. This visualization technique may sound silly, but it has worked for many speakers and it might work for you. Whatever you do, don't let yourself imagine the opposite—a bad speech or poor delivery. Negative daydreams will add unnecessary fear to your life in the days before your speech, and rob you of creative energy—energy that you need for preparing and practicing. Actress Ali MacGraw says, “We have only so much energy, and the more we direct toward the project itself, the less is left to pour into wondering ‘Will I fail?’”<sup>12</sup>

Notice that the daydream I am suggesting includes nervousness. You need to have a realistic image in your mind: picture yourself as nervous, but nevertheless in command of the situation and capable of delivering a strong, effective speech.

This technique, often called **positive imagery**, has been used by athletes for years. Have you ever watched professional golf on TV? Before each stroke, golfers carefully study the distance from the ball to the hole, the rise and fall of the terrain, and so on. Many of them report that just before swinging, they imagine themselves hitting the ball with the right amount of force and watching it go straight into the cup. Then they try to execute the play just as they imagined it. The imagery, many pros say, improves their game.

Positive imagery works best when you can couple it with *believing* that you will give a successful speech. Is it absurd to hold such a belief? If you fail to prepare, yes, it is absurd. But if you spend time in solid preparation and rehearsal, you are justified in believing in success.

**positive imagery**  
visualization of successful  
actions

Baseball pitchers use visualization to help them throw a well-placed pitch.



### Know That Shyness Is No Barrier

Some shy people think that their shyness blocks them from becoming good speakers, but this is erroneous. Many shy introverts have succeeded in show business: Brad Pitt, Gwyneth Paltrow, Mick Thompson, Halle Berry, Diane Sawyer, Mariah Carey, Elizabeth Hurley, and David Letterman, to name just a few.<sup>13</sup> Many less-famous people also have succeeded. “I used to stammer,” says Joe W. Boyd of Bellingham, Washington, “and I used to be petrified at the thought of speaking before a group of any size.” Despite his shyness, Boyd joined a Toastmasters club to develop his speaking skills. Two years later, he won the Toastmasters International Public Speaking Contest by giving a superb speech to an audience of over 2,000 listeners.<sup>14</sup>



## Chapter 2 Controlling Nervousness

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### Shift Focus from Self to Audience

Before a speech, some speakers increase their anxiety by worrying about whether listeners will like them. This is a big mistake, says Johnny Lee, a specialist in preventing workplace violence, who controls his nervousness by focusing on his audience rather than on himself. To worry about yourself and your image, he says, “is a kind of vanity—you are putting yourself above your audience and your message.”<sup>15</sup>

Carlos Jimenez, a member of a Toastmasters club in Northern California, says that focusing on himself is an act of inexcusable selfishness. “Who am I to worry about whether I will be perceived as a brilliant, eloquent expert. Who am I to think that the way I look and talk is more important than the people who are sitting in the audience? I look at public speaking as a way to help people, and I can’t really help people if my mind is filled with ‘me, me, me’ instead of ‘you, you, you.’”<sup>16</sup>

One good way to shift the focus from self to audience is to change your “self-talk.” Whenever you have a self-centered thought such as, “I will make a total fool out of myself,” substitute an audience-centered thought such as, “I will give my listeners information that will be very useful in their lives.” This approach not only will liberate you from the grip of anxiety but also will empower you to connect with your audience.

### Plan Visual Aids

Research shows that using a visual aid helps reduce anxiety.<sup>17</sup> Visual aids can help you in two ways: (1) you shift the audience’s stares from you to your illustrations and (2) you walk about and move your hands and arms, thereby siphoning off some of your excess nervous energy. Whatever illustrations you decide to use, make sure they are understandable, appropriate, and clearly visible to everyone in the room.

### Make Arrangements

Long before you give your speech, inspect the place where you will speak and anticipate any problems: Is there an extension cord for the slide projector? Do the windows have curtains so that the room can be darkened for your slide presentation? Is there a chalkboard? Some talks have been ruined and some speakers turned into nervous wrecks because, at the last moment, they discover that there isn’t an extension cord in the entire building.

### Devote Extra Practice to the Introduction

Because you are likely to suffer the greatest anxiety at the beginning of your speech, you should spend a lot of time practicing your introduction.

Most speakers, actors, and musicians report that after the first minute or two, their nervousness moves to the background and the rest of the event is relatively easy. Ernestine Schumann-Heink, the German opera singer, said, “I grow so nervous before a performance, I become sick. I want to go home. But after I have been on the stage for a few minutes, I am so happy that nobody can drag me off.” Perhaps happiness is too strong a word for what you will feel, but if you are a typical speaker, the rest of your speech will be smooth sailing once you have weathered the turbulent waters of the first few minutes.

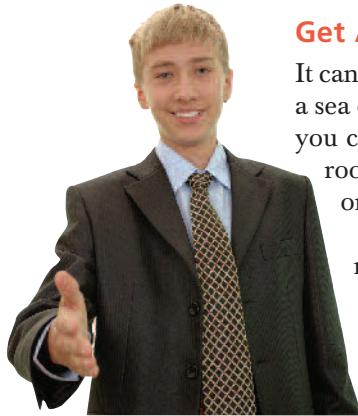


## Immediately before the Speech

Here are a few tips for the hours preceding your speech:

### Verify Equipment and Materials

On the day of your speech, arrive early and inspect every detail of the arrangements you have made. Is the needed equipment in place and in good working order? If there is a public-address system, test your voice on it before the audience arrives so that you can feel at ease with it. Learn how to adjust the microphone.



Greet listeners as they arrive.

### Get Acclimated to Audience and Setting

It can be frightening to arrive at the meeting place at the last moment and confront a sea of strange faces waiting to hear you talk. If you arrive at least one hour early, you can get acclimated to the setting and chat with people as they come into the room. In this way, you will see them not as a hostile pack of strangers but as ordinary people who wish you well.

Henry Heimlich is the creator of the famed Heimlich Maneuver for rescuing people who are choking. Even though he frequently gives lectures throughout the world, Dr. Heimlich says, “I am always a little nervous wondering how a particular audience will accept me and my thoughts. It is good to meet some of the audience socially before lecturing to them, in order to relate to their cultural and intellectual backgrounds. You are then their ‘friend.’”<sup>18</sup>

Danielle Kennedy of Sun Valley, Idaho, says that when she began her speaking career, she was so nervous she would hide out in a bathroom until it was time for her to speak. Now, she says, she mingles with the listeners as they arrive and engages them in conversation. “This reminds me that they are just nice people who want to be informed. I also give myself pleasant thoughts. Things like: ‘Can you imagine, these people drove 100 miles just to hear me. I am so lucky. These people are wonderful.’ I get real warm thoughts going by the time I get up there.”<sup>19</sup>

### Use Physical Actions to Release Tension

We have seen that adrenaline is beneficial, providing athletes and public speakers with wonderful bursts of energy, but it also has a bad side. When your body goes on red alert, you get pumped up and ready for action, but you also get trembling hands and jittery knees. If you are an athlete, this is no problem because you will soon be engaged in vigorous physical activity that will drain off excess nervous energy. As a public speaker, you lack such easy outlets. Nevertheless, there are several tension releasers you can use:

- Take a few deep breaths. Be sure to inhale slowly and exhale slowly.
- Do exercises that can be performed quietly without calling attention to yourself. Here are some examples: (1) Tighten and then relax your leg muscles. (2) Push your arm or hand muscles against a hard object (such as a desktop or a chair) for a few moments, then release the pressure. (3) Press the palms of your hands against each other in the same way: tension, release . . . tension, release . . .



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## During the Speech

Here are some important pointers to keep in mind as you deliver a speech.

### Pause a Few Moments before Starting

All good speakers pause a few moments before they begin their talk. This silence is effective because (1) it is dramatic, building up the audience's interest and curiosity; (2) it makes you look poised and in control; (3) it calms you; and (4) it gives you a chance to look at your notes and get your first two or three sentences firmly in mind.

Many tense, inexperienced speakers rush up to the lectern and begin their speech at once, thus getting off to a frenzied, flustered start. In the back of their mind, they have the notion that silence is a terrible thing, a shameful void that must be filled up immediately. To the contrary, silence is a good breathing space between what went before and what comes next. It helps the audience tune in to the speaker and tune out extraneous thoughts.

