

CHAPTER 1: FINDING YOUR VOICE

OBJECTIVES

- to introduce students to the study and practice of public speaking
- to make students aware of the personal benefits of a course in public speaking
- to help students appreciate the social and cultural benefits of public speaking
- to stress the ethical responsibilities of speakers and listeners

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING

As with the introduction of a speech, an effective first class meeting should involve, orient, and arouse your students' enthusiasm for the rest of the course. You should have a syllabus for distribution (or have one posted online), and you should be ready to present a brief *extemporaneous* overview of the course itself, its potential benefits to your students, and your policies and expectations as an instructor. You might distribute a roster or call role to begin the process of associating names with faces, and request an e-mail with contact information to be kept confidential and used for class-related purposes only. You might also administer the "audience analysis questionnaire" in Chapter 5 of this Instructor's Resource Manual (IRM) for use in later classes.

Because communication anxiety is nearly universal with inexperienced speakers and a major challenge to teaching the course effectively, we suggest that you address the subject early on and make it a point to get your students in front of the class as often as possible to facilitate a supportive and positive learning environment. Many instructors like to close the first day with a short speaking activity of which there are plenty in the first few chapters of this IRM. See Part 1 of this IRM for a sample course syllabus and further advice on pre-semester course preparations.

As you prepare your first lesson plans, we do not suggest that you outline and "spoon-feed" text materials for your students. Keep your lectures brief, and weave in illustrative examples and discussion pieces in order to bring abstract ideas to life for your students. In this chapter, we offer activities for introducing the nature of communication and finding your voice through public speaking. Various pieces emphasize the personal, social, and cultural benefits of public speaking, the importance of freedom of speech in liberal democratic societies, public speaking as a source of moral identification, and the roles and responsibilities of speakers and listeners alike in communication processes.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Dyadic Introductions

This ice breaker can help increase familiarity and is a common staple for starting the class. Divide your class into pairs, or "dyads", and allow them 5 to 10 minutes to interview each other regarding how they would like to be introduced to the class. Have them take notes and ask each other for their respective names, where they are from (or what high school they attended if they are local), what their professional or educational goals are, how developing their public speaking skills might help them in pursuit of those goals, and something interesting about them. Ask them to provide an example to illustrate how public speaking skills might aid them in pursuit of their professional or educational goals. Note that, unless told otherwise, many of your students may respond to this one by simply saying that the class is mandatory for graduation.

In order to give this first presentation a sense of structure and flow, you might provide them with the following transition/talking points:

“It is my pleasure to introduce ____.”

“____ hails from and/or attended ____ High School.”

“He/she plans to study ____ and would someday like to ____.”

“Developing his/her public speaking skills should aid him/her in pursuit of those goals by ____.”

“As for something interesting, he/she is into ____.”

“Please join me in welcoming ____ to our class.”

Mandatory Applause!

2. Ethical Analysis of Public Speaking

Show a video of student speeches, and critique them with your students in terms of the following criteria as discussed in the text of the chapter: respect for the integrity of ideas, responsible use of knowledge, and a genuine concern for both immediate consequences and facilitating open and rational public dialogue. What vision of moral community is conveyed by the speaker’s presentation? Have students take notes and share their observations for general discussions between each speech. Use this opportunity to discuss the tension that can exist between effective and ethical speaking, the importance of ethical considerations in your course, and your students’ responsibilities as speakers and listeners in facilitating ethical public communication.

For an alternative that develops discussion Item 6 at the end of the text chapter, have your students bring an advertisement to class that they think is unethical and explain why in terms of the criteria offered above or in the text. Focus class discussion on the responsible use of information, the interests, concerns, and values invoked by their ads, and whether such appeals might or might not be used effectively and ethically in public speaking. Most scholars agree that advertising has become the most prevalent form of public persuasion, and ads are often disparaged by critics and social activists as unethical. This is especially true with ads that market junk food to children or beauty products to young women. Others insist that most people know that ads are attempts to sell a product and that effective advertising is simply tailored to “what the people want.” Do public speakers have a greater moral obligation? Why or why not?

3. Practical Application Objectives

This can be used as a small-group activity or for homework followed by class discussion. Have students write out their career aspirations, and then list work situations in which public speaking skills might prove important. If you turn this into an extended homework assignment, have them consult relevant publications or a specialist in their area (either from the college or local business community) to verify or alter their assessment of the importance of public communication skills to their future work. Based on this information, they should prepare a brief summary statement that concludes with what they hope to gain from your public speaking class. You might review the basic personal, social, and cultural benefits of public speaking as discussed in the text in preparation for this exercise. You might also supplement this by having students fill out the “Learning by Objectives” worksheet in this chapter to use as a basis for private consultation.

