University of Dayton
eCommons

Communication Faculty Publications   Department of Communication

2013

The Speaker's Primer

Joesph M. Valenzano III
University of Dayton, jvalenzanoiii1@udayton.edu

Stephen W. Braden
Kennesaw State University

Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post
George Mason University

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/cmm_fac_pub

Part of the Other Communication Commons, and the Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons

The Speaker's Primer

Abstract

This book addresses the nuts and bolts of crafting and delivering different types of presentations, but unlike other public speaking handbooks, it builds on those principles and offers guidance on speaking in particular professional arenas. Throughout the book, the authors provide sidebars about the importance and application of public speaking principles specific to business, healthcare, education, politics, and the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

— Description from publisher's website

Disciplines

Communication | Other Communication | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Speech and Rhetorical Studies

Comments

Chapter 1 of this book is provided for download with the permission of the publisher and the authors. Permission documentation is on file. To read the entire volume, see the publisher's website.

Chapter Objectives

- Understand how communication works

- Differentiate between conversation and formal presentations

- Dispel myths about public speaking

1
Understanding Public Communication

The ability to use symbols, create meaning, and communicate ideas defines what it means to be human. To be sure, many different species communicate in their own way—dogs bark, snakes hiss, and some species of insects dance—but human beings are unique in our complex use of symbols to define ourselves and the world in which we live. Even more so, we influence people and move them to action through the creative and effective presentation of our ideas. Think about the different contexts in which we do this—contexts specific to the human world.

When we think of public speaking, the first context that comes to mind is politics. Public speaking is certainly an integral part of any democracy, and it remains one of the more commonly understood venues in which people deliver remarks to audiences. Stump speeches, campaign events, presidential addresses, and a myriad of other situations provide politicians with

opportunities to speak to audiences. However, the political realm is not the only one in which public speaking skills are a necessity.

In the private sector, where companies seek to convince consumers to purchase their goods or services, representatives are often called upon to deliver presentations designed to facilitate sales. Corporate executives also address their employees and investors periodically to inform them about the state of the company's finances and what the goals are for the coming quarter or year. In business, these modes of interaction involving speech have been influenced greatly in recent years by the development of electronic media such as Skype, Prezi, and even something as simple as conference calling. But the importance and utility of speech do not stop with politics and business—it even extends to our personal lives.

At some point in all our lives, we will attend a wedding and a funeral. We may also go to an anniversary celebration, awards ceremony, or some other function where we hear, and perhaps even deliver, speeches. Each of these situations requires us to know how to properly develop and deliver remarks to a specific audience in much the same way that political and business contexts demand we do. Quite simply, the use of symbols through speech is a central part of what it means to be human. In this handbook, we will help you learn how to create and convey effective presentations so that you can maximize your ability to deliver information, change minds, and influence audiences.

In this chapter, we provide a brief foundation of some important concepts related to understanding how the communication process works. This breakdown of the central components of communication is then followed by an explanation of how public speaking is different from casual conversation. Finally, we dispel some popular myths about public speaking so that you can move forward and learn how to deliver effective presentations.

Communication Models

We use theories to explain most, if not all, human behaviors. The field of communication has several models that illustrate how communication functions between people. It is essential

to understand how these models work because they inform the choices we make in preparing and performing a speech. In this section, we will cover three different models, each of which is a valid way of explaining communication in different contexts. First, we discuss the most basic model of the communication process, the linear model of communication. Then we explain the interactive model of communication, which complicates the linear model by introducing a few new variables to the communication process. Finally, we delve into the transactional model of communication, which is a bit more involved than the interactive model.

Linear Model of Communication

The first model developed to explain the communication process was the **linear model of communication** (see Figure 1.1). This model views communication as something that one person does to another. In this model, communication flows in one direction only, much like a river. The idea is very basic and at its most complicated contains seven elements.

FIGURE 1.1
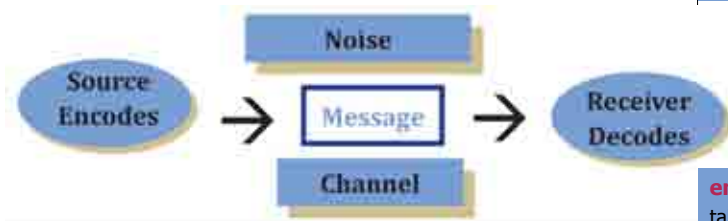
The first of these elements is the **source,** which in terms of public speaking is the speaker. The speaker is the person responsible for inventing the idea on which he or she intends to speak and crafting the message that conveys that idea to an audience. When the speaker converts the idea into words he or she is **encoding** it. This encoding process is simply taking an abstract notion and giving it meaning through the application of symbols. The end result of the encoding process is a **message**, which is the content or idea the source initially wanted to provide to the audience. This message is then delivered through a **channel**, which in the case of public speaking is the voice. A person's voice is the channel through which a source's encoded message travels to an audience in a presentation.