### Deal Rationally with Your Body's Turmoil

If you are a typical beginning speaker, you will suffer from some or all of the following symptoms as you begin your talk:

- Pounding heart
- Trembling hands
- Shaky knees
- Dry, constricted throat
- Difficulty in breathing
- Quivering voice
- Flushed face

You usually suffer the greatest discomfort during the first few minutes of a speech, but then things get better. If, however, your symptoms get worse as you go along, it might be because your mind has taken a wrong path. Examine the two paths diagrammed in Figure 2.1. If you take Route A, you are trapped in a vicious circle. Your mind tells your body that disaster is upon you, and your body responds by feeling worse. This, in turn, increases your brain's perception of disaster.

You can avoid this rocky road by choosing Route B, in which your mind helps your body stay in control. The mental trick is to remind yourself that nervousness is an ally that can help energize you. Tell yourself that your symptoms, rather than being a prelude to disaster, are evidence that you are keyed up enough to give a good speech.

### Think of Communication, Not Performance

Regard your task as *communication* rather than *performance*. Dr. Michael T. Motley of the University of California, Davis, says that speakers who suffer from excessive anxiety make the mistake of thinking of themselves as *performing* for listeners, whom they see as hostile evaluators. Such people say, "The audience will ridicule me if I make a mistake. I'll be embarrassed to death." But in fact, says Dr. Motley,

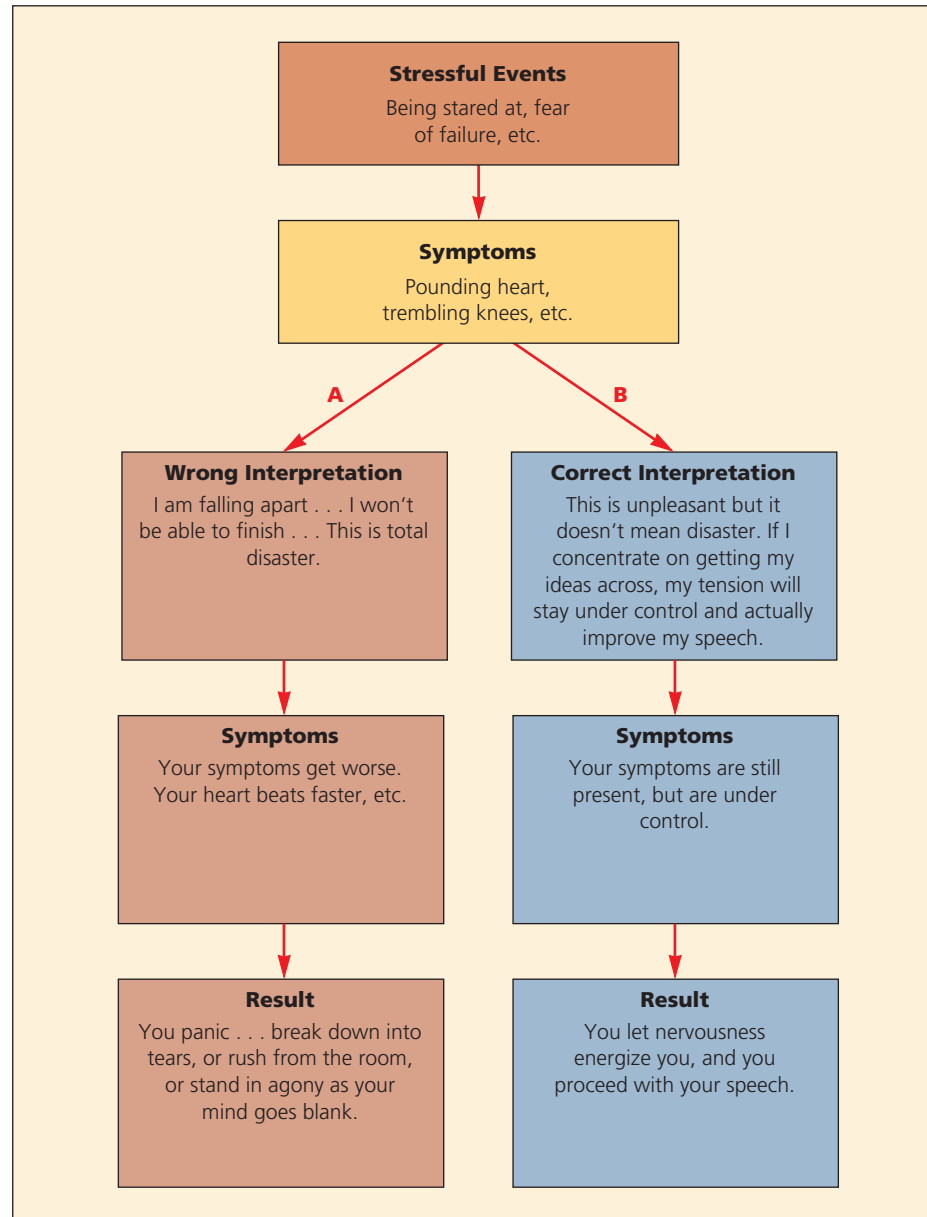
#### Your Thoughts ?

"It is folly for a speaker to focus on his or her personal appearance." Do you agree? Defend your answer.



**Figure 2.1**

The alternative paths that a speaker feeling stressed might take.



audiences are more interested in hearing what you have to say “than in analyzing or criticizing how [you] say it.” Audiences “usually ignore errors and awkwardness as long as they get something out of a speech.”<sup>20</sup>

When speakers stop worrying about “How well am I performing?” and start thinking about “How can I share my ideas with these people?” two things usually happen: (1) their anxiety comes down to a manageable level and (2) their delivery improves dramatically. By treating speechmaking as more like one-on-one communication than as a stage exhibition, they tend to talk *with* people, instead of

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orate *at* them; they tend to speak conversationally rather than in a stiff, unnatural way.

When one of my students, Maxine Jones, began her first classroom speech, her voice sounded artificial and cold; but after a few moments, she sounded animated and warm, as if she were carrying on a lively conversation. This caused her to become more interesting and easier to follow. Later she explained her transformation: “At first I was scared to death, but then I noticed that everyone in the room was looking at me with curiosity in their eyes, and I could tell that they really wanted to hear what I was saying. I told myself, ‘They really *care* about this information—I can’t let them down.’ So I settled down and talked to them as if they were my friends. I got so involved with explaining things to them that I didn’t worry too much about being scared.”

What Jones discovered is confirmed by athletes. Most tennis players, for example, are gripped by nervous tension before a match, but if they concentrate on hitting the ball, their tension recedes into the background. Likewise, public speakers may be filled with anxiety before a speech, but if they concentrate on communicating with the audience, their anxiety moves to a back burner, where it provides energy for the task.

### Know That Most Symptoms Are Not Seen

Some speakers get rattled because they think the audience is keenly aware of their thumping heart and quaking hands. You, of course, are painfully aware of those symptoms, but—believe it or not—your audience is usually oblivious to your body’s distress. Remember that people are sitting out there wanting to hear your ideas. They are not saying to themselves, “Let’s see, what signs of nervousness is this person displaying?” I have had students tell me after a speech that they were embarrassed about their jittery performance, yet I and the other listeners in the class saw no signs of nervousness. We were listening to the ideas and failed to notice the speaker’s discomfort. Various studies have found the same thing to be true: audiences are unaware of the symptoms that the speakers think are embarrassingly obvious.<sup>21</sup> In other words, you are probably the only one who knows that your knees are shaking and your heart is pounding.

Dick Cavett, who spent many years as a TV talk-show host, notes that a TV performer’s level of stage fright “varies from night to night. The best thing to do is tell yourself it doesn’t show one-eighth as much as you feel. If you’re a little nervous, you don’t look nervous at all. If you’re very nervous, you look slightly nervous. And if you’re totally out of control, you look troubled. It scales down on the screen.” People who appear on a talk show, says Cavett, should



Troy Collins, a native of Virginia who works for the Los Angeles Police Department, displays nervous tension as he waits to enter the ring for a sumo wrestling match in Washington, D.C. Before an event, many athletes are gripped by nervous tension, but when the action starts, they focus on performing their maneuvers, and the tension moves to a back burner, where it provides ongoing energy. Likewise, if public speakers concentrate on communicating with their audience, their anxiety recedes into the background, where it acts as a source of power.

always remind themselves that everything they are doing *looks* better than it *feels*. “Your nervous system may be giving you a thousand shocks, but the viewer can only see a few of them.”<sup>22</sup> The same thing holds true for a speech: you look better than you feel.