4. Stereotypes and Human Communication

The following pieces easily coordinate with the materials in Chapter 5 of this IRM on audience demographics and can be used for small group or general class discussion. For homework, have your students identify a communicative experience in which they have encountered stereotypes either with respect to themselves or other groups of people. How did these experiences make them feel and how did they respond to them? This activity emphasizes the type of self-evaluation that enhances sensitivity to audiences of different backgrounds and with different experiences. Push your students to be honest in disclosing their stereotypes before discussing the consequences of such behavior.

For an alternative that expands discussion Item 4 at the end of the text chapter, show video clips of “popular” comedians or movies engaging human stereotypes. Be sure to offer a disclaimer, but many (not all) students that are offended by stereotypes in their personal transactions will be amused by and even defend their use by such popular comedians as Dave Chappelle. Angrily disputed to be sure, critics argue that such figures inevitably reinforce ugly categories historically used to justify social divisions and injustices. Defenders typically counter that when members of historically stigmatized social groups engage disparaging labels and stereotypes, they more often redefine their meaning in a manner that amounts to a form of social or cultural resistance. Others argue that such acts of “political incorrectness” provide a potentially valuable (if explosive) catharsis for living in a multicultural society.

For yet another in-class application, ask for a few volunteers to stand one at a time and have your students respond as a class to the following questions: What is this person’s favorite kind of music? What is his/her favorite recreational activity? Is he/she more likely to vote Democrat or Republican (or neither) during the next political campaign season? Remind your volunteers and friends whom already know them to keep mum as you try to move the rest of the class to a consensus (by vote if necessary) before having the volunteers reveal the answers. Some of your students’ contributions will reflect prior class discussions and observations, but most of them will be predicated on stereotypes based on things like gender, ethnicity, age, and even dress. Regardless of which activity you choose, emphasize the extent to which even seemingly benign stereotypes tend to hinder meaningful identification through communication by reducing people to labels. As the text notes, we get into both moral and practical trouble when we allow stereotypes to guide our evaluations of others instead of considering them as unique individuals.

5. American Metaphors

This one expands on discussion Item 5 at the end of the text chapter. Ask students to consider whether they believe it is better to think of American culture as a “chorus” or a “melting pot.” What images of American identity do they prefer and why?

This is an excellent outside writing assignment or small-group activity to introduce the intercultural significance of rhetoric. You might want to start by discussing some basic ideas about metaphors (see Chapter 11 of the text), emphasizing its potential for organizing thoughts and perceptions about abstract or complex ideas. Many of your students will be familiar with the “melting pot” theory of American history and culture—an image that is falling out of fashion. Some may express reservations about multiculturalism and defend the old image.

As an instructor, you should avoid the impulse to “take sides” and welcome the inclusion of opposing views. Try to steer the discussion toward the pros and cons of both images (as discussed in the text chapter) to characterize American culture, as well as their implications for minority cultures and identities. What are the implications of both images for facilitating meaningful identification in a multicultural society? Your students should recognize that the melting pot image favors one predominant “alloy” culture and corresponding value/belief systems. The chorus image would favor more diverse input with harmonious interaction. Other multicultural images might include a quilt or cultural stew. Have students present their ideas for class discussion. Remember that there may be benefits and drawbacks to all images and encourage your students to discuss them constructively.

6. Discussing Freedom of Speech

The following application—which develops discussion Item 8 at the end of the text chapter—helps to emphasize the benefits and challenges of freedom of speech in a liberal democratic society. Choose or have your students choose a recent “freedom of speech” controversy. You might consider the debate over popular depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, attempts to “reform” the Internet in order to protect children from pornography, granting permits to “hate groups” such as the Neo Nazis or the KKK to stage public rallies, debates over permitting religious expression in public schools, proposals for a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning, freedom of speech in time of war, etc. For

homework, have your students read about your chosen issue and identify arguments being put forth in defense of and critical of this particular instance of controversial speech. Where do they stand and why? Remember the point is to get your students to explore and develop their own ideas, not to bully them with your own. You might preface your discussion with the following brief lecture outlining some arguments and strategies typically put forth in defense of and in opposition to freedom of speech:

More often attributed to such “Enlightenment” figures as Thomas Jefferson and John Stuart Mill, the classic arguments in favor of freedom of speech emphasize its importance in facilitating a higher and more truthful quality of public deliberation. There are, by definition, at least two sides to every disputed issue, and the very inclination to censor unpopular speech suggest some degree of relative truth value. People who habitually expose themselves to opposing positions tend to make better democratic citizens—better informed, more engaged, and more prone to act on their convictions. In short, a healthy democracy not only tolerates, but actively encourages, the open expression of dissenting ideas and convictions.

