Public Speaking and Democratic Participation: Speech, Deliberation, and Analysis in the Civic Realm, 2nd ed.

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If you have comments, suggestions, or corrections for this textbook, please send them to palsave@palni.edu.

1. Public Speaking as the Intersection of Rhetoric and Democracy

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Identify and explain seven characteristics of rhetoric as a civic art.
- Describe the origins of democracy and its reliance on rhetoric.
- Identify the ways rhetoric and democracy reinforce each other.
- Demonstrate how ordinary people use rhetoric to engage their communities.

At the age of fifteen, Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg grew very concerned about climate change. Many kids her age shared this concern, but Thunberg acted on it. In August 2018, she began skipping school each Friday to protest outside the Swedish Parliament building and elsewhere. She advocated for politicians to take action and stop the environment's degradation. She became, in these actions, a democratic participant.

> School strike week 28. In Hamburg with @Luisamneubauer #climatestrike #fridaysforfuture #schoolstrike4climate pic.twitter.com/XhE3WtVS5D
>
> — Greta Thunberg (@GretaThunberg) March 1, 2019

Does it seem strange to call a fifteen-year-old a democratic participant? You may think the label only applies to people who can vote and to elected leaders or government officials. However, **democratic participants** include all those who participate in public conversations about issues in a democratic society. Opportunities to speak in such conversations occur in local, regional, national, and even international organizations and networks where people work together for positive change. Perhaps you are already involved in such a group on your campus or in your community: a service organization like Habitat for Humanity, an affinity group such as a Latino cultural association, or a team of debaters or deliberation facilitators who help people think or talk through tough public issues.

You do not need to be a legal citizen to be a democratic participant. While you must be a US citizen to *vote* in elections, citizenship is not required to engage in public communication and community building. For this reason, unless we are talking specifically about voting in political elections, in this book we use "democratic participants" and "community members" when we refer to democratic participation.

This chapter explores democratic participation more fully by considering rhetoric and its relationship to democracy. It begins with a definition of rhetoric as a civic art with seven important characteristics. We then turn to an explanation of the historical relationship between rhetoric and democracy with a particular emphasis on the beginnings of democracy in ancient Greece. The chapter next describes how rhetoric and democracy are mutually reinforcing and ends by returning to Thunberg as an example of civic engagement and democratic participation.

Rhetoric as a Civic Art

Teachers and scholars have often associated rhetoric with persuasion, but with mixed characterizations. While some have positively associated the term with rich thought and expression, others have negatively equated rhetoric with hollow talk. Both versions can be considered rhetoric.

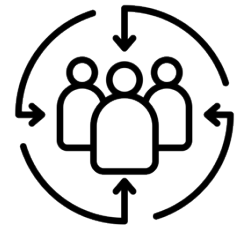
Box 1.1 Rhetoric's Rich Heritage



[Hortus Deliciarum, Philosophy and the Seven Liberal Arts](#) *via Wikimedia Commons,* [Public Domain](#).

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance in Western higher education, rhetoric was one of the seven traditional liberal arts, which included the trivium (i.e., grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (i.e., arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).

In this book, we offer a definition of rhetoric that sets a high standard for public communication in society. We define **rhetoric** as a civic art devoted to the ethical study and use of symbols (verbal and nonverbal) to address public issues. Because rhetoric is such a rich concept, our definition deserves an extended explanation.



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First, rhetoric is a *civic art* that is produced and studied for the good of society. We use **civic** in a manner reminiscent of its Latin origin (*civicus*): matters that relate to the city or citizens. Since we recognize that democratic participants need not be citizens, we use "civic" in this book to emphasize matters that relate to public life. **Civic engagement** refers to participation in community organizations, institutions, and groups with the goal of contributing to the public good. Rhetoric, then, is our chief tool to participate in public life and improve our communities. We characterize rhetoric as a civic *art* because it encourages and requires individual expression, interpretation, and style. Such artistry requires speakers to study and practice rhetoric, which is the next characteristic.

Second, rhetoric entails both the study and use of symbols, which we refer to as *rhetorical theory and practice*. That is, rhetoric includes training (practice) in the use of symbols, such as speechmaking. It also involves studying the symbols produced by others. These studies draw on and help create theories about how rhetoric functions.



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Third, both the study and use of rhetoric are *ethical* practices because they are grounded in moral principles, based on reason, and attached to rigorous standards of evaluation. This suggests that rhetoric is actively (or consciously) produced and that the ethical (or unethical) nature of the motives, choices, and effects of a speaker or analyst is important.

Fourth, rhetoric includes *verbal and nonverbal symbols*. Verbal symbols are the words we write, speak, and study. Nonverbal symbols include visual images and audio sounds. All symbols can be powerful in democratic discourse. For example, consider how images of war and destruction, sounds of gunfire and chaotic yelling, and words calling for public support can move audiences.

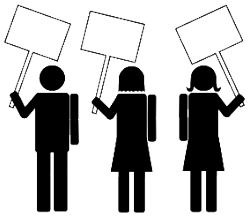
A fifth characteristic of rhetoric is that it is typically used to *address public issues*. The emphasis here is on the audiences who are addressed or spoken to about public issues. In other words, rhetoric is produced for public audiences. While the **rhetor**, or the one who speaks publicly, is important, the listener or reader—that is, the audience—also plays a crucial role. The audience interprets, evaluates, responds to, and acts on—or resists—a rhetor's public discourse. Consequently, meaning is ultimately negotiated between a rhetor and an audience.

This relationship between the rhetor and an audience leads to a sixth characteristic of rhetoric: Rhetoric is a *form of power*. Rhetoric can be a means of control that encourages action or limits an audience's options, sometimes without us even being aware of this effect. In a most basic example, consider how a parent gets their young child to do and not do many things simply with words. Then consider the power of the words in documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. As those documents suggest, rhetoric has the power to liberate from domination.



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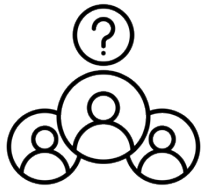
Box 1.2 Rhetoric as a Form of Power



An example of rhetoric as a form of power can be found in Martin Luther King Jr.'s powerful refrain "I have a dream" from the speech he delivered from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. That repeated phrase carried the vision and essence of the American civil rights movement to resist oppressive, racist beliefs and policies and to empower people of color to live in equality with white Americans.

Rhetoric has the ability—the power—to put ideas before the eyes and in the minds of audiences and to move audiences through language, sound, and imagery. At the same time, audiences can accept, alter, or resist those efforts.

Seventh, and finally, rhetoric is *situational and contingent*. Rhetoric operates in specific contexts and situations to address problems that are of a probabilistic and contingent nature. Rather than dealing with truth claims that are verified through formal logic or scientific demonstration, rhetoric addresses contingent matters that are uncertain, open to multiple possibilities, and dependent on many variables. Reasonable people are likely to disagree on how to best address specific community issues. While it is generally used to persuade, rhetoric can also be utilized to inform an audience. Both goals are valuable when community members need to better understand the particular situation and contingent nature of a public issue and decide on a solution.



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Box 1.3 Seven Characteristics of Rhetoric as a Civic Art

1. Rhetoric is a *civic art* that is produced and studied for the good of society.
2. Rhetoric entails both the *study and use* of symbols.
3. The study and use of rhetoric are *ethical* practices grounded in moral principles, based on reason, and attached to rigorous standards of evaluation.
4. Rhetoric includes *verbal and nonverbal symbols*.
5. Rhetoric is used to *address public issues* by communicating to an audience.
6. Rhetoric is a *form of power*.
7. Rhetoric is *contingent and situational*.

Our definition focuses attention on rhetoric's use in public contexts among community members and policy-makers. Thus, it specifically orients us to the practice of **public speaking**, which is the process of forming and delivering rhetorical content to an audience in the hopes of persuading or informing that audience. Public speech is a primary means of participation in a democratic society. We turn next to exploring the beginnings of democracy in ancient Greece and its reliance on rhetoric.

The Historical Relationship Between Rhetoric and Democracy



Athens Acropolis by Mark Cartwright via Worldhistory.org, CC BY-NC-SA.

From its beginning, democracy was conducted in and through rhetoric. In the West, this relationship began in Athens, Greece, in the late sixth century BCE. Imagine an Athenian male during that time. Unlike their ancestors, who lived in a society structured by a noble class, they are an active participant in the governmental functioning of their city-state. They can speak about the important issues of the day with their fellow citizens not only informally but also formally in the Assembly meetings—regular gatherings of Athenian citizens who discussed and voted on the important public issues of the day. During their lifetime, they are likely to serve in one or more governmental positions as a magistrate and to serve regularly as a juror.

This expression of democracy was revolutionary. Indeed, it is hard to exaggerate the importance of these advances, as participation was shared much more widely than ever before in Western history.

Box 1.4 Democratic Participation in the Athenian Assembly

Let's take a closer look at the Athenian Assembly to understand how the power to participate was shared. The Athenian Assembly met forty times each year on the Pnyx Hill in Athens, Greece. Attendance ranged from three thousand to six thousand citizens. The Pnyx represented the political center of the city-state, in contrast to the Agora marketplace (the social and legal center) and the Acropolis (the religious center with the Parthenon, Erechtheion, and other sacred and ceremonial buildings), which both sat adjacent to the Pnyx. These three—Pnyx, Agora, Acropolis—formed a physical and visual triangle.

Assembly meetings began from the speaker's platform located on the Pnyx. The presiding officer sacrificed a pig and prayed to the gods. A proposal was then announced, and the presiding officer asked, "Who wishes to speak?" Any topic could be raised during the Assembly meetings, but the majority of topics were set in an agenda constructed by a smaller council. Anyone could speak two times on a single issue, and there was no formal time limit. There were means for keeping long-winded speakers in check, however, such as heckling and, in more extreme cases, shouting the person down. These meetings were often quite boisterous and emotionally expressive. When the moment seemed right, the presiding officer called for a vote. As such, the participants in this democracy had the opportunity to fully engage in listening, speaking, and voting.



Speaker's Platform, Pnyx Hill, Athens by Larry via Flickr, CC BY.

Of course, ancient Athenian democracy was far from perfect. It excluded women, foreign-born males, and slaves. In addition, critics such as Plato, Isocrates, Thucydides, and Aristophanes critiqued the Athenian democratic experiment toward the end of its prominence, in the late fifth and early fourth centuries. They consistently characterized Assembly members as at times easy to manipulate, gullible, distracted, and lacking in motivation for the task of self-governance.

Two-and-a-half millennia later, many of these critiques persist. Some in the United States worry that the majority of democratic participants lack the ability to stay informed enough to engage productively in the political process. The enormous size of the United States, with over 340 million people, also poses tremendous difficulties for participation. It is rare to experience the personal nature of Athenian democracy's face-to-face rhetorical exchanges.

Similarly, just as ancient Athenian democracy excluded women, non-Athenian males, and slaves, today critics express concern over whether all members of the public—all races, ethnicities, religions, socioeconomic statuses, and other groups—are fully able to participate and have their ideas heard.

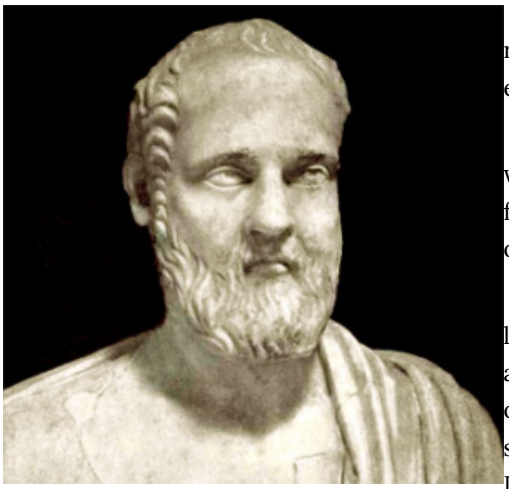
Yet at the same time that Plato and others critiqued democracy, some teachers pointed to exciting ways that rhetorical education could improve democratic engagement.

Rhetorical Education

Because it occurred through public speaking, democratic participation created the need to educate individuals in the

practice. Some teachers, such as Aristotle, taught the principles of rhetoric to noble Athenian students, including Alexander the Great. The early sophists, like Protagoras, Gorgias, and Isocrates, however, violated tradition by teaching a range of subjects, including rhetoric, to anyone for a fee. Their new educational model helped shift the city-state of Athens away from a nobility structure and toward broader democratic participation.

Box 1.5 Ancient Rhetorical Education and Civic Engagement



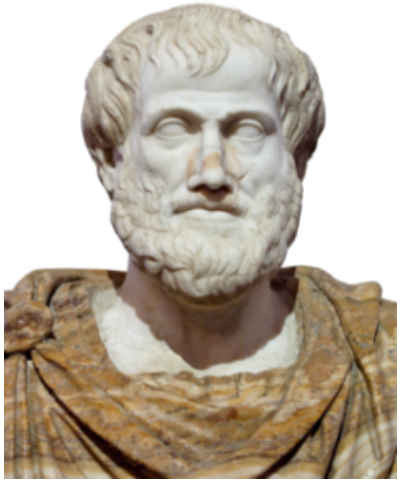
Isocrates *by Student Vives TVW via Wikimedia Commons,* CC BY-SA.

Both Isocrates and Aristotle pointed to exciting ways a rhetorical education could improve students' democratic engagement.

Isocrates became famous for his school of rhetoric, which emphasized civic participation. It trained students to focus their rhetorical skills on addressing practical matters of the state.

Aristotle similarly taught rhetoric, alongside a wide variety of other subjects, at his school called the Lyceum. In fact, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is believed to be a collection of his students' notes taken during, or in response to, his lectures.

Isocrates and Aristotle devoted much of their lives to teaching rhetoric to students, demonstrating the difficulty of the skills involved and their importance for democratic participation.



Aristotle *by Alvaro Marques Hijazo via Wikimedia Commons,* Public Domain.

Much has changed since democracy and rhetoric began in ancient Greece. Yet when we turn to the United States, we see that rhetoric has played a similarly important role in the establishment of American democracy. Rhetoric was used among colonists in discussions and debates about the British Crown's control and eventually over their possible independence, leading to the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution.

Today, many US colleges and universities continue to teach public speaking skills to prepare students for effective democratic participation. In fact, as box 1.6 illustrates, many of the fundamental skills taught in public speaking courses today reflect the canons of rhetoric first described by Aristotle! The relationship between rhetoric and democracy in the US and elsewhere remains strong.

Box 1.6 The Canons of Rhetoric

The basic elements of public speaking, first described by Aristotle, were put into a formal structure by Cicero in the first century BCE.

Invention is the process of investigation and thought that produces the content of your speech. We will explore elements of invention in chapters 5, 25, and 26.

Organization is how a speaker orders the points in a speech and verbally connects those elements so their audience can follow. You will learn about organization in chapters 12, 13, and 14.

Style is the language or expression we use—the words we choose. Chapter 16 focuses on style.

Memory is how a speaker stores and recalls the information shared in a speech. We will cover memory in chapter 17.

Delivery is how a speaker physically conveys words and ideas, both vocally and nonverbally, to the audience. Chapters 17 and 18 will explore delivery.

Rhetoric and Democracy Are Mutually Reinforcing

Democracy is a political system that locates control and power in the people. You may think such power resides in the ability to vote. However, rhetoric provides community members with many more ways to exercise power and control in a democracy. In fact, their voices—their rhetorics—are necessary to establish and maintain democracy.

Rhetoric Encourages Democracy

Rhetoric encourages democracy in several ways: It helps form communities, focuses members' attention on shared concerns, and enables members to advocate and to think critically.



Facade of the Capitol Building by Ramaz Bluashvili via Pexels, Pexels license.

First, rhetoric encourages democracy by being the chief means by which a community of any size is formed. That is, until a group of people—whether it is an organization, a town, a city, a state, or a nation—communicates with one another, they do not exist as an entity in any significant way. Rhetoric is how laws and policies and governmental and nongovernmental institutions are created and revised.

Furthermore, rhetoric is the primary way a community perceives itself as such. It matters, for instance, that the Preamble to the US Constitution begins by labeling the American colonists as "We the People." They became a people, in part, through that rhetorical expression. You might consider how your college or university uses rhetoric to name itself *as* a community. Students at the Pennsylvania State University, for instance, tend to yell "We are Penn State" during football games. Perhaps your college participates in similar rhetorical practices of self-naming and governance?

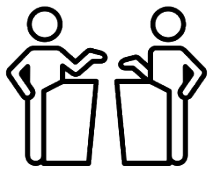
Second, rhetoric encourages democracy by enabling participants to jointly focus their attention on particular issues. Every community encounters challenges and must find ways to address them. Rhetoric provides that way. Participants use rhetoric to draw attention to issues, share lived experiences, advocate for solutions, and choose pathways forward. That is, rhetoric enables the public to attend together to matters of shared concern. You might consider how groups you are part of at college or in the local community use rhetoric to talk through challenges and issues.

Finally, rhetoric supports democracy by supplying the fundamental skills necessary for effective participation. These skills include both the production *and analysis* of messages.

> Former president of the National Association of Teachers of Speech W. Norwood Brigance declared, "Every educated person ought to know when a thing is proved and when it is not proved, should know how to investigate and to analyse a proposition that confronts him [*sic*], and how to search for a solution, how to talk about it effectively before others, and how to contribute to a discussion on problems of joint interest."[1]

1. W. Norwood Brigance, "1946: Year of Decision," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 33 (1947): 133.

To function effectively in a democracy, democratic participants must be able to assess others' communication and effectively voice their thoughts.



Created by Cuputo from Noun Project

Developing the abilities to speak well and critically analyze communication will not only aid you as an individual, but these skills will also help you protect democracy. Democratic participants who are trained in rhetoric are better able to identify, call out, and avoid unethical communication practices that threaten and weaken democracy. We will explore these practices in greater detail in later chapters.

In sum, rhetoric and democracy cannot be separated. Rhetoric is both the means by which democratic participation takes place and the content that is produced through that participation. When we shift from thinking "democracy equals voting" to appreciating that "democracy is a system in which all the participants, the people, have the power," we see how integral rhetoric is to this process.

Box 1.7 Practicing Democracy

We each have multiple and recurring opportunities for civic engagement:

1. Speak up in class to respond to what your professor and your classmates have to say.
2. Ask questions and share your ideas at public events on your campus.
3. Attend the open hearings and meetings of your local school board and city council and ask questions, share your ideas, and advocate.
4. Write or call your local representative, mayor, or the governor of your state about an issue or to suggest a new solution to a problem.
5. Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, record a podcast, or upload a social media post and follow the responses you receive.

Democracy Encourages Rhetoric

The relationship between rhetoric and democracy can also be seen when we consider how democracy encourages rhetoric. It does so in at least three ways: Democratic government bodies require ordinary people's participation, democracy protects people's right to publicly disagree with their government leaders, and election victories rely, in part, on rhetorical skill.

First, all three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial) allow—and in many cases require—participation by the people. Presidential candidates for office must secure votes, and this requires them to speak to voters and, if they are wise, to listen to them. Once elected, they must likewise listen to the public and respond to them, if for no other reason than to seek reelection. The legislative process often requires a period for the public to provide comments on new laws and regulations, and the judicial process allows and even requires individuals to speak in court. Thus, all our foundational democratic institutions promote and facilitate the practice of rhetoric. You may experience this as a college student. Perhaps you have run for a student government position, offered public commentary on campus rules or regulations, or had to testify when a wrongdoing occurred. If so, you know the prominent role rhetoric plays in these democratic processes.

Second, democracy encourages rhetoric because a fundamental feature of all democratic societies is the right of the people to gather peacefully and to protest. In other words, democracy allows the public expression of dissent and dissatisfaction. Democracy even requires such open disagreement and debate to make the public aware of pressing

issues, help them understand how problems may differently impact groups of people, and press for solutions. You might have witnessed or participated in a public protest on your own campus.

Box 1.8 Democracy Encourages Rhetoric



Gay Marriage Protest by sushiesque via Flickr, CC BY-NC.

We saw the power of public dissent in the early twenty-first century as LGBTQIA+ activists around the globe advocated for marriage equality. They used demonstrations, public speeches, legal action, and political campaigns. Their advocacy and protests sparked conversations, drew supporters (and critics), and ultimately contributed to the legalization of same-sex marriage in many countries. It's telling that nearly all these countries are democratic societies—places that allow peaceful social protest.

Attempts to stop open, lawful dissent are antidemocratic. The most egregious examples include threatening (or actually using) physical or military force against critics. During the 1960s, for example, some governmental leaders and angry Americans attempted to squelch peaceful civil rights protests through a variety of physical means, including arrests and jail time, attack dogs, water hoses, billy clubs and knives, and even—ultimately—assassinations of protest leaders.

Box 1.9 Antidemocratic Efforts to Stop Rhetoric

In 2020, President Donald Trump notoriously called on police and the National Guard to clear crowds who had peacefully gathered in front of the White House to protest the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis officers.[2] While running again for

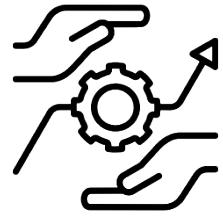


Special Forces in DC by Mobilis in Mobili via Flicker, CC BY-SA.

2. Ben Gittleson and Jordyn Phelps, "Police Use Munitions to Forcibly Push Back Peaceful Protesters for Trump Church

office in 2024, Trump warned that if elected president, he would, according to a news report, "use the powers of the federal government to punish [his] critics and political opponents."[3]

Such abuses of power punish and silence people who openly and lawfully express disagreement. In this way, they weaken democracy and the power of the people. They concentrate power, instead, in the hands of a few political, military, or law enforcement leaders. Such actions are antidemocratic because democracy encourages and protects public expressions of dissent.



Created by Andika Cahya Fitriani from Noun Project

Third, and finally, democracy reinforces rhetoric because election victories are typically achieved by skilled advocacy. You might reflect on how rhetorical abilities may have played a role in students' ability on your campus to assume leadership roles. Perhaps you are reading this book because you want to improve your advocacy skills. We are referring to the ability not to produce the loudest voice but rather to develop the most persuasive message. As we argue in later chapters, persuasive rhetoric should, ideally, be based on thorough and accurate research, organized in a clear and compelling manner, and adapted to the audience and situation.

In sum, rhetoric and democracy exist in a powerful, synergistic relationship. Each feeds and stimulates the other.

Rhetoric as Civic Engagement

Participants in a democratic society engage through rhetoric, and they do so in a variety of ways. In this last section, we return to Greta Thunberg as an example of how a young adult's use of multiple types of rhetoric began as local civic engagement but grew into an international effort.

Civic Rhetoric at the Local Level

As we explained previously, Thunberg was just fifteen years old in 2018 when she began skipping school on Fridays to protest Sweden's inaction against climate change. She learned about the devastations of climate change at an early age and reacted strongly. She is on the autism spectrum and has explained that it gives her a different vantage point to see our environment and the need for action.

Visit," *ABC News*, June 2, 2020, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/national-guard-troops-deployed-white-house-trump-calls/story?id=71004151, archived at https://perma.cc/7C7Q-Y3LB.

3. Joseph Nunn, "Trump Wants to Use the Military Against His Enemies. Congress Must Act," *Slate*, November 17, 2023, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2023/11/trump-second-term-military-nightmare-congress.html, archived at https://perma.cc/HQX7-65S5. See also Isaac Arnsdorf, Josh Dawsey, and Devlin Barrett, "Trump and Allies Plot Revenge, Justice Department Control in a Second Term," *Washington Post*, November 5, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/11/05/trump-revenge-second-term/.



Greta Thunberg by Anders Hellberg via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

From 2018 until she graduated from high school in June 2023, Thunberg peacefully sat outside the Swedish Parliament on Fridays with a protest sign. Her efforts quickly drew widespread attention from politicians who passed her on the street, sympathizers who joined what became known as Fridays for Future, and the news media who began reporting her efforts.

Thunberg's initial actions reflect what you, too, can do when you are disappointed by representatives or worried about a community problem. Like Thunberg, you can use rhetoric to initiate action through a bottom-up grassroots movement. Grassroots movements are responsive to local needs and build coalitions using the resources and talents of private individuals. These movements often raise awareness of community issues through public forums or protests, rally the community through petitions and letter-writing campaigns, and/or form community organizations that raise funds and develop programs to address community problems.

Box 1.10 Looking for Local Civic Engagement

- Name a recent example of a student-organized event intended to help improve your campus or local community.
- Identify a recent example of local community members working together to raise awareness of nearby issues or rally members to public action.
- Recall a recent example of people using social media such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), or TikTok to improve the health of the community.
- Go to the website or social media feed produced by your local newspaper. Find an example of civic engagement that is highlighted in an article, such as a fundraising effort for a family that lost their home in a fire or an effort to increase funding for the local school district.
- Find the website, social media feed, or podcast produced by your city or town and identify an initiative hosted by the city that engaged community members, such as a tree-planting project or a program to teach entrepreneurship to high school students.

Civic Rhetoric at the Global Level

Thunberg's efforts quickly drew national and international attention. She became a sought-after interview subject and speaker partly due to her message but also because of her plain and forceful manner of speaking to world leaders. She was invited to meet the pope and was even asked to be a featured speaker at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2018 and 2019. She has been criticized for her way of speaking and accused of being naive to the realities and energy necessities of modern life. Nonetheless, she has persisted with great effectiveness.



Greta Thunberg by Stefan Müller (climate stuff), via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

Box 1.11 Thunberg's Global Influence



3rd Global Climate Strike by Leonhard Lenz via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Thunberg's efforts have civically engaged people around the world. According to *Time Magazine*, Thunberg "inspired 4 million people to join the global climate strike on September 20, 2019, in what was the largest climate demonstration in human history."[4] It may not be surprising, then, that she has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times (so far), and in 2019, she became the youngest person ever to win *Time Magazine*'s Person of the Year.

Thunberg's example demonstrates the powerful role of democratic participation. Avenues for change do exist—and where they do not already exist, community-minded individuals can create them with communication skills and an understanding of how civic engagement works. Such civic communication can take many different forms.

The Many Forms of Civic Rhetoric

Oral communication remains a popular form of civic advocacy—whether that means speaking orally at protests, political events, or during interviews. However, we can advocate through written and visual forms of rhetoric as well. You might write a letter to be printed in your campus or local newspaper or on a blog. Visually, you could tape your mouth closed to help protest against a leader's unwillingness to listen to your group's concerns, or members may all dress the same to convey solidarity.

4. Charlotte Alter, Suyin Haynes, and Justin Worland, "Time 2019 Person of the Year: Greta Thunberg," *Time*, March 10, 2025, https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/, archived at https://perma.cc/6EQM-2QUQ.

Box 1.12 Thunberg's Written and Visual Communication

In addition to using oral communication, Thunberg has deployed written and visual communication for her environmental advocacy. Thunberg is the author of several books, including *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference* (Penguin Random House, 2019), *Our House Is on Fire: Scenes of a Family and Planet in Crisis* (Penguin Random House, 2021), and *The Climate Book* (Penguin Random House, 2022).

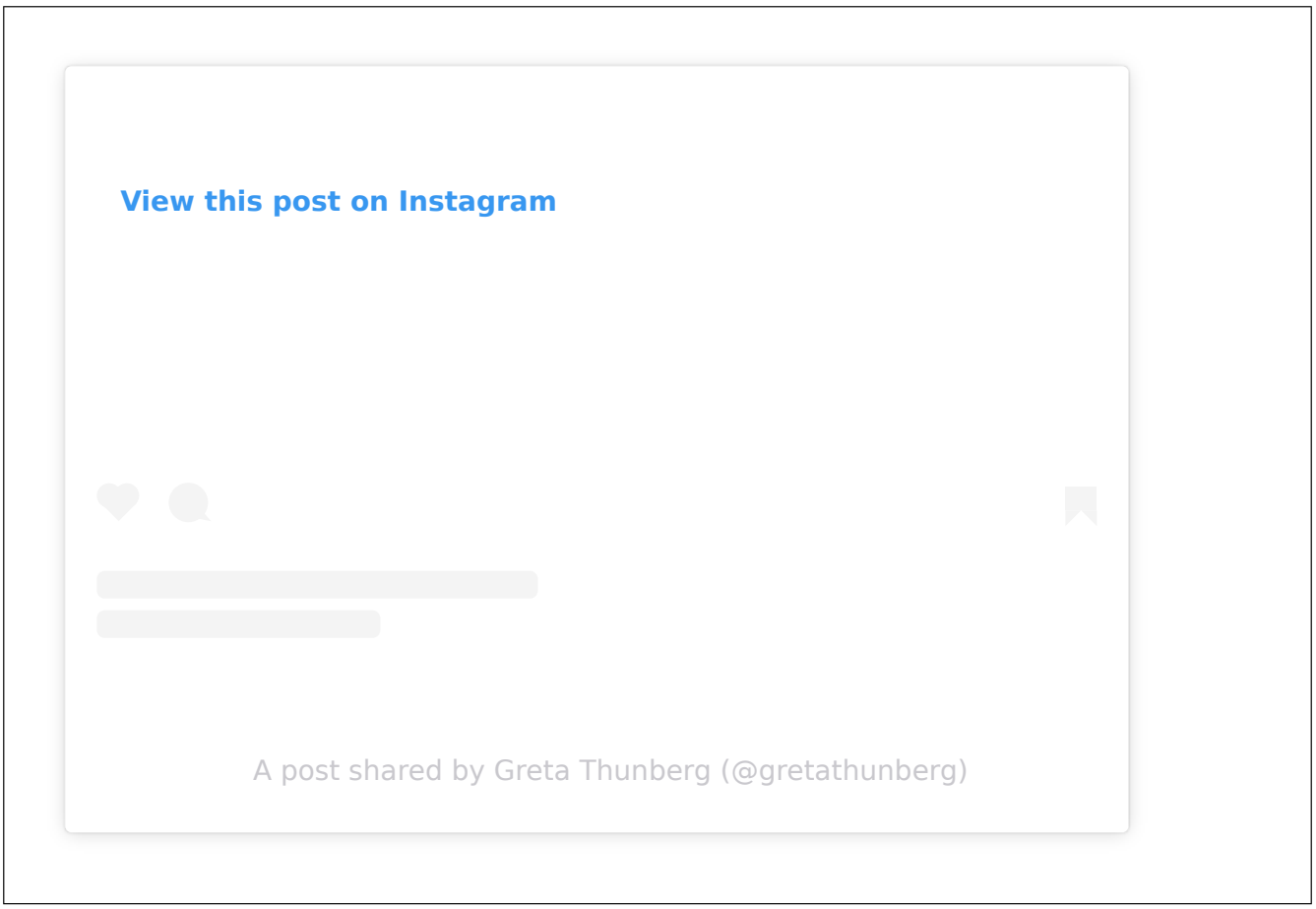
She has also employed visual rhetoric to aid her advocacy. In 2019, for instance, she sailed from Plymouth, England, to New York City for the UN Climate Activism Summit rather than fly to highlight the high carbon footprint of flying. Her choice was visually communicated through news media coverage that tended to feature pictures of her on the sailboat. Her efforts led to a flight shame movement globally.

Of course, public speaking is not restrained to being used in person. Many leaders and social influencers have made great use of oral, visual, and written rhetoric on social media, and you can too.

Box 1.13 Thunberg's Strategic Use of Social Media

On July 5, 2024, a few days after six members of Mother Nature, a Cambodian environmental justice group led by young people, were sentenced to prison time, Thunberg posted a message on her Instagram account.[5]

5. Greta Thunberg (@gretathunberg), "Week 307," Instagram, July 5, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/C9CfqM6iTnP/.



While we primarily emphasize public speaking as oral communication in this textbook, you can also adopt visual and written rhetoric to participate in your community. Thunberg's activism is a good example of the many rhetorical means and media by which public advocacy and civic engagement can take place.

It is our hope that through this book, you will better understand the relationship between rhetoric and democracy and will realize your great potential to improve your communities as a democratic participant. To assist with this learning, we encourage you to treat your classroom as a kind of public space. That is, in your classroom speaking, envision yourself as a public actor, not just a student giving speeches to be graded. You are a democratic participant capable of improving your professor's and fellow students' understanding of community issues and moving them to action.

Summary

This chapter has oriented you toward the necessity of public speaking skills for democratic participation and civic engagement. It has explained the following:

- Democratic participants include all who participate in public conversations about issues in a democratic society. While legal citizenship and the ability to vote aid democratic participation, those aspects are not required to act as a democratic participant.
- Civic engagement is participation in organizations, institutions, and societies with the goal of con-

tributing to the public good.

- Our definition of rhetoric has seven important characteristics: It is a civic art, involves the study and use of symbols, is ethical, makes use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, addresses public issues, is a form of power, and is situational and contingent.
- Democracy began in Athens, Greece, in the late sixth century BCE, and it sparked the need for rhetoric and rhetorical education.
- Rhetoric encourages democracy by being the chief means by which a community of any size is formed, by enabling participants to jointly focus their attention on particular issues, and by supplying the fundamental skills necessary for effective participation and for its protection.
- Democracy encourages rhetoric because all the United States' foundational democratic institutions promote and facilitate the practice of rhetoric, a fundamental feature of all democratic societies is the right of the people to gather peacefully and to protest, and election victories are typically achieved by skilled advocacy.
- Ordinary people can use rhetoric to participate both locally and globally in civic engagement.

Key Terms

civic
civic engagement
delivery
democracy
democratic participant
invention
memory
organization
public speaking
rhetor
rhetoric
style

Review Questions

1. Who qualifies as a democratic participant?
2. What are the seven characteristics of rhetoric as a civic art?

3. What are three ways rhetoric encourages democracy? What are three ways democracy encourages rhetoric?

Discussion Questions

1. Where do you currently see examples of how rhetoric and democracy are influencing each other in a positive or negative way?
2. What is a recent example of how social media are being used for democratic participation?
3. What opportunities exist where you could engage in public projects and initiatives to improve your community?

2. Unproductive Public Discourse and the Politics of Polarization

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Describe the public sphere and the role of public discourse within that sphere.
- Analyze the qualities of unproductive discourse.
- Identify contemporary obstacles to productive communication.

Are you comfortable talking about controversial topics or politics, especially with people who disagree with you? Do you happily join in when someone mentions the current US president, abortion, or gun rights?

If you're like most Americans, the answer is no. According to a 2023 Pew Research Center survey, 61% of US adults—including both Democrats and Republicans—"say having political conversations with people they disagree with is generally 'stressful and frustrating.'" Relatedly, that same survey found that 84% of adults say "political debate has become less respectful over the last several years," and "78% say political debate has become less fact-based."[1] Consequently, many of us avoid these conversations, sticking to safer topics like the weather or sports.

But even some previously "safe" forums and topics have become polarized and heated. Since the 2020 COVID-19 crisis, for example, many local school board meetings (that were "once orderly, even boring") have erupted into angry exchanges over mask mandates, transgender students, and teaching about race.[2] In 2014,

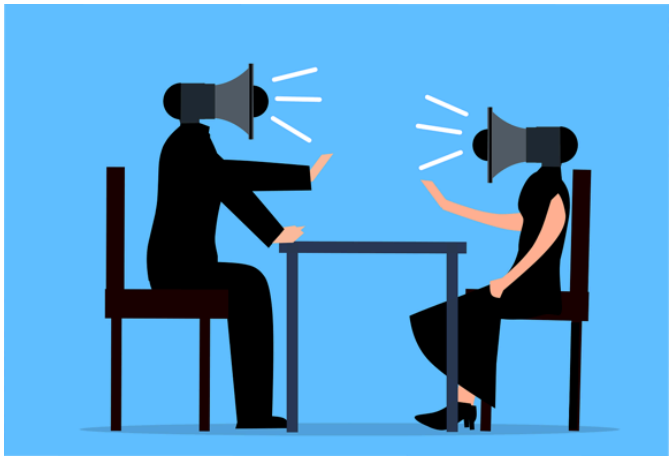


Image by Mohamed Hassan via Pixabay, Pixabay license.

1. Pew Research Center, "Americans' Feelings About Politics, Polarization and the Tone of Political Discourse," *Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics*, September 19, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-feelings-about-politics-polarization-and-the-tone-of-political-discourse/, archived at https://perma.cc/ZBB2-M22D.
2. Stephen Groves, "Tears, Politics, and Money: School Boards Become Battle Zones," *Associated Press*, July 10, 2021,

the most popular form of entertainment—video games—became particularly contentious. Using the social media hashtag "Gamergate," "thousands of people in the games community began to systematically harass, heckle, threaten, and dox several outspoken feminist women in their midst."[3] Even sports have prompted vehement disputes over players' protests of police violence, over vaccination requirements, and over transgender athletes.

In this chapter, we diagnose the issues that plague public communication and consider how *you* can fix them. We begin by defining the public, public sphere, and public discourse. We then highlight problems with public communication, including the qualities of unproductive discourse. We end by identifying obstacles to more productive exchanges. Our goal is for you to reflect on how and why we, as democratic participants, so often publicly agree or disagree in ways that harm our relationships, public institutions, and democracy.

The Problems with Public Communication

Robust disagreement is necessary for a healthy democracy. Multiple, divergent perspectives and arguments allow for better discussions of public policy. Too often, however, our disagreements devolve into yelling matches and oppositional sides. To diagnose how and why, let's begin by examining what type of speech counts as public discourse and what elements in that discourse are cause for concern.

The Public, the Public Sphere, and Public Discourse



Image by International Livestock Research Institute via Flickr, CC BY-ND.

For this textbook, a **public** refers to a collection of people who are joined together in a cause of common concern. Often a public works together to address an issue or question that affects their community. As a college student, you may consider the many publics of which you are likely a member: your residence hall or fraternity; your clubs, athletic teams, or student governance organizations; and even your major. Student athletes at your university, for example, may function as a public when they discuss, together, how they can travel to away games without missing too many classes.

In our definition, a public is distinctly different from a group of individuals. We might conceive of their differences in the following ways:

https://apnews.com/article/health-education-coronavirus-pandemic-school-boards-e41350b7d9e3662d279c2dad287f7009.

3. Aja Romano, "What We Still Haven't Learned from Gamergate," *Vox*, January 7, 2021, https://www.vox.com/culture/2020/1/20/20808875/gamergate-lessons-cultural-impact-changes-harassment-laws, archived at https://perma.cc/4DJS-56WY.

Individuals in a Group	**Members of the Public**
View themselves as separate entities or opposed sides	Recognize their interdependency and common group identity
Are driven by their own interests or needs	Consider their own needs as well as those of fellow members, especially when needs conflict
Usually believe their needs or concerns are in competition with other people's needs and concerns	Acknowledge the impacts of problems and attempted solutions beyond their own personal experiences and interests
Think in terms of "me" versus "them"	Think in terms of "us"
Analogy: Competitors on a reality television show	Analogy: Members of a sports team

Our definition of a public draws heavily on the concept of the public sphere as articulated by the sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas, the **public sphere** is the gathering of community members to discuss matters of common concern. The public talks, argues, and reasons together as equals, disregarding social and economic inequalities among participants, ideally arriving at a more fulsome understanding of the issues.[4]

When a public comes together to discuss matters of shared concern, they participate in public discourse. **Public discourse** refers to rhetoric that is publicly offered to address a significant community concern or issue. You likely hear public discourse on your campus about national politics, over local community projects, and regarding university student services ranging from dining options to financial aid. Several factors make a discourse public rather than private:

1. the setting and participants (it is visible and accessible to anyone implicated by the decisions made there);
2. the topics discussed (they impact a whole community); and ideally,
3. the nature of the communication (it is concerned with the common good rather than the desires of a few individuals).

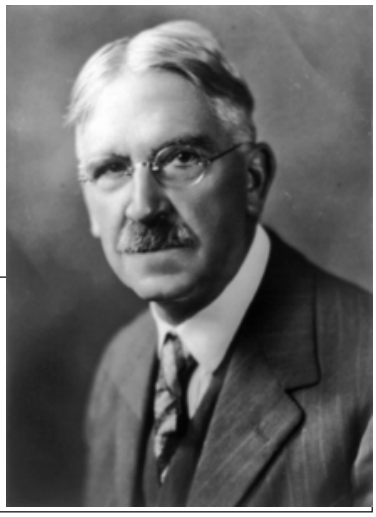
You can see, then, that "public," the "public sphere," and "public discourse" involve many members who may vary considerably from each other but who come together to discuss their shared concerns.

4. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

Growing Concerns About the State of Our Public Communication

When we look at the current state of our public discourse, we see we've developed bad habits. Scholars who have voiced concerns about our communication may help us understand what, precisely, is wrong with the way we talk to each other.

1927: The efforts to diagnose and correct our public discourse might be traced back to American philosopher and education advocate John Dewey and his book *The Public and Its Problems*. Dewey contended that more and better communication is necessary to improve the public and, hence, democracy.



John Dewey via Picryl, Public Domain.

> "The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of methods of debate, discussion, and persuasion. That is the problem of the public."[5]

1998: In the twentieth century, political theorist Benjamin Barber pointed to broadcast media as symbolic of more modern problems with public discourse in his book *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*.

> "Talk radio is loudly public without being in the least civil, though it is seductively entertaining. Unfortunately, its divisive rant is a perfect model of everything that civility is not: people talking without listening, confirming dogmas, not questioning them, convicting rather than convincing adversaries."[6]

2021: A twenty-first-century characterization of the problems of public discourse was offered by political theorist Maxime Lepoutre in their book *Democratic Speech in Divided Times*.

> "We find a public sphere saturated with emotional appeals, including intensely negative emotions such as rage and resentment. Instead of mutual respect, public speakers routinely use their airtime to ridicule, demean, or vilify others. And where sincerity should reign, campaigns of misinformation instead proliferate unimpeded."[7]

5. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Project Gutenberg, 2023), 208, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/71000/71000-h/71000-h.htm.
6. Benjamin R. Barber, *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 115.
7. Maxime Lepoutre, *Democratic Speech in Divided Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2.

How would you characterize US public discourse today? Would you agree that when you hear public figures talk about hot topics, you mostly hear ranting, emotional accusations, and ridicule? In this book, we label such talk "unproductive discourse." We turn next to the central features of unproductive discourse that make it so problematic.

Qualities of Unproductive Discourse

Unproductive discourse is purposefully sensational public communication designed to promote division and to misrepresent the complexities of public issues. It features poor arguments that appeal to the least common denominator, name-calling that substitutes for nuanced analysis, and an emphasis on points of division rather than points of agreement. In fact, when we look across multiple examples, several such qualities repeatedly appear. These qualities include, but are not restricted to, the following: division, dichotomous thinking, combativeness, certainty, lack of listening, winning, distrust, hierarchical communication, dogmatism, and misinformation.[8] We consider each quality in box 2.1.

Box 2.1 Qualities of Unproductive Discourse

8. Conor Murray, "How Drag Queens Became a Right-Wing Target—from Alex Jones to Tucker Carlson—with These States Trying to Ban Story Hours and Shows," *Forbes*, February 3, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2023/02/03/how-drag-queens-became-a-right-wing-target-from-alex-jones-to-tucker-carlsonwith-these-states-trying-to-ban-story-hours-and-shows/, archived at https://perma.cc/5AZL-HHC2?type=standard.

Division	Highlights and accentuates differences among participants and their positions.	"You aren't from around here." "They just weren't raised like us."
Dichotomous thinking	Features debate between two (and only two) diametrically opposed and extreme positions instead of exploring additional perspectives or middle ground.	"Which side are you on?" "My idea will help women, and yours will hurt them."
Combativeness	Utilizes aggressive behavior toward other participants and alternative perspectives, such as repeated interrupting, emotionally charged labels and terms, yelling, and personal attacks. Lacks empathy toward other participants and views dissenting opinions as the opposition to be defeated.	"I can't listen to your stupid ideas anymore." "Why should we listen to a college dropout?"
Certainty	Exhibits sureness about a position without recognizing its weaknesses or drawbacks. Lacks self-reflexivity or room for doubt.	"You're wrong." "My idea will benefit everyone."
Lack of listening	Only listens to an alternative perspective to find weaknesses in it. Uses questions as veiled arguments or as attempts to humiliate other participants. Instead of truly considering the fellow participants, remarks seem directed at a third-party judge, moderator, or camera audience.	"Isn't it true that…?" "Can you even believe this guy?"
Winning	Fixates on getting one's way, rather than learning or the common good, as the goal. At its worst, this form of communication uses any means necessary to win, such as providing false or misleading illusions, quoting statements out of context, and misstating or exaggerating the facts. Privileges emotion over logic and proof.	"Your proposal will bankrupt *every* small family business." "If you get your way, our country will be ruined."
Distrust	Suspects other participants' motives or goals. Presumes they have a hidden agenda and thus lacks faith in the honesty or authenticity of what they say.	"Who are you really working for?" "Are you doing this for the spotlight?"

Hierarchical communication	Discourages communication among invested community members and instead encourages communication from the "top" decision-makers (officials, leaders, spokespersons, or experts) down, which subjugates everyday individuals' preferences or insights.	"Let's listen to the mayor, who actually knows what she's talking about." "Are you just going from experience, or do you actually have a degree on this topic?"
Dogmatism	Features familiar and even predictable talking points as well as entrenched, predetermined positions.	"Before I answer that, I'd like to make two points." "As I've said before…"
Misinformation	Unintentionally propagates inaccurate or false claims that lack sufficient or valid evidence and/or identifiable and credible sources.	"Everybody knows that…" "An insider told me…"

Box 2.2 Unproductive Discourse in Practice



Image by Multnomah County Library via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND

An example of problematic public dialogue was found in debates and legislation over drag shows. Although drag and drag performances have a long history, concerns over children's exposure to them became prominently voiced in the US after 2017. A nonprofit organization called Drag Story Hour began organizing events where drag queens read books to children. While the goal was to promote literacy, inclusivity, and diversity, some people feared possible negative effects.

Instead of engaging in productive discussions about the reading hours, however, the disagreement escalated into unsubstantiated accusations and threats. Vocal opponents featured **misinformation, distrust, combativeness, and certainty** in their critiques.

- According to a *Forbes* article, conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, for instance, falsely accused drag queens of "having their way" with kids during story hours.

- Fox News personality Tucker Carlson told his audience that story hours are intended to "indoctrinate and sexualize children."
- Baseless claims of drag queens "grooming" children spread on social media outlets like TikTok. Several states introduced, and some passed, legislation banning or criminalizing drag shows where children might be present, with some labeling the shows as "obscene" content.[9]

In response, drag queens and supporters utilized **dichotomous thinking, division, misinformation**, and **combativeness** in their self-defense.

- In late 2024, popular drag queen performer Jinx Monsoon, for example, stated that conservatives are "literally perpetuating lies." She added, "Their whole agenda right now, it's just all such blatant hypocrisy. Everything they accuse us of, there's no data that supports it, and then they get caught doing the thing that they say queer people are doing."
- In the same video, drag performer BenDeLaCreme argued, "Drag is not to be feared. Drag is about love, until you cross us. Then you better fear us, because we are strong. So back down or watch out, is how I feel about it."[10]
- In March 2023, two drag supporters poked fun at conservative leaders through a comedic but combative Instagram account called "RuPublicans" that promoted misinformation by featuring AI-created images of GOP leaders in drag.[11]
- Defense of drag became more intimidating at a 2022 drag brunch in Texas, where supporters guarded the venue against protesters by dressing largely in black and holding AR–15 style weapons.[12]



BenDeLaCreme All Stars by hinnk via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

9. Ricky Cornish, host, *Pride Today*, "Jinx Monsoon & BenDeLaCreme Defend Drag Queens Against Republicans," posted October 17, 2023, by Advocate Channel, YouTube, http://youtube.com/watch?v=TgcoBvbAidw.
10. Jay Valle, "Meet the 'RuPublicans': GOP Lawmakers Are Reimagined as AI-Generated Drag Queens," *NBC News*, April 12, 2023, https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-pop-culture/meet-rupublicans-gop-lawmakers-are-reimagined-ai-generated-drag-queens-rcna79136.
11. Gino Spocchia, "Conservatives Furious as Armed Men Turn Up to Protect Drag Performers at Texas Brunch Event," *Independent*, August 30, 2024, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/dallas-drag-brunch-texas-

Rather than productively discuss the potential benefits of, and concerns about, Drag Story Hour, several communicators used an array of unproductive discourse qualities. Consequently, they reduced the issue to two incompatible sides, depicted each other as opponents to be defeated, and provided little education about the issues of literacy, diversity, safety, and modeling.

Impacts of Unproductive Discourse

Unproductive discourse offers some benefits. It often captures our attention and entertains us. Catchy one-liners that require little knowledge can be exciting and fun to watch. Such rhetoric tends to evoke strong emotions from listeners, stirring people to care about issues they might otherwise ignore. It can also bring a sense of clarity to an issue by contrasting two sides.



Created by Rockicon from Noun Project

However, the harmful outcomes produced by unproductive discourse overwhelm any advantages. Unproductive discourse typically lives up to its name in that it is, well, unproductive. It produces little new or reliable information, nor real understanding, as to why the participants or sides fundamentally disagree. Instead, it can *mis*educate us, since it overly simplifies complex issues and participants, overlooks additional perspectives, and spreads false information.

Finally, unproductive discourse discourages us from becoming civically engaged because it emphasizes our divisions and turns us into spectators rather than participants. We are reduced to sitting on the sidelines and cheering or booing the participants. It's not surprising that many of us opt out of the spectacle altogether, developing cynical attitudes about politics and civic affairs.

So what needs to change? The next section identifies recurrent obstacles to productive discourse that need to be addressed.

Obstacles to Productive Communication

There was never a golden era of respectful public discourse to which we hope to return. But there are at least five aspects of the situation today that exacerbate the problems: social media, the news media, the strategic use of incivility and disinformation, the marketing of ideas, and our own reluctant participation in democratic processes.

protest-b2155624.html, archived at https://perma.cc/J3GN-JZPN.

12. We derived these qualities in part by considering the inverse or opposite of the qualities of "civil talk" proposed by Benjamin Barber in *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998). We return to Barber's qualities of civil talk in the next chapter.

Social Media

Have you ever scrolled through social media and read a post that made you angry? Did you reach out to the person who posted it to thoughtfully discuss the topic? Or did you leave an angry comment or emoji, or even unfriend the person, and then move on to the next post? If you chose the latter, you're not fully to blame.



Image by Pixelkult via Pixabay, *Pixabay license*.

Social media platforms encourage users to post things that will garner attention and emotional reactions. For public issues, that often means provocative or controversial claims that stir viewers' emotions but rarely expand their understanding. Pair that posting incentive with communication restrictions (such as the number of characters allowed or typical post lengths), and you can see why social media are not designed to facilitate thoughtful discussions. Instead, they encourage, at worst, angry invective or, at best, an entertaining escape or mindless scrolling.

> Artist and writer Jenny Odell claims, "The platforms that we use to communicate with each other do not encourage listening. Instead they reward shouting and oversimple reaction: of having a 'take' after having read a single headline."[13]

Even people who refrain from making or commenting on posts are affected by the social media they consume. Algorithms that influence which posts we see tend to result in streams that largely reflect and reinforce our beliefs[14] and even steer us toward posts that feature anger and animosity.[15] Together, the types of posts we are exposed to and the content they highlight tend to sow oversimplification and emotional reactions and discourage curiosity, empathy, or listening.

News Media

Similar to social media, some news media frame, cover, and discuss issues in ways that emphasize conflict and talking points rather than depth and nuance. Cable news programs (e.g., FOX, CNN), in particular, frequently feature verbal fighting between people with differing views. Such news shows attract viewers, but they often make issues appear too immense or too unattractive for viewers to meaningfully engage.

13. Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2019), 23.
14. Brendan Nyhan et al., "Like-Minded Sources on Facebook Are Prevalent but Not Polarizing," *Nature* 620 (2023): 137–144, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06297-w.
15. Smitha Mill et al., "Engagement, User Satisfaction, and the Amplification of Divisive Content on Social Media," *arXiv*, December 22, 2023, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2305.16941.

News media shows on cable television tend to validate and valorize guests who stoke controversy and disagreement.

Incivility and Disinformation as Strategies

Two additional related, and more disheartening, obstacles are when public actors purposefully use ethically suspect tactics to impede meaningful discussions. One such tactic is what professor of public policy Susan Herbst calls "incivility as strategy."[16] Most of us were probably taught growing up to avoid **incivility**, or offensive and rude behavior. Some public figures, however, *purposefully* choose incivility to gain attention and to silence detractors. Comments from radio and television personalities come to mind as a broad example, or attending a community forum and yelling to prevent a speaker from being heard.

The other tactic is the spread of disinformation. Misinformation is the *un*intentional spread of inaccurate or false claims that lack sufficient or valid evidence and/or identifiable and credible sources. It is listed as a quality of unproductive discourse because it hurts deliberation when speakers fail to double-check the validity of their information before passing it on. Even more harmful, however, is **disinformation**, which refers to the *deliberate* attempt to spread wrong information to mislead listeners. Like incivility, some public actors use disinformation strategically to attract support for their ideas or followers for their campaigns.

Box 2.3 Misinformation and Disinformation in COVID-19 Rhetoric

We can find examples of misinformation and disinformation in some of the public discourse around the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, President Donald Trump **downplayed** the virus's threat and even promoted drinking disinfectant to combat it despite **no supporting evidence**. He and others in the White House also suggested, **without evidence**, that the virus was released by a lab in Wuhan, China.[17] In the summer of 2020, the US military capitalized on this false belief through a disinformation social media campaign that targeted the Philippines. To weaken China's influence there, the military created **false accounts** that mimicked Filipinos and propagated **lies** about the virus and the vaccine under a slogan (in the language of Tagalog) that declared "China is the virus."[18]

16. Susan Herbst, "Change Through Debate," *Inside HigherEd*, October 4, 2009, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20250829140151/https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/10/05/change-through-debate.
17. Benjamin Bell and Fergal Gallagher, "Who Is Spreading COVID-19 Misinformation and Why," *ABC News*, May 26, 2020, https://abcnews.go.com/US/spreading-covid-19-misinformation/story?id=70615995, archived at https://perma.cc/U2LT-AFQ5.
18. Chris Bing and Joel Schectman, "Pentagon Ran Secret Anti-Vax Campaign to Undermine China During Pandemic," *Reuters*, June 14, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-covid-propaganda/.

When politicians and powerful actors purposefully impede discussion and decision-making, we need different approaches to public discourse.

Marketing Ideas Rather Than Working Toward Compromise

The political arena has, in many ways, become more like corporate **marketing**, or the deliberate promoting and selling of products or services to consumers. Political strategists package politicians (especially candidates) and their ideas for an American consumer market. We watch thirty-second television commercials that advertise their family lives and values (with which almost no one disagrees), look at their official websites (which are nearly always clad in patriotic colors), and read memorable posts designed for social media. Civic engagement becomes reduced to simply choosing which candidate to "buy" with your vote—and later to choose which prepackaged policy to support. In the process, the public welfare becomes fragmented into demographic and interest groups, and individuals are reduced to passive consumers.

Reluctant Participation in Democratic Processes

Finally, we have ourselves to blame. How often do you research current issues? Contact your governmental representatives? Hold lively and respectful discussions with friends and family about controversial topics?

As members of a democracy, we too often do the following:

- Sit back and watch as decisions are made for us.
- Believe we are too busy to keep up with the issues or get involved.
- Defer to experts and authorities, wrongly assuming their powerful positions or knowledge will somehow enable them to promote the public welfare better than the public itself.
- Copy some of the more destructive discourse practices we see so frequently. We think that participating in a democracy means adopting a boorish persona and using the qualities of unproductive discourse.

Fortunately, there are ways to speak much more productively to bring about the change we wish to see in our institutions and communities. To improve our public discourse, many scholars and public thinkers have offered solutions to increase the quality of our public exchanges, and we outline these in the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter outlined the contemporary state of our public discourse. It explored the qualities of unproductive discourse, and it encouraged you to also think about a rhetoric's broader impacts on the public sphere when evaluating communication. In this chapter, you learned the following:

- Public discourse today is largely problematic. It frequently features qualities we associate with unproductive discourse, partly due to the obstacles that prevent speakers from engaging in more productive forms of communication.
- Unproductive public discourse is characterized by the following features: division, dichotomous thinking, combativeness, certainty, lack of listening, winning, distrust, hierarchical communication, dogmatism, and misinformation.
- Obstacles to productive discourse abound. They include social media, the news media, the strategies of incivility and disinformation, the treatment of the political arena like a marketing campaign, and the inertia or disillusionment of many everyday people who choose not to become involved and change our public conversations.

Key Terms

certainty
combativeness
dichotomous thinking
disinformation
distrust
division
dogmatism
hierarchical communication
incivility
lack of listening
marketing
misinformation
public
public discourse
public sphere
unproductive discourse
winning

Review Questions

1. What is the public sphere, and how is it related to public discourse?

2. What are the qualities of unproductive discourse?
3. What are some obstacles to productive discourse?

Discussion Questions

1. Who are examples of public figures who practice unproductive discourse?
2. Do you agree that in our contemporary culture we mostly hear and use unproductive discourse? Why do you think this is?
3. Find an example of unproductive discourse. Which qualities do the participants exhibit? How so?

3. Changing Our Public Communication Toward Productive Discourse

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

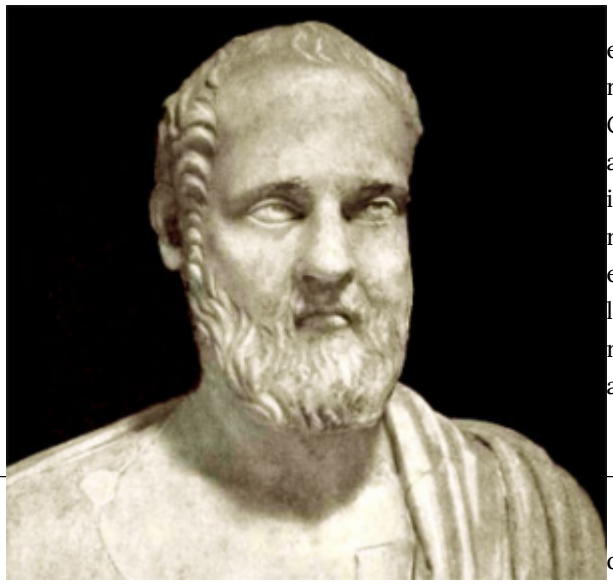
- Employ the qualities of productive discourse.
- Assess the difficulty of employing productive discourse.
- Explain the benefits of productive discourse.

How do you, as a democratic participant, improve communication practices? How can you speak in ways that build relationships and contribute to problem-solving rather than polarization? In this chapter, we consider possible solutions. We first rethink public discourse and then introduce specific qualities of productive discourse. We end by considering the difficulties and benefits of productive discourse.

Rethinking Public Discourse

To begin with, we can mentally shift away from equating public discourse with advancing one's self-interest and defeating oppositional views. We can instead think of public discourse as respectful explorations of disagreement. Such explorations are designed *for* understanding differing opinions, recognizing our shared identity as a community, and making wise judgments about what is best for the community as a whole.

Box 3.1 Public Discourse as Respectful Exchange



Isocrates *by Student Vives TVW via Wikimedia Commons,* CC BY-SA.

Approaching public discourse as respectful exchange has deep classical roots. Professor of rhetoric Takis Poulakos explains that the ancient Greek teacher of rhetoric Isocrates worked to "dis-associate rhetoric from its reputation as a tool for individual self-advancement and to associate rhetoric instead with social interactions and civil exchanges among human beings."[1] That means we, like Isocrates, can choose how to approach and use rhetoric: for selfish gain or thoughtful exchanges about community issues.

In chapter 1, we explained that rhetoric and democracy developed together in ancient Greece precisely because democracy *needs* rhetoric to function effectively. We encourage you to think of public discourse as the central tool for facilitating social interactions and common interest rather than self-advancement. Such an approach incentivizes our use of specific productive discourse. We turn next to the qualities that distinguish this type of rhetoric.

Qualities of Productive Discourse

Political theorist Benjamin R. Barber advances "Nine Characteristics of Civility" to encourage public behaviors



Benjamin R Barber by Erich Habich via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

1. Takis Poulakos, *Speaking for the Polis: Isocrates' Rhetorical Education* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 1, 5.

that will improve democracy.[2] We borrow heavily from his characteristics to outline what we call "productive discourse."

Productive discourse is public communication that is responsible to one's community and manages differences constructively. It requires active democratic participation through talking *and* listening. It reflects sound reasoning. It pursues multilateral problem-solving, and it relies on ethical standards of communication and interaction.

Drawing on Barber's work, we can identify specific qualities at the core of productive discourse: commonality, deliberation, inclusiveness, provisionality, listening, learning, lateral communication, imagination, and empowerment. To these we add two additional qualities: trust and reliable information. In box 3.2, we briefly paraphrase each of Barber's qualities of "civil talk"—what we call productive discourse—and then describe our additional qualities.

Box 3.2 Qualities of Productive Discourse

From Benjamin R. Barber[3]

2. Benjamin R. Barber, *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 114–23.
3. Barber, *A Place for Us*, 114–23.

Deliberation	Critically engages arguments and positions rather than the people themselves. Seeks and can accept critique. It can consider multiple solutions rather than a singular focus.	"That's an interesting point, but I disagree for these reasons." "I've heard that critique before, and it's fair."
Inclusiveness	Builds discussions that are multivocal rather than two-sided. It seeks dissenting voices and is aware of the many ways voices are silenced in communities and in conversation. It acknowledges variety within a given opinion or position and offers empathy to other participants.	"My experiences may not be true for others in my position." "That's my take, but I'm curious to hear from Geoff."
Provisionality	Recognizes that conclusions are never final because ideas, insights, and possibilities will evolve within the process of public discussion. Remains open to further consideration, reflection, and new ideas.	"I had not thought about that before." "...but I could be wrong."
Listening	Attempts to hear and understand alternative perspectives and to incorporate those perspectives into the whole. Participants are reluctant to interrupt each other, and they reference and directly respond to each other's points—which helps conversation build momentum.	"It sounds like you're saying...Did I get that right?" "I agree with that last point you made, but I see it a little differently."
Learning	Seeks to better understand the issues, the multiple perspectives, and the people involved. Participants may change their minds and are willing to make accommodations based on what they hear and learn.	"That's interesting. Tell me more." "Having heard you say that, I now realize..."
Lateral communication	Originates and evolves among members of the public who talk to each other in spontaneous, unorchestrated settings. As opposed to preferring conversation from leaders and experts, this form of communication circulates among community members and is multidirectional rather than one way.	"Let's ask a variety of residents what they view as pressing issues in our town." "I'm curious how the doctors' findings on addiction compare with your experience in recovery."
Imagination	Offers creative ways of approaching and rethinking the issues at hand. Discourse is marked by impromptu moments, breakthroughs, and/or fresh ideas as opposed to predictable talking points.	"Hearing you say that just gave me an idea." "What if we asked the question differently?"

Empowerment	Enables people to do something positive and effective for the community. Productive discourse is not an end in itself. Its results are collaboration, problem-solving, and the achievement of common goals.	"If this concerns you, you can…" "Join us afterward for a planning meeting."

Our additions

Trust	Assumes general goodwill on the part of participants rather than listening to them with suspicion, assuming they are speaking from a hidden agenda. When we exhibit trust toward others, we are more likely to truly listen to them, to see things we have in common, and to willingly collaborate with them to reach shared goals.	"That's a hard but good question." "I didn't realize you thought that too!"
Reliable information	Makes good-faith efforts to provide well-supported claims. Avoids exaggerating or presenting facts out of context in ways that misconstrue their meaning. Backs claims with evidence and shares sources so listeners can evaluate their credibility.	"This finding holds for small towns but not for larger cities." "*The Wall Street Journal* reported on Friday that…"

Difficulties of Productive Discourse

Have you ever angered someone because you said the wrong thing or expressed a different opinion? Did you wish they would instead try to understand you and show you some grace and compassion? That's what we must be willing to give each other, especially when we strongly disagree. Unfortunately, few models of such patience and charity exist in the media or our everyday lives. Consequently, while the qualities of productive discourse are easy to list, they can be harder to use.

In addition to curiosity and graciousness, speaking productively also requires time and attention. Compared to unproductive discourse, it is not very exciting. However, if you are willing to devote the time and energy required to learn these skills, then you will discover their numerous benefits.

Benefits of Productive Discourse

Productive discourse benefits civic engagement in at least three ways: It enriches our understanding of complex issues, it unites communities, and it shifts attention to agreeable policies.

To again state the obvious, productive discourse is productive! It produces a richer *education* about the important issues that affect our lives. You can recognize their complexity and uncertainty and the multiple options available. Such understanding means you can make better, more informed decisions about these pressing issues.

When productive discourse is used, you are more likely to actively address public issues and improve your community rather than watch other people fight it out or make policies for you.

In addition, productive discourse produces a more *united community*. You are likely to leave an exchange with a more sympathetic understanding of where someone else is coming from and with a stronger sense of what we hold in common.

Finally, productive discourse moves conversations beyond entrenched positions toward *mutually agreeable policies*. Such outcomes are more likely to motivate you to get involved. Because of its numerous positive outcomes, we consider productive discourse a much more responsible and promising form of communication than unproductive discourse.

Box 3.3 Productive Discourse In Practice

The murder of George Floyd, a Black man, on May 25, 2020, by white Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin helped spark national conversations over racism, policing, and police reform. Just five months later, in November 2020, Black social media personality Emmanuel Acho posted the video "A Conversation with Police" to his popular YouTube series "Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man."[4] In the video, Acho talked with four white male members of the Petaluma (California) Police Department about racism and policing. Their conversation illustrated several qualities of productive discourse even as they discussed contentious topics.

The conversation featured **inclusiveness** by involving a range of officers. While Acho was the only Black person visibly present, the officers themselves represented an array of positions and years of experience—differences Acho made clear when introducing and asking questions to each officer and that officers occasionally referenced (e.g., "I've been doing this for thirteen years…"). Acho even invited an officer in the live audience to provide his perspective as a traffic officer. By including this range, the conversation revealed a variety of perspectives among the officers and thus avoided dichotomous thinking: Black people versus "the police." Instead, "the police" became humanized and differentiated across multiple positions, experiences, and viewpoints.

The conversation also displayed **inclusiveness** by becoming multidirectional. Acho primarily asked the officers questions, but the officers occasionally asked Acho questions as well. For instance, after Officer Ryan McGreevy answered Acho's question about whether there is "enough accountability in the police force

4. Emmanuel Acho, host, *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*, episode 9, "A Conversation with the Police," premiered November 1, 2020, YouTube, https://youtube.com/watch?v=pM-HpZQWKT4, archived at https://perma.cc/N8BY-D3HR.

when mistakes happen," another officer immediately asked Acho, "What does justice look like to you in these situations?" By enabling all participants to ask questions as desired, the conversation was shaped by more than one person or perspective. It also required all participants to potentially be on the "hot seat" and answer questions, not just ask them. Consequently, the discussion included a greater number of topics, perspectives, and experiences than a strict interview format would have allowed.

In addition, all the participants clearly **listened** to each other. They appeared to make eye contact and nodded their heads as others spoke. No one cut anyone off, and follow-up comments or questions recognized what was previously said. In one instance, retired Officer John Antonio, for example, asked Acho if Black officers make him as nervous as do white officers. As Acho explained why not, Antonio verified he was hearing Acho correctly. Antonio asked if Acho's connection with Black people "makes you relax a little bit more or…" That check-in allowed Acho to clarify the distinction he was making so Antonio and all viewers could better understand his perspective.

Finally, several participants displayed **provisionality** rather than certainty in their positions. For example, traffic officer Nick (no last name provided) explained that his officers approach every person at a traffic stop the same way rather than interact differently with Black people (in recognition that the experience can be very different for them than for white people). But he added, "Maybe we should [approach them differently]." Later in the video, when Officer Greely explained why "defunding the police"—such as by allowing mental health workers, rather than police officers, to respond to mental health crisis calls—does not work when a person is wielding a knife, Acho admitted, "I had not heard it like that before." Such comments displayed humility and open-mindedness as discussants recognized the merits of each other's points and the limitations of their own understanding. Such provisionality lent to a productive discussion because participants (and, likely, viewers) better understood and respected each other.

Summary

This chapter identified the qualities of productive discourse as well as their numerous benefits for civic engagement. Specifically, in this chapter you learned the following:

- Productive discourse is characterized by commonality, deliberation, inclusiveness, provisionality, listening, learning, lateral communication, imagination, empowerment, trust, and reliable information.
- Models of productive discourse are sparse because such communication requires graciousness, time, and attention, and it is not as exciting to watch as unproductive discourse.
- When utilized, productive discourse enriches our education about important issues, unites us as community members, and shifts our conversations from entrenched positions to mutually agreeable policies.

Key Terms

deliberation
empowerment
imagination
inclusiveness
lateral communication
learning
listening
productive discourse
provisionality
reliable information
trust

Review Questions

1. What are the qualities of productive discourse?
2. Why is productive discourse difficult to achieve?
3. What are three benefits of productive discourse?

Discussion Questions

1. Who are examples of public figures who practice productive discourse?
2. Is productive discourse an unrealistic expectation? Can you become a civic or political leader using productive discourse? What might you gain or lose?
3. Find an example of productive discourse. What specific qualities do the participants display? How so?

4. Productive Discourse Is Responsible, Not Necessarily Polite

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Distinguish productive discourse through its responsibility to the audience and community for the accuracy and impact of claims rather than through its politeness or civility.
- Evaluate whether a public discourse produces a more, or less, inclusive and equitable public sphere.
- Identify policing discourse that determines preferred or appropriate ways of talking together when deliberating public issues.
- Recognize reasons why democratic participants may use rude, angry, or uncivil rhetoric.

In the previous two chapters, we explored qualities that influence whether communication functions productively or unproductively. In chapter 3, we defined productive discourse as public communication that is responsible to one's community and manages differences constructively. In contrast, we described unproductive discourse in chapter 2 as purposefully sensational public communication designed to promote division and to misrepresent the complexities of public issues.

If we ended our explorations there, you might assume that productive and unproductive discourses are easily distinguishable, with clear-cut differences. However, actual public discourse is often more muddled with a mixture of qualities. Focusing only on discursive qualities—getting caught up in checklists—can lead to superficial conclusions and cause us to overlook what a rhetorical exchange is actually producing.

In this chapter, then, we explore cases where seemingly "civil" or polite discourse functions *un*productively as well as when apparently "uncivil" or rude discourse functions productively. We will also consider why some rhetors opt for uncivil communication. We begin, however, by more closely scrutinizing what we mean by productive discourse.

Responsibility, Not Necessarily Politeness

If you read through the list of qualities we associate with productive discourse in chapter 3 uncritically or too quickly, you might mistakenly conclude we emphasize speaking "politely" or what some call **civil speech**: communication that maintains decorum by being respectful, dispassionate, and polite. In other words, don't yell, avoid interrupting others, and talk calmly through disagreements.

However, such an equation is misguided. Borrowing from political theorist Benjamin R. Barber, our focus on

productive discourse "is not about politeness; it is about *responsibility*."[1] Speakers must be responsible to their audience and community for the accuracy and impact of their claims. That means productive discourse should ultimately produce something greater than a calm or friendly exchange; it should help build a more inclusive and equitable public sphere.

> Productive discourse should help build a more inclusive and equitable public sphere.

Responsible public discourse, then, is public communication that draws on the qualities of productive discourse to produce a more inclusive and equitable public sphere. It may or may not be civil. Indeed, it may appear as **uncivil speech**—rhetoric that violates decorum because it is disrespectful, angry, and/or impolite.

So how can we determine when civil discourse operates unproductively and when uncivil discourse actually functions productively? Clues may be found by answering the following questions:

- Does the discourse attempt to *spark or subdue discussion* about an overlooked issue and ongoing societal problem?
- Does the rhetoric strive to *include or exclude* historically marginalized members of the public in democratic participation?
- Does this discourse attempt to *preserve or question the power* of historically dominant members of the public?

All together, these questions suggest that responsible public discourse encourages public discussion of overlooked or unresolved issues as it draws the voices, experiences, and knowledge of historically marginalized people into democratic discussions and decision-making. It also questions the social, cultural, and economic power of historically dominant people rather than unreflectively granting their perspectives authority.

Notice the questions posed here are worded as binary distinctions for clarity, but a public discourse might not be as clear-cut. In that case, you can ask if it *leans* more in one direction than another to make your judgment. The point is to avoid relying solely or superficially on the qualities listed in chapters 2 and 3 to determine productive and unproductive discourse. Instead, *also* answer these questions to help distinguish the two types of rhetorics. Let's apply these questions to two different cases as examples.

1. Benjamin R. Barber, *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 122 (emphasis added).

Civil Discourse That Functions *Un*productively



Steven Crowder by Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

Some forms of public discourse may appear civil or use some qualities of productive discourse but actually function unproductively. We can look, for example, at "Change My Mind" videos by social media personality Steven Crowder.[2] In these YouTube videos that were popular in the early 2020s, Crowder sits at a table with a poster that makes a provocative and conservative-leaning claim, like "There Are Only 2 Genders," "Common Sense Gun Control Is Nonsense," and "Black Lives Matters Is a Terrorist Organization." He usually recorded his conversation at a college campus with willing nearby participants.

In most of these videos, Crowder (and often his conversational partners as well) talks politely in ways that may seem to abide by several qualities of productive communication. He *deliberates* by engaging arguments and positions. He *listens*; he rarely interrupts the other person and does not typically raise his voice. He also appears to seek to *learn* what the other person thinks as he asks follow-up questions to clarify their position.

However, when we pay closer attention, we discover that Crowder's polite discourse does not qualify as productive because his statements borrow unproductive qualities *and* contribute to a more exclusive and inequitable public sphere.

Let's explore one example—"There Are Only 2 Genders"—by answering the questions posed earlier.

1. **Question:** Does the discourse attempt to *spark or subdue discussion* about an overlooked and ongoing societal problem?

Answer: Crowder's question starts conversation on the important public issue of gender. He says he wants "real conversation" and does "not set up [topics] to be a debate." Yet Crowder's starting point for discussion is a declared resolution: "There Are Only 2 Genders." This resolution was undoubtedly prompted by a national conversation *that was already occurring* about people who identify as transgender and nonbinary. Crowder's resolution and the conversations it started did not highlight an overlooked issue. Rather, they *reacted to* the attention alternative genders were receiving. The resolution suggested an attempt to reverse or subdue that attention.

Furthermore, Crowder refers to the resolution as reflecting "my point of view" and spends every conversation defending it. He thus frames the topic as consisting of only two incompatible positions: for and against the resolution (*dichotomous thinking*).

During conversations, Crowder strives to prove the superiority of his position (*winning*). For example, he continually returns to four points to defend the presence of only two genders: that the gender theory that distinguishes sex and gender is "modern," that legal documents historically used gender and sex interchangeably, that we must know the number of genders possible, and that intersexuality is an anomaly. Rather than attempt to explore more broadly and learn, he restricts conversation to these few, repeated points (*dogmatism*). His devotion to the resolution essentially shuts down, or *subdues*, actual deliberation of the topic.

2. Steven Crowder, *Change My Mind*, YouTube playlist, accessed July 4, 2024, https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3e1orPYt_4ZHGjuivZFsyJ81RL7j7_E1.

2. **Question:** Does the rhetoric strive to *include or exclude* historically marginalized members of the public in democratic participation?

Answer: Though Crowder talks to marginalized members of the public (including a nonbinary person and a Black man), his resolutions typically seek to *exclude* them. If successful, for instance, arguing there are only two genders excludes the existence of transgender and nonbinary people.

Many of his recurrent debate tactics also unfairly exclude alternative perspectives and arguments. Rather than truly listen, he frequently depicts the other person's views as leading to an inevitable conclusion—one that is very hard for them to defend. For example, he tells the first person he talks to (Thomas) that Thomas must name how many genders exist for his argument (that sex and gender are different) to have credibility "because we as a society have to know this." Those who perceive gender as a spectrum cannot possibly identify the number of genders possible, since the concept of a spectrum eschews such simple categories.

Crowder also occasionally focuses attention on the other person's character or affect rather than the issue by labeling the other person's reactions (*combativeness*). For example, he says to the second person (Madison), "You're getting very heated," "You've been set up here from the get-go for it [what I say] to be offensive," and "You've been very privileged in speaking over me." Such comments shift attention from Madison's arguments to their manner of speaking, implying their form of speech does not meet standards and should be stopped.

3. **Question:** Does this discourse attempt to *preserve or question the power* of historically dominant members of the public?

Answer: Crowder's defense of two genders *preserves power* ascribed to historically dominant people: cisgender people who subscribe to a gender binary. It weakens attempts by marginalized community members (like transgender and nonbinary people) to claim power and legitimacy.

In fact, Crowder uses prepared knowledge in these conversations to preserve power. He goes into discussions knowing the topic and having prepared research. He continually refers, for instance, to gender theory being "modern" by starting with Simone de Beauvoir in 1948 and then being developed by John Money and Judith Butler. Those speaking with him, however, spontaneously decide to talk about the topic. They demonstrate varying degrees of knowledge or ability to speak eloquently on the spot, which makes some of them come across as unintelligent. Thus, Crowder strategically places himself in sites where his prepared knowledge becomes a source of power over conversational volunteers. He could instead give them a chance to ruminate or do their own research before conversing about the topic.

Together, the impacts of Crowder's conversations are irresponsible and restrict the public sphere. He produces more entertainment than education as he seeks to prove the superiority of his beliefs and devalue opposing viewpoints. Those watching in person or online may be *less* likely to participate in public discourse because they fear being similarly combated or even humiliated. Thus, just because public discourse appears polite or "civil" does not mean it meets the criteria of productive discourse.

Uncivil Discourse That Functions *Pro*ductively

On the flip side, some public discourse that appears uncivil by using qualities of unproductive discourse may actually function productively. We'll focus on one such form: social protest.

The activist social movement ACT UP formed in 1987 to advocate for more and faster governmental resources to fight (the then lethal disease) AIDS. Short for the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, ACT UP sought to draw attention to the over fifteen thousand people—mostly gay men—who had contracted and died from the disease since it was discovered in 1981.



Uganda Action by Kaytee Riek via Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA.

ACT UP members used a variety of communication tactics. Among their most memorable and notorious were evocative social protests, such as demonstrating outside—and inside—of Saint Patrick's Cathedral during mass ("Stop the Church"), holding a mock trial of leaders who impeded AIDS funding and research, spreading the ashes of AIDS victims on the White House lawn, and wrapping the house of North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms in a giant yellow condom.

Evaluating these protests with the list of unproductive qualities named in chapter 2 could prompt us to judge them negatively. The actions communicated distrust, lack of listening, combativeness, and a focus on winning. Let's pause, though, before we label the protests as uncivil and therefore unproductive. We need to explore how labeling rhetoric as uncivil can function as policing discourse.

Policing Discourse


Created by Juicy Fish from Noun Project

Policing discourse is the use of rhetoric to determine preferred or appropriate ways of talking together when deliberating public issues. It functions to control or "police" communication that violates what is considered preferred or appropriate.

The call for civil speech is a policing discourse. People in positions of power have historically used this discourse to critique protesters. Critics tell protesters that they are "too radical," "too angry," or "too rude." That is, protesters are charged with violating decorum by being disrespectful, angry, and/or impolite.

ACT UP was widely denigrated for adopting uncivil and thus inappropriate means of communication. In a 1989 opinion piece authored by *The New York Times* after the group's cathedral demonstration, the newspaper concluded, "Arguments over AIDS, homosexuality and abortion are not going to be advanced by hysterics, threats or the disruption of religious services. They might be advanced by serious argument that reflects conviction." The piece also claimed that ACT UP's cathedral demonstration "offers another reason to reject both the offensive protesters and their ideas."[3]

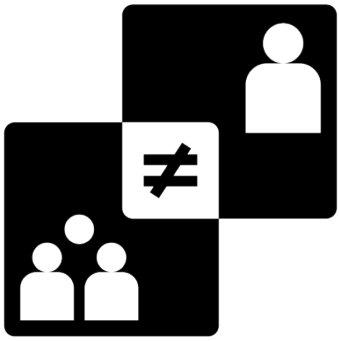
3. "The Storming of St. Pat's," *New York Times*, December 12, 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/12/opinion/the-storming-of-st-pat-s.html.

Notice the policing discourse at work by the *Times* in differentiating "serious argument" that's worth listening to from "hysterics" that are not. By definition, policing discourse attempts to exclude or censor communication it deems uncivil. The implied instruction or demand is that protesters would be heard if only they "spoke appropriately" or "followed the rules" by adopting more acceptable forms of advocacy and argumentation.

Box 4.1 The Public Sphere, Rhetoric, and Inequality

In a democracy, community members are supposed to gather as equals. Regardless of differences in age, gender, sexuality, occupation, income, education, and so on, ideally, all community members can join in talking through public issues together. Recall from chapter 2 that Jürgen Habermas conceived of the public sphere as the gathering of community members to discuss matters of common concern.

Reality often fails to meet that ideal, however. For instance, not all members of a democracy get to participate. Philosopher Nancy Fraser has argued that gatherings of citizens have historically been *created through the exclusion* of some members of society, such as the poor, women, and children.[4] In other words, certain men could talk with each other as equals *by contrasting themselves* with groups who were not even invited to speak or be heard in community conversations about public issues.



Created by Kamin Ginkaew from Noun Project

Exclusions from deliberating in the public sphere continue to exist, even if they are often subtler than the open discrimination of America's past. It is more difficult to participate in civic affairs, for instance, if you are living in poverty, less educated, undocumented, or a minor. Such exclusions might be simple accidents or weaknesses that have not yet been corrected, or they might be strategic.

Calls for civility may seem reasonable and, at times, well intentioned. However, policing discourse has historically been used primarily against social protesters who highlight injustice and call for change. By excluding their forms of communication, policing discourse shuts down their demands for equity and reform. Professors of communication Anna M. Young, Adria Battaglia, and Dana L. Cloud succinctly explain this tactic: "With the invocation of civility, calls for change are muted in favor of the status quo."[5] In other words, labeling protest speech as uncivil ostracizes these rhetorics that expose something uncomfortable or unjust in the public realm. We saw how critiques of ACT UP's protests as "hysterical" discounted their accusations and claims. As box 4.2 explains, scholars such as Audre Lorde and Maxime Lepoutre have warned that we should instead attend to uncivil, especially angry, speech for the insights and injustices it reveals.

4. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25 (1990): 56–80.
5. Anna M. Young, Adria Battaglia, and Dana L. Cloud, "(Un)Disciplining the Scholar Activist: Policing the Boundaries of Political Engagement," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96 (2010): 431.

