There is little doubt that public speaking is an important part of daily life for most people. Every night networks such as ABC, CBS, and NBC bring us “sound bites” from the major public personalities of the day. CNN and the “Headline News” update us 24-hour a day concerning what has been said around the world. And C-SPAN broadcasts numerous speeches representing the full range of political opinion in both the United States and the rest of the international arena.

As important as it is in world events, public speaking is also very much alive in your local community and places of future employment—where decisions are made and policies enacted that affect every aspect of your life. For example, every day around campus professors “profess” what they believe in public speeches known as lectures. Student councils and faculty senate debate issues relevant to their respective constituencies. Campus clubs and organizations elect officers, conduct meetings, invite speakers to talk to them, and debate their goals and future actions. Leaf through your local newspaper. Hardly a day goes by without stories reporting on the speaking that has been done to try to persuade others to consider those local situations from one point of view or another. Public speaking is all around us—anywhere people are deciding the issues that affect their lives. You may even have spoken on a number of those topics yourself—in your dorm, in your classes, or among your family members. Perhaps you have even wished you could speak to a larger audience, bringing a more public life to your private thoughts.

If so, this book can help you. For this book is about the lively art of public speaking and how you can use that art to bring your ideas to life—making them effective in the everyday situations in which you hope to make a difference. And you can make a difference. But you must know how to animate your ideas through how you organize them into patterns, phrase them into sentences, support them with examples, statistics and anecdotes, introduce and conclude your speech, and adapt all those factors to your specific audience as you deliver your speech. If you thoughtfully apply the principles that are presented in the following pages, you too can be an effective practitioner of The Lively Art of Public Speaking.

Because most public speaking classes require you to begin speaking long before you have studied all of the detailed information in the book, this chapter surveys the steps involved in preparing your first speeches. Most topics touched on here will receive extended treatment in the chapters to follow. This introductory chapter, then, is a little like a tennis coach telling you during your first lesson, “Hit the ball over the net.” Both of you know there is much more to tennis than that, but until you can successfully hit the ball over the net, nothing else matters much—especially such things as the strategies, tactics, and theories of the game. So consider this chapter as preliminary instruction in “hitting the ball over the net.”

The basic process of speech preparation can be divided into four large phases, usually completed in about the following order:

1. Deciding on preliminary matters
   a. Selecting your topic
   b. Determining your specific purpose or main idea
2. Analyzing your audience
3. Preparing your speech text
   a. Preparing your speech’s body
   b. Preparing your introduction
   c. Preparing your conclusion
4. Preparing your delivery

Although the order listed is a typical pattern for preparing a speech, it is not set in stone. You may find that your work on a later phase requires you to reconsider decisions you made earlier in the process. Or, you may discover that the external circumstances for the speech have changed while you were preparing it and that you need to change something you had previously planned to do. So the order given merely suggests a reasonable working plan. With that caveat in mind, let’s look at what is involved in each of the four main phases of speech preparation.

**DECIDING ON PRELIMINARY MATTERS**

In planning a speech there are two preliminary decisions you need to make in order to get everything else started: you must select a topic to talk about, and you must determine a purpose to try to accomplish while you are speaking on that topic.

**Selecting Your Topic**

What should you talk about in your first few speeches? Usually something you already know quite a bit about—a serious hobby, an important or unusual aspect of your major, or some other area of special interest you have. Failing that, select something you are willing to find out more about. The point is, your first speeches should probably be developed from ideas you feel relatively comfortable with, ideas coming directly from your own experience or background. After all, you will have enough to be concerned with in simply organizing your ideas for presentation and controlling your anxiety about
speaking without having to deal with unfamiliar materials as well. Some speech topics from my own classes have included the following—each taken directly from the students’ own interests.

- Acupuncture as a Healing Art
- AIDS and Your Health Care Professional
- Alternative Plans for Year-round Schooling
- Analyzing the Ethical Content of TV Commercials
- How Weather Maps Are Prepared for the Evening News
- Starting a Business in an Inner-City Neighborhood

These are all personally involving topics drawn from student experiences; and they all work well for classroom speeches. Therefore, unless your instructor guides you in another direction, choose your topic from areas you already feel relatively comfortable talking about. Then, as you gain skill and confidence, your instructor may challenge you by assigning more fully researched and documented speeches that stretch your current knowledge. However, here at the beginning of your speech training, select a topic you can manage comfortably while you focus on other aspects of the public speaking process.