Yet, all societies—however liberal and including our own—take various legal and extra-legal measures to constrain freedom of speech. We cannot scream “fire” in a crowded theatre. We can get into trouble for persuading others to commit crimes, for divulging government or corporate “secrets” lacking in public value, or for slandering others for purely personal gain. “Sticks and stones” is nonsense. Speech is a powerful form of social action, and its unethical or irresponsible use can be difficult to live with. Be it hate-groups seeking a public forum, lurid pornography on the Internet, disturbingly violent video games, or whatever, all of us eventually encounter forms of expression we find difficult to accept.

Nonetheless, our courts are generally committed to affording the broadest possible latitude for freedom of artistic, religious, and political expression. Insisting that any legal restrictions be “content neutral,” laws prohibiting “false speech,” “bad tendency,” “fighting words,” “clear and present danger,” and even attempts to censor pornography as “prurient” smut have been struck down as overly vague and a restraint on freedom of speech. In 1988, the Supreme Court unanimously agreed that Larry Flynt had the right to publish an ad parody in *Hustler Magazine* alleging that Jerry Falwell had drunken incestuous intercourse with his mother. If it addresses a public issue or figure, and/or if it can be construed as having any political or artistic merit however unpopular, then your right to say or write or draw whatever is supposed to be protected in this country.

Still, many communities do employ legal methods to limit or constrain freedom of expression. In most areas, you have to get a permit to stage a large protest gathering, and under the principle of “balancing” the courts have allowed local municipalities to impose space, time, and manner restrictions in order to protect other presumably threatened rights, such as personal safety and the protection of public and private property. Such restrictions are used to protect important public officials and proceedings, to keep opposing protest groups separated, and even to limit the location of liquor stores and “gentlemen’s clubs” to industrial “red light” districts. Still, communities imposing such restrictions are supposed to provide a least imposing alternative outlet for expression. And, all things being equal, freedom of speech is supposed to enjoy a “preferred position” over other constitutional freedoms. Your right to offend outweighs another’s right not to be offended.

No less significant are those various extra-legal restrictions that typically raise the ire of free speech activists but are not typically recognized by defenders as restraints on free speech. This would include movie ratings, parental warning labels, television and Internet-blocking technologies, the use of government funding for legitimate art, and self-censorship of the news and entertainment by a mass media industry that is increasingly/exclusively owned by a handful of mega-conglomerations. Media moguls have a long history of appeasing public officials and interest groups by refusing to run advertisements for cigarettes and (until recently) hard liquor, and by agreeing to provide more “wholesome” programming

during family hours. More recently they have refused to run paid advertisements by partisan yet respectable activist groups on both the left and the right whom they fear might offend their primary advertising constituencies.

Finally, there is the intense social, legal, and political ostracism facing anyone expressing opposition to American participation in foreign wars. From World War I to the present War on Terror, Americans have faced accusations of treason and even jail time for expressing dissenting views. They have also faced the scorn of angry crusades waged through the popular media, being fired from their jobs by patriotic bosses, and even the fear of living under death threats. Many celebrities reported receiving anonymous death threats amidst literally tons of hate mail for their opposition to the War in Iraq. For some eloquent artifacts addressing the subject of freedom of speech during wartime, see Robert La Follette's Senate address on free speech in wartime delivered October 6, 1917 (americanrhetoric.com), and/or Tim Robbins' address before the National Press Club on April 15, 2003 (<http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0416-01.htm>).

Whatever application you choose, keep in mind that these questions will and should provoke lively discussion and disagreement. And as you solicit student input and play devil's advocate, try to avoid the inclination to "choose sides" in order to stress a point of broader significance to the class. That is, how can we draw lines around the voices of those whom we do not like without threatening our own liberties? If or when we do, to what extent are our reasonable standards being used to silence relevant if unpopular views? To what extent do they preclude rather than facilitate open and healthy public dialogue? There are no easy answers to these questions. Suffice to say, that ongoing discussion as to what reasonably can and cannot be said will remain an important part of our evolution as a free and democratic people.

You might preface this activity by having your students fill out the questionnaire "How Free Is Too Free?" later in this chapter.

7. The Importance of Feedback

This exercise can help to demonstrate the importance of feedback as a vital interactive component in meaningful communication. It is inspired by a classic experiment by Harold J. Leavitt and Ronald A. H. Mueller ("Some Effects of Feedback on Communication," *Human Relations*, 1951, pp. 401–410), which illustrated the effects of feedback on the communication process by asking students to reproduce drawings of geometrical forms as described by other subjects with varying degrees of allowed feedback. As expected, the accuracy of the drawings and the speaker's sense of communicative competence both increased dramatically in the higher feedback situations at considerable cost in time. Obviously, receivers preferred the free feedback situation. Indeed, the zero feedback situations aroused continued hostility toward the speaker in subsequent free feedback situations.