Box 4.2 The Productivity of Angry Speech

To defend the productivity of some angry speech, the twentieth-century poet, professor, and activist Audre Lorde gave an address to the National Women's Studies Association Conference in 1981 that she titled "The Uses of Anger." Lorde noted that our culture has frequently branded public expressions of anger—particularly by women—as inappropriate.



Audre Lorde by Elsa Dorfman via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA,

Lorde challenged her audience to listen to the content behind anger. She told her audience we should "listen to the content of what is said [angrily] with at least as much intensity as we defend ourselves against the manner of saying." She warned, "When we turn from anger we turn from insight, saying we will accept only the designs already known, deadly and safely familiar."[6]

More recently, political theorist Maxime Lepoutre has similarly argued that "anger can and should play a key role in democratic public discourse." Lepoutre claimed that "Public expressions of anger have a distinctive ability to reveal injustices, and to promote understanding of injustices, when these may otherwise have gone unnoticed or been misunderstood." In "divided societies," they explain, "injustices suffered by some groups are often invisible to, or misunderstood by, others."[7] Thus, Lorde and Lepoutre suggest that some speech may be both angry *and* productive.

Uncivil Rhetoric That Functions Productively

Let's consider, then, how ACT UP's uncivil speech functioned productively by answering the three questions posed earlier:

1. **Question:** Does the discourse attempt to *spark or subdue discussion* about an overlooked issue and ongoing societal problem?

   Answer: ACT UP's protests sparked national discussions about AIDS at a time when the disease had killed tens of thousands of victims but was largely ignored in the broader public sphere. A major reason for silence was the disease's negative perception as a "gay plague" (since it largely affected gay men) at a time when homosexuality was still heavily taboo and even illegal in many US states. President Ronald Rea-

6. Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 131.
7. Maxime Lepoutre, *Democratic Speech in Divided Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 51, 59.

gan did not publicly recognize AIDS until 1985, after nearly six thousand people had died and the epidemic was raging. Congress was reluctant to fully fund research to cure it. The news media also were slow to seriously cover the epidemic. Though ACT UP's efforts drew criticism, they also attracted national attention to AIDS, its victims, and the need for funding and humane treatment.

2. **Question:** Does the rhetoric strive to *include or exclude* historically marginalized members of the public in democratic participation?

Answer: ACT UP consisted of queer people and their allies, who lacked easy access in the 1980s to traditional means of deliberation and advocacy due to their sexuality. Religious leaders condemned gay people as immoral. Even as late as 1993, the Reverend Billy Graham suggested that AIDS was God's punishment for gay people (though he later apologized).

When gay people did advocate publicly, their arguments and experiences were not necessarily taken seriously by political leaders. In 1982, when a journalist asked Reagan's press secretary, Larry Speakes, if the president had a reaction to the six hundred documented cases of AIDS, Speakes made light of the disease by joking that he didn't have AIDS while other media members laughed.

ACT UP's efforts, then, empowered queer people who were clearly marginalized from the public sphere by shifting the narrative from them as shameful sinners to advocates who deserved serious recognition and support.

3. **Question:** Does this discourse attempt to *preserve or question the power* of historically dominant members of the public?

Answer: ACT UP's communication directly challenged the social power of political and religious leaders who devalued and discredited the homosexual community. Their protests turned the tables by encouraging onlookers to question the morality, decency, and ethics of the very leaders who condemned gay people. The giant condom over Helms's house visually suggested *he* was an unsafe leader that the public needed to be protected against. The cathedral protest, mock trial, and dumping of ashes on the White House lawn all implied that political and religious leaders were responsible for allowing the epidemic to grow and kill. The protests characterized these leaders' accusations against homosexuals and silence about AIDS as unethical and unfair.

Consequently, while many of their protests qualified as uncivil, ACT UP's communication functioned productively, because it produced a more inclusive and equitable public sphere. It's telling that while ACT UP faced heavy criticism in its day, today it is widely seen as an incredibly successful and important social movement.

Why Use Uncivil Rhetoric?

You might still wonder, however, why do protesters ever adopt angry or rude (uncivil) rhetoric when they could instead choose to communicate more respectfully and politely (civilly)? Scholars have provided several answers: Protesters typically lack easy access to the public sphere, uncivil protest demands attention that might otherwise be difficult to attract, and uncivil communication reflects frustration and anger.

First, because marginalized people typically have less access to power in the civic arena, it is harder for them to influence public discussion and policies through traditional, acceptable means. Professors of communication Nina M. Lozano-Reich and Dana L. Cloud have noted that:

> The powerful rarely are willing to invite those less powerful into dialogue; the oppressed are hard pressed to convince oppressors who benefit materially from oppression to be open to dialogue, let alone radical change.

> Many discussions are by 'invitation only,' a phrase suggesting that invitation belongs to those who set the rules for exclusion.[8]

In other words, *because* they call for change, marginalized groups (the oppressed) lack easy access to public deliberations that use traditional, civil means of expression. It's not in the interests of the powerful to invite the oppressed into such civil discussions. Consequently, marginalized groups must often turn elsewhere to advocate for change.

Second, those marginalized groups excluded from the public sphere tend to form what Fraser has called subaltern **counterpublics**: gatherings of people excluded or dissuaded from the public sphere who raise issues ignored or trivialized by the broader public.[9] In other words, their very exclusion from the public sphere tends to encourage people to come together on their own. They find affirmation and a sense of belonging among one another.

Members of counterpublics learn and teach each other methods of challenging their exclusion in the broader public sphere, such as social protest. Indeed, sometimes social protest is the only way for members who are excluded from, or devalued in, the public sphere to influence public discussion and policies. They adopt the kind of rhetoric that, *due to its incivility*, demands attention.

Finally, social protest by the oppressed typically reflects their anger and frustration. Their voices, needs, and calls for change using traditional means have been ignored, devalued, and/or discredited. Consequently, civil speech—especially when defined as dispassionate and polite—cannot adequately express the hurt and frustrations of their lived experiences and the vigor of their demands for change. As Lorde and Lepoutre explain (in box 4.2), anger is sometimes better able to communicate the presence and ongoing harms of injustice.

Box 4.3 Not All Uncivil Rhetoric Is Productive

Not all public protest that utilizes uncivil speech functions productively. Recall in chapter 2 that we named incivility as a quality of unproductive speech that some people use to gain attention *and* silence detractors.

8. Nina M. Lozano-Reich and Dana L. Cloud, "The Uncivil Tongue: Invitational Rhetoric and the Problem of Inequality," *Western Journal of Communication* 73 (2009): 221–22.
9. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."

We can look to the August 11 and 12, 2017, "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, as an example. Participants marched at night with tiki torches on the University of Virginia campus, chanting "Blood and soil" (a phrase that evoked Nazi rhetoric) and the antisemitic expression "Jews will not replace us." The next day they carried Nazi and neo-Nazi symbols, Confederate flags, and weapons. Featured attendees, such as KKK leader David Duke, organizer Jason Kessler, and neo-Nazi Richard Spencer promoted white supremacy.



Charlottesville "Unite the Right" Rally by Anthony Crider via Flickr, CC BY.

Here we have a social protest that used uncivil speech: It was impolite, combative, and angry. It was also accompanied by violence. Physical confrontations broke out with counterprotesters, and white supremacist James Fields drove his car into counterprotesters, killing Heather Heyer and injuring thirty-five people.

The violence was egregious, and we do not diminish it. But even if we focus only on the protesters' communication, we can determine that it was unproductive in increasing the inclusivity and equity of the public sphere. To understand why, we return again to the three criteria established earlier.

1. **Question:** Does the discourse attempt to *spark or subdue discussion* about an overlooked and ongoing societal problem?

   Answer: The march was held in Charlottesville in reaction to the city's decision to remove a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee and rename the park in which it was located. Lee's statue was the seventh such statue removed in Southern states since 2009, reflecting a national conversation about monuments, white supremacy, and racial violence. The "Unite the Right" rally, then, attempted to subdue that discussion by showing support for keeping the statue and intimidating people who disagreed.

2. **Question:** Does the rhetoric strive to *include or exclude* historically marginalized members of the public in democratic participation?

   Answer: By featuring known white supremacists and chanting Nazi and antisemitic rhetoric, the protest clearly sought to exclude any Americans who are Jewish or not white from civic engagement. The violence also suggests that some members wanted to physically stop anyone who disagreed with their ideology from speaking against it.

3. **Question:** Does this discourse attempt to *preserve or question the power* of historically dominant members of the public?

   Answer: By promoting white supremacy and antisemitism, the protest explicitly sought to preserve the power of white, Christian Americans, who have historically occupied positions of cultural and economic privilege in the US.

Consequently, not all protest that uses uncivil expression functions productively. Therefore, we challenge you to examine the functions of uncivil rhetoric before you condemn *or* champion it.

Recall that productive discourse is about *responsibility, not necessarily politeness*. Responsible public discourse is public communication that draws on the qualities of productive discourse to produce a more inclusive and equitable public sphere. When we evaluate public discourse more carefully, we are cautioned against uncritically using a list of qualities to label a rhetoric as productive or unproductive. Otherwise, on one hand, we might fail to recognize forms of expression that seem civil but actually exclude marginalized perspectives and perpetuate inequity. If we call these discourses productive, we, too, may unintentionally constrict the public sphere and block challenges to the status quo and powerful interests.

On the other hand, we might also fail to appreciate social protest that appears uncivil but strives to expand democratic participation and increase equity. If we label these as unproductive, we may inadvertently help eliminate participants, reinforce inequality, and strengthen policing discourse that demands "acceptable" speech. These are important aspects of public discourse we hope you will keep in mind as you promote civic engagement in your many public relationships.

Summary

This chapter returned to distinctions we made in earlier chapters between unproductive and productive discourse. It warned against using lists of qualities in overly simplified ways that miss the goal of productive discourse: to build a more inclusive and equitable public sphere. Specifically, in this chapter you have learned:

- Responsible public discourse is public communication that draws on the qualities of productive discourse to produce a more inclusive and equitable public sphere.
- We can better distinguish productive discourse through its responsibility to the audience and community for the accuracy and impact of claims rather than through its politeness or civility.
- Policing discourse is the use of rhetoric to determine preferred or appropriate ways of talking together when deliberating public issues. It functions to control or "police" communication that violates what is considered preferred or appropriate.
- The call for civil speech—communication that maintains decorum by being respectful, dispassionate, and polite—is a policing discourse. People in positions of power have historically used civil discourse to critique protesters by accusing them of using uncivil speech: rhetoric that violates decorum because it is disrespectful, angry, and/or impolite.
- Marginalized groups may choose uncivil speech to protest because they lack easy access to the public sphere where civil discourse occurs, uncivil protest demands attention they otherwise struggle to attract, and their communication reflects their frustration and anger.

Key Terms

civil speech
counterpublic

policing discourse
responsible public discourse
uncivil speech

Review Questions

1. What three criteria must be met for rhetoric to qualify as responsible public discourse?
2. What is considered civil speech? Uncivil speech?
3. What is policing rhetoric? At whom is it usually directed? To what ends?
4. What are reasons why some groups adopt uncivil rhetoric?

Discussion Questions

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of social protesters' use of uncivil speech?
2. Can you think of additional criteria to determine if a rhetoric functions as responsible public discourse?
3. Name a contemporary counterpublic. Is this counterpublic a source of empowerment or isolation? How is the counterpublic included or excluded from public discourse? Explain.

5. The Ethics of Public Speaking

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Explain the meaning of ethics and ethical codes.
- Complete the ethical responsibilities of preparing to speak in public.
- Practice the ethical communication behaviors expected of public discourse.

When preparing for a speaking occasion, you might be tempted to seek guidance and inspiration from past examples. Examining others' speeches might uncover an ingenious theme, identify a clever reference, or clarify "what not to do." Take a few notes from this speech, "copy and paste" a paragraph from another, venture into ChatGPT or Gemini to brainstorm topics and organize themes, and before you know it, you have a page or two of promising ideas. However, what is the difference between cultivating ideas based on other speeches and plagiarizing their content?

With so much information available at our fingertips, it is easy to commit an ethical misstep—whether due to being willfully deceptive, using unauthorized generative AI assistance, taking imprecise notes, and/or failing to attribute critical information. Such transgressions—and their consequences—explain why ethics is an important, and occasionally confusing, concern for public speaking.

We admit ethical questions are not always easy to answer. However, we also hold that there are recognized ethical practices that should govern our speaking and listening behaviors. In this chapter, we consider ethics in three dimensions: the relationship of ethics and rhetorical ethics, the ethics of speech preparation, and the ethics of speech performance.

Ethics and Rhetorical Ethics

Generally associated with the field of philosophy, **ethics** refers to a set of moral principles governing human conduct as it pertains to motives, ends, and the quality of one's actions. The ethical quality of conduct is generally evaluated based on how it reflects what is deemed "good" or "bad," or "right" or "wrong," in a culture. We frequently use criteria such as honesty, morality, equality, and justice that are derived from culture, religion, upbringing, and community and institutional contexts to judge the ethics of a behavior.[1]

1. Richard Johannesen, "Ethics," in *The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, ed. Theresa Enos (New York: Garland, 1996), 235.

Ethical Codes

A more specific articulation of ethics is an **ethical code**, a set of rules or guidelines agreed to by a culture or group to regulate behavior. For instance, the American Medical Association (AMA) has a "Code of Medical Ethics" that is recognized as the "most comprehensive ethics guide for physicians." With medical advances and changing legal guidance, the code is subject to reflection and debate. For instance, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, abortion and some assisted reproductive technologies, and genetic testing and stem cell research present thorny dilemmas. However, the code provides physicians with principles to guide their professional conduct.[2]

College communities also typically have their own code of ethics, such as a university's "rule of conduct" that governs student behavior and academic honesty. Common to such policies is a prohibition on cheating and plagiarism, including copying others' work, wrongly taking credit for others' words and ideas by failing to supply necessary attribution, and engaging in additional prohibited activities. You are probably familiar with the meaning of academic honesty at your institution—and if you are not, you should be. While such codes provide guidance to students, inevitably there are debates over their interpretation and enforcement. Perhaps you can point to important debates and discussions about your institution's code of conduct or policies.

The Virginia Military Institute's (VMI) honor system is one of the most historic ethical codes in higher education. At the heart of its system is the principle that cadets are "men and women of honor and integrity who can always be trusted" to follow their succinct code: "A Cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, nor tolerate those who do."[3]



Virginia Military Institute by National Park Service via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

The difficulty in identifying a singular, universal ethical code is that individuals and communities have different worldviews, experiences, and values. Behavior that is accepted and expected in one community may be out of bounds in another. Actions we would dismiss as unethical in the abstract—lying, for instance—might be more complicated when put into specific contexts. The point is that ethical standards are **community standards**, and thus, we can expect disagreements about their meaning. However, that does not mean all actions are acceptable, only that ethical evaluations are based on many factors.

2. "Code of Medical Ethics," American Medical Association, https://code-medical-ethics.ama-assn.org/, archived February 23, 2025, at https://perma.cc/LR3S-K5CT.
3. "Honor System," Virginia Military Institute, https://www.vmi.edu/cadet-life/cadet-leadership-and-development/honor-system/, archived February 23, 2025, at https://perma.cc/YQX8-4XM5.

Rhetorical Ethics



While no single widely known code of rhetorical ethics exists on the level of the AMA's "Code of Medical Ethics," we can identify communication behaviors that are deemed acceptable and unacceptable. **Rhetorical ethics**, or the ethics of public speaking, refers to how we expect speakers and audience members to behave and interact as they communicate about matters of the public good. To that end, rhetoric scholar James Herrick identifies a set of ethical goods inherent across the history of rhetorical practice:

(1) discovering truths and arguments relevant to decision-making on contingent issues,
(2) advocating, interpreting and propagating ideas before publics, and
(3) testing propositions in debate.[4]

When you, as a speaker, adhere to these practices, you enrich our public discourse. Moreover, you embody ethical rhetoric and reflect the qualities of productive discourse discussed in chapter 3.

We contend that rhetorical ethics involves the preparation of public speakers, the actions of speakers in presenting information, and as the next chapter explores, the listening behaviors of audiences.

The Ethics of Speech Preparation

Rhetorical ethics begins with the speech preparation process. This includes the commitment a speaker shows to an audience as well as the ethical choices made in the selection of information. While the next section on speech performance discusses the latter topic, here we consider speech preparation as an ethical demand.

Box 5.1 The Deceptively Hard Work of Speech Preparation

When done well, public speaking looks deceptively easy—it is "just talking," after all. Few people fully appreciate how difficult it is to craft a successful presentation—the time it takes to develop the main idea, do the research, choose the language and tone, practice the delivery, and so forth. In fact, one might say we are trained to *not* notice these efforts.

4. James A. Herrick, "Rhetoric, Ethics, and Virtue," *Communication Studies* 43 (1992): 139, 144-45, https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979209368367.

Few football coaches give the sort of refined inspirational speech offered by Denzel Washington's Coach Boone on the field of Gettysburg in *Remember the Titans*.



[Denzel Washington](#) *by MTV UK via Wikimedia Commons,* [CC BY.](#)



[America Ferrera](#) *by Raph_PH via Wikimedia Commons,* [CC BY.](#)

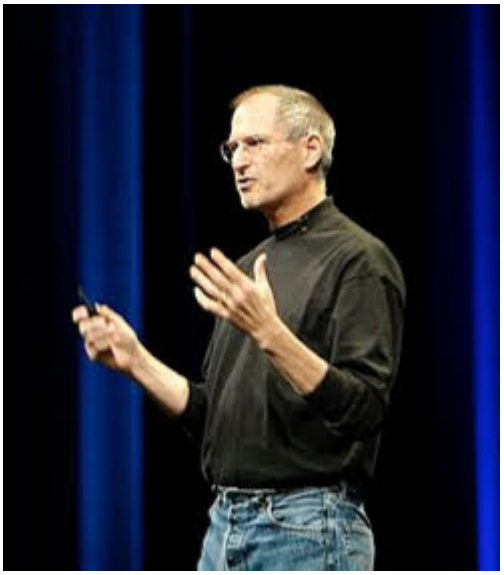
Few people can offer the type of on-the-spot—and spot-on—social commentary delivered by [America Ferrera's Gloria in *Barbie*](#) as she recited the double bind of femininity and the crushing expectations of being a woman in contemporary society.[5]

When attending public lectures on your college campus, you probably have noticed that many speakers rely extensively on PowerPoint presentations or even use a full manuscript. You are justified in desiring more engagement from such speakers. But an expert's reliance on their text reflects just how difficult public speaking can be, particularly when specific terminology is important. The point is that preparing a speech is hard work. America Ferrera and Denzel Washington are effective actors because they have honed their craft over many years.

Even nonactors like the late Steve Jobs, cofounder and chief executive officer of Apple, achieve speaking success, in part, due to their extensive preparation. Before his death, Jobs was a highly anticipated and captivating business speaker, and his "tech talks" were "must-see TV" for computer geeks and investors alike as he introduced new products and updates.

[Watching Jobs](#), one might note his easy extemporaneous style, his eye contact, the engaging gestures, and the integration of his content with his visual aids. Although he tended to pace, it fit the persona he developed. In his appearances at the Macworld Expo, for example, Jobs appeared casual and relaxed, perhaps giving the impression that he had not prepared very much or was not trying very hard. On the contrary, this was part of the appearance Jobs worked diligently to cultivate. We are not suggesting that the accolades Jobs received as a speaker were unwarranted. Instead, they were achieved after a significant investment of time and effort.

Mike Evangelist, a former associate of Jobs at Apple, explained that Steve Jobs started preparing for his keynote addresses weeks in advance, not just developing his speech, but also reviewing all the products and technologies that



[Steve Jobs](#) *by Ben Stanfield via Wikimedia Commons,* [CC BY-SA.](#)

5. HBO Max, "America Ferrera's Iconic Barbie Speech," posted December 22, 2023, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBqlDWHkdHk.

might be relevant. Evangelist says that Jobs would go through multiple dress rehearsals that focused on every conceivable element with "no detail…overlooked."[6]

What effective public speakers and performers have in common is that they take their development of public discourse—their speeches, *their work*—very seriously. They are responsible to their audience; they are *ethical* in their preparation.

The idea that speech preparation is not only important but also an ethical demand for speakers was well explained by Professor W. Norwood Brigance in a public speaking textbook chapter entitled "Four Fundamentals for Speakers."[7] In his direct and challenging style, Brigance made clear how much work is required of public speakers: "Effective public speaking is a technique, as definitely as are the techniques of designing airplanes and removing appendixes, except that it is older and more complex than either."[8] How can Brigance claim that public speaking is more complex than the precise calculations required to keep an aircraft in flight or the delicate movements necessary in surgery? His point is that there is not a single rote method for speechmaking, nor is there an equation available to guarantee success. With so many human factors and variables, public speaking requires constant revision and adaptation along with sustained attention to its preparation.

Box 5.2 Ethical Preparation

Elements of ethical preparation are addressed across this book, including instruction on research, reasoning, outlining, and delivery. Some of the more important practices that demonstrate ethical preparation for your public presentations include the following:

6. Mike Evangelist, "Behind the Magic Curtain," *The Guardian*, January 5, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2006/jan/05/newmedia.media1.
7. William Norwood Brigance, *Speech: Its Techniques and Disciplines in a Free Society* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952), 16–24.
8. Brigance, *Speech*, 16.

Advanced planning	Begin working on your speech well in advance of its due date: at least one week, and longer for lengthier and more significant presentations.
Information selection	Research your ideas and select your supporting material carefully.
Note-taking	Take careful notes while researching in order to keep track of sources, catalog internet URLs, and properly attribute information.
Revision and refinement	Engage in revision and refine your ideas as you develop the presentation.
Practice	Practice your presentation multiple times before giving it to a public audience.
Responsibility and respectfulness	Make your message meaningful to your audience out of respect for their time.

Another Brigance maxim to which we subscribe is his belief that a speaker "must earn the right to give every speech."[9] While many people "like to talk" or "like to debate," they overlook the responsibility that comes with the opportunity. When you are given a chance to speak, it comes with a corresponding ethical responsibility to take the occasion seriously and to come prepared with something meaningful to share. See box 5.2 for advice on practices important to ethical speech preparation.

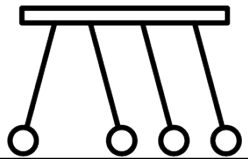
The Ethics of Speech Performance

Every so often, we learn that a high-profile speaker unethically took another person's ideas. Perhaps you know of such an example. But why does it matter if the speaker did not invent their speech? Does it really change how an audience should understand and respond to the rhetoric? Yes, it very well might. In this section we examine the ethics of public influence and five ethical practices important to public communication.

The Ethics of Public Influence

Perhaps *the* central reason rhetorical ethics is important is that audiences make decisions based on the public discourse they hear. We form judgments based on listening to commencement speakers, reading a trusted information source on the internet, and even when making travel decisions after seeing a forecast from the local meteorologist. In each case,

9. Brigance, *Speech*, 23.



rhetors communicate information the public uses in decision-making: How can I best contribute to society? Which candidate should I vote for? What can I do about environmental problems in my community? Is it safe to travel today? Public rhetoric—*your rhetoric*—has consequences for which you are responsible, and thus you have an ethical duty to your audience.

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Your rhetoric has consequences: Audiences make decisions based on what you say to them!

Box 5.3 Fact-Checking a President

Because the public makes choices based on the rhetoric of elected officials, some news outlets increasingly "fact-check" their public statements. In likely the most visible stance on the topic, starting in 2016, *The New York Times* began pointing out what it felt were misleading statements by Donald Trump rather than just reporting what he said.

- This started by taking a stand against then-candidate Trump's "Birther Lie" concerning the birthplace of Barack Obama.
- It continued by chronicling "Trump's Lies" after his first year in office during his first term as president.
- The newspaper proceeded by recording how his public statements between the 2020 presidential election and the January 6, 2021, Capitol riot contained "persistent repetition of lies."
- The paper later identified Trump's "frequently false" statements during a June 2024 presidential debate as a candidate for a second term as president.
- It persisted by documenting his "'Machinery' of Misinformation" during Trump's second term.



Trump Lies Matter by Ted Eytan via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

It is easy to question the stance of *The New York Times* as the product of the "liberal media," but its approach is notable in repeatedly calling out a president

for the accuracy of his statements. It does so because public discourse influences the decisions that the public and voters make.[10]

National Communication Association (NCA), the largest organization of communication scholars and practitioners in the United States, has a Credo for Ethical Communication that provides a useful perspective on responsible communication behaviors. In part, the credo holds:

> Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision-making, and relationship building, and community development within, and across, contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth, human life, and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live.[11]



NCA Nameplate *by Acekinghearts on Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY-SA.

The NCA Credo goes on to list principles at the core of ethical communication, including

- advocating "truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication";
- condemning "communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred"; and
- accepting "responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication" while expecting "the same of others."

You should quickly recognize that qualities consistent with the NCA Credo have been promoted in the opening chapters of this book—and appear central to *The New York Times*'s criticism of Donald Trump's rhetoric (in box 5.3). Similarly, if

10. Michael Barbaro, "Donald Trump Clung to 'Birther' Lie for Years, and Still Isn't Apologetic," *New York Times*, September 16, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/17/us/politics/donald-trump-obama-birther.html; Callum Borchers, "Why *The New York Times* Decided It Is Now Okay to Call Donald Trump a Liar," *Washington Post*, September 22, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/09/22/why-the-new-york-times-decided-it-is-now-okay-to-call-donald-trump-a-liar/; David Leonhardt and Stuart A. Thompson, "Trump's Lies," *New York Times*, December 14, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/23/opinion/trumps-lies.html; Larry Buchanan et al., "Lie After Lie: Listen to How Trump Built His Alternate Reality," *New York Times*, February 9, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/02/09/us/trump-voter-fraud-election.html; Michael Gold, "Trump's Debate Performance: Relentless Attacks and Falsehoods," *New York Times*, June 28, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/27/us/politics/trump-debate-performance-falsehoods.html; Steven Lee Meyers and Stuart A. Thompson, "In His Second Term, Trump Fuels a 'Machinery' of Misinformation," *New York Times*, March 24, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/24/business/trump-misinformation-false-claims.html.
11. "Credo for Ethical Communication," National Communication Association, 1999, revised 2024, https://www.natcom.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Credo-for-Ethical-Communication-Revised-Clean-2024.pdf.

you review the explanations of productive discourse from earlier chapters, you will see a close connection between its practices and the NCA's expectations for ethical communication.

Box 5.4 Artificial Intelligence and Ethics

Advanced artificial intelligence, more commonly known as generative AI, is rapidly reshaping the world in significant ways, including how content is produced. A quickly expanding and ever-changing array of generative AI chatbots and AI assistants are available, including ChatGPT, Claude, Google Bard, Bing Chat, and Gemini.



Artificial Intelligence by mikemacmarketing via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

Increasingly, members of the workforce need to understand how to use generative AI, and colleges need to teach their students about effective, ethical use. The extent to which generative AI acts as a supplement, as opposed to a replacement, for independent work is an important part of the conversation. We advocate measured, thoughtful use of generative AI in ways that improve and refine the speechmaking process rather than substitute for it, maintaining an emphasis on the importance of independent learning of the fundamentals of speechmaking. Here are some considerations to make before you use generative AI as well as how to use it:

Ethically Using Generative AI

- Examine any policies your school has on the use of AI in academic work.
- Discuss any potential use of AI with your instructor in advance of utilizing it.
- Follow any policies or parameters for AI use set out by your instructor: What your instructor says determines the contextual, ethical use of AI for your work on that speech and in that class.
- Track and cite your AI use to keep it transparent, including search inputs supplied to the AI. Chapter 9 provides specific instructions on how to cite your use of AI.
- Verify any information you locate using AI rather than simply relying on what the AI generates.

Using Generative AI as a Feedback Tool

- Use AI to brainstorm leading arguments and counterarguments on your topic.
- Use AI to identify policy options and solutions.
- Use AI to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your outline so you can improve it.
- Use AI to polish your writing and make writing suggestions.
- Use AI to prepare for questions the audience might ask about your speech.

Limiting Your Reliance on Generative AI

- Don't rely on AI to locate and cite sources. Some generative AI make up sources, including citations that seem plausible but are not factually accurate. Chapter 9 also discusses this tendency.
- Don't rely on generative AI to provide accurate information. AI is limited based on the resources

available to it.

- Don't rely on AI to generate complex and engaging prose.

The quality of AI-generated content is quickly improving with each iteration of AI chatbots, but limitations to source material and writing quality remain. Such issues have occasionally emerged in controversial and problematic ways, including in the creation of legal briefs that have relied on faulty information. There are also important questions related to bias in the language and stereotypes used by some AI, the material generated by AI, and efforts to detect it. These concerns range from the limitations of facial recognition, to generation of imagery, to faulty accusations of AI use that have been levied, particularly against nonnative English writers and speakers.[12]

Ethos and Five Ethical Practices of Public Communication



When engaging in public speaking, there are five ethical practices that deserve additional attention: plagiarism, ethical research, sound reasoning, respectful language, and taking responsibility for consequences. In each case, a violation results in a loss of ethos. Aristotle identified ethos as one of three modes of proof used for invention. **Ethos** refers to the state of one's public character or persona—what we commonly call credibility. In the context of public speaking, ethos involves an audience's perceptions of a speaker's trustworthiness, competence, goodwill, and dynamism.[13]

As listeners, we assess a speaker's credibility to help determine how much merit to place on their message:

- Does the speaker seem honest and of high integrity (trustworthiness)?
- Do they—by reputation, expertise, or performance—demonstrate themselves as capable (competence)?
- Do they appear to care about the audience's welfare (goodwill)?
- Is their performance engaging (dynamism)?

All these components have ethical implications, although, understandably, it is the expectation of trustworthiness that is most often invoked in ethical evaluations.

12. Pranshu Verma, "Michael Cohen Used Fake Cases Created by AI in Bid to End His Probation," *Washington Post*, December 29, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/12/29/michael-cohen-ai-google-bard-fake-citations; Benjamin Weiser and Jonah E. Bromwich, "Michael Cohen Used Artificial Intelligence in Feeding Lawyer Bogus Cases," *New York Times*, December 29, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/29/nyregion/michael-cohen-ai-fake-cases.html; Lyle Moran, "Lawyer Cites Fake Cases Generated by ChatGPT in Legal Brief," *Legal Dive*, May 30, 2023, https://www.legaldive.com/news/chatgpt-fake-legal-cases-generative-ai-hallucinations/651557/; Aniya Greene-Santos, "Does AI Have a Bias Problem?," *NEA Today*, February 22, 2024, https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/does-ai-have-bias-problem, archived at https://perma.cc/C8FL-64FN.
13. Richard D. Rieke, Malcolm O. Sillars, and Tarla Rai Peterson, *Argumentation and Critical Decision Making*, 7th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2009), 155.

Box 5.5 Five Ethical Practices of Public Communication

Ethical practice	Meaning	How to avoid ethical violation
Avoid plagiarism	Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another's words or ideas as one's own.	Do not submit another's work a ment.
Conduct ethical research	Ethical research involves proper practices for locating, using, evaluating, and citing research and sources.	Cite your sources; do not overs not suppress counterarguments.
Practice ethical and sound reasoning	Ethical and sound reasoning requires making reasonable claims supported by quality evidence.	Do not base arguments on asse
Use language ethically	Ethical language recognizes the value and humanity of others by using accurate language and recognizing one's identity.	Do not use rude, vulgar, sexist, misses their identity, and lessens
Be responsible for the consequences of your rhetoric	The speaker who is responsible for the consequences of their rhetoric recognizes and accepts that their communication influences the decision-making of others.	Do not ignore the implications policies you advocate.

Avoid Plagiarism

The most commonly recognized ethical responsibility of a speaker is to refrain from plagiarism. **Plagiarism** is the unacknowledged use of another's words and ideas as one's own. As a college student, you should understand the importance of original work that is free of plagiarism. You should also understand the need to uphold academic honesty, which avoids all forms of cheating. Original, ethical work is expected from you because it is fundamental to learning, and it is a core component of honesty.



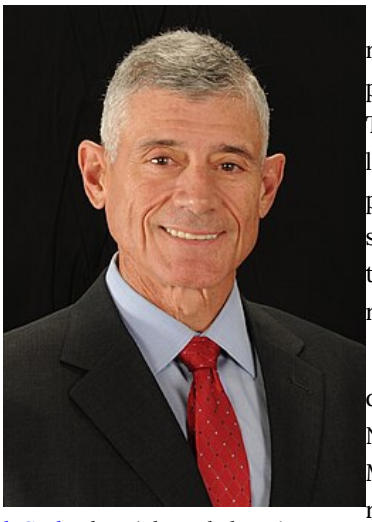
Created by Olifernes Tejeros from Noun Project

In a public speaking class, it constitutes plagiarism if you submit as your own a speech, outline, or paper prepared by someone else. Plagiarism also includes using language and ideas developed by another source without appropriate citation. Submission of such work is dishonest and thwarts the educational process. Even if you develop delivery skills through the performance of someone else's work, you cannot learn the speechmaking process, which ranges from topic selection, to thesis development, to research, to argumentation.

Generative AI raises new and complex questions surrounding original work. You should discuss any use of AI for speechmaking with your instructor in advance and acknowledge any use of AI within your work. See box 5.4 for further considerations on the ethical use of AI as part of the speechmaking process.

Plagiarism is a concern not only in the classroom but also in society. Several public figures, from politicians to academics, have been accused of plagiarism. These instances (considered in box 5.6) underscore the need to carefully document sources and to not use others' work as your own. Failing to do so can have devastating consequences and creates the need for public explanations and apologies.

Box 5.6 Case Studies: Plagiarism in Society



Bob Caslen by HigherEchelon via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

In May 2021, University of South Carolina president Robert Caslen resigned after acknowledging that aspects of his commencement speech plagiarized a 2014 commencement address given at the University of Texas by retired Navy Admiral William McRaven, who was tasked with leading the raid that killed Osama bin Laden. In an acknowledgment that parallels the scenario that opens this chapter, Caslen wrote, "I was searching for words about resilience in adversity and when they were transcribed into the speech, I failed to ensure its attribution. I take full responsibility for this oversight."[14]

Another high-profile incident involved the 2016 Republican National Convention speech given by Melania Trump. The initially well-received speech, which in part discussed Ms. Trump's upbringing in Slovenia, contained several passages and themes that echoed Michelle Obama's address at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. In the tumult that followed, a Trump Organization staff writer took public responsibility for the error of "inadvertently" leaving "portions of the Obama speech in the final draft."[15]

These examples demonstrate the importance of taking care during the research process to prevent plagiarism and the consequences of such acts.



Melania Trump by Marc Nozell via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

14. Travis Caldwell and Amanda Jackson, "A University President Resigned After a Recent Plagiarized Speech. It's Not the First Commencement Address Lifted," CNN, May 14, 2021, https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/14/us/plagiarism-commencement-speech-south-carolina/index.html; Becky Sullivan, "University of South Carolina President Resigns After Plagiarizing Part of Speech," NPR, May 13, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/05/13/996523535/university-of-south-carolina-president-resigns-after-plagiarizing-commencement-s, archived at https://perma.cc/C2GX-DHWW.
15. Jason Horowitz, "Behind Melania Trump's Cribbed Lines, an Ex-Ballerina Who Loved Writing," *New York Times*, July 20, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/melania-trump-speech-meredith-mciver.html; Brett Neely, "Trump Speechwriter Accepts Responsibility for Using Michelle Obama's Words," *NPR*, July 20, 2016, https://www.npr.org/2016/07/20/486758596/trump-speechwriter-accepts-responsibility-for-using-michelle-obamas-words; Maggie Haberman and Michael Barbaro, "How Melania Trump's Speech Veered Off Course and Caused an Uproar," *New York Times*, July 19, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/20/us/politics/melania-trump-convention-speech.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=b-lede-package-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news.

Conduct Ethical Research

As the examples from Robert Caslen and Melania Trump in box 5.6 illustrate, plagiarism also reflects failings of **ethical research** and, most specifically, proper practices for using supporting materials. These ideas are addressed with additional depth in our discussions of research (chapters 8 and 9) and reasoning (chapters 26 and 27). Here we are interested in how source use involves important ethical considerations. So while ethical research implicates issues of plagiarism—for instance, not citing sources or giving the impression that the ideas or words of others are your own—it also extends to the larger realm of academic dishonesty based on how research is gathered and credited.



Citation Needed by futureatlas.com, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

Speakers commonly face the issue of how to give proper credit to sources. In written work there is the expectation that we use formal modes of documentation ranging from in-text acknowledgment of a source, to endnotes, to bibliographies. Since an oral presentation is a different format, there is sometimes confusion over how to approach such issues. However, the basic expectation is that materials that merit citation in written form also merit citation in an oral form. Chapter 9 specifically addresses how to orally cite research and more thoroughly addresses its importance.

Keep in mind that all sources should appear in a bibliography submitted with any outline you prepare, and you should be able to supply source information to audience members on request. Ultimately, a good rule of thumb is when you are uncertain if material needs to be cited, err on the side of inclusion and provide a verbal acknowledgment.

Beyond citation there are three additional ethical issues related to the use of sources:

- Do not overstate or manipulate evidence. Representing evidence accurately rather than manipulating it to fit your desired conclusion is necessary to establish public or audience trust. Remember that the information you convey can influence decision-making.
- Do not fabricate evidence. Even if you are confident that the evidence exists, do not take a shortcut by inventing what you *think* you know. Instead, locate credible evidence for the idea and cite it. If you cannot locate the evidence, then the legitimacy of your assumed conclusion is also in doubt.
- Do not suppress counterarguments and opposing evidence. Instead, acknowledge them. This is important because it allows a community to thoroughly consider policy options, particularly since some in your audience are likely aware of such evidence. It is through addressing counterevidence that you can supply important analysis and refutation that can ultimately strengthen your case. Chapter 25 provides guidance for how to acknowledge and refute counterarguments when developing a persuasive speech.

Practice Ethical and Sound Reasoning

A third ethical responsibility for speech performance is that we make reasonable claims supported by evidence. We must not rely merely on **assertion**, a claim that lacks an evidentiary basis and is offered without reason, support, or data.

Relatedly, we must balance appeals to **pathos**, more commonly called emotional appeals, with the use of reason. Pathos refers to the psychological state of the audience and rests upon a speaker's effective, ethical appeals to the audience's emotions and motivations. Like ethos, pathos is part of the rhetorical canon of invention identified in chapter 1.


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However, relying exclusively on pathos in ways that deter critical thinking is unethical. For instance, it is unethical to ignore the facts of a situation in favor of preying on an audience's fears. Overly relying on fear tends to discourage thoughtful, reasoned analysis. Chapter 33 offers an analysis of a speech that engaged in this practice.

Use Language Ethically

Fourth, as a speaker it is your responsibility to respect your audience by using **ethical language**. Words are crucial to our understanding of the world and help construct identities. Through our words we can bring a community together to pursue improvements or divide it and hinder such progress. Think about competing ways to discuss substance addiction, transgender persons, or national identity and ethnicity. Our language can be constructive and inclusive in advancing dialogue, or it can severely undermine it.

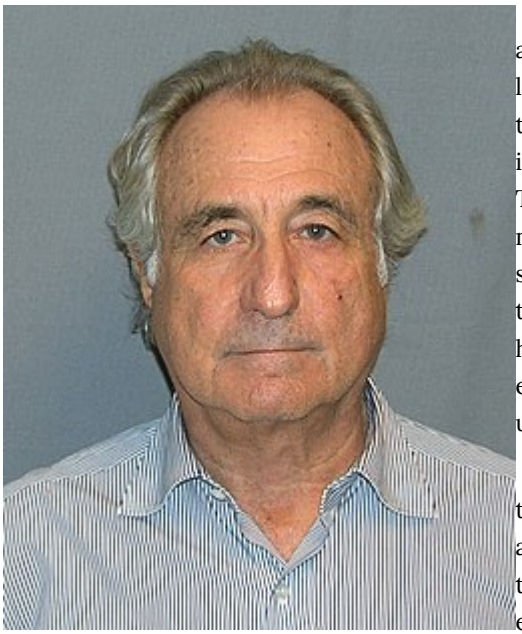
Therefore, it is important to avoid rude, vulgar, sexist, heterosexist, and racist language as we treat audience members humanely. Sexist, heterosexist, and racist language excludes audience members and denies their value as fellow community members by perpetuating negative perceptions. The labels, metaphors, and euphemisms used to characterize groups of people make it easier to dismiss them and sometimes to even forget their humanity. Similarly, inaccurate naming or pronoun use dehumanizes those included in the discussion and/or those being talked about.

Certainly, we might use unethical language unintentionally, but to do so willfully—for instance, by intentionally ignoring an individual's pronouns—is to deny and damage identity, reinforce stereotypes, and purposefully disrespect the people involved. The ethical speaker thinks about the context within which they are communicating, attempts to avoid charged or hateful language, and discusses people and objects in appropriate and accurate terms.

Be Responsible for the Consequences of Your Rhetoric

Finally, the ethical speaker considers and accepts the consequences of their rhetoric. Remember, people base decisions on what you say. Therefore, you must consider the consequences of your message for them.

Box 5.7 Case Study: Irresponsibility for Consequential Rhetoric



Bernard Madoff by U.S. Department of Justice via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

A spectacular example of an "investment advisor" who acted fraudulently is Bernie Madoff. Thousands of investors lost billions of dollars when they gave Madoff control of their assets. While they assumed the monies were being invested, Madoff was actually keeping many of the assets. There were devastating consequences for investors, with many losing a good portion or all of their life savings. In a similar fashion, in 2024 Samuel Bankman-Fried was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison after he was found to have defrauded investors and lenders to his cryptocurrency exchange corporation FTX of nearly $3 billion and been untruthful about how their funds were used.[16]

A public speaker may not cost an audience member their retirement nest egg, but the point is the same: There are consequences to what you say, and you must consider those consequences in forming your message. Just as we expect that investment advisors have training and act ethically in their dealings, we expect public speakers who advocate actions and policies to behave similarly.

There are, no doubt, other ways a speaker can fail to satisfy their ethical obligations, but we have offered five ideas at the core of ethical speaking behavior. Use these principles as a checklist to review your speech preparation prior to delivering a presentation to ensure you are practicing ethical communication.

Summary

This chapter explored the importance of rhetorical ethics in maintaining the reputation of rhetorical practice and making public deliberation possible. Public speaking ethics includes the ethics of speech preparation and the ethics of speech performance. Specifically, in this chapter we observed the following:

- Ethics and ethical codes are used to evaluate our behaviors.
- Rhetorical ethics provides guidelines for the practice of public communication.
- A casual attitude about ethics has profound implications of a personal and public nature. Ethical faults

16. Office of Public Affairs, "Samuel Bankman-Fried Sentenced to 25 Years for His Orchestration of Multiple Fraudulent Schemes," U.S. Department of Justice, March 28, 2024, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/samuel-bankman-fried-sentenced-25-years-his-orchestration-multiple-fraudulent-schemes; Rob Wile, "Sam Bankman-Fried Sentenced to 25 Years in Prison for Orchestrating FTX Fraud," *NBC News*, March 28, 2024, https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/sam-bankman-fried-sentenced-25-years-prison-orchestrating-ftx-fraud-rcna145286.

lead to negative personal evaluations and a loss of ethos, thereby damaging one's personal and professional opportunities.

- There are significant public implications to unethical behavior, including poisoning public discussion, making reasoned decision-making more difficult, and leading publics toward unwarranted conclusions.
- Sound rhetorical ethics begins with the speech preparation process as we earn the right to address audiences by being prepared, well informed, and practiced.
- Ethical speaking behavior also means being mindful of our conduct as a speaker and, in particular, avoiding plagiarism, practicing ethical research, bringing forward reasonable claims that are supported by evidence, treating audiences with respect, and taking responsibility for the consequences of our rhetoric.

Key Terms

assertion
community standards
ethical code
ethical language
ethical research
ethics
ethos
pathos
plagiarism
rhetorical ethics

Review Questions

1. What is meant by ethics? Rhetorical ethics?
2. What is ethical speech preparation?
3. What is meant by the ethics of public influence?
4. What are five ethical practices of public speaking?

Discussion Questions

1. What is your school's code of conduct? What is your school's plagiarism or academic honesty policy? How is your work in public speaking related to that code and policy?
2. What are the most important things you can do to be an ethical speaker?
3. How common is unethical communication? Where is it most prominent or frequent? Why?

6. The Ethics of Listening

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Explain listening as an ethical obligation.
- Demonstrate an ethical listening attitude by employing several types of listening.
- Illustrate listening to comprehend and retain information.



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It is tempting to think that public speaking ethics is only about talking—it is called *speaking* after all. However, speechmaking is a transactional act *between a speaker and an audience*; by listening to a speech, you are participating in it. You do that through your feedback to the speaker, such as through your eye contact (or lack thereof), body language, head nods, and so on. You also participate in a speech as a listener by how the speech impacts your own communication. Perhaps you will later use the knowledge gained from the presentation to participate in public dialogue about the topic or to inform another class presentation.

An **ethical listener** demonstrates responsibility to the speaker and to the society in which they live through *how* they listen. This chapter explores several characteristics of good, ethical listening. Specifically, we will consider how an ethical orientation to listening includes possessing an ethical listening attitude, listening to comprehend and retain information, and listening for message evaluation.[1]

Enacting an Ethical Listening Attitude



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An **ethical listening attitude**, whereby you approach discourse with an open mind and without fixed opinions, enables and requires you to engage in five types of listening that we explore next: active listening, appreciative listening, empathetic listening, listening to learn, and listening to improve.

Communication scholars sometimes lament that listening is a "lost art." Perhaps this is related to changes in public communication. You might recall from chapter 2 that unproductive discourse transforms listeners from participants into spectators of public dialogue.

If you are to meaningfully participate in the civic world, you need to avoid the tendency to be a passive recipient of information. Instead, you must strive to practice active, engaged listening.[2] When we say that an ethical listener prac-

1. William Norwood Brigance, *Speech: Its Techniques and Disciplines in a Free Society* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952), 86–96.
2. Michael Osborne and Suzanne Osborne, *The Communication Discipline and the National Issues Forums: Alliance for a Better Public Voice* (Dayton, OH: National Issues Forums Institute, 1991), 20.

tices **active listening**, we mean they participate in the speech act by listening closely, critically, and constructively. An active listener concentrates on what the speaker is saying, thinks about and reflects on the meaning of the speaker's content, and focuses on the potential of the message rather than on merely tearing it down.

Box 6.1 Types of Listening

A speaker might adopt several different and overlapping orientations to listening depending on their goals, motivations, orientation to the topic, and occasion. Some of the more common and important types of listening include the following:[3]

Active listening	An active listener listens closely, critically, and constructively. They concentrate on what the speaker is saying, and think about and reflect on the meaning of the speaker's message.
Appreciative listening	Appreciative listening is an attitude that allows for the enjoyment of a presentation, its aesthetics, and its style.
Empathetic listening	Empathetic listening seeks to see the message and point from the speaker's perspective. It adopts a sense of care and responsibility that extends beyond self-interest.
Listening to learn	When listening to learn, one approaches the speech as a learning opportunity, a way to gain new information and perspective.
Listening to improve as a speaker	Listening to improve as a speaker involves concentrating on the speaker's mechanics—organization, argumentation, source quality, delivery, style—with an eye toward how one can improve one's own speech performance.
Listening to comprehend and retain information	Listening to comprehend and retain information is an orientation in which the listener seeks to understand and remember the content of the speech.
Evaluative listening	Evaluative listening involves thinking critically about a speech's content and testing its claims in order to form judgments about its ideas.

Appreciative listening is an attitude that allows us to enjoy a presentation and its aesthetics. We should appreciate, and even be inspired by, a well-crafted speech when its style and the spirit of its message are pleasant to the ear.[4]


Created by mbomboro from Noun Project

Empathetic listening is ideally suited to deliberative practices, as it considers "the humane aspects of public issues." As communication scholars Michael Osborne and Suzanne Osborne explain, this listening quality encourages a "closeness" between the listener and speaker and a concern "for others in the immediate or larger cultural audience, who might be affected by his or her

3. Several concepts drawn from Michael Osborne and Suzanne Osborne, *The Communication Discipline and the National Issues Forums: Alliance for a Better Public Voice* (Dayton, OH: National Issues Forums Institute, 1991).
4. Osborne and Osborne, *Communication Discipline*, 25.

words."[5] This characteristic of listening reflects that we are open to change, that we respect and value the speaker, and that we have a sense of social responsibility that extends beyond self-interest.[6]

Box 6.2 Examples of Empathetic Listening

Think for a moment about a situation when a speaker or audience member was radically different from you. For instance, perhaps you are from an urban area, and a speaker advocated to hunt and fish in certain areas using means you typically reject. You lacked experience or a personal connection to the topic, but empathetic listening allowed you to see the issue from the speaker's view.

Or imagine being a burgeoning small-business owner engaged in a community discussion about zoning, one that could potentially adversely affect your ability to place your business in a particular location. Empathetic listening means working to understand the issue from the perspective of those who support zoning regulations, despite your personal interest. Practicing empathetic listening means, as best we can, seeing the world through the eyes of another and feeling as they do.

Finally, by **listening to learn**, you attend closely to what others say to gain knowledge and insights from their arguments and perspectives. When **listening to improve as a speaker**, you listen to *how* they present their speeches. Concentrate on the speaker's structure, development of the argument, and use of quality sources. However, also reflect on speaking techniques: common strategies used to introduce and frame the topic, how the speaker modulates their voice for emphasis, and how they incorporate visual aids.[7] By listening attentively, we can understand the speech *and* improve our own speaking abilities.

Box 6.3 Your Responsibility and Opportunity as a Listener

Professor W. Norwood Brigance, longtime teacher of speech, textbook author, and leading scholar on rhetoric and democracy, was known to counsel students in a frank and challenging style. Here Brigance offers sharp words on the role and responsibilities of listeners in a public speaking classroom.

> Your role while others speak, then, is not to fade into a coma and be merely aware that there is a noise. It is not to be half conscious, dully skim what is said, and rouse yourself when there is a pause, change of pace, an especially emphatic word, or an interesting tidbit. If you listen in these ways, opportunity once gone cannot be recaptured. Rather, when others speak you are in position to say, "Here is the chance to learn without making mistakes, or having to pay for them."...
>
> First, you want the answer to "*What* did the speaker say?" That is, you listen to get the idea and determine its worth: What is the speaker talking about? What is his proposition? What is his skeleton of supporting ideas? Are his facts accurate? Can his judgment be trusted?...

5. Osborne and Osborne, *Communication Discipline*, 26.
6. Osborne and Osborne, *Communication Discipline*, 28–29, 35.
7. Brigance, *Speech*, 89.

> Second, you want the answer to "*How* did the speaker say it?" That is, you listen to discern and evaluate his speaking techniques: What kind of introduction was that? Was he [*sic*] too slow in getting to that point? Did he make the proposition clear?...Should he have used a summary of that topic? Would not an illustration or comparison have made that point clearer?...He made that point perfectly clear in two minutes; I wonder if I can use that method in my next speech? He certainly knows how to use examples; ought I to look into how to use them better? Note how he drove that topic home with a climax; that's where I fell down on my last speech.[8]

Ultimately, adopting an ethical listening attitude allows you to get the most from public communication. It reflects an openness and adaptability that is at once ethical and puts you in position to consider a presentation from several different perspectives depending on your goals and circumstances. Such an approach starts with active listening but also is open to practicing appreciative and ethical listening while seeking to learn and improve as a speaker.

Listening to Comprehend and Retain Information



Ethical listening includes **listening to comprehend and retain information**, or the orientation in which you listen to understand and remember the content of a speech. Only by comprehending an issue—be it the presentation by the wildlife enthusiast or the discussion of zoning discussed in box 6.2—can you intelligently participate in its discussion. Similarly, through retention you can carry your new understanding forward into later conversations on the issue.

You can only comprehend and retain information if you pay attention to speeches. As a listener, you should adopt habits that will improve your attention. Box 6.4 provides specific suggestions to help you understand and remember what speakers share.

Box 6.4 Practicing Ethical Listening: Comprehending and Retaining Information

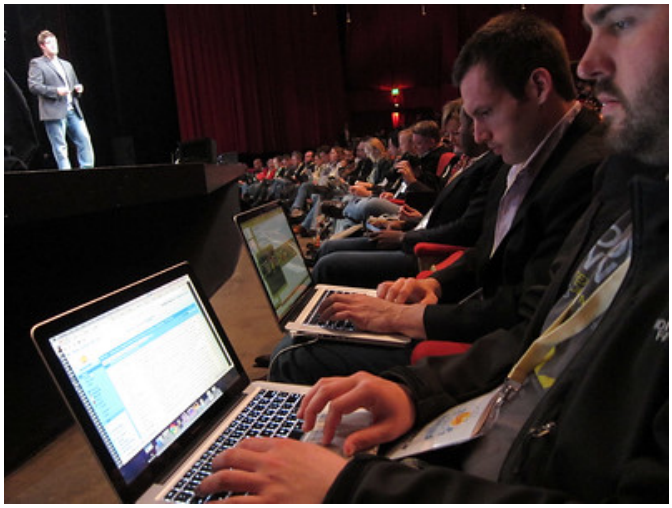
There are several behaviors and actions you can undertake to be a more ethical listener who desires to effectively comprehend and retain information. These include the following:

- Listen with an open mind: Be receptive to the message.
- Listen actively: Stay mentally alert and engaged with the message.
- Take notes: Remain engaged by writing down key ideas from the presentation.
- Create a speech outline: Chart the speaker's structure, including noting key sources and supporting material so you might consult and review them later.
- Compose questions: Be prepared to engage the speaker in discussion.

8. Brigance, *Speech*, 89.

- Check your understanding: Use paraphrasing during discussion to verify your understanding of the speaker's message ("Did I understand you to mean…" or "Is it your contention that…").
- Limit distractions: Silence your phone and put away other electronic devices that might distract you during the presentation.

One of the challenges for speakers and audiences today concerns the effective, ethical use of electronic devices. Tablets and laptops facilitate note-taking and interacting with supporting materials. However, these same electronic devices—as well as smartphones—create listening challenges too. A room full of laptops creates obstacles to speaker-audience intimacy as listeners can hide behind screens and type on keyboards. Likewise, they create temptations, as do smartphones, to surf the web and frequent social media sites.



Chirp Audience by Scott Beale / Laughing Squid *via Flickr*, CC BY-NC-ND.

Speakers and listeners must navigate the potential and problems of such electronics together. An increasing number of speakers, for instance, work smartphones into their presentations through the use of QR codes, surveys, and quizzes. Chapter 28 explores the advantages and challenges of similar kinds of audience-interactive visual aids.

For our emphasis here, the ethics of using electronic devices during presentations is often situational, as box 6.5 suggests. When speaking in an educational setting such as a classroom, remember that you want others to listen to your speech; you should extend equal respect by listening to other students' speeches. It is an ethical responsibility that you listen rather than engage in superfluous use of electronic devices.

Box 6.5 Electronic Devices and Listening: What Are the Ethics?

Should you use a tablet or laptop while listening to a presentation? Is it ever OK to access your smartphone while listening to a speaker?

Potentially Productive uses of Electronic Devices in a Speaking Situation	Unproductive uses of Electronic Devices in a Speaking Situation
• Note-taking • Fact-checking • Interacting with supporting materials • Participating in talk-related surveys and quizzes • Looking up the meaning of terms used in the talk • Posting feedback—many conventions and workshops assign official hashtags to inspire participant communication via social media	• Web surfing • Checking and composing personal emails • Checking and posting status updates on social media sites • Gaming • Using smartphones that beep or ring during presentations—even loud vibrations from hard surfaces can be disruptive

Be mindful that use of electronic devices, even use that we think is discreet (such as looking at a cell phone under a table), can often be seen by the speaker and can disrupt other audience members. Give speakers your attention and respect, and also ensure you can effectively retain and evaluate information.

Listening for Message Evaluation

A final component of ethical listening is message evaluation. **Evaluative listening** means thinking critically about a speech's content and testing its claims in order to form judgments about its ideas. In this type of listening, we practice critical thinking by evaluating the argument and evidence, we assess source credibility, analyze reasoning patterns and consider logical fallacies, and begin to form our own perspectives on the issues presented.


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You should recognize that the three core ethical listening qualities addressed in this chapter correspond with elements of productive discourse discussed in chapter 3. That is, as a democratic participant, you should have an open mind in first considering a public concern (e.g., an ethical listening attitude). Then you must listen to fully understand the issue and possible solutions (e.g., comprehend and retain information). Finally, once you sufficiently understand the issue, you are ready to discuss it and reach a critical judgment (e.g., message evaluation).

Summary

This chapter explored the importance of ethical listening in making public deliberation possible. Listening

ethics includes maintaining an ethical listening attitude, comprehending and retaining information, and evaluating the message. Specifically, in this chapter we have observed the following:

- Rhetorical ethics demands ethical listening. As audiences of public discourse, it is our dual responsibility to respect the speaker and to openly, carefully, and critically consider their message.
- There are a variety of ways to ethically practice listening in a public communication setting, including active listening, appreciative listening, empathetic listening, listening to improve, listening to comprehend and retain, and evaluative listening.
- There are a number of strategies we can employ as a listener to more ethically engage with speakers, including practices to enhance attention and retention and steps that lessen distractions and limit unproductive engagement with electronic devices.

Key Terms

active listening
appreciative listening
empathetic listening
ethical listener
ethical listening attitude
evaluative listening
listening to comprehend and retain
listening to improve
listening to learn

Review Questions

1. What are three aspects of ethical listening?
2. What is an ethical listening attitude, and what are the different types of listening?
3. What are ways you can listen to comprehend and retain information? How can electronic devices aid or interfere with such listening?

Discussion Questions

1. When listening to speakers, which types of ethical listening do you find easiest to adopt? Most difficult?
2. Why can ethical listening be difficult? What are obstacles to ethical listening?
3. How can you be a more ethical listener? What practices can become commonplace in your listening efforts?
4. How have electronic devices enhanced or impeded your ability to listen to speakers in the past?

7. Standpoint Theory and Ethical Rhetoric

Chapter Objectives

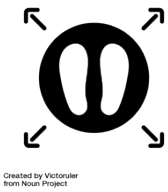
Students will:

- Use standpoint theory to describe the impact of social identities on knowledge.
- Explain the mythical norm.
- Appraise how standpoint theory influences ethical speech preparation, speech performance, and listening.

The previous two chapters explored how choices concerning your speech preparation, speech performance, and listening can help you practice ethical communication. This chapter introduces standpoint theory to further enrich that understanding.

We will first explain standpoint theory and the related concept of positionality. We will then turn to the ideas of intersectionality and the mythical norm. We will end the chapter by using these theories and concepts to reflect again on the ethics of public speaking.

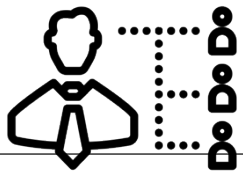
Standpoint Theory



Standpoint theory emerged from feminist philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s to help explain how we gain knowledge and form perspectives.[1] The theory suggests that our standpoint—which is produced by our social identities—influences our knowledge of the world. As philosophy scholar Briana Toole explains, "Knowledge is sensitive to features like your race, your sex, your gender, your sexual orientation, your class, your religious affiliation, and so on."[2] Our social identities impact how we are perceived and interact with the world. In other words, our social identities play a role in how we are treated, what we are (or are not) encouraged or expected to do, where we can (or cannot) easily go, and where and when we are invited to speak. Those experiences influence what we know.

1. Sandra Harding is credited with coining the term *standpoint* in Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
2. Alex Richardson, host and producer, *Examining Ethics*, "Identity Matters: Standpoint Epistemology with Briana Toole," podcast, The Prindle Institute for Ethics, October 31, 2018, https://www.prindleinstitute.org/podcast/briana-toole/, archived at https://perma.cc/QJ8D-8ABE.

For instance, a dark-skinned American Sikh man wearing a turban is more likely in the United States to be treated with suspicion (or even hate) and mistaken as Muslim than, say, an American white man wearing a baseball cap.[3] Consequently, the Sikh man likely knows more about racism, islamophobia, and microaggressions in the United States than the white man, who is less likely to experience them.



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Box 7.1 Standpoint Theory and Positionalities

Which of the following questions can you readily answer? Which questions have never occurred to you before?



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- Which buildings on your campus are easily accessible for people with physical disabilities?
- Which areas of campus are well lit at night and/or have safety call boxes?
- Where is the nearest gender-neutral bathroom located?
- Where are spaces available for religious practices?
- Who should you contact at your college for help paying for textbooks?

Your ability to answer likely depends on your physical ability, gender, religion (or lack thereof), and socioeconomic class. In other words, your knowledge (or ignorance) is influenced by your social identities.

Positionalities

Standpoint theory contends that we differ in our access to knowledge *because* our standpoints are differently positioned. Notice here the word *positioned*. That relates to the concept of a **positionality**, or a person's location (or position) in relation to others in social categories of difference. Such social categories include ethnicity, gender, sexuality, physical ability, religion, citizenship, socioeconomic class, occupation, and so on. The American Sikh man and American white man, for example, have different positionalities regarding their ethnicity and religion. However, the men share the positionalities of nationality and gender.

A positionality, then, is largely the same as a social identity, but it recognizes that social identities typically carry and communicate cultural meanings through their distinctions from others within that category. In the social identity category of "physical ability," someone who is physically able-bodied carries cultural associations that are different from those carried by someone who is visibly physically disabled, which differ from a person who is invisibly physically disabled.

Power

Different cultural meanings matter because they typically translate into differing degrees of societal power. In other

3. A. C. Thompson, "Sikhs in America: A History of Hate," *ProPublica*, August 4, 2017, https://www.propublica.org/article/sikhs-in-america-hate-crime-victims-and-bias, archived at https://perma.cc/8PA6-D3PV.

words, a society will grant privileges to some positionalities within a social category. Physically able-bodied people, for example, appear regularly in visual media and school curricula, can expect most spaces and transportation to be designed for them, and are likely to be included in group activities. Cultures accord less privilege to others who differ within a category. Invisibly physically disabled people, for instance, are frequently hassled for using aids or needing extra help, since their need is not visibly obvious. Society oppresses and even denies others within a category. Visibly physically disabled people may have to research routes and spaces to ensure they can access them, are often mistaken as being mentally challenged or talked to like children, and face job discrimination.

To help articulate such differentiations, we can borrow from Toole the definitions of a **dominantly situated positionality** as "a knower that does not occupy a position of social oppression" (or one that enjoys social privilege and power) and a **marginally situated positionality** as "a knower that does occupy a position of oppression."[4]

A notable irony is that cultural power is *inversely related* to knowledge.

	A dominantly situated positionality	**A marginally situated positionality**
Examples	Physically able-bodied or white in the US	Visibly physically disabled or Sikh in the US
Cultural power	Granted ***more*** social power and privilege	Granted ***less*** social power and privilege
Knowledge	Likely knows ***less*** about oppression because they don't likely experience it.	Likely knows ***more*** about oppressive systems and practices because they and their peers experience them.

It is also important to note that while the terms "dominantly situated" and "marginally situated" imply two separate categories, you might think of positionalities instead as existing along scales of difference—from more dominantly situated to more marginally situated. For example, in terms of housing in the US, we might recognize homeowners as more dominantly situated than people who rent an apartment or home—and even then, we might differentiate among the types and neighborhoods of homes owned or rented. Shifting toward more marginally situated positionalities, we can identify people who are in temporary shelters (due to emergencies or personal safety) as less marginally situated than people who are homeless long-term.

In addition, it is important to state again that how a positionality is situated is based on social or cultural associations rather than anything inherent or true about the people who occupy it.

Box 7.2 Power and Oppression, Not Necessarily Majority and Minority

Labels for types of positionalities correspond with one's position in relation to social oppression (and privilege). They do *not* necessarily equate to people in the majority or minority demographics of a population. We'll provide two examples to explain.

Dominantly Situated but Not the Majority

A positionality is not dominantly situated because it is popular, common, or widespread. It is dominantly situated because it yields social power and privilege. Thus, a minority population can have a positionality that is dominantly situated. In South Africa between 1948 and 1994, for instance, the policy of apartheid gave white Afrikaners political, economic, and social power, though they were numerically in the minority compared to Black Africans.

Marginally Situated but Not the Minority

4. Richardson, "Identity Matters" (emphasis added).

Similarly, a positionality is not marginally situated because it is uncommon or rare. Rather, it is marginally situated because it lacks societal power and suffers oppression. Thus, a majority population can have a positionality that is marginally situated. For example, being the only able-bodied person in a room full of people with physical disabilities does not make the able-bodied person marginally situated. They may be the only such person in that context, but culturally their physical ability still carries greater authority and privilege than people with disabilities. Most spaces, for instance, are designed for able-bodied people, implying they are "normal" compared to people with physical disabilities who are expected to adapt.

Of course, none of us consists of a single social identity or positionality, which is why we turn next to intersectionality.

Intersectionality and the Mythical Norm



Kimberle Crenshaw by *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung via Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY-SA.

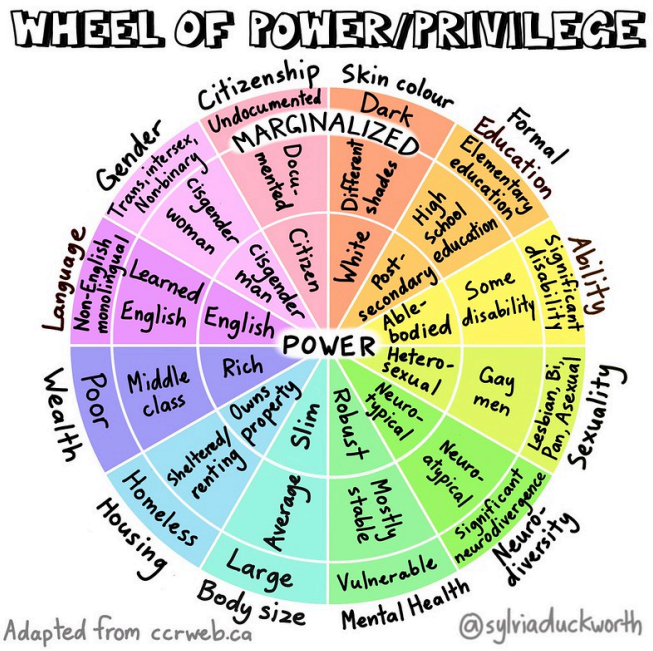
Intersectionality is a concept coined in 1989 by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw.[5] It suggests that our social identities consist of multiple features that combine in meaningful ways to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression. Crenshaw uses the example of Black women to illustrate how they are more likely to experience the intersection of *both* racism and sexism, unlike white women (who encounter sexism) or Black men (who deal with racism).

Each of us has developed a standpoint that consists of intersecting positionalities—some of which are more dominantly situated and some of which are more marginally situated. You can use the "wheel of power/privilege" to begin locating some of your positionalities and reflect on how they intersect and impact your experiences and knowledge.

5. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139–67, https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf.

You'll notice that "power" is located at the wheel's center. The closer one's positionality approaches the center, the more social power, privilege, and prestige it is granted in the United States.

Positionalities near the center of power are also more likely to be associated with cultural norms. That is, they produce and reflect a culture's standards or expectations for desirable (or normative) behaviors, values, and appearances. Having a driver's license, for example, is expected and assumed as "normal" in the United States. That association contributes to its social power and privilege. Most of our transportation infrastructure is designed for car drivers, and a driver's license is accepted for identification purposes when voting or buying alcohol, for instance.



Wheel of Power/Privilege by *sylviaduckworth via Flickr*, CC BY-NC-ND.



Audre Lorde by *Elsa Dorfman via Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY-SA,

Poet, professor, and activist Audre Lorde has labeled this phenomenon—what we might think of as the center of the intersectionality wheel—as the "**mythical norm**." She explains, "In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society."[6]

This norm is mythical because it is not actually normal or typical. Very few (if any) people occupy all the empowered social identities. Indeed, we are each unique. That means, of course, that the mythical norm does *not* necessarily correspond with the majority population. Rather, it consists of characteristics *perceived* as "normal" when, in fact, they are atypical! Nonetheless, we tend to use them to measure people against, including ourselves, because our culture deems them preferable. We might publicly downplay our differences from the mythical norm to appear "normal" or desirable.

The mythical norm helps explain why public discourse can be so difficult, especially when discussing social justice issues. Because dominantly situated positionalities typically avoid encounters with social oppression, they

6. Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 116, https://www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/sites/all/pdf/class/Lorde-Age%20Race%20Class%20and%20Sex.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/EV9W-H9RA.

are more likely to discount or reject claims and evidence (by marginally situated positionalities) that social oppression exists.

Recall in chapter 4 that one reason social protest functions productively is because it can help people with privilege and power acknowledge societal inequity. However, that chapter also explains that social protest as a form of communication—often used by socially marginalized knowers—is typically critiqued as inappropriate, since it does not meet societal norms for civil discourse.

Standpoint and Ethical Rhetoric


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Now that we've established standpoint theory, positionality, intersectionality, and the mythical norm, let's return briefly to the three ethical considerations considered in the previous two chapters: speech preparation, speech performance, and listening.

Speech preparation: Part of being responsible to your audience—and doing the hard but often invisible work of speech preparation—is recognizing the opportunities and challenges posed by your standpoint for the speaking situation. Imagine you are speaking as a person with a marginally situated positionality about a topic to an audience with dominantly situated positionalities. Consider how sharing your experiences might offer the audience something important and meaningful. Your standpoint can help them recognize an issue that may seem obvious to you but not to them.

Of course, you must also anticipate that such an audience may resist your perspective and, accordingly, you should be prepared to address counterarguments and cite outside sources as well. On the flip side, if your audience or the speaking occasion seem odd or unfamiliar to you, perhaps because you and they occupy different social identities, treat the audience with respect. Learn as much as you can about them and the occasion and adjust your speech preparation accordingly.

Speech performance: Recall from chapter 5 that central to an ethical speech performance is using communication that, according to NCA's credo, "enhances human worth, human life, and dignity." Acknowledging your standpoint should help you recognize your assumptions about what topics are worth talking about, who is worth talking to, and how to address them. Becoming more cognizant and even critical of your assumptions may help you adopt the five ethical behaviors discussed in that chapter: avoiding plagiarism, conducting ethical research, practicing ethical and sound reasoning, using language carefully, and taking responsibility for the consequences of your rhetoric.

For instance, recognize that not everyone will be similarly impacted by your language and ideas. Research beyond your own standpoint to learn how people with marginally situated positionalities may be affected if your language and ideas are adopted. For example, if you advocate for an organization to move its meetings to a distant location, away from the "noise" of loud buses and "people on the street," your speech will fail to account for the needs or humanity of people who rely on walking and public transportation.

Listening: Similarly, consider how your standpoint plays a role in who you listen to and how. Which speakers do you readily deem authoritative, and which might you be inclined to discount or dismiss? What kinds of people tend to speak in the communities you are a member of, and who must fight to be heard? Why?

If you become more aware of your standpoint, then you might choose to listen more attentively to people with different positionalities. Furthermore, you might recognize limits to your knowledge due to your dominantly situated positionalities and remain open to speakers who share different experiences.

Summary

This chapter explored standpoint theory and its implications for ethical speaking. Specifically, in this chapter we observed:

- Standpoint theory suggests that our positionalities influence what we believe to be true and normal.
- A positionality refers to a person's location (or position) in relation to others in social categories of difference. Dominantly situated positionalities are those that occupy positions of privilege, while marginally situated positionalities occupy positions of oppression.
- Our social identities consist of multiple features that combine in meaningful ways to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression.
- The mythical norm refers to the set of cultural expectations for what is normal and desirable. They are associated with dominantly situated positionalities. However, they are mythical because no one (or very few people) only consists of dominantly situated positionalities, and everyone is, in fact, unique.
- Knowing standpoint theory can help us reflect critically on our assumptions and think more deeply about the practices associated with ethical speech preparation, speech performance, and listening.

Key Terms

dominantly situated positionality
intersectionality
marginally situated positionality
mythical norm
positionality
standpoint theory

Review Questions

1. What is standpoint theory?
2. What does positionality refer to, and what are examples of positionalities?
3. What do intersectionality and the mythical norm refer to?
4. How can standpoint theory aid your speech preparation, speech performance, and listening?

Discussion Questions

1. Identify several of your own positionalities, possibly by using the wheel provided earlier. Which positionalities were you born into, or which did you not choose? Which did you choose?
2. What insights, lessons, or warnings have your positionalities enabled you to know that people who don't share them might not?
3. In your experience, what mythical norms are most frequently expected of speakers? Where/how are they expressed? What dominantly situated positionalities do the norms reflect? What happens when you violate them?

8. Preparing to Conduct Credible Research

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Adopt a research mindset that approaches research as inquiry, values diverse perspectives, clarifies the scope and needs of research, and slows down to determine best steps.
- Distinguish differences among sources according to their timeliness, accessibility, and mutability.
- Differentiate sources from compilers and recognize artificial intelligence as a type of compiling tool.
- Assess the value of sources according to their bias, accuracy, authority, recency, and relevance.

Imagine you want to develop a speech about excessive waste. Perhaps you worry about the environmental impacts of landfills, and you feel frustrated when your friends use new plastic water bottles every day. But you don't know enough to speak for more than a minute or two, and you don't have any special experiences that could offer unique insights. So why should an audience listen to you or accept your opinions?

This situation calls for **research**, the process of learning about a topic by discovering what credible sources have said, written, or recorded about it. The best speakers use research to improve their understanding of an issue, determine or narrow their focus, and support their claims. Strong research sets apart powerfully compelling speeches from merely interesting or entertaining ones.

Good research also improves civic engagement and aids productive discourse. At a minimum, it enables you to speak accurately; you avoid basing presentations on unproven assumptions or misinformation. At most, research helps you better understand complex topics by discovering multiple perspectives. Consequently, you can help your community more fully comprehend the intricacy of the issues facing it. Finally, good research focuses your attention on ideas rather than on the people advocating them. Such a focus gives you an appropriate way to critically examine alternative positions. For all these reasons, this textbook assumes effective civic engagement requires community members like you to locate, learn from, and cite strong sources.



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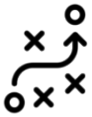
To help you conduct credible and effective research, this chapter will teach you how to differentiate and evaluate sources. We will begin by considering the type of mindset—or habits of mind—you should adopt to make your research more effective and enjoyable.

Research as a Mindset

To some of us, research means quickly finding internet "hits" to fill a required bibliography or finding evidence to back your position. Neither act really involves research, however. Recall we defined research as the process of *learning* about a topic by discovering what credible sources have said, written, or recorded about it. That means research initially requires adopting a particular mindset: one that values inquiry and diverse perspectives, clarifies the type and scope of research needed, and slows down to thoughtfully discover appropriate sources. We will briefly explain each of these habits of a research mindset.

Approach Research as Inquiry Versus Strategy

Research means educating yourself. To do that, you should approach **research as inquiry**: the process of studying a topic with the desire to learn. This contrasts with approaching **research as strategy**: the process of studying the topic only to find sources and evidence that support your preferred solution.

Research as Inquiry 	**Research as Strategy** 
Treats research as an opportunity to educate yourself	Treats research as a technique to support a predetermined conclusion
Open to discovering perspectives and arguments you had not considered before	Closed off from potentially compelling reasons to reject or rethink your desired option
Helps you discover or narrow your desired focus	Blinds you to more useful or narrower foci
Strengthens your understanding of the topic	Reinforces your understanding of the topic
Community-focused: Helps you locate and advocate the most suitable options for your community	Self-focused: Helps you promote your preferred option without fully educating yourself on alternatives first

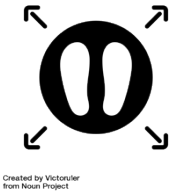
Box 8.1 A Librarian's Perspective on Research

Instruction librarian Lane Wilkinson distinguishes *researching as strategy* by referring to it simply as *searching*. In their words, "It's a simple distinction: when you know the answer, or know that an answer exists, you search. When you don't know the answer, or aren't even sure about the question, you research."

> Wilkinson goes on to distinguish research as inquiry as "involv[ing] uncertainty, persistence, iteration, and a willingness to accept that what you discover may not fit in neatly with what you believe."[1]

When researching, then, your mindset should be to remain open to finding the best outcomes for your community, not simply searching for information that supports your predetermined conclusion.

Value Diverse Perspectives



When you approach research as inquiry, you should encounter perspectives that differ from your experience and knowledge. As we learned in chapter 7, our standpoint influences what we know and find authoritative. Recall that standpoint theory suggests that our social identities influence our knowledge of the world and our perceptions of what is true or normal. Thus, we're likely to dismiss or discount perspectives that emerge from differing standpoints as foreign or even untrue.

A research mindset encourages us, instead, to be self-reflexive of our standpoint and to value experiences and knowledge that differ from our own and from each other. Indeed, among research's benefits is learning how diverse people, groups, and organizations define, experience, and talk about the issue and possible ways to address it.

Clarify Research Scope and Needs

Another habit of a research mindset is to clarify your research needs and scope. First, how broadly or narrowly should you focus your research? Think of yourself somewhat like Goldilocks, who, in the fairy tale, entered the Three Bears' house and tested their chairs, beds, and bowls of porridge to find the ones that were not too hard/hot or too soft/cold but were "just right" for her needs. Similarly, your goal is to determine the scope of your research that is "just right" for your needs: not too broad or too narrow. Review your assignment instructions or talk with your instructor for guidance.



Image by Wannapik Studio, CC BY-NC.

1. Lane Wilkinson, "Is Research Inquiry?," *Sense and Reference: A Philosophical Library Blog*, July 15, 2014, https://senseandreference.wordpress.com/2014/07/15/is-research-inquiry/, archived at https://perma.cc/9YMJ-5RMA.

Box 8.2 Researching Too Broadly or Too Narrowly

Imagine your speech topic regards mental health, and you need to conduct research to learn more.

Researching too broadly: Researching "mental health" will result in an overwhelming number of sources that may not directly relate to each other.

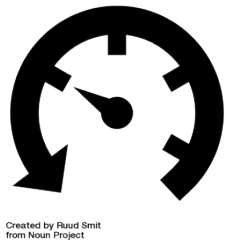
Researching too narrowly: Alternatively, beware of overly narrowing your focus, which may result in few or no useful sources. An example of an overly narrowed topic is "depression in eighth grade boys who live in Iowa."

"*Just right*": What research topics qualify as "just right" in breadth will vary based on your audience and speaking situation. For a classroom speech, though, you might consider researching about particular types of mental health challenges (e.g., depression, PTSD, gender dysphoria), specific kinds of people affected (e.g., men, elderly, people of color), or particular regions impacted (your state, rural towns, college campuses).

Second, what type of evidence and sources do you need? Too often, we make assumptions about what sources compose "research": scientific data, legal rulings, news articles? Instead of making assumptions, clarify exactly what types of information you need. Consider your speaking goal and the type of speech you are delivering (deliberative, persuasive, etc.) as well as your audience. As we will discover in chapter 11, effective speakers adapt their speeches to their audiences. That includes considering the kinds of sources and information your audience deems credible and compelling. In some cases, it may be preferable and more helpful, for instance, to cite a press release that describes the conclusions of a scientific experiment rather than citing the scholarly article itself.

Slow Down

It is tempting to immediately jump online and search Google or ChatGPT for your topic. The quickness of the results feels satisfying. But are the results likely to meet your needs?



Created by Ruud Smit from Noun Project

After considering your research needs and scope, take a moment to thoughtfully identify the best way to locate the *types* of information you need. If you decide you need a press release, then look for news articles by using a database such as Nexis Uni or searching specifically on Google News. If, instead, you need a *scientific article*, then search a database like PubMed that features such scholarship or use Google Scholar.

Slowing down also means not necessarily accepting the first relevant source you find. We will talk about evaluating sources in "Criteria to Consider When Finding Sources: BAARR." For now, we recommend you **read laterally**, meaning that you find and review several sources about the same topic. Such exposure will help you decide if you have narrowed your topic appropriately, if you are finding the types of evidence and information you need, and if the information you are finding is widely shared or is subject to debate or disagreement.

Box 8.3 Adopting a Research Mindset

If you want to conduct research about **reducing waste**, adopting a research mindset could mean that you do the following:

Research as inquiry: Don't assume your college community doesn't care enough about the environment or waste management, and don't assume recycling is the best answer. Instead, explore exactly what can get recycled in your area and how the global economy might impact that. Discover how waste *reduction* might impact the problem and if and why your community isn't already reducing its waste.

Value diverse perspectives: Consider not only what other students experience and think or even just what administrators say. Find and learn from custodial workers at your college, any clubs or organizations devoted to environmental concerns, waste management in your city or town, and studies about which items actually get recycled.

Clarify research scope and needs: For the scope, do you want to address waste only on your college campus or also in your city or town? Do the two affect one another? Should you consider how state regulations might impact how waste is handled? Might you expand your research to other countries for alternative models of waste management, reduction, or recycling?

As for your research needs, do you require state or national data about how much waste is currently produced? Might offices or people at your university help you attain more local information and perspectives? Would examples or models from other colleges or states prove more useful? Might a survey or public opinion poll help you understand consumer behaviors?

Slow down: Where should you look first? Might local newspaper archives be helpful, or perhaps conducting interviews may be most effective? Will you find the type of research you need, instead, in national news articles or scholarly studies? Perhaps you can look at collegiate press releases or even reviews of campus dining companies to learn about innovative ways to reduce, reuse, or recycle waste.

Differences Across Sources

With so many sources available online, it can be difficult to differentiate one from another. To the untrained eye, sources can all look similar: words on your screen, possibly with images or even videos. Such similarity can prevent you from recognizing important differences across sources that can help you decide which sources best suit your research needs. In this section, we highlight how sources use different processes in creating and publishing information and how sources differ from compilers.

Differences in the Information Creation and Publication Process

If you were shown digital copies of a newspaper article, a book chapter, and a blog, could you quickly tell they are very different types of sources? Do you know why? Clues can be found in their timeliness, accessibility, and mutability.

Timeliness



Timeliness concerns how fast or slow the process was to finalize and publish the source.