**Determining Your General and Specific Purposes**

Having decided on your general topic, you will next determine what you are going to try to accomplish during the speech. This decision is usually made at two levels, called your general and specific purposes. Broadly speaking, two general purposes are emphasized in most public speaking classes: informing and persuading. Each purpose places a different set of constraints on how you will handle your topic.

In **Informative** speaking occurs when you are explaining something new to your audience. In most cases, informative speaking requires you to break your topic into meaningful units that can be readily reassembled by your listeners as they hear your speech unfold. Your goal is to help your audience construct the same picture of the subject as you have. **Persuasive** speaking occurs when two or more competing opinions are possible on your subject, and you are trying to convince your audience to accept your position by providing them with reasons for seeing things the way you do. In most cases, persuasive speaking requires you to present supporting arguments that move your audience’s thinking in the direction you want it to go.

Within your general purpose you will need to focus on a specific purpose that you try to accomplish with this particular speech on this particular occasion. To see this, let’s imagine that you’re a computer science major and you’ve chosen to present a short (seven-to ten-minute) informative speech on computers. Because you cannot explain everything you know about computers in that amount of time, you must decide which major idea you want to share with your audience. Will you explain who achieved the scientific breakthroughs that made the modern computer age possible? How a microprocessor works? The early history of the commercial production of computers? Why the modern computer is so fast? How to use a computer to help your audience in school or work? The locations of various computing services for students on campus?

Each of these approaches would not only require different information but even different patterns of organization to make them effective. These informational and organizational options will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. However, at this point it is important to decide which aspect of the vast topic of computers you will discuss and to formulate that aspect into a clear and direct statement of purpose.

For example,

- **Specific Purpose:** To explain the three most significant recent breakthroughs in computer technology
  or
- **Specific Purpose:** To describe the four major processes required in manufacturing a computer chip
  or
- **Specific Purpose:** To explain how to take full advantage of the computing services available on campus

Formulate your statement of purpose as explicitly as you can because it will help guide the rest of your speech preparation. For, only if you know what you are trying to accomplish will you be able to form a reasonable plan for preparing and presenting your speech.

**Analyzing Your Audience**

Because public speaking requires you to talk to a specific audience, you need to consider your audience as you prepare your speech. In some cases, you may even need to analyze your audience before you can select your topic—let alone figure out how to adapt a topic to a particular audience. What do they know, what do they care about, and how can you connect your topic to their interests? Although there is much to say about audience analysis in Chapter 5, there are two questions that can get you started thinking about your audience—even in your earliest speeches.

1. How can I make my topic relevant and interesting to my audience?
2. How can I link my topic and purpose to my audience’s needs and goals?

To answer these questions, you need to find out about your audience—what kinds of things they do, how old they are, what they already know, and where they come from.

For example, suppose your topic is sport fishing and you discover that most of your classmates have never even been on a boat, let alone caught a fish. Does that mean you have to eliminate your favorite topic? Probably not. It just means that a speech whose specific purpose is “To explain how to refine your spinning casting technique” will probably fall on deaf ears. If, however, you learn that they are active in a number of other recreational sports (hiking, tennis, golf, and so forth), you might decide that a speech whose purpose is “To explain the four benefits of recreational fishing” would connect to their prior interests by showing them a new way to use their recreational time. The topic would now be relevant because you have linked it to the needs and goals your audience has previously expressed.

Therefore, if you are uncertain about your classroom audience’s interests, needs, and goals, ask questions during conversations before and after class, and listen carefully to class discussions that may reveal what your classmates seem to talk about. You could even prepare a little questionnaire to see what their interests may be. Your effort will pay off in a speech that is better targeted toward the audience that will actually hear you speak.
PREPARING YOUR SPEECH NOTES

Presenting a speech requires, of course, having something to say; so you will need to prepare a set of notes that represents the content of what you intend to present to your audience. Your notes may be anything from a few words jotted down on a file card to a complete manuscript written out word for word. For most speakers, the notes will be somewhere between these extremes—probably a carefully prepared topical or sentence outline. However, no matter what level of detail you include in your notes (and most instructors counsel against full manuscripts), your text would include three major components: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.