Ask for two student volunteers to "describe an arrangement of tables" to the class. Give one of them a copy of Arrangement 1 and the other a copy of Arrangement 2 taken from the article. Have the first volunteer sit at the front of the room, facing away from the audience. Using only words (no gestures or drawing on the chalkboard allowed), have the volunteer describe Arrangement 1. The class should use the information to draw the arrangement as well as they can without asking any questions to the volunteer. Have the second volunteer sit at the front of the room facing the audience as he/she describes Arrangement 2. The speaker may supplement words with gestures, but may not use the chalkboard. This time, students may interrupt and ask follow-up questions to the volunteer. Show enlarged originals of the arrangements. Ask how many students got Arrangement 1 correct (typically few can even approximate it). Ask how many got Arrangement 2 correct (usually around 70%). Discuss the importance of feedback in completing the communication process. Be sure to thank both student volunteers reassuring the first zero feedback speaker as well as the class that it was not his/her speaking skill that was deficient, but a lack of adequate feedback.

8. The Class Journal

Speech instructors often complain about students not reading assigned materials. Many students assume that public speaking is strictly a performance course and that outside readings are really not necessary. Rhetoricians have always known that their students must make applications in order to learn and integrate ideas with practice. Instead of resorting to “pop quizzes,” which more often results in last-minute and short-term memorization, consider having your students keep a reading log in which they make a one-page entry after each major reading assignment. The format page handout at the end of this chapter can help focus their entries. Students should not spend too much time on their logs and should make their entries while they are reading. Emphasize the importance of not outlining class ideas and readings so much as providing “real life” illustrations and potential applications for upcoming assignments. Have your students turn in their logs periodically for a brief pass/fail type evaluation. Note that you might coordinate this with the suggested speech log activity in Chapter 4 of this IRM.

9. Discussing and Disputing Speech Codes

This readily combines with discussions of ethical public speaking and freedom of speech. The National Communication Association has adopted a “code of ethics” for communication transactions that is reprinted in Chapter 1 of your text. For homework, have your students discuss how they might use it to develop a code of ethics for governing their choice of topics and communication techniques for use in their classroom speeches. Keep in mind that this activity will likely raise heated debate during subsequent class discussion—which is just the point. You might also engage the “real life” controversies that have erupted on American college campuses over the past two decades with respect to “speech codes” prohibiting language and communicative behaviors deemed offensive or discriminatory to women, minorities, and homosexuals. Beyond combating the detrimental effects of “hate speech,” supporters have argued that such codes are necessary for promoting an inclusive or harassment-free learning environment. Critics counter that such codes create an atmosphere that precludes free speech and inhibits unorthodox or “politically incorrect” contributions to class discussions. Some argue that they are intended to ostracize if not intimidate social conservatives. For better or worse, the courts have overwhelmingly backed the latter position, and most public universities now steer clear of words like “speech code.” Out of respect for the first amendment, we do not recommend that you officially adopt a code for use in your class. We believe that enlightened speech is far superior to censorship as a means to combating the effects of ugly speech. But in either case, just discussing the subject can help to amplify the moral significance of the issues and strategies your students bring to their assignments, and of public speaking itself as a force in shaping our lives.

10. Grab Bag Ice Breaker

Most people feel more comfortable addressing people when they are familiar with them. Therefore, it’s a good idea to get your students talking to each other as soon as possible. Once you have distributed your syllabus and discussed your class priorities and policies, this makes a good conclusion to the first class. Write different personal characteristics on small slips of paper, fold them, and place the slips in a grab bag or box. Selected characteristics should be representative of the diversity of your area but not necessarily easy to find. The list of characteristics might include:

- Grew up in a rural area
- Grew up in an urban area
- Is an environmentalist
- Has no driver’s license
- Works twenty or more hours per week
- Does not work

- Played high school basketball
- Has been to a hockey game
- Was born outside the United States
- Has traveled in Europe
- Played high school soccer
- Is under 18 years old
- Is over 30 years old
- Has signed an organ donor card
- Is a Republican
- Is a Democrat
- Has five or more brothers and/or sisters
- Is of Latino heritage
- Is of Native American heritage
- Likes classical music
- Has attended an opera

Have each student draw three or four slips. Then, have the class circulate until they find someone who matches the characteristic on each slip. That student's name should then be written on the slip with the characteristic. The first person to find matches for all of his/her draws can be declared the winner.

READING LOG

Name: _____ Date: _____

Title (or text chapter): _____

Author (if not from text): _____

Source (if not from text): _____

Applicability to current assignment: _____

Applicability outside of class: _____