If we think of timeliness on a spectrum, then some sources will fall toward the faster end. An amateur blog or a social media post can be published online immediately, because typically one person creates and publishes a post. Professional news or trade journal articles also strive for a sense of immediacy (since journalists want to report what is "new"), but they typically take a little more time, since story ideas need to be approved, edited, and formatted, often by additional people. The same is true for many social media influencers, such as YouTubers who employ teams of people to imagine new ideas, plan and record them, and then edit and post the resulting video.

Shifting toward the even slower end of the spectrum, we find scholarship. Scholarly books and articles are produced by professional academics or researchers. While the pace can vary, most scholarship takes considerable time to publish. The lengthy process includes time to prepare, write, and submit a manuscript to a journal or university press; undergo review by other people in the same scholarly field; revise based on their feedback; possibly go through a second round of review and revision; and finally be formatted for publication. The process can take anywhere from several months to a year to complete before being published.



FASTER	⟷	SLOWER
Social media post	Professional news article	Scholarly book

Accessibility

Timeliness corresponds with a source's accessibility. In this context, **accessibility** refers to whether and how easily the author can directly publish their work. As mentioned, faster sources tend to give the author more direct access to publishing. If you had the funding, for instance, you could create a website today and publish nearly whatever you want. Slower sources tend to have more gatekeeping, which is when people or groups other than the author have the power to decide what gets published and how. As we explained, professional journalists and scholars need to obtain several other people's approval before their work can be seen by a wider audience.

Box 8.4 Research Trade-Offs Related to Timeliness and Accessibility

A source's timeliness and accessibility do not determine its worth, but they do convey research trade-offs you should consider:

	Faster, More Directly Accessible Sources (e.g., Social Media Posts)	Slower, More Heavily Gatekept Sources (e.g., Scholarly Books)
+	Can provide immediate information and opinions about very current events, even as they unfold in real time	Are more likely to include valid information
−	Typically lack depth and may include inaccurate information	Cannot directly address very recent happenings

Mutability

Finally, sources vary in their **mutability**, or likelihood of changing. They may all appear immutable (stable), but what you read on your screen today may not be the same when you access that source in a month or year.

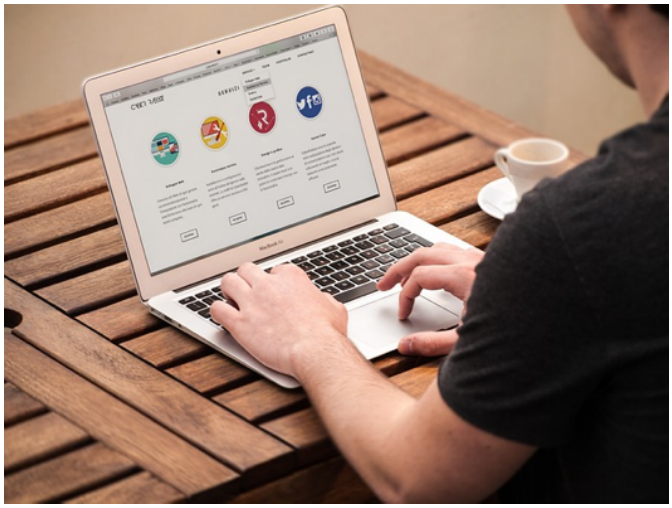


Image by CyberRabbit via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

It depends on the type of source. Some sources, such as online news articles and organizations' websites, are likely to change over time. Even websites maintained by authoritative sources like the United States government tend to alter as their information is updated. The URL remains the same, but the information or even titles will change. As another example, social media posts can alter, since the original author can edit or even delete the post. In contrast, other sources are reliably static; that is, they don't change over time. Once a scholarly article or book is published, that's it. It will be the same every time you return to it.

The likelihood of a source changing impacts not only how you cite it (which we discuss in chapter 9) but also how difficult or easy it is to find again. If you use a source that is likely to change or even disappear, we recommend you "freeze" it by saving a copy or a screenshot with the date you saved it. If you want to return to a particular digital source, you might also save it by creating a Perma Link through Perma.cc if your college library has a subscription you can use. Alternatively, you can save the source to Internet Archive's WayBack Machine at https://archive.org/web/. That service can also come in handy if you failed to save a source and are desperate to find it again!

Box 8.5 Differences Across Sources

Online sources may appear similar, but they differ in important ways based on the following:

- **Timeliness:** how slowly or quickly they are created and published.
- **Accessibility:** how directly or indirectly an author can publish their work.
- **Mutability:** whether the content is dynamic or static over time.

Sources Versus Compilers

Though we have used the term, we have not yet defined what we mean by a *source*. That term matters, because you need to differentiate between a source and a compiler. For our interests, a **source** is an original communication product that has been written by one or more human authors and published for an audience. A book, a news article, and a speech are all sources. A **compiler** is a service that gathers information from multiple sources and makes it available. Two types of compilers that students often confuse with sources are research databases and artificial intelligence (AI).

Research Databases

A research **database** is an organized online storehouse of information that can easily be searched to retrieve desired sources. Numerous research databases exist with collections ranging from scholarly articles and ebooks to news media broadcast transcripts and legal documents.



Image by Jan Antonin Kolar via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

Most of the popular research databases are actually databases *of* databases. That is, they include multiple *collections* of sources. Popular examples include JSTOR, ProQuest, and Academic Search Complete. College libraries typically subscribe to several databases, allowing students to access them for free as long as they enter through the library's website. Check your college library's home page or talk with a reference librarian at your university about available databases and how to access them. Often, *if* you go through your college's library home page, you can access for free the research databases the library subscribes to. If, instead, you go directly to a database's website, you will likely run into a paywall.

A research database is a compiler, not a source, because it is a service that pulls together and presents existing sources based on your search terms. Consequently, it can make researching for some sources easier and quicker. However, it is not a source.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)



Many types of AI exist, but at its core, AI draws on, retrieves, and compiles scores of sources to produce content. The content is prompted by a user's questions (while using an AI chatbot) or search terms (while using a search engine like Google). The output—such as the paragraphs an AI chatbot writes in response to your request or the images an AI text-to-image generator might produce—can make AI *appear* like a source. However, AI is not a source as we have defined it. It is not human, and it does not (yet) produce original communication as we—your authors—think of originality.

Instead, machine-learning AI uses algorithms that very quickly analyze existing data from myriad sources to find patterns—which is the compiling function—and then predict a useful or appropriate response. AI may assemble the predicted content in novel or unique ways, but it is based on the sources and data that AI draws on.

> *PCMag*'s K. Thor Jensen explained the shortcomings of generative AI: "Computers aren't capable of what we would consider original thought—they just recombine existing data in a variety of ways. That output might be novel and interesting, but it isn't unique."[2]

AI's function as a robust compiler rather than a source helps explain why it tends to unreflectively repeat the dominant racist, sexist, and homophobic biases and stereotypes commonly found in existing sources[3]—and why you are more likely to encounter factual errors when using generative AI. According to *PCMag*'s K. Thor Jensen, the datasets AI trains on become outdated and reflect societal biases.[4]

Jensen also points to two additional factors for AI's errors: the complexity of AI's coding, which prevents our ability to trace the source of an inaccurate response to correct it, and AI's requirement to produce a response to your query even if it does not have the answer.[5]

> "A generative AI model cannot tell you whether something is factual; it can pull data only from what it's

2. K. Thor Jensen, "Yes, Machines Make Mistakes: The Ten Biggest Flaws in Generative AI," *PCMag*, April 18, 2023, https://www.pcmag.com/news/yes-machines-make-mistakes-the-10-biggest-flaws-in-generative-ai.
3. A. W. Olheiser, "AI Automated Discrimination. Here's How to Spot It," *The Highlight by Vox and Capital B*, June 14, 2023, https://www.vox.com/technology/23738987/racism-ai-automated-bias-discrimination-algorithm; Nitasha Tiku, Kevin Shaul, and Szu Yu Chen, "These Fake Images Reveal How AI Amplifies Our Worst Stereotypes," *Washington Post*, November 1, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2023/ai-generated-images-bias-racism-sexism-stereotypes/.
4. Jensen, "Yes, Machines Make Mistakes."
5. Jensen, "Yes, Machines Make Mistakes."

been fed. So if that data says that the sky is green, the AI will give you back stories that take place under a lime-colored sky. When ChatGPT prepares output for you, it doesn't fact-check or second-guess itself. And while you can correct it during your session, those corrections aren't fed back to the algorithm. This software is comfortable lying and making things up because it has no way not to, and that makes relying on it for research especially risky."[6]

Further, people can use AI to deliberately produce false videos or recordings of famous people, for instance, doing or saying things that never occurred. While many of these fakes are produced in good fun (like hearing Adele's version of a Beatles' song), the technology can easily be used more maliciously to trick audiences into believing falsehoods.

Therefore, we warn you to not rely on AI for your research. Not only is it a compiler rather than a source, but it also risks being inaccurate or used purposefully to deceive—a point we made in chapter 5 and explore more fully in chapter 9.

Having said that, AI can help you get started on a speech by functioning as a feedback tool. As we suggested in chapter 5, you might use AI to brainstorm arguments and counterpoints. It can also help you restate complex ideas more clearly and produce effective visual aids. If you want to use AI in *any* of these ways,

1. consult your instructor and/or librarian to discuss if and how you can use AI,
2. consider the ethical implications involved in doing so (chapter 5),
3. explicitly acknowledge your use of AI by citing which tool you used and how (chapter 9),
4. double-check any sources AI cites to ensure they actually exist and provide useful information, and
5. find additional sources and develop and synthesize the ideas you gain on your own.

Criteria to Consider When Finding Sources: BAARR

In addition to adopting a research mindset and distinguishing differences among sources, we urge you to recognize that not all sources are equally credible. Some sources may be easy to find but are outdated and provide inaccurate information, for instance. If you adopt such sources, you set a very low bar for references and evidence, which will reflect poorly on your credibility and weaken your advocacy.

Instead, we invite you to keep in mind five criteria when you find sources. You will notice they form the acronym BAARR to remind you to set the bar high when finding sources. They include the following:

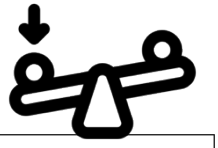
Bias
Accuracy
Authority
Recency
Relevance to your topic

Avoid thinking of these as a checklist; rather, use the criteria to answer questions about each source so you can make thoughtful decisions.

6. Jensen, "Yes, Machines Make Mistakes."

Bias

Bias is a predetermined commitment to a particular ideological or political perspective. A biased source is one that openly professes such a commitment or is commonly recognized as doing so. Biased sources can include those that see the world through a predetermined set of presumptions, beliefs, and/or philosophies.



Created by komsiatun from Noun Project

Box 8.6 Biased Sources

Biased sources include the following:

- politically aligned sources (e.g., the liberal magazine *Mother Jones* and the conservative magazine *National Review*)
- some nonpartisan organizations (e.g., People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals [PETA] and the Food Research and Action Center)

Biased sources are likely to produce information and perspectives that reflect or even reinforce their preferences. To return to a speech on excessive waste again, if you interviewed the board chair of Keep America Beautiful, they would certainly provide information on why recycling is important and should be improved.

The point of this is *not* that you should never make use of biased sources. Indeed, most sources include some kind of bias. Fortunately, many biased sources can be considered authoritative, relevant, and recent. Rather, you should utilize biased sources knowingly and incorporate them into a broad range of sources, including those that are not inherently biased or are more balanced. When you use a biased source in your presentation, acknowledge it as such. This shows the audience you are an honest speaker because you make your sources fully known rather than deceptively use biased sources to manipulate your listeners.

Two of the most helpful ways to identify whether and how much a news source is politically biased are through Ad Fontes' online Media Bias Chart and the AllSides Media Bias Chart.[7] Both reveal that biased sources vary in their degree of bias. The Ad Fontes' chart also accounts for sources' degrees of reliability or accuracy. We turn to this important consideration next.

Accuracy

Whatever your immediate speaking goal, your ultimate achievement is to aid your community in thinking through issues and making sound decisions. Fulfilling that objective requires accurate information. **Accuracy** refers to the truthfulness or veracity of the information provided by a source. Unfortunately, misinformation and disinformation abound. As defined in chapter 2, misinformation is the unintentional spread of inaccurate or false claims that lack sufficient or valid



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7. "Media Bias Chart 12.0," Ad Fontes Media, January 2024, https://www.adfontesmedia.com/static-mbc/; "AllSides Media Bias Chart, Version 10.1", AllSides, 2025, https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart.

evidence and/or identifiable and credible sources (i.e., an innocent mistake or gaffe). Disinformation, in contrast, refers to a deliberate attempt to spread wrong information to mislead listeners.

Box 8.7 Examples of Disinformation

Disinformation can be spread by a range of people, groups, and organizations—including some that may surprise you or do not *appear* to deliberately supply disinformation. The following are examples:



Disinformation vs Misinformation by *Srijankedia/Eman235 via Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY.

- Some government actors distribute disinformation for **propagandistic purposes**. We can find examples historically in the lies US high-ranking government officials knowingly made about the Vietnam War (famously revealed in the Pentagon Papers) or in Russian President Vladimir Putin's falsehoods to his own people about its war on Ukraine.
- Interest groups have been created online to **promote disinformation and political polarization** around topics such as climate change. They can have convincing-sounding names like the Climate Intelligence Foundation, and their online presence can appear authoritative, but their bias against environmentalism corresponds (in this case) with strategically promoting disinformation.

Obviously, you must be wary of both misinformation and disinformation so you do not mislead your listeners. Saying that can be easier said than done, since sources that meet other criteria—that is, they are authoritative, recent, and relevant—can present disinformation.

Your best bet, then, is to read laterally and do some background reading. As we established earlier, reading laterally means finding and reviewing several sources about the same topic, and background reading involves going to reference sources that reflect information and facts that are consensually agreed to by a wide variety of parties. These strategies will help you decide if the information you are finding is widely shared or is subject to debate or disagreement. If a source you have found directly contradicts what you are finding elsewhere (for instance, that climate change is occurring), that can be a clue that the source may be promoting misinformation or disinformation and should be further investigated.

Authority



Authority relates to the expertise, power, or recognized knowledge a source has concerning a topic. We might distinguish among various types of authority a source may exercise: subject, societal, and special experiences.

Subject Authority

Subject authorities are sources with trained expertise on the topic. A scholar with a PhD in waste management studies would be a subject authority on that topic. Somewhat similarly, the Environmental Protection Agency would also be

an authoritative source about environmental effects of landfills, because the agency's entire work—that is, their subject expertise—focuses solely on environmental concerns. Sources that have also been reviewed by subject experts—such as scholarly publications—carry even more authoritative weight.

Societal Authority

Societal authority emphasizes a source's power to control outcomes based on their position within a society or organization. Your mayor would be considered an authoritative source, for instance, about your city's waste management challenges. Similarly, Harvard University's Office for Sustainability wields societal authority over that university's reduction, recycling, and disposal of waste.

Authority from Special Experiences

Authority can also be accrued through *special experiences*. For instance, a person who grew up in a neighborhood near a hazardous waste site could speak with some authority on that experience. Perhaps they attended town meetings about the site, experienced ill health effects, or could share the site's effects on their quality of life.

Recall that sometimes special experiences are due to one's positionalities. In chapter 7, we discussed how, according to standpoint theory, a person with a marginally situated positionality is likely to know more about a relevant system of power because they are more likely to encounter and navigate it. Hazardous waste sites are more often located near neighborhoods of low-income families and people of color.[8] The special experiences of such a person who grew up near a hazardous waste site might also be able to shed light on how such issues as racism and classism contribute to inequity.



It is important for you to assess the type and degree of a source's authority—both for yourself and on behalf of your audience as part of your obligation to ethical speech preparation, discussed in chapter 5. Such assessment helps you determine how much you and your audience can trust a source to understand the topic. It also prevents you from dismissing sources that can offer useful information but may not be authorities on the subject. Reference librarians are great resources and can answer questions you may have about finding authoritative material. Don't be afraid to approach one of them at your university or college library to ask for help.

Recency

The recency of your sources is also important. **Recency** refers to how up to date the information is that a source provides. If the source and its information are outdated, then it is not terribly useful to you or your audience. Imagine if you began a speech about waste by sharing data from ten years earlier. "What about now?" your audience would immediately wonder.

8. "Targeting Minority, Low-Income Neighborhoods for Hazardous Waste Sites," *University of Michigan News*, January 19, 2016, https://news.umich.edu/targeting-minority-low-income-neighborhoods-for-hazardous-waste-sites/.


Created by Miss Ok
from Noun Project

Instead, when addressing community concerns and issues, seek sources published recently. Even persistent community issues can change at any moment. If your town's mayor announces a new waste reduction plan the week before your speech, you would need to incorporate that announcement and revise your speech accordingly. Otherwise, your audience will likely dismiss your speech as obsolete.

Of course, not every topic requires the use of recent sources, however. For example, historical facts seldom change and thus can be supported by older sources. Landmark works that have received acclaim might maintain a timeless character. On the other hand, our understanding of history can alter with new archival research, the release of private papers, and new interpretations of historical documents. Thus, a more recent treatment of a traditional topic may, depending on its credibility, prove to be a superior source.

Relevance

Not every source that mentions your topic is as relevant as another. **Relevance** refers to the degree of association between the source, a speaker's topic, and their audience. Highly relevant sources offer information that directly addresses your particular focus on your topic and resonates with your specific audience. No matter how interesting the information or ideas presented by a source, it won't help your speech if it doesn't relate directly to your topic or your audience.


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from Noun Project

Box 8.8 Relevant Sources for a Speech About Excessive Waste

If you wanted to motivate your college community to reduce waste, you would desire sources relevant to your audience and particular angle.

- You might find articles in your college newspaper to be more compelling, for instance, than national news articles.
- You might turn to a source such as *The College Sustainability Report Card*, an annual survey conducted by the Sustainable Endowments Institute that grades each college and university's efforts at sustainable living. What if you discovered that your college's chief rival consistently scored a much higher grade than your own campus? That might get your audience's attention and perhaps bring out its competitive spirit!

The point is that with each speech, you must consider which sources work for your particular topic and audience.

Together, the criteria discussed—bias, accuracy, authority, recency, and relevance—can help you decide which sources to use to develop your speech and which to dismiss. Opt for sources that best meet your needs, using the criteria as guidelines. When in doubt, you can also always ask a reference librarian for help.

Box 8.9 Criteria to Evaluate Sources: Setting a High BAARR

When determining the value and veracity of a source, consider the following criteria. Think of each as a spectrum rather than a box to be checked.

Bias: A predetermined commitment to a particular ideological or political perspective.

- Who are the publishers, sponsors, and/or authors of the source? Who paid for the source's creation? What can you learn about them?
- How is the source described, such as in an "About" section or mission statement?
- How do other sources describe this source, and where does it fall in the Ad Fontes Media Bias chart or on the AllSides Media Bias chart?
- What evidence of bias, if any, is present in the material itself?

Accuracy: The truthfulness or veracity of the information provided by a source.

- Has the material been reviewed or vetted by an editor or reviewers?
- Does the material line up with information and facts provided by other sources about the same topic? Do a wide variety of parties agree on the same facts?
- Can you find reviews or responses to the material?

Authority: The expertise, power, or recognized knowledge a source has concerning a topic.

- Who is the author, and what type of (relevant) authority do they have, if any?
    - Are they an expert on the subject matter? Do they have a title or degree that demonstrates their expertise?
    - Does their position in society or an organization lend them authority on the subject?
    - Have they had relevant special experiences that authorize the information they provide?

Recency: How up to date the information is that a source provides.

- What is the publication date or the date the material was last updated?
- Have more recent sources appeared that alter or revise the information the source provides?
- Are you using the source to establish a historical fact or to offer a more recent interpretation of a historical occurrence?

Relevance: The degree of association between the source, a speaker's topic, and their audience.

- Does the source directly address your particular focus on the topic?
- How well will this source resonate with your specific audience?

Summary

This chapter has introduced you to the mindset, considerations, and evaluative criteria needed to prepare to conduct credible research. Good research produces more effective speeches and aids productive discourse.

- We recommend you adopt a research mindset that approaches research as inquiry, values diverse perspectives, clarifies the scope and needs of research, and slows down to determine best steps. If you approach research in this way, you will more likely enjoy the purpose of research: to learn about a topic by discovering what credible sources have said, written, or recorded about it.
- Distinguishing differences among sources can help you decide which sources best suit your research needs. In particular, it is important to appreciate the different processes sources use in creating and publishing information as well as how sources differ from compilers.
- Artificial intelligence is a robust compiler rather than a source. While it may help stimulate speech ideas, it does not qualify as a source and therefore should not be used as such or to find sources.
- Assess the value of sources by asking questions about their potential bias, accuracy, authority on your topic, recency, and relevance to your topic. Use these criteria to set a high BAARR for your research.

Key Terms

accessibility
accuracy
authority
bias
compiler
database
mutability
read laterally
recency
relevance
research
research as inquiry
research as strategy
source
timeliness

Review Questions

1. What role does research play in civic engagement? How does research aid communal decision-making?
2. What is the difference between researching as a mode of inquiry and researching as a strategy?
3. What are major differences in the process sources use to create and publish information? What's the difference between a source and a compiler?
4. What criteria should you consider when finding sources? What does BAARR refer to?

Discussion Questions

1. Is it ever appropriate to approach research as a strategy or to focus on a single perspective? When? Why?
2. How might AI aid or harm your research? How have you used it for a class assignment, or how have you heard of other people using it for research?
3. What are the best ways you have found to recognize and avoid misinformation and disinformation? Have you ever accidentally failed to recognize either? Why?
4. Are there any circumstances when it is ethical to use sources biased in only one direction? When? Why?

9. Finding and Documenting Research Sources

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Strategically find research sources using Google and college library resources.
- Conduct an interview effectively.
- Accurately document sources through written and spoken citations.

In the previous chapter, you learned how to prepare to conduct credible research. That chapter talked about adopting a research mindset, recognizing differences across sources, and evaluating the value of sources. Keep those skills in mind as you read this chapter, which will help you shift from preparing to finding and documenting research sources.

Because most students use Google to find sources, this chapter will provide tips to make your efforts more fruitful. We will follow that with the encouragement to also explore the resources available through your college or local library. Then the chapter will explore interviews as a means of creating sources. We will give you tools to contact someone to interview, prepare for the interview, and conduct the interview. Finally, the chapter will end by explaining the importance of documenting your sources and providing guidance for how to do so for a variety of sources. But first we'll begin with a note about using artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots to find research sources.

Using Artificial Intelligence Chatbots to Find Research Sources

As AI becomes more popular and powerful, students increasingly turn to chatbots for their research. We clarified in the previous chapter that AI is itself not a source but is more of a robust compiler of sources. We defined a compiler as a service that gathers information from multiple sources and makes it available.

As you probably already know, among the information that an AI chatbot can compile are research sources. If you ask ChatGPT for "a list of specific sources about excessive waste management," for example, it will provide five or so. The ease and efficiency of this service is terrific, but be careful! AI chatbots can "**hallucinate**," or make up, sources that do not exist.



Image by Ungeorgiy via Wikimedia Commons, *Public Domain*.

"In addition to potentially providing false information, ChatGPT can produce legitimate looking reference citations for materials that don't exist."[1]

Box 9.1 AI Hallucinates Research Sources

When we asked for specific sources about excessive waste, most of what ChatGPT provided *did not exist*.

- It named *The Waste Land: A History of Waste Management* by Elizabeth A. M. McKenzie, published by Routledge in 2019, but that full title does not appear on Routledge's site, Amazon, or Google Scholar.
- Similarly, ChatGPT listed a scholarly article by John Smith titled "Excessive Waste: A Global Perspective" and published in 2021 in the *Journal of Environmental Studies*, volume 34, issue 2. This journal does exist, but its volume 34 was published in 2024 (not 2021), that volume only consists of issue number 1 (so there is no issue 2), and John Smith does not appear in the journal's list of authors published.

1. "Don't Get Ghosted: Beware of ChatGPT Generated Citations," *Los Alamos National Laboratory Research Library*, https://researchlibrary.lanl.gov/posts/beware-of-chat-gpt-generated-citations/, archived June 30, 2025, at https://web.archive.org/web/20250630180533/https://researchlibrary.lanl.gov/posts/beware-of-chat-gpt-generated-citations/.

Others have run into similar problems with AI chatbots hallucinating research sources.[2]

AI chatbots will get smarter with time and therefore should offer more accurate references and hallucinate less. Nonetheless, if you choose to use an AI chatbot to find research sources, it will always be your responsibility to (1) make sure the sources provided actually exist and (2) find the sources and read them. Recall from the previous chapter that research is the process of *learning* about a topic by discovering what credible sources have said, written, or recorded about it. Finding and documenting sources are means toward the end of that learning, not ends in themselves.

Finding Research Sources with Google

In addition to AI chatbots, you probably also turn to Google to conduct research. Tech companies such as Google have incorporated AI into their products, including their search engines, making a distinction between Google and AI somewhat futile. For our purposes, however, when we refer to Google, we mean the more traditional search engine as opposed to AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini.

Fortunately, search engines like Google can often meet your research needs, especially for an introductory-level class.[3] To help you, we will briefly discuss domain labels, open access resources, specialized search engines, and advanced searches.

Domain Labels

When deciding which Google search results to use, consider domain labels. The top-level domain name appears after the dot of a web address. Use the domain name to decide which search results are more likely to be of high quality, such as the following:

.edu	US postsecondary educational institution	willamette.edu, usc.edu
.gov	US government entity	whitehouse.gov, senate.gov
.mil	US military organization	army.mil, health.mil
.org	Noncommercial organization, such as a charity or nonprofit organization	habitat.org, redcross.org

Information from any of these domain labels is less likely to be used to sell you a service or product. In contrast, the .com domain name refers to a business with explicitly commercial motivations, such as exxonmobil.com or walmart.com.

Of course, websites with the domain labels listed here may still offer biased information. As we discussed in the

2. "Don't Get Ghosted."; Robin Emsley, "ChatGPT: These Are Not Hallucinations—They Are Fabrications and Falsifications," *Schizophrenia* 9, no. 52 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1038/s41537-023-00379-4.
3. Maureen Richards, "Is 'Just Googling It' Good Enough for First-Year Students?," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 28, no. 1 (2021): 85–104, https://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2021.1894295.

previous chapter, bias does not mean you should not use the source, but it does mean you should be aware of the bias and honest with your audience when citing the source.

For domain labels, also notice that the examples are for US websites. Other countries issue domain names as well, and when they do, they include a country code at the end of the website address. For instance, all website addresses that end with .uk, such as parliament.uk, refer to domain names issued by the United Kingdom. So that is worth keeping in mind as you process the information provided.

Open Access Resources

Another savvy way to find higher-quality research on Google is to look for open access (OA) materials in your search results. According to Anita Walz, "Open access items are always free to read. Unless printed, they are always online, and never require passwords, log-in credentials, payments, or access restrictions to read."[4] They typically do not include advertisements either. OA materials most frequently appear as scholarly books and articles, typically making them more credible, thoughtful, and in-depth than other types of digital resources.



Open Access *by Rafabollas via Wikimedia Commons,* CC BY.

Box 9.2 Finding Open Access Research Sources

There is no single "OA" website to search. Instead, there are many online repositories of OA materials.

- If you want to find *books*, you might begin by using the Directory of Open Access Books or the Online Library of Open Access Books.
- If you want to find *journals or articles*, you might start with the Directory of Open Access Journals.

Specialized Searches

In addition to considering domain labels and finding open access resources, you can also take advantage of the specialized search options that search engines like Google offer. These options only show websites that fit the specific category chosen. For instance, Google currently offers search engines devoted to news, scholarship (Google Scholar), patents, finances, trends, books, and images. Once you have chosen your specialized search engine (say, Google Scholar), type in your search terms knowing you will only retrieve sources directly relevant to the type of specialized search you selected.

4. Anita R. Walz, "Differentiating Between Open Access and Open Educational Resources," *VTech Works*, October 19, 2019, http://hdl.handle.net/10919/94422.2.

Advanced Searches



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A final way you can smartly use Google is by using its Advanced Search options. The exact location of the Advanced Search page changes, but it is typically part of Settings, or you can search on Google for "Advanced Search" or go directly to google.com/advanced_search. Once there, you will find a wide range of options, including

- searching for sources with precise phrases or ranges of numbers,
- ensuring particular words are *not* included in the findings,
- narrowing sources to those updated within a given time period (past twenty-four hours, past week, etc.),
- searching only specific types of domain labels or sites, and
- many more.

While all the advanced options can be incredibly useful, we draw your attention to conducting a site- or domain-specific search. This type of search limits your research results to matches found only on one particular website or domain label. A site-specific search—like all the Advanced Search tools—is a helpful way to both harness the power of a search engine like Google and focus your search.

Box 9.3 Using a Site-Specific (Advanced) Search

Let's say you want recent information about landfills, but only data published on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) web pages. In that case, you would simply

- go to google.com/advanced_search
- on the Advanced Search page, type your search term: "landfill"; and
- then find the prompt for "site or domain" and type "epa.gov."

Every result listed will include epa.gov in its web address. Alternatively, you can search only for a particular domain label, such as .org websites.

Limitations with Using Google

Be aware of Google's limitations as a place to search for sources: The results range in quality, paywalls can stop you from accessing materials, and you might mistake the results from an incorporated AI chatbot for search engine results.

First, the quality of Google's findings can range dramatically, and the order in which findings are listed does not correspond to their quality. Don't assume the best research materials will appear at the top or that the best resources can necessarily be found through Google. Even using the tips provided, you are more assured of high quality if you search through your library's website.



Created by Hanbai from Noun Project

Second, despite the proliferation of OA materials, you can quickly run into paywalls that prevent you from accessing the sources you need unless you pay. Your university library website, in contrast, likely provides full free access if you are a student, or you can often

request free materials through an interlibrary loan. Thus, *you likely should never have to pay to access a source yourself*. If you hit a paywall, then turn to your university library's website for free access. If you cannot find the resource there, ask a librarian or your instructor for help, or request the material through an interlibrary loan.

Finally, AI chatbots are increasingly built into search engines, including Google. Although chatbot results are typically separated from search engine results visually and/or through labeling, if you are not careful, you might mistake the results for sources produced by the search engine.

Consequently, we strongly recommend that you access sources in more than one place when searching for sources. If you begin with Google, don't end there. Also explore what your campus library's website and professional librarians have to offer.

Finding Research Sources Through Your Library

As a college or university student, you likely already pay (in your tuition or school fees) for library resources, both online and in person. It's smart, then, to make use of those resources! We will comment briefly on especially helpful online library resources and the types of in-person guidance your librarians can likely provide you.

Research Databases for Subject-Specific Sources

Among the most useful library resources you can find through your college library's website are research databases. In the previous chapter, we defined a research database as an organized online storehouse of information that can easily be searched to retrieve desired sources. We listed the various types of sources you can access through such databases.

Here we'll add that you can conduct subject-specific searches by *targeting* specific, relevant databases. For example, if your speech topic concerns community spaces, you might find Art and Architecture Complete especially useful. If, instead, you need to learn about vaccines, then MEDLINE could prove useful. Your library may not subscribe to these exact examples of databases. The point is for you to find and make use of the subject-specific databases your college library does have through its website. Libraries often have subject-specific research guides that will suggest which databases are most relevant to given subjects. They are generally aligned with majors and minors offered at the institution.

Local News Sources



Image by kalhh via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

Your library also likely provides free digital access to a variety of local news sources, such as your university's newspaper, your local town newspaper, the newspaper of one or more major cities in your state, and one or more national newspapers (such as *The New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal*). Your library likely offers both archival and ongoing access to such news sources. If you choose a topic that is particularly localized, you may find searches in one or more of these news sources handy.

Professional Guidance

Don't forget about your university's librarians themselves! They are paid professionals who are trained to help you find appropriate resources. Find out when one is available and make an appointment or drop by! Not only might you get help locating useful sources, but you are likely to also pick up several more tips on how to search effectively.



Image by Desola Lanre-Ologun via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

Choosing Your Search Language

Whether you search for sources on Google or your library's website, choose your search language thoughtfully. If your first search terms do not result in what you want, think of synonyms and try those. Persist, despite frustrations. Online search success comes partly from discovering the right words to use to produce sources that help you learn, focus your topic, and educate your community in turn. If you are striking out, go back and read background information about your topic. Background reading involves reference sources such as encyclopedias and dictionaries. These sources tend to reflect information and concepts that are consensually agreed to by a wide variety of parties. Consequently, you can look for what words or phrases those sources use and try them in a search.

So far we have mostly discussed accessing sources online, sometimes with the help of librarians. Next we turn to another way to find sources: through interviews.

Interviews



Image by Christina @ wocintechchat.com via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

You might not immediately think of interviews when researching a topic. Yet people can be some of your best sources! Interviewing them enables you to solicit the precise kinds of information, opinions, or experiences most useful to crafting your speech. In the process, you can form a new community relationship.

Setting up and conducting an interview may seem like a daunting task. Who should you contact? What might you ask? Fortunately, by following a few simple guidelines, interviewing can be a relatively easy and fun endeavor.

Making a Contact

Begin by deciding what kind of person might be most helpful to talk to about your topic. Consider, for example, where they might be located. We stress the value of initiating a local interview. Certainly, interviewing someone internationally or nationally can provide very useful information and input. But part of becoming involved in your community involves learning who the local experts are. Whether you live in a small town or urban setting, you can find people nearby who can convey the local impact of the issue you are studying, even when it is global in scope. They may also provide possible solutions your community might adopt to improve it.



Created by sobokali from Noun Project

To find a local person to interview, research your area. Ask local community members (nonprofit organization participants, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and so on) for suggestions, search online for relevant groups and organizations, or visit your local library. Once you have chosen a person to interview, make an initial connection. We recommend the following:

- *Introduce* yourself and your project.
- Tell them *why* you want to talk to them. For instance, explain you would like input to help develop your speech, and be clear and specific about the subject matter you want to discuss. This allows the interviewee to reflect on the topic in advance and, if appropriate, to review and collect relevant information to share with you.
- *Estimate* the amount of time you anticipate the interview will take (thirty minutes? one hour?) so the interviewee can account for that when scheduling the interview.
- Set up a *day and time* to conduct the interview. Don't assume an interviewee has time at that moment or when it is most convenient for you.
- Clarify their *preferred means of communication* (via videoconference, phone, or email or in person).

Preparing for the Interview

Prepare for the interview by carefully crafting your questions. Keep your questions specific but open-ended and neutral.

Consider what types of information you are seeking and write your questions accordingly, using box 9.4 for guidance. Be prepared to ask follow-up questions. End the interview by allowing the respondent to offer additional thoughts.

Box 9.4 Asking Questions to Gain Different Types of Information

When writing and asking questions, consider the kind of information you'd like to learn from the person you are interviewing.

- **If you want factual information**, ask for the exact data and facts you need. You might also tactfully request how the person knows these facts or from whom or where the information comes. If the interviewee references a report or study, for instance, ask where you might find a copy.
- **If you want information about the person's experiences**, ask how they have been affected by the topic or what a typical day at work or at the organization they belong to looks like. Or you might request the interviewee to relate their most vivid memories associated with your topic.
- **If you want to learn the person's opinions or feelings**, explicitly invite a perspective on or response to an opinion or policy proposal you've read or heard.
- **If you want the person's ideas for local actions community members can take to help improve the issue you're researching**, simply ask what local people, including college students, can do to help address or solve the problem. If the person is part of an organization devoted to the issue you're exploring, you might ask how local community members can aid their organization—what needs or opportunities it currently has—and get all the necessary details to relay to your peers if you choose to advocate one of these options.

Conducting the Interview

Having made a contact and prepared your questions, you are ready to conduct the interview. Follow a few simple guidelines to help ensure an enjoyable and productive exchange:

- Be *punctual* for your scheduled time if your interview is by videoconference, phone, or in person.
- *Reintroduce* yourself and remind the respondent why you asked for the interview.
- *Ask* your questions one at a time.
- Either *take great notes* during the interview or *ask permission to record the interview*. Don't count on your memory to recall their answers. Recognize that some people may feel uncomfortable being recorded.
- *Make clear to the interviewee how you will use the information* provided and *verify you have permission* to use their input and quote them. Sometimes people will share information with you off the record or will not want some ideas attributed to them. You need to respect their wishes.
- *Thank* the person for taking time to talk with you.
- *Keep an eye on the time*. Stick to the amount of time you estimated when scheduling the interview. If you come to the end of that time and wish to continue, ask if the person can answer one or two more questions. Provide the option of ending the interview in case they cannot linger.
- When you leave, *spend time immediately going over your notes*. Make sure you note the date of the interview and the name and title of the person you interviewed.
- Give the person the option to *review any quotations* you plan to use from the interview for accuracy.

By following this guidance, you should enjoy a very positive interviewing experience. Your exchange will likely provide helpful information and opinions for your speech. And you will probably feel more closely joined to your community afterward because you connected with another member.

Source Documentation

Once you have found strong sources for your topic—whether through Google, your college library, or interviews—how do you properly and effectively credit them in your speech? We next answer this question by considering how to document your sources during a speech and in an associated bibliography. We will begin by explaining the importance of source documentation.

Better Safe Than Sorry

Whenever you get ideas from, directly quote, paraphrase, or summarize content from another source, cite your source. A **citation** provides a source's basic identifying information, such as the four W's we discuss in "What to Cite: The Four W's." As we encouraged in chapter 5, when in doubt, cite.

Citing your sources strengthens your credibility because it reflects your competence (you did your homework) and trustworthiness (you are making clear what sources you consulted). In contrast, passing off someone else's ideas as your own (i.e., not citing your sources) is an act of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. As chapter 5's discussion of ethics made clear, it is unethical to take credit for other people's ideas or work. You will lose your audience's and instructor's trust. Furthermore, not citing your sources makes it more difficult for your audience to learn more about your topic and take action. By citing your sources, you provide them with a path forward to further education and advocacy.

Written and Spoken Citations



Citation Needed by *futureatlas.com, via Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY.

When preparing a public speech, keep in mind two types of citations: written and spoken. **Written citations** are written down, typically in the form of a bibliography (perhaps called a Works Cited or References)—much like you might provide with an essay you have written. Your instructor may require you to submit a written bibliography with your speech outline or manuscript. Alternatively, you may choose to provide your bibliography to a community group you are addressing so they can further pursue the topic you discuss.

Written citations should follow a **style guide**, or instructions for writing and formatting sources. Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) both author style guides. Ask your instructor what style guide they prefer and consult Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (known as "Purdue OWL") for help following it. Your library likely has access to both print and online style guides, and your reference librarians can help you with citation questions. Alternatively, free software such as Zotero may prove useful.

Speakers should also use spoken citations, because audiences don't typically receive or read a bibliography, or they don't see it (such as on a concluding visual aid) until after the speech is over. Consequently, speakers should use

spoken citations, which are vocalized during the speech. They can be integrated anywhere into a speech: as part of the attention-getter, to establish the problem, to make a viable solution compelling, and so on. Wherever you include them, say the spoken citation *prior* to summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting the source. Announcing the source first allows the audience to evaluate the information in light of its source.

What to Cite: The Four W's

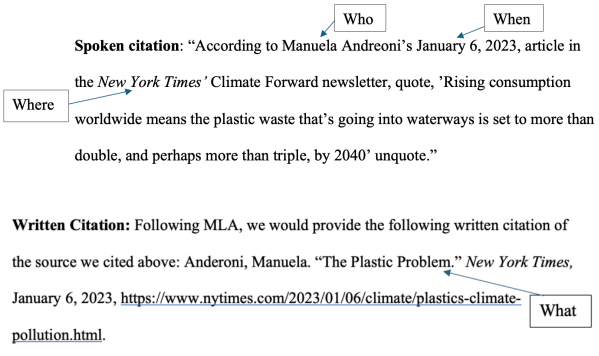
While specific requirements differ based on the exact type of source, most written and spoken citations need you to answer the four W's: who, where, when, and what.

- *Who* created the source? That is, who is the author of the article, post, or book, or who did you interview?
- *Where* was it published? What is the title of the journal or website, for instance, where the article or blog can be found? Alternatively, how did you conduct the interview (by email or in person)?
- *When* was the source published or made available, or when did you talk with your interview subject?

Answering the three questions of "who," "where," and "when" is sufficient for a *spoken citation*, but a fourth question—"what"—may also be necessary for a *written citation* in a bibliography.

- *What* is the name of the source? In other words, what is the title of the article, book chapter, or post? This is more specific than the publication ("where").

Box 9.5 Examples of Citing the Four W's



Notice the use of the words "quote" and "unquote" to orally indicate where the source's direct language begins and ends.

Notice both citations answer who, where, and when. Only the written citation additionally answers what *and* provides a URL (if relevant). Neither of these are included in a spoken citation.

But What About Citing...?

A few situations are a little tricky to know when and how to cite, so we address them here. Specifically, we address citing the use of AI, open access sources, and sources used to produce visual aids.

Citing the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

We established that artificial intelligence (AI) is not a source but a compiler of information and sources—and that the sources a chatbot offers may or may not actually exist. However, we also recognized there are valuable uses for AI in developing a speech, such as brainstorming arguments and restating complex ideas more simply. *If you make use of AI in any way, you should cite it.* That means if you paraphrase, summarize, or quote text produced by AI or if you use AI to generate ideas, translate language, edit your work (including your word choices or grammar), or for any other task, you should make that clear in your written citations. You can use box 9.6 for citation guidance, but please check with your instructor as well as style guides, as norms are rapidly evolving.

Box 9.6 Citing the Use of AI Tools

To cite your use of AI, you should name the following elements in a written citation (not necessarily in this order):

- the AI tool and version you used (e.g., ChatGPT 4.5, Gemini 2.5 Pro, DALL-E 3.0),
- the company who made the tool (e.g., OpenAI, Google),
- the date you used the tool,
- what you used it for or what you asked it to do, and
- a URL to the tool.

For example, "Provide a list of harms caused by excessive waste" prompt. *ChatGPT* 4.5, OpenAI, 17 April 2025, https://chatgpt.com/.

In a spoken citation, you only name the AI tool and version you used (what) and company who made the tool (who). For example, 'As you can see in this list of harms generated by Open AI's ChatGPT 4.5 . . .'

Before following this model, check with your instructor as well as style guides for current recommendations.

Citing Open Access and Creative Commons Sources

Other potentially difficult types of sources are open access and Creative Commons. As we explained earlier, open access refers to online sources that are available without the need to pay, either directly or via a library, and generally do not include advertisements. Typically, open access sources will designate a Creative Commons license to guide how they can be used or mixed into new work. For example, CC-BY is a license that indicates you can use the work for any purpose as long as you credit the creator, whereas CC-BY-NC-ND means that you must give credit to the creator, may only use the work for noncommercial purposes, and cannot modify the work.



Creative Commons Logo by Creative Commons, *Used per Creative Commons policies*.

What this means is that you need to cite any open access materials you use (in addition to complying with any

requirements dictated by their Creative Commons license) if you summarize, paraphrase, or quote them. Depending on what kind of open access material you use and how you use it, you may need a written citation, a spoken citation, or both. Ask your instructor for specific guidance.

Box 9.7 Citing Open Access Materials with Creative Commons Licenses

To provide a written citation of Creative Commons material, follow the TASL Method developed by the creators of Creative Commons licenses. That means your citation should identify the following:

Title: If the written or visual material has a title, identify it. If not, ignore this.
Author: Name the author (licensor) of the material, using the way they name themselves. Link to the author's profile page, if available.
Source: Identify where the material can be found and link to it.
License: Name the specific Creative Commons license and link to it.

For example, the picture in the next section of a person pointing at a visual aid could be cited this way in a written citation: "Whiteboard" by sumarni at the noun project, CC–BY 3.0.

In a spoken citation, you would only need to include the author (who) and source (what). For example, 'In this picture by sumarni at the noun project . . .'

There is no one way to communicate the TASL information. We recommend you consult a style guide and your instructor for specific preferences.

Citing Sources Used to Make Visual Aids



Created by sumami from Noun Project

Finally, it can be difficult to know how to best cite sources you draw on to produce visual aids for your speech. As we will discuss in chapter 29, your visual aids might include a video clip you find, or they may visually display data, examples, photographs, or even testimony you discover from outside sources. Alternatively, you might create a visual aid using an AI tool such as DALL-E.

You can incorporate into your speech a *spoken citation* of the source or AI tool you used as you talk through the information or imagery shown. In most cases, however, you will likely prefer the less disruptive option of a *written citation*. In either case, we recommend you include written citations at the end of the slide deck or video (as a bibliography or credit page) or on the visual slide itself or in the video as it plays. If you choose to include a written citation on the slide or in the video, use a small font and a low positioning of the citation so it does not compete for the audience's attention. As always, include the four W's (and follow a style guide) or use the guidance provided in "Citing the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools" and "Citing Open Access and Creative Commons Sources." Including a written citation builds your credibility by giving credit to the source who created the image or video or produced the information you are using.

When you document your sources, both when speaking and in writing, you follow the best practices of excellent speakers. You can feel pleased by how well you discovered, learned from, and utilized strong and diverse sources for your speech.

Summary

This chapter has offered you specific techniques to find and document research sources.

- AI chatbots currently too often hallucinate research sources to be useful research tools. Even as these tools improve, speakers should always ensure the sources provided to a prompt actually exist and then find and read the information they offer.
- There are smarter ways to search Google than to simply type in search terms. We recommend you consider domain labels and open educational resources and use site-specific searches as well as specialized search engines.
- Make use of the resources provided by your library if you are a college or university student. They include such helpful online resources as research databases and news sources as well as in-person guidance from librarians.
- Conducting an interview is an excellent way to ascertain people's opinions and experiences related to your topic. To ensure an interview is effective, you should follow basic instructions on how to make a contact, prepare for the interview, and conduct the interview.
- Ethical speakers give credit to all their sources through spoken and written citations.

Key Terms

citation
hallucinate
spoken citation
style guide
written citation

Review Questions

1. What are the differences between a specialized Google search, a site-specific search, and a domain label?
2. What is a research database, and why might it be valuable when researching?
3. When conducting an interview, what should you make sure to do or not do?
4. What should you include in a spoken citation for a source? In a written citation?

Discussion Questions

1. Try searching for a topic using a basic Google search. Then try searching for the same topic on a specialized Google search or an online database. How do the results compare? What did you learn in the process?
2. Which databases and news sources do you have access to through your library's website? How have you used databases or news sources in the past?
3. Who might you interview for an upcoming assignment? How could you research your local area to find a group or individual relevant to your topic? What questions might you ask?
4. Which types of sources are the strongest in your opinion? Why?

10. Knowing Your Audience

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Differentiate between types of public speaking audiences.
- Analyze an audience according to three factors.

If asked to draw the act of public speaking, what would you sketch? A person—maybe a stick figure—standing on a stage? Perhaps the figure would be holding a microphone or have a speech bubble? Or would they be sitting at a computer screen or talking into a phone? More importantly for this chapter, would you draw an audience? If so, how would you feature them? When we ask our students to visually depict public speaking, or rhetoric, they rarely think to include an audience. When they do, students typically draw an audience much smaller than, or positioned lower than, the speaker. Such depictions imply that public speaking is really an exercise of power over an audience by talking "at" them.



Created by Design Circle from Noun Project

Today we know that model of public speaking is old-fashioned even if it still is a common first reaction. It simply doesn't respect the integral and powerful role audiences play in public speaking. Discourse is not the sole creation or property of a speaker. Public speech only has meaning in its relationship to an audience that listens and responds to it. Recall that in chapter 1, we claimed that the listener has a role of equal, *if not greater*, importance than the speaker in providing rhetoric with meaning. As we stated there, meaning is ultimately negotiated between a rhetor and an audience, often over an extended period and in many different forms. In short, audiences are central to public speaking.

Consequently, this chapter focuses your attention on your audience. It comes relatively early in the textbook because good speakers take their specific audience into consideration at every stage of the speech process, including research, organization, outlining, and delivery. We begin with the importance of audience analysis and then consider the types of audiences to analyze, factors to consider, and the limitations of audience analysis in public speaking.

The Importance of Audience Analysis

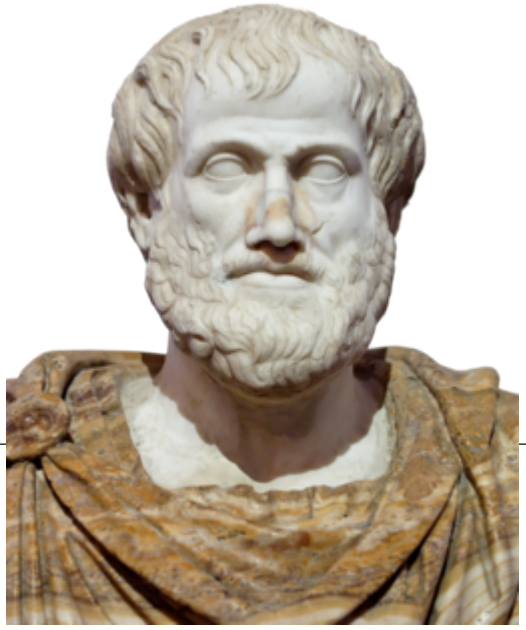


Audience listens *by Robert Scoble via Flickr,* CC BY.

Valuing your audience is critical not just to being more successful but also to inspiring audience members to work together to improve your communal life. When we value the audience for our speech, a host of questions must be answered. Who is my audience, and what is their reason for gathering or listening? What do I know about them, and what might they expect or need from my speech? To help answer these questions, we employ audience analysis. **Audience analysis** is the practice of assessing factors that are likely to influence an audience's reception of a message.

Box 10.1 The Ancient Roots of Audience Analysis

We find references to audience analysis by ancient Greek philosophers and teachers such as Plato and Aristotle. In *Phaedrus*, Plato defined oratory as "the art of enchanting the soul" and encouraged speakers to "learn the difference among human souls" so speakers can alter their speeches accordingly.[1] Several decades later, Aristotle gave the first description of audience types based largely on age, including their tendencies and likely beliefs, values, and motivations. Aristotle instructed speakers to analyze their listeners and select appeals that will best speak to their experiences, knowledge, and desires.



Aristotle *by Alvaro Marques Hijazo via Wikimedia Commons,* Public Domain.

You experience audience analysis in your daily life, although perhaps not always with full awareness. If you read ESPN online, for instance, you are likely exposed to ads for athletic gear, sports betting, and technology. Peruse *Glamour* online, and you'll more likely find ads for food (especially sweet treats), medication, and stores like Target. The products reflect the presumed interests of the magazines' target audiences. Increasingly, ads on the internet are individually tailored to you. If you have recently shopped for a pair of Converse shoes online, for example, then you might suddenly find them advertised on another website you visit. We don't find this surprising because audience-targeted advertising (audience analysis and adaptation) makes intuitive sense. It also makes our lives easier, since we don't have to endure (as many) advertisements for products we don't want.

Similarly, as a speaker you should critically assess your audience. However, we add a significant note of

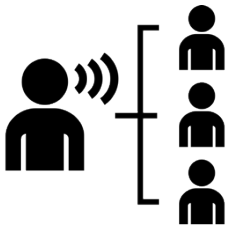
1. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Project Gutenberg, 2013), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1636/1636-h/1636-h.htm.

caution: Capitalist consumerism (like the advertisements we mentioned) and civic engagement begin from very different premises and can be at odds with one another. A speech is more than selling a product; ideally, it is about contributing to the public good. Just because something is effective, be it a marketing ploy or a persuasive message, does not guarantee that it is ethical. This differentiation influences our investigation of audience analysis, beginning with the multiple types of audiences you should consider.

Types of Audiences

We've referenced "the audience," but who, exactly, do we mean? Who should you analyze? The answer is more complicated than it may seem! To illustrate, we will make three types of distinctions: direct and targeted audiences, discrete and dispersed audiences, and implied and implicated audiences.

Direct and Target Audiences


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Your **direct audience** refers to the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech. If you speak in person, that may be easy to determine. It is everyone at the location who can hear you and is paying attention.

Of course, a direct audience won't always be preassembled and ready to listen to you. If you're lucky, a civic organization will invite you to address its members, or fellow community members will quickly respond to a recorded speech you upload. Much of the time, however, you may have to find or even build a direct audience to hear your message. Your efforts can range from requesting speaking time at a local meeting, to creating a public event and making publicity efforts to draw an audience, to even convincing others to help you pressure leaders to meet with and hear from you.

Once you have found or arranged a direct audience, it can be composed of people with diverse experiences and opinions. Thus, you might choose to focus on specific members who are more likely to be influenced by your appeals and/or more likely to act on them. We call them your **target audience**. If you are trying to convince your classmates to support a national ban on assault weapons, you might focus on—or target—those who adopt a more expansive or looser interpretation of the US Constitution's Second Amendment.

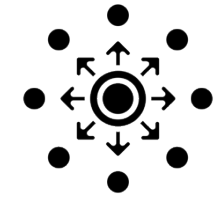

Created by Vectors Market from Noun Project

Discrete and Dispersed Audiences

A second useful distinction is between discrete and dispersed audiences.[2] In traditional, face-to-face public speaking, the audience is often limited to those individuals who show up for the event at a particular day and time—the audience

2. This section is adapted from an excerpt of the original chapter 14, "Online Public Speaking," in Meggie Mapes, *Speak Out, Call In: Public Speaking as Advocacy*, https://opentext.ku.edu/speakupcallin/. Author information: https://coms.ku.edu/people/meggie-mapes. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA, https://creativecommons.org/about/cclicenses/.

is **discrete**. In other words, only the people who attended can see and hear the speech. Those who did not attend lose out on the opportunity.



Created by facor from Noun Project

When speaking online, however, your audience may be **dispersed**, unlimited by location or, perhaps, time if it's recorded. A dispersed audience is more difficult to determine. If you become passionate about a local policy, for example, and upload a speech to YouTube and make it publicly available, the audience is dispersed because it's unclear who will click the link. Geographically, people from your hometown as well as folks across the nation or even around the globe could watch it. In terms of time, viewers could click the link as soon as it's available, and people could continue to find the speech as long as it remains a live, public link. With a dispersed audience, then, it can be difficult to make specific or timely references or calls to action because geographic locations and time differences may alter what individuals are able to do.

Reflecting on types of audiences can help you decide exactly who you should analyze and make adaptations for. If your direct audience is dispersed, for instance, identify whom you might target or even attempt to draw to your speech. If your direct audience is discrete, consider how you analyze the group while keeping in mind the subgroup(s) you particularly want to target.

Implied and Implicated Audiences

A third important distinction is the implied and implicated audiences.[3] An **implied audience** is a group that is represented in your message, and an **implicated audience** is affected by your message if it succeeds.

Let's use a state congressional hearing as an example. Imagine a group of congressional representatives and experts meeting to deliberate a bill that decreases environmental protections for a city in that state. An expert advocates passionately for the bill's passage, noting that reducing the environmental protections would allow more businesses in the area to flourish. The speaker crafts an argument they think their target audience—the congressional representatives who are present—will find compelling.



NMSS Director John Lubinski at Congressional Field Hearing *by Nuclear Regulatory Commission via Flickr, CC BY.*

However, there are also the

- *implied audience* of the business owners who are being spoken for, or represented in, the speech; and
- *implicated audiences*, those affected if the speaker is successful, including not only those business owners but also people who work for them or are looking for employment as well as residents who live in the area and local environmentalists. These audiences are important because they are impacted by the results of the speech but might not be part of the direct or target audiences.

3. This section is adapted from an excerpt of the original chapter 2, "Centering Audiences," in Meggie Mapes, *Speak Out, Call In: Public Speaking as Advocacy*, https://opentext.ku.edu/speakupcallin/. Author information: https://coms.ku.edu/people/meggie-mapes. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA, https://creativecommons.org/about/cclicenses/.

Box 10.2 Determining Your Implied and Implicated Audiences

To determine your **implied audience**(s), ask, Who are you speaking about or advocating for? Against? What are you saying about them or for them? How are you characterizing (explicitly or implicitly) a culture, group, or individual?

To determine your **implicated audience**(s), ask, If your goal of informing or persuading your target audience(s) is successful, what culture, group, or individual will be affected? If you are *un*successful, who might be impacted?

These two types of audiences are not mutually exclusive!

It may seem odd to consider audiences who may not be physically or digitally present for your speech. After all, isn't the target audience who you're trying to inform or persuade? Yes, your target audience is important, whether they are discrete or dispersed. But the way you represent or depict groups, cultures, or individuals has lasting impacts, even outside your speech event. Similarly, the purposes you seek to fulfill, whether to inform or persuade the target audience, will affect individuals, groups, or cultures, especially if you successfully fulfill your purpose. Whomever your audience, we recommend you use the following guidance to analyze them.

Audience Analysis Factors

We've established that many types of audiences exist for any given speech. From this point on, we will refer again to "the audience" for the sake of simplicity. But when we do, you can substitute any of the types explored in the previous section. Paying attention to and learning about every audience will aid your speaking efforts.

So what should speakers learn about their audience to help adapt their messages? Audience analysis includes demographic, psychological, and environmental factors.

Demographic Factors

Demographic factors are personal characteristics that are likely to shape the audience's views and perspectives on a topic. Audience demographics are useful in providing a sort of shorthand for audience interests and beliefs.

The *age* of an audience, for example, is a proxy for their experiences in life.



Showing on Computer by Lauren Proffitt via Flickr, CC BY.

- If you attend a residential liberal arts college, the typical age of your classroom audience (eighteen to twenty-two years) means that few in your class likely have children or own their home. So if you want to address tax deductions, focusing on the child tax credit or mortgage deduction would probably be less relevant to this audience than examining deductions available for college tuition and school expenses. Likewise, a traditional college audience (ages eighteen to twenty-three) has a different range of experiences with the social world than more mature audiences.
- People in their sixties are more likely to be familiar with using pay phones or going to the library to access research sources. However, they are less likely to be familiar with TikTok, YouTube celebrities, or the most recent album by Harry Styles.

The point is that age is often a demographic signifier for a range of information about an audience, including experiences, personal concerns and interests, and cultural knowledge or awareness.

Box 10.3 Audience Demographic Factors

As a speaker, it is valuable to consider the demographic characteristics of your audience as you plan your message. Relevant demographic factors may include the following:

- age
- gender
- race and ethnicity
- socioeconomic status
- culture—values and customs
- geography—where the audience is from and where you are speaking
- education
- occupation
- group memberships—religious and political affiliations, civic clubs, and so on

In using such information, ask yourself how the particular factor potentially affects

- the relevance of the topic to my audience,
- my audience's interest in the topic,
- my audience's knowledge of or exposure to the topic, and

- my audience's likely perspective on and reaction to the topic.

Other demographic characteristics can similarly be useful in thinking about how to approach a speech. For example, if you shared the results of a study you conducted on narcissism, you would approach it differently for a classroom of public speaking students as opposed to a room full of psychology professors at a national conference. The difference in their *education* would guide you toward altered language use (employing or avoiding specialized, scientific vocabulary terms) and level of detail (including or excluding supporting literature or an explanation of your methodology). The contrast in their education would give you hints about their likely interest in specific content and ability to understand concepts or terms.

Box 10.4 Who Is My Audience?

When you do not know a great deal about your audience, there are several ways you can learn about their demographics and attitudes. Some of the most useful techniques are addressed in chapters 8 and 9 on research.

- **Internet research:** Do online research on the organization, location, membership, or event to gain more understanding of your likely audience.
- **Questions:** If you are giving an invited talk, ask questions of whoever extended the invitation to learn more about the speaking situation and audience.
- **Observation:** If you will be speaking to a particular group or at a particular location, try to observe a meeting or speaker at the location prior to your presentation.
- **Interviews:** Conduct interviews of group leaders or members to gain the perspectives of the likely audience. Also, interview several members of your implied and implicated audiences to get to know them better.
- **Nontraditional sources (social media posts, blogs, etc.):** Search new media sources to find locations that feature the voices and perspectives of your implied and implicated audiences.

Always remember that one person's perspective cannot be generalized as indicative of the entire group that shares their demographic features.

Regardless of your topic, the questions to ask about your audience remain remarkably similar: What are the likely demographics of my audience? How might those demographic factors be important to their awareness, interest, needs, and predispositions on my topic? How can I use this demographic information to better relate to my audience, make my presentation more relevant and accurate, and encourage them to understand my perspective?

Limitations to Using Demographic Factors



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There are some limitations in demographics-based audience analysis. A key concern is how much you can reasonably generalize before you create stereotypes about the audience. A **stereotype** is a generic categorization of individuals and groups based on the inaccurate conclusion that people sharing a particular characteristic will automatically possess similar qualities and beliefs. Remember that people—regardless of similarities such as age, gender, and race—are individuals. Thus, while there is some evidence that allows us to generalize possible views based on these sorts of demographic factors, any individual can defy that generalized pattern.



Created by Victoruler from Noun Project

Also, each of us has multiple demographic features that intersect in ways that influence our standpoint. In chapter 7, we introduced standpoint theory, which suggests that our social identities influence how we are treated and our knowledge of the world. We also introduced intersectionality, or the notion that our identities consist of multiple features that combine in meaningful ways to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression—and sometimes in seemingly contradictory ways that defy stereotypes. A Hispanic woman is likely to experience a combination of racism and sexism, but significant wealth may give her access to resources—and thus experiences—others with a similar background do not share. Reducing an audience to one demographic quality and making subsequent assumptions about them is overly simplistic.

Overly relying on demographic factors can also invite **implicit biases**, unreflective beliefs about a group of people based on your background, personal experiences, and social stereotypes. Don't assume, for example, that a group of women is interested in hearing about makeup rather than sports. Not only does that assumption rely on a stereotype of women, but it is also likely informed by implicit biases about them.

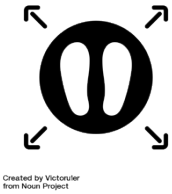
When you rely on stereotypes or implicit biases to analyze your audience, you risk drawing faulty conclusions, harming your relationship with the audience, passing along misinformation about them, and hurting your speaking effectiveness. These concerns are especially true for your implied and implicated audiences, who may not be present to correct or add to your representation of them and their interests.

Additionally, demographics generally encourage you to concentrate on the majority views of your direct or target audience. This means you risk overlooking or marginalizing audience members who are exceptions to the predominant factors found in the audience. You might occasionally decide to not target audience outliers, but it is often beneficial to include appeals that might connect with those in the audience beyond the demographic norm. Similarly, the ability to account for audience demographics is complicated when the audience is dispersed. One example is a videorecorded speech uploaded to YouTube, which will remain accessible to future, unknown audiences. In such a case, with changing contexts, circumstances, and listeners, our ability to analyze our audience effectively is necessarily limited.

Box 10.5 Analyzing Your Audience

- **Demographic factors:** Personal characteristics such as age, ethnicity, geographic background, religious affiliation, political affiliation, and socioeconomic status
- **Psychological factors:** Interest and personal stakes in the topic, expectations of the speaker, knowledge about the topic, assumptions about the occasion
- **Environmental factors:** Time of day, audience size, physical layout of the venue or affordances of the digital medium

Psychological Factors



Like audience demographics, speakers should consider how psychological factors may influence reception of their message. **Psychological factors** are an audience's predispositions related to their mental state, attitude, personal stakes, and interest in and experience with the topic, occasion, and speaker. Many of these predispositions relate to demographics. If we think in terms of standpoint theory, we know that an audience's social identities (demographic factors) influence their experiences and thus their knowledge and views about the world (psychological factors).

Psychological factors such as audience interest in the topic and personal stakes can influence how an audience reacts to a message. For example, we generally assume audience members who attend voluntarily have more genuine interest in a topic. In contrast, when you address a largely **captive audience**—an audience that is required to be in attendance (such as your classmates)—it becomes more important to engage them and make the presentation relevant.

An audience's interest level is related to their **personal stakes**—each individual's financial, material, and/or psychological investments that could be improved or worsened based on how a topic is addressed. People who attend a speech voluntarily likely come with a sense of their own personal stakes. That is, they probably already perceive themselves as part of the implicated audience. Speakers can tailor their speeches accordingly. A captive audience, however, may not automatically perceive the speech as meaningfully affecting their lives and be more inclined to disengage as a result. Consequently, you might explicitly identify how your topic and its outcome affect them personally. Explain how they are an implicated audience.

Another psychological factor subject to audience analysis is the audience's familiarity with the speaker and topic. **Familiarity** is the degree to which an audience already knows or is ignorant about the speaker and topic. Positive familiarity can be a source of goodwill between a speaker and audience, which the speaker can capitalize on to build credibility. In contrast, if a speaker has developed a poor speaking reputation or is unfamiliar to the audience, they will need to work harder to build a positive relationship. Relatedly, speakers may need to spend time giving extensive background information to audiences who are ignorant about a topic but can save that time when audiences are already knowledgeable.

Finally, it is important that the speaker consider the occasion or purpose of the speech when shaping it for a particular audience. This includes factors such as the expected formality of the event, its tone or mood, and its importance. As a speaker, you want your presentation to reflect the demands of the situation, and you should adapt accordingly.

Environmental Factors



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As a speaker, you should also consider how environmental factors impact your message. **Environmental factors** refer to elements of the speaking situation such as time of day, size of audience, and communication medium. These factors can influence how the audience receives the message.

For instance, the time of day a speech is given—early, late, near mealtime—can affect the audience's attitudes and reactions. Anyone who has taken an 8:00 a.m. class understands that audience alertness is often lower at that time of morning! Similarly, an audience's size can influence their expectations. We typically anticipate speakers will talk more casually to a very small group and more formally to a large gathering. The communication medium impacts expectations as well.

We might think of the medium in terms of whether it is in person or presented through a screen (what we will call a "televisual delivery" in chapter 18). Even among televisual media, an audience's expectations may differ. We may be content with slides during a live Zoom presentation but anticipate much more polished and highly edited visual aids in a YouTube video. In each case, you want to change your speaking plans due to such factors—how long you speak, the sorts of supporting media you use, your use of humor or seriousness, and so on.

To assist in doing so, try to learn as much as possible about your speaking environment. If speaking in person, visit the location in advance to stand in the speaking space, test equipment, and so forth. If speaking televisually, play around with the electronic platform you will use to better learn the opportunities and constraints it poses. Learn what expectations audiences may have for your specific communication medium. Being flexible and adjusting to the environmentally influenced needs of the audience will allow you to speak more effectively.

Summary

This chapter stressed the importance of audience to your success in inspiring audience members to work together to improve your communal life. Public speaking actively involves both a speaker and an audience.

- Audience analysis, the practice of assessing audience factors that are likely to influence an audience's reception of a message, is an important resource for public speakers when developing their message.
- Audience can be conceptualized in many helpful ways. The direct audience consists of the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech, whereas the target audience are specific members you focus on because they are more likely to be influenced by your appeals and/or more likely to act on them.
- A discrete audience includes a finite amount of people, typically limited to those individuals who show up for a speaking event at a particular day and time. A dispersed audience is unlimited by location, or perhaps time, if it's recorded.
- An implied audience is a group that is represented in your advocacy. An implicated audience refers to a group that will be impacted by the results of your speech.

- Audience analysis functions by considering three kinds of factors: demographic factors, psychological factors, and environmental factors.
- Audience demographic factors are personal characteristics of the audience that are likely to shape their views and perspectives on a topic. Common demographic factors include age, gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, geography, education, occupation, and group memberships.
- Psychological factors include the audience's mental state, attitude, personal stakes, and interest in the topic, occasion, and speaker.
- Environmental factors include elements of the speaking situation such as time of day, location, size of audience, and communication medium.
- Despite its utility, audience analysis is also subject to important limitations, including how well we can know our audience, how accurately demographic factors will predict predispositions, and what audience analysis means for audience members who fall outside the audience majority. To generalize about an audience too broadly risks stereotyping individuals and groups and/or relying on implicit biases about them.

Key Terms

audience analysis
captive audience
demographic factors
direct audience
discrete audience
dispersed audience
environmental factors
familiarity
implicated audience
implicit bias
implied audience
personal stakes
psychological factors
stereotype
target audience

Review Questions

1. Why is it important to analyze your audience?
2. What is the difference between a direct audience and a target audience? What about between a discrete audience and a dispersed audience?
3. Why should you reflect on your implied and implicated audiences?
4. As a speaker, how might you learn more about the demographics and attitudes of your audience in advance of a public speech?
5. What are the risks and limitations to using demographic factors to analyze an audience?

Discussion Questions

1. Recall a recent speaker on your campus who did a particularly good or poor job of adapting to their audience. What demographic, psychological, and environmental factors did they account for or overlook?
2. Thinking of the same recent speaker or someone different, how might you distinguish their audiences? Who were their direct and target audiences? Were they discrete or disparate? Who was included in their implicated and impacted audiences? How do you know?
3. How do social media change our understanding of audience? How might our efforts to analyze audiences for social media compare or contrast with more traditional public speaking?

11. Adapting to Your Audience

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Adapt specific elements of a speech for an audience.
- Construct a vision of who the audience can become as they strive with the speaker to create a better future together.

The previous chapter established audience analysis as the practice of assessing factors that are likely to influence an audience's reception of a message. So what do you do with all the insights and information you gain about your audience?

This chapter answers that question by considering **audience adaptation**, or the ways you alter your speech, using audience analysis cues, to better achieve your speaking goals. We begin by establishing the importance of adapting your speech to your audience. We follow with specific strategies you can use to connect with and engage your audience. We end by addressing how rhetoric allows you, as a speaker, to work with your audience in imagining a more productive future together.

The Importance of Audience Adaptation

Too often, student speakers make one of two mistakes when drafting and presenting their speeches. One mistake is that they don't think enough about delivering it *to an audience*. They approach their speech similarly to writing an essay they will submit only to the instructor. A second mistake is that speakers assume their audience is just like themselves. They deliver a speech they personally find compelling and assume their classmates will too.

Both mistakes result in similar consequences: speeches that fail to connect with the audience. They center the needs and interests of the speaker rather than their audience. You might even call these speeches selfish or self-focused. Accordingly, they do not create a sense of community or compel the audience to address communal issues.

Adaptation corrects both mistakes. It approaches a speech as *public address*—that is, as communication with and to a public audience. The audience is critical to a speech. Without an audience, there is no speech! Adaptation also recognizes that your audience is not the same as you, the speaker. Your and your audience's demographic and psychological factors (explored in the previous chapter) may overlap, but they also likely differ. Audience adaptation, then, prompts you to adjust, or adapt, your speech to center the audience's needs. We next offer strategies for making such adaptations.

Audience Adaptation Strategies

What do we mean by adapting your speech? We offer seven specific strategies you can (and should) utilize in crafting your speech: own your message, find common ground with your audience, use appropriate language, adjust the depth and complexity of the content, appeal to deeply held values, use compelling supporting appeals, and select credible and familiar sources.

As we explore each strategy, we assume you will use these strategies mostly for your direct and target audiences. Recall from the previous chapter that your direct audience are the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech. Your target audience includes specific members of the direct audience who are more likely to be influenced by your appeals and/or more likely to act on them. When appropriate, however, we note ways your adaptation efforts should also be mindful of your implied audience (a group that is represented in your message) and your implicated audience (those affected by your message if it succeeds).

Box 11.1 Strategies for Adapting to Your Audience

- Own the message.
- Find common ground.
- Use appropriate language.
- Adjust the depth and complexity of content.
- Appeal to deeply held values.
- Use compelling supporting appeals.
- Select credible and familiar sources.

Own Your Message

Though it may seem counterintuitive, one of the first strategies to remember when adapting to your audience is that you, as the speaker, must continue to own the message. That is, your efforts at audience adaptation must not compromise your voice and vision. Your intent is not to tell the audience what they want to hear or what is popular. Instead, maintain your authenticity as you connect with the audience and make your message relevant to them.

Find Common Ground



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At the center of audience adaptation is the effort to find common ground or, as literary critic Kenneth Burke says, to develop identification.[1] **Identification** is the degree to which individuals or groups find themselves joined or linked. For Burke, identification is the primary means of persuasion and occurs when audience members feel a connection with the speaker. When we identify with someone, we also can share a view of life, demonstrate similar values, or develop a sense of trust.

In terms of audience adaptation, the speaker can cultivate identification in several ways. You may explicitly reference what you hold in common, such as demographic factors (your shared age, geographic region, political affiliation, etc.) or psychological factors (your shared personal stakes, knowledge about the topic, or enthusiasm for the occasion). Alternatively, you can foster identification more implicitly through your verbal style (chapter 16), vocal and nonverbal delivery (chapter 18), use of visual aids (chapters 28 and 29), and the other adaptation strategies we will offer.

You have undoubtedly experienced several means of identification in everyday life. Perhaps you've talked with a stranger wearing the hat of your favorite sports team or your college's T-shirt. The connection and sudden comfort you felt came from identification. As a speaker, you hope to make adaptations, based on information gleaned from analysis, that create a connection. Your adaptations should be authentic, though, or they could backfire. For instance, a group of ranchers probably won't take seriously a city slicker who shows up wearing a cowboy hat and suddenly starts talking with a drawl.

Identification also occurs through *division*. In chapter 2, we discussed division as a quality of unproductive discourse when speakers highlight and accentuate differences with other participants and their positions. We can also think about division, however, more positively as a tool you can use to adapt to your audience. People might identify with each other through their shared distaste for (division from) a rival sports team or college, for instance. You might build an audience through your joint frustration with the local school board.

Be careful with using division to foster identification with your direct or target audience, however. Division is often built on the rejection of an absent implied or implicated audience. Calls to "strengthen" or "close" the US/Mexico border, for instance, attempt to form identification among North American citizens by dividing them from migrants. In this case, migrants (and others) form the implied and implicated audiences, because they will be impacted by these policies and are being indirectly represented in the discourse, but they are not typically part of the direct audience. Unethical speakers may capitalize on that absence, oversimplifying or even dehumanizing implied and implicated audiences to connect with their target audience.

Ethical speakers, in contrast, recognize the power of their speech and adjust it to also account for the humanity, experiences, motives, and actions of the implied and implicated audiences. They may still advocate for a more stringent immigration policy (that is, they can still own their message), but they will find alternative ways to identify with their

1. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950; Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969), 55.

direct audience. They may also recognize and offer ideas for how we can aid immigrants who are escaping violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Use Appropriate Language

Another way to adapt to your audience is to use appropriate language for your direct and target audiences. Think for a moment about our common expectation that our teachers, doctors, lawyers, and religious leaders adjust what they teach or say to our level and specific needs and interests. We would be frustrated with a professor who spoke to a college class with the same vocabulary with which they write a journal article for specialists. In speaking situations, you should adjust your language based on audience characteristics such as age, education, and knowledge. This means altering the complexity of your language—the amount of technical language you use and even the possible use of popular slang terms—depending on the audience and situation. If you don't, the audience is likely to tune you out.

Using appropriate language also regards your implied and implicated audiences.[2] Asking yourself to be accountable to these audiences encourages you to use ethical communication, pay attention to power, and reduce stereotypes. For example, if a speaker advocated to intervene in a country through military means, they might argue, "The United States needs to intervene because, right now, the other country is exhibiting barbaric tendencies." First, ask, Who are the implied and implicated audiences in this example? A clear implied and implicated audience includes the non-US population or cultural group—that is, "the other country." Second, ask, How have these groups been represented? What kind of talk is being used to describe these implied and implicated audiences? You'll notice that "barbaric" was used to describe individuals in this culture. In this instance, "barbaric" seems to imply that the United States' intervention is justified; barbaric seems bad, and alternatively, the United States does not exhibit those "barbaric tendencies," so the US may be best suited to intervene. However, this explanation is using **ethnocentrism**—or the belief that one's own culture is superior—as part of the argument. This type of talk should be avoided because it often represents other cultures in unethical, stereotypical, or unjust ways.

Adjust the Depth and Complexity of Content

Audience adaptation also means adjusting the depth of information presented on a topic and its complexity. Consider your direct and target audiences' familiarity with, or knowledge of, a topic as you assess how much background information is needed. Likewise, adjust the depth and complexity of your content based on situational factors such as the time available to speak and the purpose of the occasion.

It is frustrating when a speaker spends significant time explaining an idea or event that the audience already knows about. In that case, the speaker squandered an opportunity to address what attracted the audience to the presentation by rehashing common knowledge. Adapting to the needs and knowledge of the audience ensures your presentation will be relevant and timely.

2. This section is adapted from an excerpt of the original chapter 2, "Centering Audiences," in Meggie Mapes, *Speak Out, Call In: Public Speaking as Advocacy*, https://opentext.ku.edu/speakupcallin/. Author information: https://coms.ku.edu/people/meggie-mapes. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA, https://creativecommons.org/about/cclicenses/.

Appeal to Deeply Held Values

Another way to adapt to your direct and target audiences is by appealing to values they identify as important. Demonstrating in a speech how a problem violates or jeopardizes a deeply held value motivates an audience. Similarly, explaining how a particular action or decision will advance an important value makes an audience more likely to lend their support. Common values that work in such a fashion in the American context are freedom, justice, and equality. Value appeals are explored in more depth in chapter 21's discussion of deliberation.

Use Compelling Supporting Appeals

One of the most effective ways to employ audience adaptation is through supporting appeals. In general, you want to use diverse forms of evidence as discussed in chapter 26: examples, statistics, and testimony. However, you don't have to use them in equal amounts. You might, for example, employ more numerical data if most of your direct audience—classmates in this case—are pursuing studies in the natural or social sciences. If you are speaking at a protest rally, however, your direct audience might find quotes by several eloquent leaders about your cause to be more compelling.

Whomever your direct or target audiences are, examples can be impactful if they reverberate with your listeners. As defined in chapter 26, an example is a concrete instance that supports a broader point or conclusion. However, if a selected example is unfamiliar to the audience or too obscure, it is unlikely to be effective. Similarly, an **anecdote**—a story or extended example in narrative form—can nicely draw an audience in, but only if it's an already familiar story or features values esteemed by the audience. Box 11.2 extends this logic to your use of metaphors.

Box 11.2 Using Sports Metaphors to Support Your Message

Metaphors compare two items or situations. Because of their popularity, sports are frequently drawn on to make comparisons:

- A heroic effort is characterized as "swinging for the fences."
- A successful effort is a "touchdown."
- An intense effort is described as a "full-court press."
- A desperate effort is labeled a "Hail Mary."

Sports metaphors can be very effective for some audiences *but not all*. Think about your audience's interests and the relevance particular metaphors may or may not have for them.

Select Credible and Familiar Sources

Finally, even your sources can be adapted to your direct and target audiences. As discussed in chapter 8, you should set the evaluative standard, or bar, high when choosing research materials by judging each source by its BAARR: potential bias, accuracy, authority, recency, and relevance.

However, you should also consider which sources your audience likely holds in high esteem. It is one thing if you use a source to support your claim, and it is quite another (and very helpful) if your audience knows and respects

that source. Don't assume all groups value the same sources. Quoting the Bible or Koran, for example, may help sway fellow members of your church or mosque, but these sources are less likely to compel classmates at a nonreligiously associated university.

Box 11.3 Sample Audience Analysis and Adaptation

Lisa wanted to prepare a speech for class on the benefits of community supported agriculture (CSA) as a valuable source of local, organic food.



Image by congerdesign via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

Audience Analysis

- *Demographic factors*: Lisa realized most of her audience members were eighteen to twenty-three years old, lived in campus housing and were on a school dining plan, and had minimal disposable income. Many were also athletes and did not own cars. She concluded that they valued economic responsibility, proximity, and health.
- *Psychological factors*: Through a class survey, Lisa also learned most of her classmates were from urban areas and thus were likely unfamiliar with either growing their own food or CSAs.
- *Environmental factors*: Lisa knew her class met right before lunch, when her classmates would be hungry.

Audience Adaptation

- *Find common ground*: Lisa referred to herself as a fellow student living in the residence halls who shared a desire for more healthy options on or near campus.
- *Adjust the depth of the content*: She gave a brief explanation of how CSAs work and why they got started before advocating that their college offer CSA shares to students as part of their meal plans.
- *Use compelling supporting appeals*: Lisa handed out several fresh fruits and vegetables she had purchased from the local farmers' market. She used them as examples of the kinds of produce available through a CSA.

Lisa crafted specific appeals that engaged her peers and centered their needs and values. She practiced audience adaptation.

Adaptation, Not Manipulation


Created by Amethyst Studio from Noun Project

Before leaving the strategies, we offer a final warning. Adaptation does not mean saying what the audience wants to hear or what is popular. Nor does it mean manipulating the audience to achieve your desired response. Ethical speakers do not mislead or prey upon their audience, whether by magnifying fears or promising the fulfillment of personal desires.

Instead, we adjust our speech to help make messages more meaningful to our audience, centering their needs, stakes, and interests. As a speaker, you are speaking "with" an audience, not "to" or "at" them. Ideally, adaptations enable you to talk to and work with the audience to address issues together and improve your communities. The point is that speakers need to examine the ethics of their alterations and be mindful that adaptation and manipulation are not the same, nor are they equally acceptable.

Imagining the Future Together

So far we have concentrated on adapting to an audience based on your analysis of who they are. Before closing, however, there is another dimension of audience adaptation to consider, one that is particularly important in efforts at civic engagement: who your audience *wants* to be and how you can all work together to accomplish that vision.

That is, in considering your direct or target audience, you are not restricted to who they are now. Rather, you can offer a vision of who they can become as they strive with you to create a better future together. The ideas you address in your speech can be framed as opportunities for your audience to grow and thrive, thus making them more attractive to subscribe to.

Box 11.4 Public Figures Who Help Us Imagine the Future

We can look to popular speakers and figures for examples of people who help audiences imagine the future together:

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously shared his "dream" of racial equality to help motivate Americans to support civil rights legislation.
- Greta Thunberg offers contrasting visions of the environment—one where climate change has continued unimpeded and one in which we have curbed rising global temperatures—to advocate for conservation and stewardship of our planet.
- Laverne Cox advocates for transgender rights by acting in fictional films and television shows where her gender is normalized and by hosting talk shows and documentaries that feature



Laverne Cox by WEBN-TV *via Flickr,* CC BY ND.

transgender people.

These public figures don't just take audiences as they are; instead, they present a vision that imagines what we can become by working and dreaming together.



We the people by *Navyatha123 via Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY.

In his essay "In Search of 'the People': A Rhetorical Alternative," Michael Calvin McGee theorized "**the people**" as a rhetorical construct that is called into being by an advocate.[3] In other words, a speaker can use rhetoric to transform an audience from a mass of individuals into a collective—"the people"—with a defined purpose. As McGee explains, the people "are conjured into objective reality, remain so long as the rhetoric which defined them has force, and in the end wilt away, becoming once again merely a collection of individuals."[4]

Your local community already exists. But it is through rhetorical advocacy that its members might envision themselves as united together in brainstorming, problem-solving, and imagining a better future. Through speech, your community can envision themselves as "the people" or similarly, as we defined in chapter 2, a public: a collection of people who are joined together in a cause of common concern.