Preparing Your Speech’s Body

Frequently completed first, the body of the speech contains your main ideas. Preparing the body involves two key steps. First, you will need to decide what your main points will be, including the order in which you wish to present them. Second, you must decide what developmental material you will use to give those points an impact on your audience. Some specific purposes strongly suggest the order in which you will present your points (how-to speeches, for example, usually dictate chronological order) and what types of developmental material will be most effective. Other topics allow quite a bit of free choice in both organizational and developmental matters. In any case, however, you must decide on your main points and then support them with enough material to help the audience fully understand them.

Deciding What Your Main Points Will Be. Whenever you speak, you will divide your topic into units of thought that your audience can use to guide them in understanding your ideas. The largest division of your topic into units provides the main points you will try to communicate. Thus, if your topic were “Management by Objectives,” and your specific purpose were “To explain the five phases of the process of managing by objectives,” you might have the following five major points for your speech:

1. Determine your actual objectives.
2. Prepare an objectives statement.
3. Secure agreement from those who will fulfill the objectives.
4. Implement the objectives.
5. Evaluate the progress toward fulfilling the objectives.

In this outline, these five stages have been clearly worded as five main points and arranged in the order you would use to explain them.

Deciding What Developmental Materials You Will Use. Once you have the basic skeleton of main ideas outlined in an orderly structure, you will need to flesh out your speech with a variety of developmental materials. Your audience will want definitions to make your key terms comprehensible, examples to make your general points more concrete, stories to give your points human interest, statistics to give your speech precision, visual aids to make complex relationships clear, quotations to enhance your credibility, comparisons and contrasts to link your new information to ideas you assume your audience has already mastered, and descriptions of people, places, and things to appeal to your audience’s physical senses.

These types of materials are essential if your audience is to fully understand the skeleton of main points you are trying to communicate. Furthermore, using such materials provides an opportunity to target your speech for your particular audience—because you can select your specific supporting material with your listeners in mind. Talking about the continuing crisis in local education? Then there are some examples of the types of materials you might use.

1. Definitions of what you mean by the term crisis
2. Examples of specific problems we currently have in our schools
3. Statistics concerning such things as
   a. Possible teacher shortages
   b. International competitiveness on standardized tests
   c. Dropout rates among teenagers
   d. Violence in the schools
   d. Funding rates per pupil
4. Stories from a former teacher concerning some aspect of the crisis
5. Quotations from leading educators describing the trends occurring in large city schools
6. Visual aids charting such trends as student dropout rates, violence against teachers, the changing longevity of a typical teacher’s career, and so forth
7. Comparisons and contrasts between local educational practices and those used in other major industrial democracies
8. Descriptions of the practices some of the most innovative regional schools

Many more examples could be given; but the general point has probably been made: you should experiment with many different forms of supporting materials during your speech class in order to get a good sense of the options available to you. Furthermore, as you prepare your speeches, you should probably gather a broader spectrum of material than you are likely to try to include in a six- or eight-minute speech. In that way, you will be better prepared to select the best material for a particular occasion rather than having to include everything you found, just to fill the available time.

Preparing Your Speech’s Introduction

Although the body of your speech carries the major responsibility in communicating your ideas, audiences are usually not prepared to consider those ideas from the minute you begin to speak. You should help them get ready for the main body of your speech by creating an effective introduction. In the introduction you will probably do such things as (a) capture your audience’s attention, (b) reveal your topic and specific purpose, (c) preview your speech’s structure of main points, (d) mention the source of your expertise on the topic, (e) try to help your audience feel that the topic is important to them, and (f) make a clear transition to the main body of your speech. An effective introduction might sound like this:

Our society loves quick fixes: fast food restaurants for lunch, jiffy lube for oil changes, and fax machines for correspondence. All of these help to get rid of our problems in a hurry. The latest quick fix for a continuing American problem proposes to legalize such drugs as marijuana and cocaine. Proponents for such legalization point to such factors as the strain that enforcing current drug laws puts on the legal system and the many additional crimes that are committed to support illegal drug habits as reasons to change our drug laws.

Such proposals, and the reasons given to support them, sound like quick, attractive fixes on the surface. But, as I have researched the topic for projects in
my major in community health, I have come to believe that legalizing so-called recreational drugs is not the answer to our problems. There is no quick fix for the problems caused by these drugs in our society, for three key reasons. Legalization will: (a) increase rather than decrease the number of addicts, (b) fail to reduce both primary and secondary drug-related crime, and (c) fail to save money for the judicial system to use elsewhere. Let us begin, then, by looking at why legalization will increase rather than decrease the number of addicts in our society.