linear model of communication
theory that views communication as a one-way process in which a source conveys an encoded message through a channel to a receiver, who then decodes that message

source
the person responsible for inventing the idea on which he or she intends to speak and crafting that idea to an audience

encoding
taking an abstract notion and providing it meaning through the application of symbols

message
the content or idea that the source tries to convey to the audience

channel
the medium through which an encoded message is transmitted from a source to a receiver

3

So far this sounds fairly simple, and you may be wondering how it could get confusing or how a person's message could be misinterpreted. Well, even in that simple initial stage of encoding and delivery through the channel, speakers can make poor word choices that do not accurately reflect the meaning of the source's idea. The speaker may also use words the audience does not understand when encoding the message. These are two small ways this seemingly easy process can get confusing. Problems, though, are not simply relegated to the source in the linear model, so let's take a look at how the linear model explains what happens after the message travels through the channel to its destination.

When a message is sent, it is also received, and the audience, also called the **receiver**, processes those symbols. The processing done by the receiver is called **decoding**, which essentially takes the symbols used to encode the message and draws meaning from them. This is much like what some kids do with decoder rings in cereal boxes. To understand the message, you need the key to understand how it was encoded. In terms of public speaking, receivers need to understand the symbol system, or language, used by the speaker when sending the message.

As before, this may seem easy, but all of us have been in a situation when as the receiver of a message we did not exactly understand what was being said. This can occur in a classroom during a lecture, in a debate between two political candidates, and even in a casual conversation with a friend. We may be speaking the same language, but when we have different definitions of words we process them differently than the speaker might intend, resulting in confusion. What leads to the interruption or inaccurate decoding of a message sometimes comes not from a person's listening ability but from some other force.

The other force that can impede the delivery and proper decoding of a message is called **noise**, and noise is the final component of the linear model of communication. Noise refers to anything that can change the message after the source encodes and sends it. There are a variety of different types of noise, some physical and some psychological, but all throw a wrench into the communication process. The chart in Table 1.1 shows the different types of noise speakers and audiences might encounter during a presentation.

receiver
the person or audience that a message is being transmitted to

decoding
the process of drawing meaning from the symbols that were used to encode a message

noise
anything that can change the message after the source encodes and sends it

4

TABLE 1.1

Types of Noise	
Physical Noise	**Psychological Noise**
▪ Other sounds ▪ Visual barriers ▪ Poor volume and projection ▪ Distractions in the room ▪ Hunger, tiredness, and other bodily limitations	▪ Preoccupation with other thoughts ▪ Emotional reaction to the topic ▪ Prejudice or ill will toward the speaker ▪ Unwillingness to listen ▪ Resistance to the message

In looking at this model, it seems to adequately explain a basic form of communication, but we all know that the process is more involved, because receivers are not simply sponges that absorb information provided by a source. So, although usable, this model provides an incomplete explanation of how communication functions between people. It was not long after the model was developed that it was rethought and extended to include a more active role for receivers. Next, we go over the changes that were made in the more thorough interactive model of communication.

Interactive Model of Communication

The **interactive model of communication** (see Figure 1.2) expands our understanding of the communication process by taking into account that messages flow back and forth from the receiver. Whereas the linear model of communication views the communication process as complete when the receiver decodes the sender's message, the interactive model does not; here we will see the sender and receiver are both responsible for encoding and decoding messages.

interactive model of communication communication theory that views communication as a two-way process that includes feedback and the environment

FIGURE 1.2

5
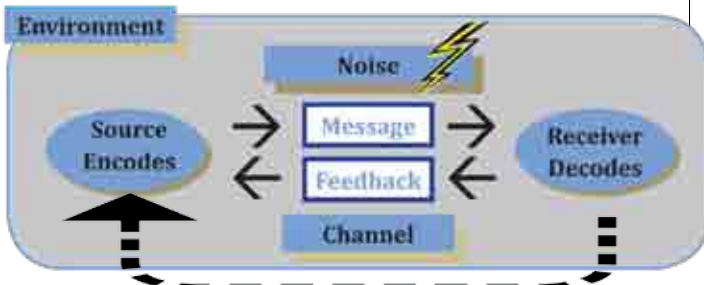
The main way in which the interactive model is different from the linear model is in the concept of **feedback.** Feedback occurs after the receiver decodes the sender's message and is essentially the receiver's response to the message. This new message then flows linearly back to the sender, who becomes the receiver of the feedback to the original message. To better conceptualize this process, think about a telephone call or a text message.