Imagine, for instance, that your hometown wants to build a new school. To pay for it, the city needs to increase property taxes, which requires local citizens to vote in approval. If you advocate for that cause, you will, of course, appeal to parents of schoolchildren. However, to rhetorically activate "the people" to support the measure, your vision should be broader. You can appeal to lifelong residents of the city, grandparents of schoolchildren, small-business owners, and others by imagining what a new school might mean for their future: It could attract people to the town, help produce engaged citizens and productive workers, lower crime rates, and so on.

If effectively drawn together during your persuasive campaign, volunteers would form a people—a collective working on behalf of their common cause through phone calls, placement of yard signs, development of campaign literature, door-to-door canvassing of neighborhoods, and other activities. Once the vote was complete, this collective would disperse, as the rhetoric that drew this diverse set of individuals together would cease to be a unifying force. As a speaker, you too can lead your audience by offering a collective vision of their existence and future potential.

Summary

This chapter explored how you can adapt your speech to your audience to better achieve your speaking

3. Michael Calvin McGee, "In Search of 'the People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1976): 235–49.
4. McGee, "In Search of 'the People,'" 242.

goals. Adjusting your message makes your speech more meaningful to your audience, so they can work with you to improve your community.

- Audience adaptation ensures that you center the needs and interests of your audience rather than yourself as a speaker.
- Common audience adaptation strategies include owning your message, finding common ground, using appropriate language, adjusting the depth and complexity of material, appealing to deeply held values, using compelling supporting appeals, and selecting credible and familiar sources.
- When working with an audience, you are not restricted to who they are in the present. Rather, by engaging in brainstorming, problem-solving, and dreaming, you can work with an audience to imagine a better future together. Through rhetoric, a speaker can bring a people—a community—together in the service of a cause.

Key Terms

anecdote
audience adaptation
ethnocentrism
identification
the people

Review Questions

1. Why is it important to adapt your speech to the audience?
2. What kinds of adaptations can you make to your speech based on what you learn through audience analysis?
3. Who are "the people," and how can the concept help speakers and audiences improve their communities?

Discussion Questions

1. When do you know you have crossed the line from audience adaptation to manipulation?
2. Imagine you are asked to deliver a two-minute pitch about the greatness of your college or university. What exact changes would you make to your message if delivering your pitch to local high school students versus their grandparents? To people who live in another region of the United States? To immigrants who work in your community? Are there any ethical concerns involved in adapting your speech?
3. Which aspects of audience adaptation seem most important when using a teleconference platform (such as Zoom) to deliver your speech?

12. Organizing Your Presentation with a Strong Thesis Statement

Chapter Objectives

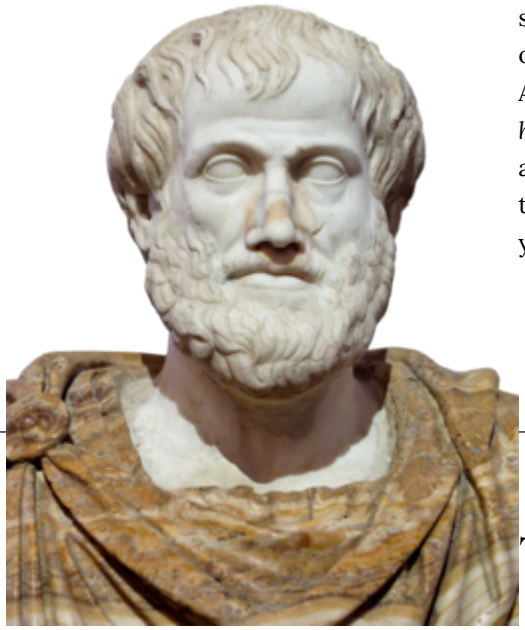
Students will:

- Explain four goals of speech organization.
- Construct a strong thesis statement.

We all know the frustration of getting lost while someone else is speaking. When a speaker meanders, it is exhausting to figure out what their point is, where they are in the speech, or how one idea relates to another. You might even give up listening, start thinking about something else, or discreetly turn to your cell phone.

These frustrations point to the importance of organization, which you learned in chapter 1 refers to how a speaker orders the points in a speech and verbally connects those elements so their audience can follow. Inexperienced or ineffective public speakers may believe that once they select and research a topic, the speech-writing process will flow naturally. On the contrary! Skilled speakers know that selecting and organizing speech content requires time and critical thinking. We will begin by discussing the purpose and goals of organization and then turn to the foundational element of organization: thesis statements.

Box 12.1 Organization as an Ancient Art



Aristotle *by Alvaro Marques Hijazo via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.*

Since ancient times, scholars and practitioners of public speaking have classified, studied, and practiced methods of organization. During the fourth century BCE, for example, Aristotle recognized that speakers who wish to capture *and hold* an audience's attention must think about how to arrange and connect their content. This and the following two chapters draw on their wisdom so you may apply it to your contemporary speech topics.

The Purpose of Organization

The ultimate purposes of organization are to serve your audience's needs and to inspire them to become civically engaged. When we refer to the audience in this chapter, we are talking about your direct audience. In chapter 10, we defined the direct audience as the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech. The needs of your audience, who are giving you their time and attention, should motivate you to thoughtfully organize your speech. Clearly presenting complex or unfamiliar issues enables your audience to better think through pressing public concerns.

But how do you know when your speech is well organized? We'll next explain the four goals a speech fulfills when it is well organized. Afterward, we'll consider how organizing your speech can help you tighten and hone your ideas.

Four Goals of a Well-Organized Speech

There are at least four goals for a well-organized speech: make the speech easy to follow, coherent, engaging, and well timed. You might think of these as benefits—for you as a speaker *and* for the audience—when accomplished.



Created by Iqbal Jaya Pangestu from Noun Project

Easy to Follow

The first goal is to make the speech *easy to follow*. Audiences should be able to easily identify the thesis and distinguish the speech's major elements—often an introduction, main points, and conclusion. Instead of laboring to figure out where you are in a speech, your audience should be able to focus on your ideas instead. A well-organized speech also gives the speaker confidence; you can more easily remember the main points because each is clear and distinct. Thus, you can focus your energy on delivering the ideas, which allows you to give a more fluent and compelling presentation.

Coherent

Second, a well-organized speech should *cohere* as a presentation. That is, effective structure should draw connections between ideas. Major speech elements should flow logically from one part to the next. The audience should easily understand how the main points support or lead to the thesis. Speech content coheres when it makes sense together and leads to a compelling conclusion. Furthermore, a well-organized speech improves the case you are making. If listeners can easily see the connections between ideas, they may find your line of reasoning more convincing.

Engaging

Third, an organized speech is more *engaging* because it's more interesting and memorable for the audience. A cleverly structured speech can offer the audience a new and interesting way of approaching an issue or understanding the merits of a particular approach or solution. Similarly, taking time to carefully craft your introduction and conclusion can effectively draw your audience in with a desire to learn more.

Box 12.2 Using Organization to Make Your Speech More Engaging



Image by Aaron Doucett Kolar via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

Imagine advocating for a food pantry to be built on your campus for students. How might you organize your speech? You could name three benefits it will provide: easy accessibility, free food, and recognition of many students' financial pressures. That might be easy to follow but rather boring.

Alternatively, that same topic could be organized by *first* establishing the prominence of anxiety and depression among college students. *Next* you could identify hunger caused by food insecurity as a contributing factor to students' anxiety and depression. *Following that* you might offer your solution of an on-campus food pantry. This three-point structure could more effectively intrigue the audience by drawing attention to the connections between food insecurity and mental health challenges.

When a speech's organization is interesting, it is also typically memorable. An audience member may report after listening to your speech, "She first explained the problem, then identified a cause of the problem, and advocated for her preferred solution." Or "He started by sharing his own family's struggles with food insecurity, which immediately drew me into the speech." A well-organized speech tends to enable active listening, whereas a jumbled speech tends to elicit passive listening (at best) from an audience.

Well Timed

Finally, an organized speech is *well timed*. In other words, its length meets the audience's expectations and the requirements posed by the context. Speakers who talk without first organizing the content (in a "stream-of-consciousness" fashion) are more likely to talk too long or too briefly, or they may misappropriate how they spend time within their speech. Carefully attending to a speech's organization should avoid those pitfalls and satisfy the timing expected for the occasion and by the audience.

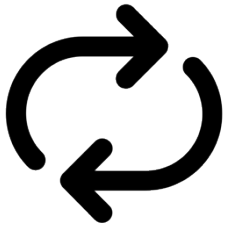
Box 12.3 Four Goals Accomplished by a Well-Organized Speech

1. Easy to follow
2. Coherent
3. Engaging, because it is memorable and interesting
4. Well timed

The best speeches utilize organizational structures that meet all four goals. When any one goal is unmet, the speech's success will suffer. A speech that is engaging and impactful but hard to follow, for example, may leave the audience wondering what they just heard. A speech that is easy to follow but poorly timed or boring, on the other hand, may lose the audience's attention before it ends. Few speakers develop an effective organizational method the first time they write or outline their speech. Instead, they typically follow a more recursive pattern.

The Recursive Nature of Organization

The remainder of this chapter, along with the next two chapters, provides steps to organize your speech. Although they appear straightforward or linear, your process will likely be more **recursive**—that is, circular. The process moves forward and backward; it circles back on itself. You may write a thesis statement and then craft an introduction that leads up to it. You may develop your main points but discover that your focus evolved and you need to go back and revise your thesis.



Created by Garrett Knoll from Noun Project

Expect this recursivity as you draft your speech. The best speakers find themselves honing or tightening their ideas throughout the process of organizing them. Whatever your approach looks like, keep in mind that speeches need a clear purpose and central claim (thesis) to be successful. For this reason, we next turn to your thesis to build a strong foundation for the rest of your speech.

Thesis Statements: Identifying a Clear Purpose

The **thesis statement** is the central statement of the speech. It states the key idea or claim the speaker wants the audience to accept or adhere to. It is the focal point of your entire presentation.

All speeches should center on one key idea or proposition, ideally captured in a single sentence. That sentence

should be written as a declaration; that is, it should be a complete sentence that makes a single statement or expresses an opinion or belief. Avoid a sentence that simply states facts, names a topic, provides a description, or asks a question. Writing your thesis as a single declarative sentence that centers on one idea or proposition keeps the focus of your speech straightforward, simple, and clear—for you *and* your audience. The rest of the speech should employ illustrations and arguments that support this central idea.

Fashioning a clear and concise thesis statement requires you to know the purpose of your speech. As you craft your thesis, consider the following questions to determine your broad purpose:

- Is my purpose to explain how an instance of public discourse operated productively or unproductively?
- Do I want to inform my audience about relevant approaches to addressing a problem before they engage in a public deliberation?
- Am I writing a speech to advocate for a specific plan of action to address a civic issue?
- Do I want to convince my audience about how a specific public artifact functioned persuasively?

The answers you give to these questions will influence the wording you use to articulate your thesis.

Your thesis wording should reflect your overarching purpose, which, in this textbook, is likely to be either informative or persuasive.

- Notice in the prior questions how the words "explain" and "inform" cue the audience that your purpose is to *educate* them. Additional words that signal an informative goal include "teach" and "learn."
- Contrast those words with ones like "advocate" and "convince," which imply that your goal is to *persuade* the audience. Similarly, words like "should" and "must" tend to suggest a persuasive goal.

Try incorporating such cuing language into your thesis to signal your overarching purpose to your audience.

Your more precise purpose will be narrower than informing or persuading your audience, of course. Your thesis will need to articulate what you will inform your audience about or hope to persuade them of. Consequently, your thesis should also name the more specific claim or central focus you want your audience to accept. Specifying your exact emphasis will help crystallize in your own mind what you want your speech to convey or advocate. It can then guide your decisions about what material you include in your speech and what you should leave out. Chapters 21 and 24 will further help you articulate your thesis for informative and persuasive speeches.

Box 12.4 Suggestions for a Strong Thesis Statement

- State a single idea or claim.
- Require one sentence (two at most).
- Write a complete sentence that makes a statement or expresses an opinion or belief.
- Use cuing language that reflects your overarching purpose of informing or persuading your audience.
- Make clear the exact idea you want to convey or the position you are advocating.

We will end this chapter with expanded boxes that look at a couple speakers' attempts to come up with effective, appropriate thesis statements.

Box 12.5 A Sample Thesis to Inform an Audience as They Prepare for Deliberation



Image by Muyuan Ma via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

Javon was a member of his high school football team, and at the recent homecoming game, the star quarterback got a severe concussion. This was the fourth concussion of the season for Javon's team, and he was scared. He saw news stories about NFL players who were suing the league due to severe brain injuries. Some suspected recent suicides by former NFL players might also be linked to concussions. Something needed to change.

He noticed that community members advocated for different solutions but did not carefully listen to each other's ideas. They were talking past each other and getting nowhere. He felt that if they could sit down and discuss several perspectives and options, they might agree on a way forward. But first they would need to understand the potential solutions to the problem of concussions in high school football.

He decided to write a speech to inform community members about the options. His purpose was to ask his audience to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of several approaches before they deliberated together on a way forward.

Javon's Draft Thesis for an Informative Speech

Javon began with this thesis statement:

> *We need to stop judging one another and listen better. We need to hear what other people in the community think because this is a way to show respect.*

Javon's draft thesis offers a fairly clear claim: We need to listen to and respect one another. But the thesis statement is also rather imprecise. He could say the same thing about any number of topics. The focus of his speech is not really about the importance of listening to one another but about *the question he wanted his audience to consider more fully*. After more thought, Javon rewrote his thesis so that it better aligned with his goals.

Javon's Revised Thesis for an Informative Speech

> *The first thing we in Columbus need is a fuller understanding of the problem, as well as of multiple perspectives on addressing concussions in high school football, before we are ready to advocate and implement specific changes. With this goal in mind, the question that guides my speech this morning is, How can we best address the issue of concussions in high school football?*

This revised thesis, you will notice, is not a clearly stated argument; rather, it is a question. Remember that advocacy is not Javon's goal in this speech. His purpose is to inform his audience about a problem and possible solutions and to invite them to weigh options. (This is a necessary step before they move toward action in the future.)

To this end, Javon's thesis statement does offer a directly stated focal point for his presentation. It

is still the foundation on which the rest of his speech will be built. Not all thesis statements, then, are decisive arguments or claims. This is important to remember because, as discussed in chapter 2, many participants in public debates make the point of arguing without acknowledging the complexity of the problem or the competing interests of those they need to involve in addressing the problem. Often, productive civic engagement must begin by weighing trade-offs before advocating a solution.

Box 12.6 A Sample Thesis for Persuasion

Riley was passionate about the problem of animal abuse and neglect, and they wanted to give a speech on how to address this problem in their local county. They first considered advocating for changing local law to allow private or government agencies to more easily intervene when abusive or neglectful pet owners were identified. But Riley decided that a legislative route would take too long to have an effect.



Image via Rawpixel, Public Domain.

So Riley decided to write a speech that discouraged audience members from putting time into legal reform but urged them to act in other tangible ways to improve the lives of local pets.

Riley's Draft Thesis for a Persuasive Speech

Riley's first thesis read,

> *We should support local animal control agencies that care for abused pets in our county.*

The strengths of this thesis are that it states the solution Riley prefers, it is simple and direct, and it offers a narrow focus for the action they advocate.

This thesis does not, however, indicate exactly what Riley means by "support" or how the audience might make that happen. Presumably, Riley would identify and explain those actions in the speech. Riley may have liked that the thesis does not give everything away. But there is a risk here. The thesis might not provide enough information, and consequently, Riley might lose some audience members until they name specific actions within the speech.

Riley's Revised Thesis for a Persuasive Speech

Riley decided to experiment with a more detailed thesis:

> *There are several ways to support our local animal control agency's power to remove and care for abused animals in Montgomery County, but the most important thing you can do for neglected pets is to increase awareness in our county so more people know what counts as abuse and how to report it.*

This thesis is more specific than the first thesis because it names the ways audience members can support local agencies. They can increase awareness about what counts as animal abuse and how to report it. Here, audience members know exactly what Riley means by "support"—unlike before. With this revised thesis, the purpose and direction of the speech are very clear.

The advantage of this type of thesis is that it prepares the audience to hear Riley's request in a specific way; they will probably listen to the entire speech with an ear for *why* and *how* they should increase awareness of what counts as animal abuse and how to report it.

A well-crafted thesis identifies your purpose and focuses your and your audience's attention. Though succinct, a thesis may take you several drafts to clearly articulate. Once you have crafted your thesis statement, you need to determine the best way to develop and support your thesis for a given audience. It is time to develop your main points, which the next chapter addresses.

Summary

This chapter covered the purpose and goals of organization as well as the foundation of any framework: the thesis statement. More specifically, this chapter covered the following:

- When organizing a speech, speakers should strive to build structures that achieve four outcomes: make the speech easy to follow, cohere as a presentation, engage the audience's interest, and ensure the speech's length meets the expectations of the audience and occasion.
- Though the steps to organizing a speech may appear to be straightforward, the actual process is more often recursive; it circles back on itself because speakers revise and alter speech elements as they develop their ideas and support.
- Strong thesis statements are critical to any good organization, because they succinctly and directly state the argument or central focus of the speech.

Key Terms

recursive
thesis statement

Review Questions

1. What four goals should you accomplish through speech organization?
2. What does it mean to say the process of organization is recursive?
3. What questions are most important to consider in crafting your thesis statement?

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the four goals of organization are the most important to achieve? Why?
2. How might you use recursivity while organizing your speech?
3. Pick a speech topic and try writing one thesis statement that strives to inform and another that strives to persuade. What did you change to alter the thesis statement's purpose?

13. Organizing Your Main Points

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Organize the main points of a speech.
- Distinguish linear from nonlinear patterns of arrangement.
- Identify several patterns of arrangement for organizing main points.

The previous chapter stressed the importance of speech organization. It also helped you develop a strong thesis statement. As a speaker, what's your next step?

It's time to develop and organize the body of your speech, guided by your thesis statement. The **speech body** is typically the largest or longest part of a presentation. It includes everything except the introduction and conclusion, which we explore in the next chapter. Here we focus solely on your **main points**, or the major ideas or claims that compose a speech's body and support the thesis statement. First, we will briefly provide pointers for initially finding possible main points. Next, we will more thoroughly discuss several patterns of arrangement. Throughout our guidance, we will reference your audience. In this chapter, the audience refers to your direct audience, who we defined in chapter 10 as the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech.

Finding Possible Main Points

Look through your research and identify the information and evidence most pertinent to your thesis statement. Begin grouping that information into one-sentence ideas or claims as best as you can. Then evaluate what you have. How do they fit together—or what does not fit with the others? What relationships can you identify among these points? Answering these questions can help you discover your main points. Then you can turn to a pattern of arrangement to order the material in your speech.

Alternatively, you might *begin* with a pattern of arrangement. Use it to help you sift through your research for the most relevant or useful elements. The pattern can provide guidance and order the material simultaneously. Either way, you'll find a pattern of arrangement very useful for finding and organizing your main points.

In the next section, we share two types of patterns of arrangement. We recommend you approach these as tools for identifying and constructing the type of speech you want to deliver.

Patterns of Arrangement

A **pattern of arrangement** is a specific guide, or template, for choosing and organizing the main points of a speech. The

arrangement helps determine both the content of the main points and their order. As you consider how to arrange your speech body, spend some time thinking about the type of thesis you are making, the types of supporting materials you are presenting, and the type of response you are asking of your audience. Knowing what you want your audience to get out of the speech (or what an assignment asks you to demonstrate) will help you consider how best to arrange your material.

Interestingly, each of these patterns is not only reflective of a clear speech structure but also representative of the most common ways we tend to think about or make sense of our world. We have divided the patterns into those that follow a linear logic and those that adopt a nonlinear approach.



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By **linear**, we mean a progression of main points that moves in a "straight line"—with one step logically leading to the next—all clearly in support of a thesis that is stated early in the speech. Consequently, linear patterns tend to value explicit statements of claims and evidence as support for the thesis. By prioritizing such explicit connections, however, linear patterns can seem unartful or dull, especially when poorly developed or for audiences more accustomed to nonlinear patterns.



Created by Tom Bedford from Noun Project

In contrast, **nonlinear** refers to an approach that adopts a more circuitous or indirect route to, or in support of, a thesis. These approaches may circle around the thesis through repetitive, but varied, main points, or their connection between the main points and the thesis may not be immediately obvious. Because nonlinear patterns tend to value vividness, they are more likely to incorporate stories, examples, and testimony to bring the central focus to life. The detailed content of these supporting materials may be as important as the "point" to be drawn from them. These patterns may build up to a thesis as the final "a-ha" or culminating moment that pulls all the support together, though they can also be thesis driven. As a result, nonlinear patterns can be very engaging and moving but can also be difficult to follow for audiences more accustomed to linear patterns.

While you might be tempted to see patterns of arrangement as simple organizational devices, recognize that by using them, you are tapping into human logic and sensemaking at a deeper level. Keep in mind that there is not a single, correct pattern of arrangement. You may decide on a different organizational structure depending on subject, specific purpose, thesis, or audience.

Linear Patterns of Arrangement

Categorical Arrangement

A **categorical approach** uses a "category" of elements—such as parts, forms, functions, methods, characteristics, perspectives, or qualities of a topic—as its organizing principle. All the main points belong to that category. For example, a speaker who wants to convince their classmates to volunteer time toward youth development could identify three types of local programs they might join: after-school tutoring centers, mentoring programs, and sports teams.

A word of caution about categorical arrangement: Novice speakers too quickly resort to this pattern of organization without considering other options more carefully. We suggest you use it as a last resort for two reasons. First, if not approached with some creativity and imagination, this pattern is less likely to capture and sustain your audience's interest in your topic. Second, this pattern runs the highest risk of seeming random or disorganized if you do not include transition words (discussed in chapter 14) that clearly define the category that connects your main points.

Chronological Arrangement

A **chronological structure** uses time as its organizing principle. Thus, a chronological speech often takes a past-present-future approach, organizes its main points by historical era, or addresses issues as they unfolded through time. If you are giving a speech requesting more funding for your community charity, you might persuade your audience to donate based on a chronological pattern that shows the positive impact your agency has had over time. You might end by stressing what the agency could do in coming months and years with more support.

Spatial Arrangement

A **spatial structure** is sequential, moving through a progression of elements. The pattern essentially demonstrates how we get from point A to point B or what is similar and different as we move from point A to point B. Often overlooked by speakers, this pattern can be a powerful tool if you want to show, for example, how different regions of the country are affected by a particular policy or how different sites in a city appeared before and after a historical event.

Cause-Effect Arrangement

In the **cause-effect arrangement**, a speaker offers two main points:

- "Cause": Describes a source, reason, or existing condition
- "Effect": Identifies or predicts the effects of the cause named in the previous point

For instance, if you want to increase people's concern about air pollution, you might first establish current pollution levels and then explain their effects on physical health.

Cause-effect arrangement is a particularly useful approach in showing the relationship between ideas or actions. For example, you might use this pattern if you wish to show how a local organization has been positively affected by a grant you seek to renew.

A word of caution about this pattern: When talking about cause and effect, a speaker needs to avoid oversimplifying a situation. Before you use this pattern, ask yourself whether there are multiple causes that should be considered to do justice to the problem. Will your credibility and strength of reasoning be undermined if you address only one of those causes?

Problem-Solution Arrangement

The problem-solution pattern is frequently used in persuasive speeches and proceeds by first documenting the nature, extent, and source of the problem before advocating a solution. Like the cause-effect arrangement, this type of speech typically has two main points that are succinctly divided between aspects of the "problem" and the "solution" advocated by the speaker. Examples might include explaining a particular solution to the deteriorating middle school in your community or a plan for improving air quality in your city.

Problem-Alternatives-Solution Arrangement

An attractive alternative is the **problem-alternatives-solution arrangement**. This pattern includes a middle main point that names and counters one or more alternative solutions before advocating for the solution the speaker sees as most promising. This approach allows the speaker to address popular counterarguments and policies in the alternatives section of the speech.

Box 13.1 Sample Problem-Alternatives-Solution Arrangement

Recall Riley's speech on animal abuse and welfare in the previous chapter. They ultimately chose the problem-alternatives-solution arrangement for their speech. The main points of their presentation include the following:

- **Problem:** Riley established the existence of animal neglect and cruelty in their county and state.
- **Alternatives:** Riley described a recent initiative to stiffen penalties for pet abuse and argued why that initiative was an ineffective solution.
- **Solution:** Riley advocated for their preferred approach of educating the public about animal abuse and how to report it, and they provided ways for the audience to spread the word.

Problem-Cause-Solution-Solvency Arrangement

A second alternative is the **problem-cause-solution-solvency pattern**. This pattern typically includes four main points:

- *Problem:* Identify the nature and extent of the problem.
- *Cause:* Address the source of the problem.
- *Solution:* Name the solution and emphasize how it directly targets the cause of the problem.
- *Solvency:* Discuss the practicality, or costs and benefits, of implementing the solution.

Box 13.2 Sample Problem-Cause-Solution-Solvency Arrangement

The previous chapter considered a speech that advocated for an on-campus food pantry. If the speaker adopted a problem-cause-solution-solvency pattern of arrangement, they could organize their main points this way:

- **Problem:** Establish the prominence of anxiety and depression among college students.
- **Cause:** Identify food insecurity as a contributing factor to students' anxiety and depression.
- **Solution:** Offer the solution of an on-campus food pantry.
- **Solvency:** Suggest where exactly the pantry could be located, identify where funding might come from, and cite the many other successful university food banks around the country.

Refutative Arrangement

The **refutative arrangement**, sometimes called the negative method of arrangement, is best suited to a hostile or apathetic audience. That is because it allows the speaker to focus on the counterarguments the audience brings to the rhetorical occasion *before* making their appeal. This speech usually consists of three or four main points:

- In the first two to three points, the speaker acknowledges and *refutes* the strongest opposing arguments or most common solutions to the topic at hand. Each opposing argument and refutation constitutes one main point in the body of the speech.
- In the final main point, the speaker identifies their preferred *solution* and argues for its superiority.

You might use this arrangement when you expect your audience's resistance to your proposal will be strong. For example, a speech that calls for an investment in downtown recycling bins in a city that has shown little commitment to recycling might be served well by this pattern of arrangement.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

Monroe's Motivated Sequence was developed by Alan H. Monroe, a twentieth-century professor of communication. He based it on the idea that when one feels psychological discomfort, one is motivated to resolve that discomfort through some sort of action. The speaker who employs this sequence typically follows this pattern of five main points:

- *Attention step (introduction)*: Catch the audience's interest.
- *Need step*: Convince the audience that something is presently wrong that needs their attention.
- *Satisfaction step*: Provide the audience with a solution that is within their power to correct the need.
- *Visualization step*: Let the audience see how the satisfaction step will really change things in the future and/or see how bad things will get if they fail to adopt your method of satisfying the need.
- *Action step (conclusion)*: Ask the audience to participate and do something specific to satisfy the need.

Many commercials follow this effective sequence as well as speeches, as box 13.3 demonstrates.

Box 13.3 Sample Monroe's Motivated Sequence Arrangement

President Franklin Roosevelt's famous "War Address" is a real-world example largely patterned on Monroe's Motivated Sequence.[1] He delivered it on December 8, 1941, to a joint session of the US Congress, just one day after Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor and many other sites. This speech marked the United States' entrance into World War II.



Franklin D. Roosevelt Delivers 1943 State of the Union Address, *The U.S. National Archives via Picryl*, *Public Domain*.

- **Attention step:** FDR's famous opening line caught listeners' attention as he described the "infam[ous]" day "America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan."
- **Need step:** FDR went on to explain that the Japanese government "deliberately sought to deceive the United States" by striking while claiming to be at peace with the US. He then specified all the locations that Japanese forces attacked.
- **Satisfaction step:** FDR built up to stating how the attack will be met: "We will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us."
- **Visualization step:** FDR inspired listeners to view the future positively, promising, "We will gain the inevitable triumph" over Japan "so help us God."
- **Action step:** FDR ended the speech by asking Congress to "declare" that "a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire" since their December 7 attack.

Nonlinear Patterns of Arrangement

Recall that nonlinear patterns of arrangement adopt a more circuitous or indirect route to, or in support of, a thesis. They place value on vivid stories, examples, and testimony they offer as evidence as much as on the main points (claims) themselves. Next we describe three examples of nonlinear patterns of arrangement: spiral, narrative, and triangle or star.

1. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Japan" (transcript, Washington, DC, December 8, 1941), *National Archives*, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/joint-address-to-congress-declaration-of-war-against-japan, archived at https://perma.cc/6AJ2-9G7X.

Spiral

A **spiral arrangement** utilizes main points that circle around the thesis, building tension and strength along the way.



- The initial main point identifies an aspect of the speech topic that is mildly concerning.
- A middle main point strengthens the magnitude of the issue.
- The final main point focuses on an element that is deeply alarming or greatly impactful for the audience.

The content of the main points can focus on whatever aspects of the topic the speaker finds useful for their audience—such as particular elements of the problem, types of stakeholders or victims, or even contexts or scenarios that illustrate the issue. Typically, the main points should include similar types of content so that their growing intensity or tension is more readily experienced. An advantage to the spiral pattern is its ability to help the audience increasingly feel the urgency, importance, or magnitude of the issue.

Box 13.4 Sample Spiral Arrangement

A speaker advocating to their employer for a company-wide four-day workweek might organize their main points this way:



Image by Elena Mozhvilo via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

- **Mildly concerning point:** High infrastructure costs of lighting and heating/cooling for a full five days (compared to four days)
- **More worrisome point:** The physical and mental health risks related to a five-day week (and the benefits and savings provided by reducing one day)
- **Most alarming point:** Decreased revenue and higher employee turnover suffered by companies with a five-day workweek (contrasted with higher revenue and lower turnover for a reduced workweek)

Narrative

A **narrative pattern** tells a single detailed story to compel the audience to accept the speaker's thesis; that is, the speaker uses the story to illustrate the thesis and make it compelling. Consequently, the main points typically draw on a chronological arrangement by moving audiences through the beginning, middle, and ending moments of the story. The beginning might establish the people, setting, and conflict of the narrative. The middle can emphasize the climax of the story, and the ending might offer resolution. Each main point offers rich details to establish and draw listeners into that part of the story.

While the story form naturally lends itself to testimony and examples, statistics can also be incorporated to support each main point or story moment. For instance, if the story focuses a main point on the major conflict or problem faced in the narrative arc, statistics could be integrated to establish the commonality or impacts of the problem on people like those featured in the story.

A narrative pattern is advantageous because human beings love telling and hearing stories. According to rhetorical studies scholar Walter Fisher, we use stories to make sense of information and to guide our decision-making.[2] Through a well-told story, a speaker can bring a community problem to life and elicit empathy by helping the audience walk in someone else's shoes. Narratives can emotionally move and compel listeners in ways that cold statistics alone cannot. In addition, a narrative pattern can flex to suit the speaker's needs. It may alter the audience's beliefs or attitudes about a problem by focusing the story's attention on the issue, or it may promote a desired policy by offering it as the resolution to the story. Narrative patterns can also communicate the speaker's own story or convey the experience of another person or group.

Narrative patterns appear frequently in diverse speaking environments. In some Western religious contexts, for instance, speakers share personal testimonies about their spiritual awakenings to encourage similar kinds of discoveries or conversion for their listeners. In civic contexts, speakers seeking funding for policies and programs share how previous grants helped their clients overcome major obstacles.

Box 13.5 Sample Narrative Pattern of Arrangement

Imagine being the director of a community program that helps adults earn their high school equivalency diploma. If you hope to persuade the city officials to help fund the program, you might use a narrative structure to organize your speech this way:

- **Begin the story:** Describe a client who dropped out of high school because of childhood trauma and, consequently, could only qualify for low-wage jobs.
- **Middle of the story:** Explain how, due to generous financial support for your program, the client enrolled for free and pursued their high school equivalency diploma.
- **End of the story:** Celebrate how the client earned their diploma and now works at a higher-paying job.

You could develop each story point with statistics that establish the broader prevalence of challenges like those faced by this client, the quality of support offered by your program, and the program's track record of success.

Triangle or Star

A **triangle or star arrangement** provides multiple main points—like the corners of a triangle or the tips of a star. The main points may appear disparate from each other, but all support the thesis. For instance, one main point may focus on a supporting claim that is particularly exciting, engaging, or entertaining for the audience. Another main point might

2. Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 1–22.

make a controversial supporting claim, while a third main point may forward a proposition the audience likely already accepts.

We're calling this a triangle or star only due to the number of main points you need. Many speeches are short and thus are served well by three main points (a triangle). Some presentations, however, are much longer. You might think here of delivering a keynote address at a community event or an educational speech for a civic organization. In these cases, five main points, or the star, may be more useful.

As with a triangle or star, the ordering of the points is flexible. You can rotate a triangle or (a drawing of a) star to the left or right without damaging the form. Similarly, a speaker using either can change the order of main points without damaging the logic of the speech.

Because of such flexibility, a triangle or star pattern can be easily adapted to different audiences and situations—even in the moment. These structures also encourage diversity in the content and tone of main points. Supporting material can range from deeply serious or even controversial to more lighthearted.

Box 13.6 Sample Triangle Pattern of Arrangement

A speaker advocating for their college to widely adopt open educational (i.e., free) resources (OER) might support that thesis with the following three main points (or could add two more points and use a star pattern):

- **Serious point:** Establish the increasingly expensive costs to students of commercial textbooks.
- **Interesting point:** Demonstrate the more vivid formatting, pictures, and even online interactive features of some OER books.
- **Controversial point:** Argue that requiring commercial textbooks exacerbates wealth inequality.



OER Logo by Markus Büsges (leomaria design) für Wikimedia Deutschland e. V. via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY SA.

Because of the diversity of supporting material, the thesis plays the satisfying role of anchoring or tying all the main points together—in our example, that would be to widely adopt OER materials. The thesis may be articulated in the introduction to help guide the audience's understanding of the main points' connections, or it can be delayed until the conclusion to provide an "a-ha" moment of the speech's primary claim and goal.

Boxes 13.7 and 13.8 summarize the patterns of arrangement addressed in this section. They list the primary strengths of each pattern of arrangement, offers examples of speech topics that *could be* potential candidates for this pattern of arrangement, and suggests a *possible* outline of main points. Ultimately, the pattern of arrangement you choose, and how you outline its main points, should be determined by your primary arguments and your purpose for the speech rather than by our charts.

Box 13.7 Linear Patterns of Arrangement

Linear Pattern of Arrangement	Primary Strengths	Example Topics
Categorical	• Straightforward way to divide a topic into parts, aspects, characteristics, or perspectives within a single category	• Ways to get involved with youth mentorship in the • Multiple benefits of buying locally sourced food
Chronological	• Demonstrates a process across time • Shows historical relationship or connections between past, present, and future • Speaker chooses to move forward or backward from a chosen point in time	• Appeal for an environmental intervention by focus habitat has changed over time • How a brief history of civil rights in the US helps il rights issues in the contemporary era
Spatial	• Enables speaker to organize topic geographically • Can illustrate spatial connection or relationship	• How various sites in the community have improve one another thanks to a grant you want to renew • Ways different regions of the country have been af manufacturing outsourcing
Cause-effect	• Shows a direct relationship between one condition or situation and another	• How child obesity in the local school district rose a introduction of soda vending machines and the re required physical education courses in schools • Ways new tax laws have curtailed downtown revita
Problem-solution	• Invites audience to consider the nature, extent, and source of a shared problem • Advocates a viable solution to a shared problem	• Appeal to shut down local manufacturing plant to i quality and decrease high rates of asthma • Introduction of a transition-to-college mentoring improve the success of first-generation college stu schools
Problem-alternatives-solution	• Acknowledges the inherent complexity of many issues by noting several possible solutions • Allows the speaker to address counterarguments before advocating a preferred solution	• Address declining college enrollment, not by incre campus employment, but by more fully integrating students into campus life • Proposal that green cards for illegal immigrants wh completed eight years of schooling in the US is a b approach to immigration reform than other popula
Problem-cause-solution-solvency	• More complex, balanced approach than the two previous problem-solution models • Emphasizes how the problem came about and considers the viability of the proposed solution • Speaker may move audience to act more quickly than in other arrangements because the speech has answered questions about the solvency of the solution	• Appeal to start summer and weekend food backpa hungry children • Request to fund local Boys and Girls Club to reduc truancy in community—based on a similar, success neighboring community
Refutative	• Allows speaker to acknowledge and refute prominent opposing arguments • Well suited for a hostile or apathetic audience who brings counterarguments to the rhetorical occasion	• Appeal to build a treatment center for juvenile deli county despite residents who oppose the move be will raise crime and truancy • Proposal to fix traffic gridlock by a major multiyear light-rail system
Monroe's Motivated Sequence	• Creates or amplifies psychological discomfort in the audience by elaborating on a significant problem • Satisfies audience's sense of need by visualizing a solution • Provides a clear and specific call to action	• Plan to destigmatize mental health treatment and psychological services for military personnel and t speech begins with recent tragic news about famil base and ends with well-researched steps for audi implement solution • Appeal to increase funding for coach training, asse oversight in treating concussions; speech offers co data from a successful similar program in a nearby and ends with a community action plan for fundra

Box 13.8 Nonlinear Patterns of Arrangement

Nonlinear Pattern of Arrangement	Primary Strengths	Example

Spiral	• Main points build tension and strength as they progress • Takes the audience on a journey and helps them increasingly feel the urgency of the issue	• Reas publ • Appe spac
Narrative	• Can bring a community problem to life and elicit the audience's empathy • May be used to establish the urgency of a civic issue or to promote a desired policy	• Supp over stor relu • Prop spee path and
Triangle and star	• Easily adapted to different audiences and situations • Encourages diversity in the content and tone of main points	• How lives brew crea • Why your

As you select an arrangement to organize your speech material, think about which one will help you achieve the desired outcomes of a well-organized speech. More specifically, pick the pattern that will help the audience track your thinking and logic, making it both *easy to follow* and *coherent*. Remember to also consider which pattern may *engage* your audience's attention because of the interesting connections it suggests between points. Finally, consider your *time restraints* as you determine the number of main points you can reasonably develop and deliver.

Summary

In this chapter, we focused on a speech's main points and common patterns of arrangement. More specifically, this chapter covered the following:

- Main points are the major ideas or claims that compose a speech's body and support the thesis statement.
- Patterns of arrangement can typically be categorized as linear or nonlinear. A linear progression of main points moves in a "straight line"—with one step logically leading to the next—all clearly in support of a thesis that is stated early in the speech. Examples include categorical, chronological, spatial, cause-effect, problem-solution, problem-alternatives-solution, problem-cause-solution-solvency, refutative, and Monroe's Motivated Sequence.
- A nonlinear progression of main points adopts a more circuitous or indirect route to, or in support of, a thesis. Examples include spiral, narrative, and triangle or star patterns of arrangement.
- Main points can be organized according to several patterns of arrangement. Each pattern has its own strengths and is not appropriate for every subject, thesis statement, or audience.

Key Terms

categorical arrangement
cause-effect arrangement
chronological arrangement
linear
main points
Monroe's Motivated Sequence
narrative arrangement
nonlinear
pattern of arrangement
problem-alternatives-solution arrangement
problem-cause-solution-solvency arrangement
problem-solution arrangement
refutative arrangement
spatial arrangement
speech body
spiral arrangement
star arrangement
triangle arrangement

Review Questions

1. What are main points?
2. How does a linear pattern of organization differ from a nonlinear pattern?
3. What are examples of two linear patterns of arrangement and two nonlinear patterns?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you tend to prefer linear or nonlinear patterns of arrangement? Why?
2. Where are you most likely to hear a speech that is organized linearly? Nonlinearly?
3. Find a sample speech and identify its main points. Which pattern of arrangement does it seem to fol-

low?

14. Organizing Your Presentation with an Introduction, Conclusion, and Transitions

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Assess the functions of introductions and conclusions.
- Write effective transitions with signposts.

Now that you have developed a strong thesis (chapter 12) and organized your main points (chapter 13), you are ready to develop the introduction and conclusion and add transitions. You might wonder why this chapter comes now, *after* the previous two chapters on organization. Don't speeches usually *start* with an introduction? Why not begin with that, then?

It's hard to introduce something when you don't yet know what you're introducing. You need a working outline of your thesis and main points *before* you write your speech's opening, or **introduction**, and closing, or **conclusion**. Similarly, it's difficult to write **transitions**—connectors that move listeners from one point to the next—if you have not yet developed the main points!

In this chapter, we will begin by identifying the primary functions of introductions and conclusions. We will then turn to transitions to help you communicate connections between the sections of your speech. Similarly to the previous two chapters, when we refer in this chapter to the audience, we mean your direct audience: the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech, based on our explanation in chapter 10.

Effective Introductions and Conclusions

How you begin and end a speech can have an outsized effect on how audiences respond to your speech. On the one hand, most listeners make an initial decision about how seriously to take your speech or how much attention to give based on what they hear in the introduction. On the other hand, what you say in the conclusion is what many audiences will best remember.

While there is no easy formula, there are principles and tools that can help you craft effective introductions and conclusions. Of course, because each speech is unique, an approach that is well suited for one speech, audience, or context may be ill suited for another. It can be useful, then, to have a series of tools in your rhetorical toolbox as you craft the introduction and conclusion.

The Functions of Introductions



A popular internet meme declares, "Apparently it's rude to poke someone in the forehead and say, 'Skip Intro' when they start a conversation." The meme, of course, alludes to the option many streaming services provide to skip the introduction of our favorite shows and immediately start an episode.

Reflecting, however, on why shows offer introductions and—perhaps more tellingly—why we sometimes *do* watch their introductions highlights what a good introduction should accomplish. Whether for a television show or a speech, most introductions try to accomplish several functions. That is, they try to provide compelling answers to the questions audiences ask themselves as they decide whether or not to pay attention:

- get attention ("Does this sound interesting?")
- raise a need ("Will this address my interests or concerns?")
- establish credibility ("Is the person speaking worth listening to?")
- state your thesis or focal point ("What is this about?")
- preview the body of the speech ("What's coming?")

We address each of these functions in turn.

Get Attention

Your audience members have many things on their minds when you address them. As a speaker, you must find a way to get their attention. To be effective, your method must be appropriate to the occasion, your topic, and the audience. Avoid starting with "Uh, thanks, for, uh, coming" or "My topic today is…" or even "My name is…" These are too bland. Instead, have a clear plan for how to grab their attention with your first words. Several specific strategies for attention-getting introductions appear in box 14.1.

Box 14.1 Strategies for Getting the Audience's Attention

- Use a quotation from a well-qualified or well-known individual.
- Make a joke—using tasteful and relevant humor, of course.
- Ask a rhetorical question or a series of questions to engage your audience.
- Tell a brief story or anecdote that introduces the topic of your speech in a compelling manner. This narrative should be connected to your topic in some way.
- Share your personal experience as it relates to some aspect of your speech.
- Make a brief (possibly ceremonial) reference to the occasion: "Mr. President, members of the board of trustees, family and friends of the graduates, and members of the graduating class of 2035…"
- Use a surprising statistic discovered in your research to awaken the audience's curiosity.

Raise a Need

You are much more likely to hold your audience's attention if you articulate something they are interested in, need, or are concerned about (broadly defined). You must convince them that they want to listen to your speech because they will learn something important from it or will benefit from it in some way. Briefly but explicitly state what they will gain, and make clear how that benefit directly relates to their interests or needs.

Establish Credibility

Assure the audience you are a credible source on the topic. This does not necessarily mean you are the foremost expert on the topic, but your introduction can give them a sense that you have done your research and know and care about the issue. You might explain that you studied the topic in a previous class, or you conducted multiple interviews with several community leaders involved with the issue.

You can, alternatively, build credibility by making your relationship to, or interest in, the topic clear. If you plan to address child obesity, for example, you might share that you struggled as a child with health issues from being overweight. If you want to advocate to increase salaries for schoolteachers, you might explain that it always bothered you that your favorite middle school teacher had to work a second job to stay afloat financially. When the audience understands your investment in the issue at hand, they are often more willing to listen to what you have to say.

Box 14.2 Strategies for Establishing Your Credibility

- State where, and possibly why, you have previously studied or researched this topic.
- Share how this topic relates to a hobby you have.
- Describe some of the research you conducted to prepare for this speech.
- Explain specifically why this topic matters to you.
- Identify your personal connection to the topic or how it relates to a close family member or friend.

State Your Thesis or Focal Point

Most speeches are **thesis driven**, meaning the thesis "drives" or determines the route the speech will take. As we discussed in chapter 12, the thesis guides what material stays in the speech and what goes. Consequently, the thesis should be clearly stated in the introduction. Because it is the most important sentence in the speech, you don't want it to get lost. Articulate it as its own sentence, using the wording you developed to clearly state your central focus or claim.

There are exceptions to stating your thesis in the introduction. In what we might call **thesis-seeking** speeches, the thesis is reserved for later in the speech. The introduction and main points build up to (or "seek") the thesis, which comes toward the end. We discussed patterns of arrangement in the previous chapters. Some patterns that are more likely to adopt a thesis-seeking approach include the refutative pattern of arrangement, some uses of Monroe's Motivated Sequence, and several of the nonlinear patterns.

Preview the Body of the Speech

A **preview statement** elaborates on your thesis by announcing the main points of your speech *in the order you will develop them* as the speech progresses. It is a clear indication of how, exactly, the speech will proceed. In many ways, it tells the audience what to listen for.

Box 14.3 Sample Preview Statement

In the previous two chapters, we discussed Riley's speech about animal welfare. Here we return to that speech for a sample preview statement.

Riley's thesis statement: There are several ways to strengthen our local animal control agency's power to remove and care for abused animals in Montgomery County, but the most important thing you can do is to increase awareness in our county so more people know what counts as abuse and how to report it.

Riley's preview statement: In my speech, I will **first** establish the problem of animal neglect and cruelty in our county and state. **Next**, I will examine a frequently proposed solution and tell you why it will not make an immediate difference in the lives of our animal friends. **Then** I will advocate my preferred approach of educating the public about animal abuse, and I'll tell you specific ways you can help spread the word.

The preview statement should allow audience members to anticipate the progression of your speech. When they know where you are going, they begin to listen for how your main points build on each other instead of struggling to determine your train of thought.

The Functions of Conclusions



Conclusions, like introductions, play an important role in your speech because they tend to be what audiences remember. Consequently, conclusions share many characteristics with introductions; however, they tend to be shorter.

There are three primary functions of conclusions. They should

- summarize your main points
- restate your thesis or focal point
- end decisively

Again, we look more closely at each of these functions.

Summarize Your Main Points

Your audience hears your speech only once, but with the benefit of a summary, they hear your main points three times: first in the introduction's preview, then in the body itself, and here again in the conclusion's summary. This repetition

increases the possibility that they will remember your message. Active listening requires an audience's ongoing effort. The final summary makes that task a little easier.

What do we mean by "summarize"?

DO	**Do NOT**
Simply rename or restate each main point.	Do not reexplain each main point.
Express the summary in a single sentence.	Do not offer any new support.
"Today I explained A, B, C, and D." "I have described how W is largely caused by X, but Y can help if we do Z."	

The simple renaming briefly reminds your audience of what you said. Also, if someone was distracted during part of your speech, the restatement of your points enables them to review the argument's progression.

Restate Your Thesis or Focal Point

Because your thesis statement captures the main point of the entire speech concisely and compellingly, state it again in the conclusion. Do so even if you adopt a "thesis-seeking" pattern that holds off on stating your thesis until a main point later in the speech's body. The thesis is still your central claim or focus. Restating it in the conclusion reinforces your thesis before you finish speaking.

End Decisively

Conclusions should also be decisive. They should make clear that you are at the end of your presentation.

- *Avoid* ending by simply saying "thank you" or "thank you for your time." That is gracious but not terribly interesting or decisive.
- Instead, try crafting a *unique ending* to the speech that is *decisive* enough that audiences automatically know to begin their applause without needing to hear you say "thank you" or "that's it." Use the strategies named in box 14.4 for ideas.

You might think of the conclusion's decisive ending in relation to your introduction's attention-getter—like "bookends" for your speech. Consider how your decisive ending might return to your attention-getting device in some way.

Box 14.4 Strategies for Ending a Speech Decisively

- Briefly share the implications of your presentation.
- If you opened your speech with a quotation, perhaps restate it or end with another arresting quota-

tion.

- If you began your speech with a story, consider returning to and finishing that story.
- Offer inspiring last words that relate to your speech topic and thesis.

Now that you see what your introduction and conclusion can accomplish, add transitions to aid the speech's clarity and movement.

Clear Transitions

Listening to a speech is unlike reading text. When you read an article or book, you can always go back a few paragraphs if you find your attention wandering, if you are interrupted by a text message, or if you did not catch the relationship between ideas the first time through. We do not have this luxury when listening to a speech. We hear the words only once, and if we miss something, we cannot go back and hear it again.

Box 14.5 Speech Transitions Are like GPS Navigation

Think about the way a GPS operates. As the computerized voice gives you driving directions, it says something like "In two miles, take a left onto Park Place" or "Continue 4.6 miles to exit 14 for Roosevelt Street." Then as you get closer to your exit or turn, you might get a reminder: "In half a mile, turn left onto..." If the GPS were to wait until you were at the exit and then say, "Get off here!" you would likely miss the exit. You were not prepared for the change in direction.

The same concept applies to public speaking. Transitions supply the verbal hints or signals that your speech is going to take a turn toward a new claim or emphasis.



GPS by Pixabay via Stockvault, Public Domain.

When you understand how easily listeners can get lost during your speech, you also understand how to help them: Include transitions. Recall we defined transitions as connectors that move listeners from one point to the next. They help audiences navigate your presentation, often summarizing a main point they just heard or providing a clue of where they are going next on their journey. Indeed, transitions typically consist of two elements. First, transitions offer a brief internal summary of what was just said. Second, transitions offer a brief preview of what you will address next.

Box 14.6 Sample Transitions

Let's return once again to Riley's speech about animal welfare. During their speech, Riley established the problem of animal abuse and neglect. They then explained why legal reform was not the best approach to helping pets in their county. At that point, Riley was ready to introduce their solution.

To signal that shift, Riley added the following transition. It consisted of two parts.

Mini Summary of the Previous Point

"I have just critiqued a popular solution for decreasing animal abuse in Montgomery County."

Mini Preview of the Next Point

"Next, I will turn to my preferred approach."

Riley stated the summary and preview together, as a single transition. They then shared their solution.

We often use cuing language, called **signposts**, to alert audiences to a transition. In Riley's example in box 14.6, words like "just" ("I have just critiqued") and "next" ("Next, I will turn to") notify listeners of what just happened and what's about to be focused on. Such cuing language functions like actual signposts on the road that indicate where you are within a larger environment. Box 14.7 provides additional examples of transitions with signposting language.



Image by Charles Parker via Pexels, Pexels License.

Box 14.7 Strategies for Writing Transitions and Signposts

- **Try numerical sequencing:** First…, Second…, Third…, In conclusion…, or Next…, In addition…
- **Stress relationships between elements:** Just as we have…so we also have…, To the left…and to the right…
- **Summarize what you have covered:** In short…, To summarize…, To clarify…, That is…, Keep in mind…, Before I move on to the next point, take note of…
- **Ask a rhetorical question:** "You may ask, 'What does this have to do with me?'" "You may wonder what caused this situation in which we find ourselves," or "How do we work through these conflicts?"

When it comes to connectives like transitions and signposts, the bottom line is that your audience will thank you for using them. They give your listeners handles to grab onto as they travel through your speech with you.

Now that you have examined the goals of organization and the various elements of planning and arranging a speech, in the next chapter we turn to the concrete principles of composing an outline.

Summary

This chapter addressed the functions of introductions and conclusions and the importance of clear transitions. More specifically, this chapter established the following:

- Introductions and conclusions play critical roles in conveying your most important ideas and engaging listeners.
- An introduction should fulfill the following functions: get attention, raise a need, establish credibility, state your thesis or focal point, and preview the body of the speech.
- The conclusion should summarize your main points, restate your thesis or focal point, and end decisively.
- Transitions with signposts improve the flow of a speech and, just as importantly, help audience members navigate material they hear.

Key Terms

conclusion
introduction
preview statement
signpost
thesis driven
thesis seeking
transition

Review Questions

1. How does a preview statement differ from a thesis statement?
2. What are two good strategies for introductions? For conclusions?
3. What are the functions of transitions in public speaking?

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a particularly well-organized public presentation you attended. What did the speaker do in the introduction, conclusion, and between main points that made the speech easy to follow?
2. What strategies might you add for getting an audience's attention in the introduction and ending decisively in the conclusion?
3. Can you think of a speaker who uses transitions well? What do you notice about their speeches when you listen to them?

15. Writing a Preparation Outline

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Identify the benefits of outlining.
- Employ the principles of outlining to visualize arguments and clarify thinking.
- Construct a preparation outline.

In the previous three chapters, we discussed the importance of organizing your speech. We also named elements to include in your speech, such as an introduction, main points, and a conclusion. You may be wondering, "How will I know if I've included everything I need?" or "How can I see if my points make sense together?"

This chapter answers these questions by exploring the basics of outlining. An **outline** is a sketch or condensed version of your speech. We will focus on the **preparation outline**, which is the draft you write as you plan and organize your speech. It includes all your arguments, support, transitions, and citations. It helps you know if your points cohere together and if there are any gaps. Much of the hard but rewarding work of speech writing occurs while constructing and revising the preparation outline.

We begin by considering the importance of outlining for you and your audience. When we refer to the audience in this chapter, we mean your direct audience, who we described in chapter 10 as the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech. Next we establish the principles to follow when crafting a Roman numeral outline. We conclude by explaining what to include in a preparation outline. For your reference, Appendix A and Appendix B offer full models of preparation speech outlines: one for an informative speech and one for a persuasive speech.

The Importance of Outlining



Created by Nanik haq from Noun Project

You may be tempted to avoid outlining and instead write your speech in free form or as an essay. We urge you to reconsider. Writing a well-crafted outline offers at least three benefits for speakers and audiences: It makes your speech more compelling, helps you identify and improve problems, and aids your memory of your speech.

First, a preparation outline helps you arrange your ideas and supporting evidence in the *most compelling manner*. When you write a speech in free form, you can quickly lose your way and very quickly lose your audience too. Drafting your speech as an outline helps you focus on your thesis and visualize the linear or nonlinear arrangement you've chosen to support the thesis.

Second, the preparation outline helps you *diagnose and address potential problem areas* in your speech. The outline form allows you to locate points of repetition, gaps in reasoning, or extraneous information. You can more quickly determine if your main points are well balanced and if you have remembered to include an introduction and conclusion.

Finally, a preparation outline provides a visual representation of the speech, which helps you *learn* the speech.

You can easily see your main points, so they become more memorable to you. You can also observe how transitions help you move from one point to another and how the introduction and conclusion open and close the speech.

Time spent constructing, arranging, and revising your speech outline now can reward you later, when audience members join your cause and have a clear sense of how to proceed. Outlining is the work you do to learn your speech, to know it well, and to communicate that deep knowledge to your audience. If you put the time in, it will show.

> The presidential speechwriter Peggy Noonan said of speech preparation, "If you find yourself doing draft after draft, this is good. As you write and rewrite you are unconsciously absorbing, picking up your own rhythm and phrasing. This will show itself in a greater ease, a greater engagement when you stand up and give the speech. People will know that you know your text."[1]

There are several specific guidelines that will help you write your preparation outline. Many instructors have strict requirements about how preparation outlines should look and what elements should be included, so be certain to check with your professor about their preferred format before you turn in your document. In the following section, we recommend general principles to follow when outlining.

The Principles of Outlining

The outlining system we present here is widely employed in public speaking courses, because it provides a *visual* representation of the structure of your speech. This visuality helps you see the relationship among your ideas, making the structure easier to develop *and* revise. Consequently, the principles are useful both for speeches that adopt a linear pattern of arrangement and for those that employ nonlinear patterns as discussed in chapter 13. Some instructors, however, may allow you to submit an outline that more visually matches a nonlinear pattern (i.e., appears as a star or as a spiral).



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Consistent Indentation and Symbolization

Make sure your outline is structured with a *consistent pattern* of symbols and indentations. Adopt a *pattern of symbols* that helps you visually differentiate main points from subpoints and quickly count the number of each. *Avoid bullet points* because they make these tasks much harder. Instead, main points should be identified by increasing Roman numerals, subpoints by sequential capital letters, and sub-subpoints by rising Arabic numerals. In addition, adopt a *pattern of indentations* to further distinguish types of points. Each Roman numeral should be flush left, each subpoint should be indented once, and sub-subpoints should be indented twice, as box 15.1 makes clear.

1. Peggy Noonan, *Simply Speaking: How to Communicate Your Ideas with Style, Substance, and Clarity* (New York: Regan Books, 1988), 24.

Box 15.1 Sample Indentation and Symbolization

Notice how each point uses sequential symbols (I, A, 1) and spacing (indentation or lack thereof).

I. First main point

A. First subpoint

B. Second subpoint

II. Second main point

A. First subpoint

1. First sub-subpoint

2. Second sub-subpoint

B. Second subpoint

III. Third main point and so on…

Indentation and symbolization help you *see* the flow of your speech and the relationship among your ideas. You can quickly observe, for instance, what your three main points are. You might discover an idea is not really a main point and functions better as additional *support* for a main point. This visual relationship among ideas is built on the principle of subordination.

Subordination

Subordination is the practice of making material that is less important, or primarily supportive, secondary to more central ideas and claims. Material in your outline should descend in order of importance. That is, supporting ideas or evidence should be *listed under* main points and *indented*.

Noting subordination is much different than writing an essay where subpoints are typically written with the claim they support as a single paragraph. Typically, *paragraphs should be avoided when outlining*. The subpoints instead should be visually subordinated.

Box 15.2 Sample Subordination

As Javon worked on his deliberation speech, he wanted to list the "benefits" and "drawbacks" of each potential solution or approach to the problem of concussions. These points he labeled "B" (benefits) and "C" (drawbacks). *Underneath* each of these points, and *indented*, he gave more detail about what the benefits and what the drawbacks were. This portion of his outline read as follows:

B. This approach foregrounds two benefits.

1. It tries to address the unhealthy aspects of hypermasculinity within football culture, like

ignoring pain and ignoring the recovery protocols that may slow the chances of repeated concussion.

2. The education extends beyond players and coaches to include parents, fans, and community members who often perpetuate attitudes that celebrate players for sacrificing their bodies for the game.

C. But there are also drawbacks to this approach.

Here we see that points 1 and 2 are each listed *under* the claim "This approach foregrounds two benefits." That's because the individual examples of benefits (1 and 2) are subordinate to *and support* the claim that benefits exist (A). The drawbacks will similarly follow as points 1 and 2 under C.

Subordination is closely related to the next principle of outlining: coordination.

Coordination

Coordination is a visual representation of the proper relationship between ideas. It is related to subordination because it stresses that ideas of similar importance should be on the *same level* of the outline.

Box 15.3 Sample Coordination

Here is an example from Riley's speech, discussing how members of the community can help spread awareness about animal abuse:

1. Use social media to broadcast pet news in our county.

    a. Spread news about pet abuse and neglect to broaden awareness of this issue.

    b. Spread news about current laws protecting animals.

    c. Publicize agencies and phone numbers residents can call if they witness abuse or neglect.

    d. Follow the Montgomery County Humane Society on Instagram and "like" them on Facebook.

Here we see coordination in that the four ways for community members to volunteer at the local animal shelter are listed *on the same level* of the outline: Each has a lowercase letter, each refers to subpoint 1, and each has identical indentation.

After you have sketched the subordination and coordination in your outline, you can turn to another important outlining principle: parallelism.

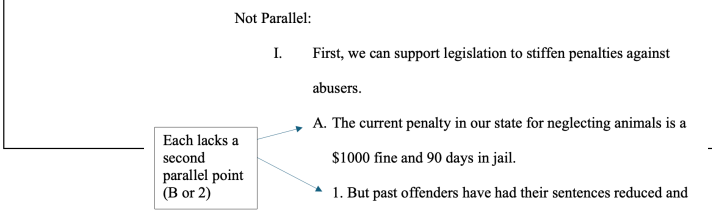
Parallelism

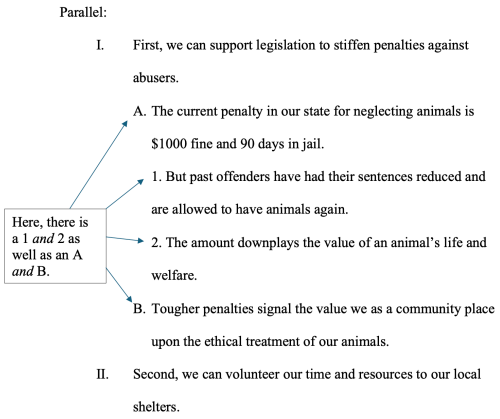
The **parallelism** principle dictates that you balance your points and subpoints as you divide them. Just as you cannot balance two ends of a scale with only one object, each level of your outline needs *at least two points* to be in balance or to justify the subdivision.

To explain this concept another way, we often say when it comes to outlining, "every little one has a little two." In other words, there *must be at least two* relevant and worthy subordinate ideas to make the subdivision; otherwise, the division is not warranted.

Box 15.4 Sample Parallelism

Parallelism can best be illustrated through contrasting examples. Notice how the first example *violates* the principle of parallelism twice. Both subpoint A and sub-subpoint 1 *lack a pair* for balance. The second example provides such balance by *adding* subpoint B (to balance A) and sub-subpoint 2 (to balance 1).





Balance

The final principle of outlining is balance. **Balance** in speech outlining dictates each main idea receives *roughly the same amount of time and attention* in the speech. If the first main point of your speech lasts three minutes, the second main point lasts thirty-seven seconds, and the final main point is four minutes, then the audience suspects that your second "main" point really isn't that important. An outline helps you visually detect such situations, because you can see how much or how little support you have included for each main point. If you find yourself with unbalanced points, consider adding or subtracting material to balance them.

Now that we have explained the guiding principles that will help you construct a coherent outline, we turn to the specific tasks of writing the preparation outline.

Constructing the Preparation Outline

As we said, the preparation outline is designed to help you think through and develop your speech. In a public speaking

course, it is generally the version of a speech that you submit to your instructor, perhaps to receive feedback before you deliver the speech. Your preparation outline will be *too detailed to serve as the notes you use to deliver your final speech*, but writing a preparation outline is essential to the thinking and planning process. Unless your professor tells you otherwise, preparation outlines should include the following elements.

State Your Specific Purpose

The purpose statement is related to, but not the same as, your thesis statement. Another way to think of the purpose statement is as the overarching goal or objective for your speech. Since you are using this textbook, your purpose will likely be either informative or persuasive, so the verb you choose should reflect the goal ("explain" or "inform" versus "advocate" or "persuade"). Clearly label your purpose statement at the top of your outline. Here is Riley's purpose statement.

Purpose statement: To urge audience members to become animal welfare educators in our county.

You *will not state* the purpose statement to your audience, but knowing and succinctly stating your purpose can help you write a good speech. If you do not know what you want your speech to accomplish, there is a good chance the rest of your speech will betray that lack of purpose.

Label Key Components of the Speech: Introduction, Conclusion, Thesis, Transitions

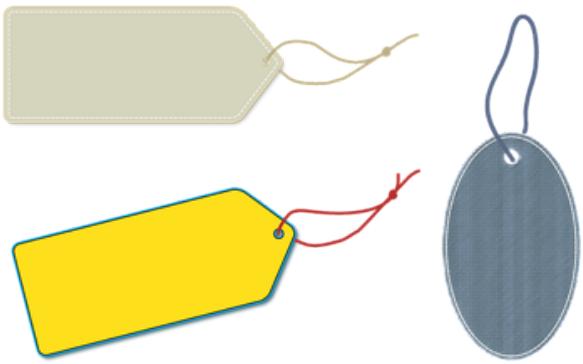


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Visually highlight key components of the speech by labeling them in the outline. This helps you easily find them and better ensures they will fulfill their roles. The key components include the *introduction* and *conclusion* as well as the *thesis* and *transitions*.

First, clearly label the "Introduction" and "Conclusion" by writing those words with the Roman numeral assigned to each. Do not add any other information to the Roman numeral. Instead, the content of these points should appear below the Roman numeral and be indented to show subordination.

Second, label your "thesis" with that word whenever it appears in the outline. We discussed the characteristics of strong thesis statements at length in chapter 12. In your outline, labeling your thesis clearly will help you (and your professor) diagnose whether your central idea is well developed and is fully supported by the main points and subpoints.

The thesis's location may depend on whether your speech is thesis driven or thesis seeking as we distinguished in chapter 14. If your speech is thesis driven, meaning the thesis "drives" or determines the route the speech will take, then the thesis will likely appear within both the introduction and conclusion (and should be labeled in each). If your speech is thesis seeking, meaning the introduction and main points build up to or "seek" a thesis, it is likely to appear only within the last main point and/or conclusion.

Box 15.5 Sample Labeling of the Introduction and Thesis in a Preparation Outline

Here is the introduction to Riley's speech on animal welfare. Notice that only the label "Introduction" appears with Roman numeral I. The same would be true for the Conclusion, but with a different Roman numeral. Also notice that the thesis is noted as such, since it is a major speech component.

I. Introduction

A. In 2020, the Netflix documentary series *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem, and Madness* aired and became widely popular.

B. Many of you may have heard of or even watched *Tiger King*, or you may have laughed at parodies and memes of Joe Exotic and Carole Baskin. But how many of us focused on the animals who were treated cruelly?

C. Today I want to talk about this issue that is of great importance to me and I know to many of you as well. I'm an animal lover, and I became aware of pet abuse in our county through my volunteer work at the animal shelter. I was saddened by the *Tiger King* story and was motivated to do something locally.

D. **(Thesis)** There are several ways to support our local animal control agency's power to remove and care for abused animals in Montgomery County, but the most important thing you can do is to increase awareness in our county so more people know what counts as abuse and how to report it.

E. In my speech, I will first establish the problem of animal neglect and cruelty in our county and state. Next, I will examine a frequently proposed solution and tell you why it will not make an immediate difference in the lives of our animal friends. Then I will advocate my preferred approach of educating the public about animal abuse, and I'll tell you specific ways you can help spread the word.

Third, label each "transition" between main points by using that word. Transitions are crucial to how an audience makes sense of and follows your speech as you progress. Labeling your transitions in a preparation outline ensures that you include them and can find them easily. It also helps you evaluate the connections between main points and the flow of your reasoning.

Box 15.6 Sample Labeling of Transitions in a Preparation Outline

Within their speech, Riley included this transition to shift from the problem to an alternative solution:

* **(Transition)** Having addressed the problem of animal cruelty in our county and state, I will now turn to a potential solution to this problem.

Notice that "Transition" is explicitly labeled to draw attention to its presence and function.

Write Main Points, Subpoints, and Transitions in Complete Sentences

Except for the introduction and conclusion, which begin with only their labels, you should write every main point, subpoint, and transition as a full sentence. This is only true for the preparation outline because it helps you plan and organize your speech. Writing full sentences at this stage is a way to discipline yourself to complete your thought and fully prepare what you will say in your speech. Later, *after* you have developed your preparation outline and are ready to create speaking notes, you can remove full sentences and use keywords and phrases instead. We provide guidance on preparing speaking notes in chapter 19.

Include Spoken and Written Citations



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As we explained in chapter 9, providing full citations for all your sources is a sign of ethical and responsible speech writing. That starts with the preparation outline. *Include spoken citations*—the source citations you plan to vocalize during the speech—*in the outline itself*. Add them wherever you plan to orally cite a source. Refer to chapter 9 for the specific information to cite each time.

In addition, *include written citations* within your preparation outline and at the end of this outline. Within the outline, add a written citation whenever you orally cite or draw information from a source. Each such written citation will likely appear similar to an in-text citation you might add to an essay. At the end of your preparation outline, on a separate last page, include a *bibliography* (or it might be called Works Cited or References). Be sure to check with your instructor about their preferred style guide (Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, etc.).


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Now that we have explained each element of the preparation outline, we encourage you to look at two full sample preparation outlines in Appendix A and Appendix B. One speech's purpose is to *inform* an audience about the multiple approaches to a shared problem as they prepare to deliberate together. This type of speech is one you will learn more about in chapter 20. The other speech's purpose is to *persuasively advocate* a particular solution to a problem (like you will learn more about in chapter 24).

Summary

This chapter stressed the importance of outlining and described general outlining principles that best produce a visual depiction of your organizational structure. It also explained the usefulness of a preparation outline and how best to construct one for your speech.

- Outlines have at least three benefits for you as the speaker: They help you arrange ideas in the best order for your purpose. They allow you to see where potential problems in evidence or logic emerge. They also help you learn the speech.
- Outlines should be written by following the principles of consistent symbolization and indentation, subordination, coordination, parallelism, and balance.
- Preparation outlines are full sketches of your speech, with ideas written in complete sentences to ensure complete thoughts. They label important elements such as the introduction and conclusion as

well as the thesis and transitions. They follow outlining principles and include both spoken and written citations.

Key Terms

balance
coordination
outline
parallelism
preparation outline
purpose statement
subordination

Review Questions

1. What are three reasons an outline is important for public speaking?
2. Why is it useful to write the elements of your preparation outline in full sentences?
3. How do the principles of consistent symbolization and indentation, coordination, subordination, parallelism, and balance help you develop a speech?

Discussion Questions

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of developing a speech by fully outlining it versus including large paragraphs?
2. What parts of the outlining advice in the chapter seem the most daunting? The most useful? Explain your answers.
3. Do you agree with the advice given in this chapter to avoid using bullet points in a speech outline? Why or why not?

16. Using Style to Harness the Power of Language

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Assess a speech's style for how well it meets four core goals.
- Identify and distinguish common stylistic devices.
- Employ stylistic devices in a presentation.



Many Cans of Soda by *Freerange Public Domain Archives*, *Public Domain*.

If you live in the United States and speak English, do you use the word "pop," "soda," or "coke" to refer to a sweetened carbonated beverage? What kind of shoes do you wear: sneakers or tennis shoes? When you want to get others' attention, do you say "you guys" or "y'all"?

These are just a few of the questions linguists Bert Vaux and Scott Golder asked Americans across the country in the early 2000s. Graphic artist Josh Katz updated and illustrated the responses with colorful maps for his 2016 book *Speaking American*. As you might expect, US residents differ considerably in their responses depending on where they live.[1] Your language probably reflects the words you heard where you grew up.

Of course, geographic region is just one of many factors that influence our word choice. Family upbringing, education, race, socioeconomic status, and age play roles too. Have you ever used popular slang terms with older adults, and they scratched their heads in confusion? If so, you know age contributes to language. What teenagers found "boss" in the 1960s, they called "rad" in the 1980s, "sweet" in the early 2000s, and "sigma" in the 2020s. That is, each generation develops its own style.

As defined in chapter 1, style is the language or expression we use—the words we choose. Style can significantly influence a message's reception. To be an effective speaker, you must adopt a speaking style that suits your audience and purpose.

In what follows, we discuss four goals for style in public speaking. We then explore a few of the most helpful stylistic devices speakers can use to fulfill those goals.



Created by M. Oki Orlando from Noun Project

1. Mark Abadi, "27 Fascinating Maps That Show How Americans Speak English Differently Across the US," *Business Insider*, January 3, 2018, http://businessinsider.com/american-english-dialects-maps-2018-1.

The Goals of Style in Presentations

In everyday life, we often use style to mean how someone uniquely expresses themselves. Stylish people dress or walk in ways that exude sophistication, swag, or pizzazz. The same holds true for style in public speaking. A speaker who develops their personal speaking style is more likely to grab and hold their audience's attention.

However, style can and should accomplish much more in public speaking. In this section, we discuss four desired outcomes of style: to create clarity, to maintain audience attention, to construct an appropriate mood or emotional state, and to generate a perspective on a topic for the audience. When we refer to the audience in this section, we are talking about your direct audience (unless we indicate otherwise). In chapter 10, we defined the direct audience as the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech.

Clarity

Aristotle claimed that making ideas clear to the listener was the proper goal and result of all stylistic choices.[2] If a speech is composed primarily of technical terms, puzzling language, or unfamiliar words, audience members will not understand nor act upon the information presented. They will also not likely listen for very long.

Attention

Our language should capture and hold the attention of audience members. You have probably experienced boring or dry speakers. To be sure, this can be a product of delivery, but it is also an element of style. A speaker must create interesting, engaging images in our minds through words, such as by sharing vivid anecdotes, statistics, quotations, and rhetorical questions.

Emotion

Stylistic choices also help shape the emotional element of communication. Language can encourage listeners to overcome apathy by creating a feeling of intensity. Style also has the power to bring us together by emphasizing communal values and using inclusive words and phrases. Such feelings of unity can increase the persuasiveness of the message. Consequently, speakers must be ethical and reflective about the creation and use of such emotional bonds.

Perspective Creation

Finally, word selection has incredible power. Language shapes perspectives on the world—an idea we have alluded to in previous chapters.

2. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), sec. 1404b.

Most of what we know we've learned through words rather than firsthand experience. For example, many people know a good bit about the country of China, including specific features of the topography such as the Yangtze River and the Great Wall, the population size, and its dramatic economic development over the last several decades. However, relatively few have traveled to China and seen any of this firsthand.

Words even influence how we perceive and react to things we do experience firsthand. For example, students sometimes describe their college education like a product they are purchasing from a business: "I need to get my money's worth." "The cost of time and money will pay off for me after graduation." This metaphor turns students into customers and professors into service providers. Their relationship becomes purely transactional (an exchange of goods for payment) instead of potentially transformational to achieve a shared vision.

The words you choose to label or characterize your topic invite your audience to adopt a perspective on that issue. That means you must be especially thoughtful when talking about groups who are not part of your direct audience (and/or who will be impacted by your message). In chapter 10, we labeled these groups your implied and implicated audiences. The words you choose to describe them will shape your and your direct audience's perspectives about them.

Style, then, is critical to forming your community's attitudes, thinking, and even desire to act. Read box 16.1 for an example of how word choices shape your and your direct audience's perspectives and actions.

Box 16.1 Word Choices Shape Perspectives and Actions

Imagine a drunk man sleeping in public.

- A court judge walks by, sees this publicly intoxicated man, and thinks, "**Criminal**."
- A priest walks by, sees the same man, and thinks, "**Sinner**."
- A medical doctor passes by next and thinks, "**Sufferer**."
- A business owner walks by and thinks, "**Loafer**."

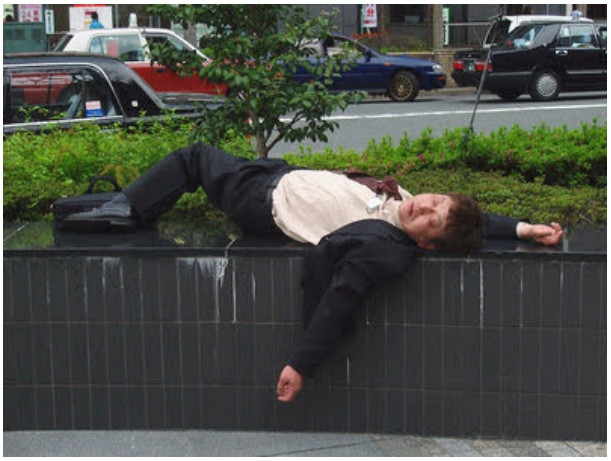


Image by Laurent Fintonivia Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA.

Four different words are used to label the same person in the same situation, and each of these words is likely accompanied by a whole vocabulary. For example, along with "sinner," the priest might use words like "repentance," "forgiveness," "God," "weakness," "spirit," and "flesh." The doctor, on the other hand, might adopt words like "blood alcohol level," "addiction," "healing," "patient," and "withdrawal."

Each label—and the vocabularies that accompany them—evokes a different set of attitudes and likely encourages a different set of actions toward the man.

- The judge might **fine or even incarcerate** the man.
- The priest might attempt to **bring the man to repentance** to experience forgiveness and spiritual renewal.
- The doctor may medically examine him to **help him physically recover**.
- The business owner may simply walk past the man, **determined to not hire him**.

This example demonstrates the power of language to create each person's perspective about, and (in)action toward, another person or group.

In sum, when chosen thoughtfully, your language choices should clarify your ideas, capture your audience's attention, appeal to their emotions, and encourage them to adopt perspectives that facilitate community problem-solving. The next section examines specific devices you can use to help fulfill these goals.

Box 16.2 Tips for Meeting the Goals of Style

As you develop your speech, use this set of questions to reflect on and possibly revise your language choices. Doing so will help ensure your style fulfills the four core goals of style.

- **Clarify the speaker's ideas:** Are all or most of the words you plan to say familiar to your audience? If not, will you supply clear definitions for words new to them? If you are using technical language, is it appropriate for your audience? If not, can you restate the ideas in more common language? How might you express your ideas in creative or imaginative ways that might better help the audience understand them?
- **Maintain the audience's attention:** How well will your words themselves intrigue the audience? Can you communicate your ideas in interesting or engaging ways? How might language help the audience envision the problem or its solution?
- **Evoke emotion:** What words or phrases might help your audience feel strongly about the issue you will address? What forms of expression might move them to action? How might you adopt language to unify the audience in response?
- **Create perspective:** How might your labels and word choices shape the audience's perceptions of the issue and the people affected? What vocabulary do you plan to employ, and what aspects of the issue does it highlight? Obscure? Which alternative labels and vocabularies could you use instead, and how might they shape the audience's perceptions differently?

Stylistic Devices

Stylistic devices are language techniques and literary tools effective speakers use to present their ideas to their audience. These devices help fulfill the four goals previously covered by creating a sense of rhythm, providing visualization, enhancing argumentation, and developing a sense of community.

Rhythm



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One effective function of stylistic language is to create a sense of rhythm in a speech. Rhythm helps maintain the audience's attention because it creates a familiar and inviting pattern or cadence. Rhythmic language also heightens the audience's emotions. There are several devices that develop rhythm, but here we briefly comment on four: parallelism, repetition, antithesis, and alliteration.

Parallelism

Parallelism is a series of ideas that is conveyed through language choices in a similar way. This can occur in a single sentence or across successive sentences. When he took the first steps on the moon, for example, astronaut Neil Armstrong famously said, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." His repeated use of "one" followed by two words illustrated parallelism.

Box 16.3 Parallelism in Practice



Nikki Haley by Artaxerxes via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

An example of parallelism occurred in 2024 during a campaign speech by former South Carolina Governor and US Ambassador Nikki Haley when she ran for the Republican presidential nomination. About halfway through her speech, Haley shifted to the topic of national security: "Now let's talk about national security. The world is on fire literally. **You've got** a war in Europe. **You've got** a war in the Middle East. **You've got** North Korea testing intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of hitting the US. **You've got** China on the march. But make no mistake, none of that would've happened had we not had that debacle in Afghanistan."[3]

The four parallel phrases (each beginning with "you've got") amplified anxiety about the country's vulnerable and perilous state. They also invited listeners to join in the rhythm created, leading them to conclude that the country needs better leadership. Her final sentence bluntly ended the rhythm by blaming President Joe Biden for the calamities when she referenced his decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan in 2021.

3. Nikki Haley, "Nikki Haley Speaks at South Carolina Campaign Rally" (transcript, Conway, SC, January 28, 2024), *Rev*, https://www.rev.com/transcripts/nikki-haley-speaks-at-south-carolina-campaign-rally-transcript, archived at https://perma.cc/H3VE-94N7.

Repetition

When using **repetition**, a speaker restates a word, sentence, idea, or theme. Repetition can emphasize a point and improve its retention. We often hear political leaders, for example, sprinkle a repeated phrase throughout their comments or even just within a sentence or paragraph.

Box 16.4 Repetition in Practice

In August 2020, civil rights protesters organized a March on Washington in response to George Floyd and other Black Americans who died at the hands of police officers. During the event, Reverend Al Sharpton addressed the crowd from the same spot where Martin Luther King Jr. spoke in 1963 during the original March on Washington. At one point, Sharpton repeated a word to advocate for racial justice and police reform: "They keep telling me about how it's a shame that Black parents have to have 'the **conversation**' with our children, how we have to explain if a cop stops you, don't reach for the glove compartment, don't talk back, the **conversation**. Well, we've had the **conversation** for decades. It's time we have a **conversation** with America. We need to have a **conversation** about your racism, about your bigotry, about your hate, about how you would put your knee on our neck while we cry for our lives. We need a new **conversation**."[4]



Reverend Al Sharpton by Lorie Shaull via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

Sharpton's repeated use of "conversation" cleverly shifted responsibility from Black parents to the broader country for keeping Black children safe during police interactions. It also created a sense of urgency for reform and built a connection with the audience through shared frustrations.

Antithesis

Antithesis is the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, typically in the same sentence. For example, in his inaugural address, former President John F. Kennedy famously stated, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."[5] The contrasting commands ("Ask not" and "ask") and the flipped positioning of words ("country" and "you") are catchy to the ear and invite the audience to rethink a familiar idea.

4. Al Sharpton, "2020 March on Washington" (transcript, Washington, DC, August 28, 2020), *Rev*, https://www.rev.com/transcripts/al-sharpton-speech-transcript-2020-march-on-washington, archived at https://perma.cc/XC8A-J53F.
5. John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961," in *American Speeches: Political Oratory from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton*, ed. Ted Widmer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 538.

Box 16.5 Antithesis in Practice



Malcom X, *Library of Congress via Picryl*, Public Domain.

Civil rights activist and Nation of Islam leader Malcolm X delivered a famous speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet," in 1964. He used a powerful antithesis wherein he contrasted a hopeful and patriotic sense of America (and identifying as American) with a cruel and exploitative characterization of the country: "No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver—no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any **American dream**; I see an **American nightmare**."[6]

The contrasting views of America climaxed in the last sentence with the direct antithesis between the dream and nightmare. The "American dream" was no doubt familiar to his audience, but the "American nightmare," he argued, was his and other African Americans' experience. His use of antithesis highlighted the difference between white and Black Americans' lives, bringing sharp clarity and emotional intensity to the distinction.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of a single consonant in a sentence or series of sentences. It's prominent in tongue twisters such as "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." Alliteration is also frequently featured in songs and poetry because it can be melodic. In speeches, alliteration prompts us to repeat a phrase over in our minds.