Here we see all of the functions performed in just a few efficient sentences.

Preparing Your Speech’s Conclusion

Once you are finished presenting the main body of your speech, you will need to let the audience know you are completing the speech by presenting a formal conclusion. This is a special portion of the speech that gives it a satisfying feeling of completion. This feeling may be evoked in many ways: with a simple summary or restatement of your main points, a quotation that captures your theme in a memorable way, or a call to action action based on what you have told them. Whichever approach you decide to take, your conclusion should be clearly marked, and the audience should know that you have definitely finished your speech. The speech should not merely peter out or end with thoughtless remarks like: “Well, I guess that’s about all I have to say.” Or, “Okay, that’s it. Are there any questions?” The following example presents a well-crafted conclusion for a speech on executive pay in the corporate world:

Let me conclude, then, by reviewing the case against executive pay scales that are hundreds of times greater than the wages earned by the hourly employees who make the goods and services a company sells. First, it is wasteful of a company’s material resources—resources that could be used to increase research and development or to reduce the cost of the company’s product for the consumer. Second, it penalizes the stockholders, whose money made the company possible in the first place. And, third, it demoralizes the work force, whose goodwill and hard work are necessary for the long term success of the company. Good CFOs may be hard to find, but they are not that hard to find. Our tax laws must be changed so that salaries and benefits in excess of 250,000 dollars per year are not deductible as expenses that reduce a company’s tax burden. Only then will we be able to get executive compensation back in line with the true worth of the accomplishments it is designed to reward.

Preparing Your Delivery

Preparing the delivery of your speech does not mean that you will be practicing specific gestures, postures, and platform movements. It is not that such aspects of delivery should never be practiced, but that certain types of rehearsal methods tend to result in an artificial feeling in your final delivery. Because standing up in front of an audience is what students usually think of as the most difficult part of preparing their first speeches, the goal of this more extended discussion of delivery is to describe some principles for preparing your delivery that will result in a natural rather than an artificial feeling in your final presentation. For the purpose of the following treatment, preparing your delivery will be divided into two steps: (1) selecting your manner of delivery and (2) rehearsing the speech for fluency.

Selecting Your Manner of Delivery

What will you have in front of you when you speak? An empty lectern? A few hastily sketched notes? A formal topical or sentence outline? An entire manuscript of the text, word for word? Each of these represents a different manner of delivery and each represents a choice you might make under a particular set of circumstances. Traditionally, four manners of delivery have been identified: impromptu, extemporaneous, reading from a manuscript, and memorized.

In most circumstances, the extemporaneous mode of delivery seems to be the most desirable. In this mode you are typically quite comfortable with your speech by the time you give it—because you are familiar with your chosen topic, because you have carefully planned the structure or pattern of ideas you intend to talk about, and because you have worked hard in rehearsing the speech you have outlined. In this mode you may be familiar enough with your speech that a topic outline is all you need in front of you, although many speakers work equally comfortably with a full sentence outline to guide their thoughts. Whatever type of outline is used, in extemporaneous speaking it is used primarily to remind you of the sequence of ideas you intend to present. Using an extemporaneous delivery, you normally have the best chance of being truly spontaneous and natural looking in front of your audience because you have not memorized a sequence of words, but rather, have mastered a sequence of ideas.

In spite of the many advantages of extemporaneous delivery, there are times when you must adopt one of the non-extemporaneous modes of delivery: memorizing a previously prepared text virtually word for word; preparing a complete manuscript to read word for word; or impromptu, that is, speaking with almost no prior formal preparation. Memorized speeches are rare, occurring only when a speech must appear to be spontaneous but when the exact wording of your ideas is crucial. More frequently, when exact wording is a priority, speakers will develop a word-for-word manuscript that can be read from. To try to achieve a sense of spontaneity, such manuscripts should be rehearsed aloud several times and adapted whenever possible to an oral rhythm and vocabulary. That is, because written vocabulary and sentence structure are typically more complex than are spoken, manuscript speakers must consciously use the general rehearsal process (described below) to try to adapt the written draft to a more natural spoken style.

Although most speeches allow for some prior preparation, you may also be called upon to “say a few words,” that is, to speak impromptu. In such circumstances you will need to quickly adapt the speech preparation process by giving yourself a moment to organize an appropriate response. Especially important in impromptu speaking is deciding what your main points will be and clearly announcing them as you begin. Doing so will not only get you started positively, it will also give you additional time to consider the details of your response.