### Never Mention Nervousness or Apologize

Despite what I’ve just said, there may be times when an audience does notice your nervousness—when, for example, your breathing is audibly labored. In such a case, resist the temptation to comment or apologize. Everyone knows that most people get nervous when they talk in public, so why call attention to it or apologize for it?

Commenting about nervousness can create two big dangers. First of all, you might get yourself more rattled than you were to begin with. I remember listening to a teacher who was giving a talk to a PTA meeting one night. In the middle of her remarks, she suddenly blurted out, “Oh my god, I knew I would fall apart.” Up to that time, I had not been aware of any discomfort or nervousness. She tried to continue her talk, but she was too flustered. She gave up the effort and sat down with a red face. I don’t know what kind of internal distress she was suffering, of course, but I am certain that if she had said nothing about her nervousness, she could have dragged herself through the speech. When she sat down, I felt irritated and disappointed because I had been keenly interested in her remarks. How selfish of her, I thought, to deprive me of the second half of her speech simply because she was nervous. I know that my reaction sounds insensitive, but it underscores an important point: your listeners don’t care about your emotional distress; they only want to hear your ideas.

The second risk in mentioning symptoms is that your audience might have been unaware of your nervousness before you brought it up, but now you have distracted them from your speech and they are watching the very thing you don’t want them to scrutinize: your body’s behavior. If you say, “I’m sorry that my hands are shaking,” what do you think the audience will pay close attention to, at least for the next few minutes? Your hands, of course, instead of your speech. Keep your audience’s attention focused on your ideas, and they will pay little or no attention to your emotional and physical distress.



Actress Penelope Cruz listens to a speaker at a film festival in Berlin. Is she displeased with the speaker’s remarks? Is she angry? Is she bored? Don’t jump to conclusions. Perhaps this is just her habitual expression when she’s absorbed in listening to an interesting subject. Speakers should not let such expressions upset them. Some listeners who look displeased are actually quite pleased.

### Don’t Let Your Audience Upset You

If you are like some speakers, you get rattled when you look out at the audience and observe that most listeners are poker-faced and unsmiling. Does this mean they are displeased with your speech? No. Their solemn faces have nothing to do with you and your speech. This is just one of those peculiarities of human nature: in a conversation, people will smile and nod and encourage you, but

## Tips for Your Career

### Tip 2.1 Prepare for Memory Lapses

A psychologist tells of the time when he was speaking at a convention as the presiding officer. At one point, he wanted to praise an associate, who was sitting next to him at the head table, for her hard work in planning the convention. “As I began my words of tribute,” he said, “my mind suddenly went blank, and I couldn’t remember her name! It was awful. This was a woman I had worked with for years. She was like a sister.”

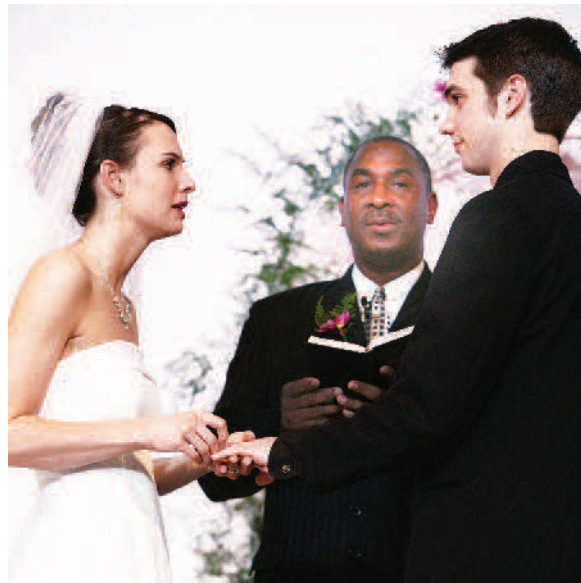
Fortunately, he said, everyone was wearing name tags, so he leaned over, saw her name, and used it in his remarks—without the audience suspecting his memory lapse.

Such lapses are common, but don’t be alarmed. There is a simple solution: Prepare a card with all basic information—names, dates, phone numbers—and keep the card with your other notes for easy access.

This “card trick” is used by many ministers, politicians, and other public speakers. “When I perform weddings, even if I’m an old friend of the couple,” says one minister, “I have their names printed in big letters on a card that I keep in front of me.”

Use a card for any familiar passages, such as the Lord’s Prayer or the Pledge of Allegiance, that you are supposed to recite or to lead the audience in reciting. You may never need to read the card, but it’s nice to have a backup in case of emergency.

Please don’t misinterpret this tip to mean that you should write out an entire speech. Brief notes—a few words or phrases—are still recommended. Use the “card trick” only for names, numbers, and wordings that must be recalled with complete accuracy.



Officiating at a wedding, a minister directs the bride to put the ring on the groom’s finger. At public ceremonies, many ministers avoid embarrassment by having key information (such as the names of bride and groom) on a card in front of them.

when listening to a speech in an audience, the same people will wear (most of the time) a blank mask. The way to deal with those stony faces is to remind yourself that your listeners want you to succeed; they hope that you will give them a worthwhile message. If you are lucky, you will notice two or three listeners who are obviously loving your speech; they are nodding in agreement or giving you looks of appreciation. Let your eyes go to them frequently, for they will give you courage and confidence.

If you are an inexperienced speaker, you may get upset if you see members of an audience whispering to one another. You may wonder, “Are these people making negative comments about me?” If the listeners are smiling, it’s even worse: You ask yourself, “Did I say something foolish? Is there something wrong with my clothes?” If this happens to you, keep in mind that your rude listeners are probably talking about something other than the quality of your speech or your personal appearance. Most likely, they are just sharing some personal gossip. If

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For an interactive exercise on nervousness, visit Chapter 2 on *Connect Public Speaking*.

**Part 1 Foundations of Effective Communication**

by chance they *are* whispering about something you've said, it's not necessarily negative. They may be whispering that they agree with you 100 percent.

What if you see faces that look angry or displeased? Don't assume the worst. Some people get a troubled look on their face whenever they concentrate on a speaker's message. Michelle Roberts, a defense attorney in Washington, D.C., studies the facial expressions of every juror when she addresses the jury during a trial, but she has learned that sour faces do not necessarily signify disapproval. "Sometimes jurors seem like they're scowling and actually they're with you."<sup>23</sup>

What if a listener stands up and walks out of the room? For some inexperienced speakers, this is a stunning personal setback, a cause for alarm. Before you jump to conclusions, bear in mind that the listener's behavior is not necessarily a response to your speech: he or she may have another meeting to attend or may need to use the rest room or may have become ill suddenly. But what if the listener is indeed storming out of the room in a huff, obviously rejecting your speech? In such a case, advises veteran speaker Earl Nightingale, "don't worry about it. On controversial subjects, you're bound to have listeners who are not in agreement with you—unless you're giving them pure, unadulterated pap. Trying to win over every member of the audience is an impossible and thankless task. Remember, there were those who disagreed with wise, kind Socrates."<sup>24</sup>

**Act Poised**

To develop confidence when you face an audience, act as if you already are confident. Why? Because playing the role of the self-assured speaker can often transform you into a speaker who is genuinely confident and poised. In various wars, soldiers have reported that they were terrified before going into combat, but nevertheless they acted brave in front of their buddies. During the battle, to their surprise, what started off as a pretense became a reality. Instead of pretending to be courageous, they actually became so. The same thing often happens to public speakers.

**Look Directly at the Audience**

If you are frightened of your audience, it is tempting to stare at your notes or the back wall or the window, but these evasions will only add to your nervousness rather than reduce it.

Force yourself to establish eye contact, especially at the beginning of your speech. Good eye contact means more than just a quick, furtive glance at various faces in front of you; it means "locking" your eyes with a listener's for a couple of seconds. Locking eyes may sound frightening, but it actually helps to calm you. In an article about a public speaking course that she took, writer Maggie Paley said, "When you make contact with one other set of eyes, it's a connection; you can relax and concentrate. The first time I did it, I calmed down 90 percent, and spoke . . . fluently."<sup>25</sup>

**Don't Speak Too Fast**

Because of nervous tension and a desire to "get it over with," many speakers race through their speeches. "Take it slow and easy," advises Dr. Michael T. Motley of the University of California, Davis. "People in an audience have a tremendous job of information-processing to do. They need your help. Slow down, pause, and guide the audience through your talk by delineating major and minor points



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carefully. Remember that your objective is to help the audience understand what you are saying, not to present your information in record time.”<sup>26</sup>

To help yourself slow down, rehearse your speech in front of friends or relatives and ask them to raise their hands whenever you talk too rapidly. For the actual delivery of the speech, write yourself reminders in large letters on your notes (such as “SLOW DOWN”). While you are speaking, look at your listeners and talk directly to them in the same calm, patient, deliberate manner you would use if you were explaining an idea to a friend.