Box 16.6 Alliteration in Practice

6. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," in *American Speeches: Political Oratory from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton*, ed. Ted Widmer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 576.

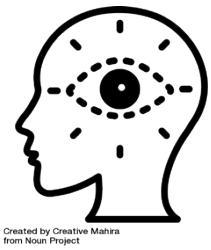
Beginning in the 1960s, Dolores Huerta helped farmworkers organize to advocate for better working conditions and payment. She cofounded the United Farmworker's Association with Cesar Chavez in 1962 and helped organize several grape boycotts. In 1969, her proclamation of one such boycott included the following: "We did not choose the grape boycott, but we had chosen to leave our **peonage**, **poverty** and despair behind....The boycott was the only way forward the growers left to us. We called upon our fellow men and were answered by consumers who said—as all men [*sic*] of conscience must—that they would no longer allow their tables to be **subsidized** by our **sweat** and our **sorrow**: They shunned the grapes, fruit of our affliction."[7]



Dolores Huerta by Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

Her use of "peonage" and "poverty" as well as "subsidized by our sweat and sorrow" illustrates alliteration by the repeated use of the letters *p* and *s*. These repetitions helped make the statements melodic and memorable, thus augmenting their persuasiveness concerning the plight of farmworkers at the time.

Visualization



In addition to rhythm, stylistic language offers audiences visualization through vivid imagery. Such language heightens audience interest and helps an audience's understanding and retention. Many stylistic devices can be used for visualization; here we highlight five: concrete language, visual imagery, simile, metaphor, and personification.

Concrete Language

Concrete language includes words that ground ideas in examples from the physical world. Good speakers move up and down the ladder of abstraction as they discuss their ideas. We can take the concept of transportation as an example. We can imagine a speaker discussing transportation and, as they do, also discussing automobiles, then American-made cars, and finally, Ralph's beat-up 1975 metallic blue Ford Maverick. By moving "down" the ladder of abstraction, the speaker will make the concept of transportation concrete and easier for the audience to understand.

7. Delores Huerta, "Proclamation of the Delano Grape Workers for International Boycott Day," *Digital History*, May 10, 1969, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=613, archived at https://perma.cc/6NYG-HPAB.

Box 16.7 Concrete Language in Practice

We find a gripping example of concrete language in President Ronald Reagan's 1984 speech on the fortieth anniversary of the D-Day invasion of Normandy by American and Allied forces during World War II. He spoke at Pointe-du-Hoc, where American Rangers climbed the one-hundred-foot cliffs under heavy fire to take the strategic location during the invasion. Some of the surviving Army Rangers were seated before him as he spoke.

Reagan first described the events abstractly as when "the Allies stood and fought against tyranny" and the particular battle as when the Rangers "began to seize back the continent of Europe." But then he turned to very concrete language to describe this battle:

> We stand on a lonely, windswept point on the northern shore of France. The air is soft, but 40 years ago at this moment, the **air was dense with smoke and the cries of men**, and the air was filled with the **crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon**. At **dawn**, on the **morning of the 6th of June, 1944, 225 Rangers** jumped off the **British landing craft** and **ran to the bottom of these cliffs**. Their mission was one of the most difficult and daring of the invasion: to climb these **sheer and desolate cliffs** and take out the enemy guns. The Allies had been told that some of the mightiest of these guns were here and they would be trained on the beaches to stop the Allied advance.[8]

This powerful passage helps us appreciate how concrete language can clarify and drive home a much more abstract point.



President Ronald Reagan, *The U.S. National Archives via NARA & DVIDS Public Domain Archive*, Public Domain.

8. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Normandy Invasion, D-Day" (transcript, Normandy, France, June 6, 1984), *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum Archives*, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-ceremony-commemorating-40th-anniversary-normandy-invasion-d-day, archived at https://perma.cc/7UG8-WQC7.

Visual Imagery

Visual imagery is a way to describe ideas with word pictures so your audience can see in their mind's eye a double-decker bus traveling through downtown London or a seagull flying in the sky above the beach in Santa Monica, California. The idea is to help your audience see, hear, and even smell and taste what you describe.

Box 16.8 Visual Imagery in Practice

In his September 20, 2001, State of the Union address to Congress, President George W. Bush began with powerful visual imagery to help Americans see the country's condition just nine days after the terrorist attacks of 9/11:



President George W. Bush, *The U.S. National Archives via Picryl*, Public Domain.

> Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tempore, members of Congress, and fellow Americans, in the normal course of events, presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the union. Tonight, no such report is needed; it has already been delivered by the American people.
>
> We have seen it in the courage of **passengers who rushed terrorists** to save others on the ground. Passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer. And would you please help me welcome his wife Lisa Beamer here tonight?
>
> We have seen the state of our union in the **endurance of rescuers working past exhaustion**.
>
> We've seen the **unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers in English, Hebrew, and Arabic**.
>
> We have seen the **decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own**.
>
> My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has seen for itself the state of our union, and it is strong.[9]

Here President Bush used visual descriptions of actions his listeners could actually see in their minds to capture an abstract idea—that the state of the union of the United States was strong.

9. George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People" (transcript, Washington, DC, September 20, 2001), *President George W. Bush White House Archives*, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html.

Simile and Metaphor

Metaphors and similes compare things that are essentially different. **Similes** make the comparisons *explicit* through keywords (e.g., "like" or "as"). For example, the great boxer Muhammad Ali described his boxing style in this way: "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee." Metaphors make comparisons *implicitly*. Box 16.9 provides examples of metaphors.

Box 16.9 Metaphor in Practice



Ben Shapiro by Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

In 2024, conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro debated liberal political commentator Steven Bonnell, who goes by Destiny. While talking about the idea of free school meals to improve students' education, Shapiro argued that improvements need to occur at a deeper level (such as increasing two-parent households). He explained, "It seems to me that one of the big flaws in the way that many people of the left approach government is, 'What if we **hit every gnat with a hammer**?' And my question is, what if the gnat isn't even the problem? What if there is a much bigger sub-structure problem....**If you're shifting deck chairs on the *Titanic*, sure, you can make the *Titanic* slightly more balanced because the deck chairs are slightly better oriented. But the real question is the water that's gaping into the *Titanic*, right?**"[10]

Here Shapiro compared student hunger to a gnat and free school meals to a hammer and then to *Titanic*'s deck chairs. In doing so, he helped listeners perceive meal programs as an excessively inefficient effort to target a minuscule contributor to poor student performance while ignoring the much bigger, more pressing cause.

Personification

Personification involves referring to an inanimate object or an abstract concept as if it were alive. Most often, personification works by giving human characteristics or abilities to something that is not human. For example, "Tradition richly rewards those who stick to the path she has set." Here tradition is characterized as a person with the power to reward.

10. Lex Fridman, host, *Lex Fridman Podcast*, episode 410, "Ben Shapiro vs. Destiny Debate: Politics, Jan 6, Israel, Ukraine and Wokeism," January 23 2024, https://lexfridman.com/ben-shapiro-destiny-debate/.

Box 16.10 Personification in Practice

In 2020, then–Senator Kamala Harris made history by being the first woman to be elected vice president of the United States. She was also the first Black person and Asian American to be vice president. In 2024, she became the first Black woman and Asian American to be a major party's presidential candidate.



Kamala Harris by Adam Schultz / Biden for President via Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA.

In her victory speech given on November 7, 2020, Harris celebrated becoming vice president and inspired children to recognize the US as a "country of possibilities." She added, "And to the children of our country, regardless of your gender, **our country has sent you a clear message**: Dream with ambition, lead with conviction, and see yourself in a way that others might not see you, simply because they've never seen it before. And we will applaud you every step of the way."[11]

In stating that the country had sent children a message, she personified the country to make the positive message for young people more vivid. She presented the whole country as speaking directly to young kids with dreams.

Box 16.11 Stylistic Devices

Rhythm	Visualization	Argumentation	Community
Parallelism	Concrete language	Irony	Inclusive pronouns
Repetition	Visual imagery	Satire	Gender-neutral language
Antithesis	Simile and metaphor	Reference to the unusual	Maxim
Alliteration	Personification		Ideograph

11. Kamala Harris, "Speech after Historic Election Win" (transcript, Washington DC, November 7, 2020), *ABC News*, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/read-kamala-harris-full-speech-historic-election-win/story?id=74084644, archived at https://perma.cc/C9PN-TT7T.

Argumentation



Created by gravisio from Noun Project

A third function of stylistic language is to enhance argumentation. In other words, style choices themselves can help argue your case. Ideally, *all* stylistic language contributes to this end, but some devices do this particularly effectively. Metaphor is one device we have already discussed. Beyond metaphor, additional elements of style that directly advance argumentation include irony, satire, and reference to the unusual.

Irony

Irony is the use of words in a way that is the opposite of their intended or normal use. For example, when someone says to you "nice shot" in a basketball game when the ball entirely misses the rim and backboard, they have employed irony. This technique functions as argument insofar as it offers an unexpected or surprising perspective on the underlying thought.

Box 16.12 Irony in Practice

Frederick Douglass, an African American and former slave, was asked to speak in celebration of Independence Day in Rochester, New York, on July 5, 1852. His speech, "What to the Slave Is the 4th of July?" is recognized as one of the greatest speeches in American history.

Douglass answered the question in the speech's title by noting that, **ironically**, it is a day that points out more than any other day of the year "the gross injustice and cruelty to which [the slave] is the constant victim." He called out the disparity between his white audience members who enjoyed freedom and African American slaves who experienced oppression and brutalization: "The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me." He continued: "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joy-



Frederick Douglass, *Metropolitan Museum of Art via Wikimedia Commons*, Public Doman.

ous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. **Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today?**"[12]

Douglass ended this passage with an ironic question. He was not actually asking his audience to answer, and he presumably knew they did not mean to mock him. By employing irony, Douglass highlighted ongoing injustice and shifted the audience's emotions from celebrating America's freedom from British rule to shamefully condemning the country for hypocritically maintaining slavery.

Satire

Satire is a particular form of ridicule that is typically used to attack people or ideas or to highlight human vices and failings. Rather than a specific speech element, satire often characterizes the entirety of a piece of discourse.

Box 16.13 Satire in Practice

Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby frequently employs satire in their performances. In a 2024 Netflix Special called *Gender Agenda*, Gatsby showcased several queer comedians but opened the show with their own spot.

During their comedic monologue, Gadsby referenced public debates about transgender athletes and, in particular, some male critics' objections to trans female athletes participating in women's sports: **"I think it's adorable how so many men are all of a sudden very concerned about women's sport. That's new. That's real new. The idea that men are transitioning to become women so they can dominate *women's* sports. Like, you know, pick up all those amazing perks you get in women's sports!...Women get *all* the perks. They get kisses and everything."**[13]

Gadsby used satire to ridicule male critics' concerns as disingenuous and wrongheaded. The satire prompted laughter at the critics, but it also held up for scrutiny a broader cultural devaluing of women's sports. The comedian added irony to satire with the last sentence. It referenced the notorious kiss that former president of Spain's soccer federation Luis Rubiales gave (without consent) to player Jenni Hermoso after her team won the Women's World Cup in 2023.

12. Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the 4th of July?" (transcript, Rochester, NY, July 5, 1852), *EDSITEment: The Best of the Humanities on the Web*, https://edsitement.neh.gov/student-activities/frederick-douglasss-what-slave-fourth-july, archived at https://perma.cc/MJE2-HBN6.
13. Hannah Gadsby, "Hannah Gadsby's Gender Agenda," Netflix stand-up special, 2024, https://www.netflix.com/watch/81607199?trackId=268410292&tctx=0%2C0%2C856d1017-c5d3-4bd6-add5-7bae4235b041-362449649%2C856d1017-c5d3-4bd6-add5-7bae4235b041-362449649%7C2%2Cunknown%2C%2C%2CtitlesResults%2C81607199%2CVideo%3A81607199%2CminiDpPlayButton, archived at https://perma.cc/C2NF-DFQH.

Reference to the Unusual

In making use of a **reference to the unusual**, a speaker includes an unbelievable story or a startling statistic or fact to catch people's attention and interest. The uniqueness and often surprising nature of such references encourage audience members to process and reflect on the reference.

Box 16.14 Reference to the Unusual in Practice

RuPaul Andres Charles (known simply as "RuPaul") became nationally famous in the 1980s and 1990s as a drag queen who appeared in films and television shows and even recorded popular music. In 2009, he developed and starred in the competition television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which has aired for many seasons.

In 2021, RuPaul hosted *Saturday Night Live*. During his opening monologue, RuPaul introduced himself: "My name is Ru which is short for *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Now, for anyone who's not familiar with my show, how dare you? And second of all, let me break it down for you in terms you can understand. So our girls **gag** us with their **eleganza**, **death drop** for the children, and **slay** the house down, **boots**. Make sense?"[14]

RuPaul's description of the popular show used unusual language for anyone unfamiliar with it. The vocabulary—"eleganza," "death drop," "slay," "boots," and so on—likely piqued the curiosity and interest of novices as it demonstrated the drama and playfulness of drag. It simultaneously enabled devotees of the show to feel like true insiders of drag culture.



RuPaul by dvsross via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

14. RuPaul, "Monologue" (transcript, New York, NY, February 21, 2020), *SNL Transcripts Tonight*, http://snltranscripts.jt.org/2020/rupaul-monologue.phtml, archived at https://perma.cc/GD85-A4WV.

Community



Created by Justin Blake from Noun Project

Finally, speakers can utilize stylistic devices to create or reinforce the idea of *community*. Such devices are used to bring audiences together for a common cause or concern or to create separation between one audience ("us") and an oppositional group ("them"). We might think about how speakers use stylistic devices to unite or differentiate their direct audience from their implied audience (referenced in the speech) and implicated audience (impacted by the message if it succeeds). Language tools that accomplish such ends include the use of inclusive pronouns, gender-neutral language, maxims, and ideographs.

Inclusive Pronouns

Inclusive pronouns are pronouns that create community and unity between the speaker and their direct audience and can be extended to include their implied and implicated audiences. Most prominently inclusive pronouns are the terms *we*, *us*, and *our*. The terms are used to create identity and put the speaker in league with their audiences, expressing shared purpose and concern, which can be particularly useful when a community experiences division.

Box 16.15 Inclusive Pronouns in Practice



Steve Gleason by Senate Democrats via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

In 2024, Steve Gleason won the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPYs. The former football player was diagnosed with ALS in 2011 and later formed Team Gleason to inspire other ALS sufferers to live meaningful lives. Gleason delivered his award acceptance speech from a wheelchair and through a speech-generating device.

He quickly pivoted, though, from talking about his own experience with ALS to "all of you who experience fear and suffering." Referring to everyone in his direct, and possibly implied, audiences, he went on to say, "It's clear to me that **our** ability to courageously share **our** vulnerabilities with each other is **our** greatest strength. By doing this,

we're able to understand the issue compassionately, collaborate with each other to solve problems and overcome fear."[15]

In making use of the inclusive pronouns "our" and "we," Gleason abolished divisions between people with ALS and people who have not developed ALS, and he bonded them together through shared experiences of fear. He used that bond to encourage his audience(s) to work together in more compassionate and collaborative ways in the future.

Gender-Neutral Language

Gender-neutral language refers to words that do not specify a particular gender. The meaning of gender-neutral language expanded during the twenty-first century.



Initially, it referred to language choices that do not explicitly or implicitly favor one gender over another. So, for example, instead of using terms like "policeman," speakers should say "police officer" to avoid gendering the word as male. Speakers also should not make gender-biased assumptions, such as referring to nurses as female and to doctors as male.

Today, gender-neutral language also includes pronoun use. The Purdue Online Writing Lab, which many teachers and scholars turn to for guidance, explains:

> *He* and *she* are not sufficient to describe the genders of all people, because not all people identify as either male or female. As such, the phrase "he or she" does not cover the full range of persons.
>
> The alternative pronoun most commonly used is *they*, often referred to as *singular they*. Here's an example:
>
> Someone left *his or her* backpack behind. → Someone left *their* backpack behind.[16]



Image by Kira Josie Murphy via Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA.

As part of adopting an effective and ethical speaking style, then, you should use a person's preferred pronouns to refer to them—whether they are in your direct audience or part of your implied or implicated audiences. If their pronoun is unknown, then default to the neutral and singular "they." Using singular "they" avoids the risk of misgendering someone and/or creating divisions rather than unity within a community.

Box 16.16 Using "They" as Singular

15. Steve Gleason, "Acceptance Speech for the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPYs" (transcript, Hollywood, CA, July 11, 2024), *Axios*, https://www.axios.com/local/new-orleans/2024/07/12/steve-gleason-transcript-espys-acceptance-speech.
16. "Gendered Pronouns and the Singular 'They,'" Purdue Online Writing Lab, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/pronouns/gendered_pronouns_and_singular_they.html#:~:text=When%20individuals%20whose%20gender%20is,range%20of%20people%20and%20identities.

If it sounds oddly new or incorrect to use "they" for an individual, it's not!

- The singular "they" first appeared in writing at least as far back as the fourteenth century.
- In 2019, Merriam-Webster added the singular "they" to the dictionary and made it the "word of the year."

Maxim

A **maxim** is a statement of a general truth or rule of conduct believed by a culture, such as "the best defense is a good offense." A maxim makes a main point accessible and memorable for the audience. However, don't overuse this device or else your speech may seem trite or vacuous.

Box 16.17 Maxim in Practice



Michelle Obama by Ali Shaker/VOA via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

In her speech to the 2016 Democratic National Convention, Michelle Obama sought to respond positively to the negative political talk and growing polarization in the country.

Her efforts were noteworthy given her role as First Lady at the time and given the persistent and unfounded claims by critics that Barack Obama was not a United States citizen and therefore not eligible to hold the office of president.

Michelle Obama used a maxim to express

what she believed is the most effective way to respond to untrue and hateful political claims: **"When they go low, we go high."**[17]

This pithy phrase captured an honorable approach to politics in a polarized environment. Though it divided her direct audience ("we") from an implied audience ("they"), it did so to encourage listeners to take the "high road" in politics and not return insult for insult. Listeners could extend her advice to interactions with such implicated audiences as their coworkers, friends, and family members.

Ideograph

An **ideograph** is a culturally specific term that has great emotive power because it represents a deeply held value or vice.[18] Core positive ideographs in American culture include "equality," "freedom," "liberty," and "property." Core negative ideographs include "terrorism," "communism," and "slavery." Appeals to such values and vices generally need little elaboration and are accepted easily as rallying points for what is *right* or *wrong* even though their exact meaning is vague and unclear.

Box 16.18 Ideographs in Practice

During his 2024 acceptance speech as the Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump employed both positive and negative ideographs.

At one point he stated, "Today, our cities are flooded with **illegal aliens**. Americans are being squeezed out of the labor force and their jobs are taken. By the way, you know who's taking the jobs, the jobs that are created? One hundred and seven percent of those jobs are taken by **illegal aliens**."



President Donald Trump by Liam Enea via Flickr, CC BY-SA.

The phrase "illegal aliens" functioned as an ideograph that likely triggered strongly negative and judgmental reactions about this implied and implicated audience. The label has become a kind of shorthand reference to people who are characterized as unwanted lawbreakers who don't belong in the US.

17. Michelle Obama, "Remarks by the First Lady at the Democratic National Convention 2016" (transcript, Philadelphia, PA, July 25, 2016), *President Barack Obama White House Archives*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/25/remarks-first-lady-democratic-national-convention, archived at https://perma.cc/4A6X-96MZ.
18. Michael Calvin McGee, "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 1–16.

By fomenting fear and anger toward them, the ideograph helped Trump make a case for his needed return as president.

He later shifted to a positive ideograph when he proclaimed, "So tonight, whether you've supported me in the past or not, I hope you will support me in the future, because I will bring back the **American dream**. That's what we're going to do. You don't even hear about the American dream anymore."[19] The "American dream" represents a deeply, positively held vision and characterization of the country as a place of limitless possibilities. Trump's use of the phrase helped associate his candidacy with this vision.

You can observe stylistic devices by examining the style of nearly any speech, from well-known presentations to everyday sermons and lectures. You may be surprised at the number and range of stylistic appeals in the discourse all around you.

Box 16.19 Using Stylistic Devices

1. Incorporate stylistic devices that will appeal to your audience.
2. Use stylistic devices in a manner that clarifies your points.
3. Adopt stylistic devices to capture and maintain audience attention.
4. Consider how stylistic devices can generate the best emotional tone for your speech.
5. Reflect on how the devices you choose will shape the perspectives of your audience.
6. Seek moderation in your use of stylistic devices.

Summary

In this chapter, we have addressed style, or the language or expression a speaker uses to communicate with an audience. Thoughtfully choosing words can help speakers engage their audience while clarifying the content, eliciting listeners' emotions, and shaping their perspective. More specifically, this chapter has made the following clear:

- The stylistic use of language serves the important goals of creating clarity, maintaining audience interest, evoking emotion, and creating perspective.
- Stylistic devices are language techniques and literary tools that can be used to create a sense of rhythm (e.g., parallelism, repetition, antithesis, alliteration), enable visualization (e.g., concrete language, visual

19. Donald Trump, "Convention Speech" (transcript, Milwaukee, WI, July 18 2024), *New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/19/us/politics/trump-rnc-speech-transcript.html.

imagery, simile, metaphor, personification), enhance argumentation (e.g., irony, satire, reference to the unusual), and develop a sense of community (e.g., inclusive pronouns, gender-neutral language, maxims, ideographs).

Key Terms

alliteration
antithesis
concrete language
gender-neutral language
ideograph
inclusive pronouns
irony
maxim
metaphor
parallelism
personification
reference to the unusual
repetition
satire
simile
stylistic devices
visual imagery

Review Questions

1. What goals should a speaker try to accomplish through their style?
2. What are four devices to generate rhythm discussed in this chapter?
3. What are five ways to foster visualization?
4. What are the three devices mentioned to aid argumentation?
5. What are four ways to build community through language choices?

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a public presentation that had a particularly strong style. Which devices did the speaker use? What was their impact on the message and audience?
2. What kind of style have you developed for presentations in the past? What kind of language did you use? How would you like to improve your style?
3. How does—or should—style change based on the audience, setting, and occasion?

17. Engaging Your Audience Through Delivery and Memory

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Compare and contrast four common modes of delivery.
- Define communication apprehension and identify strategies to manage it.
- Characterize delivery as an individual skill that is situational and constantly evolving.

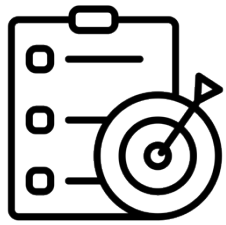
When most people think about public speaking, they probably focus mostly on delivery and memory. *Delivery*, as you learned in chapter 1, is how a speaker physically conveys words and ideas, both vocally and nonverbally, to the audience. When a speaker uses an electronic medium of communication, delivery also regards the speaker's use of televisual elements, such as the camera, lighting, and background, to communicate. We described *memory* in chapter 1 as how a speaker stores and recalls the information shared in a speech, such as whether and how much they depend on notes.

Delivery and memory are two of the most visible elements of public speaking. Consequently, it's easy to equate speaking success with animated gestures, energetic volume, and sustained eye contact. These elements *do* make a difference, and rhetoric teachers have developed principles and practices to use them effectively.

However, delivery and memory should be placed alongside the many other components of public speaking. Indeed, our positioning of delivery and memory in this book—in the middle—underscores their roles as two of many elements of public speaking rather than a primary focus of attention. In other words, don't place so much focus on your delivery that you neglect your research, audience adaptation, organization, or verbal style.

At the same time, cultivating skills in delivery and memory is very important. If you have ever listened to a speaker say "like" and "you know" after every sentence, or watched them stare at their notes the entire time, or seen them constantly move in and out of the screen's frame, you understand why. This chapter begins with the goals of speech delivery, followed by a focus on memory and four associated modes of delivery. We then turn to the anxiety that often accompanies speech delivery and offer ways to address it. We conclude by discussing several principles of delivery to keep in mind as you prepare your speech.

Delivery Goals


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The ultimate objective of speech delivery is to communicate with your direct audience effectively and clearly. Recall we defined the direct audience in chapter 10 as the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech. To that end, effective delivery should achieve three goals: engage this audience, enhance your ideas, and strengthen your credibility.

First, well-executed delivery helps your audience feel connected to you as a speaker and invested in your speech topic. Ineffective delivery may result in disengaging the audience instead.

Second, delivery also supports your speech content without becoming the focus of attention. Poor delivery can distract from your ideas and instead draw attention to your repetitive use of gestures or excessively fast rate of talking.

Finally, delivery aids your credibility with the audience, or ethos. As discussed in previous chapters, ethos refers to an audience's perceptions of a speaker's public character or persona. Effective delivery can bolster an audience's sense of your goodwill, trustworthiness, competence, and dynamism, but poor delivery can undermine their perception of these qualities. Next we discuss four modes of delivery you can use to achieve these goals.

Memory and Modes of Delivery

Again, memory is how one stores and recalls the information that is shared in a speech. That means delivery and memory go hand in hand. Beginning speakers often find that their delivery improves when they increase their ability to remember their material. As with many aspects of public speaking, how we use our memory is dependent on the expectations and constraints of the speaking situation.

Public speaking scholars commonly recognize four **modes of delivery**, methods by which a speaker delivers their information. Each approach has its merits in particular situations. We begin discussion of modes of delivery by considering an extemporaneous delivery and then address impromptu, memorized, and manuscript deliveries in turn.

Extemporaneous Delivery

In an **extemporaneous delivery**, a speaker uses trimmed-down notes to recall the speech's structure, key ideas, and any direct quotations or source citations. We say "trimmed down" because the notes only include the *outline structure and prompting words and phrases*; they do not include every word you plan to say (unlike a preparation outline discussed in chapter 15). We call these notes a presentation outline and offer fuller instructions in chapter 19.

Because you cannot rely on your notes for exact wording, an extemporaneous delivery demands a sense of spontaneity as you choose most of your language *in the moment*. You may want to memorize a few ideas with more precision, such as the introduction (including your thesis and preview) and conclusion to help you begin and end the speech smoothly. With the exception of these elements, however, your delivery will vary each time you practice or give the speech. That keeps the speech fresh.

An extemporaneous delivery enables speakers to maintain a more conversational and energetic delivery while connecting with direct audience members. You are less tied to your notes, which allows you to be present in the situation and potentially make eye contact with the audience more easily. The flexibility offered by extemporaneous speaking

also allows you to adjust to audience feedback, be that an unexpected audience reaction, a question posed during the speech, or when you detect the need to add or remove material based on audience feedback.

Extemporaneous delivery particularly suits public settings that discuss issues of community importance. In such situations, elements like setting, audience, and the time available for presentation can change without advanced notice. Relatedly, comments made by other participants before your chance to speak may influence what you plan to say or how you say it. This mode of delivery allows you to alter your remarks in the moment. Thus, extemporaneous speaking capitalizes on your advanced preparation while enabling you to respond to the needs of a given situation as they arise.



Image by Open Government Project via Flickr, CC BY.

Box 17.1 Using an Extemporaneous Delivery to Quickly Adapt to the Situation

What would you do if you found out, moments before giving a speech, that you had half the time to speak than you had anticipated? Could you make cuts within seconds? Would your speaking notes easily accommodate those cuts?

Each of your textbook authors has been invited to speak in public settings. In one case, one of us was asked to deliver a twenty-minute presentation at a specific time. Upon arrival, however, she discovered the event was running late and the audience was growing tired. The person running the event told her she'd have ten minutes before the audience had to leave. She had to cut her speech in half to only the most salient points.

Fortunately, she had planned to speak extemporaneously, and her speaking notes consisted of a trimmed-down outline of keywords. That made it fairly easy to make significant adjustments on the fly. She marked out one main point and several subpoints, and she was ready to go. The audience likely never knew how drastically she changed her plan because of the flexibility an extemporaneous delivery provided her.

Impromptu Delivery

You have probably heard of the mode of delivery frequently called impromptu speaking. In an **impromptu delivery**, you rely on instant recall because it refers to a situation in which you speak publicly without advance preparation or warning. Your delivery is integrally linked to what you can recall and articulate about a topic on the spot.

This form of speaking comes with a rush of adrenaline as you either are thrust unexpectedly into a speaking situation or feel compelled to suddenly, voluntarily enter a discussion of an issue. As such, it is a reactionary form of speaking, often characterized by high energy and spontaneity while featuring less polish and being more prone to vocal fillers.



President George W. Bush Visits New York, *The U.S. National Archives via NARA & DVIDS Public Domain Archive*, *Public Domain*.

Due to the lack of preparation, you may feel more anxiety and pressure with impromptu speaking. Almost inevitably when looking back later, you will think of things you wish you had said. Impromptu speaking challenges even seasoned speakers.

While impromptu speaking prevents formal preparation, you can adopt four strategies to speak more effectively: Take a breath, quickly organize your thoughts, mentally prepare, and jot down notes.

First, *take a breath*! While you will not have time to develop a speech, you can take a moment to collect your thoughts. Write down two or three keywords, each of which might represent a central point or example you want to mention.

Second, remember the *organizational principles* you learned in chapters 12, 13, and 14 because they are helpful even in impromptu speaking. Begin your remarks by stating your central point, perspective, or position. Follow that with a short series of brief supporting ideas, probably no more than two or three. You might number the ideas or offset them with transitions to keep the points distinct. Where possible, offer detail in support of your claim in the form of specific examples or illustrations. When you conclude, offer a summary of what you have said.

Third, *be prepared*. That undoubtedly sounds paradoxical, but there are ways you can mentally prepare for the prospect of impromptu speaking. Most importantly, practice ethical listening as discussed in chapter 6. By being present and engaged in a communication setting, listening actively, and being mentally alert, you will be better prepared to speak if desired or called on.

Lastly, have a way of *taking notes* (pen and paper, tablet, etc.) so you can jot down ideas during the discussion. This too will spark your thinking and allow you to formulate a response or question to contribute to the ongoing dialogue.

Memorized Delivery

As its title suggests, in **memorized delivery** you memorize the speech word for word with the intent of precisely recalling and delivering its content without the aid of notes or a manuscript. This mode of delivery emphasizes your memory, requiring extensive practice to recall not only ideas but the exact words prepared for the presentation.

As you can imagine, effective memorized speaking is difficult, particularly for lengthy presentations. It also comes with substantial risks, including "blanking" on what you plan to say, needing to rebound from a lapse in memory, and finding the flexibility necessary to adapt to a challenging situation or adverse audience feedback.

Box 17.2 Disadvantages of a Memorized Delivery

Have you ever tried to memorize a lengthy text? One of your textbook authors competed in their high school's speech and debate club. They researched, wrote, and frequently delivered a ten-minute informative speech completely from memory, with no notes! That feat was impressive when they succeeded. On one occasion, however, they suddenly lost their place about four minutes into the speech. Instead of picking up where they stopped, they had to start the speech over—from the very beginning. That was the only way they could recite it fully. Talk about embarrassing!



A final concern for memorized speaking is the adoption of a mechanical delivery and a vacant or distant look—one that lessens engagement with the audience—that can result from the strain of recalling the words. This sort of "canned" presentation—one that is fully prepared in advance—can result in the speaker losing touch with the moment during the presentation.

Memorized speaking should be used sparingly, though it can be valuable in particular situations. Crises, for instance, can call for specific, prepared language that informs or comforts a community. A memorized delivery in these cases allows the speaker to visually connect with listeners instead of looking down at a manuscript. It also prevents the speaker from inadvertently saying something that prompts additional uncertainty or harm.



Image by Cathy Benscoter via Google Images/Penn State Beaver Webpage, CC BY-NC-ND.

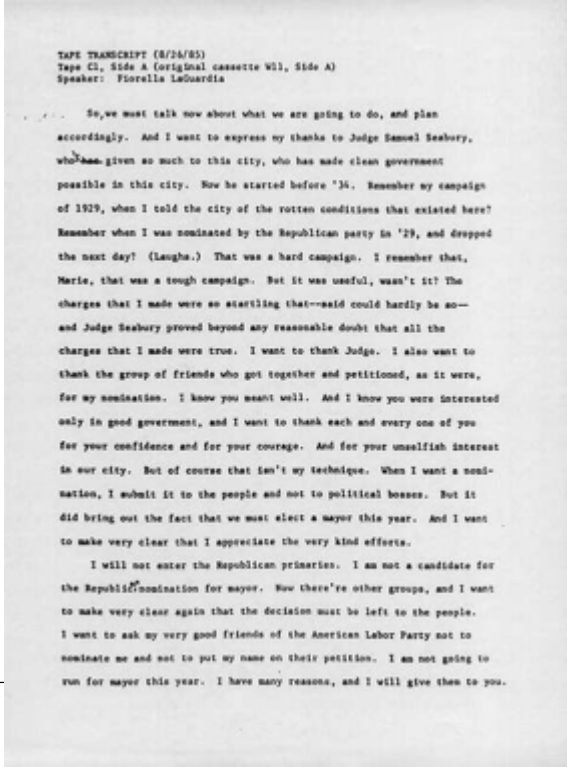
Speeches given routinely may also benefit from memorization, such as a university campus tour speech, because the guides can look where they are walking while still providing all the details each tour group seeks. If you deliver a memorized speech, allow plenty of time to commit the speech to memory and attempt to do at least one full rehearsal with a listener who can provide feedback on your vocal, nonverbal, and—if appropriate—televisual delivery.

Manuscript Delivery

Finally, in **manuscript delivery**, the speaker writes the entire address in advance and utilizes the text in delivering the speech. Depending on the technology available (e.g., a teleprompter, video conference), the use of a manuscript may not be readily apparent.

A skilled manuscript speaker achieves the goals of an effective delivery. That is, they engage the audience, enhance their ideas, and strengthen their credibility. Such success requires preparing your manuscript in ways that free you from monotonously reading your text. We provide tips for preparing a manuscript in chapter 19.

Manuscript speaking is best suited to formal situations with a large direct audience. This includes formal platform speaking and some televised or recorded speeches with a large viewership. Manuscript speaking also aids occasions where precise wording matters and you have given particular attention to the artistry and style of the speech. Finally, manuscript speeches are common for lengthy addresses. They have the advantage of letting you know more precisely how long your speech will take to deliver.



TAPE TRANSCRIPT (8/24/85)
Tape C1, Side A (original cassette W11, Side A)
Speaker: Fiorella LaGuardia

So,we must talk now about what we are going to do, and plan accordingly. And I want to express my thanks to Judge Samuel Seabury, who has given so much to this city, who has made clean government possible in this city. Now he started before '34. Remember my campaign of 1929, when I told the city of the rotten conditions that existed here? Remember when I was nominated by the Republican party in '29, and dropped the next day? (Laughs.) That was a hard campaign. I remember that, Marie, that was a tough campaign. But it was useful, wasn't it? The charges that I made were so startling that--said could hardly be so--and Judge Seabury proved beyond any reasonable doubt that all the charges that I made were true. I want to thank Judge. I also want to thank the group of friends who got together and petitioned, as it were, for my nomination. I know you meant well. And I know you were interested only in good government, and I want to thank each and every one of you for your confidence and for your courage. And for your unselfish interest in our city. But of course that isn't my technique. When I want a nomination, I submit it to the people and not to political bosses. But it did bring out the fact that we must elect a mayor this year. And I want to make very clear that I appreciate the very kind efforts.

I will not enter the Republican primaries. I am not a candidate for the Republican nomination for mayor. Now there're other groups, and I want to make very clear again that the decision must be left to the people. I want to ask my very good friends of the American Labor Party not to nominate me and not to put my name on their petition. I am not going to run for mayor this year. I have many reasons, and I will give them to you.

Speech by Fiorello H. La Guardia, *Library of Congress via LOC's Public Domain Archive*, *Public Domain*.

Box 17.3 Amanda Gorman's Manuscript Delivery



Image by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff via Flickr, CC BY.

It takes real skill and practice to effectively deliver a manuscript speech, and it should not be envisioned as simply reading to the audience. Amanda Gorman's presentation of her poem "The Hill We Climb" at President Biden's 2021 inauguration ceremony offers a particularly strong example of a well-delivered manuscript presentation. She powerfully drew on such vocal and nonverbal delivery techniques as eye contact, gestures, rate, and the strategic use of intonation and pronunciation to enhance her recitation of the poem. Her delivery helped animate the poem's artistry and sense of urgency, making her performance one of the most talked about moments from the inauguration.

Every mode of delivery offers both opportunities and constraints. We encourage you to make a thoughtful choice based on your speaking situation, audience, and personal comfort and strengths. Whatever mode of delivery you choose, you will likely experience some degree of nervousness and anxiety. We turn to that challenge next.

Box 17.4 Choosing a Mode of Delivery for Civic Engagement

Opportunities to speak in your community can greatly differ by audience, situation, location, medium, timing, occasion, and purpose. It's important you choose a mode of delivery that best suits each opportunity, features your strengths as a speaker, and aids your purpose. The following are a few potential civic speaking engagements to help you reflect on available modes of delivery.

- **Meeting or public event organized by a civic organization or group:** An extemporaneous delivery is ideal if you are invited in advance to address the group, but you will need to rely on an impromptu approach if you are spontaneously asked or suddenly decide to comment. If you are speaking at an event where you will interact with the broader public, an impromptu delivery can provide you with maximum flexibility while keeping a few talking points in mind.
- **Ceremonial gathering (dedication, celebration, memorial):** For a large, formal ceremonial gathering, a manuscript or memorized delivery will enable you to carefully plan your comments for the occasion and do so with a thoughtful use of verbal style. Choosing between using a manuscript or memorizing your comments may depend on your personal preference and the audience's expectations. If the gathering is a bit more casual, then an extemporaneous approach can give you more flexibility and informality in your delivery.
- **Protest, march, or rally:** If you are helping to lead a protest, march, or rally and plan to address attendees at a particular moment, a memorized delivery can ensure you communicate your message precisely while maintaining a visible connection with participants. An impromptu approach may be required if you are suddenly called on to address attendees.
- **Publicity for a community event:** An extemporaneous or manuscript delivery can work well to share specific information about an event, such as when invited as a guest on a local radio station or when recording a podcast.

Communication Apprehension

Don't panic. It sounds easy, but we know it can be a challenge. The fear or anxiety that arises when you anticipate public speaking is referred to as **communication apprehension**. Most people know it as "stage fright." Such feelings of anxiety emerge for many reasons. You may feel general nervousness about being in front of public audiences or feel stress over the importance of a particular situation. Perhaps you are poorly prepared, feel uneasy about the subject matter, worry about the audience's reaction, or fear failure. No matter how much preparation this textbook provides, you will ultimately have to navigate a variety of feelings to deliver a speech.



Image by Victor Jeg via Flickr, CC BY.

There is good news. Nervousness before, and even during, the act of public speaking is normal. You are

not strange or alone in experiencing communication apprehension, and the practices promoted in this chapter can help mitigate its effects. Also, remember that your audience will want you to succeed, especially if you are all in a public speaking class together. They are "rooting" for you because they feel nervous about speaking too. Also, seeing a speaker deliver a speech comfortably makes the audience more comfortable as well.

Box 17.5 Common Symptoms of Communication Apprehension

- feeling that your heart is "racing"
- perspiring
- shaking or trembling
- having a dry mouth
- feeling a "knot" in your stomach
- having a slight sense of nausea
- mind going "blank" while speaking
- swaying
- pacing
- reading speech
- gripping lectern
- having hands in pockets
- folding arms and "hugging" oneself
- speaking too quickly
- fidgeting
- frequently touching face and hair

These symptoms may be manifestations of your speech anxiety. Even when they are not, these behaviors reflect conduct that audiences can perceive as signs of anxiety, regardless of how you actually feel.

The best way to manage communication apprehension is to focus on the skills and preparation techniques described in this textbook. Experience is also an antidote; your level of speech anxiety will likely decrease naturally over time. Still, you are unlikely to completely eliminate speech anxiety—and that can even work to your advantage. An absolute lack of anxiety can actually cause a speaker to sound bored or flat to an audience. In contrast, the energy and passion conveyed by the slightly anxious speaker can encourage the audience to assume the speech topic must be worthy of excitement.

Strategies to Use Prior to a Speech

Some of the most effective techniques for responding to communication apprehension are the preparation practices discussed earlier in this book: researching your topic thoroughly, analyzing your audience, constructing a sound outline, and familiarizing yourself with the speech's location or medium. These steps will give you confidence as you anticipate what to expect.

You can further reduce communication apprehension prior to your speech if you do the following:

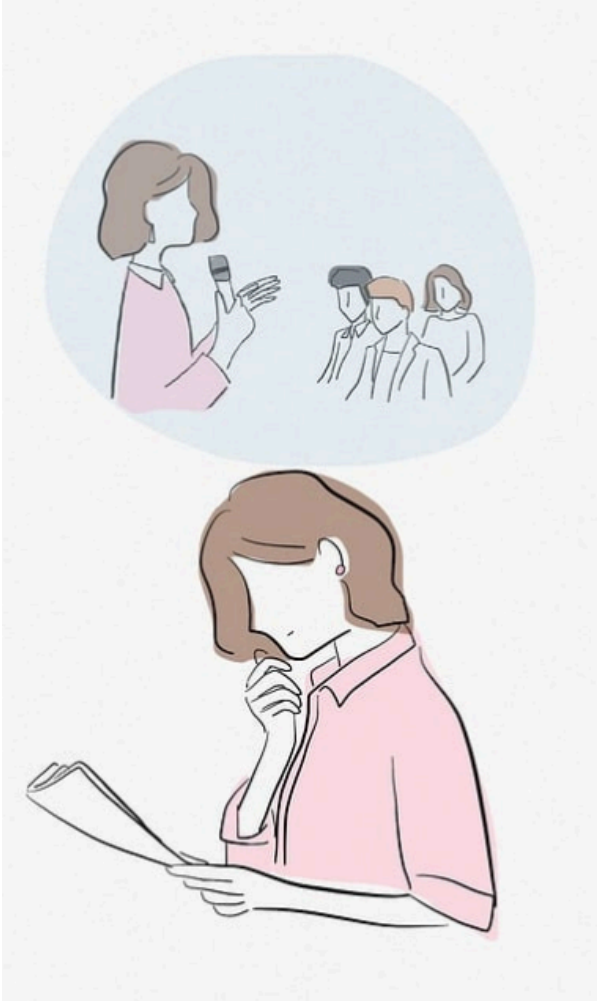


Image by Kei_Therapeutic_Artvia via Pixabay, *Pixabay Content License*.

- *Learn your introduction* particularly well, helping to make sure the speech starts smoothly.
- *Practice* the speech several times. You might consider working with a speaker's lab, speech tutor, or friend to help identify and limit any distracting physical mannerisms or signs of anxiety.
- Remember to *relax or unwind in advance* of the speech. Rather than enter the speaking situation tense and on edge, take a little time for yourself, be that by practicing meditation, engaging in light exercise, working on a logic game, or undertaking another activity that you enjoy and releases tension.
- *Visualize* yourself giving a successful speech. Close your eyes. Then imagine yourself walking to the front of your classroom or turning on your camera and delivering your speech confidently while interested audience members smile and nod their heads. It may sound silly, but positive visualization can strengthen your confidence by mentally going through the motions.
- If you have the option to *deliver your speech as a prerecorded presentation*, consider doing so. Prerecording requires significant time to set up, record, edit, and convert into a file or URL you can easily share. However, it allows you to watch yourself and rerecord until you are happy with the outcome. That option can be particularly advantageous for speakers who greatly struggle with communication anxiety as well as those who have a speech impediment or for whom English is a second language.

Box 17.6 Managing Speech Anxiety Associated with Civic Engagement

Civic engagement settings are often more flexible and hence less predictable than other public speaking opportunities. They also more often involve informal, impromptu remarks. Nonetheless, there are several steps you can take to lessen your anxiety when speaking before a civic group or at a public forum.

- Try to meet the organization's leaders or forum organizers in advance to ask about the likely audi-

ence.

- When speaking in person, visit the location of the meeting in advance to learn about the speaking environment.
- When speaking online, ask the people running the event what communication platform will be used and how.
- If it is a recurring meeting, attend a gathering in advance of your speech to gain an understanding of its normal operation.
- If you are giving a formal presentation, discuss the expectations and constraints with the organizers.
- Speak with people who will attend the meeting or have attended the meeting in the past to gain their insights.
- Plan your remarks in advance, forming a speech outline and notes if it is a formal presentation.
- For less formal situations, fill out note cards identifying key points on the topics you are most interested in and most anticipate raising in discussion.

Strategies to Use During a Speech

You can also employ strategies during the speech to help control your anxiety and limit its visual manifestation. You might try the following:



Public Speaking by JohnDiew0107 via Flickr, CC BY.

- *Look directly* at your audience. It is normal to avoid eye contact when feeling nervous, but if you are able, you may find that looking at your audience—physically sitting in front of you or shown through cameras on a screen—can actually calm your nerves. You'll likely notice facial expressions that express interest and attention, which may build your confidence.
- *Adopt good posture* if you are physically able to; avoid leaning on a podium or table. Pulling your shoulders back, lifting your chin, and centering or balancing your weight can make you feel and appear more confident.
- *Avoid gripping* the podium or table (if either is present), as these behaviors can exacerbate and communicate anxiety.
- Remind yourself to *breathe* to calm your nerves, perhaps using pauses to catch your breath or even making notations on your speaking notes to assist with this.
- *Pause* if you notice yourself speaking too quickly or falling into a physical pitfall. Do not draw the audience's attention to the behavior ("Gosh, I'm really nervous," or "I guess I'm pacing a lot"). Instead, pause for a moment, take a breath, subtly correct your delivery, and keep going.
- *Trust yourself* and remember the perfect speech will never be given. Being perfect is an impossible expectation that will only heighten your communication apprehension.

Strategies to Use After a Speech

Just because the speech is over doesn't mean you should stop working to address speech anxiety. Post-speech reflective exercises will help reduce future anxiety. Soon after your speech, therefore, we recommend the following:

- *Take notes* on how the speech went. Reflect on the positive elements of the speech while also noting areas you can improve.
- *Get reactions* from your peers. You are typically your harshest critic. Oftentimes, what feels like obvious signs of speech anxiety to you—the speaker—are barely noticeable to the audience.
- Carefully *consider instructor feedback*. They will likely highlight strengths to continue into the next speech and suggestions for how to improve weaker areas.

Taking a few steps before, during, and after you speak will help you improve your delivery and reduce your anxiety. Your communication apprehension may further decrease by keeping a few delivery principles in mind.


Photo by Alia Youssef from Noun Project

Delivery Principles

We will end this chapter by inviting you to consider three comforting insights about delivery: (1) no one manner of delivery is right for all speakers, (2) delivery is situational, and (3) your skill in delivery will develop over time.

Find a Delivery That Works for You

You can undoubtedly think of speakers with great deliveries. However, that doesn't mean you should emulate them. You must find a style of delivery that works for you as an individual. What works for someone like James Charles will not necessarily suit you. What worked for John F. Kennedy or Kamala Harris probably won't fit you well either. To be effective as a speaker, you must develop a delivery that is consistent with who *you* are as a person and adapted to your personal capabilities and constraints.



Kamala Harris by Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA

Delivery Is Situational

It might sound logical to think a speaker should always speak with energy and passion, incorporate movement, and smile. However, those behaviors aren't always appropriate or effective. Instead, vary your delivery based on the dictates of the situation.

Box 17.7 MrBeast's Many Delivery Styles



MrBeast by Steven Khan via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

Jimmy Donaldson, better known as MrBeast by his over 150 million YouTube subscribers, alters his delivery for his YouTube channels. While his appearance remains largely unchanged, his tone, background, use of eye contact, and distance from the camera varies based on whether he is recording videos for his "MrBeast Gaming" channel, for instance, or his "Beast Philanthropy" channel.

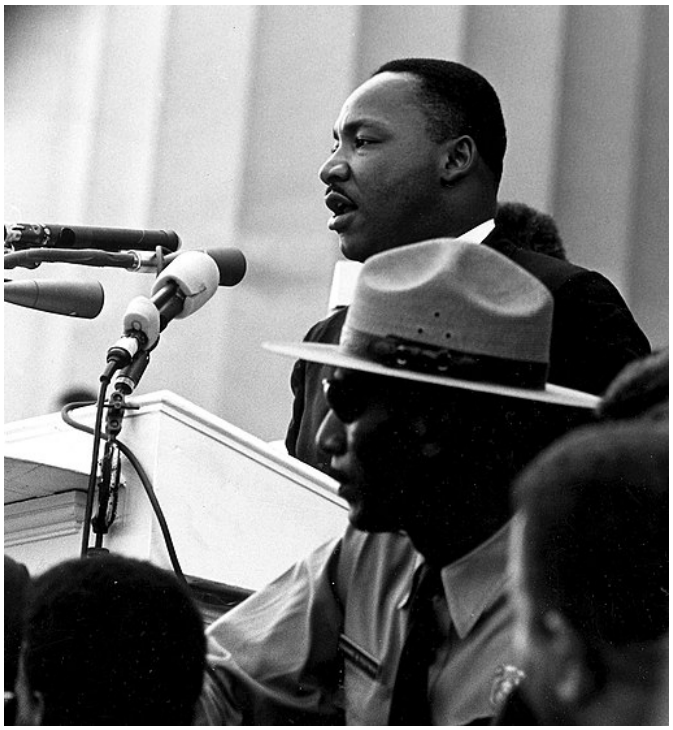
The gaming videos are more casual and relaxed, with attention devoted to the game being played. MrBeast tends to record himself for these videos with headphones on, his head and shoulders imposed onto a screen corner over a moving image of the game he's playing, and eye contact directed away from viewers (assumed to be on the game itself).

The philanthropy videos are more solemn and serious, so MrBeast typically records himself making eye contact with the camera, showing his upper body, often located on the scene of where he is doing the philanthropy, and adopting a more serious tone.

The contrasts in MrBeast's deliveries reflect the differences in the public speaking situations he is recording.

Situational factors such as the speech's purpose, timing, location, and audience composition and size will require adjustments to your tone, volume, and possible movement (all discussed later in chapter 18). Dr. Martin Luther King's delivery of his "I Have a Dream" speech is remarkable, but it's suited to a large audience and significant occasion, not to a boardroom presentation or for a speech honoring the accomplishments of a departing coworker. The situations are different, and so too will be the delivery.

Likewise, conditions such as your immediate physical setting, use of visual aids, and communication medium (in person or through a camera) may constrain the type of delivery you can use. You'll find suggestions in the next chapter for how to adjust your delivery for a camera, for instance. In chapter 29, we provide guidance for how to deliver your presentation with visual aids in ways that enrich, rather than distract from, your speech.



Martin Luther King by Rowland Scherman via NARA/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Your Delivery Will Develop over Time

Finally, realize your delivery will develop over time. As you gain more experience, you will learn what works for you and what does not. You will discover the ideal amount of notes for you, effective and natural gestures or facial expressions, and if you can tell a joke (and when to tell it). When you finish your public speaking class, your delivery will be different than it is now, and it will change again in the months and years ahead. There is always room to improve delivery, even for the best speaker. The target is constantly moving because the subject matter, occasion, audience, available media, and historical moment are also in motion. This is why public speaking is more of an art than a science.

Summary

This chapter addressed the importance of delivery and memory to public speaking. While aiding speech content in important ways, these two concepts are more attuned to issues of form, or *how* one conveys messages to the audience. Specifically, we observed the following:

- Delivery is a means of engaging the audience, enhancing your message, and bolstering your credibility

with the audience.

- Each of the four common modes of delivery—extemporaneous, impromptu, memorized, and manuscript—has its benefits and limitations.
- Communication apprehension, or speech anxiety, is common but can be effectively managed with strategies employed before, during, and after a speech.
- Delivery is a fluid and constantly developing skill that changes over time and according to the situation and personal abilities. With experience you will find a form of delivery that is most natural and comfortable for you.

Key Terms

communication apprehension
extemporaneous delivery
impromptu delivery
manuscript delivery
memorized delivery
modes of delivery

Review Questions

1. What is delivery? What is its relationship to memory?
2. What are the four common modes of delivery? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of speaking?
3. What is communication apprehension? What are some common strategies for reducing anxiety?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we heavily focus on delivery and memory in contemporary evaluations of public speakers?
2. What about public speaking makes you apprehensive or anxious? What strategies have you used to

lessen your anxiety when preparing to speak before an audience?

3. Think of a situation in which manuscript delivery would be appropriate. How about a situation when impromptu delivery would be better?

18. Effectively Using Verbal, Nonverbal, and Televisual Delivery

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Identify the most important elements of vocal delivery.
- Assess specific elements of nonverbal delivery.
- Demonstrate the thoughtful use of televisual delivery elements.

The previous chapter established desired outcomes of an effective delivery: engaging the audience, enhancing your message, and strengthening your credibility. This chapter offers three sets of specific tools or techniques to achieve these goals: vocal delivery, nonverbal delivery, and televisual delivery.

Keep in mind that not every speaker is physically, psychologically, neurologically, or culturally comfortable with, or capable of, using every available delivery element. Use the elements that play to your strengths and abilities.

This chapter begins by identifying vocal and nonverbal elements of delivery. We then move to additional televisual components of mediated delivery. Throughout the chapter, we focus on delivering a speech to your direct audience. As defined in chapter 10, these are the people who are exposed to and who attend to your speech.

Vocal Delivery

Vocal delivery refers to how the voice and mouth are used to deliver words. Different vocal techniques can draw the audience into a speech and even encourage audience participation and discussion. Key elements of vocal delivery include volume, tone, rate, pauses, articulation, pronunciation, and avoidance of vocal fillers.

Volume



Created by Bhuvan from Noun Project

Volume, or vocal amplification, refers to the loudness of your voice. If you fail to be heard while speaking, nothing else will matter. When determining what volume is reasonable, consider the needs of people who are hard of hearing and may require a louder volume than others. Of course, you should avoid yelling at or overpowering your audience.

Further volume modification is required based on factors such as the setting, audience size, and type and quality of audio equipment you may be using. Speaking outdoors, which is common for rallies and many civic events, requires more vocal projection to overcome background noise, particularly when a microphone or other amplification is unavailable. The same may hold true when speaking

through a screen while sitting in a busy or noisy area. When using a microphone in person or speaking through a screen, test the equipment in advance whenever possible. If you are uncertain about your volume, ask the audience for feedback and adjust accordingly.

Additionally, the size of the audience and your distance from them requires adjustments to your volume. Large and distant audiences demand a louder volume when speaking in person but likely not when addressing them through a screen.

Finally, your volume can also be used strategically. Speaking particularly loudly at key points can reinforce their importance and signal passion for the topic. You can also underscore the significance of information or suggest its sensitivity and confidentiality by using a whisper or drop in voice.

Tone



Created by Muh zakaria from Noun Project

Vocal tone refers to the sound of your voice or its pitch. You might think of it as the placement of your voice—its highness or lowness—on the musical scale. There is great variety among humans in the tones we adopt for speaking, and you probably have a typical pitch at which you speak. Indeed, most of us naturally stay within a small range of pitches on the musical scale when we speak—that is, most of us speak rather monotonously. Unfortunately, a monotonous pitch can become dull and boring to an audience over time. They may disengage from your message and even wrongly assume you are not excited or passionate about your own message.

Therefore, if you are able, work on speaking with more variety in your vocal tones over the course of a presentation. You might practice with a friend, at a speech lab, with a speech tutor, or by recording yourself. Focus on occasionally raising and lowering your pitch beyond your typical tone. Consider strategically varying your tone to emphasize particular points or to underscore your thesis, particularly compelling evidence, or your conclusion.

Be mindful, however, to not go too far in strategically timing your intonations or varying them so much that you sound almost robotic or fake. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, an ineffective delivery draws attention to itself rather than enhances the message, and that can occur when speaking too monotonously *or* too strategically. If you are capable, strive for what we might call a "conversational tone"—that is, a voice that varies in pitch like it might more naturally when you're having an animated conversation with friends.

Finally, consider how your vocal tone can potentially alter the meaning of what you say. For instance, ending declarative sentences with a higher pitch, like you might when asking a question, can suggest you are unsure of yourself. Using vocal tone to emphasize different words can change the meaning of a word or phrase. Saying "My mom moved to TEXAS in 2020" communicates something different than saying "My mom moved to Texas IN TWENTY TWENTY." Being aware of how tone can alter meaning is particularly important when leading a public discussion. In a deliberative discussion, as we discuss in chapter 21, one's vocal tone or pitch should be used to frame topics in a vocally neutral fashion that welcomes diverse participant contributions.

Rate

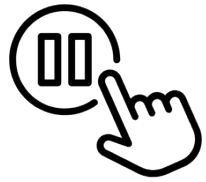


Created by Athok from Noun Project

Rate is the speed at which you speak. You should speak at a pace that is comfortable for you and the audience. In seeking that comfortable rate, be mindful of adopting a speed that is neither too fast nor too slow. If you speak too quickly, the audience will struggle to comprehend the information, particularly more complex material. You also risk overpowering the audience with a rapid-fire style. On the other hand, if you speak too slowly, you might lose the audience's attention. As listeners, we typically process words faster than a speaker can say them, leaving time for the mind to wander.

You might selectively increase your rate of delivery when covering less important material. Rate can also be adjusted to add verbal emphasis (slowing down, for instance) or to provide a sense of energy or enthusiasm (increasing your rate at particular points). Changes in rate can be especially effective in situations urging civic action—using your rate to establish urgency and to convey excitement in rallying support for a cause. The takeaway is to vary your rate based on what is comfortable for the audience, the material in your speech, and the occasion.

Pauses



Created by Adrien Coquet from Noun Project

A **pause** refers to the strategic choice not to speak and to allow a momentary silence instead. Pauses fix the attention of the audience on what you just said, inviting them to ponder an idea for a moment. A pause also allows the audience to catch up with you or to anticipate what you will say next. Additionally, a pause can help indicate a transition, often in conjunction with a verbal signal. However, be mindful of pausing too frequently or at awkward moments. Doing so can make the presentation choppy, result in unintended divisions in content, and create perceptions of nervousness.

You can learn to use pauses as a means of incorporating audience feedback and reactions. For instance, if the audience laughs in response to something you say, pause. Otherwise, your next thought will be lost in the laughter. Make similar allowances for audience applause and the occasional "aha" moment when you have made a significant point. Your ability to incorporate such audience feedback will also encourage their participation, whereas talking over their reactions will do the opposite. Practice your presentation with others to help identify moments in your speech that are likely to provoke laughter or applause.

Articulation



Created by Eklip Studio from Noun Project

Articulation refers to speaking each word with clarity. Poor articulation—mumbling—undermines the clarity of a speech. If you struggle with articulation, try monitoring your speaking rate. When you speak too quickly, you risk running words together, thereby decreasing your clarity. Articulation is an issue to particularly monitor in settings or venues with poor acoustics or when you are using equipment with poor sound quality. In such situations, clear articulation, a slow rate, and purposeful volume will increase your clarity.

A facet of articulation called **enunciation** refers to the fullness of articulation (or lack thereof). Your enunciation can depend on the situation and audience. For instance, some cultures and communities have a shared habit of dropping the endings from words, such as words ending with "ing" ("runnin" instead of "running," for example) or mashing words together ("gonna" instead of "going to"). If you are a member of

a community, already share the habit, and are addressing them, your enunciation may be fitting, depending on the occasion. It may detract from your message, however, if you are addressing a group that enunciates words differently or if you are not a member of that group. Strategically adopting an enunciation you do not typically use can appear fake or manipulative.

Pronunciation



Created by Restu fadillah
from Noun Project

Pronunciation is the way particular words are spoken or given sound. Proper pronunciation shows command of vocabulary, while mispronouncing terms (particularly when done multiple times) may cause an audience to question your understanding of the word or concept. Pronunciation can also be an issue of (dis)respect and (lack of) cultural awareness if we consistently mispronounce a person's name or cultural custom. Of course, what is considered proper pronunciation can alter based on one's culture, community, or geographic region. The word "advertisement," for instance, is pronounced very differently by Americans than by the British. You can adapt your pronunciation to your audience if you can do so in a way that flows comfortably.

Vocal Fillers



Created by Cuan Studio
from Noun Project

Vocal fillers, also called **nonfluencies**, are sounds ("um" and "er" most prominently) and words (e.g., "like," "you know," and even "and") spoken repetitively that do not add content to a speech. They are typically used due to nervousness, out of habit, or to fill the silence while finding your next words. A few "ums" are understandable, but when used too often, nonfluencies become distracting to the audience, who may begin to anticipate the filler rather than listen to the speech itself. As you practice your speech, try to break yourself of the habit of using vocal fillers. Learn to pause instead, because a small space of silence is much more effective than hearing a nonfluency.

The conclusions to draw regarding vocal delivery have been addressed in Chapter 17: find a delivery that suits you, remember delivery is situational, and recognize your delivery will develop over time. Your goal is to use your voice to enhance your content and build your credibility while encouraging audience attention. Through practice in front of people or by recording yourself, you can refine your vocal delivery to best achieve your goals.

Box 18.1 Vocal Delivery Elements

- **Volume:** Vocal amplification
- **Tone:** Sound of your voice
- **Rate:** Speed at which you speak
- **Pause:** Strategic use of momentary silence
- **Articulation:** Clarity of each word
- **Pronunciation:** Manner in which particular words are spoken or given sound
- **Vocal Fillers:** Repetitive sounds and words that do not add content to the speech

Nonverbal Delivery

Nonverbal delivery refers to how the body is used to communicate. The audience reads or interprets nonverbal cues just as they do a speaker's vocal delivery. Consequently, nonverbal delivery can engage or distract an audience, underscore or undermine the message, and strengthen or weaken the speaker's credibility. Important nonverbal elements include eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and movement, and appearance.

Eye Contact



Student presentation via Science Photo Library/NTB, CC BY-NC.

We understand that maintaining **eye contact**—looking into the eyes of your audience members—can be a challenge for reasons ranging from nervousness, to note dependence, to differences in culture, status, and neurology. In some cases, eye contact may be too physically, psychologically, or culturally uncomfortable—or even painful—to maintain, or it may simply be impossible due to sight impairment. We recommend these speakers turn their attention to developing other elements of vocal and nonverbal delivery to effectively present their speeches.

For others, however, consistent eye contact may simply take practice to overcome nervousness or to use speaking notes more effectively. Culturally, most Americans associate eye contact with truthfulness and sincerity, regardless of whether these perceptions are grounded in reality. Maintaining eye contact also helps the audience feel connected with you, and it provides you with an excellent way to gain audience feedback. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, by looking at your audience (whether in person or through their images on a screen), you can notice signs of positive reception that will lessen your anxiety or signals that you need to move on or slow down.

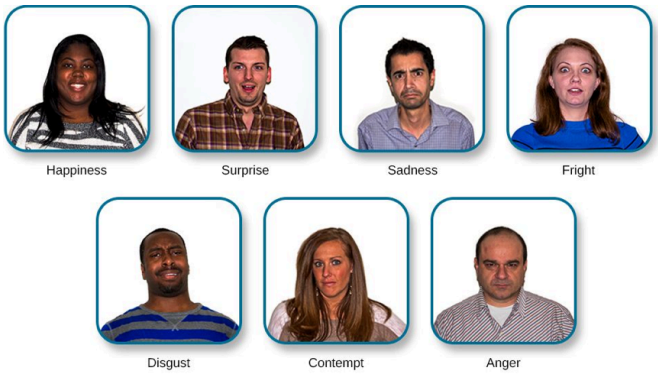
To make meaningful eye contact as you speak in person, try to look at specific people in the audience, establish and hold eye contact with them for several seconds at a time, and then move to someone else. Include people through-

out the space rather than concentrating on a particular location where you find one or two familiar, friendly, or interested faces. Similarly, do not direct too much of your eye contact toward a visual aid—keep most of your focus on your audience.

When speaking through a screen, focus your gaze on the camera or cameras. In such instances, looking elsewhere on your screen will make it appear as if you are avoiding eye contact. You can occasionally glance at the images of your audience members, however, to help alleviate anxiety and to receive their nonverbal feedback to your speech.

Finally, whether you are speaking in person or through a screen, avoid constantly looking at your notes, such as by bobbing your head up and down or reading them on the screen. Neither behavior results in meaningful eye contact, which typically requires holding eye contact with a person or the camera for several seconds as you speak.

Facial Expressions



Universal facial expressions by Lumen Learning via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

One of your most expressive physical attributes can be your face. Taken together with tone, your **facial expressions**—or use of your face to communicate emotions or reactions—can help clarify the meaning of your message. Think for a moment of how difficult it can be sometimes to interpret an email, text, or post. We are left to wonder if the message is serious or sarcastic, because it lacks the vocal tone and facial expressions that can give it meaning. It's telling that we've developed emoticons and emojis that often feature facial expressions to clarify our meaning. If you are comfortable and able to make a range of facial expressions, then they can be a major asset to your public speaking.

Of course, we also send unintended messages through our facial expressions. As a speaker, think about what message you might send if you never smile during a speech (or if you smile all the time). In a civic context, be mindful of how you interact with other participants through your expressions. You can encourage a participant to contribute or continue talking, for instance, with a warm facial expression or with a nod of the head. In contrast, a flash of anger, a dismissive look (like rolling your eyes), or an expression of frustration may make participants feel less valued or interested in continuing the conversation.

Gestures and Movement



Image by Picture Alliance for DLD via Flickr, CC BY-NS-SA.

Movement of your hands (**gestures**) and the positioning and motion of your body (**body movement**) can both positively impact your speech. While these nonverbal elements are most readily available to uninjured and able-bodied people, many of us can still make use of one or the other. A speaker who is born without arms or loses the ability to use them, for instance, may still be able to walk or alter their posture. A person who cannot stand or move their lower body may be able to gesture with their hands or move a wheelchair while speaking. We encourage each speaker to thoughtfully consider how they may incorporate their available physical motion into their speeches.

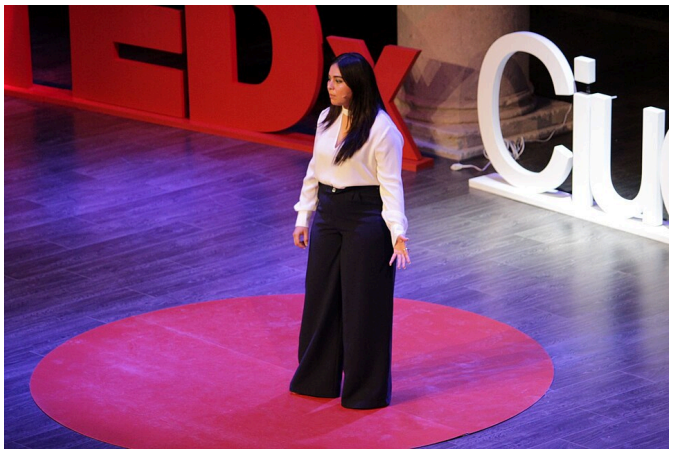
Well-placed gestures can draw emphasis to your main points, provide another form of audience engagement, and even assist with transitions. Gestures can also accentuate words by almost physically drawing objects and by illustrating actions. However, repetitive gestures should be avoided, as they are distracting for the audience. Consider leaving your arms relaxed at your sides or on a table when not gesturing. The challenge is to strike an effective balance between random or repetitive gestures on the one hand and overly rehearsed (and thus artificial) gestures on the other.

When offering gestures, think about their visibility, meaning, and situation. If you are standing behind a lectern or sitting at a table, your gestures must be high enough to be seen by the audience. If you are speaking to a large crowd in person, your gestures must be large enough to be visible. If you are speaking through a screen, your gestures must be small enough to be seen within the camera's frame.

Box 18.2 The Meaning of Gestures

Not all gestures mean the same thing to all people or in every situation. A gesture may be interpreted quite differently across cultures or even over time. In the United States, for instance, the gesture that used to only mean "OK" became widely adopted by white supremacists to promote their racist agenda. In 2019, the Anti–Defamation League classified the "OK" gesture as a symbol of hate. Speakers must be aware of what their gestures might communicate to their audience, given the context.

Along with gestures, a speaker can strategically use body movement to aid the message. When speaking, you might reposition yourself to mark major transitions and to give the audience an opportunity to reset their attention. Such strategic movement can also help you engage different segments of the audience, can possibly release nervous energy, and is much preferred to random pacing.



Alondra Berber Donde by Mexicanosenazulvia Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

Another element of movement to consider is body positioning. When talking in person, be cognizant of the physical distance between you and the audience. Situating yourself too close to the audience may make them feel anxious by violating their space. Positioning yourself too far away, such as at the back of a platform or near the back wall, can increase a sense of separation and make you appear uncomfortable. In general, it is best to locate yourself in a central position rather than to the side of the room or speaking platform. If possible, try occasionally repositioning yourself over the course of the speech to ensure all audience members can see you.

Appearance

Appearance regards how you look while speaking. We can control some factors more than others. An element of physical appearance in your control is attire. The way you dress should be fitted to the occasion, the audience, your topic, and you as a person. Dress conveys the formality of the situation and is seen as a sign of speaker competence.

Box 18.3 Looking Presidential



Official Portrait of President Reagan, *Exec. Office of POTUS via Picryl*, *Public Domain*.

We might look to well-known figures like US presidents to better appreciate the ways your appearance communicates to onlookers.

You may have heard the phrase "looking presidential." It typically refers to how we expect the US president or presidential candidates to appear in official settings. As the picture of President Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office depicts, we typically expect the president to wear a finely tailored suit or dress. Such clothing suggests the president is ready to conduct serious government business.

Contrast that with how presidents generally appear when surveying a disaster site or visiting a more casual setting (e.g., rolled-up sleeves and casual pants). In the other picture, for instance, President Reagan appears on his ranch near Santa Barbara, California, in jeans, a cowboy hat, and a visible belt buckle. His appearance matches the more natural and informal setting, implying he is relaxing and taking time to enjoy his horses.

In both cases, the attire communicates the role the president or presidential candidate is assuming in the situation. Consider what your appearance communicates about your speaking situation and your role in it.



Reagan with Horse, *Courtesy Reagan Library, PD via Wikimedia Commons*, *Public Domain*.

While your classroom speeches are likely fairly casual, think about the perceptions you risk creating if you arrive with your hair standing on end and wearing sweatpants. Your appearance can communicate to your audience that you are not taking the occasion seriously and have not put forethought into your preparation. While your instructor will determine how much that impacts your speech grade, the stakes increase if you dress inappropriately for a job interview, community organization gathering, or public rally. Each of these settings and situations likely calls for very different types of attire; you need to consider that expectation and dress accordingly.

Box 18.4 Nonverbal Delivery Elements

- **Eye contact:** Looking into the eyes of audience members
- **Facial expressions:** Use of your face to communicate emotions or reactions

- **Gestures:** Movement of your hands
- **Movement:** Positioning and motion of your body
- **Appearance:** The aspects you can control about how you look while speaking

Televisual Delivery

Many of our speaking opportunities today occur through a screen using videoconferencing platforms such as Apple's FaceTime, Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams, though their popularity and names change over time.

When we present a public speech through a screen, we call that a **televisual delivery**. Nearly all the vocal and nonverbal elements previously discussed hold importance for a televisual speech delivery, and we have drawn attention earlier to when and how you should adapt those elements for the screen. In what follows, we consider additional delivery components that are unique to a televisual medium: camera framing, angle, and distance; lighting and background; and camera steadiness.

Keep in mind that when you speak through a screen, your televisual delivery may reach different kinds of audiences. As described in chapter 10, if you record and make your speech widely available, your speech may extend beyond a *discrete audience* (limited to those individuals who show up for your speech event at a particular day and time) to include a *dispersed audience* (a group of people, unlimited by location or time, who can view your speech). You should consider your speech's audiences as you use televisual delivery to achieve desired delivery outcomes.



Image by Anete Lusina via Pexels, Pexels license.

Camera Framing, Angle, and Distance



Image by Ron Lach via Pexels, *Pexels license*.

When speaking through a screen, how you use the camera can influence your speech's effectiveness. **Camera framing** refers to the edges of what the camera allows the audience to see and what it cuts out from their visibility. Take time to test what your video presentation looks like for the audience. Typically, you want them to see your full head and shoulders, or possibly also your upper body. Without testing or looking at your framing ahead of time, you may inadvertently display only the top of your head (yes, we have had students do that!) or cut off part of your face, which would distract from your message and likely hurt your credibility.

Your **camera's angle**—its slant or viewpoint on the speaker—can also impact what the audience sees and notices. A camera angle that is too high (that looks "down" on the speaker) can focus too much attention on the top of their head and give the sensation of the speaker being small. A camera angle that is too low (that looks "up" at the speaker) tends to draw too much attention to what's above the speaker (often ceiling lights or fan) and can make the audience feel like we are looking up their nose!

There may be situations in which you strategically adopt a low or high camera angle to accentuate a point or reengage the audience. In general, however, you want the camera more directly in line with your eyes to replicate the experience of talking to someone face-to-face. Doing that focuses attention on your face and generates a sense of connection and equality with your audience. You can accomplish a direct camera angle by raising the height of your electronic device. Stack some books or boxes on a table, for instance. The audience won't see what you use to raise your device, so it does not have to look good for the camera.



Image by PixelCraft Studios via Pexels, *Pexels license*.

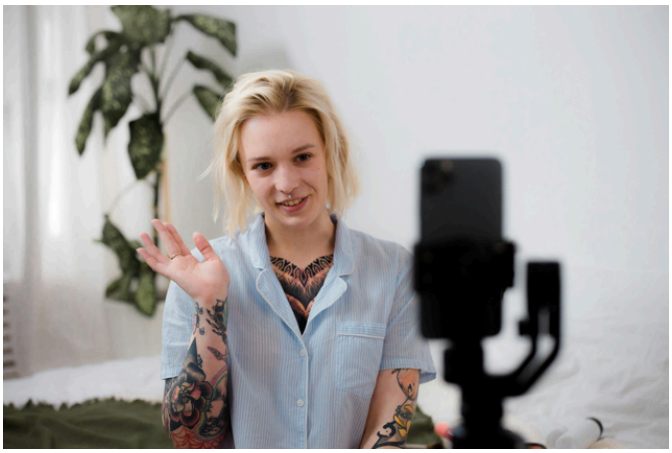


Image by Ron Lach via Pexels, *Pexels license*.

Your **camera distance** is the length of space between you and your camera. It, too, affects what the audience sees and notices. A far camera distance (also called a long or full shot) enables an audience to see more of your body, gestures, and background, and it may provide space for you to later edit in visual aids if you are prerecording your speech. But it also makes it harder to see your face and thus for you to make meaningful eye contact through the camera. A close camera distance (also called a close-up shot) draws attention to your face and eyes. However, it leaves little room to see gestures, and it can make viewers feel uncomfortable, a little like you are invading their personal space.

Again, you may choose to strategically use shots with a far or close camera distance to meet your delivery goals. Typically, however, as a speaker, you should opt for a medium or medium close-up camera distance that allows viewers to comfortably see your head, shoulders, and upper body from the waist or chest up.

Lighting and Background

Like on any television or movie set, attention should be given to your lighting and background when using a televisual delivery. Both impact what the audience sees and notices, and they can also enhance or hurt your message. **Lighting** refers to the amount and placement of brightness or darkness on the speaker. When thinking about lighting, try to opt for brightness so it is easier to see your face through the screen. Avoid shadows or uneven lighting when possible.

An inexpensive way to achieve good lighting is by speaking in front of a window on a sunny day. If those conditions are unavailable to you, then you might sit in front of a white or brightly painted wall. Then direct a lamp toward the wall so that light "bounces" off the wall and back onto your face. That indirect approach is typically softer looking than aiming light directly onto you. You might also use two table lamps, perhaps in addition to an overhead light, to better balance the lighting in your space. Relying on an overhead light alone will produce harsh shadows on your face.

Your **background** refers to everything the audience can see behind or around you within the camera's frame. To maintain the audience's attention on your speech, strive to speak in a setting that is quiet both audibly and visually. That is, avoid settings where people may need to walk or move around in the background. Even if they stay silent, their presence will distract the audience.



Image by RDNE Stock project via Pexels, *Pexels license*.

You may opt for a very simple background, such as in a classroom against a bare wall or even a clean sheet. Alternatively, you may strategically choose your setting to enhance your message. If you are advocating for hunting as a means of environmental conservation, for instance, you might locate yourself in an outdoor setting or adopt a virtual background that replicates the outdoors.

Indeed, virtual backgrounds (and visual effects) are increasingly available and easy to employ. Used strategically or creatively, high-quality backgrounds and effects can enhance your message and strengthen your credibility—and hide a messy room or office. However, many virtual backgrounds and visual effects are of poor quality, excessively busy (e.g.,

animations, lots of colors), and/or corny. They are more likely to distract viewers from your message and detract from your credibility, especially if the background has no clear connection to your purpose, topic, or occasion.

Camera Steadiness

When televisually delivering a presentation, speakers should be mindful of their **camera's steadiness**, or the motion or stillness of the camera's frame. If you set a laptop on your lap while speaking, for instance, the camera will move around as you gesture and speak (not to mention that your camera angle will be too low). You are unlikely to notice the movement as you speak, but it will be very distracting and possibly uncomfortable for your audience to view. The same may occur if you pound the table on which your electronic device is resting as you speak. To avoid distracting camera movement, place the electronic device on a solid surface and try not to touch that surface while speaking. A desk or folding tray table can work well, especially if you are stacking boxes on top to raise your camera angle.

Box 18.5 Televisual Delivery Elements

- **Camera framing:** The edges of what the camera allows the audience to see and what it cuts out from their visibility
- **Camera angle:** Slant or viewpoint of the camera on the speaker
- **Camera distance:** Length of space between the speaker and the camera
- **Lighting:** Amount and placement of brightness or darkness on the speaker
- **Background:** Everything the audience can see behind or around the speaker within the camera's frame
- **Camera steadiness:** Motion or stillness of the camera's frame

Conclusions

Our listing of vocal, nonverbal, and televisual delivery techniques provides a range of considerations for you to make as a speaker. It is important to again recognize that all speaking situations and all speakers are different.



Image by TED Conference via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND.

In the end, good delivery helps the audience understand, remember, and act on the speech, and it appropriately suits the situation. Nearly any "TED Talk"—speeches made available online by the nonprofit organization TED—demonstrates the positive effects of a strong delivery. TED Talk speakers typically utilize a range of vocal and nonverbal delivery techniques to successfully engage their audience, enhance their message, and build their credibility. Similarly, many popular YouTubers—people who use YouTube to host their video presentations—model excellent televisual delivery skills in addition to strong vocal and nonverbal deliveries.

Poor delivery, in contrast, can communicate unintended and damaging messages about us as speakers or our attitude toward the audience. Tune into the opening skit (or "cold open") for any *Saturday Night Live* television episode, and you're likely to see the show's comedians exaggerate the worst delivery elements of the public figures they are parodying. These mocking depictions often imply that the figures have poor morals, low intelligence, or little public appeal. Fortunately, you can use the tools described in this chapter to improve your delivery and aid your public speaking efforts. Remember that experience and practice will help you find the delivery style that works best for you.



30 Rock by Anthony Quintano via Flickr, CC BY.

Summary

This chapter addressed three sets of tools you can use to achieve an effective delivery. Though not every tool is available for every speaker, each person can use the techniques that play to their speaking strengths. More specifically, we observed the following:

- Vocal delivery, how a speaker uses their voice and mouth to deliver words, is important in engaging an audience. Key elements of vocal delivery include volume, tone, rate, pauses, articulation, pronunciation, and avoidance of vocal fillers.
- Nonverbal delivery, how the body is used to communicate, can enhance or distract from the message. Important nonverbal cues include eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and movement, and appearance.
- Televisual delivery, presenting a speech through a camera and screen, can influence a speech's effectiveness. Key elements of televisual delivery include camera angle, distance, and framing; lighting and background; and camera steadiness.

Key Terms

appearance
articulation
background
body movement
camera angle
camera distance
camera framing
camera steadiness
enunciation
eye contact
facial expressions
gestures
lighting
nonfluencies
nonverbal delivery
pause
pronunciation
rate
televisual delivery
vocal delivery
vocal filler
vocal tone
volume

Review Questions

1. What are important features of vocal delivery that impact the effectiveness of a presentation? How can you adjust these features to benefit your speeches?
2. What are important features of nonverbal delivery that impact the effectiveness of a presentation? How can you adjust your nonverbal delivery to increase your connection with the audience?
3. What are important features of televisual delivery that impact the effectiveness of a presentation? How can you adjust these elements to enhance your message?

Discussion Questions

1. Name three excellent speakers. What makes their delivery effective? How do these speakers differ from one another in terms of their vocal, nonverbal, and (if appropriate) televisual delivery?
2. Think of speakers you've heard who spoke very poorly. What specific vocal and nonverbal delivery elements hurt their performance? What exactly did they do, and how did it affect you as an audience member? What might they have done differently?
3. Recall effective speakers who use a televisual medium almost exclusively, such as popular YouTubers or other influencers. What have you noticed about how they adapt their delivery to the camera and televisual medium?

19. Preparing a Presentation Outline or Manuscript for an Effective Delivery

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Use a presentation outline for an extemporaneous delivery.
- Create a manuscript for a manuscript delivery.
- Choose a medium for speaking notes or text that suits the situation and their personal comfort.

When you are ready to practice delivering your speech, you might wonder what to include in your speaking notes. The answer depends on what kind of delivery you plan to adopt.

In chapter 17, we described four modes of delivery: extemporaneous, impromptu, memorized, and manuscript. Two of these typically require no speaking notes. Speakers delivering *impromptu* speeches develop their speeches as they speak, though they might jot down a note or two just before speaking. *Memorized* speeches should, by definition, be committed to memory and thus similarly require no speaking notes.

The other two modes of delivery—*extemporaneous* and *manuscript*—do necessitate written words to speak from. As we defined in chapter 17, in a *manuscript* delivery, the speaker writes the entire address and utilizes the text in delivering the speech. In that same chapter, we defined an *extemporaneous* delivery as when a speaker uses trimmed-down notes to recall the speech's structure, key ideas, and any direct quotations or source citations.

This chapter focuses first on how to prepare speaking notes for an extemporaneous delivery. We then offer tips for preparing a manuscript for a manuscript delivery. We end by helping you consider what medium to use for your notes or manuscript.

Preparing a Presentation Outline for an Extemporaneous Delivery



ECOSOC Youth Forum by Global Landscapes Forum via Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA.