Rehearsing Your Speech for Fluency

Practicing is especially important for beginning speakers. However, you will probably find that you still want to rehearse even as you gain more public speaking experience. In order to profit most from your rehearsal sessions, however, there are at least six principles to remember.

1. Practice Aloud. The first thing you need to remember is to practice your speech aloud rather than silently. You need to hear what the speech sounds like to your own ears before you try it out on the ears of your audience. Strange things sometimes happen when you step up to speak, and you do not want one of those to be a sense of amazement at what
is coming out of your mouth as you listen to the speech for the first time. Even though the extemporaneous mode does not require you to memorize the exact words of your speech, you do expect to deliver the same ideas in essentially the same way every time you work through your speech. Practicing aloud should help you choose from among alternative phrasings of your ideas. And it should also familiarize you with presenting them aloud in the first place, no matter how you finally decide to phrase them in front of your audience. If you have a friend or two who are willing to serve as a “rehearsal audience,” so much the better, because you may also benefit from their comments.

2. Practice While Standing. Not only should you practice your speech aloud, you should practice it while standing up. And the reason is the same: standing up is how most speeches will be delivered. You need to get a sense of what it feels like to be on your feet talking without interruption (or help) for several minutes. Furthermore, you need to get used to the fact that your body will want to move around, and your arms will want to gesture as a natural accompaniment to speaking (Kendon, 1980). Because the question “What do I do with my hands?” is a common one for beginning speakers, it is important to see just what your hands are naturally inclined to do—which is to move in spontaneous synchrony with your speech (Condron, 1982). The answer to the question of what to do with your hands is simple: gesture as spontaneously as you do in conversation. Although nervousness may cause you to develop distracting mannerisms (such as playing with a pen, your hair, glasses, buttons, or change in your pockets), your instructor will call these to your attention and help you eliminate them. But it is better to forget about your hands and feet, especially during the rehearsals, and concentrate on your ideas. Your natural inhibition during the actual speech will normally prevent you from distracting or excessive movement.

3. Practice Without Stopping. The suggestion that you practice without stopping is different from saying “practice without ceasing,” which suggests that you practice continuously from the time you finish preparing your speech text to the time you actually present it. Aside from being impractical, such an approach would probably also be counterproductive. Rehearsals are usually more helpful when they spread out over several different sessions rather than conducted back to back. The distributed pattern of rehearsal allows you to better incorporate what you learned from earlier sessions into your later practices.

What practicing without stopping really emphasizes is that, within any particular run-through of your speech, you should not stop every time you make a mistake (or think of something new to add) and correct the speech. Of course, if you discover a serious trouble spot, you may want to stop right away and work on it before you forget what you want to change. However, it is easy to get into the habit of stopping to correct minor problems, where, during the actual speech this will be impossible (or at least highly undesirable). Can you imagine making a mistake, stopping your speech, and asking your instructor whether you can start over? It happens, but it is rarely a better idea to start over than it is to simply cover your mistakes and go on. So get used to the idea of practicing without stopping. Besides, this will also help you become more comfortable with the order in which you intend to present your ideas. Too much stopping during your rehearsals defeats one of the real benefits of rehearsal: getting the feel of the overall flow of your speech from beginning to end.

4. Practice in a Classroom-sized Room. Another important element of your rehearsals is to practice in a room as close to the size of your classroom as you can, because part of your task as a speaker is to fill the entire room with your speech. Many students, living in a dorm or apartment with one or more roommates, go into a small room to get away from everyone else so they won’t be embarrassed or interrupted. The danger of this is that you will get used to being too “small” when, in your actual speech, you will have to project yourself much larger than you typically do in conversations. Therefore, it is important to try to rehearse in a room that invites you to make yourself as large as you need to be for your class. If the situation permits, practice your first speech in the classroom itself, to get a feeling for what it looks like to speak from the front of the room.

5. Practice from Your Outline. One dangerous habit you should avoid developing is practicing with notes other than the ones you intend to take with you when you speak. Some instructors emphasize using a minimum of notes; others may allow you to use nearly a full manuscript. Whatever you plan to take with you, however, should also be what you practice with. You want to gain experience in quickly finding what you need so that you don’t lose contact with your audience while you check your notes. Every glance down is an opportunity to lose your audience’s attention. To practice with a manuscript but to remove your topic outline for the speech itself can cause you real headaches when you scan your notes for the friendly reminder-word you had been practicing with but now cannot find. If you are going to work with only a few notes during your speech, gradually wean yourself from extensive notes during your rehearsals.