### Get Audience Action Early in the Speech

I said earlier that it’s a bit unnerving to see your listeners’ expressionless faces. In some speeches, you can change those faces from blank to animated by asking a question. (Tips on how to ask questions will be discussed in Chapter 11.) When the listeners respond with answers or a show of hands, they show themselves to be friendly and cooperative, and this reduces your apprehension. When they loosen up, you loosen up.

### Eliminate Excess Energy

For siphoning off excess energy during the speech, you can use visual aids (as mentioned earlier) and these two tension releasers:

- Let your hands make gestures. You will not have any trouble making gestures if you simply allow your hands to be free. Don’t clutch note cards or thrust your hands into your pockets or grip the lectern. If you let your hands hang by your side or rest on the lectern, you will find that they will make gestures naturally. You will not have to think about it.
- Walk about. Though you obviously should not pace back and forth like a caged animal, you can walk a few steps at a time. For example, you can walk a few steps to the left of the lectern to make a point, move back to the lectern to look at your notes for your next point, and then walk to the right of the lectern as you speak.

In addition to reducing tension, gestures and movement make you a more exciting and interesting speaker than someone who stands frozen in one spot.

### Accept Imperfection

If you think that you must give a perfect, polished speech, you put enormous—and unnecessary—pressure on yourself. Your listeners don’t care whether your delivery is perfect; they simply hope that your words will enlighten or entertain them. Think of yourself as merely a package deliverer; the audience is more interested in the package than in how skillfully you hand it over.

Making a mistake is not the end of the world. Even experienced speakers commit a fair number of blunders and bloopers. If you completely flub a sentence or mangle an idea, you might say something like, “No, wait. That’s not the way I wanted to explain this. Let me try again.” If you momentarily forget what you were planning to say, don’t despair. Pause a few moments to regain your composure and find your place in your notes. If you can’t find your place, ask the audience for help: “I’ve lost my train of thought—where was I?” There is no need to apologize. In conversation, you pause and correct yourself all the time; to do so in a speech makes you sound spontaneous and natural.

If you make a mistake that causes your audience to snicker or laugh, try to join in. If you can laugh at yourself, your audience will love you—they will see that you are no “stuffed shirt.” Some comedians deliberately plan “mistakes” as a technique for gaining rapport with their audiences.

### Welcome Experience

If you are an inexperienced speaker, please know that you will learn to control your nervousness as you get more and more practice in public speaking, both in your speech class and in your career. You should welcome this experience as a way to further your personal and professional growth.

One student told her public speaking instructor at the beginning of the course that she just *knew* she would drop out of the class right before her first speech. She stayed, though, and developed into a fine speaker. She later got a promotion in her company partly because of her speaking ability. “I never thought I’d say this,” she admitted, “but the experience of giving speeches—plus learning how to handle nervousness—helped me enormously. Before I took the course, I used to panic whenever I started off a talk. I had this enormous lump in my throat, and I thought I was doing terrible. I would hurry through my talk just to get it over with.” But as a result of the course, she said, “I learned to control my nervousness and use it to my advantage. Now I’m as nervous as ever when I give a speech, but I make the nervousness work *for* me instead of *against* me.”

In your career, rather than shying away from speaking opportunities, seek them out. An old saying is true: experience is the best teacher.

After reading this chapter, if you feel that you need additional tips on managing your anxiety, see the article entitled “Speech Phobia” in the Supplementary Readings on Connect Public Speaking ([connectpublicspeaking.com](http://connectpublicspeaking.com)).

## Resources for Review and Skill Building

connectpublic  
speaking.com



Connect Public Speaking provides resources for study and review, including sample speech videos, an Outline Tutor, and practice tests.



## Summary

The nervousness engendered by stage fright is a normal, understandable emotion experienced by most public speakers. The major reasons for speakers’ nervousness are (1) fear of being stared at, (2) fear of failure, (3) fear of rejection, and (4) fear of the unknown.

Instead of trying to eliminate nervousness, welcome it as a source of energy. Properly channeled, it can help you give a better speech than you would deliver if you were completely relaxed.

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The best way to avoid excessive, crippling nervousness is to pour time and energy into preparing and practicing your speech. Then, when you stand up to speak, deal rationally with your nervous symptoms (such as trembling knees and dry throat); remind yourself that the symptoms are not a prelude to disaster but instead are evidence that you are keyed up enough to give a good speech. Never call attention

to your nervousness and never apologize for it; the listeners don't care about your emotional state—they just want to hear your message. Concentrate on getting your ideas across to the audience; this will get your mind where it belongs—on your listeners and not on yourself—and it will help you move your nervousness to a back burner, where it can still simmer and energize you without hindering your effectiveness.

## Key Terms

adrenaline, 26

positive imagery, 28

positive nervousness, 26

## Review Questions

1. What are the four main reasons for speakers' nervousness?
2. Why are fear and nervousness beneficial to the public speaker?
3. Why is delivering a speech from memory a bad method?
4. Is shyness a liability for a speaker? Explain your answer.
5. How can a speaker reduce excessive tension before a speech?
6. Does an audience detect most of a speaker's nervous symptoms? Explain your answer.
7. Why should you never call attention to your nervousness?
8. Explain the idea "Think of communication, not performance."
9. Why should speakers not be upset when they see the solemn faces of their listeners?
10. Why should a speaker act as if he or she is confident?

## Building Critical-Thinking Skills

1. In an experiment, psychologist Rowland Miller asked college students to do something embarrassing, such as singing "The Star-Spangled Banner," while classmates watched. Those students who reported a great degree of embarrassment thought that their classmates would consider them fools and like them less, but Miller found just the opposite: The classmates expressed greater regard for the easily embarrassed students after the performance than before. What lessons can a public speaker draw from this research?
2. Imagine that while you are speaking to an audience, you notice that (a) everyone is very quiet, (b) a man in the front is rubbing his neck, and (c) a woman is looking in her purse. Using two columns on a piece of paper, give a negative interpretation of these events in the first column, and then give a positive interpretation in the adjacent column.

## Building Teamwork Skills

1. In a group, make a list of the nervous symptoms that group members have experienced before and during oral communication in public. (This may include being asked for comments during a class discussion.) Then discuss ways to control nervousness.
2. Worrying about future events, say mental-health therapists, can be helpful at certain times and harmful at other times. In a group, discuss the pros and cons of worrying, giving examples from everyday life. Then decide which aspects of speech preparation and delivery deserve to be worried about and which do not.



An ethnic Uighur student in China listens to an instructor. When listeners are engaged and attentive, they not only learn a lot but also help to energize and encourage the speaker.

# Listening

# 3 chapter

## OUTLINE

### The Problem of Poor Listening Skills

#### How to Listen Effectively

Prepare Yourself  
 Be Willing to Expend Energy  
 Listen Analytically  
 Take Notes  
 Resist Distractions  
 Avoid Fake Listening  
 Give Every Speaker a Fair Chance  
 Control Emotions

### The Listener's Responsibilities

Avoid Rudeness  
 Provide Encouragement  
 Find Value in Every Speech

### Speech Evaluations

When Evaluating  
 When Receiving Evaluations

## OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between hearing and listening.
2. Describe eight keys to effective listening.
3. Define three major responsibilities that listeners have toward speakers.
4. Know how to give and receive evaluations of speeches.

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## Part 1 Foundations of Effective Communication

**Causing 1.6 million deaths each year,** tuberculosis is an infectious disease that strikes most often in low-income areas of the world. Because it is rare in North America, news media sounded an alarm in 2007 when an American, Andrew Speaker, contracted the disease and was quarantined by the U.S. government. Some experts feared that he could set off a national epidemic of tuberculosis.