Typically, an extemporaneous delivery will use trimmed-down notes, or what we call a presentation outline. A **presentation outline** is a brief sketch of your speech designed to help you deliver your speech as free from your notes as possible. It allows you to more easily make on-the-fly adjustments and connect with your direct audience (the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech, as defined in chapter 10).

Let's explore four qualities of the presentation outline: It maintains visual cues from the preparation outline; it is brief, though some elements are written out; and it should include delivery notes. To see each of these qualities in use, there is a sample presentation outline in Appendix C.

Maintain Visual Cues from the Preparation Outline

Recall that in chapter 15, we talked about your *preparation* outline, or the draft you write as you plan and organize your speech. We instructed you to adopt specific outlining principles for that outline and to include labels for such key components as the introduction, conclusion, transitions, and thesis.

The *presentation* outline keeps these visual cues and labels. Specifically, it visually shows the structure of your speech by *retaining the outlining symbols and indentations*. That way, you can quickly glance at the page, locate your place in the speech, and find the information you are looking for. The visual structure can also provide a brief reminder of where you are going next. If you don't maintain symbols and indentation, you are forced to read through dense text or a full paragraph to find the section you are looking for.

Strive for Brevity

The presentation outline replaces full sentences with *keywords or phrases* that jog your memory about your points or information, as box 19.1 demonstrates. That means you find your specific wording or expression *in the moment*. The keywords are simply there to prompt the ideas so you can choose your wording as you go. Consequently, your wording will change slightly each time you deliver your speech using your presentation outline.

Box 19.1 Sample Presentation Outline Excerpt

Imagine delivering an extemporaneous speech on the subsection "Maintain Visual Cues from the Preparation Outline." The presentation outline for that section might look like this:

A. Maintain visual cues from preparation outline

1. Preparation outline: principles, visual labels
2. Presentation outline:
    a. Keep principles, labels
    b. Visually show structure by outlining symbols, indentation
    c. Can glance, locate information; find where to go next
    d. If not, forced to read

Notice how few words appear on each line—just enough to prompt the speaker's memory of what point or idea they want to convey.

Choosing brevity prevents you from reading your speech and encourages you instead to connect with your audience. Otherwise, if you write too much down, the temptation to read can be overwhelming, especially when you feel nervous.

Write Out Minimal Elements

Even in a presentation outline, you will still want to fully write out a *few* elements of the speech. These include your thesis, quotations, and spoken citations because accuracy is particularly important for each. In the sample presentation outline in Appendix C, you will notice several occasions where these elements are written out. Just keep to a minimum the speech elements you fully write out or, again, you will likely end up reading your speech.

Include Delivery Notes

As you practice your speech, you may receive feedback that you consistently mumble a phrase or you tend to read quotations too quickly for an audience to follow. You may find you have trouble pronouncing a word or you leave out one subpoint repeatedly. All this information is useful as you write your presentation outline.

You can include delivery notes to help yourself through problem spots. *Highlight* the point you tend to skip. *Write out* the difficult word phonetically. *Remind* yourself to "slow down here!" or "pause" in places where those elements of delivery will help your audience absorb the full impact of your words. Again, you can find examples of this in the sample presentation outline in Appendix C.

If you observe the four qualities of a presentation outline, you will more likely succeed in delivering your speech extemporaneously. A presentation outline might even help you with other types of deliveries. You could use it in case your memory goes blank while delivering a memorized speech or to jot down some ideas a few seconds or minutes before delivering an impromptu speech. If delivering a manuscript speech, however, you should approach your speech text differently.

Preparing a Manuscript for a Manuscript Delivery

A manuscript delivery requires a **manuscript**—a fully written-out version of your speech. Unlike a presentation outline, a manuscript typically looks more like an essay. Thus, it will likely include paragraphs rather than indentations, outlining symbols, or labels.

A manuscript delivery may seem rather easy. Just read your text. However, you still need to achieve the three goals of an effective speech delivery established in chapter 17: engage the direct audience, enhance your ideas, and strengthen your credibility. If you don't adequately prepare your manuscript, simply reading your speech is more likely to bore your audience, distract from your ideas, and harm your credibility.

How, then, can you prepare a manuscript for an effective delivery? We recommend you alter your manuscript in the following ways to aid your success (and as demonstrated in box 19.2):

- Double-space the typed text and use a larger font (16, 18, or 20 point) so you can find your place more easily when you look down.
- Use such visual cues as underlining, **bolding**, or highlighting keywords or sentences to help draw your attention to them. Such cues enable you to maintain some eye contact with the audience while reducing the risk of losing your place.
- Include prompts or reminders in the manuscript to enhance your vocal and nonverbal delivery, such as your pronunciation, tone, volume adjustments, and pauses.

Box 19.2 Sample Manuscript Excerpt

If you delivered a manuscript speech of the very first paragraph of "Preparing a Manuscript for a Manuscript Delivery," the manuscript might look like this:

A manuscript delivery [LOUDER] **requires a manuscript**—a fully written-out version of your speech. [PAUSE] *Unlike* a presentation outline, a manuscript typically appears [SLOWER] **more like an essay**. Thus, it will

likely include paragraphs *rather than* indentations, outlining symbols, or labels.

Choose the Medium for Your Presentation Outline or Manuscript

With the evolution of technology, it is hard to recommend one preferred medium or means of communication. Should you print your presentation outline or manuscript onto *paper* or *note cards*? Or should you read or glance at them from a *tablet*, *phone*, *or laptop*?

To decide, learn as much about your speaking situation as possible:

- Will you have a podium? If so, note cards can rest easily and rather noiselessly there.
- Will it be a windy, outdoor setting? Perhaps a tablet or paper printout is better.
- Will you speak from a seated position, such as at a conference? Then speaking from a laptop might be ideal.

In general, we recommend *against using your phone* for speaking notes, since the screen size is harder to read and can fit less text, prompting you to continually look at your phone and scroll down.

In addition to the speaking situation, consider what you find most reliable and comfortable. Perhaps you prefer note cards for a presentation outline because their size forces you to include brief notes. Maybe you like speaking from sheets of paper (especially tucked inside a professional-looking folder) so you don't have to change pages as often. Some speakers like the convenience of a digital tablet so they never worry about getting their note cards mixed up or losing a page. Whatever medium you choose, it is important to practice using your notes or manuscript.

Practice with Your Chosen Notes and Medium

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of practice, especially when sharpening your delivery. Practice with the medium you have chosen for your notes or manuscript. The experience of speaking from your laptop can be very different from printed pages you hold. Practicing ahead of time will help you find the best medium for you.

Also practice with your presentation outline or manuscript. When delivering from your presentation outline, you may discover you need to add words because you are forgetting your points. Perhaps, instead, you need to remove words because you are relying too much on your notes. You might find one section overly confusing and need to rethink it. Similarly, practicing with your manuscript will help you find the easiest font size for you to read from and where you need to add or remove visual cues.

Practicing with your presentation outline or manuscript ahead of your actual speech delivery leaves you time

to make necessary adjustments. If you wait until just before your speech to produce your speaking notes or manuscript, you may run into difficulties while delivering it for your audience.

Summary

This chapter discussed presentation outlines and manuscripts. It provided guidance on what to include in your speaking notes or manuscript and how to use it for an effective speech delivery. Specifically, it covered the following:

- Presentation (keyword) outlines are brief. They avoid full sentences in most places so you are forced to speak extemporaneously from your outline. They still maintain the visual cues of the preparation outline so you may find your way if you lose your place. It is a good idea to include delivery notes in your presentation outline.
- Manuscripts include every word you plan to say during your speech. They are typically written in paragraph form, but they are written in a larger font size, with visual prompts to aid your vocal and nonverbal delivery.
- Choose the medium for your presentation outline or manuscript—printed paper, note cards, tablet, or laptop—based on your speaking situation and personal comfort. Avoid using your phone.
- Practice your delivery using your presentation outline or manuscript in your chosen medium. Doing so will help you make necessary adjustments to ensure a smoother delivery on your actual speaking day.

Key Terms

manuscript
presentation outline

Review Questions

1. What are four qualities of a presentation outline?
2. How is a manuscript different from a presentation outline?
3. What should you consider when choosing the medium for your presentation outline or manuscript?
4. Why should you practice using your presentation outline or manuscript?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you prefer speaking from a presentation outline or a manuscript? Why?
2. What kinds of delivery notes do you find most useful in a presentation outline or manuscript? Why?
3. What is the best medium for speaking notes or manuscript: Note cards? Full printed pages? A digital tablet, laptop, or smartphone? Explain your answers and consider the space where your speech will occur.

20. Speaking Informatively Through Deliberative Presentations

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Contrast different types of informative speaking.
- Explain the role of deliberative presentations in engaging public controversies.
- Demonstrate steps in the process of forming a deliberative presentation.

The number of US school shootings in recent years has many Americans alarmed and calling for change. But figuring out what should change, how, and who is responsible are difficult questions to answer. Should we tighten security measures at schools? Better drill students and staff for such emergencies? Increase the number of police officers and enhance their training? Decrease classroom sizes? Provide affordable and easy access to mental health services? Stiffen background checks for purchasing guns? Ban assault weapons?



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Difficult cases rarely offer one right answer or one universally satisfying way forward. Instead, they raise the need for communities to learn about the problem, possible options, and opposing perspectives before making decisions. In this chapter, we turn to a form of speech that effectively meets that need: informative speaking.

In what follows, we first broadly outline the major features and types of informative speaking. The remainder of this chapter and the following chapter focus on one version of informative speaking: the deliberative presentation. We will define and explain the deliberative presentation as an especially useful way to address public controversies. We will then explore the first three steps of preparing a deliberative presentation: selecting a wicked problem, researching the problem, and discovering a range of approaches that address the wicked problem. Chapter 21 will discuss the remaining steps of framing and organizing the problem for deliberation.

Informative Speaking

In **informative speaking**, a speaker educates their direct audience about a topic without leading them toward a particular position, conclusion, or outcome. Recall from chapter 10 that the direct audience consists of people who are exposed to and attend to your speech.

In this type of speaking, you set your personal preferences aside and present a neutral, fair, and inclusive understanding of the topic. Of course, none of us can remain completely impartial, and staying impartial does not prevent you from sharing relevant, personal experiences. The goal is to do your best to keep your *opinions* in check to allow audience members to arrive at their own conclusions.


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The need for informative speaking in civic affairs may not be self-evident. After all, information has never been easier to obtain for people with access to the internet. However, the material provided through the internet can quickly become overwhelming, and not all of it is reliable.

Few of us have the time—or, at least, take the time—to thoughtfully discover, evaluate, read, and process information from multiple sources. Instead, we may glance at headlines or articles in our social media feeds or even abandon the effort altogether. It can be tempting to leave civic affairs to public officials and specialists to save ourselves the trouble. Consequently, we remove ourselves from decision-making that may directly impact our quality of life.

Informative speaking, then, is critical to democratic participation. An informative speech empowers listeners by drawing attention to public concerns, presenting relevant and reliable information from credible sources, and helping a community make sense of that information.

Types of Informative Speeches in a Civic Engagement Context

Different kinds of informative speeches enable civic engagement in various ways. In this section we briefly describe three types of informative speeches that aid democratic participation: instructional speeches, problem-focused speeches, and deliberative presentations.

Instructional Speeches

An instructional speech explains or teaches an audience about a process, concept, or entity to help community members participate in civic affairs more easily and confidently. This type of informative speech stops short of actively promoting involvement or prescribing particular actions. Such advocacy becomes persuasion and is the focus of chapters 24 and 25. Instead, you simply lay the groundwork for involvement should an audience member choose to take part.

Box 20.1 Instructional Speech Topics

In instructional speeches, speakers provide information so audience members can better understand and participate in the community's affairs. For example,

- How does a meeting run? You might educate new members of an organization about the rules. Several of this textbook's authors, for instance, have delivered an instructional speech to new professors about the parliamentary procedures used during faculty meetings. We sought to educate new members so they could understand what was happening during a meeting and more easily participate.
- What are club expectations? You might deliver an instructional speech about the history, member-

ship, and expectations of a club or organization you belong to at your school.

Notice that in both examples, speakers would not explicitly advocate for participation in faculty meetings or campus organizations.

Problem-Focused Speeches



Problem by Nick Youngson via Alpha Stock Images/Picpedia, CC BY-SA.

Problem-focused speeches identify, describe, and explain a civic problem. The goal is to help an audience understand the issue and possibly prepare them to address it. Most typically, a problem-focused informative speech will explain the problem's history, impacts on those affected, probable cause(s), and major components. Such a speech avoids naming or advocating a solution, though it might explain previous efforts to address the problem.

Box 20.2 Problem-Focused Speech Topics

The emphasis of a problem-focused speech can vary *based on your audience*:

- **If your audience is unaware of a problem**, you might highlight and explain it.
    - *Example*: A dangerous intersection in town you notice on your commute to campus but your peers miss because most live on-site.
- **If your audience is aware of the problem but perceives it as too minor to merit immediate action**, you can increase your audience's sense of urgency about a problem.
    - *Example*: The overpopulation of animals at your community's animal shelter. Most people are aware that animal shelters fill up with stray animals. However, they may not appreciate exactly how many animals are left at the shelter daily, the stress animals experience in tight quarters due to overcrowding, and the high costs associated with supporting (or, sadly, terminating) unwanted animals.
- **If your audience misunderstands a well-known problem**, you should strengthen and even correct their knowledge about it.
    - *Example*: The rising cost of college tuition. An issue like this is broadly recognized as problematic, but some community members may know little about why your college raises tuition or

what trade-offs it must make to avoid doing so. A problem-focused speech could verify, supplement, and possibly correct popular beliefs about the problem.

Deliberative Presentations

A **deliberative presentation** strives to fairly and evenhandedly describe a civic problem and multiple approaches to solving it. Emphasis is placed on the benefits and drawbacks of each approach. A deliberative presentation functions as the setup or preparation for a **deliberative discussion**, which is a group conversation through which a community, guided by one or more moderators, examines a complex public problem and a range of available solutions to ultimately arrive at a choice or conclusion. Together, the deliberative presentation and subsequent discussion form the **deliberative process** (also referred to simply as deliberation). The deliberative process involves a presentation of a problem and multiple options and a subsequent moderated discussion of those options (though the format and timing of both parts can vary).

Box 20.3 The Deliberative Process

The Deliberative Process =		
Deliberative presentation	+	Deliberative discussion
Description of a civic problem and multiple approaches to addressing the problem		Guided public conversation about the problem and approaches that ends with a choice

The nature and emphasis of the deliberative process is educational. We want to better understand the problem and investigate each solution in the most open manner possible. Note the emphasis on probing and contrasting *solutions* to the problem, unlike a problem-focused speech.

Indeed, the ultimate end goal—and a key distinguishing feature of the deliberative process—is that the participating community chooses the option it wants to pursue or at least outlines the next steps required. Ideally, the process results in consensus on a way forward, but that may not always be the case. Eventually, traditional persuasive efforts and/or voting may be appropriate.



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The deliberative process is ideally suited to address a public controversy, or what others have called a **wicked problem**—that is, an issue that is difficult to resolve because it involves diverse values and perspectives about what the problem is, who is responsible, and how it should be addressed.[1] A wicked problem is widely acknowledged *as* a problem and draws broad concern locally, nationally, or even internationally. It may be persistent, such as the issues of gun violence and immigration; or it may become prominent at certain moments and then die down only to resurface again later, such as controversies over oil spills and nuclear power. The point is that wicked problems are never completely resolved; they can only be gradually improved. In contrast, **tame problems** are simpler issues that *can* be solved with expertise.

Box 20.4 Wicked Versus Tame Problems

Wicked Problems	Tame Problems
How can we reduce the number of school shootings?	What is the most effective metal detector?
How should we limit the spread of a health pandemic (COVID-19, etc.)?	What are risk factors for getting sick?
What should universities do to survive amid increasing costs and competition?	How does the average increase in tuition at public universities compare with private colleges over the past fifteen years?

Wicked problems are marked by **contingency**, a condition in which events and circumstances are dependent on several

1. Brian W. Head identifies Horst Rittel and Mel Webber as originating the term *wicked problem* in 1973. See Brian W. Head, *Wicked Problems in Public Policy: Understanding and Responding to Complex Challenges* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

variables that evolve in unpredictable ways. Thus, the effects of any decision made about a wicked problem cannot be fully anticipated.

Box 20.5 The Contingent Nature of Wicked Problems

What are the answers to these questions about how to end or reduce school shootings?

- Will **increasing security** at schools lessen school shootings and bring them to an end more quickly? Or will such measures traumatize kids or make them feel like criminals?
- Would **stronger background checks** for gun ownership and bans on certain weapons decrease shooters' access to weapons? Or will they leave kids and teachers more vulnerable to attacks?
- Might providing more affordable **mental health services** steer possible shooters toward more productive outlets? Or will that provision shift necessary funding away from police staffing, training, and protective gear?

We cannot know the answers to questions like these with absolute certainty because too many unpredictable variables influence the outcomes. If we knew the answers with certainty, disagreements and discussion would be unnecessary because the best decision would be self-evident.

Because informative speaking is educational, it typically takes place *before* we select or advocate for any solution, conclusion, or belief. Communities need to know and understand before they can select and decide. Whatever the type of speech, informative speaking should result in an improved understanding of the topic addressed. In the case of deliberative speaking, audience members should also have a thorough review of several possible solutions. Because of the importance of deliberative presentations, we will focus the remainder of this chapter and the next chapter on the steps involved in producing and delivering such an address.

Preparing a Deliberative Presentation

The specific steps you should take to prepare a deliberative presentation include selecting a wicked problem, researching the problem, discovering a range of approaches, framing the issue for deliberation, and organizing the presentation. This chapter will explain the first three steps, and the next chapter will focus on framing and organization.

Box 20.6 Preparing a Deliberative Presentation

1. Select a wicked problem.
2. Research the wicked problem.
3. Discover a range of approaches that address the wicked problem.
4. Frame the wicked problem for deliberation:
    - Define the problem fairly.

- Identify the trade-offs of each approach.
- Specify the value(s) that motivate each approach.

5. Organize the deliberative presentation.

Selecting a Wicked Problem

Developing a deliberative presentation begins with identifying a wicked problem. Your instinct may be to shy away from difficult issues, particularly those you know little about. This reaction is natural, but try to resist it. Take the initiative to educate yourself. Effective democracies rely on participants who learn and help make decisions about civic matters—and who do not shy away from conflicting viewpoints. In fact, democracy thrives on diverse views and on reasoned, thoughtful discussion. As a student of public communication, learn to embrace productive conflict as a healthy element of democracy. You cannot avoid conflict without also avoiding participation in democratic governance.

Box 20.7 Identifying a Wicked Problem

1. List all the communities of which you are a part: your college, hometown, church, employment, online activity, state, and so on.

    a. Think about the problems each group is facing. Write them down.

    b. Look over your list. Which of the problems you identified meets the definition of a wicked problem: It is difficult to resolve because it involves diverse values and perspectives about what the problem is, who is responsible, and how it should be addressed.

2. Ask yourself, "What's important to me? Which issues really matter to me? What is upsetting to me?" Write down your answers.

    a. Do other members of your community share these concerns?

    b. Which of the problems you identified meets the definition of a wicked problem?

Researching the Wicked Problem



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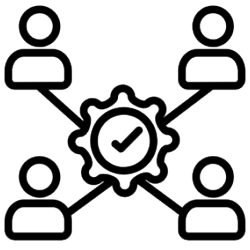
Once you have selected a wicked problem, use the advice provided in chapters 8 and 9 to research the issue and to identify and correct misinformation and disinformation—particularly about the problem, its background, impacts, and contributing factors.

Box 20.8 Researching Information About the Wicked Problem of School Shootings

If you focused your deliberative presentation on school shootings, what kinds of information should you find in your research? What would the audience need to know so they could base their opinions on accurate knowledge rather than presumptions, guesses, or misinformation? We would recommend you research the following:

- previous school shootings (how many, their locations, their nature [targeted or as a result of a dispute])
- number of victims
- demographic information about the shooters
- whether and how the number is trending compared to previous years
- past responses to school shootings (by police, medical personnel, legislative bodies, schools and students themselves)
- prevention efforts (such as wellness and security measures taken by schools)

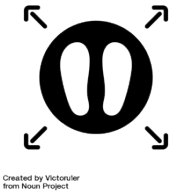
What else might you include?



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Factual information alone, however, cannot resolve a wicked problem. You must also consider *the people* impacted by, and invested in, the issue. In chapter 10, we identified the implicated audience as people affected by your message if it succeeds. We also introduced the concept of personal stakes, which are an individual's financial, material, and/or psychological investments that can be improved or worsened based on how an issue is addressed. A slight variation on implicated audiences and personal stakes is the idea of **stakeholders**, or groups and organizations that have vested interests in a wicked problem and its outcome because of the impact on their lives.

Every public issue impacts many different groups, so you should also research multiple stakeholders. Discovering their needs, lived experiences, values, and preferences can help you better understand—and inform your direct audience about—the issue from multiple angles.



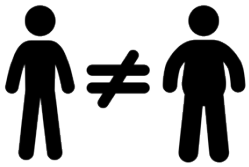
Created by Victoruler from Noun Project

You might also be a stakeholder yourself in the wicked problem you've chosen. If so, reflect on your own experiences and interests to inform your presentation. Relying *too* much on your own knowledge, however, will likely blind you to aspects of the problem you have never experienced or considered because of your standpoint. Recall from chapter 7 that standpoint theory suggests that our social identities influence our knowledge of the world and our perceptions of what is true or normal. In the case of school shootings, for example, our identity is likely to influence our perceptions of shooters, guns, gun violence, and police officers. If you are a white person who lives in a rural setting, for instance, you are more likely to associate school shootings with troubled kids and associate police officers and guns with offering potential safety and protection.

By researching and discovering additional stakeholders, you will discover not only additional perspectives but also how stakeholders are differently impacted by the wicked problem. Indeed, we recommend you research how inequity plays a role in the wicked problem and who it particularly impacts.

Box 20.9 Researching Stakeholders in the Wicked Problem of School Shootings

Stakeholders that quickly come to mind for school shootings include students and their families, teachers, and school staff members. You might count *yourself* among these stakeholders as a student who practiced drills in high school, knows a victim of gun violence, or has experienced gun violence firsthand. Consider what insights you can bring from your experience.



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Recognize, however, that not all students (or teachers or families) experience the problem similarly. You will find the following, for example:

- People associated with **wealthier, rural, and mostly white**-populated schools are more likely to fear school-targeted shootings because they largely occur in those settings.
- Students, teachers, and families associated with **urban, poor, and mostly minority** student bodies are more likely to fear shootings related to disputes and accidents, which occur more frequently at these settings and *much* more often than school-targeted shootings. Nearly half (47%) of shootings at K–12 schools from 2009 to 2019 were caused by disputes or accidents; only 14% were "school targeted," such as in Parkland, Florida.[2] Accordingly, students who are minorities are more likely to be victims of school shootings, yet they are *less likely* to receive news coverage, since "the most violent (and least common) stories [about school shootings] make the headlines."[3]
- Recognizing the differences will help you and the direct audience to better identify the issue's complexity and avoid conflating one stakeholder's experience with another's.

Also ask yourself, Beyond students, teachers, and their families, *who else has a stake* in the issue of school shootings and how it's resolved? You might include the following stakeholders:

2. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *K-12 Education: Characteristics of School Shootings* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, June 9, 2020), https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-455, archived at https://perma.cc/379H-MDPP.
3. Tiana Gaudette et al., "Media Coverage of School Shootings: A Distortion Analysis of Incident and Perpetrator Characteristics," *Crime & Delinquency*, published online November 28, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287231211263.

- **mental health counselors and nurses** who aid kids who are traumatized by gun violence or even by practice drills
- **community and religious leaders and organizations** who strive to help young people resolve grievances without violence
- **police officers** who are expected to respond swiftly and effectively to anyone inflicting harm on students
- organizations that have a somewhat narrower stake in how the use of guns is addressed, such as **reform advocates** like Moms Demand Action and **rights activists** such as the National Rifle Association, not to mention owners of businesses that sell guns and those who promote and teach gun safety

If you pushed yourself even more, you might add stakeholders such as the following:

- **legislators** who provide school funding, hold police forces accountable, and pass laws that govern gun rights
- **news media reporters** who make decisions about how to report school shootings
- **gender studies educators** like Jackson Katz and Richard Majors and Jennifer Mancini Billson who research and teach about connections between masculinity and violence

Your thinking about stakeholders should not result in telling your audience a laundry list of groups. Instead, use this work to clarify for your audience how the wicked problem differently affects the lives and interests of diverse groups and thus why their preferences might conflict. For instance, include examples of differing stakeholders when educating your audience about the wicked problem. As you discover and explain diverse approaches to the problem—a task we turn to next—specify which stakeholders are benefited and harmed by each approach and how.

Discovering a Range of Approaches

Once you have selected a wicked problem and researched its elements and stakeholders, identify a range of approaches to improving the issue. As discussed in chapter 2, we tend to divide issues into two sides, often "for" a policy change and "against" it. This binary approach is popular, but it reduces complicated issues to tidy, oppositional dichotomies as if everyone on each side is in complete agreement and no one from opposing sides agrees on anything.

Box 20.10 Avoid Two Opposing Approaches to the Wicked Problem

The issue of school shootings can easily become a two-sided debate over gun regulation. People are identified as being either

for	or	against gun regulation
	which is assumed to mean	
total prohibition of guns	vs.	unrestricted gun access

Of course, few people hold such extreme views either way. *Generally speaking*,

- those in favor of gun regulation do not propose that *all* guns be removed or banned from law-abiding citizens, and
- those against gun regulation are not in support of all persons having unlimited access to all types of weapons.

When we oversimplify positions as one extreme or another, we tend to lose sight of our common problem: "How do we best ensure our children's safety?" We also overlook more moderate and nuanced options. These could range from waiting periods and increased background checks and registration to "red flag" laws, permits, and legislation based on factors like age, criminal record, or intellectual ability.

Try to avoid getting caught up in two-sided policy debates. Do not make two of your approaches the extremes in a debate and the third approach a halfway measure or compromise between them. Such a setup prompts a debate rather than a deliberation, or it encourages most participants to choose the third option.

Instead, seek a much wider range of approaches. As box 20.11 advises, brainstorming, considering stakeholders' interests, and researching will help you find suitable and diverse approaches. You might, for instance, discover how inequity or systems of oppression contribute to the wicked problem and focus one approach on targeting such inequity.

Box 20.11 Discovering at Least Three Approaches to a Wicked Problem

The challenge of discovering at least three approaches for a deliberative presentation can be overcome by following a few tips:

- **Brainstorm:** Write down all the pertinent beliefs, opinions, and specific public actions that come to mind. You can even imagine additional approaches or possible actions that others may not have considered.
- **Consider stakeholders:** Return to the research you conducted on the stakeholders in this controversy. What policies and approaches did each advocate? Consider interviewing several key stakeholders, following the guidelines provided in chapter 9, to learn more about their experiences, perspectives, and preferred approaches.
- **Research the issue:** Focus particularly on sources that express public opinions and perspectives, such as letters to the editor or opinion editorials, news interviews, YouTube videos, podcasts, blogs, websites devoted to advocating a group's perspective, and opinion polls.

As you gather perspectives, preferences, and policy ideas, refrain from evaluating their merit. The sole criterion is that all ideas listed are *reasonable*. Options that no one in their right mind would choose are not useful for a deliberative presentation.

Then look for repetition or similarities across the ideas so you can sort them into three approaches to present to your audience. By **approach** we mean a *broad category* of similar opinions on how to address a wicked problem, typically gathered around a shared *logic* and *value*. A single approach should be broad enough to include several, and possibly conflicting, actions by multiple actors.

Box 20.12 Sample Approaches to the Wicked Problem of School Shootings

1.**Adopt stronger security efforts**, with the *logic* that if it is more difficult to bring or hide a gun on school property, there will be fewer shootings there.

a. Specific sample actions: Restrict kids to carrying clear backpacks, use metal detectors at entrances, and hire more on-site security officers.

b. People who like this approach would agree with the overall emphasis on security, but they might disagree with each other over which sample actions should be chosen.



Michelle E. Quick-Reyes, school resource officer by Defense Visual Information Distribution Service via Picryl, Public Domain.

2. **Improve youth wellness.** Such an approach poses the *logic* that if communities know and attend to young people's emotional and psychological needs better, then they will be less likely to resort to shooting each other.

a. Specific sample actions: Incorporate daily meditation practices into classrooms, hire more school counselors, offer training in dispute reconciliation, fund community centers, and strengthen family involvement.



Image by Meet the People, Witness the Events Big Mind Zen Center via Flickr, CC BY.

b. All these ideas are included in one approach because they emphasize youths' mental health and wellness, though people attracted to this approach might disagree on which specific sample actions will be most effective.

3. What might be a third broad approach?

Rest assured there is no one right set of three approaches for any wicked problem, and you might even want to present four or five. Your goal is simply to provide a set of truly divergent approaches that account for most, if not all, of the concerns and opinions you discovered about the wicked problem. Everyone in the community who hears your deliberative presentation should be able to find their own outlook somewhere in the approaches you provide.

Summary

Informative speaking educates an audience about a topic without biasing them toward a particular position, conclusion, or outcome. It helps provide the understanding necessary for productive public exchanges and decision-making to follow. Specifically, this chapter covered the following:

- By providing an audience with reliable information about public affairs, informative speaking helps community members participate in civic concerns more confidently and actively.
- Two common types of informative speeches include instructional speeches, which teach an audience about a process, concept, or entity, and problem-focused speeches that describe and explain a civic problem.
- A third type of informative speech is a deliberative presentation, which fairly and evenhandedly describes a wicked problem and multiple approaches to solving it with an emphasis on the benefits and drawbacks of each approach.
- Three of the five steps to form a deliberative presentation are selecting a wicked problem, researching the problem, and finding a range of approaches.

Key Terms

approach
contingency
deliberative discussion
deliberative presentation
deliberative process
informative speaking
stakeholders
tame problem
wicked problem

Review Questions

1. What is informative speaking, and what role can it serve in civic affairs?
2. What are three different types of informative speeches, and how do they differ?
3. What does it mean that wicked problems are marked by contingency?
4. What are the first three steps for developing a deliberative presentation?

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the three types of informative speaking discussed in this chapter have you seen or experienced? What did you learn?
2. Think about the communities of which you are a part. What might be suitable topics for an instructional speech, problem-focused speech, or deliberative presentation for one of those communities? What topics or problems need clarification and understanding?
3. Choose a current wicked problem and find or name three conflicting approaches to how to solve it. What logic does each approach apply? What sample actions does each include, and what value motivates each approach? What do you learn or notice by contrasting the approaches?

21. Framing and Organizing Deliberative Presentations

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Recognize framing in a public speech.
- Practice deliberative framing for a deliberative presentation.
- Organize a deliberative presentation.

The previous chapter introduced deliberative presentations as a type of informative speech. As we explained, in a deliberative presentation, the speaker strives to fairly and evenhandedly describe a wicked problem and multiple approaches to solving the problem. This presentation prepares a community for a deliberative discussion in which participants examine the problem and approaches to ultimately decide, together, how best to address the issue.

Preparing a deliberative presentation involves five steps. The previous chapter discussed the first three steps: choosing a wicked problem, researching the problem, and discovering a range of approaches that address the problem. This chapter picks up with the fourth and fifth steps: framing and organizing the deliberative presentation. We'll first explain framing as a rhetorical concept and differentiate persuasive framing from deliberative framing. We will then explain how to frame a deliberative presentation, followed by advising you on how to organize a deliberative presentation. The chapter ends by reflecting on the limitations and benefits of informative speeches.

Framing

Framing refers to the use of language to order and make sense of the world. That is, framing is how we employ language to help shape perceptions of reality. Consequently, you should be conscious of the language you employ when discussing public issues. For any complex and controversial social issue, your words can influence what an audience notices and thinks about, as well as what they overlook or downplay, when drawing conclusions.

The framing of any civic issue typically consists of three parts: It identifies or defines the *problem* (i.e., what's wrong), its *cause* (i.e., who's to blame), and the *solution* (i.e., what should be done). Every issue-specific frame includes—and typically promotes—these three elements, whether they are explicitly stated or merely implied.



Created by Sari Braga from Noun Project

You can use framing strategically when trying to persuade an audience, but framing for deliberation should strive for neutrality and fairness. We'll explain this distinction next.

Box 21.1 Framing as a Rhetorical Concept



Image via Rawpixel, Public Domain.

To better understand framing, consider a more typical use of the word. Think about the frames you use to border pictures or pieces of artwork. The size, color, and pattern of a frame can influence what you see or notice in the picture or art itself. Also, choosing what parts of a picture to include inside the frame and what parts to exclude (or crop out) significantly affects what viewers see and notice in the resulting framed image. Discursive framing (i.e., frames created by language) functions similarly.

Persuasive Framing

Different people will frame the same issue differently. Many of our disagreements result from conflicting frames for the same issue. **Persuasive framing**, then, occurs when a speaker strategically names or defines an issue in a way that sets up their desired outcome as effective and reasonable. Box 21.2 provides examples. Persuasive framing also typically involves stressing the advantages of the speaker's preferred solution and downplaying or ignoring its drawbacks. We will further explore this type of framing in chapter 25 when we discuss persuasion.

Box 21.2 Sample Persuasive Framing

When it comes to illegal immigration, speakers' language choices often signify their persuasive framing of the issue. For example, compare two different uses of language to describe unlawful immigration:

- "**Illegal aliens**" points to immigration as the problem, blames the immigrants for entering the country unlawfully, and typically promotes the solutions of deportation and securing our borders.
- "**Undocumented workers**" or "**unauthorized immigrants**" implies the problem is the lack of proper documentation or authorization (such as a certificate of citizenship), blames the long delays and significant costs immigrants face when applying for legal US citizenship, and typically promotes the solution of legislative reform to the citizenship process.

Notice how the problem, cause, and solutions identified in both frames correspond with each other; they compose an internal logic or coherent point of view.

Deliberative Framing

Since deliberative presentations are informative rather than persuasive, a speaker must establish the problem and possible solutions as clearly and neutrally as possible. **Deliberative framing**, then, occurs when a speaker names or defines the issue in a way all parties can agree upon and encourages the fair and direct comparison of approaches. By adopting deliberative framing, you enhance the audience's ability to make a group decision about how best to move forward.

Deliberative framing can be tricky, however, because each of the approaches you explore likely offers its own persuasive framing that defines the problem in a way that leads the audience to its preferred solution. Avoid adopting persuasive framings so you can encourage the public to consider more than one way of solving the problem.

How do you do that? We now turn to the work required to successfully frame a wicked problem for deliberation: define the problem fairly, identify the trade-offs of each approach, and specify the value or values that motivate each option.

Defining the Problem Fairly

It is critical that you define the wicked problem fairly; otherwise, the language you use can bias the audience in favor of one of the approaches. To depict the problem fairly, we recommend you adopt a common definition, phrase the problem as a "how" or "what" question, and avoid language used by proponents of any one approach.

First, find a *common definition* of the problem that all interested parties can agree upon—one that identifies the core issue *all* the approaches are trying to solve. To do so, you typically want to articulate the problem at a *greater level of abstraction or generality* than the definition offered by any one of the groups involved. That means presenting the problem as bigger than any specific actor (person, group, organization, or institution) or action. Doing so captures the ultimate focus of all interested parties, invites a variety of perspectives to be expressed, and enables a community to compare them more easily.

Second, phrase the problem as a "how" or "what" question, because these questions invite multiple answers. Avoid using "should," "does," or "is" to begin your question because they invite only two sides (for and against, or yes and no).

Finally, avoid language that is used by advocates for any one approach or else the conversation will unfairly favor that preference and unhelpfully narrow the issue. Box 21.3 offers an example of a problem definition that follows these suggestions.

By following these guidelines for defining the problem, no one cause of the problem is stated or clearly implied. Instead, any number of causes could—and should—be identified, revealing the complexity of the wicked problem and opening the door to numerous solutions or approaches as reasonable.

Box 21.3 Defining the Problem for a Deliberative Conversation About School Shootings

To help explain how to define the problem fairly for deliberative framing, let's take the wicked problem of school shootings. Compare the following appropriate and inappropriate ways of defining the problem and asking about the problem.

Defining the Problem of School Shootings

How Should We Define the Problem of School Shootings?		
YES: Deliberative	NO: Persuasive	NO: Persuasive
"incidents where one or more people are injured or killed by a firearm on school grounds"	"the exploitation of soft targets"	"the desperate actions of depressed individuals who don't respond well to life's stressors"
• offers a common definition by describing the event in general • does not imply any specific cause • consequently, invites the audience to consider a wide range of approaches	• adopts the language of advocates for greater security efforts • implies the cause is inadequate safety precautions at schools • encourages greater security measures to make schools "harder" places for shooters to inflict violence	• narrows the problem to the mindset of individual shooters • suggests the cause is the lack of support or community for shooters • infers the solution is improved access to mental health care and/or improved wellness

Phrasing the Problem as a Question

YES: Fair and open-ended	NO: Overly narrow	NO: Biased
"How can we best reduce the number of school shootings?"	"Should schools hire more security officers?"	"How can we stop people from using military assault weapons to kill schoolchildren?"
"What should we do to decrease school shootings?"	"Is it acceptable for a school to search students' backpacks?"	"How can we stop school shootings without restricting gun ownership?"

Identifying Trade-Offs

In addition to defining the problem fairly, deliberative framing requires you to identify the trade-offs of every approach.



Trade-offs are the relative advantages *and* disadvantages that accompany every approach to a wicked problem. Each solution offers certain benefits and drawbacks, prioritizes some people's needs and neglects or diminishes others, and poses challenges for implementation. Making wise choices requires understanding the drawbacks to each approach as well as the benefits.

The emphasis on trade-offs contrasts with persuasive framing, which typically only stresses the advantages of the speaker's preferred solution. Deliberative framing encourages us instead to comprehend that every wicked problem has multiple sides and no magic solution exists—one choice that stands out as the most obvious, that defeats the opposing views, or that will result in 100% agreement.

Box 21.4 Discovering the Trade-Offs of Each Approach

To discover trade-offs, answer the following questions by going back through your research and thinking on your own:

1. What are the benefits of this approach?

- What advantages are gained?
- Which stakeholders benefit from this approach, or whose needs are prioritized by this approach?

2. What are the drawbacks of this approach?

- What disadvantages are incurred?
- Which stakeholders are hurt by this approach, or whose needs are neglected or devalued? Recognize that a single approach can simultaneously benefit one stakeholder while hurting another.

3. What challenges might arise when implementing this approach?

Example: Returning to the example of school shootings, we can predict that increasing the frequency and realism of security drills at schools would likely mitigate the damage and end a shooting more quickly.

But…

It would simultaneously scare children who experience the drills as if they were real, which could decrease their ability to learn and flourish.

Weighing Competing Values

Further frame your topic for deliberation by identifying the value or set of values that motivates each approach. A **value** refers to a principle or quality that human beings are committed to and on which they base their thinking and decisions for important issues. Values tend to be central to our self-identity and to our community's identity.

To understand more clearly how values function in public controversies, we need to establish several principles: (1) we agree generally upon the attraction of basic values, (2) our value hierarchies typically shift from issue to issue and sometimes from case to case, and (3) even when we agree to prioritize the same value for a specific case, we may define or apply the value differently. Let's briefly explore each principle.

1. *We agree generally upon the attraction of basic values*, such as loyalty, freedom, and equality. Speakers, however, often imply they support a value (freedom, for instance) while their opponent does not. That is rarely the case.

- Instead, though we agree on most values, we rank them differently. A **value hierarchy** is a list of values ranked from the most to the least important.

  Example: If you and another person create a value hierarchy for equality, responsibility, freedom, family, cooperation, and creativity, you might each, for your own reasons, designate distinct orders. If that occurs

with a group of just six values, imagine how much you would diverge when ranking a significantly larger number of the hundreds of values that exist!

- When you and another person prioritize different values, a value dilemma emerges. A **value dilemma** represents a difficult choice among competing values, especially those associated with policy options.

Box 21.5 The Value Dilemma over the School Shooting in Parkland, Florida

On February 14, 2018, Nikolas Cruz walked into his former school, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, in Parkland, Florida, and began shooting. He killed seventeen people and wounded fourteen more. Reactions to this horrific incident reveal the value dilemma it presented as stakeholders prioritized diverse values to address it.



Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School sign by Coral Springs Talk via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

- **Security:** Scot Peterson, the sheriff's deputy assigned to protect the school, did not enter the school building during the six-minute massacre. He was charged with (but later acquitted for) child neglect and culpable negligence because of his alleged failure to provide security for the kids.
- **Life:** Cruz used an AR-15-style semiautomatic weapon to murder classmates. About a month later, on March 24, 2018, survivors of the shooting organized March for Our Lives to protest gun violence and demand legislators pass gun control measures. Florida representatives responded by raising the age required to buy firearms in Florida and passing a "red flag" law to remove guns from potential threats.
- **Freedom:** The National Rifle Association sued Florida, saying the increased age requirement to own a gun violated the freedom granted in the Second and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution. President Trump made similar comments and called to arm teachers with firearms instead.
- **Health:** Cruz suffered from depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and autism, leading Trump to comment on Cruz's mental health. Florida's legislature increased funding for mental health assistance at schools.

What do you think? Which value(s) would you prioritize to address a US school shooting? How does that choice impact the other values listed here? What other current wicked problems are creating tensions between multiple values?

2. *Our value hierarchies typically shift from issue to issue and sometimes from case to case.* Changing your value hierarchy does not mean you lack principles or consistency. It simply means you recognize the contingent nature of public controversies.

Example 1: A person who prioritizes "life" in the abortion controversy (and thus opposes most or all abortions) might prioritize justice over life in the case of capital punishment (and thus favor the death penalty even though it means terminating a life).

Example 2: Someone who generally favors capital punishment might oppose it when the criminal has an intellectual disability or is underage, thereby placing fairness (in that these criminals cannot be held fully responsible for their actions) over justice.

3. *Even when we agree to prioritize the same value for a specific case, we may define or apply the value differently.* Therefore, a speaker should not merely name the value prioritized by an approach but explain how it is defined and applied to the problem.

Example: Regarding school shootings, many people argue that safety is important. But what is considered "safe"? Arming teachers sounds to some like it will increase safety. That same action to others, however, sounds unsafe because of the increased likelihood of accidental shootings and the possible differential treatment by police toward Black teachers who carry a weapon compared to white teachers.

In sum, value dilemmas play a critical role in our conflicts, but too often rhetors speak in ways that hide or simplify them. Part of your job is to help your audience recognize, understand, and ultimately discuss the value dilemmas that undergird their disagreements. Doing so will provide the foundation they need to understand their conflicts and find creative ways to move forward together. But how can you present your findings and information in ways that facilitate such progress? We turn next to the final step of preparing a deliberative presentation.

Organizing the Deliberative Presentation

For your presentation to serve its purpose, it must also be clearly organized. Refer to chapters 12 through 14 to recall why clear organization is important, how to organize main points, and how to develop an introduction, conclusion, and transitions. Here we will suggest ways to tailor an introduction, main points, and conclusion for a deliberative presentation.

In addition to an attention-getter, the introduction might include a central idea (rather than a thesis statement). For a deliberative presentation, your central idea should name the wicked problem as a "what" or "how" question since this question is the presentation's focus. Your introduction might also include a preview statement that indicates the main points or sections. See Appendix A for an example of these suggestions.

You may find it useful to structure your main points using the problem-alternatives-solution pattern of arrangement discussed in chapter 13 *without the solution step included*. That means the body of a deliberative presentation could include four main points:

- one main point that explains the problem and
- a main point devoted to each of the three approaches explained. These are the options or alternatives offered for the audience to compare and contrast.
- Notice there is no main point focused on a preferred solution, since that would make the speech persuasive rather than deliberative in nature.

The main points devoted to the approaches could explain the logic of each approach in addressing the problem, its benefits and drawbacks, and the value(s) it prioritizes.

You can conclude by restating the wicked problem and three perspectives and inviting the audience to engage the information you provided through a deliberative discussion.

Box 21.6 Deliberative Presentation Media

A deliberative presentation can be delivered through at least three different media:

- A **speech** delivered by an individual or group of people. Often the same person or people who deliver the speech then function as moderators of the deliberative discussion (discussed in chapter 22).
- A **short film or video**. A video can more easily humanize the issue by including video clips of people affected by the problem and/or people voicing support for each of the approaches.
- A **written booklet**. The National Issues Forum has made what it (and now others) call "issue books" popular. Such booklets are typically concise, yet dense, explanations of a wicked problem and three approaches, though their precise format varies.

Of course, a deliberative presentation can be delivered with two or more of the media listed. Some deliberation practitioners, for instance, provide an issue book to the public in advance of a deliberative discussion and then show a short video right before the discussion to remind them of the options and to educate anyone who did not read the booklet.

Ultimately, creating a deliberative presentation using the five steps outlined in this and the previous chapter will help you prepare an audience for a deliberative discussion. A successful deliberative presentation in any form helps create an environment in which participants are able and willing to listen to each other.

Limitations and Benefits of Informative Speaking



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Informative speaking can empower ordinary people to participate in public concerns more knowledgably and actively. However, if done poorly, informative speaking can leave an audience confused, overwhelmed, and even less likely to become active in civic affairs. You might think of a speech you heard that simply regurgitated piles of information. Maybe the speaker stated statistic after statistic, or maybe they simply compiled a list of facts or quotations. The speaker needed to help the audience make sense of the information, such as by clearly organizing the speech and more effectively explaining how the pieces of information related to each other.



Created by Gan Khoon Lay from Noun Project

Informative speaking can also manipulate or constrain an audience. When dishonestly developed, a speech can disguise itself as educational when it actually promotes a particular viewpoint, solution, or action. We might think of the example of infomercials, so called for presenting themselves as informative programs but functioning as commercials to sell products. Audiences must always be wary of informative speeches that rely on biased sources, fail to provide more than one perspective, present overly simplistic depictions of alternative viewpoints, or identify only the positive points of a perspective.

Even given these limitations, the benefits of informative speaking in general and deliberative presentations in particular far outweigh the dangers. Well-researched, fair, and balanced informative speeches equip ordinary community members to take an active and influential role in civic affairs.

Summary

The process of forming a deliberative presentation involves the steps of framing the topic for deliberation and organizing the presentation. Specifically, the chapter covered the following:

- Framing is the use of language to make sense and shape perceptions of the world. The framing of any civic issue typically consists of three parts: It identifies or defines the *problem*, its *cause*, and the *solution*.
- Deliberative framing of a problem requires a speaker to fairly define the problem so all parties agree with its characterization, identify trade-offs for every approach, and identify the competing values among the approaches.
- Organizing a deliberative presentation is likely to draw on the problem-alternatives-solution pattern of reasoning without the solution step included.
- If done poorly, informative speaking can endanger civic engagement by overwhelming or confusing an audience. If presented dishonestly, informative speaking can actually advocate a particular solution or perspective.

Key Terms

deliberative framing
framing
persuasive framing
trade-off
value
value dilemma
value hierarchy

Review Questions

1. What is deliberative framing, and what does it entail?
2. How should you organize a deliberative presentation?
3. What are the limitations of informative speaking?

Discussion Questions

1. Choose a wicked problem. Find or invent a way to frame the issue persuasively. Now apply deliberative framing. Which is easier to construct? Why?
2. Is it ever truly possible to define a problem in a way that everyone agrees? Are there any disadvantages of doing that?
3. How might a speaker claim to inform the audience but actually, and perhaps subtly, attempt to persuade them instead?

22. Helping Communities Make Difficult Decisions Through Deliberative Discussions

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Accurately describe the goals of a deliberative discussion.
- Identify historical uses of deliberative discussion.
- Demonstrate five intellectual virtues as participants in a deliberative discussion.
- Avoid using calls for civil conversations to quell disagreement and maintain the status quo.

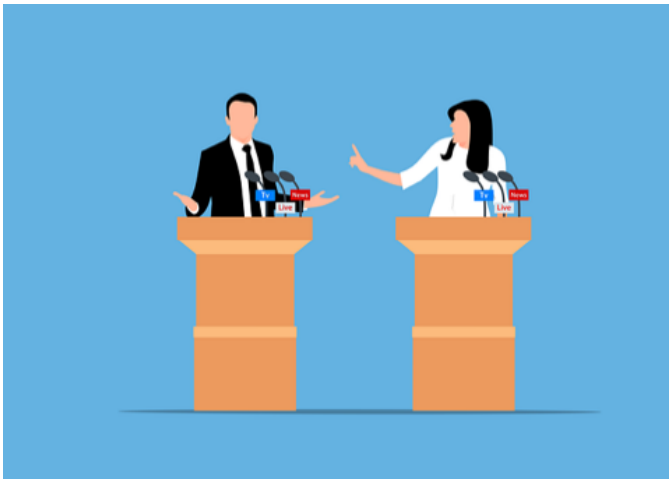


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You have likely witnessed or participated in a debate. Perhaps you watched US presidential candidates like Kamala Harris and Donald Trump debate over foreign policy, or maybe you watched Shannon Sharpe and Skip Bayless debate the merits of a particular basketball player on Fox Sports. If so, you know that debates typically feature clashing arguments for and against a topic. They tend to emphasize disagreements between two sides and imply that one position is a winner and the other is a loser.

You probably have *not* watched or participated in a deliberative discussion. In contrast to debate, a deliberative discussion encourages thoughtful investigation of multiple approaches to improving a public issue. As we will explain, it takes dedicated work and planning to organize a deliberative discussion, and it typically requires guidance from facilitators.

However, a deliberative discussion has many advantages over debate. It improves participants' understanding of an issue's complexity, helps them find common ground among competing interests, and enables them to make hard choices. This chapter will help you better understand the nature of a deliberative discussion and how to lead and participate in one.

We will begin this chapter by identifying the major goals of a deliberative discussion. We will then introduce you briefly to the history of deliberative discussions in the United States. Next, the chapter will identify five intellectual virtues that participants in deliberative discussions should adopt to help ensure productive conversations. The chapter will end by considering the general benefits and limitations of deliberative discussions.



Group discussion by ILRI via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND.

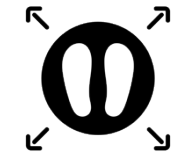
Goals of Deliberative Discussions

In chapter 20, we defined a deliberative discussion as a group conversation through which a community, guided by one or more moderators, examines a complex public problem and a range of available solutions to ultimately arrive at a choice or conclusion. We explained that the deliberative discussion nearly always follows some type of deliberative presentation (though both may vary in format and timing). Together, the deliberative presentation and subsequent discussion form the deliberative process, or what some people refer to simply as deliberation.

A deliberative discussion strives to produce both public knowledge and public judgment. Let's talk briefly about each goal.

Public Knowledge

Public knowledge refers to participants' shared and improved understanding of the wicked problem and possible solutions as they offer and hear multiple points of view. Recall standpoint theory from chapter 7, which posits that our social identities influence our knowledge of the world and our perceptions of what is "true" or "normal."



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Created by Yogi Aprelliyanto from Noun Project

By hearing and genuinely considering viewpoints, experiences, and values from participants with differing standpoints, deliberative discussion shifts us from our individual, partial knowledge to a *shared*, public knowledge that is more robust. Public knowledge develops as we, together, better recognize the complexity of problems, the merits of alternative views, and the demerits of our originally preferred solution.

Box 22.1 Goals of Deliberative Discussions

- produce **public knowledge**: participants' shared and improved understanding of the wicked problem and possible solutions as they offer and hear multiple points of view
- produce **public judgment**: the community's thoughtful choice about its desired approach or next steps to address the problem based on the public knowledge developed during the discussion

Public Judgment

A deliberative discussion's ultimate goal is to produce public judgment. **Public judgment** is the community's thoughtful choice about its desired approach or next steps to address the problem. Public judgment is based on the public knowledge developed during the discussion.



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Two elements are worth noting here: First is that the group's choice comes *after* they have produced public knowledge. That timing helps prevent what modern psychology scholars call **groupthink**, which is a phenomenon that occurs when members' desire for harmony outweighs their willingness to critically examine alternative perspectives. Such critical examination (including scrutiny and disagreement) is required in a deliberative discussion.

The second aspect worth noting is that a deliberative discussion seeks to move participants to *choice making*. The ultimate goal of a deliberative discussion is for participants to choose the next best step(s) to solve the problem and ease the controversy, having considered the trade-offs of at least three broad approaches.

The next steps chosen can vary widely, such as adopting a particular approach, exploring new options, or finding answers to questions raised during the discussion. Naturally, participants in a deliberative discussion will not always come to an agreement about the next step(s) to take. But because they have thoughtfully considered the options and competing interests together, each will be prepared to advance a thoughtful proposal.

The "Public" in Public Knowledge and Public Judgment

Keep in mind that the "public" in public knowledge and public judgment signals that a public is required to produce each *together as a group*. Recall from chapter 2 that a public refers to a collection of people who are joined together in a cause of common concern. Thus, public knowledge and public judgment can only be achieved by such a collection of people. These goals cannot be attained by individuals working alone. Box 22.2 offers an example of a public that engaged in deliberative discussion. In the next section, we look back historically to recognize the long legacy of deliberative discussions to aid public decision-making.

Box 22.2 Public Knowledge and Public Judgment in a Deliberative Discussion

A deliberative discussion occurred in Indiana in 2022 to address the management of a local watershed. A watershed is an area of land that directs rainfall and snowmelt toward local creeks, streams, and rivers. In this case, the watershed spread across four Indiana counties. The discussion was sparked by widespread concern over the poor quality of water entering a nearby creek due to a variety of pollutants, including *E. coli* from manure spread on adjacent farmland, contamination from improperly installed septic tanks, and litter from people who recreate on the creek. However, stakeholders disagreed about how to best improve the water quality or who to blame.

Consequently, trained facilitators at a nearby college organized a deliberative discussion for a variety of residents and local organizations across the counties. During their discussion, participants produced the following:



Wabash River Watershed by Davodd at the English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA.

- **Public knowledge** about the issue's complexity, such as recognizing that both farmers who own nearby land and recreators who canoe on the creek are impacted by the water quality *and* contribute to its pollution.
- **Public judgment** when they agreed on an educational approach to preserving the watershed's health. They determined that educational efforts should also attend to related concerns like soil runoff and animal welfare versus only targeting water quality.[1]

1. Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse, "Upper Creek Watershed, Report on Initial 319 Grant Public Meeting," March 16, 2022.

Deliberative Discussions in Historical Context



Pnyx Bema by Tomisti via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

People in the Western political tradition have historically used deliberative discussions to enact and improve democracy.

One of the earliest venues for democratic governance—during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE—was the Athenian Assembly. As we discussed in chapter 1, Greek citizens convened there to raise, discuss, and make decisions about public issues.

Perhaps because of the strengths of such deliberative exchanges, we find movements in the United States that strongly resemble the Athenian precursor, albeit on a smaller scale. Box 22.3 provides several US examples from over the past five centuries! For hundreds of years, Americans have recognized the value of deliberative discussions in North American democratic participation.

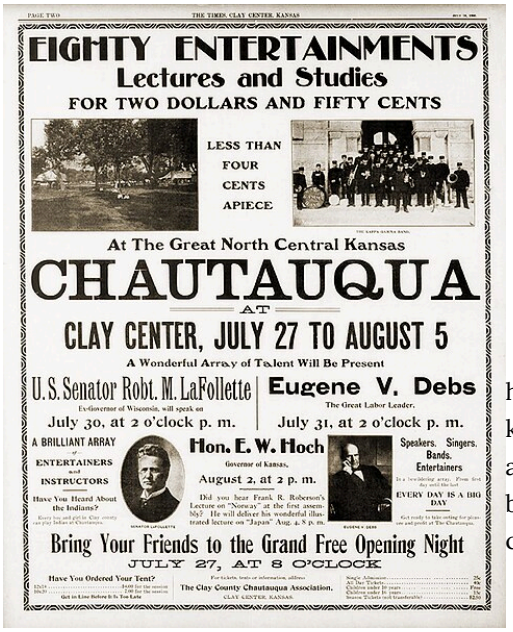
Box 22.3 Deliberative Discussions in the United States from the Seventeenth to Twenty-First Centuries

In the **seventeenth century**, New England colonists developed town hall meetings. These meetings were informally structured, met on an ad hoc basis, and included citizens, town officials, and magistrates. As colonists grew dissatisfied with British rule, town hall meetings became a place to discuss their situation and to deliberate possible actions.

During the **nineteenth century**, new efforts arose in the United States to promote public discussions and educate our young country's citizens. The Lyceum movement emerged in the 1820s and lasted until just after the Civil War in the 1860s. Teacher and scientist Josiah Holbrook started the movement and named it after Aristotle's school in ancient Greece. It provided adult education and a place to discuss public issues.



Francestown, NH Meetinghouse by Magicpiano via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.



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The Clay County Chautauqua Association,
CLAY CENTER, KANSAS.

Clay Center Chautauqua Ad Clay Center Times via Wikipedia, Public Domain.

The Chautauqua movement began in 1874 on the heels of the Lyceum movement. It similarly functioned as a kind of adult education that included discussion of civic affairs. It started in New York and spread across the country by 1880. Though most groups disbanded by the 1930s, you can still find Chautauqua meetings today.

The Open Forum movement developed around the same time as the Chautauqua movement. Starting from such established open forums as the Cooper Union in New York City (1894)[2] and the Ford Hall Forum in Boston (1908),[3] the Open Forum movement gained popularity across the country during the 1930s. It utilized community discussions to educate and engage adult citizens in social and political topics.



The Cooper Union's Foundation Building by Ajay Suresh via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

During this same period of the **1920s and 1930s**, American academics also grew interested in the role of public discussions. These years correspond with the aftermath of World War I; the Progressive Era when many social reformers attempted to strengthen national democratic practices; and the Great Depression. Some college professors of speech responded to societal concerns by teaching students how to engage in discussions.[4] This added focus increased and extended through the mid-1950s but largely faded out of university curricula by the 1960s.[5]

Enthusiasm for deliberative discussions arose again near the **end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century**. During the 1980s, increased social fragmentation, political disaffection, and even illiteracy in civic affairs prompted nonprofit organizations like the Charles F. Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forum to focus on teaching, researching, and advancing deliberative discussions. In 2002, the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation became a meeting place for practitioners. As the twenty-first century progressed, several universities and colleges established centers and initiatives to promote deliberative conversations on and off their campuses.

Despite ongoing interest, however, few US residents today have been trained in or experienced a deliberative discussion. Instead, unproductive discourse, which we characterized in chapter 2, seems to dominate mainstream communication. Consequently, we focus this chapter on instructions for effectively *participating* in deliberative discussions. The next chapter offers guidance for *leading* deliberative discussions.

2. "History," The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, https://cooper.edu/about/history, archived February 10, 2025, at https://perma.cc/VQF6-HAUZ.
3. Irina Rogova, "Ford Hall Forum: Promoting Free Speech Since 1908," *Moakley Archive & Institute Digital Collections*, 2016, updated 2018, https://moakleyarchive.omeka.net/exhibits/show/fordhallforum/openforum, archived at https://perma.cc/ANX4-D78K.
4. William Keith, *Democracy as Discussion: The American Forum Movement and Civic Education* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 144, 152, 157.
5. Keith, *Democracy as Discussion*, 158, 193.

Participating in a Deliberative Discussion

All participants in a discussion play a role in the outcome. Those who dominate the discussion, block the ideas of others, seek attention for themselves, or engage in excessive sarcasm obviously harm the discussion. Those who participate in the discussion with an open mind, frankness, and sensitivity to others help the discussion thrive. In the following table, we highlight five intellectual virtues—and ways you can adopt them—to practice good participation in a deliberative discussion.

Active listening	• Seek to understand others' comments. When ideas are unclear, ask questions. • Check the accuracy of your understanding by briefly paraphrasing what a speaker has said.	• "Could you help me understand what you mean by that?" • "So it sounds like you're saying…"
Intellectual humility and doubt	• Make clear the limitations of your knowledge and perspective. • Seek new knowledge, understanding, and a broader perspective.	• "From what I understand…but I could be wrong." • "That's new to me. Can you say more about that?"
Inclusiveness	• Ensure all perspectives are heard fully and fairly. • Invite all participants into the discussion.	• "I think we're missing farmers' voices. I wonder what they'd think about this issue." • "I'm interested in hearing from Marcus."
Imagination	• Entertain and develop ideas that might not be realistic when first presented but can be made more practical with a little creative thinking.	• "What if…" • "Maybe we could try…"
Reflectiveness	• Think in new and constructive ways. • Be willing to challenge even long-held beliefs or ideas.	• "I never realized that before." • "What might be an argument against this idea?"

Notice that employing the virtues requires *actively* taking responsibility for the discussion. That might sound surprising. After all, when you are not leading the discussion, it can be tempting to zone out, go along with what others say, or slyly scroll on your phone. Even as a participant, however, you can and should help shape the conversation. That means paying attention, listening ethically (as discussed in chapter 6), and speaking up in ways that embody the five intellectual virtues. When you accept such responsibility, you ensure the group will reap the benefits of deliberative discussions, to which we turn next.

Benefits and Limitations of Deliberative Discussions



Created by Alice Design from Noun Project

The importance of deliberative discussions can hardly be exaggerated. Public deliberation provides us the invaluable opportunity to engage in discussion with those whose opinions differ. When discussing a problem of mutual concern, we realize those who disagree with us are reasonable, engaged individuals. We may even learn that how we characterize such people is untenable.

Box 22.4 Humanizing the Opposition

Imagine being a participant in a deliberative discussion about water quality, similar to the Indiana discussion explored in an earlier example. Perhaps you walk in, ready to argue against small-town inhabitants and against environmentalists.

You may discover the following:

- The "local yokel," for example, turns out to be a third-generation farmer—say, Marcus—who is trying to shift from using chemical pesticides to living organisms to control pests but cannot find sufficient funding.
- The "tree hugger" may be a woman—say, Amanda—who wants to improve water quality so she and her kids can continue to enjoy canoeing together.

When the opposition is given a name and a voice to explain the reasons for their position, we can better connect as people and find more productive ways forward.

Also, while deliberative discussions are hard work, if done well, they result in better decisions. In contrast to when experts or officials make decisions on their own, deliberative discussion allows the public to directly influence community agenda-setting and choices. That is, ordinary residents can influence what topics community leaders attend to and how. Deliberative discussions also help community members avoid the pitfalls of unreflective bias and groupthink. A wiser set of decisions results from sharing opinions and experiences as well as from systematically considering the benefits and drawbacks of every approach.

Deliberative discussions, however, incur limitations as well. From chapter 4, you may recall philosopher Nancy Fraser's critique of the public sphere—a theory developed by sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas.[6] While the public sphere is meant to be a gathering of community members to discuss public issues as equal participants, it can actually privilege members with higher social status and increased knowledge of participation norms—such as how the group expects you to talk and behave during a deliberative discussion.



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As we further discussed in chapter 4, talk or behavior that falls outside expectations may be shut down or excluded because it's deemed inappropriate. The inappropriate talk or behavior is often accused of being *uncivil*. We defined *uncivil speech* in chapter 4 as rhetoric that violates decorum

6. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25 (1990): 56–80.

because it is disrespectful, angry, and/or impolite. Censorship of uncivil speech can stop discussions from becoming unproductive or divisive, but it can also be abused by shutting out people with lower social status.

Typically, people in power get to decide when expectations have been violated. What that means is what counts as appropriate behavior for deliberation is not universally or objectively agreed upon, so those in power typically get to decide where to draw the line.

In chapter 4, we explained that lines, or standards of decorum, are drawn through *policing discourse*, which is the use of rhetoric to determine preferred or appropriate ways of talking together when deliberating public issues. Policing discourse aims to censor the speech of people who challenge the social order.

Box 22.5 Calls for Decorum That Silence Dissent

It's not hard to find historical examples of people in power accusing others, typically with lower social status, of violating "civil speech" or "decorum" to silence their disagreement.



Colin Kaepernick by TechCrunch via Flickr, CC BY.

For example, in 2016 former professional football player Colin Kaepernick protested police violence against Black people by kneeling during the national anthem at games. Objectors accused Kaepernick of inappropriate behavior due to his posture (kneeling), timing (during the national anthem), identity (as a professional football player), and context (at a sports event). The most powerful US political leader at the time, President Donald Trump, publicly voiced such objections. Referring to Kaepernick and other NFL players who joined his protest, Trump proclaimed that "when somebody disrespects our flag," the NFL owner should fire him.[7]

7. Dan Cancian, "Everything Trump Has Said About NFL Kneeling So Far," *Newsweek*, June 8, 2020, https://www.newsweek.com/everything-donald-trump-said-nfl-anthem-protests-1509333, archived at https://perma.cc/5ET2-ZDLE.

In 2023, Montana Representative Zooey Zephyr, the first transgender lawmaker in Montana, argued against legislation that would restrict transgender health care for youth, warning that the bill's supporters would have "blood on their hands." Montana House Majority Leader Sue Vinton called the comments out of order and then led a vote that banned Zephyr from attending or speaking during future floor sessions.[8]

In both examples, calls for respectful behavior and civil discourse censored dissenting perspectives instead of engaging with, or even debating, their merits.



Zooey Zephyr by Pax Ahimsa Gethen via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

When used to quell disagreement, policing discourse strategically shifts attention *away from* the dissent raised (in the cases in box 22.5, against racism in the legal sphere and transphobia in the legislative context) and *toward* the individuals or groups protesting (Kaepernick and Zephyr). Consequently, such rhetoric implies that the *individuals* need to change (or be "civilized") and that the status quo, including existing systems of inequity, should be maintained.

NPR's Karen Grigsby Bates goes so far as to argue that "pushing back against the status quo will be seen as inherently uncivil by the people who want to maintain it. And there are always higher standards expected of those people pushing back."[9]

Deliberative discussion leaders should, therefore, proceed with sensitivity in light of these limitations and historical abuses.

- One suggestion, which we explore more in the next chapter, is to invite participants to "*call out*" *problematic language* while keeping participants in the conversation. In other words, deepen and widen the conversation instead of shutting it down or censoring voices.
- Also, encourage participants to expect a productive discussion to *make them uncomfortable*. It is likely their assumptions and values will be challenged. They will likely hear perspectives they had not considered and realize their conclusions need to change. They may hear language that makes them upset and need to articulate why. They may also need to listen to others express anger about things they say or solutions they prefer.

8. Shaylee Ragar and Acacia Squires, "Montana House Vote to Formally Punish Transgender Lawmaker, Rep. Zooey Zephyr," *National Public Radio*, April 26, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/04/26/1172158461/montana-gop-transgender-zooey-zephyr-punishment-banned-speaking-lgbtq, archived at https://perma.cc/M6QR-NDS2.
9. Karen Grigsby Bates, "When Civility Is Used as a Cudgel Against People of Color," *National Public Radio*, March 14, 2019, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/03/14/700897826/when-civility-is-used-as-a-cudgel-against-people-of-color, archived at https://perma.cc/98HL-C8P6.

If leaders take appropriate steps and participants allow themselves to be uncomfortable, deliberative discussions can model and teach the civic skills people need to productively contribute to their communities. Participating in a discussion teaches participants to listen as much as they talk; to ask questions as well as advocate ideas; to recognize the drawbacks, and not just the benefits, of their ideas; and to consider the consequences of any choice upon a wider range of community members than only themselves.

Summary

The ability to discuss civic concerns productively with your fellow residents is an integral aspect of public speaking. This chapter offered you an explanation of the nature, benefits, and US lineage of deliberative discussions. It also provided guidance on how to effectively participate in such discussions, and it warned against calls for civil speech that silence dissenting voices.

- A deliberative discussion is a group conversation through which a community, guided by one or more moderators, thoughtfully and thoroughly examines a complex public problem as well as the range of available solutions to ultimately arrive at a decision or conclusion.
- The ongoing importance of civic-centered discussions is demonstrated through several historical US movements and organizations dedicated to public discussion and adult education.
- Productively participating in a deliberative discussion requires exhibiting several intellectual virtues, including active listening, intellectual humility and doubt, inclusiveness, imagination, reflectiveness, and responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
- Leading or participating in a deliberative discussion can result in better decision-making, potentially help you connect with people whose opinions differ from your own, and teach civic skills that people need to productively contribute to their communities.
- The norms of participating in deliberative discussions can be used to exclude community members, particularly with marginalized positionalities, by accusing them of violating "civil speech" or breaching "decorum." Such accusations can function to maintain the status quo and systems of inequity.

Key Terms

groupthink
public judgment
public knowledge

Review Questions

1. What are the two main goals of a deliberative discussion?
2. What virtues does an effective participant in a deliberative discussion exhibit?
3. What are two benefits and one limitation of a deliberative discussion?

Discussion Questions

1. How do public knowledge and public judgment differ from individual knowledge and judgment? How do they overlap?
2. Which of the five intellectual virtues do you find easiest to adopt during discussions? Most difficult? Why?
3. Find an example (locally or nationally) of a person who was silenced because they did not speak in appropriate ways, as defined by a powerful leader. What was the person trying to say or do? What about their way of speaking did the leader critique? Should the person have been allowed to speak that way? Why or why not?

23. Facilitating Deliberative Discussions

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Recognize the stages of a deliberative discussion.
- Explain what it means for a deliberative discussion group to talk through an issue as opposed to talking about an issue.
- Fulfill the tasks of an effective deliberative discussion leader.

The previous chapter helped you appreciate and participate in deliberative discussions. It explained the goals, historical uses, benefits, and limitations of such discussions. It also described five intellectual virtues participants should adopt to ensure productive conversations.

But how do you *lead* deliberative discussions? This chapter provides detailed instructions for facilitators. The chapter will first identify the basic structure a deliberative discussion can follow. It then explores one of the most important facilitation tasks: asking effective questions. Next, we provide instructions for helping participants talk through an issue instead of talking about it. The chapter ends with additional specific tasks that discussion leaders should fulfill.

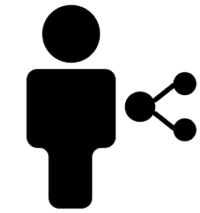
Deliberative Discussion Structure

How should you begin a deliberative discussion? What should you spend the most time on? How might you conclude a discussion? Facilitators often use a template or structure for guiding participants through a deliberative discussion. We will adopt a structure inspired by the National Issues Forum (NIF). It includes five major stages: personal stakes, approach one, approach two, approach three, and reflection period. This structure can and should be adapted to suit a specific community's problems and needs, and the structure itself evolves as NIF and related scholars and practitioners develop adaptations.

Box 23.1 NIF's Five Stages of a Deliberative Discussion

1. Personal stakes
2. Approach one
3. Approach two
4. Approach three
5. Reflection period

Personal Stakes



Deliberative discussions often begin with introducing *personal stakes* by inviting participants to state their connection to the issue. In chapter 10, we defined personal stakes as an individual's financial, material, and/or psychological investments that could be improved or worsened based on how an issue is addressed. In chapter 20, we explained the related concept of stakeholders, or groups and organizations that have vested interests in a wicked problem and its outcome because of the impacts on their lives. Ideally, participants in your deliberative discussion include a variety of stakeholders.

As a facilitator, you can invite discussion participants to self-disclose their personal stakes in the issue. Ask if they are comfortable sharing their connections to the problem and even how it has impacted them or people close to them.

This stage serves several functions. It encourages discussants to empathize with one another and gravitate toward shared concerns and interests. It also immediately moves the discussion from an abstract consideration of the topic to something more tangible and personal. Finally, this opening helps equalize participants because it avoids formal introductions that could emphasize differing degrees of societal power.

Box 23.2 Facilitation Questions About Participants' Personal Stakes

- Why are you concerned about this issue?
- How have you witnessed or experienced the problem in our community?
- How has this issue impacted you or people you know?

Approaches



Image by Dan Moyle via Flickr, CC BY.

After the personal stakes stage, a deliberative discussion group typically explores each of three or more *approaches*, one at a time. Recall from the previous chapters that the deliberative presentation and the deliberative discussion work hand in hand. In setting up the discussion, the deliberative presentation identifies and explains the problem and each of the approaches that participants will consider during the discussion.

Deliberative discussions explore every approach with the goal of building public knowledge. In the previous chapter, we defined public knowledge as participants' shared and improved understanding of the wicked problem and possible solutions as they offer and hear multiple points of view.

To build such knowledge, facilitators encourage participants to share their perspectives on each approach, consider and possibly generate specific actions that fall within that approach, invite consideration of what stakeholders stand to lose or gain from the approach, and evaluate the benefits *and* drawbacks (i.e., trade-offs) of the approach.

Discussion leaders also ask participants to weigh approaches, specific actions, and values against one another.

Such weighing requires discussants to really talk through the problem and confront tough choices rather than simply talking about each approach independently. We'll more fully explore this task in a later section about the groan zone.

Box 23.3 Facilitation Questions About Approaches

Questions About the Benefits of an Approach or Sample Action

- What are the benefits of this approach or action for our community?
- How might someone argue on behalf of this idea?
- Why do you find this approach or action attractive?

Questions About the Costs or Challenges of an Approach or Sample Action

- What are the drawbacks to this approach or action?
- What might be an argument against that suggestion?
- What will the consequences of this approach or action likely be for our community?

Questions About the Value Dilemmas and Trade-Offs

- Who are the major stakeholders, and what do they stand to lose or gain from this approach?
- What is the central trade-off between these two actions? Within this approach? Between these two approaches?
- What values conflict among the approaches?

Box 23.4 Case Study: Facilitation Questions During a Deliberative Discussion

The organizer of an Indiana deliberative discussion about a local watershed (introduced in the previous chapter) focused their deliberative presentation on the water quality, land use, and management of the watershed. They identified the three approaches:

1. Limiting river access for recreationists
2. Educating stakeholders on how to improve the river and its use
3. Addressing environmental contamination from farm runoff

They chose these approaches based on survey results of various groups' awareness of the issue, concerns, and openness to options.

During their deliberative discussion, when facilitators focused participants on the **third approach**—addressing environmental contamination from farm runoff—they asked participants to discuss the sample action of giving farmers and landowners full authority over watershed maintenance. To prompt discussion, the facilitators **asked** participants

- to consider the **benefits** of this sample action,
- which **stakeholders** would be privileged and which would be marginalized in that scenario (such as recreators who don't own the land but are also affected by the creek's water quality), and

- what the **drawbacks** would be of such marginalization.

This set of questions helped participants consider the trade-offs of empowering any one group with addressing the water quality issue. It also encouraged them to reflect on which stakeholders would stand to gain or lose from implementing the approach.

Reflection Period

A deliberative discussion usually ends with a **reflection period**. This stage allows discussants to reflect on the conversation they just had and shifts them toward public judgment. We defined public judgment in the previous chapter as the community's thoughtful choice about its desired approach or next steps to address the problem based on the public knowledge developed during the discussion.



As a facilitator, it is typically *not* helpful to use the reflection period to merely repeat what was said during the discussion. Instead, it is more useful to highlight or invite participants to name the common ground and key tensions that arose during the discussion.

Box 23.5 Facilitation Questions About Common Ground and Key Tensions

- What can you all agree about X (the problem, a particular approach or action, etc.)?
- What trade-offs are you all willing to accept? What trade-offs do you agree are unacceptable?
- What trade-offs do you most strongly disagree about?
- What important value dilemmas emerged among you?

By recognizing common ground *and* key tensions, the reflection period helps the group identify which approaches and actions they prefer and the next steps to address the issue. They should try to name actions appropriate for a wide range of actors, including ideas for community members in addition to elected or appointed officials or experts. While the group may not achieve consensus about the actions it prefers, the members should decide the next steps to take to continue their momentum.

Box 23.6 Facilitation Questions About Future Actions and Steps

- Having discussed several approaches to solving the problem, which do you prefer? Why?
- What actions would you prioritize? Who should do them? What might ordinary community members do to address this problem?

- What way might we proceed that would address everyone's most serious concerns?
- What are the next best steps to keeping momentum moving forward on this topic?

Talking through all five stages of a deliberative discussion can be time-consuming and tiresome. Indeed, it's not always possible when time does not allow. In those cases, you may need to truncate the stages, such as by shortening the personal stakes stage or even spending time on two approaches instead of three. However you progress through the discussion, asking effective questions is critical to a productive deliberative discussion.

Asking Effective Questions

Asking effective questions is crucial to facilitating a deliberative discussion. Questions drive discussions. Knowing when to narrow or broaden questions and what type of questions to ask are skills a discussion leader must learn over time.

Use Broad and Narrow Questions During the Deliberation Stages

Starting Questions

Early in a discussion, relatively *broader* questions—that is, questions that are not overly narrow or specific—tend to help, especially about participants' *personal stakes* in the issue. Box 23.2 includes examples of broad questions. You want participants to learn about one another, and such questions invite a wide array of responses.

Broader questions are also best when you start a conversation about *each of the approaches*. Beginning that way allows discussants, rather than facilitators, to determine what specific ideas or trade-offs they want to consider.

If you begin a conversation about an approach with questions that are overly specific, the discussion can become mired in details and, consequently, lose participants. On the other hand, if questions are *too* broad or unclear to begin with, the discussion will suffer from confusion. Box 23.7 illustrates this tension with a specific example.

Box 23.7 Starting Questions That Are Too Specific or Too Broad

Let's return to the Indiana watershed deliberative discussion. Imagine a facilitation leader started a conversation about a specific approach with the following questions:

- **Too specific:** "Which kinds of trees will best prevent pollution from flowing into the water?" Notice how this question too quickly narrows the conversation to a very specific action. Only those who are drawn to this approach and know the differences among trees could meaningfully participate.
- **Too broad:** "What should we do?" or "What do you think?" These questions are so general that

respondents would not know where to start.

- **Just right:** "What are the advantages of this approach for our community?" This question is broad enough to invite numerous responses, yet it also initially focuses participants' input on advantages.

Midway Questions

As discussion about each approach progresses, somewhat *more specific* questions work well to guide participants. For each approach, consider following this sequence of questions:

- A discussion leader can start with a *broad* question about an approach's benefits.
  - Then they can follow up with *somewhat more specific* questions, such as why or which stakeholders are advantaged.
    - Next the leader can narrow participants' attention to particular sample actions and ask *even more specific questions*: Which sample action does the group find most appealing? Why? For whom?
    - The facilitator can do the same as they turn to the approach's trade-offs. Which trade-offs are most concerning? Why? For whom?
  - The leader can end discussion of an approach by asking rather pointed questions: Do the benefits of this approach outweigh the drawbacks for our community? Why or why not? Is this approach more or less desirable than other approaches? Why or why not?

Ending Reflection Questions

The *reflection period* can be a time to return to *broader questions* to encourage participants to reflect on the entire issue and think ahead to the next steps. Boxes 23.5 and 23.6 provide examples of broad questions.

Whenever facilitators ask questions, they should keep in mind several considerations in addition to how broadly or narrowly to word them.

Question Forms and Directions

Discussion leaders should also consider both the form and the direction of their questions. Typically, you should ask open-ended and indirect questions.

Question Forms

There are two major forms of questions: open and closed.

Open questions call for more than a one-word response, making possible a range of answers.

- "What are your reactions to…?"
- "For what reasons do you believe that…?"
- "How do you feel about…?"

Open questions are usually the best type of questions to generate discussion because they allow a wide variety of responses.

Closed questions prompt a single, one-word answer—usually yes or no.

- "Is this option your favorite choice?"
- "Would you agree that…?"
- "Can we conclude, then, that…?"

Closed questions *can* be helpful for shifting the focus of discussion, for stopping someone from going on a tangent, or for preventing someone from dominating the discussion. However, closed questions should be used sparingly because they tend to shut down conversation. You should almost always avoid "Don't you think…?" questions because they are actually veiled arguments.

Question Directions

A question can take at least four directions: indirect, direct, reverse, and relay.

Indirect questions target the entire group and tend to stimulate thought. They are very useful for deliberative discussions.

- "What might be the consequences of choosing this solution?"

Direct questions target one individual and should be used sparingly to draw out timid group members.

- "Tim, how do you respond to what Joan just said?"

Reverse questions reflect a question back to the group and are especially helpful in preventing the discussion from turning into a question-and-answer session.

- After Tim has asked which approach the leaders like best, you could respond by asking the whole group, "Well, how would you all answer Tim's question?"

Relay questions encourage group members to share experiences. This can help ground the conversation in personal examples and better understand where someone is coming from.

- "Nia, what experiences have informed your perspective?"

Ultimately, keep in mind that good discussion leading is both an art and a science. That means a good leader prepares for a discussion as much as possible. For example, develop a list of questions for each of the five stages of the discussion, anticipate how the discussion is likely to unfold given the topic and specific participants, and think through how you might respond to potential difficulties, such as members who dominate, withdraw, or try to debate.

At the same time, the art of discussion leading lies in the following abilities: remaining present during the actual

discussion, listening closely to the participants' comments, observing nonverbal communication, and guiding the discussion accordingly. The discussion may take a totally different direction than anticipated and unforeseen challenges may arise. A good discussion leader adapts to the situation as it develops. They also use questions to guide participants into the groan zone.

The Heart of a Deliberative Discussion: Working Through the Issue



Created by Gregor Cresnar from Noun Project

When a discussion leader is executing their role well by asking effective questions and adapting to the group's needs, participants will raise numerous conflicting perspectives on the problem, approaches, and specific sample actions. That experience typically leads participants to encounter what Sam Kaner and associates have labeled the **groan zone**. The groan zone is a stage of confusion and frustration that results from the broad representation of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas shared.[1] Put simply, this is when participants groan and say, "Ugh! This problem is too complicated and hard!"

Effectively dealing with this zone requires participants to *work through* diverse perspectives and not simply name them. As we mentioned earlier, they must weigh options against one another, confronting tough choices—and working through the conflict such confrontation brings—rather than simply talking about each approach independently. That means probing more deeply to explore their conflicting reasons and values. The objective of deliberative discussions, after all, is to discover and discuss the real underlying sources of conflict so the group can ultimately move through the groan zone into shared public judgment.

Due to the discomfort of the groan zone, deliberative discussion participants may try to skirt around it. This section will explore three common ways a group might avoid the groan zone and specific strategies you can use in each case.

Box 23.8 Working Through the Groan Zone

1. Sam Kaner, with Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk, and Duane Berger, *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 18, 223.