One further suggestion concerning notes: don’t be afraid to mark your notes with reminders and underlining of key terms—in a contrasting color, to help you quickly pick up what you need from the page. Your notes are a tool for your speech, not a sacred document for eternal preservation. During your rehearsal sessions, mark your notes as you discover what guidance you need in order to make them as useful as possible.

6. Talk through Your Speech—Don’t Memorize It. This principle is really a corollary of the previous one. It is meant to remind you that your speech, under most circumstances, will work best if it is extemporaneous rather than memorized. Therefore, unless absolutely exact wording is required, get used to talking through the speech, using whatever wording comes to you under the impulse of the moment. After several rehearsals, some wordings will come to you more often than others, and you will find that you want to preserve them. Selecting exact wordings for special effects will be discussed in the chapter on language choices. For the time being, however, it is more important to aim for what is called a conversational quality in your delivery. The predominant image of speeches since James Winnans (1917) first introduced it is that of an “enlarged conversation.” Because conversations are spontaneous and interpersonal involving rather than memorized and distant, viewing a speech as an enlarged conversation means that you try to involve your audience with your natural enthusiasm for your topic. You will have more difficulty doing this if you are continually searching your mind for the exact wordings you have memorized.

Handling Speech Anxiety

Perhaps the hardest part of giving your first speeches will be the anxiety you feel about being in front of your audience in the first place (Phillips, 1991). That is normal and to be expected. According to one widely reported survey, having to give a speech is the number one fear among Americans. Furthermore, even experienced speakers will confess that they feel some anxiety before nearly every presentation. So don’t expect to rid yourself of speech anxiety entirely; that is not a realistic goal. But, if you have done a thorough job of preparing your speech and have rehearsed it adequately, then you need not be excessively concerned about the natural apprehension you will feel. You may even begin to look forward to the “butterflies” as a sign that you are readying yourself for your presentation.
Understanding Speech Anxiety

Why do you feel the symptoms of anxiety you experience—such things as shallow breathing, sweaty palms, shaking hands, heart palpitations, dry mouth, and cracking voice? Speech anxiety is a normal physiological response brought on by your concern in a potentially threatening situation—part of the body’s so-called fight-or-flight response. It is actually your body’s way of preparing for action. Because we experience these ready-for-action symptoms in a potentially threatening situation, the symptoms of speech anxiety are often called fright—and thus the commonly used term stage fright to label them. However, the symptoms themselves are actually the result of an overflow of energy in a body that is preparing for immediate action.

Controlling Speech Anxiety

Because speech anxiety is a physiological ready reaction, the problem is not how to avoid it, but rather how to best utilize the adrenaline/glycogen reserves that are being generously dumped into your circulatory system. The first thing you can do is recognize that the physical symptoms are really a positive sign—your body is readying itself for the sustained act of speaking you are about to perform. Continuous speaking requires vast amounts of energy. Recognizing the positive value of what is happening inside you, rather than emphasizing the negative symptoms you feel, can help you to be less bothered by those feelings (which only makes things worse anyway). They are really signs that, as an otherwise fully prepared speaker, you will also have the benefit of extra reserves of energy to see you through. Failure to have any butterflies will eventually worry you more because it may mean you don’t care enough about the success of your speech to present it well.

Whether or not you ever begin looking forward to the symptoms of speech anxiety, there are two general things you can do early in your speech preparation that should help minimize paralyzing levels of speech apprehension: (1) Select an interesting topic. Confidence in your topic can give you greater confidence during your presentation because it eliminates one unnecessary source of worry. (2) Be well prepared. Don’t invite strong speech anxiety by giving yourself a legitimate reason to be frightened. If you have taken the time to work through the phases of speech preparation and have rehearsed your speech adequately, the most realistic sources of harm to your reputation have already been eliminated.

In addition to these general suggestions, there are several specific suggestions for handling your natural anxiety, all of which involve the use of physical action. Because speech anxiety results from your body’s preparation for physical action, take advantage of that fact by using physical activity to siphon off the excess adrenaline/glycogen surging through your body. There are two types of physical action you may find helpful: (1) physical action before you speak, and (2) physical action while you speak. Let’s look at each of these in turn.