The patient was treated at Denver's National Jewish Medical and Research Center by Dr. Gwen Huitt, one of the nation's top infectious-disease specialists. Shortly after she began treatment, Dr. Huitt conducted a press conference to educate the public on what was happening. During the conference, which was televised by several cable TV networks, she discussed the nature of the disease and mentioned that "tuberculosis infects one-third of the world's population." She was trying to make the point that millions of people are exposed to the TB bacterium, but most of them do not die.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, some TV viewers thought she said that one-third of the world's population would be killed by the disease. Scared individuals telephoned doctors' offices with queries—until authorities reassured the public that there was no cause for panic.<sup>2</sup> Further reassurance was given two months later when the patient was released in good condition.<sup>3</sup>

As Dr. Gwen Huitt tries to calm public fears, some TV viewers fail to listen correctly.



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Dr. Huitt was totally innocent in the public misunderstanding—she had spoken clearly and concisely. Her experience, however, illustrates a common problem in all levels of society—ineffective listening. When new or difficult material is presented, almost all listeners are faced with a challenge because human speech lacks the stability and permanence of the printed word. Oral communication is fast-moving and impermanent—“written on the wind.”

This chapter is designed to help you become a better listener. It also should help you become a better speaker. As you become more aware of the difficulties of the listening process, you will be able to make adjustments in your presentations to ensure that everyone in your audience receives your message clearly and accurately.

## The Problem of Poor Listening Skills

A parent says to a child, “Are you listening to me?”

The child replies, “I hear you. I hear you.”

Although in conversation we sometimes use the words “hear” and “listen” interchangeably, they are not synonymous. **Hearing** occurs when your ears pick up sound waves being transmitted by a speaker. **Listening** involves making sense out of what is being transmitted. As Keith Davis put it, “Hearing is with the ears, listening is with the mind.”<sup>4</sup>

Listening is a major part of daily life. People spend an estimated 50 to 70 percent of their communication time listening. In almost all jobs, employees spend far more time listening than they spend reading and writing.

And yet, despite all this time devoted to listening, research shows that most of us are not very effective as listeners. According to tests by Dr. Lyman K. Steil of the University of Minnesota in St. Paul, here is what happens after the average person listens to a 10-minute oral presentation:

- Ten minutes later: The listener has heard, understood, properly evaluated, and retained only about 50 percent of what was said.
- Two days later: The listener’s comprehension and retention have dropped to only 25 percent of what was said.<sup>5</sup>

You might think that our chief problem is failing to retain information, but actually our biggest error is miscomprehending and distorting what we hear. The results can be disastrous. Throughout the world, instructions are misunderstood, equipment breaks down from improper use, productivity declines, profits sag, sales are lost, feelings are hurt, morale is lowered, rumors get started, and health is harmed.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Steil estimates that listening mistakes each week in American business might cost as much as a billion dollars.<sup>7</sup>

## How to Listen Effectively

Many businesses have discovered that they can boost productivity and sales by teaching their employees to listen more effectively. Here are some of the techniques that are taught.

### hearing

the process by which sound waves are received by the ear

### listening

the act of interpreting and evaluating what is being said

## Prepare Yourself

Listening to difficult material is hard work, so prepare yourself as thoroughly as a runner prepares for a race.

Prepare yourself *physically*. Get plenty of sleep the night before. If necessary, exercise right before the speech or lecture. Let's suppose that you will be sitting in a warm room in mid-afternoon and are therefore likely to become drowsy and lethargic. You could take a brisk walk before entering the room to make yourself alert.

Prepare yourself *intellectually*. If the subject matter of the speech is new or complex, do research or background reading beforehand. In this way, the speech will be much easier to understand. The American philosopher Henry David Thoreau once said, "We hear and apprehend only what we already half know."

## Be Willing to Expend Energy

When you listen to a comedian cracking jokes on TV, do you have to work hard to pay attention? Of course not. You simply sit back in a comfortable chair and enjoy the humor. It is easy, effortless, relaxing.

If you are like many listeners, you assume that when you go into a room for a lecture or a speech on a difficult subject, you should be able to sit back and absorb the content just as easily as you grasp a comedian's jokes. This is a major misconception, because the two situations are quite different. Listening to light material requires only a modest amount of mental effort, while listening effectively to difficult material requires work. You must be alert and energetic, giving total concentration to the speech, with your eyes on the speaker, your ears tuned in to the speaker's words, and your mind geared to receive the message.

According to Dr. Ralph G. Nichols, who did pioneering work on listening skills at the University of Minnesota, listening "is characterized by faster heart action, quicker circulation of the blood, and a small rise in body temperature."<sup>8</sup>

If you tend to drift away mentally whenever a speaker begins to talk about unfamiliar or difficult material, try to break yourself of the habit. Vow to put as much energy as necessary into paying attention.



Listening often requires intense concentration.

## Listen Analytically

You should analyze a speech as it is being presented—not to nitpick or poke holes in it, but to help you understand and remember the speaker's message, and to determine which parts of the speech are valuable to you and which are worthless. There are two elements that you should examine analytically: the main ideas and the support materials.

**Focus on main ideas.** Some listeners make the mistake of treating all of a speaker's utterances as equal in importance. This causes them to "miss the forest for the trees": they look so hard at individual sentences that they fail to see the "big picture," the larger meaning.

Try to distinguish the speaker's primary ideas from the secondary material—such as facts, figures, and stories—that are used to explain, illustrate, or prove the primary ideas. If a speaker tells an interesting story, for example, ask yourself, "Why is the speaker telling me this? What main idea is the speaker trying to get across to me by telling this story?"



## Chapter 3 Listening

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Main points are more important than support materials, as you can see in the sample notes in Figure 3.1.

**Evaluate support materials.** Effective speakers use support materials (such as stories, statistics, and quotations) to explain, illustrate, or prove their main points. As a listener, you should evaluate those supports, asking yourself these questions:

- Is each main point amplified with support materials?
- Do the support materials seem to be accurate and up-to-date? Are they derived from reliable sources or are they merely hearsay?
- Do they truly explain or prove a point?

Learning to listen analytically not only will help you become a better listener but also will help you improve the quality of your own speeches. You will find yourself avoiding the mistakes you see in the speeches of others.

## Take Notes

You should take notes whenever you listen to a speech—for the following reasons:

1. *Note taking gives you a record of the speaker's most important points.* Unless you have superhuman powers of memory, there is no way you can remember all of a speaker's key ideas without taking notes.
2. *Note taking sharpens and strengthens your ability to listen analytically.* When you take notes, you force your mind to scan a speech like radar, looking for main points and evidence. You end up being a better listener than if you did not take any notes at all.<sup>9</sup>
3. *Note taking is a good way to keep your attention on the speaker and not let your mind wander.* For this reason, it's a good idea to take notes on *all* speeches—not just on important lectures at school. A colleague explains why he takes notes at every meeting he attends, even though he often throws his notes away soon afterward:

I take notes at any talk I go to. I review the notes right after the meeting to solidify the key points in my mind. Afterwards, I may save the notes for my files or for some sort of follow-up, but I usually throw them away. This doesn't mean that I had wasted my time by taking notes. The act of writing them helped me to listen actively and analytically. It also—I must confess—kept me from daydreaming.

There are many ways of taking notes, and you may have already developed a method that suits you. Some listeners use a variety of methods because speakers have different organizational and delivery styles, and a method that works with one speaker might not work with another.

Whatever system you use, your notes should include major points, with pertinent data or support materials that back up those points. You also may want to leave space for comments to yourself or questions that need to be asked.

Two methods are shown in Figure 3.1. In Option A, the first column is designated for main ideas and the second column for support materials. The third column is for your responses—questions and concerns that come to mind during the

## Your Thoughts ?

Sometimes listening can be treated as passive receiving, while at other times it should be regarded as active participation. Give examples of when each approach is appropriate.



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See "Listening Profile" and "Notes" template in Supplementary Readings on Connect Public Speaking.

**Figure 3.1**

Two methods of note taking are shown as Option A and Option B.

**Speaker's Words**

"Many people don't pledge to become organ donors because they think there is a surplus of organs available. This is tragic because there is actually a dire shortage in all parts of the country, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Many patients will die while waiting for a desperately needed organ. The situation is especially grim for liver and heart patients. Last year, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing, 7,467 patients were on the national waiting list for a liver; 954 of them—13 percent—died while waiting. For people needing hearts: 3,698 were on the list; 746 died while waiting—that's 20 percent. According to the *Times*, the situation is even worse than these statistics indicate: thousands of people needing organs, such as those injured in car accidents, die before their names can reach the official waiting lists."