When you say something or write a message on one end and send it to the receiver, the receiver processes your message and responds either verbally or nonverbally. You then receive that response, thus completing the communication process. The introduction of feedback creates a fuller picture of what happens when two or more people interact.

A second aspect added in the interactive model of communication is that of **environment**. The environment provides a deeper understanding of context than noise did in the linear model. In fact, noise is part of the environment, but not the whole thing. The environment is the context, which includes a plethora of different things that both help and hinder the communication process. See Table 1.2 for a few aspects of the environment that both senders and receivers should consider when encoding and decoding messages.

TABLE 1.2

Environmental Elements		
• Beliefs	• Participants	• Physical setting
• Context	• Relationships	• Values
• History		

Although it provides a better picture of how communication works, even the interactive model is not perfect. One of the major missing components in this useful model is the idea that receivers and senders do not wait to provide feedback. Next, we will look at perhaps the richest explanation of the communication process, the transactional model.

Transactional Model of Communication

Although more illustrative of how the mechanics of the communication process works, the interactive model of communication did not take into account one very important aspect of how we communicate: the fact that both encoders and decoders send and receive messages simultaneously, and both parties use the same channel. The **transactional model of communication** (see Figure 1.3) is a far more complete explanation of communication because it recognizes that communication is constant and thus we play the roles of sender and receiver simultaneously in just about every interaction.

transactional model of communication the theory that views communication as a constant process in which all parties simultaneously play the roles of sender and receiver

FIGURE 1.3
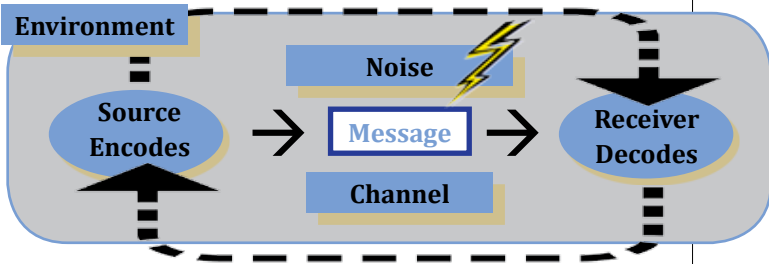
This model is particularly useful when explaining the dynamic context of face-to-face communication, such as what occurs when we have a conversation or deliver a presentation to an audience. In both of these scenarios the sender is also reacting in real time to how the audience is receiving the message. If the sender notices confused looks, perhaps he or she then asks a question to find out what needs to be clarified. This change in remarks is a direct result of feedback from the audience.

The transactional model of communication helps us understand that things never go as planned, and so we constantly adapt to feedback. This dynamic model which explains how communication functions most accurately reflects public speaking as a process. Now that we have a model for appreciating the complexity of the speech process, let's get a picture of how not all speech is the same by differentiating speech from casual conversation.

Conversation Versus Speech

All speaking situations, and thus all forms of speech, are not equal, although there are similarities among contexts. Informal conversations and speech have several such overlaps but also some significant differences. When we understand some of these similarities and differences it can place public speaking in a new, less threatening light (see Table 1.3).

TABLE 1.3

Similarities and Differences in Conversation and Speech	
Similarities	**Differences**
• Audience-centered • Attention to feedback • Goal-driven • Logic is required • Stories for effect	• Language choices • Speeches require more organization • Use of notes • No interruptions • Delivery style • Physical arrangement

We all know how to talk to each other, and rarely does a day go by when we don't have a casual conversation with someone. Certain aspects of those interactions also color public speaking situations. First, both conversations and speeches are audience-centered. By this we mean that we pay attention to the audience when making choices regarding our speech. In conversations as well as speeches there are certain topics we address only with particular people or groups. We also pay attention to the feedback we receive from the receivers in both situations so we know how to respond. Both conversation and speech are activities centered upon the audience.

A second quality shared by conversation and speech is that both are goal-driven activities. We seek to accomplish something, whether it is conveying information or changing the audience's mind, whenever we either have a casual conversation with someone or deliver more formal remarks. These goals differ with each event and interaction, but there is always something we want to achieve. A third area of overlap

related to the achievement of goals is that in both conversation and public speaking we need to organize our thoughts logically in order for the receiver to understand what we are saying. Finally, in both situations we want to tell stories to our audiences for maximum effect. In short, conversation and public speaking both seek the same outcome in an organized way that does not bore people. This is not to say that there are not differences between the two communication practices.

One significant difference between the two relates to the language choices we make. Conversations tend to be colloquial and relaxed, while public speaking requires more formal language. For instance, in public speaking contexts speakers should not swear or use slang terms, but in conversations these things may very well happen.