Physical Action Before You Speak. There are four key suggestions for using physical action before you speak. First, sit upright in your chair and start breathing deeply and regularly. One of the characteristic bodily changes produced by speech anxiety (which is not captured very well by the expression fight-or-flight) is short, shallow, irregular breathing. For not all animals respond to threats by either fighting or fleeing. Instead, they resort to the third response available to them—they try to make themselves as small, motionless, and inconspicuous as possible. Shallow breathing minimizes eye-catching movement that might induce a predator’s attack. Because a public speaker’s fight-or-flight responses are almost always out of the question (who would you fight, where would you flee?), your body quite naturally takes the option it does have available: it shrinks as much as it possibly can toward invisibility, through, among other things, very shallow breathing. But have you ever tried to talk that way? Because shallow breathing is counterproductive to your speaking, you should try to overcome the tendency to shrink by consciously forcing deeper and more expansive breathing while you wait to speak.

Second, you should try to relax your hands and arms, which have stiffened up as your body has tried to make itself as invisible and inanimate as possible. You can loosen up by flexing your arms and fingers as unobtrusively as you can, or by pressing your fingertips together firmly. Besides, how can you gesture conversationally if your hands and arms are locked tight?

Third, the facial muscles can be relaxed by covert flexing and relaxing. It is pretty hard to talk when your face won’t move.

Finally, if you can do it without calling attention to yourself, yawn. Yawning is one of the best exercises for prespeech relaxation, because it involves virtually all of the muscles of the face, jaw, and throat simultaneously. Since it is not always possible to yawn without attracting notice, use this relaxation device before you are in front of your audience, or before attention has been focused on you.

Physical Action While You Speak. There are three suggestions for physical action while you speak. First, you must get physically set to speak. All organic activities begin with a preparation phase, and delivering your speech is no exception. To get set, (a) walk confidently to the lectern, (b) set your notes on the lectern and arrange them the way you want them, (c) place your feet squarely on the floor, about shoulder-width apart, with your knees slightly bent, (d) stand up straight, neither drooping over the lectern nor standing rigidly at attention, (e) look at your audience for a second or two to get adjusted to them, (f) take one last deep breath, and (g) begin with a well-prepared and rehearsed introduction.

Second, use natural gestures while you speak; they help use up excess tension while at the same time contributing to the overall impact of your speech.

Third, if the room and circumstances permit, move around as you talk. Again, this activity uses up the excess energy that contributes to the symptoms of speech anxiety. And, it helps your audience attend to the structure and content of your speech by spontaneously marking the transitions and points of emphasis contained in your text (Schellen, 1965). More will be said about this in the chapter on speech delivery.

On Cookbooks And Masterpieces

During the past 2,400 years a vast wealth of commonsense observation and conventional wisdom have been developed concerning the elements of successful public speaking. In addition to this extensive tradition based on thoughtful observation of marketplace public communication, the modern scientific era has also begun to contribute to what we know about speech in the public setting. Because we know a good deal about what goes into constructing and presenting a successful speech, there is much to share with your in a straightforward manner, prescriptively, in cookbook fashion: “Mix a little supporting material with some organization, add a dash of vivid language, and spic things up with an appropriate anecdote; bake it for a while in a temperate mind, and you will come out with a very passable speech.” Where we know such things, this book presents principles directly, with the hope of making them as accessible as possible for you to learn, and as interesting as possible for your instructor to teach.
However, speech making also has an intangible, artistic element that goes beyond the skills that can be formally taught, an element that needs to be experienced more directly. Even so, the artistic aspect can be understood. Thus, this book attempts to set public speaking within a larger theoretical approach to human communication in general. In that way, the artistic elements can be understood and practiced. This book not only seeks to tell you clearly what has been discovered about public speaking by patient observation and experimental test, but also to provide you with a coherent explanation for why those practices work as they do.