**Option A**

The speaker's message is analyzed and sorted. (See text for details.)

Main ideas	Support material	Response
Shortage of organs	All parts of U.S.	Why is heart stat higher?
Many will die waiting	Liver—13% died last year	
	Heart—20% died	
Situation worse than it looks	1000s die before names can reach lists	

**Option B**

Because it is sometimes hard to distinguish between main ideas and subpoints while a speaker is talking, some listeners jot down one item per line.

Shortage of organs  
 All parts of U.S.  
 Many will die waiting  
 Liver—13% died last year  
 Heart—20% died—why higher?  
 Situation worse than it looks  
 1000s die before names can reach lists

Later, the listener can analyze the notes, using a highlighter to focus on key ideas and a red pen for follow-up items.

Shortage of organs  
 All parts of U.S.  
 Many will die waiting  
 Liver—13% died last year  
 Heart—20% died—why higher?  
 Situation worse than it looks  
 1000s die before names can reach lists

## Tips for Your Career

### Tip 3.1 Take Notes in Important Conversations and Small-Group Meetings

Whenever your superiors and colleagues talk to you (either one-on-one or in a group meeting) about work-related matters, take notes. Not only does this give you a written record of important discussions, but it also is a compliment, a nonverbal way of saying, “Your ideas are important to me—so important that I want to make sure I get them down correctly.” Contrary to what some may think, taking notes does *not* signify to others that you have a poor memory.

One of the most common gripes of employees is that “the boss never listens to what we say.” So, if you are ever in a supervisory position, take notes whenever one of your

subordinates comes to you with a suggestion or a complaint. Doing so demonstrates that you value the employee’s comments and are prepared to take action if necessary. Even if you can’t take action, the employee’s morale is boosted because you have shown you truly listen and truly care.

Can you ever rise so high in your career that you no longer need to take notes? Not if you’re Robert Stempel, former chairman of General Motors. Though he headed one of the world’s largest corporations and could have hired a platoon of secretaries to take notes for him, Stempel took his own notes at management meetings.

speech. When the question-and-answer period begins, you can scan the response column and ask questions. (If a question that you jotted down is answered later in the speech itself, your effort hasn’t been wasted; having raised the question will cause you to listen to the explanation with special interest.) The response column also can be used to plan follow-up research. (For example, you might remind yourself: “Look up more info on this in library.”) The response column does not require an entry for each of the speaker’s points; use it only as needed.

Option B is a good choice when a speaker talks fast and does not present his or her material in an easily recognized pattern or does not clearly distinguish between main points and subpoints. Write one note per line. Later use a highlighter to mark the key ideas and a red pen to circle items that you need to follow up on.

Whatever method you use, don’t try to write down every sentence that the speaker says. Summarize; put the speaker’s ideas into your own words. This will help you make sure that you are understanding the speaker’s message. If you try to copy all utterances, as if you were a court stenographer, you would wear your hand out, and you would fall into the habit of transcribing without evaluating.

Soon after a presentation, review your notes and, if necessary, clarify them while the speaker’s words are still fresh in your mind. If any parts of your notes are vague or confusing, seek help from another listener (or the speaker, if available).

## Resist Distractions

Concentrating on a speech is made difficult by four common types of distractions: (1) *auditory*—people coughing or whispering, a noisy air conditioner, loud music from an adjacent room; (2) *visual*—cryptic comments on the board from a previous meeting, a nearby listener who is intriguing to look at, an appealing magazine on the desk or table; (3) *physical*—a headache or stuffy nose, a seat that is too hard, a room that is too hot or too cold; (4) *mental*—daydreams, worries, and preoccupations.

## Tips for Your Career

### Tip 3.2 Learn How Listeners Show Respect in Different Cultures

While Gail Opp-Kemp, an American artist, was giving a speech on the art of Japanese brush painting to an audience that included visitors from Japan, she was disconcerted to see that many of her Japanese listeners had their eyes closed. Were they turned off because an American had the audacity to instruct Japanese in their own art form? Were they deliberately trying to signal their rejection of her?

Opp-Kemp later found out that her listeners were not being disrespectful. Japanese listeners sometimes close their eyes to enhance concentration. Her listeners were paying tribute to her by meditating upon her words.

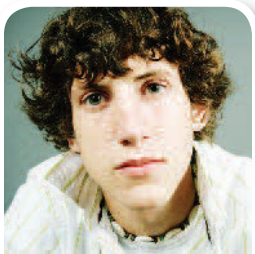
Someday you may be either a speaker or a listener in a situation involving people from other countries or members of a minority group in North America. Learning how different cultures signal respect can help you avoid misunderstandings. Here are some examples:

- In the deaf culture of North America, many listeners signify applause not by clapping their hands but by waving them in the air.
- In some cultures (both overseas and in some minority groups in North America), listeners are considered disrespectful if they look directly at the speaker. Respect is shown by looking in the general direction but avoiding direct eye contact.
- In some countries, whistling by listeners is a sign of approval, while in other countries, it is a form of jeering.

For detailed information about different cultures, visit the author's Web site ([connectpublicspeaking.com](http://connectpublicspeaking.com)), select STUDENT EDITION, click on WEBLINKS, and explore links for this page.

Mental distractions are often caused by the fact that your mind runs faster than a speaker's words. As a listener, you can process speech at about 500 words per minute, while most speakers talk at 125 to 150 words a minute. Thus, your brain works three or four times faster than the speed needed for listening to a speech. This gap creates a lot of mental spare time, and we are tempted to spend the time daydreaming.

How can you resist distractions? By using rigorous self-discipline. Prepare yourself for active listening by arriving in the room a few minutes early and getting yourself situated. Find a seat that is free from such distractions as blinding sunlight or friends who might want to whisper to you. Make yourself comfortable, lay out paper and pen for taking notes, and clear your mind of personal matters. When the speech begins, concentrate all your mental energies on the speaker's message.



This is what fake listening looks like.

### Avoid Fake Listening

Many members of an audience look directly at a speaker and seem to be listening, but in reality they are just pretending. Their minds are far away.

If you engage in fake listening, you might miss a lot of important information, but even worse, you risk embarrassment and ridicule. Imagine that you are engaged in fake listening during a meeting and your boss suddenly asks you to comment on a statement that has just been made. You don't have a clue. You are speechless, and you look very foolish.

If you have the habit of tuning speakers out while pretending to listen, one of the best ways to force yourself to pay attention is to take notes, as discussed earlier.

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## Give Every Speaker a Fair Chance

Don't reject speakers because you dislike their looks or their clothes or the organization they represent. Instead, focus on their message, which might be interesting and worthwhile.

If speakers have ragged delivery, or they seem shaky and lacking in confidence, don't be too quick to discount the content of their speech.

Wyatt Rangel, a stockbroker, relates an incident:

At a dinner meeting of my investment club, one of the speakers was a woman from Thailand who had lived in the U.S. only a year or so, and she spoke English with a heavy accent. It took a lot of concentration to understand what she was saying, and frankly I didn't think a recent immigrant could give me any worthwhile information. I was tempted to tune her out, but I made the effort, and I'm glad I did. She had some good insights into Asian corporations, and I was able to parlay her tips into financial gain a few months later.

Give every speaker a fair chance. You may be pleasantly surprised by what you learn.

## Control Emotions

Some listeners don't listen well because they have a powerful emotional reaction to a topic or to some comment the speaker makes. Their strong emotions cut off intelligent listening for the rest of the speech. Instead of paying attention to the speaker's words, they "argue" with the speaker inside their heads or think of ways to retaliate in the question-and-answer period. They often jump to conclusions, convincing themselves that the speaker is saying something that he or she really is not.

During many question-and-answer periods, I have seen listeners verbally attack a speaker for espousing a position that any careful listener would know was not the speaker's true position.

When you are listening to speakers who seem to be arguing against some of your ideas or beliefs, make sure you understand exactly what they are saying. Hear them out, and *then* prepare your counterarguments.

## The Listener's Responsibilities

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the speaker who is honest and fair has ethical and moral obligations to his or her listeners. The converse is also true: the honest and fair listener has ethical and moral obligations to the speaker. Let's examine three of the listener's primary responsibilities.

## Avoid Rudeness

Are you a polite listener? To make sure that you are not committing acts of rudeness, consider the advice in the following two sections.