Ways Participants Avoid the Groan Zone	Strategies to Help Participants Enter and Work through the Groan Zone
Participants claim they need more information.	-Encourage participants to temporarily set requests for information aside and focus on the trade-offs and value dilemmas.
Participants emphasize their differences.	-Help participants identify their common ground. -Highlight controversial language and invite participants to discuss and contest its meaning and implications.
Participants quickly claim agreement on the best solution.	-Probe participants for the reasoning, values, and personal experiences that inform their conclusions. -Ask the group to consider the implications, consequences, and trade-offs of their preferred option.

When Participants Claim They Need More Information



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Some groups may *claim they need more information* before discussing the issue. Of course, there is some truth to this. In the previous chapter, we discussed the importance of researching and correcting misinformation and disinformation when preparing a deliberative presentation. However, wicked problems result from deep disagreements over underlying values and trade-offs rather than a lack of sufficient information.

Thus, if requests for information emerge and the discussion leader cannot easily fulfill them, then the leader should encourage discussants to temporarily set their questions aside and gear their conversation, instead, toward the larger issues involved.

When Participants Emphasize Their Differences

Alternatively, groups may try to avoid the groan zone by *solely emphasizing their differences* from one another, perhaps due to misconceptions they have about one another. To work through the issue, participants can be asked to identify their relevant **common ground**. Common ground refers to any perspectives, interests, values, or concerns shared by some or all members of the discussion. Even discussants with opposing perspectives are likely to agree on important core values, fundamental aspects of the problem, or particular needs.

Sometimes participants' disagreements are reflected in their use of very different labels, phrases, or metaphors to discuss the problem or the people affected. Some of these terms may be off-putting or even offensive to other participants, driving them further apart as well as away from the groan zone.

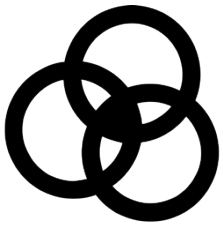


Created by Hary Murdiono JS from Noun Project

Consequently, facilitators should draw attention to such divisive or controversial rhetoric and invite participants to discuss and even contest its meaning and implications. This invitation "calls out" the language while "calling in" participants to share why they used or objected to it.[2] It avoids shaming or silencing participants while also enabling frank conversations around divisive language. Such direct conversations can give participants a chance to explain why certain catchphrases or metaphors are dehumanizing, are unfair, or even draw on histories of oppression. The discussion can also reveal where and why participants perceive the problem differently. A facilitator can use those insights to guide participants through the groan zone, likely after they have asked the group which phrases and labels they will agree to use or avoid.

When Participants Quickly Agree

In contrast to emphasizing differences, groups may try to avoid the groan zone by too *quickly agreeing*. They may, for instance, agree on the best solution before exploring its trade-offs or additional stakeholders' perspectives, or they may simply state preferences without offering reasons behind them.



Created by John Caserta from Noun Project

In cases like this, a discussion leader should probe participants for the reasons, values, and personal experiences that inform their conclusions. A discussion leader may also ask the group to consider the costs, challenges, and trade-offs of their preferred option to encourage the exploration of possible disagreements.

Box 23.9 Example of Strategies to Use When Participants Avoid the Groan Zone

Let's return to the Indiana deliberative discussion about a local watershed again. In the following sections, we consider how facilitators guided participants into the groan zone rather than avoiding it.

When Participants Wanted More Information

Problem: What did leaders do when some participants got hung up on how much money the county governments had to spend on water treatment and cleanup initiatives?

Strategies: Leaders encouraged participants to identify their values and then reflect on how those values could translate into a plan of action. Spending too much time on the missing information would have narrowed their vision and distracted them from other possible options.

When the Group Emphasized Their Differences

Problem: Participants at the Indiana watershed deliberation disagreed about the trade-offs they were willing to accept.

Strategies: Facilitators asked what participants could agree on. The group discovered that they agreed that private landowners and farmers should be part of the solution to improve water quality. This

2. Renee G. Heath and Jennifer L. Borda, "Reclaiming Civility: Towards Discursive Opening in Dialogue and Deliberation," *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 17, no. 1 (2021): 9–18, https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.976.

was based on a common understanding participants reached that landowners and farmers were often the ones perpetrating pollutive practices.

Problem: Fortunately, this did not occur, but you can imagine that if some people at the Indiana watershed deliberation derided farmers as ignorant "yokels" or recreators as liberal "tree huggers," then such language would have further emphasized differences among the group. It also would have made some (maybe many) participants feel hurt and angry.

Strategies: In that case, discussion leaders could have drawn attention to those problematic labels and asked the group for their reactions to the language. They could have also asked what concerns or frustrations were implied through the labels and invited the group to directly discuss those experiences and perspectives.

When Participants Stressed Their Agreements

Problem: Several groups at the Indiana watershed deliberation agreed on the second approach of educating those around the watershed on how to improve the river and its use.

Strategies: Rather than ending the conversation, facilitators pushed the group to define what they meant by "education." Who is being educated? By whom? About what?

Ideally, as the discussion progresses through the groan zone using the strategies provided, participant investment increases. Discussants begin explaining their reasoning, listening to others, and weighing options. Participants shift from their individual perspective ("I") to using collective terms that reflect their broader shared community ("we"). Encouraging participants to talk through the groan zone requires discussion leaders to create an inclusive environment.

Creating an Inclusive Environment

The discussion leader is responsible for creating an inclusive environment in which all participants can contribute. That means facilitators must seek to engage all participants, help quieter members join, excite discussants to want to participate, and allow the conversation to flow.

Engage All Participants

First, discussion leaders seek to engage *everyone* in a productive manner, no matter their ideological, political, or personal perspectives. That means facilitators should do the following:

- Avoid answering questions themselves and withhold their own opinions. As discussed in chapter 20, a discussion leader may share personal experiences related to the wicked problem if/when relevant, but you should avoid dominating the discussion or swaying opinions toward one solution.
- Function like a referee at a football game or soccer match. The leader is not focused on who wins or loses but rather on how the game is played. They should refrain from taking sides.
- Intervene if any participant is personally attacked or ridiculed.
- If a group repeatedly asks them questions, leaders should redirect the questions back to the discussants to answer.



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Help Quieter Members Join the Discussion

Second, discussion leaders should also create an inclusive environment by helping *quieter* members get involved. For example, facilitators can try the following:

- Invite multiple participants to respond to a single question.
- Redirect the conversation outward if one or two people dominate.
- Allow silence after asking a question and even after hearing a couple of responses, since discussants need time to consider their input, and some need more time than others.
- Rephrase the question or even direct it toward a specific person if no one responds after a period of silence.

Excite Discussants to Participate

Third, getting diverse participants engaged also means creating an atmosphere in which members *want* to participate. That means that as facilitators, you should do the following:

- Ask questions with enthusiasm, maintaining eye contact with group members if that is comfortable or possible for you.
- Be conscious of your facial expressions and posture. Your body may communicate messages you don't intend to send (disgust, disinterest, anger, etc.).
- Express gratitude when a participant shares something personal or vulnerable.

Allow the Conversation to Flow



Informal Business Meeting by Jack Moreh via Freerange Stock, Equalicense.

Finally, facilitators *allow the conversation to flow* if it is on topic. Sticking too strictly to a prepared list of questions may squelch discussants' interest and wrest too much control away from them. With that said, it is OK to get the discussion back on topic if a string of irrelevant tangents arises.

Remember, participants will naturally look to the leader for cues, so if you are positive and welcoming, you can succeed at drawing multiple participants into a productive and healthy conversation.

Specific Discussion Facilitation Tasks

In addition to creating an inclusive environment, deliberative discussion facilitation consists of several important tasks. Typically, at least two facilitators lead a deliberative discussion: a moderator, who sits with the group and asks questions through the stages of a discussion, and a recorder, who takes notes of the group's conversation. It is very difficult to guide a group's discussion and take notes simultaneously.

Further dividing facilitation tasks among a small group of discussion leaders enables each person to focus on just one or two jobs, yet it also necessitates a greater degree of cooperation among group members. However many people facilitate a discussion, the tasks listed in box 23.10 should be accomplished to help ensure its success.

Box 23.10 Facilitation Tasks for Deliberative Discussions

Initiate questions. Ask questions to get a chain of conversation started.	See the earlier section on asking effective questions for guidance.
Play devil's advocate. Help respondents dig deeper into the issues and avoid rushing to consensus. *Do not make arguments or claims*. Instead, invite discussants to share or consider a differing viewpoint or stakeholder or require the group to address and work through trade-offs of a desired approach.	• "Who might disagree with you and why?" • "What are you sacrificing with this approach?"
Clarify/summarize. At appropriate times, help the group uncover common ground *or* points of disagreement by identifying and summarizing the discussion and relevant points being made. This task requires attentive listening to make connections between respondents' comments.	• "It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes…" • "I hear a split between…"
Record. Capture the *key* points of common ground, tensions, and conclusions made during the discussion. Notes may be written where participants can see them as the deliberative discussion occurs or on an individual notepad. This task works well with the job of clarifying/summarizing.	Possible notes for approach 1: • "Many like this approach, especially (name actions)." • "But disagreement emerged between prioritizing safety vs. freedom in (name actions)."
Observe. Observe the process of the discussion with the goal of making it as inclusive and productive as possible. Attempts to get everyone engaged without allowing a few participants to dominate. Responsibilities include noticing when a participant wants to talk but hasn't (such as by raising a hand, making a facial expression in reaction to another respondent, or taking a breath to talk) and prompting people who have withdrawn to rejoin the discussion.	• "Maria, you look like you're about to say something." • "Aaron, can you hold that thought for a moment while a few others respond?"

Manage time / shift focus. Ensure that participants address and compare/contrast approaches within the discussion's time limits. This task requires an eye on the clock and, when needed, encouraging the group to shift focus to an aspect not yet addressed. Beware, however, of prompting the group to shift too quickly and preventing them from working through the groan zone. Alternatively, this job involves prompting a group to return to the issue should the conversation stray too far off topic. This task can work well with the job of observing.	• "We've been focusing on approaches one and two, but what about three?" • "Let's return to the approach's drawbacks. What else comes to mind?"
Manage conflict. Keep conflict focused on the issues rather than on personalities. Help participants explore their differences and defuse heated conflicts when needed. This task works well with the task of observing, since defusing conflict often requires bringing other participants into the conversation.	• "What seems to be at the heart of this issue?" • "What do others think?" • "We seem to be stuck. What can we do to move forward?"

Summary

Leading a discussion is an important task. This chapter taught you how to guide participants through the five stages of a deliberative discussion, from personal stakes through the reflection period. It encouraged you to help the group work through the groan zone along the way.

- For our purposes, a deliberative discussion consists of five stages: an offering of personal stakes, during which participants share why they attended the discussion and what concerns they have about the problem; a discussion of each of three approaches to solving the problem, one at a time, during which participants consider the benefits, challenges, and trade-offs of each approach and specific actions within them; and a reflection period, during which participants reflect on the problem and approaches, naming the preferred actions and next steps.
- The discussion leader develops questions with consideration to their direction and form and to the stage of the discussion.
- Ideally, participants in a deliberative discussion enter the groan zone, during which they may feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable as they work through multiple viewpoints and options.
- An effective deliberative discussion leader creates an inclusive environment and accomplishes many other facilitation tasks. These can be shared by two or more discussion leaders.

Key Terms

closed question
common ground
direct question
groan zone
indirect question
open question
reflection period
relay question
reverse question

Review Questions

1. What are the five stages of a deliberative discussion, and what are the objectives of each?
2. What kinds of questions should a discussion leader ask during different moments of the conversation?
3. What are three ways groups tend to avoid the groan zone, and how can a discussion leader guide them back to the zone?
4. What are some of the major tasks of a deliberative discussion leader?

Discussion Questions

1. How might you prepare for or address the following common pitfalls when leading a deliberative discussion?
    1. You ask a question but are met with silence from discussion participants.
    2. One or two people dominate the discussion.
    3. The conversation turns into a debate between two sides.
    4. The conversation moves to a distant tangent.
    5. Everyone quickly agrees on the best solution.
2. Who is a good discussion leader you know? What makes their discussion leading effective? How might you adopt some of their strategies?

3. In which of your communities could you start practicing deliberative discussions? What problems might such discussions address? What challenges might you encounter when introducing deliberation in your community?

24. Persuading an Audience to Modify Their Beliefs, Attitudes, or Courses of Action

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Explain the importance of persuasion for civic engagement.
- Select a specific persuasive goal for a particular issue.
- Identify a clear means for an audience to enact the persuasive goal.

Have you been asked to give a persuasive speech but are struggling to find a topic? You might initially think about large, seemingly intractable issues like abortion, immigration, and gun violence—and feel reluctant to weigh in. While there *are* ways to engage such issues, you might find momentum in tackling more local problems in your community.

Ask yourself, What bothers me about my hometown or city or about my college experience? Who is struggling or suffering, and how can I advocate to improve their situation?



Image by U.S. Embassy New Zealand via Rawpixel, Public Domain for Editorial Use Only.

When Priyanka asked herself these questions, she thought about her time on the college basketball team. She loved playing and was proud of herself for not dropping out when so many of her friends stopped playing sports. But she wondered why so few women still competed compared to men. Her concern grew when she saw the results of a 2022 poll by Women in Sport in her social media feed. The poll of 4,000 teenage kids found that "43% of teenage girls who once actively engaged with and enjoyed sport were being side-lined in their teenage years and made to feel not good enough, compared with just 24% of boys of the same age."[1] Priyanka knew then she had a topic for her persuasion speech.

Persuasion is the strategic use of verbal and nonverbal symbols to influence the beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action of an audience. It is the form of communication most closely associated with rhetoric—and the form of communication we most often hear. In this chapter we first explain the importance of persuasion for civic engagement. We then turn to the persuasive process and provide instructions for the first three steps.

1. "More Than 1 Million Teenage Girls Fall 'Out of Love' with Sport," *Women in Sport*, March 7, 2022, https://womeninsport.org/news/more-than-1-million-teenage-girls-fall-out-of-love-with-sport/

The Importance of Persuasion for Civic Engagement



Created by Sari Braga from Noun Project

Persuasion is a necessary and important aspect of civic engagement for at least three reasons: It helps audiences make decisions, more fully explore ideas, and enact democracy.

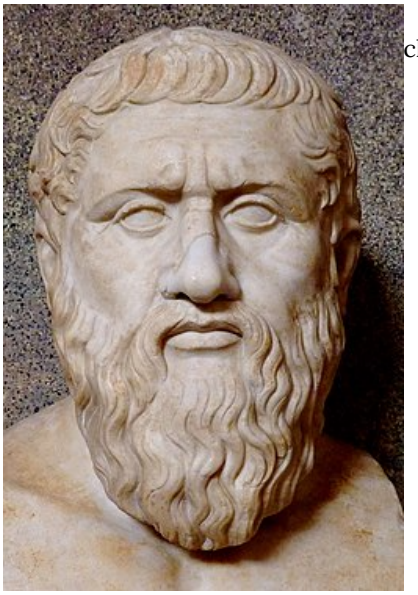
First, in many cases, diverse audiences will not arrive at a consensual decision after reviewing the facts, trade-offs, and value dilemmas of a complex and difficult issue. Advocacy is necessary to move audiences toward a position or conclusion. Persuasion can play a critical role in how communities decide a city might best address sanitation challenges, how a jury resolves a legal dispute, or how citizens choose who to vote into office.

Second, advocacy often helps us see the greatest advantages—and disadvantages—of an idea. Listening closely to someone passionately argue for a position can help us appreciate an idea more fully, or it can crystallize our reasons for rejecting it.

Third, as we established in chapter 1, rhetoric (and persuasion as a subset) is necessary for democracy. Rather than "shoot it out," we "talk it out." We advocate for what we believe is the public good, and we try to convince fellow community members that our ideas are meritable. Persuasion is, ultimately, how we enact democracy, such as Priyanka's attempt to convince her audience to improve gender equity in sports.

Persuasion, however, can be negatively perceived as a form of manipulation—a perception that has plagued persuasion, and rhetoric more generally, since at least the classical period. Given the goal of persuasion—attempting to influence others—it is easy to understand why it has been subject to special scrutiny.

Box 24.1 Ethical Concerns About Persuasion in the Classical Period

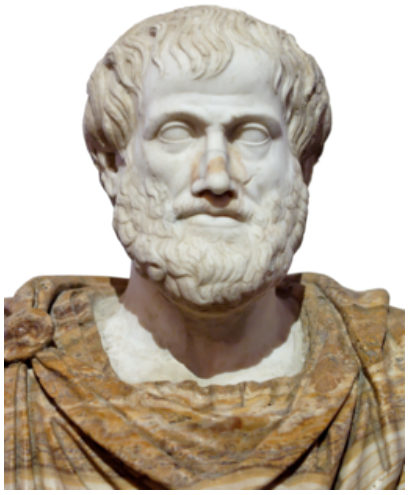


Bust of Plato by Dudva via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

In his Socratic dialogue titled *Gorgias*, Plato demeaned rhetoric. He characterized it as a mere knack akin to cooking and as a form of flat-

tery without substance. In other words, he warned that rhetoric was a simple ability that could be used unethically to manipulate people.[2]

In contrast, Aristotle defined rhetoric more fundamentally as the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion.[3] In other words, he taught that rhetoric was about developing the ability to discover or see the elements of persuasion in specific situations. This placed rhetoric in an ethically neutral place. That is, it can be used in an ethical or unethical manner.



Aristotle *by Alvaro Marques Hijazo via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.*

Greek teachers along with Romans in the classical period expressed concern over the practice of rhetoric and, consequently, developed ethical expectations for rhetors. These expectations included the following:

- Plato's depiction of a true rhetoric in the Socratic dialogue *Phaedrus*, whereby philosophers lead people toward truth
- Isocrates's vision of rhetoric as a civic art that improves the community
- Cicero's and Quintilian's vision of rhetoric as the joining of wisdom and eloquence by the good person speaking well

We contend, however, that ethical persuasion is essential for civic engagement for the reasons we have provided. To help you deliver an ethical persuasive speech, we turn next to steps you should take to develop your presentation.

The Persuasive Process

Taking an idea and developing it into a compelling persuasive appeal can be envisioned as a six-part progression, enumerated in box 24.2. We will provide you with guidance in this chapter on the first three steps. The next chapter will offer you instructions on the last three steps.

Box 24.2 The Persuasive Process

1. Consider audience analysis and adaptation.

2. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Project Gutenberg, 1999; updated 2022), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1672/1672-h/1672-h.htm.
3. Aristotle, "Rhetoric," in *Aristotle's Treatise on Rhetoric*, trans. Graduate of the University (London: Oxford, 1823), 10.

2. Select a persuasive goal.
3. Empower your audience to act.
4. Invent the content of your speech by using heuristics and three modes of proof.
5. Frame your persuasive efforts by demonstrating the issue as worthy of attention and emphasizing the superiority of your response.
6. Refute counterarguments.

Audience Analysis and Adaptation

The persuasive process begins with studying your direct audience and tailoring your speech to them and the environment where the speech will occur. In chapter 10, we defined the direct audience as the people who are exposed to and attend to your speech. Review chapters 10 and 11 for help with analyzing and adapting to them. As you take each step in developing your persuasive speech, make choices that consider this audience.

Your direct audience is central to your persuasive presentation. In fact, if you were to deliver the same ideas to two different direct audiences, then you would prepare two different speeches. The more the two groups diverge, the more distinct your speeches would need to be because what is likely persuasive for one audience in a particular environment may not be effective for another group in a different setting.

Persuasive Goal

A speaker must keep their goals clearly in mind when crafting a speech. You might think about achieving multiple goals: to advocate for change, to seek the public good, and to convince your audience to adopt a specific belief, attitude, or action.

Advocate for Change


Created by Lemon Liu from Noun Project

The goal of persuasion is change. That might seem obvious, but it's a major contrast from the goal we discussed in chapter 20, which covered informative speaking with a particular emphasis on deliberation. When speaking informatively or deliberatively, you strive to educate your audience fairly and robustly. This chapter focuses on persuasion. Consequently, your goal now is to convince your audience to adopt your desired belief, value, or action. That means you must push your audience to change.

Do not choose a goal your audience is already fulfilling because then persuasion isn't necessary. For instance, it's likely that Priyanka's audience already agrees that girls should be encouraged to play sports. It's less likely they all agree that colleges should focus on hiring more female coaches as role models in men's and women's athletics.

Seek the Public Good



Created by Demetria Rose from Noun Project

Even when focused on the goal of persuasion, you'll want to keep in mind your overarching goal of improving your community and the public good. A speaker motivated solely by *personal gain* may say anything to persuade their listeners, and their presentation will seek to directly benefit themselves. Think of a stereotypical used car salesperson who manipulates customers into buying defective cars because the salesperson earns a commission.

In contrast, a speaker motivated by the *public good* will aim for outcomes that benefit the whole group—not only themselves and their direct audience but also their implied and implicated audiences. In chapter 10, we defined an implied audience as a group that is represented in your message and an implicated audience as those affected by your speech if it is persuasive. You should keep both groups in mind by continually asking for whom or what you are speaking. It is easy to begin with the best of intentions and then get caught up in winning or only advantaging yourself as you develop and deliver your speech. When that happens, you are likely to reinforce the qualities of unproductive discourse discussed in chapter 2.

Specify the Belief, Attitude, or Course of Action You Want the Audience to Adopt

In addition to advancing the public good and striving to persuade, you must identify your more specific persuasive goal. This goal should shape—and be reflected in—your thesis statement. (Look back to chapter 12 for a discussion about thesis statements.) We offer three types of persuasive goals to kickstart your thinking: speeches that attempt to persuade the direct audience to adopt a particular belief, attitude, or course of action.

One type of specific persuasive goal is to target an audience's **belief**: their conclusion about, or confidence in, what is or is not true or real. Scholars of public speaking and debate call this a "fact" proposition. The following are examples of thesis statements that target beliefs:

- Global warming is caused by human activity.
- Excessive exposure to social media worsens mental health.

Notice how the wording of both examples focuses attention on convincing the audience that a particular belief or conclusion is true or real. Alternatively, you can convince an audience to reject a belief they hold that is not true or real. For instance, you may claim that sugar does not make kids hyperactive.

A second type of specific persuasive goal is to change an audience's **attitude**: their feeling or moral judgment about what is good or bad, right or wrong. Scholars refer to this as a "value" proposition. In chapter 21, we defined a value as a principle or quality that human beings are committed to and upon which they base their thinking and decisions regarding important issues. A speaker might propose, for example, the following:

- Tattoos and piercings are healthy forms of self-expression.
- Oklahoma's penalties for carrying or consuming small amounts of marijuana are too harsh.

You can hear the emphasis on a value or attitude with words like "healthy" and "too harsh."

A third type of specific persuasive goal strives to impact the audience's **course of action**: their choice, behavior, or support for specific policies or procedures. Scholars also call this type of claim a "policy" proposition. The following are examples:

- Public high schools should be required to offer students a financial literacy course.
- We should use the word "unhoused" instead of "homeless" to describe people without a physical address.

While you don't have to use "should" to indicate a course of action, that word is an easy way to communicate your emphasis on affecting behavior or policy.

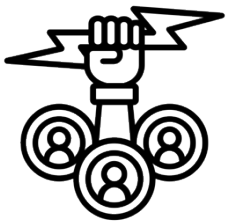
Box 24.3 How to Choose Your Specific Persuasive Goal

Your persuasive goal will—and should—change depending on your audience. To determine which goal to target, ask yourself a set of questions about your direct audience.

- **Beliefs:** Does your audience believe the problem exists? Do they draw the same conclusions as you about the facts? If not, then target their beliefs. If so, then consider their values or attitudes about the issue.
- **Attitudes:** Is your audience apathetic about the issue, or are they *too* worried about a nonissue? If so, then target their values or attitudes. If not, then reflect on their current actions or inaction.
- **Courses of action:** Is your audience already doing something about the issue? Have they adopted your desired policy or behavior? If not, then convince them to change their course of action. If yes, then it sounds like your audience doesn't need to be persuaded on this topic since they already share your beliefs, attitudes, and courses of action! Best to alter your topic or focus on a different aspect of it.

Whatever specific goal you choose, work on its wording. Your goal (and thesis statement) must clearly communicate what you are targeting and how you want your audience to change. As you determine your goal, also decide what specific actions the audience should take to empower them to enact that change.

Empower Your Audience: Provide a Means to Act



Created by Besokpagi from Noun Project

Whenever possible you should empower your direct audience by giving them a means to enact your goal. Your audience should not just accept your thesis; they should act on it. This means offering listeners clear options they can take to reinforce or act on their beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action.

The type of action you advocate depends on your specific persuasive goal. If your objective is to change your audience's *beliefs or attitudes*, then you might ask the audience to participate in an activity that will help accomplish that goal. Very often that activity will be educational in nature. Such activities further expose audience members to a supportive point of view without yet requiring them to actively back a change in policy or change their daily behaviors.

Box 24.4 Empowerment in Practice

Let's return to Priyanka's persuasive speech. How might she empower her audience to act? To decide, she should consider her specific persuasive goal.

- **Beliefs:** If she wants her audience to conclude that women's sports are as exciting and interesting as men's, then she might do the following:
    - insist that audience members attend the next women's basketball game at their college
    - motivate the audience to attend a WNBA game when one or more top athletes will be playing
- **Attitudes:** If she wants her audience to value women's sports equally with men's, she may do the following:
    - encourage them to watch such documentaries as *Women of Troy* (about the University of Southern California's women's basketball team in the 1980s), *The Founders* (about female golfers who created the Ladies Professional Golf Association), or *Under Pressure: The U.S. Women's World Cup* (about the US women's soccer team)
    - invite them to attend an upcoming lecture that is relevant to the topic
- **Courses of action:** If Priyanka wants her audience to help create gender equity in college sports, she might do the following:
    - ask them to participate in an upcoming rally to pressure the athletic director to hire more women onto athletic staffs
    - volunteer to coach a local girls' team

If your goal is to influence the audience's *course of action*, then ask them to help you enact your policy or plan. Encourage them to adopt the desired behavior, help put the procedure into action, or assist with laying the groundwork to enact the policy.

Box 24.5 Factors to Consider When Empowering Your Audience to Act

Your Specific Persuasive Goal

- If you target your audience's ***beliefs*** *or* ***attitudes***, then you might ask the audience to participate in an educational activity that will further expose them to the preferred belief or attitude.
- If you target your audience's ***courses of action***, then ask them to help you enact your policy or plan.

What Options Are Available

- ***Already existing opportunities*:** Discover these on campus or in your local town or city and encourage your audience to participate in them.
- ***Opportunities you create*:** Use your imagination and creativity to develop specific ways your audience can make a difference.

Whatever your goal, keep in mind that most actions are of two types: already existing opportunities and opportunities that you create.

First, there are *already existing opportunities* that you need to discover and then encourage or enable your

audience to participate in. For instance, if you are concerned with girls dropping out of sports, not having sufficient role models, or suffering from stigma if they continue to play sports, you can do the following:

- You might ask the audience to volunteer to mentor local youth.
- With a little searching, you will likely discover several such mentoring programs *already existing* at your school and the surrounding area (Boys and Girls Club, tutoring programs, community centers, etc.). You simply need to contact the organization to assess their needs and discuss the details about how to get involved.

Second, there are *opportunities that you create*. Sometimes you need to use your imagination and creativity to offer your audience a chance to get involved. For example, you might want the audience to increase the budget for your college's women's basketball team.

- You could ask your audience to help organize and execute a donation drive on campus.
- Or you might invite the audience to join you in a meeting with the athletic director to solicit more funding.

Whenever possible, find or create an opportunity *close at hand* for the audience—whether that is on campus or in your city or town. Your audience will be more likely to take advantage of the opportunity, and doing so will help them notice ways to directly improve their local community.

Of course, finding or creating local opportunities can seem challenging at first. To help, we recommend you become familiar with the nearby community:

- Talk to local residents about opportunities.
- Search for your issue on the local visitors' bureau web page or government websites. Such searches are likely to identify local organizations and groups devoted to the issue.
- Watch for announcements of upcoming events in the local news and on campus.
- When you find a local connection, interview someone associated with it. People regularly involved with the issue are likely to offer great insight and provide ideas about ways citizens can get involved.

Once you have chosen a specific action to advocate, give the audience the detailed information they need to participate. The key is to reduce the burden on your audience and prove they can truly make a difference.

Box 24.6 Empower Your Audience with Detailed Actions

To empower her audience to act, Priyanka decided to convince them to help local kids' sports teams. However, she used overly vague language when she first drafted this part of her speech.

First Draft: Too Vague

You can encourage girls to stay in sports by helping coach a local kids' team.

- Please donate your time.
- No prior experience is needed.
- Call the local Boys and Girls Club or YMCA.

The ideas here are a good start, but they lack the details needed to convince her audience to take action. The speaker is relying upon the audience to do the work, which is unlikely.

After getting feedback from her teacher, Priyanka revised her language by providing pertinent information.

Second Draft: Sufficiently Detailed

You can encourage girls to stay in sports by helping coach a kids' team at our local Boys and Girls Club.

- This fall the club will organize youth soccer leagues that could use your assistance.
    - Each team needs a head coach and an assistant coach. No experience is required to be an assistant coach.
    - The season goes from September through November. Teams typically practice one evening a week and have a game on Saturdays.
    - Mary Green is responsible for the soccer program and would be happy to speak with you. Their number is (333) 333-3333, or you can email them at ourtownbgc@gmail.com to see how you can help. You can visit the club at 111 Main Avenue.
- So please visit, call, or email to find out more information about the available opportunities.
- I plan to volunteer again this fall and can provide a ride if you'd like to go with me.

If you begin the persuasive process by analyzing your audience and then thoughtfully choosing your goal and empowering your audience to act, you will be on your way toward producing a persuasive speech that will compel your audience and aid your community.

Summary

This chapter explained persuasion as the strategic use of verbal and nonverbal symbols to influence the beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action of an audience. We explored its importance for civic engagement and steps to take in the persuasive process.

- Persuasion is important to civic engagement because it helps audiences make decisions, more fully explore ideas, and enact democracy.
- There are six steps in the persuasive process, though this chapter spent the most time on the second and third steps. After considering the audience (step one), the second step is the selection of a persuasive goal. That goal should focus on advocacy, strive to promote the public good, and encourage the audience to change a specific belief, attitude, or course of action.
- The third step in the persuasive process is to empower your audience by providing a particular means to act. Suggested actions may differ based on the speaker's specific persuasive goal and what existing opportunities exist nearby.

Key Terms

action
belief
persuasion

Review Questions

1. What are the six steps in the persuasive process, and which three steps did this chapter cover?
2. What are three types of specific persuasive goals you might pursue in a persuasive speech?
3. What types of specific actions can speakers encourage their audience to perform?

Discussion Questions

1. How can we distinguish between personal gain and the public good in relation to persuasion? How might these motivations or goals differ? Overlap?
2. Which persuasive goal is the easiest to achieve: an audience's belief, attitude, or course of action? The hardest? Why?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of encouraging your audience to take personal or local actions versus taking action at the broader state, national, or even international scale?

25. Developing Your Persuasive Speech Through Invention, Framing, and Refutation

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Use the elements of invention to produce persuasive appeals.
- Persuasively frame an issue to lead the audience to the desired solution.
- Refute counterarguments to a preferred position.

The previous chapter introduced persuasion as the strategic use of verbal and nonverbal symbols to influence the beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action of an audience. In that chapter, we established persuasion's importance for civic engagement and identified six steps you should take when developing a persuasive speech. We then explored the first three steps: (1) consider audience analysis and adaptation, (2) select a persuasive goal, and (3) empower your audience to act. Basically, we suggested you start by knowing your audience and then, using that information, determine what you want them to think, believe, or do and give them the means to carry that out.

This chapter picks up with the next (and last) three steps to prepare your speech: (4) invent the content of your speech, (5) frame your persuasive efforts, and (6) refute counterarguments. Together, these steps will help you develop the speech content that fulfills your speech goal. We will explore each step, beginning with invention and then turning to framing and refutation in turn.

Invention: The Substance of Persuasion



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Invention, as you learned in chapter 1, is the process of investigation and thought that produces the content of your speech. This designation originated in rhetoric's ancient past, but we still use the term. It emphasizes that when we speak, we make up or "invent" arguments intended to persuade. Of course, when done properly—and ethically—your words and arguments will be based on thorough research and credible sources that you credit through citations as described in chapters 8 and 9. Ultimately, though, *you* come up with what you say in your speech.

How do you stimulate your thinking? How do you overcome writer's block to construct your speech? This is precisely what the canon of invention is designed for. We

will begin by considering how you can use available strategies, or heuristics, of invention to develop ideas. Second, we will guide you through central proofs or means of invention you can adopt to develop the substance of your persuasion.

Heuristics

Imagine a legal pad or computer file with pages of information and evidence you collected from your research. What can you do with all this information? Thinkers and speakers in the past turned to **heuristics**: specific strategies for generating new ideas.

Box 25.1 The Greek Origins of Heuristics

Also referred to as topics, loci, and lines of argument, the term "heuristic" comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means "to discover." The Greek term *topos* means "place" and seems to have referred to the spot or place on a scroll wherein a particular common pattern of argument was written. The first formal presentation of heuristic devices occurs in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, book 2, under the heading of topics. There he outlines twenty-eight heuristic devices for constructing arguments.

Heuristic devices stimulate your intellectual discovery as you think through your topic, formulate arguments, and structure your speech. Box 25.2 contains a selection of the most commonly used strategies of rhetorical invention, or heuristics.

Box 25.2 Selected Heuristic Devices

1. Definition: What is it?
2. What are the parts, and how are they related?
3. How can the subject and object be reversed or how can the order of ideas be reversed?
4. How does an idea or physical entity compare with another?
5. How does an idea or physical entity contrast with another?
6. Has something happened or not happened? Will something happen or will it not happen?
7. Is one item greater or is it smaller than another item?
8. Is something possible or is it not possible?
9. What is and what is not?
10. How big is something and how far does it reach?
11. In the past, what was something like?
12. In the future, what will something be like?[1]

1. Numbers 6–12 are based on Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 82–83.

How do heuristic devices work in developing a speech? In many ways, they are comparable to the stunningly successful—and always enjoyable—original Play-Doh Fun Factory. The device took a blob of Play-Doh and turned it into a spaghetti-type noodle, a star, or a lightning bolt. Somewhat like when using cookie cutters, there were perhaps twenty or thirty different shapes you could mold the Play-Doh into.

Heuristic devices make use of your research in much the same way; they show you various ways to shape that information and those ideas for your audience into a thesis statement, supporting arguments, or even organizational structures (like those discussed in chapter 13). The best thing to do is to try several, see what they generate, and then select from your creations, taking into account your audience, goals, and context.



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Box 25.3 Heuristic Devices in Practice

In the previous chapter, we introduced you to Priyanka, who decided to advocate for gender equity in women's sports. As she prepared her speech, she researched positions that have been taken on the subject, relevant court cases and rulings, statistics on college women's participation in sports and female employees on athletic staffs, and testimonials from administrative bodies like the NCAA. Then she used the following heuristic devices (drawn from box 25.2) to develop arguments:

- **#5: Contrast:** The average budget, travel accommodations, and equipment provided to men's collegiate basketball teams versus women's teams.
- **#4: Compare:** Basketball with other sports teams or compare gender equity in amateur and professional athletics.

Priyanka could use contrast and comparison to establish the broader existence of inequity in sports and argue for specific changes.

- **#11: How things used to be:** In terms of resources for women's sports in the United States, she could use this to argue the impressiveness *or* disappointment of the growth. We know that resources for women's participation differed before Title IX became law in 1972, for example, but how well has equity been achieved over fifty years later?
- **#1: Definition of "equity":** What do participants in the conversation mean when they use that word? She might discover the word has different meanings to different people and argue for a particular definition.

Modes of Proof: Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Another aspect of invention, also formally presented by Aristotle, includes three artistic modes of proof: ethos, pathos,

and logos. By *modes of proof*, Aristotle simply meant the ways people are persuaded or what they find persuasive. In differentiating the modes, Aristotle explained that

- ethos is found "in the character of the speaker,"
- pathos relies on "disposing the hearer a certain way," and
- logos depends on "the thing itself which is said, by reason of its proving, or appearing to prove, the point."[2]

In each case, the proof is the persuasive appeal you share with your audience. Depending on the goal, audience, subject matter, and occasion, you will vary the proof you use.

Whatever your specific persuasive speaking goal, you should employ *all three aspects* of invention—namely, logos, ethos, and pathos—to accomplish it. In the previous chapter, we explained that your specific persuasive goal will be to change your audience's beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action. Some students mistakenly think speeches that target beliefs rely solely on logos while speeches that try to change attitudes only utilize pathos and so on. Such thinking confuses the end goal with the means used to achieve it (i.e., tools of invention). Whatever your end goal is, you can *and should* make use of all three available modes of proof. Let's turn briefly to each next.

Logos


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Sound persuasion is based on evidence and valid reasoning. In Aristotle's words, this is the work of logos. **Logos** is the logical or reasoned basis of an appeal. Thus, for our purposes, logos refers to the argumentative substance of the presentation. Argumentation constitutes a type of proof to convince audiences to accept your message. Because this aspect of public presentations is fundamental, we have made it the focus of the next two chapters. However, argumentation is only one mode of proof.

Ethos


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Persuasion is also a matter of credibility or ethos. As described in chapter 5, ethos is drawn from the audience's perception of the speaker's credibility. When an audience perceives you as credible, or "worthy of confidence," they are more likely to be persuaded by you. In other words, your credibility functions as another form of proof of the validity of your argument.

Notice, however, that your ethos exists only to the degree that your audience *perceives* you as credible, and their perception is based on how you present yourself in and through your speech. You may have established a public reputation that precedes your speech, but you must further develop, reinforce, and/or improve your ethos in and through each presentation you make.

According to Aristotle, speakers can develop their *ethos* by demonstrating one or more of the following four qualities through their speech:

- competence (expertise, preparation, intelligence)
- trustworthiness (moral standing, integrity)

2. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *Aristotle's Treatise on Rhetoric*, trans. Graduate of the University (London: Oxford, 1823), 10.

- goodwill (having an audience's best interests at heart)
- dynamism (charisma)[3]

We are persuaded by advocates and sources that best display these qualities. Consequently, Priyanka, for example, might stress her experience as a lifelong athlete and member of the basketball team (competence) as well as her desire for all student athletes at her college to be treated fairly (goodwill).

It's important you spend time cultivating your ethos because, according to Aristotle, moral character (ethos) offers the most effective means of persuasion.[4] You might consider why and whether you agree with him.

Pathos


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Finally, there is the role of emotion or pathos. Recall from chapter 5 that pathos is concerned with the psychological state of the audience and rests upon effective, ethical appeals to their emotions and motivations. Practically speaking, pathos is a measure and reflection of the extent to which we are moved by and feel invested in a topic and a message. Those feelings constitute another form of proof of the validity of the speaker's case.

Feelings may be appealed to or cultivated in a multitude of ways. Aristotle makes the intuitive argument that we desire emotions that result in *pleasure* and want to avoid emotions that result in *pain*. A speaker can use this observation when crafting their message:

- Perhaps they associate the *problem* they are targeting with *painful* emotions. Aristotle listed such *painful* feelings as anger, fear, shame, shamelessness, contempt, pity, indignation, and envy.
- A speaker can elicit *pleasurable* feelings in relation to their desired *solution*. Aristotle named such *pleasurable* feelings as patience, friendship, confidence, and kindness.

Of course, these are only a sampling of possible emotions you can elicit and ways you can use them in your speech.

Box 25.4 Pathos in Practice

3. Richard D. Rieke, Malcolm O. Sillars, and Tarla Rae Peterson, *Argumentation and Critical Decision Making*, 7th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2009), 155–56.
4. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 11.

The effective use of pathos can be seen in Notre Dame women's basketball coach Muffet McGraw's April 4, 2019, response to a reporter's question.[5] The question was prompted by an interview published earlier in which McGraw critiqued the prominence of men hired as coaches in women's sports, especially college basketball, and defended her own all-female coaching staff.[6] On this occasion, the reporter asked her, "How seriously do you take being that voice," referring to being a voice for women.



Muffet McGraw by Sphilbrick via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

McGraw answered by eliciting **indignation** about the current inequity. She explained, "We've had a record number of women running for office and winning and, still, we have 23% of the House and 25% of the Senate. I'm getting tired of the novelty of the first female governor of this state; the first female African American mayor of this city. When is it going to become the norm instead of the exception?"

She then expressed **anger** and **shame** about the state of things: "Girls are socialized to know when they come out, gender roles are already set. Men run the world. Men have the power. Men make the decisions. It's always the men." Moving from broader society to sports, McGraw offered **hope** that athletics could help improve conditions for women: "When these girls are coming out, who are they looking up to tell them that that's not the way it has to be? And where better to do that than in sports?...Wouldn't it be great if we could teach them to watch how women lead? This is a path for you to take to get to the point where in this country we have 50% of women in power."

Her use of hopefulness was then joined by **confidence** in her practice of hiring women and a return to **anger** about the problem. McGraw's response exemplifies the range of emotional appeals available to a rhetor when advocating for a policy change and, especially, the effective association of painful emotions with the status quo.

Clearly, appeals to pathos are potentially very powerful. Consequently, it is this dimension of rhetoric—emotional appeal—that has caused some scholars to distrust rhetoric. The concern is that rhetoric can obstruct good decision-making by displacing reason with emotion. We have certainly seen examples of speakers who rely excessively on emotional appeals and frequently on the emotion of fear. For instance, we see scare tactics in accusations of immigrants overrunning our borders and committing crimes or claims that our legal system is persecuting innocent officials and turning a blind eye to guilty leaders. Although emotion can be overused, it is a valuable part of deliberation and a corrective to an idealized, coldly rational perspective.

Because invention regards the core appeals and content of your speech, its methods and results should inform

5. NCAA March Madness (@MarchMadnessWBB), "Muffet McGraw: A Voice for Women. A Voice for Women in Sports," Twitter (now X), April 4, 2019, https://x.com/MarchMadnessWBB/status/1113842633481310212.
6. Lindsay Gibbs, "Muffet McGraw Is Done Hiring Men," *Think Progress*, March 30, 2019, https://archive.thinkprogress.org/this-top-womens-college-basketball-coach-is-done-hiring-men-5f3b6d06609b/, archived at https://perma.cc/A95U-L862.

the next several steps in the persuasive process. In other words, use heuristics and modes of proof to help you frame your persuasive efforts and refute counterarguments.

Framing Persuasive Efforts

Recall from chapter 21 that framing is the process by which people use language to present and make sense of their world. We identified three parts to any *framing* of a civic issue. Every frame identifies or defines

- the *problem* (i.e., what's wrong),
- its *cause* (i.e., who's to blame), and
- the *solution* (i.e., what should be done).

We also discussed how to use deliberative framing to set up a deliberative presentation. We concluded that since such presentations are educational, a speaker must frame the problem and possible solutions as clearly and fairly as possible.

You will now be involved with advocacy, however, whereby you will try to influence your direct audience's beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action. Therefore, you should employ *persuasive framing* in your speech. As we explained in chapter 21, persuasive framing occurs when a speaker strategically names or defines a problem (and its cause) in a way that *sets up their desired solution as effective and reasonable*. Indeed, you will need to frame the civic issue you are addressing as worthy of the audience's attention and your solution as a reasonable and superior response to the problem.

Demonstrate the Issue as Worthy of Attention

Unless you can convince your audience of the issue's seriousness, they won't have reason to change their beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action. You can demonstrate seriousness in a few ways: Characterize the problem as a violation of the audience's shared values, narrow your focus, offer compelling evidence of the issue's existence, and illustrate how the problem affects your audience's lives.

Violation of Values

First, it is often effective to depict the problem as a violation of the audience's shared *values* or commitments. In chapter 21, we defined a *value* as a principle or quality that human beings are committed to and upon which they base their thinking and decisions for important issues. You can employ the power of values in persuasion by explaining how the problem is violating your audience's values and commitments. This strategy is effective whether your specific goal is to influence the audience's beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action.

Box 25.5 Framing the Issue as a Violation of Values: Sample Argument

A good example of persuasive framing can be found in the rhetoric we considered earlier by McGraw. Recall she had said earlier that as head coach for Notre Dame's women's basketball team, she only hired female coaches. That statement stirred controversy, resulting in her being asked more about her policy.

When prompted by a reporter, McGraw could have presented her argument in terms of its effectiveness (her team was headed to the Final Four) or the disproportionate amount of male staff in college sports.



Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) banner *Susan Ruggles via Flickr*, CC BY.

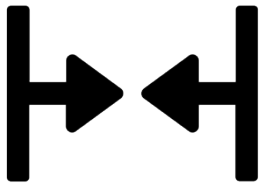
Instead, she **framed her case in light of national gender inequity**. She opened by referring to the US *government's failure* to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). As she reminded the audience, the ERA was introduced in 1967 to make sex discrimination unconstitutional, but it failed to gain sufficient state support to pass.

She then turned to congressional and local leadership by noting how *few women* are in the House of Representatives or Senate or are even governors or mayors. At that point she asked, "How are these young women looking up and seeing someone that looks like them, preparing them for the future? We don't have enough female role models. We don't have enough visible women leaders. We don't have enough women in power."

McGraw **established the problem as a vast breach in *fairness* and gender *equity* nationally and locally**. By establishing the disparity in female leadership as a national and enduring **violation of shared values**, McGraw's practice of hiring female staff for women's sports teams seemed both reasonable and practical—a small place to start, so to speak. Notice, too, that framing her hiring practice as helping alleviate the problem depicted McGraw as a kind of innovative problem-solver and encouraged the audience to identify with her desire for equality and fairness.

Narrow Focus

Second, narrow your focus so your audience perceives themselves as capable of making a change. Avoid making an issue seem so immense or difficult that you give the impression that nothing can be done. For instance, it would be a tall order to convince your audience in ten minutes that all women's sports should be funded equally to men's sports. It would be more realistic to whittle the problem of gender inequity in sports down to a topic like pressures on girls to quit sports in larger numbers than boys or on the relative lack of media attention to women's sports compared to men's.



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Compelling Evidence

Third, further demonstrate the issue as worthy of your audience's attention by offering high-quality, tangible evidence of the problem or community concern, whether that be through a reliance on

- logos, which demonstrates the scope of a problem through *statistics*;
- pathos, which appeals to the emotional and human toll of an issue and highlights specific *examples*; or
- ethos, which is generated when a subject is explained through credible sources and *testimony*.

Ideally, a combination of all three types of appeals and evidence forms the strongest presentation.

Direct Effects

Finally, relate the issue directly to your audience by showing how and where it is evident *in their lives and communities*. Such an approach will not only create audience understanding but also heighten audience identification with the issue.

Emphasize the Superiority of Your Response

Another element of framing is to present a good way to respond to the problem. It isn't enough to demonstrate that the issue is worthy of the audience's attention. You must persuade them of the change in belief, attitude, or course of action you want them to adopt in response. Here you clearly restate your thesis and emphasize the superiority of this response to the issue.

Spend time *explaining how* the desired belief, attitude, or course of action would address the problem. What will it improve, solve, or help? How might recognizing the reality of internet addiction enable sufferers to get help? How would eating locally grown produce improve the city's economy and possibly the health of its residents?

As you explain, *support* your explanation of how the desired outcome will improve the problem with evidence derived from examples, statistics, and testimony. Don't make the audience take your word for it. Use the research methods we discussed in chapters 8 and 9 and employ the argumentation skills we will provide in chapters 26 and 27 to strengthen your case.

Also, ensure that the solution aligns logically with your presentation of the problem. Somewhat like the relationship between a question and an answer, you must frame the issue so that the problem (and its cause) sets up your solution as effective and reasonable.

The Ethics of Framing

You might read our instructions to persuasively frame your topic and wonder, Is this ethical? Is it morally acceptable to strategically present a topic so the audience is more likely to accept my solution? Let's address these important concerns.

Framing as Necessary and Helpful

On one hand, framing is ethical, because it is necessary and helpful for audiences. Frames *help* people absorb and make sense of facts and information. A more typical use of the word "framing" may clarify this point.

- Think of the wood frame constructed to build a house. That frame is built directly on top of the foundation, and it creates the solid structure upon which the rest of the housing materials (drywall, roofing tiles, window panes, etc.) hang.
- Similarly, persuasive frames form the basis or context on which we hang or make sense of information. Facts and statistics alone are meaningless to us without a frame or context to give them significance, somewhat like drywall is useless without a wood frame on which to hang it.

In other words, framing in and of itself is not unethical; it is simply the way our minds and human language work. By thoughtfully framing public issues, speakers enable community members to make sense of otherwise meaningless facts or to make order out of seemingly incoherent information.

Box 25.6 Using Framing to Help Your Audience Make Sense of Information



Patch of the United States Border Patrol by United States Department of Homeland Security via GetArchive Public Domain.

If you tell your audience that US Customs and Border Protection had 2.47 million encounters with people illegally crossing the southwest border in fiscal year 2023, they probably wouldn't know what to conclude from that statistic. If, instead, you **frame these crossings as illustrating a "border crisis"** and explain that the number is 40% higher than fiscal year 2021—as the US House Committee on Homeland Security did[7]—that would invite the audience to conclude that illegal immigration is a problem and that border policies are inadequately addressing it.

Of course, you can prompt a different conclusion with the same statistic if you **frame the crossings differently**. Bloomberg opinion analyst Jeff Fox, for instance, argued the number is actually **evidence of more successful border measures** that catch most people crossing or prompt migrants to turn themselves in (to apply for asylum), unlike previous years.[8] If you framed the statistic accordingly, the audience would be encouraged to view illegal immigration as an issue that is being successfully addressed by border policies at the time.

7. U.S. Congress, House, 118th Cong., 1st sess., Committee on Homeland Security, *Border Crisis Startling Stats* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, October 26, 2023), https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/September-Startling-Stats.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/Q7KM-YZWM.
8. Justin Fox, "Illegal US Border Crossings Aren't Really Breaking Records," *Bloomberg*, March 20, 2024, https://bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2024-03-20/illegal-us-border-crossings-aren-t-really-breaking-records.

Honest Versus Dishonest Framing Efforts

On the other hand, we can borrow Will Friedman's work to distinguish honest from dishonest ways of "framing to persuade." Friedman defines **honest framing** efforts as "sincere rhetorical advocacy" in which the speaker says, "'I believe this because' and…means it." Such framing efforts attempt to persuade the audience in an ethical, open, and trustworthy manner with the public good in mind.

In contrast, **dishonest framing** efforts manipulate facts and promote disinformation. Motivated almost solely by a desire to win the argument by any means necessary, dishonest persuasive framing prioritizes personal gain over the public good.

We have all seen, for example, how attack ads during an election season can take the statements of an opponent (an implied audience or person represented in a speech) out of context, feature unflattering pictures, and publicize rumor as if it's truth. Such framing harms public debate and fosters the vices of unproductive public discourse discussed in chapter 2.[9]



Image by tswedensky via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

We invite and strongly encourage you, then, to advocate a position as skillfully and passionately as possible. Use persuasive framing strategically to make your solution look attractive but do so with honesty and integrity for the benefit of the public good. Maintain such ethical standards as you identify and rebut arguments opposed to your thesis.

Refute Counterarguments

By its very nature, a persuasive presentation will encounter resistance. You are attempting to persuade people to think or act in a way that is counter to what they are presently doing. Listeners generally have reasons they disagree with your perspective—some good, some bad.

To persuade an audience to change its mind, you must address their reasons. If you ignore common **counterarguments**, or claims and reasoning that oppose your own, the audience is more apt to ignore you. They will feel like you haven't challenged their perspective and may think you are uninformed about the topic. As a result, an important component of nearly every persuasive speech is attention to counterarguments.

One option available is to *explicitly acknowledge a counterargument* by stating it and then refuting it—that is, giving the reasons why you think it is invalid or weak. You might even devote a main point of your speech to refuting one or more counterarguments. This occurs when you discuss alternative solutions to a problem, such as in the problem-alternatives-solution or the refutative patterns of organization discussed in chapter 13.

The benefits of acknowledging counterarguments are many: It makes your argument more persuasive to those with opposing views, it shows you are prepared and thoughtful, and it demonstrates you are willing to confront difficult choices.

9. Will Friedman, "Reframing 'Framing,'" *Occasional Paper*, no. 1 (Center for Advances in Public Engagement), accessed May 13, 2024, http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/reframing_framing.pdf.

However, acknowledging counterarguments can *backfire* if you commit two common mistakes:

1. First, while you have a responsibility to refute counterarguments, don't feel obliged to *make* the counterargument. That is, don't provide evidence that proves the opposing position. Too often this reinforces the opposing view held by those in your audience. This is an additional way persuasion differs from deliberation.
2. Second, avoid adopting the *language or phrases* used by people who argue against your position. Otherwise, you will unwittingly reinforce the counterargument. For example, if you argue on behalf of undocumented workers but refer to them as "illegal aliens," it will be difficult for your audience to think of them as anything other than violators of the law who deserve to be punished. Once you adopt the words of a counter perspective, you are arguing at a disadvantage. Instead, find a different language to express the counterargument and your refutation.

Between this and the previous chapter, we have outlined six steps in the process of developing a persuasive speech. While the steps by no means compose a comprehensive template, they do cover the basics of the persuasive process as you move from analyzing your listeners to refuting popular counterarguments.

Summary

This chapter covered the last three (of six total) steps in the persuasive process:

- The fourth step is the invention of effective persuasive appeals and arguments. In the process of invention, speakers can draw on heuristic devices as well as the three primary modes of proof—logos, pathos, and ethos—to generate ideas and specific arguments.
- The fifth step of the persuasive process involves framing your persuasive efforts. Speakers should use framing in honest and ethical ways to demonstrate their issue as worthy of attention and to emphasize the superiority of their desired response.
- The final step is refuting counterarguments. To strengthen advocacy, speakers should acknowledge and refute one or more counterarguments to their proposal.

Key Terms

counterargument
dishonest framing
heuristics
honest framing
logos

Review Questions

1. How do heuristic devices help speakers and writers form their ideas?
2. According to Aristotle, what are the three modes of proof for advocating an idea or claim?
3. What are counterarguments, and why should speakers refute them during their speech?

Discussion Questions

1. Aristotle asserts that ethos is the most important of the proofs. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?
2. For Aristotle, the modes of proof were to be used in combination but with the special instruction that pathos *not* be used as the sole means of persuasion. Why do you think Aristotle objected to basing persuasion solely on pathos? Do you agree with that instruction? Why or why not?
3. Think of a public issue and identify several ways of framing it. For each frame, name its definition of the problem, to whom or what it assigns blame for the problem, and the solution it supports. Which is the most persuasive? For whom?
4. Do the means of persuasion ever justify the ends? That is, as long as the belief, attitude, or course of action that you convince an audience to accept is in their best interest, does it matter how you convince them to do it? What about when a political candidate uses dishonest framing to win an election—but then ultimately governs well?

26. Building Sound Arguments Through Quality Evidence

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Construct sound arguments.
- Analyze arguments for their strengths and weaknesses.
- Evaluate common types of evidence to assess their quality.

Every day you make and encounter a variety of arguments. You might make an argument to your school's student government to start an esports club. On a video chat with your parents, you might present an argument for why they should purchase you a car for school or send (more) spending money. Later that night, your friends might seek to convince you that LeBron James, rather than Michael Jordan, is the best basketball player of all time.

We also routinely encounter arguments about important civic matters. We might read a letter in the newspaper by a school board member arguing why a local property tax increase is necessary to improve area schools. On news programs and in public speeches, we daily hear politicians and political operatives advance arguments about the best way to run the country.



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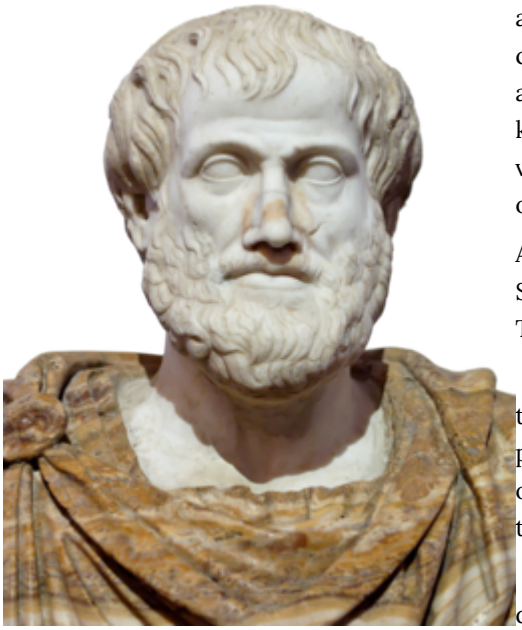
With so many different arguments competing for our adherence, how do we make decisions about personal matters, about what is best for our local community, and about what the nation should do on vital issues of the day?

This chapter enables you to think carefully about logos. Logos is the logical or reasoned basis of an appeal (i.e., argumentation), and it is part of the rhetorical canon of invention (as explained in chapters 1 and 25). By learning more about argumentation, you will improve your ability to make sound decisions and critically analyze public options. You will also learn about speechmaking, since most speeches are based on a series of arguments. In this chapter, we examine two fundamental issues related to reasoning in public speaking: the structure of argument and the selection and evaluation of evidence.

The Structure of Argument

An **argument** is the advocacy of a belief, attitude, or course of action that is supported by evidence. An argument (or series of arguments) gives reasons why a listener should agree with the perspective being advocated. We begin by considering the development of what is known as the Toulmin model and some limitations to the practice of good reasoning.

Box 26.1 Classical Reasoning



Aristotle by Alvaro Marques Hijazo via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Aristotle advocated the syllogism as the proper form of argument.[1] A **syllogism** is a three-step proposition that consists of two premises and a conclusion. If the premises are valid, then the conclusion must be true. This is also known as **deductive reasoning**, reasoning that moves from valid premises to a specific conclusion. The classic example of a syllogism is the following:

All men are mortal. (major premise)
Socrates is a man. (minor premise)
Therefore, Socrates is mortal. (conclusion)

If the two premises can be proven true, then it follows that the conclusion *must* also be true. This is also the process of formal logic, which relies on the certainty of the offered premises to reach what is considered an unquestioned, or true, conclusion.[2]

Syllogism is a valid argumentative form—as is deductive reasoning generally. However, in regular conversation, we rarely have premises and conclusions that are accepted as absolutely true. Just as often, some premises are omitted from an argument. Observing such tendencies, Aristotle coined the enthymeme as a rhetorical syllogism.

An **enthymeme** is an informal, incomplete syllogism in which a speaker relies on an audience to use its knowledge and experience to supply missing information that completes the argument. Take, for example, the underdeveloped argument, "Tax incentives for electric vehicles are justified because they will slow climate change." Its central, unstated premises include "tax incentives influence consumer behavior" and "vehicle emissions contribute to climate change." The enthymeme expects listeners to supply the missing reasoning that completes the argument.

However, these premises can also be debated or argued. Even if, as an audience member, we can supply a missing premise, we might still reject the argument. In this case, we might reject that "vehicle emissions contribute to climate change" or that the government should intervene in the free market. The contingent nature of premises in enthymemes allows for disagreement on public matters and policy decisions.[3] Exceptions and counterarguments to premises and conclusions result in complex arguments that defy categorization in classical syllogistic form.

1. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (ed. J. H. Freese, 1926), *Perseus Digital Library*, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0060.
2. Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 122.
3. John T. Gage, "Enthymeme," in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age*, ed. Theresa Enos (New York: Garland, 1996), 223–25.

The Toulmin Model

In the 1950s, Stephen Toulmin developed an approach to reasoning that is accepted by many as the standard in argument studies.[4] This approach, popularly known as the **Toulmin model**, provides a way to understand and critique arguments. In its full form, the model consists of as many as seven parts (see box 26.2); however, we primarily focus on its three most central components: claim, data, and warrant.

Claim

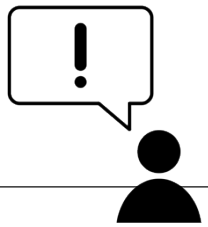
The **claim** of an argument is what you are attempting to prove and want an audience to accept. Examples of claims include the following:

"I should study chemistry this evening."

"My education will provide a good return on investment (ROI)."

"My public speaking professor is the best."

Your thesis statement is the most important claim in your speech. For instance, in a persuasive speech, you might offer the thesis "Greek organizations' new member recruitment should be improved." Each main point—each reason for changing Greek recruitment—is also a claim that supports your thesis. These are what we call *subclaims* because they are subordinate to the larger argument.



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Box 26.2 The Toulmin Model

Born in London, Stephen Toulmin (1922–2009) studied mathematics and physics before turning to philosophy and a focus on ethics, logic, and reasoning after World War II.[5] While Toulmin authored several books and taught at multiple US institutions, he is best known for the model of argument that came to be identified with his name.

In his 1958 book *The Uses of Argument*, Toulmin originally outlined an argument as consisting of six parts, but following the work of argumentation scholars Richard D. Rieke, Malcolm O. Sillars, and Tarla Rai Peterson, we offer the full model as containing seven elements:

- **Claim:** The idea one is trying to prove and wants an audience to accept.
- **Data:** Material or evidence that supports the acceptance of the claim. It answers the question

4. Toulmin, *Uses of Argument*.
5. William Grimes, "Stephen Toulmin, a Philosopher and Educator, Dies at 87," *New York Times*, December 11, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/education/11toulmin.html; Toulmin, *Uses of Argument*, in particular chapter 3, "The Layout of Argument," 94–145; Richard D. Rieke, Malcolm O. Sillars, and Tarla Rai Peterson, *Argumentation and Critical Decision Making*, 7th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2009), 91–97. We rely on Rieke, Sillars, and Peterson's explanation of the Toulmin model because it seems to best align with Toulmin's later views. See Gary A. Olson, "Literary Theory, Philosophy of Science, and Persuasive Discourse: Thoughts from a Neo-Premodernist," *Journal of Advanced Composition* 13, no. 2 (1993): 291, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20865918.

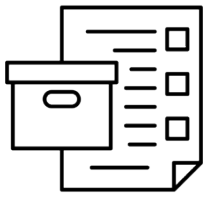
"Why?" or "What have you got to go on?"

- **Warrant:** A statement that justifies the connection between data and claim. The warrant is often implied and answers the question "How do you get there?"
- **Backing:** More specific evidence that reinforces data or the warrant. It explains the data or warrant as being "On account of."
- **Qualifier:** A term that modifies the strength or certainty of the claim such as "might," "usually," or "always."
- **Reservation:** A condition or exception when the claim would not be advocated. A reservation is noted by terms like "except" or "unless."
- **Rebuttal:** A basis for challenging the validity of the claim.

Data

A claim alone is not an argument. A claim offered without reason, support, or data is merely an assertion, a term previously introduced in chapter 5. An assertion fails to qualify as an argument because no reason is given for why it should be accepted. This is why **data**, or material and reasons supporting the acceptance of the claim (also commonly called evidence), are essential in forming a valid argument. Note that "data" here refers to *all* types of evidence, not solely statistics and facts.

Data fill in the "why" or "because" for your claims. For your thesis that Greek organizations' new member recruitment should be improved, data could consist of the following:



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- statistics on recent challenges to new member recruitment
- testimony about unfair recruitment practices
- examples of problems with the recruitment system

Each piece of information allows you to better support the claim and more convincingly persuade an audience to accept your argument. Data are typically found throughout your speech.

Warrant

Finally, a valid argument rests upon an acceptable warrant. The **warrant** provides justification for using the data to support the claim. In essence the warrant is a bridge, often in the form of a value statement, that connects the data with the claim, reinforcing their relationship.



Created by Luis Prado from Noun Project

Warrants are typically implied rather than stated; however, at times it is important to state your warrant as well, particularly when an audience may not readily agree with the link between claim and data that you are otherwise asserting.

Consider the following example to understand how a warrant functions:

Claim: I should replace my old truck with a new hybrid vehicle

Data: because hybrid vehicles produce significantly less environmental pollution.

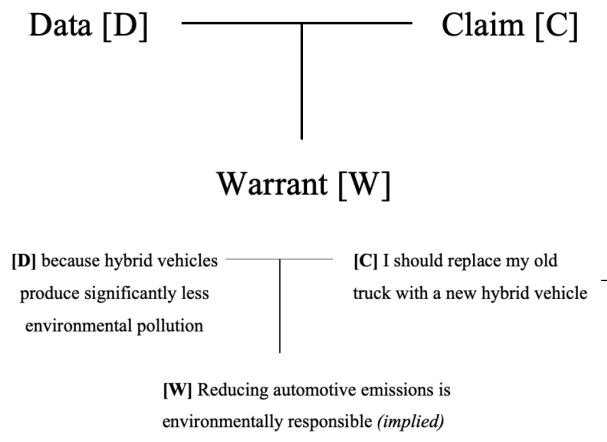
The warrant wants to answer how we get from the data to the claim or explain what makes this data a reason to accept the claim.

Warrant: Reducing automotive emissions is environmentally responsible.

It is likely that this warrant would be implied, relying on enthymematic reasons supplied by an audience. Presumably, the positive contribution to the environment is a strong enough incentive to cause the person making this argument to take action. However, there could be counterarguments or rebuttals that might cause this person to reject the claim (the cost of a new vehicle, for example). A more developed argument would consider these possibilities by providing *backing* for the warrant and/or data in quantifying the environmental benefits.

Box 26.3 Visualizing the Toulmin Model

The Toulmin model provides a layout to visualize or diagram arguments.



Example argument: I should replace my old truck with a new hybrid vehicle because hybrid vehicles produce significantly less environmental pollution.

The Toulmin model is more than a way of diagramming arguments—it is a way of improving how you *think* about arguments. It allows you to conceptualize and diagnose your own arguments and those produced by others. Putting an argument into the Toulmin form can allow you to

- see what the *claim* is and if it is reasonable;
- consider what the *data* are, if there is enough, and the data's quality; and
- evaluate if there is a reasonable *warrant*, or one can be inferred, that connects the data and the claim.

Because the model promotes clearer thinking about how we reason together, it is a way of enriching our civic engagement and the messages we send and receive about democratic participation.

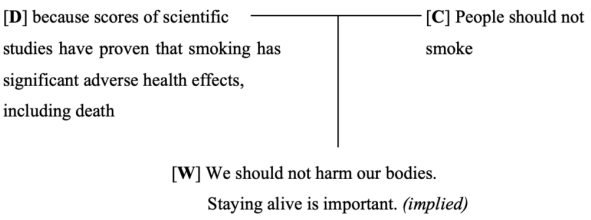
Arguments and Their Limits

Rhetorical arguments are powerful but inexact. Audiences can weigh arguments on public issues and come to significantly different conclusions about their merit. Such is the case in the difficult issue of abortion access as different people hold different views on the issue, and different states have vastly different laws.

Some audiences may also refuse to reason. As the example in box 26.4 illustrates, some appeals, urges, and habits overcome reason, and not all decision-makers weigh competing arguments the same way.

Box 26.4 Limitations on Arguments Against Smoking

Think about this abbreviated (and asserted) causal argument: "People should not smoke because scores of scientific studies have proven that smoking has significant adverse health effects, including death." In a Toulmin form, the argument would appear as follows:



A wealth of valid backing for this argument is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other sources. Yet many people who hear the strong evidence against it still smoke. The American Cancer Society reports that as of 2019, approximately thirty-four million people in the United States (14% of the population) smoke.[6] The reasons are no doubt varied, including value hierarchies that justify the decision to smoke, challenges to the evidence concerning the impacts of smoking, and the difficulty of kicking the habit.

Evidence and Its Evaluation

Evidence is data and backing in the form of examples, statistics, and testimony that are used to support a claim. The key is finding not just any evidence but the *best* evidence to support your argument. When you use weak evidence, your data will generally be insufficient to convince an audience of your argument's validity.

To discover strong evidence, begin by selecting credible sources using the guidance in chapter 8. Then draw from your sources to find and evaluate evidence. Use the instructions provided next for choosing examples, scrutinizing statistics, and selecting testimony.

Choosing Examples

An **example** provides a concrete instance in the form of a fact or occurrence. An example seeks to make a claim tangible to an audience. Examples generally take one of three forms: specific, hypothetical, and anecdotes.

6. Sandy McDowell, "Smoking Rates Historically Low, but Other Cancer-Related Behaviors Need Improvement," *American Cancer Society*, May 19, 2021, https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/acs-report-smoking-rates-historically-low-but-other-cancer-related-behaviors-need-improvement.html, archived at https://perma.cc/MKN4-PM63.

Specific Examples

The most valuable type of example is a **specific example**. A specific example is factual, one that has actually happened or is being experienced. A specific example prompts an audience to recognize that the claim (or a similar claim) has been demonstrated or proven true on a prior occasion.

Box 26.5 Specific Examples in Practice

In a 2023 commencement address at the University of Chicago, Bret Stephens, a *New York Times* columnist and Chicago graduate, gave a speech that argued for the value of "speaking your mind when other people don't want you to." One way he supported his thesis was through the use of a series of specific examples in which conventional wisdom proved incorrect and it would have been beneficial to interrogate the ideas of allies or superiors, including the following:

> Why were the economists and governors at the Federal Reserve so confident that interest rates could remain rock bottom for years without running a serious risk of inflation?...Why were so few people on Wall Street betting against the housing market in 2007? Why were so many officials and highly qualified analysts so adamant that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction?...and why did so many major polling firms fail to predict Donald Trump's victory in 2016?[7]

The effectiveness of Stephens's examples was in their succinct expression of a **series of specific instances** where most experts were ultimately proven incorrect and more dissenting voices would have been valuable.



[Bret Stephens] by Grant Wickes via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

Hypothetical Examples

A less powerful but still useful type of example is a **hypothetical example**. A hypothetical example is based on a plausible event or occurrence but does not represent a specific, actual instance. This sort of example allows an audience to visualize the claim, but it lacks the concrete data of a specific example.

7. Bret Stephens, "Go Forth and Argue," *New York Times*, June 2, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/02/opinion/free-speech-campus.html.

Box 26.6 Hypothetical Examples in Practice

In 2023 when former South Carolina governor and US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley announced her intention to run for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, she spoke of her desire to create a country where "anyone can do anything and achieve their own American dream." To illustrate her claim, Haley pointed to a plausible range of American experiences, without naming any one individual in particular as possessing the experiences:

> The college student who's paying too much and getting too little from her education. The young adult in his first real job wondering how he'll ever afford a mortgage or start a family. The single mom working two jobs and three times harder than anyone else....I'm fighting for all of us because all of us have to be in this together.[8]

Haley used **hypothetical examples** that allowed her audience to visualize themselves within the America she was seeking to lead.



Nikki Haley by Renee Ittner-McManus via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Anecdotes

Finally, anecdotes, which we defined in chapter 11 as stories or extended examples in narrative form, are more elaborate examples that include additional detail. Often presented in the form of personal narratives, these examples seek a deeper connection with the audience. While powerful, these take time for a speaker to develop and present.

Box 26.7 Anecdotes in Practice

An effective illustration or personal narrative is again found in Nikki Haley's presidential campaign announcement. Three times in that speech Haley returned to her status as "the proud daughter of Indian immigrants" to illustrate the relevance of her personal experience in leading "a new generation" of Ameri-

8. "Watch Nikki Haley's Full Speech Announcing Presidential Run," video, *NBC News*, February 15, 2023, 20:50, https://www.nbcnews.com/video/watch-nikki-haley-s-full-speech-announcing-presidential-run-163418181896.

cans "into the future." The extended example peaked near her conclusion where she underscored her experiences a final time. Speaking about the "country's renewal," she shared:

> I'm more confident than ever that we can make this vision real in our time because that's what I've seen my entire life. As a brown girl growing up in a black and white world, I saw the promise of America unfold before me. As the proud wife of a combat veteran, I saw our people's deep love of freedom and our determination to defend it. As governor I saw our state move beyond hate and violence and lift up everyone in peace....The time has come to renew that spirit and rally our people. Our moment is now....Let's save our country...and move forward together.[9]

Here Haley offers an **illustration of her life experiences** that is richer than any specific accomplishment she has had as a politician and provides insight into her life.

Not all examples are equal, and thus you must carefully evaluate their selection. A poor example fails to justify your claim and risks damaging your credibility and persuasiveness.

Here are a few considerations (also found in box 26.15) that you should make when *selecting and evaluating examples*:

- Is the example *representative*, or typical, of the broader situation or experience?
- Are a *sufficient number* of examples used to prove the claim?
- Have negative examples (counterexamples) been *addressed*?
- Is the example *compelling* in its detail, clarity, and vividness?

Consider these questions when evaluating the strength of an example, though an example may not meet all of these standards and still be satisfactory.

Box 26.8 Examples as Evidence

An example provides a concrete instance in the form of a fact or occurrence. It seeks to make a claim tangible to an audience. Examples generally take one of three forms.

- **Specific example:** A specific example is factual, an example that has actually happened or is being experienced.
- **Hypothetical example:** A hypothetical example is based on a plausible event or occurrence but does not represent a specific, actual instance.
- **Anecdote:** Anecdotes, extended examples, or illustrations are more elaborate examples that contain additional detail.

9. "Watch Nikki Haley's Full Speech Announcing Presidential Run," 23:30.

Scrutinizing Statistics

Statistics, a second common form of evidence, represent information in numeric form according to size, quantity, or frequency. In public speaking, statistics are most commonly used to demonstrate public opinion, capture common experiences and behaviors, and efficiently express the distribution and allocation of resources.

Speakers love statistics—and with a little searching, it seems we can find a statistic for just about anything, from the number of pieces of mail processed and delivered every day by the US Postal Service (318 million) to the percentage of people who believe in extraterrestrials (about 65% of adults in the United States).[10]

Because statistics have an air of tangibility, appear to be exact, and seem authoritative, we too often accept them as true. In reality, statistics should be carefully scrutinized. As American author and satirist Mark Twain is purported to have once said, "There are lies, damned lies, and statistics." Nonetheless, statistics are a useful basis of proof in many speeches.

Box 26.9 Statistics in Practice

In his April 3, 2024, remarks at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome H. Powell relied on statistics in advancing his case that the nation's economic outlook was continuing to improve after a period of stubbornly high inflation. Powell supported his contention by pointing to improvements in inflationary trends and continued job growth.



Governor Powell by Federalreserve via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

- Specifically, Powell noted that inflation had slowed from an annual rate of 5.2% in the prior year to only 2.5% in the twelve-month period leading to February 2024.
- Moreover, three million new jobs had been created in 2023 as inflation declined, and an average of 265,000 new jobs were added in the previous three months.
- Due to such changes, the Federal Open Market Committee predicted continual, if "sometimes bumpy," progress toward the Fed's goal of 2% annual inflation.

These **statistics**, which reflect the use of raw numbers, trends, and averages, were some of the primary data offered by Powell as he addressed the overall health of the US economy.[11]

10. "Postal Facts: One Day in the Postal Service," United States Postal Service, https://facts.usps.com/one-day/, archived at https://perma.cc/Y3X4-CKY7, accessed March 11, 2025; Courtney Kennedy and Arnold Lau, "Most Americans Believe in Intelligent Life Beyond Earth; Few See UFOs as a Major National Security Threat," *Pew Research Center*, June 30, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/06/30/most-americans-believe-in-intelligent-life-beyond-earth-few-see-ufos-as-a-major-national-security-threat/, archived at https://perma.cc/PU2V-PERC.
11. Jerome H. Powell, "Fireside Chat at the Stanford Business, Government, and Society Forum," Board of Governors of the

Four of the most common forms of statistics called upon by public speakers are averages, raw numbers, trends, and polls.

Average

An **average** is a common and seemingly benign statistic that is frequently used by speakers. In principle it represents what is typical—what is average—and in box 26.9, we see Federal Reserve Board Chair Powell making use of the average number of new jobs being added to the economy on a monthly basis—265,000. However, an average may be more complicated than it initially appears because there are at least three methods for determining an average—through mean, median, or mode.

The most common method for representing an average is the mean. A **mean** is derived by summing all the data and dividing the total by the number of data points. The **median**, in contrast, is the data point that appears in the exact middle of a sample, and the **mode** is the result number that appears most frequently.

Box 26.10 Limitations of Using the Mean to Find an Average

Suppose you were leading a discussion about the low working wages available for college students seeking summer employment. A statistic you might find valuable is the amount earned by the average student worker in your class during the previous summer (this would be a small sample but a relevant one to your audience).

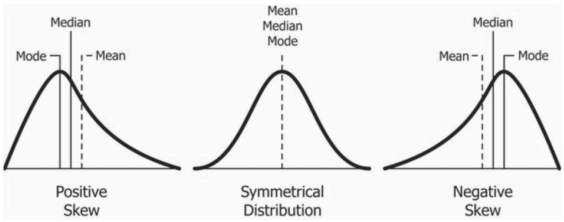


Image by Diva Jain, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

If you had access to all the financial data, you could determine the **mean income** by adding together the total dollars earned by your classmates and then dividing it by the number of student workers. If twenty-five students had combined wages of $150,000, the *mean* student income was $6,000. Seems clear enough, right?

However, what if you found that this included $50,000 earned by a single student in an astoundingly successful entrepreneurial venture? How does this change the average, and what does it do to the value, meaning, and accuracy of this statistic for your speech?

Raw Number

A second common statistic is a **raw number**. In the student wages example in box 26.10, the raw number was $150,000 (the total wages earned). In box 26.9, Jerome Powell made use of a raw number as well—three million jobs added in the

Federal Reserve System, April 3, 2024, https://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/powell20240403a.htm, archived at https://perma.cc/NM3G-VGTW.

previous year. We use raw numbers when we want to draw on the power of the magnitude of a number. An average may make a number seem small or insignificant, but by giving the entire scope of the data through a raw number, an audience may gain a better grasp of the situation.

However, the opposite may also be true: A raw number can make a problem look much worse than it actually is because it combines all the data into a single representation. Box 26.11 provides an example.

Box 26.11 Limitations of Using Only Raw Numbers



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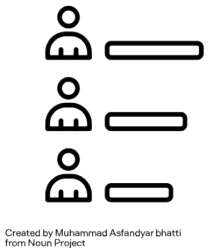
If you were to learn that the Biden administration proposed a $34 billion increase (**a raw number**) to the United States' 2025 defense budget, you might be concerned about the seemingly large budget increase. However, if you also were provided with a **trend statistic** clarifying this represented a budget increase of only about 4.1%—and that after accounting for inflation over the prior two years the spending power of the defense budget experienced a 3% decline—you might perceive the raw number differently.[12]

Trend Statistic

When a speaker wants to demonstrate a change that has occurred over a period of time, the statistic that is most often used is called a *trend*. A **trend statistic** emphasizes change in a clear and meaningful way by providing two points of comparison. As the Powell example in box 26.9 demonstrates, trend statistics are important to economists. Trend statistics for inflation, gross domestic product, unemployment, and interest rates can provide a more focused and efficient evaluation of the immediate economic climate.

12. Michael E. O'Hanlon and Alejandra Rocha, "What's in Biden's $850-Billion Defense Budget Proposal?," *Brookings Institution*, March 15, 2024, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/whats-in-bidens-850-billion-defense-budget-proposal/, archived at https://perma.cc/UH3P-8P92.

Polling Data



Created by Muhammad Asfandyar bhatti from Noun Project

Finally, perhaps the most popular type of statistic is **polling data**. A valid, scientific poll measures the opinions or beliefs of a large group of people by collecting data from a representative random sample that is similar in its demographics to the rest of the population and then generalizes the results.

Polling data is collected on a variety of topics, ranging from whom one intends to vote for in a presidential election to what is the best movie ever made. One of the oldest and most recognized polling researchers is Gallup, a global analytics firm that has measured public opinion for nearly a century. Gallup regularly tracks opinions on various topics, such as consumer confidence, presidential approval, and the future of Medicare and Social Security. While polling data must be carefully analyzed, it is valuable in giving your audience an indication of what a larger public thinks. That is, while the majority may not always be right, their opinion can be influential.

However, not all polls are equally valid, and in selecting polling data, there are several items you should consider:

- In particular, you should verify that the poll is based on a *representative random sample*. This can be determined by examining how the poll was conducted—who was polled, how they were polled, how many people were polled, when they were polled—and what the margin of error is. The **margin of error** is the uncertainty or potential variation in a polling result. It reflects the sampling error or margin in which there is less confidence about the accuracy of the survey result.
- Also, be careful how you use *nonscientific internet polling* that asks website visitors their opinion on an issue. Such polls have a selection bias in terms of who chooses to take the poll. For example, *The Athletic*'s daily sports newsletter, "The Pulse," periodically gives sports fans the opportunity to express their opinion on various sports-related issues and events. Such polls are interesting to sports fans and do show something of popular opinion, but be mindful that the results are not statistically valid.

Box 26.12 The American Freshman

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey, administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, is taken by tens of thousands of first-time full-time college students each fall. In 2019, 126,642 new students from 178 four-year schools participated in the survey. Ninety-five

thousand of those students from 148 institutions were included in the normative data that was reported. Among the results are the following:[13]

- Getting a better job was identified as a "very important" reason to attend college by 83.5% of respondents.
- Making more money was named as a "very important" reason to attend college by 73.2% of respondents.
- A personal goal of being well-off financially was indicated by 84.3% of respondents.
- A significant portion of respondents, specifically 43.6%, perceived themselves as "middle-of-the-road" politically.

Issue	**2019 Respondents Indicating Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat**	**2015 Respondents Indicating Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat**	**2012 Respondents Indicating Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat**
Abortion should be legal.	73.1%	63.6%	61.1%
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions.	X	52.3%	41.9%
Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America.	X	18.6%	23%
Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.	X	81.1%	75%
Colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers from campus.	51%	43.2%	X

- What other information would you want to know about the data before deciding whether to use it?
- How useful might this information be to a speaker planning a presentation on a related topic?
- How might the information be misused or overgeneralized?
- What information do these results leave out?

In sum, it is crucial that you carefully scrutinize statistics. You should closely consider how a statistic was derived so you have a good grasp of its validity. It is ethically suspect to simply report a number without some understanding of how it was derived. Similarly, as a listener, be skeptical of statistics presented without enough information

13. "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2019," *Higher Education Research Institute*, https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2019.pdf; "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2015," *Higher Education Research Institute*, https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2015-Expanded.pdf; "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2012," *Higher Education Research Institute*, https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2012.pdf.

or context to evaluate their credibility. A statistical conclusion is only as good as the method used to arrive at it. For that reason, here are a few questions (also in box 26.15) you should ask when *selecting and evaluating statistics*:

- If the number is an average, is it *the mean*, *the median*, *or the mode*? Is it representative of the data, or is it skewed by an extreme data point?
- What was the ***sample size***: the number of people used to determine the average or polled?
- If using polling data, what is the *margin of error or reliability*? Polls that have a margin of error greater than a few percentage points are suspect, particularly if the margin of error is greater than the difference between the polling result options.
- What do you know about the *sample*? Was it randomly selected? Are there factors about the sample population (age, gender, geography, etc.) that make the data suspect?
- W*hen* was the data collected? Public opinion, averages, and raw numbers can change with time.