Cookbooks and masterpieces? What a masterpiece adds to mere technical skill is imagination. No book can teach you imagination. What a book can give you are the materials to help you structure your natural imagination into its most powerfully expressive form. Having given you those skills, as well as an understanding of why they work, it is hoped that you will eventually present speeches that are more than just competently informative or persuasive, but also significant, interesting, and artfully crafted. If you learn only the practical skills of public speaking during your public speaking course, you will have accomplished much. Even so, there is more to public speaking than mere cookery, and you can aspire to master it.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have surveyed, in a preliminary way, the phases you will go through in preparing your first speeches. Refining your speech preparation ability is a continuous process composed of adding new skills to your repertoire and building on those skills you have already acquired. Eventually, these speech construction and delivery processes will become second nature to you. Eventually. With practice. But at first you must work on them deliberately, self-consciously, even at times awkwardly. For, like all complex skills—such as playing a musical instrument, using a modern computer, or driving a car—preparing a speech seems to require that you know everything at once before you can do it at all, and certainly before you can do it well. Yet, as a practical matter, you can only concentrate on improving isolated skills that you work on one at a time—skills that you will eventually perform simultaneously and almost unconsciously. Because knowing everything at once is impossible, you must be patient with yourself and give your speech preparation ample time. The knowledge and skills will accumulate, and you will become much more efficient at accomplishing them, if you work at them conscientiously and vigorously in the order your instructor thinks is best for you. For the time being, however, you will at least be able to "hit the ball over the net."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. What are your reasons for taking a course in public speaking? Is it a required course or an elective? What do you hope to learn from it? What do you expect to be able to do after your course that you could not do before?

2. When was the last time you had to speak publicly? What were the circumstances? How many people were there? How did you feel about the event? How did you prepare for the speech? Were you satisfied with the results? What would you do differently to get ready for a similar occasion?

3. Who are some of your favorite speakers in public life? What do you especially like about their speeches? Why are these speakers typically more effective than others you have heard? Are their ideas more clearly presented? More compatible with your own?

Delivered with greater animation, enthusiasm or conviction? Arranged in a way that is especially easy to follow?

4. When you prepare your next speech, whether in class or outside, what order of steps are you likely to use? Will you adapt the order presented in the book to your own special needs, or will you follow the order presented in the chapter fairly closely?

5. Which manner of presentation—extemporaneous, impromptu, reading, or memorized—are you expected to use in your classroom speeches? Why? Under what special circumstances would you be likely to choose some other manner of delivery?

6. As you prepare for your next speech, why should you practice aloud? While standing? Without stopping? In a classroom-sized room? From your outline? Without note memorization?

7. On the day you are to give your first graded speech, what can you do to help control any symptoms of speech anxiety you may feel while you wait for your turn? While you are actually speaking?

8. Why is a small amount of speech anxiety actually helpful for presenting your speech effectively?

9. Is preparing and delivering a speech primarily a skill or an art? What is the difference? What difference does it make to you as a novice speaker which way you think of a speech?

10. Public speaking is not widely taught outside the United States. Why do you suppose that is true? Do you think that situation might change as more and more countries adopt democratic principles of government?

THINGS TO TRY

1. Make a list of some of the occasions that might require you to speak publicly during the next twelve months. For example, does a course you will be taking require an oral report? Are you thinking about running for an office in a club or organization? Is there a campus or local problem you might want to speak about?

2. If your major department requires a course in public speaking, find out why the course is considered important enough to be required. Did the department take a written survey of recent graduates' opinions?

3. Interview a professional person in your community whose college major was the same as yours and find out what public speaking requirements the person has had since graduation. Ask what advice the person would give concerning your own public speaking class.

4. If you have heard a speaker who did a particularly weak or ineffective job, what went wrong? Why didn’t you like the speaker’s presentation? What specific recommendations would make to help the speaker improve?

5. There have been many famous orators, including Demosthenes, Daniel Webster, William Jennings Bryan, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ronald Reagan, and Mario Cuomo. Select a famous orator and find out more about that speaker. Your instructor can give you the names of several others, both past and present, who may interest you.

6. Prepare and deliver a brief (one- to two-minute) speech about yourself. Make sure you plan and rehearse the speech. Try to avoid just listing random details about yourself. Instead, select a central theme that runs through your life and illustrate the theme with examples, anecdotes, visual aids, and so on. Make sure you have a definite introduction and conclusion as well. Some themes that may apply are the good or bad effects of being an only child, being left-handed, being from a small town, having blond hair, and so forth.
7. As a variation, instead of talking about yourself, select a classmate to interview. Find out enough details so that you can present a speech introducing the student to the class. Again, select a central theme that runs through the student’s life to present to the class.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SUGGESTED READINGS**