## Follow the Golden Rule of Listening

If you were engaged in conversation with a friend, how would you feel if your friend yawned and fell asleep? Or started reading a book? Or talked on a cell phone? You would be upset by your friend's rudeness, wouldn't you?

Many people would never dream of being so rude to a friend in conversation, yet when they sit in an audience, they are terribly rude to the speaker. They fall

### Your Thoughts ?

Why do you think that the Chinese character for "listen" consists of pictures of the ear, the eye, and the heart?



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For interactive exercises, visit Chapter 3 on Connect Public Speaking.



## Part 1 Foundations of Effective Communication

asleep or study for a test or carry on a whispered conversation with their friends. Fortunately, a public speaking class cures some people of their rudeness. As one student put it:

I had been sitting in classrooms for 12 years and until now, I never realized how much a speaker sees. I always thought a listener is hidden and anonymous out there in a sea of faces. Now that I've been a speaker, I realize that when you look out at an audience, you are well aware of the least little thing somebody does. I am ashamed now at how I used to carry on conversations in the back of class. I was very rude, and I didn't even know it.


**Ethical Issue**

Follow the Golden Rule of Listening: "Listen unto others as you would have others listen unto you." When you are a speaker, you want an audience that listens attentively and courteously. So when you are a listener, you should provide the same response.

**Reject Electronic Intrusion**

In recent years, a new kind of rudeness has become rampant throughout society, says reporter Julie Hill. "Hardly a meeting, presentation, movie, or even church service is not interrupted by the ringing of at least one cell phone and then (even more annoying) the sound of a one-way conversation from the idiot who actually takes the call."<sup>10</sup>

These outrages are committed by people who should know better. "A business student in Milwaukee," writes Hill, "stumbled through an in-class presentation that was worth 20 percent of his grade, painfully aware that his professor was chatting on a cell phone through most of it."<sup>11</sup>

Cell phones are just one of many distractions that mar presentations today. Some listeners use laptop computers and wireless devices to engage in text messaging, e-mailing, browsing the Internet, or playing electronic games. In 2003, citizens in Norway were outraged when TV cameras caught a member of parliament playing a game on his handheld computer during a crucial debate on whether Norway should send troops to the war in Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

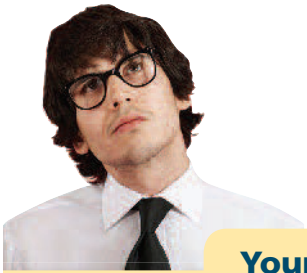
Refrain from using a laptop computer during a presentation unless you need to take notes on the speaker's remarks. In this case, ask the speaker for permission beforehand. During the presentation, show the speaker that you are respectfully paying attention by looking at him or her frequently (rather than keeping your eyes focused nonstop on your computer).

To avoid rude and insulting behavior, follow these rules of courtesy:

- Don't speak on a cell phone or a wireless headset during a presentation. Even whispers are distracting.
- Before a meeting begins, turn off any electronic equipment that might beep, chirp, or ring.
- Remove earphones that are connected to devices such as iPods.
- If you are subject to an emergency call (for example, if you are a firefighter or a paramedic), set your cell phone or pager to vibrate mode. When you are alerted that a message has arrived, leave the room quietly and then answer the call. Don't be disruptive by standing outside the door and shouting into the phone.


**Your Thoughts**

What do you think is the best way to solve the problem of electronic rudeness? Defend your answer.



## Tips for Your Career

### Tip 3.3 Confront Electronic Rudeness

If you are like most speakers, you will be irritated or even unnerved if you see listeners who are immersed in their private world of electronic devices. It is hard to communicate effectively with people who are tuning you out.

What can you do to capture their full attention?

If possible, forbid the use of electronic devices. During her tenure as CEO of eBay, Inc., Meg Whitman banned electronic devices from her Monday morning staff meetings. "Talking on a cell phone or working on a laptop during a meeting is rude and insulting," she says. A similar ban has been enforced by other executives and by many military officers, high school teachers, and college professors.

What if you lack the power to order a ban? If possible, ask the person in charge of a group to request—before you rise to speak—that all equipment be turned off. But what

if those strategies aren't possible, and you see that some of your listeners are using electronic equipment? Try saying something like this: "I hate to inconvenience anyone, but I have a problem. I have trouble concentrating on what I want to say when I look out and see people working on their computers or talking on their cell phones. I would appreciate it if you would help me out and turn off your equipment while I'm speaking." By emphasizing *your* difficulties rather than attacking *their* rudeness, you enhance your chances of gaining compliance.

One final strategy that has been used successfully by some speakers: In the introduction of your speech, use an attention-getter that is so compelling that listeners become totally absorbed in listening to you. (Samples of attention-getters are presented in Chapter 11.)



A Dutch official holds placards to request that guests refrain from taking pictures and having cell phones on during the wedding of Prince Constantijn and Princess Laurentien in the Netherlands. Making requests in advance is one of the best ways to prevent electronic distractions.

- Use the vibrate option sparingly, because if you get up and leave a room to respond to a friend's routine call, you are creating an unnecessary disruption.
- If you receive permission from a speaker to use a laptop or some other device, confine yourself to taking notes. Save games, text messages, and e-mail for later.

### Refrain from Multitasking

Some students object to the preceding guidelines, claiming that they are multitaskers, capable of using electronic devices and listening to the speaker at the same time. But they are overlooking two important issues:

1. When listeners avert their eyes and perform nonlistening activities, the speaker usually interprets the behavior as disrespect and rejection.
2. Although multitaskers think they are performing all activities effectively, studies show that their comprehension suffers. For example, researchers at Cornell University arranged for two groups of students to listen to the same lecture and then take a test immediately afterward. One group was allowed to use their laptops to browse the Internet during the lecture, while the other group was asked to keep their laptops closed. When tested, the students with open laptops remembered significantly less information from the lecture than did the students with closed laptops.<sup>13</sup>

Many other research studies show that in most situations, multitaskers—young and old alike—are likely to misunderstand information and make mistakes.<sup>14</sup> As Publilius Syrus, a Roman slave who lived 2,000 years ago, said, “To do two things at once is to do neither.”<sup>15</sup>

### Provide Encouragement

Encourage the speaker as much as possible—by giving your full attention, taking notes, leaning slightly forward instead of slouching back in your seat, looking directly at the speaker instead of at the floor, and letting your face show interest and animation. If the speaker says something you particularly like, nod in agreement or smile approvingly. (If the speaker says something that offends you or puzzles you, obviously you should not give positive feedback; I am not recommending hypocrisy.)

The more encouragement a speaker receives, the better his or her delivery is likely to be. Most entertainers and professional speakers say that if an audience is lively and enthusiastic, they do a much better job than if the audience is sullen or apathetic. From my own experience, I feel that I always do better in giving a speech if I get encouragement. Maybe just a few people are displaying lively interest, but their nods and smiles and eager eyes inspire me and energize me.

When we help a speaker to give a good speech, we are doing more than an act of kindness; we are creating a payoff for ourselves: the better the speaker, the easier it is to listen. And the easier it is to listen, the better we will understand, remember, and gain knowledge.

### Find Value in Every Speech

Sometimes you will be obliged to hear a speech that you feel is boring and worthless. Instead of tuning the speaker out and retreating into your private world of daydreams, try to exploit the speech for something worthwhile. Make a game of it: see how many diamonds you can pluck from the mud. Is there any new information that might be useful to you in the future? Is the speaker using techniques of delivery that are worth noting and emulating?

If a speech is so bad that you honestly cannot find anything worthwhile in it, look for a how-not-to-do-it lesson. Ask yourself, “What can I learn from this



## Tips for Your Career

### Tip 3.4 Express Appreciation to a Speaker

Whenever you listen to a speech that you find enjoyable or profitable, let the speaker know. It will provide him or her with much-needed uplift.

After giving a speech, some speakers are physically and emotionally exhausted, and they sit down with a nagging doubt: Did it go okay? A word of thanks or a compliment from a listener is refreshing and gratifying. (If you can't express your appreciation in person right after the speech, write the speaker a brief note.)

Be sure to say something positive about the *content* of the speech. A corporation president told me of a commencement address he had delivered to a college several years before. "I sweated blood for a whole month putting that speech together and then rehearsing it dozens

of times—it was my first commencement speech," he said. "When I delivered the speech, I tried to speak straight from my heart. I thought I did a good job, and I thought my speech had some real nuggets of wisdom. But afterwards, only two people came by to thank me. And you know what? They both paid me the same compliment: they said they were grateful that I had kept the speech short! They said not one word about the ideas in my speech. Not one word about whether they enjoyed the speech itself. It's depressing to think that the only thing noteworthy about my speech was its brevity."