There are a few other notable differences between public speaking and conversation.   One of those pertains to the structure of the remarks.   Although both conversations and speeches present information in a logical manner, speeches are more clearly organized and less prone to tangents than conversations, and note cards or outlines are often employed to help speakers stay on track. Additionally, whereas we all know people who interrupt a conversation, such interruptions are not the norm during formal presentations.

A final area of difference can be seen in delivery. Conversations often occur in very small intimate settings that do not require people to raise their voices; however, when giving a speech you must make sure everyone in the audience can hear you. Physical delivery is also different in that when giving a speech we should avoid distracting mannerisms and verbal pauses, while these things often feature prominently in conversations. During a conversation, people are usually sitting or standing together so that every person can see the others' faces, but during a speech, the speaker usually stands at the front of the room facing a seated audience that is looking only at the speaker.

Now that we understand how communication works, and how public speaking is not all that different from conversation, let's cover some common misconceptions regarding public speaking that many people hold.

Public Speaking Myths

It is no secret that people communicate with varying degrees of skill. Some people are adept at interpersonal conversation, while some are more comfortable communicating in groups. When it comes to public speaking and formal presentations, some people naturally feel more comfortable, even enjoy the experience, while others fear it more than they do death. That fear, like many others, is irrational and indicates that someone has bought into several myths regarding public speaking.   In fact, as with interpersonal and small group communication, with training and practice anyone can deliver a competent speech. In this section, we will cover those myths that keep people from developing their public speaking skills—and as the first myth indicates, public speaking is a skill, not a talent.

Myth #1
Public Speaking Is a Talent, Not a Skill

Good speakers are made, not born, and they are made through hours of practice and preparation. Like any skill or complicated task, public speaking takes time to develop because of the many components involved. Thankfully, many ways exist to hone this skill and become a competent public speaker.

People can start improving their speaking skills by taking a public speaking course and reading and studying texts such as this one.   These courses are available at colleges and universities around the country, as well as more informally through organizations such as Toastmasters.   One course, though, is not a silver bullet and will simply provide you with the tools you need to improve. The real work comes when you practice with the tools provided to you.

Another way to develop your speaking skills is by watching and listening to good speakers. Many people learn well through modeling, and there is no shortage of good speakers or speeches for you to read and watch. This exposure to good practices will help spark ideas and provide samples upon which you can reflect as you work to improve your speaking.

Finally, there is no substitute for preparation and experience. Taking as much time as necessary to develop your speech,

practicing, and editing it will pay off. Additionally, the more speeches you deliver, the better you will be because you will become more comfortable with the context and more familiar with your own speech patterns. Don't shy away from chances to give presentations but rather embrace them as opportunities to hone your skills.

Myth #2:
Speech Is Easy; We Do It All the Time

As we have shown, communicating is a natural human activity. As children, we begin trying to speak very early in life, and because we have been speaking for so long we think it is easy to do. But just because we do it all the time doesn't mean we do it correctly or as well as we could. We are all guilty of having said something at an inappropriate moment or of not being prepared to answer a question or deliver remarks. Presentations are not something that can be prepared the night before and then flawlessly delivered. They are, in fact, the opposite.

Choosing the right words to convey ideas to an audience takes thought, and thought takes time. It takes even more time to organize your thoughts into a coherent presentation, and so waiting until the last minute is simply not an option.   Finally, we may be comfortable with speaking in conversation, but presentations to attentive audiences in a formal setting are an entirely different matter. This is why it takes time and practice to speak well. There is a big difference between speaking well and delivering a good, effective speech. Just because we have been doing something for a while does not mean that we do it well.

Myth #3
There Is No "Right Way" to Deliver a Speech

Many people believe that there is no correct way to give a speech and that all ways of delivering a speech are equally acceptable and effective. If that were the case, we would not have great speeches or speakers, because they would all be equally good. There is a proper way to construct and deliver a speech, and to be a competent presenter you need to learn what is and is not effective.

To say there is a "right" way of delivering a speech does not mean there is not more than one way to approach a speech topic. There are untold ways in which a topic could be covered by a speaker; however, the principles of organization, delivery, language, and style apply to how the treatment of that topic is conveyed. In this book, we will show you these guiding principles for effective speech and illustrate that the idea that all speeches are equally good is simply not correct.

Summary

In this chapter we introduced you to some foundational ideas regarding communication and public speaking. We explained the three models of communication: linear, interactive, and transactional. We then showed how conversation and public speaking share certain similarities and differences. Finally, we dispelled a few myths people hold about public speaking. This overview of some foundational concepts related to public speaking will help provide a clearer understanding of how to develop effective public presentations.

Key Terms

channel 3
decoding 4
encoding 3
environment 6
feedback 6
interactive model of communication 5
linear model of communication 3
message 3
noise 4
receiver 4
source 3
transactional model of communication 7