Sad to say, there were probably dozens of people in the audience whose hearts and minds were touched by the eloquent wisdom of the speaker—but they never told him.

speaker's mistakes?" Here is an example of how one business executive profited from a poor speech:

At a convention recently I found myself in an extremely boring seminar (on listening, ironically enough). After spending the first half-hour wishing I had never signed up, I decided to take advantage of the situation. I turned my thought, "This guy isn't teaching me how to run a seminar on listening," into a question: "What is he teaching me about how *not* to run a seminar?" While providing a negative example was not the presenter's goal, I got a useful lesson.<sup>16</sup>

"When life hands you a lemon, make lemonade," some wise person once advised. If you look for value or a how-*not*-to-do-it lesson in every poor speech, you will find that the sourest oratorical lemon can be turned into lemonade. "Know how to listen," the Greek writer Plutarch said 20 centuries ago, "and you will profit even from those who talk badly."

## Speech Evaluations

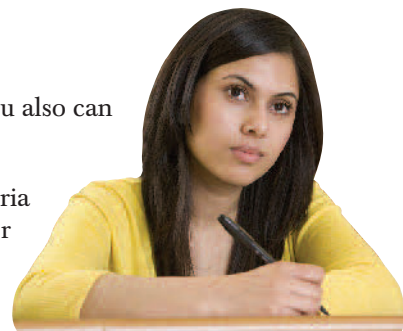
Both evaluators and speakers profit from a speech evaluation. Evaluators gain insights into what works and what doesn't work in speechmaking. Speakers can use suggestions to improve their speaking skills.

### When Evaluating

Evaluating speeches should not be limited to a public speaking class. You also can apply these techniques to speeches that you hear in your career.

**Establish criteria.** Before you listen to a speech, decide upon the criteria for judging it. This will keep you from omitting important elements. For classroom speeches, your instructor may give you a checklist or tell you to analyze certain features of a speech. Otherwise, you can use the "Quick Guide to Public Speaking" in Chapter 1 for your criteria.

An attentive listener takes notes and keeps her focus on the speaker.



**Part 1 Foundations of Effective Communication**

**Listen objectively.** Keep an open mind. Don't let yourself be swayed emotionally by the speaker's delivery or appearance. If, for example, a speaker sounds ill at ease and uncertain, this doesn't necessarily mean that her arguments are inferior. Don't let your own biases influence your criticism; for example, if you are strongly against gun control, but the speaker argues in favor of it, be careful to criticize the speaker's ideas fairly and objectively.

**Take notes.** Jot down your observations throughout the speech. Otherwise, you will forget key items.

**Concentrate on one criterion at a time.** If you try to evaluate everything at once, you will find your attention scattered too widely. Focus on one item at a time: evaluate eye contact, then gestures, and so on. If time permits, you may want to use videotape to take a second or third look at the speech.

**Look for both positive and negative aspects.** Emphasize the positive (so that the speaker will continue doing what works well) as well as pointing out the negative (so that he or she can improve).

**Give positive comments first.** When it comes to public speaking, most people have fragile, easily bruised egos. If you start out a critique with negative remarks, you can damage the speaker's confidence and self-esteem. Always begin by discussing his or her strengths. Point out positive attributes that might seem obvious to you but may not be obvious to the speaker. For example, "You looked poised and confident."

**Couple negative comments with positive alternatives.** When you point out a flaw, immediately give a constructive alternative. For example, you can inform a speaker that he has the habit of jingling coins in his pocket, and then you can suggest an alternative: "Instead of putting your hands in your pockets, why don't you rest them on the lectern?"

**In most cases, ignore nervousness.** Because people cannot prevent themselves from being jittery, don't criticize nervousness—unless you can give a useful tip. In other words, saying, "You looked tense and scared" is unhelpful, but saying, "Put your notes on the lectern so that your trembling hands don't rustle the paper" is helpful advice.

**Be specific.** It is not useful for the speaker to hear generalized comments such as "You did great" or "Your delivery was poor." Be as specific as possible. Instead of saying, "You need to improve your eye contact," say, "You looked too much at the floor."

## When Receiving Evaluations

To get maximum benefit from evaluations, follow these guidelines:

**Don't be defensive.** Try to understand criticism and consider its merits. Don't argue or counterattack.

## Chapter 3 Listening

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**Seek clarification.** If an evaluator makes a comment that you don't understand, ask for an explanation.

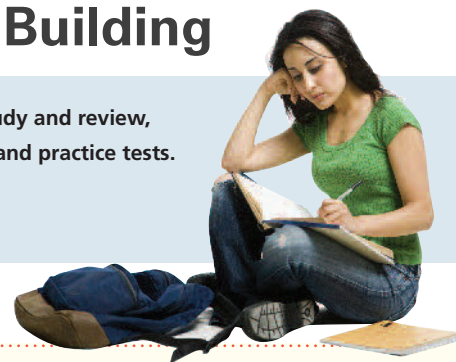
**Strive for improvement.** In your next speech, try to make corrections in problem areas. But don't feel that you must eliminate all errors or bad habits at once.

## Resources for Review and Skill Building

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Connect Public Speaking provides resources for study and review, including sample speech videos, an Outline Tutor, and practice tests.



### Summary

Listening effectively is often a difficult task, but it can be rewarding for the person who is willing to make the effort. The guidelines for effective listening include the following:

1. Prepare yourself for the act of listening. Do whatever background reading or research that is necessary for gaining maximum understanding of the speech.
2. Be willing to put forth energy. Since listening is hard work, especially if the material is new or difficult, you must have a strong desire to listen actively and intelligently.
3. Listen analytically, focusing on main ideas and evaluating support materials.
4. Take notes, not only for a record of key points, but also as a way of keeping your mind from wandering.
5. Resist distractions, both external and internal. Use rigorous self-discipline to keep your mind concentrated on the speaker's remarks.
6. Avoid fakery. Don't pretend to be listening when in fact your mind is wandering; this kind of behavior can settle into a hard-to-break habit.
7. Give every speaker a fair chance. Don't discount a speaker because of personal appearance or the organization he or she represents.
8. Control your emotions. Don't mentally argue with a speaker; you might misunderstand what he or she is really saying.

As a listener you have three important obligations to a speaker: to avoid all forms of rudeness, to provide encouragement, and to find value in every speech. The more support you give a speaker, the better the speech will be, and the more you will profit from it.

Evaluating speeches can help you improve your own speechmaking skills. Look for both positive and negative aspects of a speech, and give specific, constructive suggestions. When you are on the receiving end of evaluations, don't be defensive. Try to understand the criticism and then make improvements.

### Key Terms

hearing, 43

listening, 43

## Review Questions

1. What is the difference between *hearing* and *listening*?
2. Name at least four problems caused by ineffective listening in business.
3. Why should a listener avoid faking attention?
4. What is the difference between listening to easy material and listening to complex material?
5. List at least two ways in which you can prepare yourself physically and intellectually to listen to a speech.
6. The text lists four types of distractions: auditory, visual, physical, and mental. Give two examples of each type.
7. What two speech elements should a listener examine analytically?
8. List three advantages of taking notes during a speech.
9. When you are a listener, how can you encourage a speaker?
10. When you evaluate a speech, how should you handle both the positive and the negative aspects that you observe?

## Building Critical-Thinking Skills

1. Some psychologists characterize listening as “an act of love.” To illustrate what this statement means, describe a real or imaginary conversation between two people (spouses, close friends, doctor/patient, etc.) who are truly listening to each other.
2. Science writer Judith Stone wrote, “There are two ways to approach a subject that frightens you and makes you feel stupid: you can embrace it with humility and an open mind, or you can ridicule it mercilessly.” Translate this idea into advice for listeners of speeches.

## Building Teamwork Skills

1. In a group, conduct this role play: One student gives an impromptu speech describing his or her classes this term, while all the other group members exhibit rude behaviors (chatting, reading a magazine, putting head on desk, solving math problems with a calculator, etc.). Then the speaker discusses how he or she felt about the rudeness. (If time permits, other group members can play the speaker’s role.)
2. Working in a group, compile a list of the attributes that would describe “the ideal listener” for a speech. Then do likewise for a conversation. In what ways are the lists similar and different?