Box 26.13 Statistics as Evidence

A statistic represents information in numeric form according to size, quantity, or frequency. A statistic has an aura of certainty and exactness while being able to efficiently express public opinion, capture common experiences, or show the scope of an issue. Statistics may be expressed in several forms.

- **Raw number:** A single number or figure that captures the breadth of an occurrence.
- **Trend statistic:** A trend statistic represents meaning over a specific period of time.
- **Polling data:** Polling data seeks to represent the opinions or beliefs of a large group of people by collecting data from a representative random sample.
- **Average:** An average seeks to numerically represent what is a typical or common experience. An average may be derived in three different ways.
    - The **mean** is calculated by adding together all the data and dividing the sum by the total number of data points. Within the mean might be outliers—experiences that are either much larger or much smaller than what is typical.
    - The **median** seeks to compensate for outliers by representing the data point that is in the exact middle of the sample; it is the middle result from among all of the data points.
    - The **mode** is the data point that appears most frequently in the sample.

Selecting Testimony

Testimony is a third common form of evidence that serves as data and backing for arguments. **Testimony** is facts or opinions drawn from the words, experiences, and expertise of another individual. Testimony is used to supplement our own opinions and experiences.

Testimony should come from authoritative sources on an issue. In chapter 8, we recognized three types of source authorities. *Subject* authorities are sources with trained expertise on the topic. *Societal* authority emphasizes a source's power to control outcomes based on their position within a society or organization. Authority can also be accrued through *special experiences*.

Suppose you are giving a speech on US immigration from Venezuela. You may have sensible ideas, but your

audience is unlikely to accept your opinions alone. Instead, you should build your credibility by supplying well-informed testimony as data for your claims. Perhaps you could draw on testimony from the following:

- *subject authorities* such as Dr. Christopher Salas-Wright, whose research focuses on Latin American migrants
- *societal authorities* such as the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization
- *authorities from special circumstances* like a Venezuelan who immigrated to the United States

Testimony from such figures about the wisdom of your proposal would significantly aid the power of your argument.

Effective testimony provides explanation and analysis. Make clear how and why the source is authoritative on the issue. Then offer a sufficient amount of testimony to make the evidence compelling. For example, saying that an economic analyst declared "The current economic recovery will not continue" *does not say much*. The testimony fails to provide an explanation or analysis for *why* this perspective is justified.

Box 26.14 Testimony in Practice



Attorney General Holder by Douglas Palmer via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.

In a 2011 speech on voter registration and rights, then–Attorney General Eric Holder used testimony to support his contention that voting rights are important and in need of attention.

Near the start of his address, Holder quoted former President Lyndon B. Johnson as saying, "The right to vote is the basic right, without which all others are meaningless." Holder drew from Johnson's authority as the president who in 1965 signed the Voting Rights Act into law.

In turn, to establish that there was a threat to this essential right, Holder drew from US Congressman John Lewis, a civil rights leader from the 1960s with firsthand knowledge and experience of the struggles over voter registration and voting rights. Holder quoted Lewis to supply testimony that voting rights are "under attack…[by] a deliberate and systematic attempt to prevent millions of elderly voters, young voters, students, [and] minority and low-income voters from exercising their constitutional right to engage in the democratic pro[cess]."[14]

In this way Attorney General Holder, himself a credible source based on his title and position, enhanced his argument through the use of **testimony**.

14. All quotes from Eric Holder, "Attorney General Eric Holder Speaks at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library & Museum" (transcript, Austin, TX, December 13, 2011), *U.S. Department of Justice Archives*, https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/speech/attorney-general-eric-holder-speaks-lyndon-baines-johnson-library-museum, archived at https://perma.cc/J5AQ-2X5J.

As with the other forms of evidence, there are some considerations to make (also in box 26.15) when *selecting and evaluating testimony*:

- Is the source a *qualified* authority due to their subject expertise, societal position, or special circumstances? The testimony will strengthen your speech only if the source can truly add insight based on their status as a qualified authority on the topic being addressed.
- Does the source have *firsthand knowledge* of the issue? Ideally, the testimony is based on experience rather than opinion, and the source has had close dealings with the issues you are addressing.
- Does the source have *excessive personal interest* in the issue? A conflict of interest might overly bias the source's testimony.
- What *assumptions* are made in the testimony? Consider what the source assumed when they made the comments and consider whether those assumptions are consistent with your own assumptions and argument.

Examples, statistics, and testimony are necessary components of valid arguments as they provide the substance used to demonstrate claims. Effective speakers use all three types of evidence in their presentations. Box 26.15 summarizes useful guidelines for selecting and evaluating examples, statistics, and testimony as you build and listen to speeches and arguments.

Box 26.15 Guidelines for Selecting and Evaluating Evidence

Universal Criteria	**Using Examples**	**Using Statistics**	**Using Testimony**
• Is the evidence relevant? • Is the evidence recent? • Is the evidence credible? • Does the evidence contain bias? • Does the evidence provide explanation and analysis? • What is the certainty of the evidence?	• Is the example representative? • Are there a sufficient number of examples? • Have negative examples been addressed? • Are the examples compelling in their detail and clarity?	• How was the average arrived at? • What is the sample size? • What is the margin of error or reliability of the poll? • What is known about the sample? • When was the data collected?	• Is the source a qualified authority? • Does the source have firsthand knowledge? • Does the source have excessive personal interest or bias? • Have assumptions in the testimony been accounted for?

Summary

Arguments form the basis of decisions we make daily; thus, the ability to produce high-quality arguments is of vital concern to public speaking and civic participation. In this chapter you have learned the fundamental elements of argument and how to support them.

- An argument is the advocacy of a belief, attitude, or course of action that is supported by evidence. An argument (or series of arguments) gives listeners reasons for adopting or agreeing with the perspective advocated.
- The Toulmin model of argument is a seven-part model that provides a way to conceptualize, verify, and critique arguments so that one can more effectively understand and evaluate public arguments.
- The central elements of the Toulmin model are claim, data, and warrant. The claim of an argument is what the speaker seeks to prove and wants an audience to accept. Data are material and reasons that

support the acceptance of the claim. The warrant provides the justification for using the data to support the claim, acting as a bridge between the two concepts.

- Evidence is data and backing in the form of examples, statistics, and testimony that is used to support a claim. Evidence is vital in providing support, and without evidence or data, a speaker is left only with assertion.
- An example is evidence that supports a claim by providing a concrete instance in the form of a fact or occurrence. The principal forms of examples are specific examples, hypothetical examples, and anecdotes. When selecting and evaluating examples, speakers should judge if the example is representative, if a sufficient number of examples have been provided to prove the argument, if negative examples have been accounted for, and if the examples have been expressed with sufficient detail and clarity.
- Statistics represent information in numeric form according to the size, quantity, or frequency of an idea, outcome, or occurrence. Four common forms of statistics are averages, raw numbers, trends, and polls. When selecting and evaluating statistics, pay attention to how an average was derived, observe the selection and size of a sample population, review margin of error or reliability for polling data, and consider the source and date of the statistics.
- Testimony is facts or opinions derived from the words, experiences, and expertise of another individual. When selecting and evaluating testimony, speakers should use a qualified authority with clear expertise, firsthand knowledge of the topic, and a minimum of personal interest or bias. It is also important to understand the assumptions of testimony in order to be confident it is utilized in a fair and accurate manner.

Key Terms

argument
average
claim
data
deductive reasoning
enthymeme
evidence
example
hypothetical example
margin of error
mean
median
mode
polling data
raw number
sample size

specific example
statistics
syllogism
testimony
Toulmin model
trend statistic
warrant

Review Questions

1. What is an argument?
2. What are the primary parts of an argument according to the Toulmin model? What function does each element of argument serve?
3. What are the primary forms of evidence? What tests should you perform in evaluating the quality of each type?

Discussion Questions

1. What is required to make a "good" or "quality" argument? Why do people sometimes reject "good" arguments?
2. What is the value of the Toulmin model?
3. Test your ability to identify arguments by analyzing an editorial from *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. First identify the thesis, the subclaims, the data, and the warrants. Second, identify what types of data (i.e., examples, statistics, testimony) are used. Third, assess the quality of the data to create an overall assessment of the editorial—is it a good argument?
4. As you watch television or read a magazine, think about the advertisements. Are the advertisements arguments? Do some of them present a claim and data? How do they compare with the arguments you find in speeches and essays?

27. Identifying Reasoning Patterns and Fallacies

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Construct sound arguments.
- Identify reasoning patterns.
- Test for common reasoning fallacies.

In the previous chapter, you learned about the meaning and structure of argument and how to select high-quality evidence in order to build strong, valid arguments. In this chapter, we continue our exploration of argument by more broadly considering how arguments function. We do this by examining two interrelated concepts: patterns of reasoning and reasoning fallacies.

This chapter begins by explaining both terms and their relationship. We will next explain five patterns of reasoning and their related fallacies. The chapter will end by introducing you to a few additional fallacies.

Reasoning Patterns and Fallacies

When developing arguments in a speech, you can choose from several available approaches or **patterns of reasoning**. A reasoning pattern is derived from *what kind* of data or evidence is selected and *how* that data or evidence is used to prove a claim.

Generally, patterns of reasoning reflect the practice of **inductive reasoning**, a form of reasoning in which a speaker uses a series of examples, instances, or cases to support the likelihood of a conclusion. Inductive arguments are judged based on the strengths (or weaknesses) of the observational data offered in support of a claim. For example, an inductive argument might be based on a series of examples (the most common form of inductive reasoning), analogies, or even signs that collectively suggest the likelihood of a particular conclusion.

Working in concert with reasoning patterns is attention to reasoning fallacies. A reasoning **fallacy** refers to a flaw or defect in reasoning that undermines argument validity. A fallacy:

NO	YES
Does *not* exist simply because we disagree with an argument.	Does occur when a reasoning pattern is *used incorrectly or ineffectively*. This incorrect use is generally due to poor *evidence* or an implied *warrant* that is faulty. Recall from chapter 26 that a warrant is a statement that justifies the connection between data (evidence) and claim.

We will next introduce you to several reasoning patterns and their corresponding reasoning fallacies.

Types of Reasoning Patterns and Related Fallacies

This section will introduce you to five patterns of reasoning: reasoning from example, reasoning from analogy, reasoning from cause, reasoning from sign, and reasoning from authority. It will also consider how these patterns are sometimes used ineffectively, resulting in reasoning fallacies.

Reasoning from Example

The first type of evidence we discussed in chapter 26 was examples. The effort to prove a claim through examples, also understood as *inductive reasoning*, is called **reasoning from example** or generalization. That chapter's discussion of *examples* as evidence identified several ways to evaluate reasoning from example.

- If an example passes those tests and there are a *sufficient number of examples* to prove the claim, then you can reasonably conclude that you have presented a valid argument (or at least that *this portion* of your argument is valid).
- If, however, the example(s) *violates* those conditions, it *isn't representative* of the larger situation, or an *insufficient* number is presented, then a reasoning fallacy has been committed. This reasoning fallacy is known as a **hasty generalization**.

Box 27.1 Reasoning from Example: Sample Arguments

Consider reasoning from example through these two brief arguments:

Example 1: President Donald Trump's inaccurate claim that the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine could be used to effectively treat COVID-19 proves that all presidents mislead the public.

Analysis: Is this example representative? Are there a sufficient number of examples to prove the claim that "all presidents mislead the public"? Is there enough detail to make this example believable or to prove the president made misleading statements? While one can always ask a variety of questions about an argument, **this singular, brief example is insufficient to prove that *all* presidents mislead the public**. This is an example, then, of a **hasty generalization**.



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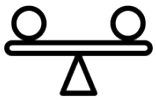
Example 2: President Trump's inaccurate claim that hydroxychloroquine could effectively treat COVID-19, President Obama's broken promise that people could maintain their existing health care plans under the Affordable Care Act, President George W. Bush's administration's inaccurate claims about Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction, and President Clinton's denial of a relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky prove that all recent presidents have misled the country in public statements.

Analysis: While certainly one could challenge the lack of detail in explaining the individual situations, overall, this argument is stronger. Rather than presenting only one example, ***four* examples are offered, which would seem to be a sufficient number**. By limiting or **qualifying the claim to "recent"** presidents instead of making a claim about all presidents, this argument is initially of **sufficient strength** to avoid being considered a fallacy.



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Reasoning from Analogy



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A second common form of argument is to reason from analogy. When using reasoning from analogy, also known as **analogical reasoning**, you attempt to prove a claim by comparing two situations or cases.

Box 27.2 Reasoning from Analogy: Sample Argument

In June 2024 when Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, then–surgeon general of the United States, advanced the claim, "It is time to require a surgeon general's warning label on social media platforms, stating that social media is associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents," he supported his argument through analogical reasoning:

> Faced with high levels of car-accident-related deaths in the mid- to late 20th century, lawmakers successfully demanded seatbelts, airbags, crash testing and a host of other measures that ultimately made cars safer. This January the F.A.A. grounded about 170 planes when a door plug came off one Boeing 737 Max 9 while the plane was in the air. And the following month, a massive recall of dairy products was conducted because of a listeria contamination that claimed two lives.[1]



Vivek Murthy, Surgeon General by United States Department of Health and Human Services via Wikimedia Commons, *Public Domain*.



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Analysis: In this statement, Dr. Murthy demonstrates the principle of analogical reasoning. He asked readers and, ultimately, Congress to support issuance of a surgeon general's warning label on social media platforms on the basis that the harms being caused by social media were **analogous** to the level of harm that justified actions and regulations to protect safety in other instances. He **reasonably compared** a new situation (regulation of social media) with past situations where regulations were used to address public problems (seat belts, airline safety, product food safety).

In testing analogies, speakers and listeners need to *examine the similarities and differences* between the implicated circumstances. In doing so, you might ask,

- Are the situations reasonably *comparable*?
- Do the situations possess *more similarities than differences*?

If you answer yes to these questions, then you should feel comfortable with the analogy. If, however, you find that the answer to both is no, then you have discovered a fallacy known as a **faulty analogy** or faulty comparison.

1. Vivek H. Murthy, "Surgeon General: Why I'm Calling for a Warning Label on Social Media Platforms," *New York Times*, June 17, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/17/health/surgeon-general-social-media-warning-label.html.

Box 27.3 Faulty Analogy: Sample Argument

Consider another example of reasoning from analogy through this brief argument:

Just as the United States has reduced smoking rates and related health harms through regulation and public health advocacy, it can similarly reduce drug-related harms. Regulation and public health promotion have worked in Canada and Portugal, so surely it will work in the United States.

Analysis: The first sentence provides the claim and the initial inspiration for the claim. The second sentence provides the data intended to explain why the policy will be successful. **What would the warrant be? The United States is similar enough to Canada and Portugal that what has worked there will work in the United States** ("so surely it will work in the United States"). Is this warrant, and hence this analogy, valid? If not, this is an example of a **faulty analogy**.



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Reasoning from Cause



Another popular pattern of reasoning is reasoning from cause. Also known as **causal reasoning**, reasoning from cause is used when a speaker claims an event is caused by a particular circumstance or action. When a direct link between an action and a consequence is exhibited, then a causal argument can be very effective.

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Box 27.4 Reasoning from Cause: Sample Argument

An increasing public health issue is the rise of obesity among children and adolescents. Seeing a potential association between soft drink consumption and increasing levels of adolescent obesity, some communities have raised the cost of sugary drinks. Consider the following causal argument related to this relationship:

By placing new taxes on sugary drinks, cities can discourage the purchase of products that contribute to youth obesity. After new 'soda taxes' raised purchasing costs by an average of 33% in Boulder, Philadelphia, Oakland, San Francisco, and Seattle, retailers also saw purchases of such drinks decline by 33%.[2]

2. Steven Ross Johnson, "How 'Soda Taxes' Could Fuel Better Health," *U.S. News & World Report*, January 5, 2024, https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2024-01-05/how-soda-taxes-could-fuel-better-health.



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Analysis: This is a cause-effect argument that offers data (related to product purchases) to support the claim that **taxation resulted in a particular effect (reduced purchases)**. The argument may need additional development to withstand heavy scrutiny, but in this form, it appears to draw a **reasonable** cause-effect relationship.

In determining whether a causal argument is valid, consider the following criteria:

- Does the fact that the effect has occurred after the cause *reasonably signify a relationship* between the two events?
- Are there important alternative reasons or causes that have been *ignored*?

When a speaker is guilty of attributing a cause-effect relationship between two items that are not connected, they have created a **faulty cause** fallacy. When the faulty attribution of cause occurs only *after the fact* (e.g., in hindsight), the reasoning error is more specifically known as a **post hoc fallacy**.

Box 27.5 Post Hoc Fallacy: Sample Argument



[Mr. Met] by Metropolitan Transportation Authority via Flickr, CC BY.

Consider the following example heard from a discouraged New York Mets fan: "I never watch the Mets on television because they always lose when I do." If we call back to the Toulmin model (in the previous chapter), we can pinpoint that the reasoning flaw in this causal argument rests in the *implied warrant*: "What I do determines whether the Mets win or lose."



Created by Zach Bogart from Noun Project

Analysis: There might be a miraculous coincidence between this fan's viewing habits and their favorite team's results, but in reality we know there is **no causal connection** between the two. Hence this beleaguered fan has (knowingly, no doubt) created a **faulty cause fallacy** of the **post hoc** variety.

Slippery Slope Fallacy



[Slippery Slope](#) *by Malcolm via Flickr,* [CC BY-NC](#).

Relatedly, speakers sometimes attempt to use causal reasoning to argue that a *single event or action will lead to a chain reaction of cause-and-effect events*, typically ending with a catastrophic outcome. To effectively make such an argument, the speaker would need a significant amount of evidence to support the idea that one cause-and-effect sequence will lead to another, then to another, and to another. When speakers advance such arguments without providing necessary support, they commit a fallacy known as a **slippery slope**. They suggest that if a first step is taken, then we will slide all the way down the slope to the very bottom.

Box 27.6 Slippery Slope Fallacy: Sample Argument

In more closely considering how a slippery slope fallacy operates, consider this brief argument about the expanded use of artificial intelligence in the workplace:

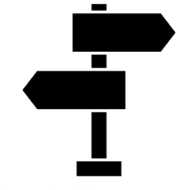
> If we start relying on AI to perform basic tasks, next we will use it for more complex jobs. Quickly, we will be unable to do the work ourselves, and AI will replace almost all human workers, leading to mass unemployment and poverty.

Analysis: This argument advocates we not make any use of AI because if we do, we will **slide down a slope** toward employee obsolescence and economic chaos. What is provided, however, are **only asserted assumptions** about what a basic use of AI might lead to—total reliance and mass elimination of jobs. Although that outcome is possible in a dystopian future, nothing is provided to suggest that it is likely or imminent, hence it reflects the fallacy of a slippery slope.



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Reasoning from Sign



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Reasoning from sign relies on circumstantial evidence, or signs, to demonstrate a claim.

For instance, a driver might notice a dashboard warning light indicator and say, "There must be something wrong with my car. The check engine light is on." They have made a sign argument:

- Their *claim* ("There must be something wrong with my car") is based on



- sign *data* ("The check engine light is on"). Created by Annisa from Noun Project
- The implied *warrant* to the argument is that "vehicle warning lights signal a possible problem." The warning light indicates to the driver that the car should be checked by a mechanic.

Note, however, that the engine light is *not the cause* of the problem, nor is it the problem itself; it is only a sign, or indicator, of it.

It is important to note, however, that it is possible to commit the mistake of *misreading a sign*. This happens when one assumes that a certain sign is a reliable indicator of something else when it is not.

Box 27.7 Misreading Signs: Sample Argument



Trayvon Martin by Eoliver naacp via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA. Adapted by the author.

In the wake of the 2012 shooting death of Trayvon Martin, there was a national debate over the meaning of his clothing—a hoodie—and if it could be reasonably interpreted by George Zimmerman, who killed Martin, as a sign of Martin being a threat or a gang member. The hoodie became a prominent part of national discussion, an exhibit in the criminal trial, and part of an exhibition on post–Civil War Reconstruction at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.[3]

3. Manuel Roig-Franzia, "What Became of Trayvon Martin's Hoodie?," *Washington Post*, March 17, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/03/17/trayvon-hoodie-in-smithsonian/. Others debated if the sign caused George Zimmerman's actions, transforming the sign into evidence in a causal argument. For instance, Geraldo Rivera stated on Fox News, "I think the hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin's death as George Zimmerman was." Further, in an interview, then–Fox News host Bill O'Reilly said, "The reason Trayvon Martin died was because he looked a certain way and it wasn't based on skin color. If Trayvon Martin had been wearing a jacket…and a tie…I don't think George Zimmerman would have any problem. But he was wearing a hood and he looked a certain way. And that way is how 'gangstas' look." Erik Wemple, "Fox News's Bill O'Reilly Blames Trayvon Martin's Death on Hoodie,"

Analysis: Making faulty associations between circumstances (**Martin's sweatshirt**) and an outcome (**Zimmerman's assumption of Martin's intent to harm him**) is what we mean by **"misreading signs."**



Created by Zach Bogart from Noun Project

Thus, in considering a sign argument, you should scrutinize the connection being made between the claim and the data.

- If the sign evidence is an *accurate referent or indicator* and/or if you can expect that the events *reasonably occur together* (but one does not cause the other), then you have a valid basis for a sign argument.
- If the sign is an *unreliable indicator or referent* and/or if you *cannot reasonably associate events to occur together*, then you are in danger of misreading a sign.

Reasoning from Authority



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A final reasoning pattern is reasoning from authority. **Reasoning from authority** occurs when a speaker supports a claim with the testimony or credibility of a qualified source. The use of authority is common in argumentation.

Box 27.8 Appeal to Authority: Sample Argument

In a June 2024 essay in *The Wall Street Journal*, Gerald F. Seib argued the perils of mounting debt to the continued prosperity of the "American Empire." Seib based his argument on the **authority of scholars** who had studied the impact of debt on past civilizations:

- He quoted historian Niall Ferguson on lessons offered by Habsburg Spain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and the British Empire.
- He drew on the analysis of J. H. Cullum Clark, director of the George W. Bush Institute-Southern Methodist University Economic Growth Initiative, in his study of the spending of the Roman Empire.
- He recounted the lessons of Yale historian Paul Kennedy's well-known *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*.



[Gerald Seib] by *Center for Strategic and International Studies via Flickr*, CC BY-NC-SA.

Washington Post, September 16, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/erik-wemple/wp/2013/09/16/fox-newss-bill-oreilly-blames-trayvon-martins-death-on-hoodie/.



Analysis: In each case, Seib used the **subject authority of public intellectuals** as support for the argument on the threat posed by growing debt.[4]

Created by Annisa from Noun Project

In the last chapter's discussions of testimony, we considered several ways to evaluate reasoning from authority. The use of authority must pass those tests for the argument to be valid:

- The source is a *qualified authority* due to their subject expertise, societal position, or special circumstances.
- The source has *firsthand knowledge* of the issue *without undue bias*.
- The source's *assumptions* match your own.

When a source of authority does not pass these tests, then basing a conclusion on evidence from that source can produce an **appeal to authority** fallacy.

Box 27.9 Appeal to Authority Fallacy: Sample Argument

When Dr. Robert Jarvik promoted the popular cholesterol drug Lipitor in a national television campaign, parent company Pfizer and Dr. Jarvik were questioned over the use of Jarvik's authority. In the commercial, Jarvik is accurately credited as the inventor of the artificial heart and is ostensibly shown rowing across a body of water. Jarvik goes on to speak about the wonder of the heart and the risks associated with excess cholesterol while verbally and visually offering an argument from authority:

Claim: "When diet and exercise aren't enough, adding Lipitor significantly lowers cholesterol."

Data: Jarvik's endorsement of the drug, and his performance of the physical activity of rowing.

Warrant: [Implied] If Dr. Jarvik, a heart expert, trusts the drug, I should too.



Image by Julien Tromeur via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

4. Gerald Seib, "Will Debt Sink the American Empire?," *Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 2024, https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/will-debt-sink-the-american-empire-8459096b.

Analysis: The argument would seem to be a reasonable one at the surface—a nationally renowned doctor who has studied the heart endorses a drug as improving health. However, Dr. Jarvik is a medical researcher rather than a cardiologist, and he is **not licensed to practice medicine or prescribe medication**. Furthermore, it turns out Jarvik **doesn't row**, and the commercial **featured a body double** to simulate his physical activity. On the whole, the commercial reflects an **appeal to authority** fallacy for how it used Jarvik, something that eventually caught the attention of Congress and resulted in Pfizer ending the campaign.[5]



Created by Zach Bogart from Noun Project

A sharp understanding of reasoning patterns can help you participate more effectively in the civic realm. Using a *variety of reasoning patterns* can enhance your ability to convince an audience to accept your thesis.

- For example, suppose you discover that your entire speech is based on sign argument. That means you have relied extensively on circumstantial evidence, and it is likely there is a lot of statistical data throughout the speech.
- It might be helpful to balance the speech by including reasoning from authority through the use of testimony—to add a human dimension and gain source credibility—as well as an example or two to which an audience can relate (reasoning from example or reasoning from analogy).

Such balancing creates stronger arguments by broadening the speech's overall appeal to your community.

Box 27.10 Reasoning Patterns and Associated Reasoning Fallacies

5. Stephanie Saul, "Drug Ads Raise Question for Heart Pioneer," *New York Times*, February 7, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/07/business/media/07jarvik.html; Alice Park, "The Problem with Jarvik's Prescription," *Time*, February 26, 2008, https://time.com/archive/6932454/the-problem-with-jarviks-prescription/, archived at https://perma.cc/LZU7-FA6R.

Reasoning Pattern	Reasoning Fallacy
Reasoning from example: In this pattern, one or more examples are used to demonstrate a claim.	**Hasty generalization:** This fallacy occurs when the example(s) used to support a claim are not representative or insufficient in number.
Reasoning from analogy: In this pattern, there is an effort to prove a claim by comparing two situations or cases.	**Faulty analogy:** This fallacy occurs when an argument rests upon comparing two cases that possess more differences than similarities and are not reasonably comparable.
Reasoning from cause: In this pattern, a speaker claims an event is caused by a particular circumstance or action.	**Faculty cause or post hoc:** This fallacy occurs when there is a faulty attribution of cause and effect.
	Slippery slope: This fallacy occurs when a speaker seeks to use causal reasoning to argue that a single event or action will lead to a chain reaction of cause-and-effect events but fails to provide the necessary support for each step or action in the chain.
Reasoning from sign: In this pattern, circumstantial evidence, or signs, are used to demonstrate a claim. It occurs when a sign reliably indicates a connection between data and claim.	While not a formal fallacy type, one can "misread signs" when they make a faulty association between circumstances (signs) and an outcome without the sign serving as an accurate indicator of the claim.
Reasoning from authority: In this pattern, a speaker supports a claim with the testimony or credibility of a qualified source. The source should have clear expertise and first-hand experience and possess a minimum of bias.	**Appeal to authority:** This fallacy occurs when an authority is used as the basis for an argument but has been removed from its area of expertise or is perceived to have excessive bias.

Additional Common Fallacies

Although you can find many more examples of fallacy types in argumentation and logic courses, we limit our further consideration of the topic to five additional common fallacies: appeal to popularity, appeal to common practice, begging the question, ad hominem attack, and false dilemma.[6]



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6. Scholar Douglas Walton, in particular, is known for his work on argument fallacies. His books on the subject include *Ad Hominem Arguments* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998); *Argument from Ignorance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); *Slippery Slope Arguments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); and *Begging the Question: Circular Reasoning as a Tactic in Argumentation* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

Appeal to Popularity


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Do you remember your parent asking, "If everyone else jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?" This was their way of introducing you to the **appeal to popularity** fallacy, even if they didn't identify it as such. The basic idea is that popularity alone doesn't make for a good argument.

Example: The success of *Barbie* as the top-grossing movie of 2023 proves that it was the best film from that year.

Analysis: The only basis this argument offers for being "best" is popularity. That might be one relevant piece of data. Basing the claim only on popularity, however, commits a fallacy, because it equates popularity with being the best.

Appeal to Common Practice

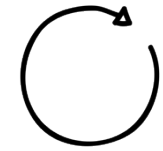

Created by Makarenko Andrey from Noun Project

This fallacy is also called an "is/ought" fallacy because the speaker suggests that just because something *is* a certain way, it *ought* to be that way. Whereas an appeal to popularity relies on people's positive feelings about, or approval of, a statement or activity, an **appeal to common practice** relies on the commonality or tradition of the belief or activity as justification for its validity.

Example: I know many professors look down on using ChatGPT to help write essays, but most students use it, so it must be OK.

Analysis: The only justification offered for the action (use of ChatGPT) is its asserted status as a common habit of students. However, as explored in chapter 5's discussion of ethics, original work and the ability to understand the principles of speechmaking are important expectations for learning and operating professionally.

Begging the Question


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When **begging the question**, the speaker fails to provide evidence for their claim and, instead, restates the claim in place of additional data. This fallacy is also known as circular reasoning.

Example: Reading is fundamental to a good education because an educated person needs to be able to read.

Analysis: In this example the claim (reading is fundamental to a good education) and data (an educated person needs to be able to read) are nearly identical, with no offer of proof or independent support beyond a slight restatement of the claim.

Ad Hominem Attack



An **ad hominem** fallacy occurs when the person, rather than the argument, is attacked. Certainly, on occasion, character is an issue in an argument, and in those cases questioning a person's character is not a basis for deeming an argument fallacious. However, when the substance of a disagreement is ignored in favor of a blatant attack, an ad hominem fallacy has been committed.

Box 27.11 Ad Hominem Fallacy: Sample Argument

Consider this exchange between two congressional representatives during contempt proceedings against Attorney General Merrick Garland in May 2024.



Marjorie Taylor Greene by House Creative Services via Wikimedia Commons, *Public Domain*.

Example: "I don't think you know what you're here for....I think your fake eyelashes are messing up what you're reading"—Georgia Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene to Texas Democratic Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett during a House oversight meeting on May 16, 2024.

Response: "I'm just curious...if someone on this committee then starts talking about somebody's bleach blonde, bad built, butch body, that would not be engaging in personalities, correct?"—Jasmine Crockett, in response to the suggestion that Marjorie Taylor Greene's comment was not about personal characteristics and appearance.

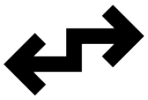


Jasmine Crockett by United States Congress via Wikimedia Commons, *Public Domain*.

Analysis: In these examples, Greene and Crockett trade **physical insults** rather than discuss the substance of their differing views. Such comments do not advance argumentation, and they distract from argumentation by engaging in **personal attacks**.[7]

7. Haley Talbot, Morgan Rimmer, Manu Raju, and Melanie Zanona, "Crockett Slams Greene as 'Racist' Following Contentious House Committee Meeting," CNN, May 17, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/17/politics/crockett-greene-contentious-committee-meeting/index.html.

False Dilemma



Created by Pablo Rozenberg
from Noun Project

You have probably heard a variation of the phrase "You're either with us or against us." This familiar ultimatum, like all **false dilemmas**, eliminates alternative options by suggesting there are only two conclusions available when additional possibilities exist. It is possible to side "with us" but be "against" particular ideas or tactics.

Example: We must either ban all cars immediately to stop pollution or accept that the planet will be destroyed by climate change.

Analysis: The statement suggests only two possible outcomes—banning cars or planetary destruction—while ignoring other potential solutions related to electric vehicles, emissions regulations, promoting public transportation, or taking other actions that would protect the environment.

Box 27.12 Additional Common Reasoning Fallacies

- **Appeal to popularity:** occurs when the validity of the claim is based on its popularity alone without any more specific offering of proof
- **Appeal to common practice:** occurs when the validity of the claim is based on the commonality or tradition of a belief or activity without any more specific offering of justification
- **Begging the question:** occurs when the data is little more than a restatement of the claim with no additional offer of independent proof
- **Ad hominem attack:** occurs when the person making the argument, rather than the substance of the argument itself, is attacked and character is not relevant to the validity of the argument
- **False dilemma:** occurs when it is suggested that there are only two conclusions available when, in reality, other possibilities or options exist

Understanding reasoning fallacies will make you a more skilled student of argument and a more effective participant in public discussions. If you can identify faulty reasoning, you should also be able to avoid it. Likewise, you can identify and explain reasoning flaws in other speakers' messages about public issues.

Summary

The ability to produce multifaceted arguments that call on diverse reasoning types is a vital skill for public speaking and civic participation. In this chapter you have learned a range of reasoning patterns that will improve your ability to make valid arguments and to critically analyze public discourse presented by others.

- In inductive reasoning, a series of examples or instances are used to support the likelihood or probability of a generalized conclusion.
- A pattern of reasoning reflects what kind of data or evidence is used in an argument and how that data or evidence is used to prove a claim. Prominent patterns of reasoning are reasoning from example, reasoning from analogy, reasoning from cause, reasoning from sign, and reasoning from authority. Effective speeches use a variety of reasoning patterns in urging acceptance of the thesis.
- A reasoning fallacy is a flaw or defect in reasoning that undermines the validity of an argument. There are many different reasoning fallacies, some of which are associated with the faulty use of particular reasoning patterns. Among the most common reasoning, fallacies are hasty generalization, faulty analogy, faulty cause or post hoc fallacy, slippery slope, appeal to authority, appeal to popularity, appeal to common practice, begging the question, ad hominem attack, and false dilemma.

Key Terms

ad hominem
analogical reasoning
appeal to authority
appeal to common practice
appeal to popularity
begging the question
causal reasoning
fallacy
false dilemma
faulty analogy
faulty cause
hasty generalization
inductive reasoning
patterns of reasoning
post hoc
reasoning from analogy
reasoning from authority
reasoning from cause
reasoning from example
reasoning from sign
slippery slope

Review Questions

1. What are the five common reasoning patterns?
2. What is a reasoning fallacy?
3. What fallacy or faulty reasoning is associated with each of the reasoning patterns?

Discussion Questions

1. Test your ability to identify reasoning patterns and reasoning fallacies by analyzing an editorial from *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. Remember that to do so, it is first necessary to identify the thesis, the subclaims, the data, and the warrants in the discourse. Second, identify what types of data (i.e., examples, statistics, testimony) are used and what types of reasoning patterns are employed. Third, assess the reasoning for potential fallacies. Finally, based on your analysis, create an overall assessment of the editorial—is it a good argument?
2. As you watch television or read a magazine, think about the appeals made in the advertisements. Are the advertisements arguments? Do some of them present a claim and data? Do they employ fallacies?

28. Choosing Visual Aids for Civic Engagement

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Name the goals of using visual aids in public speaking.
- Distinguish the advantages and challenges of three types of digital visual aids.
- Identify how visual aids can promote or hamper civic engagement.

Reflect on the last YouTube or TikTok video you watched, the last meme you viewed on social media, or even a lecture you heard that used presentation software like PowerPoint. Now try to think of a public speech you heard that did *not* include *any* visual aids—no photographs or video clips, no infographics or charts, no virtual backgrounds, and no words or symbols visually imposed onto a screen. It's hard to do, right? Imagining public speaking today without visual aids is increasingly difficult.



Created by New River from Noun Project

We define a **visual aid** as anything optical that enhances speech or even functions *as* speech. This definition can encompass aspects of nonverbal delivery (think of a speaker's clothing choices, for instance) and televisual delivery (such as a speaker's use of lighting or camera angles), both of which we explored in chapter 18. In this chapter, we will focus on additional types and uses of visual aids, primarily spotlighting such digital options as presentation software, video, and audience-interactive visual aids.

In many cases, visual aids enhance speech by supplementing or illustrating what is being said. Think, for example, about how a line graph might visually illustrate a speaker's claims about changes in college tuition rates over the past four decades.

Visual aids can also function as speech themselves, however. To demonstrate, reflect on why so many US political candidates feature the American flag in their advertisements. They hope to associate themselves with what the flag can communicate: liberty, justice, and patriotism. Indeed, in our multimedia-saturated culture, audiences are inundated with visual images that attempt to shape their perceptions and actions. In that sense, such images "aid" speakers by communicating with and for them rather than simply by enhancing speakers' words.



Image by waggtime via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

In this chapter, we introduce you to visual aids for public speaking. We first establish the desired goals of using visual aids. We then review three of the most common types of digital visual aids: presentation software, video, and audience-interactive visual aids. The chapter ends by considering how visual aids can promote or hinder civic engagement.

With this guidance, you will be ready to choose the types of visual aids you want to use and establish goals for doing so. The next chapter will help you effectively design the visual aids and use them during your speech.

Goals of Using Visual Aids

You may find it easier to create visual aids for your speech if you first identify what you hope to accomplish with them. We suggest you consider at least four goals for your direct audience (or those who are exposed to and attend to your speech): increase the clarity of your message, enhance audience attention and recall, strengthen your credibility, and improve your attempt to inform or persuade the audience.

Increase Clarity

Visual aids have the power to make your ideas clearer to your audience. Many audience members are visual learners, and well-designed visual aids help them comprehend what you are saying. Infographics, for instance, are named as such because they clearly communicate (often numerical) information through visual means.



Created by Omah Icon from Noun Project



A Walk on the Moon During Apollo 11, NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND.

Similarly, a visual aid can help your audience comprehend an abstract concept or complex event. Indeed, some photographs have become iconic because they clearly sum up a complex historical moment. Examples include photographs of the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, or a photograph of Neil Armstrong walking on the moon.

Beyond that, it is likely in our increasingly globalized world that members of your audience may have different levels of fluency with the language you speak. Furthermore, depending on the content and your professional specialty, audience members will have different levels of familiarity with the technical knowledge or specialized language of your topic. In these cases, visual aids can help define terms and clarify concepts and ideas.

Improve Audience Attention and Recall

Visual aids can also help hold or increase your audience's attention. If members of the audience find their minds wandering—or if one or two listeners glance at an incoming text message—the introduction of a new image or the change of a slide can draw their attention back to your speech. Well-planned and well-designed images make your speech more interesting. When someone later asks an audience member what your speech was about, a person might recall a visual image from your presentation. The image assists the audience in remembering your message after the fact.

Strengthen Your Credibility as a Speaker

Also importantly, effective visual aids can increase your credibility as a speaker. They illustrate to your audience how carefully you researched, crafted, and incorporated visual aids into your speech. Proper citations of images or charts you adopt further enhance your credibility. Remember, however, that the inverse is also true: A hastily prepared or poorly cited visual presentation can undercut an otherwise well-prepared speech.

Additionally, good visual aids foreground your ideas. An effective visual aid increases your credibility precisely because it helps your audience grasp what you want to communicate. "That person was a great communicator!" someone might say when recalling your speech. "Their points were very clear."

Improve Your Effort to Inform or Persuade

Ultimately, visual aids should serve your speaking goal, whether that is to inform your audience or to persuade them. Think of your visual aids as another form of support for your thesis or main points. When integrated smoothly into a speech, visual aids can strengthen your explanations and evidence. However, poorly designed or executed visual aids can distract or confuse an audience, hurting your ability to inform or persuade them.

In addition, recall that visual aids not only enhance communication but also can function as speech themselves. Earlier we mentioned the American flag as an example. We might also think of such resonant visual symbols as a dove or peace sign, a rainbow, or even a skull and bones. In such cases, the visual images can aid your attempt to inform or persuade by communicating meaning or even emotions.

You might draw on these four goals to guide your creation of visual aids and to evaluate whether and how well they function after you've designed them. Use your evaluation to revise or even cut visual aids from your speech when they do not serve clear ends.



Peace symbol, *Symbol by: Gerald Holtom; file by: Crotalus horridus via Wikimedia Commons*, *Public Domain*.

Box 28.1 Goals of Visual Aids

Effective visual aids should accomplish the following four goals:

- heighten the **clarity** of your speech
- help the audience **attend to and recall** your message
- increase your **credibility** as a speaker
- improve your effort to **inform or persuade** the audience

Types of Visual Aids

There are several analog (nondigital) visual aids available for public speaking, such as handouts, props, or charts. In today's world of omnipresent technology, however, most people use *digital* visual aids, particularly presentation soft-

ware, video, and audience-interactive visual aids. In this section, we will consider each of these digital visual aids, focusing on their advantages and challenges for speakers. Use these insights to determine which type(s) best serve your needs.

Presentation Software

You are likely already familiar with **presentation software** such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Slides, and Canva Presentations. Such programs are designed as digital slide shows, and thus, presenters tend to refer to their digital visual aids as "my slides." A **slide deck** is your set of digital visual aids, no matter which software brand you use. Presentation software offers many advantages to speakers.



Advantages

Presentation software is popular for a reason. It is incredibly *versatile*. Using this software, you can typically

- import images,
- create graphs,
- embed audio and video content into your slides, and
- give your slides a uniform design for a more coherent and polished appearance.

Indeed, presentation software allows you tremendous *control* over the following:

- The look of your slides, including the placement of each item.
- The timing of each slide. As a speaker, you choose when to show each slide and for how long simply by choosing the slides' order and deciding when to "click through" to the next slide.
- When an audience no longer sees any slides. If you want a blank screen during part of your speech, simply include a blank slide to achieve that effect.

Learning how to design and use slides effectively takes some work. Fortunately, tutorials and advice are freely available online. You can find video tutorials for all the presentation software previously mentioned—Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Slides, and Canva Presentations—by searching in a web browser for its name and adding the word "tutorial." Similarly, searching for "presentation software dos and don'ts" results in several websites, blogs, and videos with helpful advice.

Challenges



Image by Oliver Tacke via Flickr, Public Domain.

While advice is readily available about using presentation software well, so, too, are endless jokes and cartoons about *mis*using slide decks. Many jokes poke fun at *lulling the audience to sleep* by overly relying on presentation software.

Most of us dread a speaker who loads their slide deck for a short speech and has forty slides lined up. Not everything you say needs to have a corresponding slide!

Remember *you* are giving the speech and should be able to communicate vocally without always relying on visual aids for help. Use slides only when they fulfill the four goals previously mentioned. Otherwise, too many slides will obscure rather than clarify your points, overwhelm your audience rather than aid their attention and recall, weaken rather than strengthen your credibility, and hurt rather than aid your effort to inform or persuade.

A related challenge of presentation software is that it tends to lure speakers into featuring *too much text* (words), often in an outline or bulleted lists. Speakers may even be tempted to use their slides as speaking notes. Stop yourself from falling into this trap!

- Utilize the techniques discussed in chapter 14 to *vocally* (not visually) communicate your thesis, main points, and transitions.
- Turn to chapter 19 to prepare and use a presentation outline or manuscript—*not your slides*—as your speaking notes, depending on your selected mode of delivery.
- Rely on your slides, instead, to feature *optical* elements you cannot achieve through words alone. You might include a photograph that clarifies your point, a visual symbol that aids your persuasion, a short video clip that helps the audience recall your thesis, or a correctly cited graph that increases your credibility.

As you find or create visual elements for your slides, *avoid using the first photograph, chart, or infographic you find.* Too often students think they should wholesale copy and paste a visual aid they locate online, perhaps because it relates to their topic and looks attractive. However, not only should you be wary of copyright infringement—something we turn to in the next chapter—but you should also evaluate how well the visual element suits your needs.

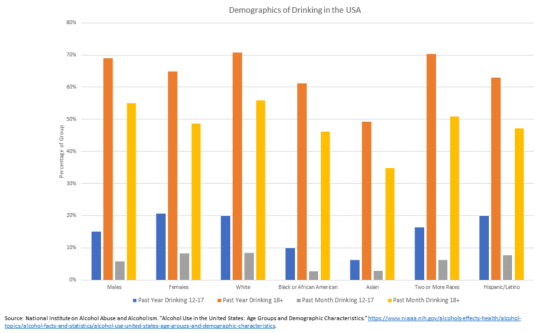
When you find an image you like, ask yourself if it supports your specific speaking goal, thesis, or point. If a visual aid features more than what you really need, consider changing it. You might do the following:

- Adapt the preexisting visual aid (such as cropping a photograph you find).
- Re-create the parts you need (such as reproducing a bar chart with only the bars you want the audience to focus on—like we demonstrate in box 28.2).
- Use the preexisting visual aid to inspire your own visual production. Can *you* take a photograph that will better feature what you want the audience to see or notice locally? Can *you* create an infographic that visually demonstrates the main statistic you want to emphasize?

Box 28.2 "Ready-Made" Versus Customized Visual Aids

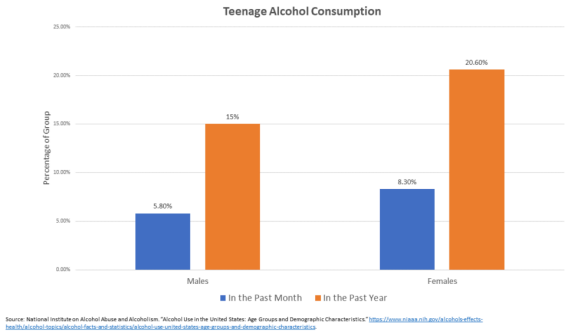
Imagine a student's speech is about teenage alcohol consumption, and they want a slide that conveys relevant statistics.

Slide A: The following chart is a "ready-made" image the student might find online. It includes information about teenage alcohol use (the blue and gray bars) but much more irrelevant information (for their topic) as well. Audiences would struggle to focus only on the teenage consumption visualized in the chart.



Right click image to enlarge in a new tab.

Slide B: In this slide, the student made their own customized version of the chart in slide A. Notice how much more effectively it focuses the audience's attention only on teenage alcohol consumption.



Right click image to enlarge in a new tab.

We offer several more design and usage principles in chapter 29 that apply to presentation software. For now, we end with a caution about using features like transitions and animations. These have the tendency to look more amateur than professional. They also typically distract and confuse the audience instead of clarifying points. We believe visual aids are most effective when they are elegantly simple.

Video



Created by Evon from Noun Project

Public speakers today frequently draw on **video**, or a recording of moving images, to visually aid their presentations. Some incorporate short video clips or animated GIFs into their speeches. Others record themselves speaking and edit the video to visually enliven their presentation, such as by creating split screens or showcasing picture-in-picture. Still others stitch together visual images and video clips while narrating their speech through voice-over. Of course, these three uses of video are not mutually exclusive! Consider some of the more sophisticated YouTube channels you watch; you likely see all three in one presentation.

Box 28.3 Video in Practice



~~Caitlin Doughty~~ *~~by Mara Zehler via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA~~*.

Caitlyn Doughty showcases many uses of video on her YouTube channel, "Ask a Mortician." As a mortician, author, and advocate, Doughty uses her channel to educate her two million subscribers about death and to model a more positive orientation toward death. She also advocates for options like legal human composting as an environmentally friendly alternative to burial or cremation.

Her YouTube videos regularly incorporate video clips, highlight such editing as picture-in-picture, and feature her voice narrating videos and other visual imagery. Together, her use of video encourages viewers to think and talk about the often-taboo subject of death.

If you want to use video as a visual aid, several software brands are available to help you record and edit videos. A few notable examples are iMovie, Adobe Premiere (Pro and Rush), Microsoft Clipchamp, ScreenPal, and Screencastify. Some are completely free, while others are **premium**, meaning they cost money to use. Still others, referred to as **freemium**, allow users to freely use a few basic features *but* require payment to access more sophisticated or advanced tools. Check your college or university resources to learn if they provide students free access to software that would otherwise cost money to use. Choosing video as a visual aid, whether by using your phone or specialized software, offers speakers several advantages and challenges.

Advantages

Video can be an engaging and powerful visual aid. A video clip reignites the audience's *interest* because it introduces something new to listen to and watch. Somewhat similarly, an animated GIF can offer humor and draw in your audience through a popular culture reference.

Video can also function as powerful *support* for your speech. Using video, you can

- literally show your audience examples of the problem, place, or people you are describing;
- showcase a person offering emotionally moving testimony about their personal experience; or
- feature an expert explaining a concept or finding, which should strengthen your argument and credibility.

Perhaps one of the greatest advantages of using video, however, is the *creativity* it offers, especially if you prerecord your presentation. Even if you simply record yourself speaking, you can do so in ways that are visually clever or inventive.

Recall in chapter 18, when explaining televisual delivery, we mentioned you might record yourself in strategic settings or backgrounds—virtual or real—to accentuate your points.

If you want to incorporate more traditional visual aids into a prerecorded speech, you might leave space in the camera frame while recording to later edit in photographs, charts, or graphs. As we demonstrate in box 28.4, you might even gesture to that open space as you talk about the visual aid in the recording (a little like using a green screen).

Box 28.4 Leaving Room in a Video Frame for a Visual Aid

The top image exemplifies a still shot from a prerecorded speech about texting while driving. Notice how the student purposefully left room in the shot and gestured toward the contrasting visual aids that he later edited into the shot, which you can see in the bottom image.





Inset left: Image by Amanda Mills, USCDCP, via Pixnio, Public Domain.; Inset right: Image by bobtheskater via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

If you are more creatively ambitious, use video software to layer tracks, such as

- a *video* track focused on you speaking,
- a track of your *audio* alone (likely extracted from your video track with the software's help),
- a track of relevant *audio clips* you import, and
- a track of *alternative visual aids* you produce.



[Pitivi Video Editor](#) *by Linux Screenshots via Flickr,* [CC BY](#).

You can edit the video strategically to choose which tracks viewers see and hear as the video plays.

Alternatively, you might *animate* your video by drawing pictures that visually illustrate or bring your ideas to life while narrating your points through an audio recording. Whatever forms of video you choose, the options for creating visual aids are almost as broad as your creativity and imagination allow.

If you prerecord your presentation, another advantage of using video for your visual aid is the ability to *review and redo it*. You can adjust the placement of your images or the timing of your animations, for instance, for maximum impact. If you give yourself enough time, you can ensure that your visual aids appear sleek and professional, increasing your credibility.

Challenges



Time is a major challenge when using video for your visual aid:

- At a minimum, a speaker who shows a video clip during their presentation must first produce or find the clip and then leave time during their speech to introduce, show, and draw conclusions from it.
- At a maximum, a speaker who prerecords their speech must set up their shots, audio clips, and other images; record themselves; layer their tracks; edit the video; finalize the video when satisfied; and upload it to the internet or download it as a file before it's ready to be viewed. Students are often shocked at how long that process takes—much longer than they anticipate.
- Furthermore, impactful speakers practice or review their presentation and adjust their video visual aid if needed. That could entail altering when you begin or end a video clip or even rerecording and reediting your presentation.

Another challenge when using video as a visual aid is the temptation to use clips, animations, or backgrounds that are attention getting but *do not actually serve your speech*. Too often students throw in a funny or fast-moving video or GIF that elicits an initial reaction from the audience but ultimately leaves them (or your instructor) confused and distracted. Your visual aids should directly support your thesis or main points, not just relate loosely to your topic.

Finally, using video well can be *difficult*. It requires extra setup when speaking synchronously (live). You have to make sure the clip is accessible and ready to play and/or able to be seen and heard accurately (especially when sharing your screen while speaking remotely).

When prerecording your presentation, it is especially difficult to create a video that is *professional looking*.

Social media influencers and celebrities make it seem easy, because they typically employ people who work behind the scenes to produce their final products. Fortunately, you can improve the look of your videos by learning from free tutorials online, which are available from most software brands and vloggers that teach the basics.

If you put in the time to learn the software, practice with it, and revise your work, you will likely produce video visual aids that make your speech compelling.

Audience-Interactive Visual Aids



Image by US Department of Agriculture via Flickr, CC BY.

We are referring to a third kind of digital visual aid as **audience-interactive** because they rely on the audience's input in real time to produce imagery. They can be used when speaking in person or remotely through a screen, but they require an audience who is watching synchronously.

As examples of audience-interactive visual aids, a speaker might

- poll the audience and then visually display the results,
- ask and then show the audience's answers to a question, or
- display a word cloud that results from descriptive words the audience provides about a topic.

Alternatively, a speaker might invite *audience members watching remotely* to provide real-time reactions that the speaker shows and incorporates into their speech. For instance,

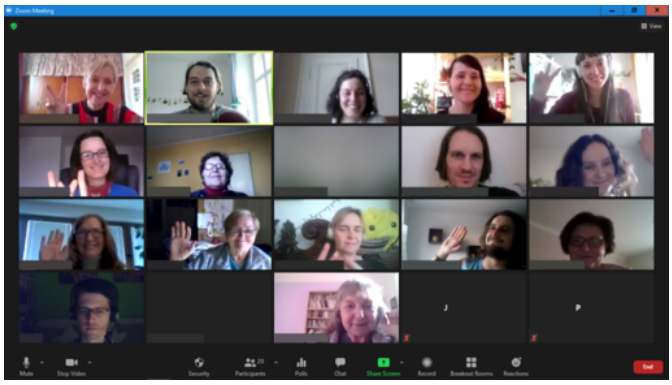


Image by Vojtěch Veselý via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

- A speaker might invite audience members to send a chat that is visually overlaid into the video "live" as the speaker streams their speech.
- If using video conference software like Zoom, a speaker might ask the audience to
  - raise their hands or
  - select a visual emoji "reaction," such as a heart, thumbs-up, or sad face, that everyone can see immediately.

Box 28.5 Audience-Interactive Visual Aids in Practice



Hasan Piker by mo1567 via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA.

Audience-interactive visual aids are used for a wide variety of purposes, including civic ends. For examples, we can look to Twitch, a global streaming service that offers over 100,000 live broadcasts at any one time in over thirty languages. While Twitch is typically associated with video games, some Twitch streamers provide commentary on civic issues.

Streamers such as Hasan Piker (who goes by HasanAbi) and Morgan (who goes by Frogan) use their popularity to engage political affairs and public health concerns (respectively). Their broadcasts typically incorporate visual displays of viewers' live chats, including negative and critical comments, many of which they respond to immediately.

This audience-interactive visual aid helps make the experience more meaningful for viewers because their comments directly influence what the speaker says as their speech unfolds. Such influence helps them feel more connected to the speaker and lends a greater sense of authenticity to their exchange.

As discussed in box 28.5, Twitch lends itself to audience-interactive visual aids, but so do many other tools. Examples that may be used whether you speak in person or remotely include Mentimeter, Socrative, and PollEverywhere. As with video, software for audience-interactive visual aids ranges from premium (payment required) to freemium (payment necessary to use advanced tools) to free. Check with your university or college to discover what software it might give you access to for free. Using audience-interactive visual aids offers many advantages.

Advantages

Speakers who use audience-interactive visual aids *recognize the audience's active role* in cocreating meaning. Recall that in chapter 10, we discussed the audience's central role in negotiating meaning with a rhetor. Using audience-interactive visual aids is one way of honoring the audience's centrality to public speaking and acknowledging the important part they play in coproducing communication. Audiences typically appreciate such recognition and empowerment.

By allowing the audience to have such direct input, audience-interactive visual aids additionally provide speakers with useful *insights*.

- On the one hand, you can learn *from* your audience. Their ideas and views can develop your own understanding of, and thinking about, your topic or thesis. You might be surprised, for instance, at the words they choose for a word cloud or by their answers to a poll.
- On the other hand, you can learn *about* your audience and better adapt your speech to them. Their responses can help you make on-the-fly adjustments to how you find common ground with them or the supporting appeals you feature.
- Relatedly, your audience members can *learn more about one another*, which may clarify their understanding of

their community and how the issue affects them.

Finally, audience-interactive visual aids are simply *fun*. They tend to enliven a group as audience members switch from primarily listening to the speech to "talking back." It's enjoyable to discover how everyone responded and to watch the speaker react to the feedback. When handled well—that is, when a speaker takes the time to process the audience's feedback in the visual aid and alter their speech accordingly—their credibility is strengthened.

Challenges

The advantages named already hint at the challenges with audience-interactive visual aids. First, they require *time* during a presentation to execute and process. Novice speakers typically underestimate the amount of time it takes to explain what you want the audience to do, have them do it, and then read and respond to the resulting visual aid.

Consequently, if you need to deliver a short speech with a strict time requirement, as is often the case for class assignments, we *discourage* the use of audience-interactive visual aids. You will likely spend too long on the visual aid, preventing you from meeting other core requirements for the assignment.

If you deliver a longer presentation with sufficient time, then we strongly recommend *practicing* the speech with the audience-interactive visual aid. Ask several family members or friends to listen to your speech and participate in the visual aid. That should give you a more realistic sense of the time you will need.

Second, effectively using audience-interactive visual aids requires speakers to talk impromptu in response to the audience's input. Their feedback may result in a visual aid that looks very different from what you expected or practiced. As we mentioned, that surprise can be beneficial, but it can also be challenging, as you must respond and adjust in the moment. Box 28.6 explores an example.

Box 28.6 Incorporating a Word Cloud into Your Speech

Imagine giving a speech on performance-enhancing drugs and asking your audience for three words that come to their minds. If their input resulted in the following word cloud, what might you point out about the visual aid? How might you use their input to argue a position?



Finally, as with presentation software and video, avoid the temptation to *overuse* audience-interactive visual aids. Don't include polls, word clouds, live chats, and audience emoji reactions just because you can. Use them sparingly and strategically so the visual aid helps achieve your communication goal.

Having outlined three types of digital visual aids available to speakers, we end by considering how visual aids can aid your civic engagement.

Visual Aids and Civic Engagement

This chapter began with the claim that visual aids enhance communication and even function as communication themselves. Consequently, we must tackle questions of the *ethical and unethical use of visual aids*. Like any rhetorical act, visual aids can be used to clarify and inform, or they can be used to obscure and mislead. As you produce visual aids for your presentation, then, it is important to use them in ways that promote productive discourse and civic engagement.

In chapter 3, we outlined nine qualities of *productive* discourse that enhance and promote civic engagement. Three qualities are particularly important to keep in mind as you select visual aids: learning, lateral communication, and imagination.

- *Learning*: As you select images, choose ones that help your audience learn about the issue at hand rather than merely entertain. As a speaker, one of your goals is to encourage your audience to participate in public issues, and you can do this by using visual means to strengthen their grasp of the topic and its relevance to their lives.
- To prompt *lateral communication*—that is, multidirectional communication among members of the public—design and select visual aids that distill information or do not require highly technical knowledge to discern. That way audience members with different levels of knowledge or background can converse with one another on a more level playing field. Select visual aids that help clarify issues. Avoid images that are more likely to exclude or confuse.
- *Imagination:* Notice that the word "imagination" is related to the word "image." Your visual aids should do more than present the facts to the audience; they should help audiences *see* the issue and creative ways forward. Productive discourse helps audiences visualize new possibilities or imaginative solutions; it prompts them to build a new vision for understanding one another and addressing controversies. When you use visual aids, design and select images and videos that help the audience *imagine* the public issue or themselves in a different way.

Chapter 2 outlined the qualities of *unproductive* discourse that impede civic engagement. Visual aids can promote the unproductive qualities of division, combativeness, and certainty when they *oversimplify* complex issues.

- *Division:* Visual aids that highlight the main points of a complex issue can inadvertently suggest the issue is simpler than it really is. A list of bullet points, a singular image, or an animated GIF, for instance, can make conclusions appear obvious. Such oversimplification can imply that alternative points of view are ill-informed or silly and thus promote division. Audiences are encouraged to distance themselves from—rather than better understand—people with different interpretations.
- *Combativeness:* Unethical speakers can use visual aids to overly simplify and belittle their detractors' positions. Such intentional oversimplifications are themselves a form of combativeness, as they unfairly represent and impact the implied and implicated audiences (as discussed in chapter 10). Their use can further promote combativeness with people who argue for alternatives or offer more nuanced analyses.
- *Certainty*: Images that present data as decisive, when conflicting data or alternative plausible interpretations exist, can leave the audience with a false sense of certainty. The oversimplification in this case can lead the audience to feel assured that there are simple solutions to problems they have not fully thought through.

As a presenter, you have an ethical obligation to construct visual aids that promote civic engagement by offering clarity and enabling lateral communication and imagination. You should opt for visual aids that treat topics, evidence, and alternative points of view fairly. Avoid oversimplifying them and inadvertently promoting such hallmarks of unproductive discourse as division, combativeness, and certainty.

Summary

Visual aids offer many advantages to speakers when they are well designed and effectively incorporated into a speech. However, when poorly crafted or mishandled, visual aids can do more harm than good.

- Visual aids enhance communication, and they can function as communication when they influence and persuade audiences.
- Speakers should use visual aids to clarify their ideas, improve the audience's attention and recall, strengthen credibility as a speaker, and improve the effort to inform or persuade.
- Three types of digital visual aids are presentation software, video, and audience-interactive visual aids.
- All three types of digital visual aids offer many advantages to speakers but also bring several challenges that must be overcome. Presentation software is versatile and offers users significant control over design and timing, but speakers can rely too heavily on slides and overly fill slides with text. Video can be a very engaging, powerful, and creative visual aid, but it is time-consuming to use well, and speakers can be tempted to include attention-getting, but irrelevant, clips and GIFs. Finally, audience-interactive visual aids offer fun ways to acknowledge the audience's active role in public communication and to learn from and about your audience; however, they use valuable speaking time, and speakers must be prepared to respond to audience input in the moment.
- Because of the communicative power of visual aids, it is important that speakers use them ethically, in ways that promote civic engagement. Visual aids that clarify issues, promote lateral communication, and prompt imagination can promote civic engagement. In contrast, visual aids that oversimplify complex issues can promote division, combativeness, and certainty, which discourage civic engagement.

Key Terms

audience-interactive visual aids
freemium
premium
presentation software
slide deck
video
visual aid

Review Questions

1. What is a visual aid?
2. What should visual aids accomplish for your presentation?
3. What are three types of digital visual aids? What's an example of each?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each kind of digital visual aid?
5. How can visual aids help or hurt civic engagement?

Discussion Questions

1. What types of digital visual aids do you think are overused? Underused? Explain.
2. What type of visual aid have you never before used and would like to try in your next speech? Why? What might it help you to accomplish?
3. Think of a speaker you recently saw (in person or online) who used visual aids. How did their visual aids help or hurt civic engagement? Provide the context and explain.

29. Designing and Using Visual Aids to Reach an Audience

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Construct visual aids that fulfill eight design principles.
- Use visual aids effectively during a speech by following five usage principles.

The previous chapter introduced you to three types of visual digital aids: presentation software, video, and audience-interactive visual aids. Understanding the strengths and drawbacks of each is helpful. However, knowing how to design and use them effectively is essential.

This chapter gives you specific advice—dos and don'ts—for designing and using visual aids. Much of what follows applies to any of the three types of visual aids, and we will highlight how as we go. We begin with designing or preparing visual aids. We then turn to using or incorporating visual aids into a presentation.

Design Principles

In the previous chapter, we established four goals for visual aids: increase the clarity of your message, enhance audience attention and recall, strengthen your credibility, and improve your effort to inform or persuade the audience.

How do you produce visual aids that help accomplish these goals? We offer eight design principles—or advice to follow—to guide your preparation: visual aids should be visual, less is more, consider spacing and positioning, use color strategically, consider what your visual choices suggest, consider readability for all audience members, strive for high quality, and follow copyright and academic honesty rules.

Visual Aids Should Be Visual

We begin with the design principle—and reminder—that visual aids should be *visual*. If you are tempted to put blocks of text or bulleted lists into presentation software or a video, stop yourself. Ask if that same information can be communicated visually. For example,

- Can you show a photograph of the person you are quoting rather than simply typing the quote?
- Can you display a fraction, like ¾, by displaying four stick figures and coloring three of them blue and one green rather than just writing ¾?
- Can you illustrate your point through a visual metaphor? Consider the example in box 29.1.

Box 29.1 Making Visual Aids Visual

Notice the following difference between a visual aid that presents information about plastic waste in textual form (on the top) and a visual metaphor (on the bottom).





Inset image by Nick Fewings via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

As you design your visual aids, reduce the number of words wherever possible and think of ways to visually communicate the information instead.

Less Is More

A second design principle is "less is more." Any graphic designer will tell you not to be afraid of **white space**, or the empty space between elements on a slide or on the screen. Your audience will have a much easier time processing your photo, chart, or video footage if it is not overcrowded with information.



Noun project icon adapted by the author.

As you put together your visual aid, ask yourself, What is its central message? Will the audience have their eye drawn to that message?

- On *slides*, for instance, avoid putting multiple images—say, two charts and a photograph—on one slide. Instead, choose the single most impactful image to communicate the message. Give each image its own slide or moment if they make different points.
- In *video*, avoid adding multiple cuts, visual effects, and animation to a single segment. Allow for some degree of stillness so your audience can focus on the footage itself.
- When using *audience-interactive visual aids*, beware of pairing them with additional visual aids. It can be very difficult, especially for an older audience, for example, to skim viewers' live chats while also watching a video clip.

Consider Spacing and Positioning

Third, consider *spacing or positioning* when designing visual aids by paying attention to alignment and proximity. **Alignment** is the deliberate placement of the elements within a given slide or frame. Alignment includes how photos, text, and captions are lined up with one another (center them, left-justify them, etc.). You don't want anything to look ran-

domly placed. When elements on your slide or in the camera's frame, like corporate logos or titles, have visual similarity in where they appear and in relation to one another, your presentation looks more professional.

Proximity says that items that are similar should be placed next to one another. Placing items together creates a visual unit, and the eye readily understands that these elements are part of a group. If you are talking about the advantages or drawbacks of a particular solution, for instance, the proximity principle says,

The advantages should appear together,	and

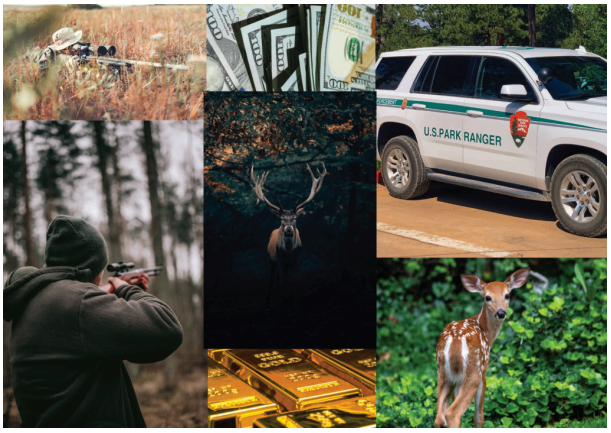
Mixing or randomly placing these elements confuses rather than clarifies. The purpose of proximity is to help organize the material for the audience.

Box 29.2 Using White Space and Alignment in Visual Aids

Imagine a student who wants to deliver a speech that advocates the ecological benefits of hunting.

Slide A: This slide was hastily designed. It offers a confusing and crowded collage of images associated with hunting. The audience would not be sure what to focus on or what conclusions to draw from it.

Slide B: This slide more effectively supports the student's message because it strategically incorporates white space *and* aligns images in a meaningful way.



Images L-R by maxx ❄; Giorgio Trovato; Yaroslav Muzychenko; Sebastian Pociecha; Jingming Pan; Philipp Pilz; and Robert Woeger; via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

Use Color Strategically

A fourth design principle is to *use colors strategically*, such as through contrast and harmony. **Visual contrast** is optical difference, and the idea here is that you should make elements that are different from one another in kind *visually* different as well. For example, imagine using the following:



Images L-R by Robert Woeger; Sebastian Pociecha; Yaroslav Muzychenko; and Giorgio Trovato; via Unsplash, Unsplash License.
Right-click image to enlarge in a new tab.

An orange background for images of *trash* contrasted with...
a green background for images of *recycling*.

Gray tones for items that *cannot* be recycled, contrasted with...
bright colors for items that *can* be recycled.

Contrasting colors can create a visual "pop" and quickly help the eye determine what is important or different.

Visual harmony, on the other hand, is the pleasure produced by colors that complement or go well together. You generally want all the colors you choose on a given visual aid or within a video, even when contrasting, to produce harmony (thus, orange and green work nicely together even as they contrast). When color choices are disharmonious—such as if you pair canary yellow with neon green—the resulting visual aid can produce discomfort and distract the audience.

Consider What Your Visual Choices Suggest

Fifth, consider what your visual choices *suggest*. Rhetorical scholar Sonja K. Foss writes that we can understand and evaluate the nature of an image by paying attention to both its presented elements and its suggested visual elements. **Presented visual elements** are the "major physical features of the image," such as size, color, shapes, form, background, and

so forth. **Suggested visual elements** are "the concepts, ideas, themes, and allusions that a viewer is likely to infer from presented elements."[1] In other words, suggested elements may help us determine how audiences receive and understand the image.

Many types of visual choices communicate information to audiences:

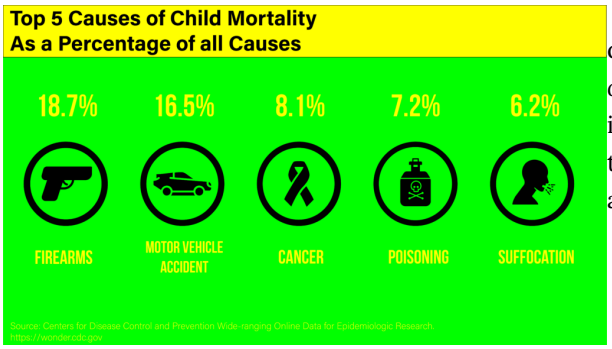
- We already mentioned that *alignment and proximity* can suggest similarities or distinctions among visual elements.
- *Size differences* can allude to distinctions such as inferring the superiority of large images compared to the weakness or inferiority of smaller images.
- Certain *colors* can suggest emotions and associations. We relate red with anger, passion, and danger, for example, and pink with femininity. In Western cultures white connotes purity (the origin of the traditional white wedding dress), whereas in China, white is associated with death and is the color of mourning. Chinese brides wear red, a color that signifies good fortune.

Cultural contexts may be important to keep in mind as you anticipate what your visual choices suggest to your audience. For an example of how to use presented visual elements effectively to suggest information that supports your point, read box 29.3.

Box 29.3 Visual Elements Function Rhetorically

If you delivered a speech about the harms of firearms for children in the US, which slide would better communicate your message?

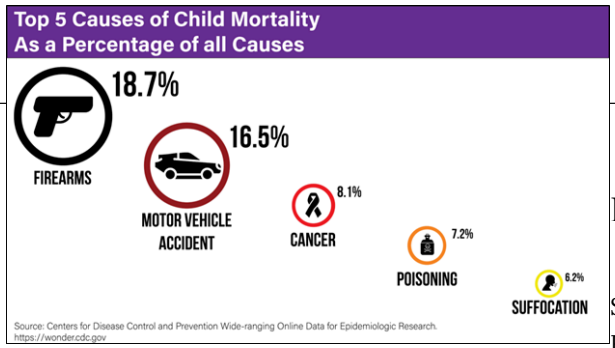
Slide A: This slide presents *disharmonious* colors, making it unpleasant to look at. Also, its visual *layout* **suggests** that all causes of child mortality are equal even though the percentages indicate otherwise.



Right-click image to enlarge in a new tab.

Slide B: Notice how this slide makes use of differences in *positioning, size, and harmonious colors* **to suggest** that one cause of child mortality—firearms—is greater and more worrisome than the others. We tend to **associate** height, larger size, and darker colors with importance or authority.

1. Sonja K. Foss, "Theory of Visual Rhetoric," in *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, Media*, eds. Ken Smith, Sandra Moriarty, Gretchen Barbatsis, and Keith Kenny (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 141–52.



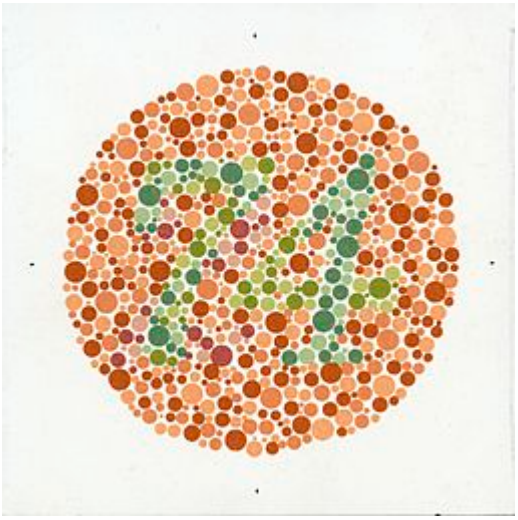
Right-click image to enlarge in a new tab.

Ensure Readability

Sixth, consider *readability* for all audience members. Remember that what is clear and visible on your computer screen may translate well for viewers watching through a screen remotely, but not for an in-person audience when projected onto a screen. Yellow, for instance, can be very difficult to read when projected, especially against a white background.

Remember, too, that audience members may have varying quality of vision. Thus,

- As you choose *images and fonts*, go larger than you might otherwise and avoid overly fancy or embellished font styles.
- If you are showing *video* and want audience members to see particular elements, pause the video and point to those elements or also use (possibly enlarged) still shots taken from the video to ensure everyone can see the crucial parts.
- Know, too, that a fair number of people have color vision deficiency (frequently referred to as being *color blind*), meaning they struggle to see differences between colors. Two of the most prevalent forms of color blindness are between red and green and between blue and yellow. So if you want to contrast colors, opt for alternative combinations.



Ishihara chart via Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY.

Strive for High Quality

Seventh, strive for *high quality* in your visual aids. While it may seem unfair, nothing undercuts the impact of a carefully prepared speech like a typo in your visual aid. Audience members read such seemingly small errors as marks of carelessness or lack of preparation. Thus you should read and reread your visual aids for spelling or grammatical errors before your presentation.

Similarly, a low-quality image can hurt your credibility. This is especially true when presenting in person. An image needs to be large enough for the people in the back of the room to see, and it should not be blurry or pixelated when projected.

Creating your own visual aid better ensures a high-quality image. In the previous chapter, we explained that making your own visual aid also ensures it is customized to your specific speech's needs. The final usage principle will add that using your own image avoids copyright concerns.

Follow Copyright and Academic Honesty Rules

Finally, *follow copyright and academic honesty rules*. It can be difficult to navigate copyright laws, especially when speaking in an educational context. Therefore, we provide guidance both for the images or video clips and for citing them.

Creating or Borrowing Images and Video

To be safe, whenever possible, *create your own* images (pictures, charts, infographics, etc.) and video (clips, GIFs, etc.).

Creative Commons Logo *by Creative Commons, Used per Creative Commons policies.*

If it's not possible to make your own, use images and videos that are *legally free to use*. These might be called "open access," "Creative Commons," "public domain," "royalty-free," "free stock," or simply "free," and there are many websites devoted to them. Just search for "Creative Commons images" to find several websites. Alternatively, after conducting a Google Images search, find the Google "Tool" that allows you to specify that your results only show images with "Usage Rights" set to "Creative Commons licenses."

Once again, you should also discover what resources your college or university can make available to you. It is possible your library already subscribes to an image service you can use for free. Otherwise, if an image or video does not explicitly give you permission to use it, assume it is protected by US copyright law.

If you really want to use a copyright-protected image or video and do not have explicit permission to use it, *try to obtain permission* from the copyright holder. Explain who you are (likely a student), what you want to use (the specific image or video), what you will use it for (likely a class assignment), and who the audience will include (likely your instructor and classmates). This path can be simple if the holder is clearly named, is easy to contact, is quickly responsive to your request, and grants you free access. More typically, however, it is not that easy or fast, which is why creating your own images or finding legally available images or videos is a preferable option.

Fortunately, in some cases, you can legally use copyrighted images or video clips without receiving permission. **Fair use** is a legal doctrine that allows copyrighted material to be used without explicit permission, based on four factors:

- the purpose and character of use
- the amount or substantiality of use compared with the work as a whole
- the nature of the copyrighted work
- the effect on the potential market for sale or value of the copyrighted material



Doctrine Of Fair Use *by Nick Youngson via Pix4free.org, CC BY-SA.*

You must apply these four factors *each time* you want to use a copyright-protected image or video to assess the applicability of fair use.[2] Your librarian or professor may be able to help you, and your college or university may have a guide to fair use that provides a more detailed explanation.

2. "U.S. Copyright Office Fair Use Index," U.S. Copyright Office, updated February 2025, https://www.copyright.gov/fair-use/, archived at https://perma.cc/L7CD-LP35.

Citing Images and Video

Whenever you use images or videos you did not fully create by yourself, exercise academic honesty by correctly citing them through written citations. That means abiding by the following advice:

- Follow a style guide (like MLA or APA). They typically have citation guides for artwork, YouTube videos, social media posts, and so on.
- If you used legally free images or videos, follow our advice in chapter 9 to use the TASL method developed by the creators of Creative Commons licenses.
- If you used some form of artificial intelligence (AI) to produce a visual aid, follow our guidance in chapter 9 for citing the use of AI tools: Name the AI tool and version you used as well as the company that makes it, list the date you used the tool and what you used it for, and include a URL to the tool.
- If you used copyrighted material based on the fair use doctrine or with the originator's permission, you should specify that along with your citation.

You might wonder *where* you should include written citation information for viewers. Recall our advice in chapter 9 to either create a "credit page" at the end of the slide deck or video or add citations to the visual slides or in the video itself. If you choose the latter, you can use a small font and a low positioning of the citation so it does not compete with the image or video for the audience's attention. Wherever you decide to offer a written citation of a visual image or video, including the citation builds your credibility by giving credit to the source who created the image or video clip.

Box 29.4 Improving Your Visual Aid Design

After you have created a visual aid, improve it by using the design principles and answering the following questions. Alternatively, apply the principles to a peer's visual aid to help them improve their design.

Design Principle	Questions to Ask about the Visual Aid
Visual aids should be visual.	• Is the aid more visual than textual? • Can any words be removed? • How might existing words or numbers be communicated visually instead?
Less is more.	• Is the eye drawn to the visual aid's central focus or message? • What excess information or editing can be removed so the main visual point pops out? • If visual aids are crowded together, can they be separated onto different slides so they each have their own moment?
Consider spacing and positioning.	• Are visual elements aligned in ways that appear strategic and meaningful? How might their alignment be improved? • Does the proximity of visual elements communicate similarities or differences? How might proximity be used more intentionally?
Use color strategically.	• Do contrasting colors help the eye determine what is important or different? How might contrast be used better? • Are color choices harmonic overall? Which colors should be changed to achieve harmony?
Consider what your visual choices suggest.	• What might the presented visual elements (colors, size, shapes, etc.) suggest or imply? • Do the suggestions support the point being made? If not, how might the presented elements be altered? • How well are the suggested elements adapted to the direct audience's culture and context?
Consider readability for all audience members.	• Is the visual aid easy to see and/or read? Should anything be enlarged or any video paused? • If speaking in person, are all the visual elements clear when projected onto a screen? • Does the visual aid avoid pairing red and green or blue and yellow?
Strive for high quality.	• Is all writing free of typos or misspellings? • Are images or videos high resolution?
Follow copyright and academic honesty rules.	• Did you create your own images and/or video? If you were helped by AI, did you name the tool you used? • Did you use images or videos that are copyright protected? If so, did you gain permission to use them and indicate that in your citation? • Did you accurately cite visual aids you did not create?

Usage Principles

Once you have designed your visual aids, plan how you will incorporate them into your speech. We offer five usage prin-

ciples, or advice, to guide you: introduce and explain your visual aids, give the audience time to digest your visual aids, do not be afraid of a blank slide or screen, talk to the audience or camera rather than to your visual aids, and practice with your visual aids.

Introduce and Explain Your Visual Aids



Created by Iconographer from Noun Project

First, *introduce and explain* your visual aids. Do not expect your visual aids to speak for themselves or for their connection to your speech to be self-evident. Instead, introduce your slide, video clip, or audience-interactive visual aid by providing a transition and any necessary context or instructions. Then explicitly acknowledge your visual aid and explain what you hope the audience notices or concludes from it.

- If you display a *chart*, *graph*, *map*, or *photograph*, for instance, point out what you want the audience to visually attend to.
- If you play a *video clip*, cue the audience for what to look for and/or explain afterward what they should have noticed.
- If you use an *audience-interactive visual aid*, draw conclusions from the resulting visual aid that the audience's feedback helped produce.

Give the Audience Time to Digest Your Visual Aids

A second usage principle is to *give audiences time* to digest your visual aid. It takes people a moment to process a visual aid, even when it's simple. Consider pausing while they watch or read, and plan that moment into your allotted time. When you talk, speak about the visual aid, which buys your audience more time to focus on it. If you too quickly move to the next point in your speech, the audience's attention will be split between listening to you and reading your slide, chart, or GIF. They are more likely to pay attention to the visual aid than to you.

Do Not Be Afraid of a Blank Slide or Screen

Third, *do not be afraid of a blank slide or screen*. Shifting to a blank screen at key points in the speech—for instance, when you want to tell a story—is a great way to refocus attention on you and your ideas. You do not need to show an endless series of images or clips while you speak.

Talk to the Audience or Camera Rather Than to Your Visual Aids

Fourth, *talk to the audience or camera* rather than to your visual aids. When *speaking in person*, we recommend the following:

- Don't turn your back on the audience to face your visual aids projected onto a screen. Keep your body facing your audience even as you glance at your visual aids to talk through them.

- Don't read from your visual aids! Don't stare at the slides as if looking for answers. Use your speaking notes instead and make eye contact with the audience if you are able.

When speaking *remotely through a screen*, we similarly insist on the following:

- Don't read your notes from your computer or tablet screen nor look only at the visual aids you are sharing on your screen. If your face is visible, it is obvious to viewers that your eyes are looking down, away, or even left and right as you read your notes.
- Instead, look at the camera if you can, or, if appropriate, turn off your camera and just focus viewers' attention on your visual aids while you discuss them.

Practice with Your Visual Aids

Finally, *practice with your visual aids*. This is one of the best pieces of advice we can offer. Many presentations could be more powerful if slides, a video clip, or an audience-interactive visual aid were timed better. Practicing your speech with visual aids will help you work out the timing and gain familiarity and confidence using them.

Box 29.5 Improving Your Use of Visual Aids

When incorporating visual aids into your presentation, abide by the following usage principles as you prepare and practice your speech:

- Verbally introduce and explain your visual aids.
- Give the audience time to digest your visual aids.
- Do not be afraid of a blank slide or screen.
- Talk to the audience or camera rather than to your visual aids.
- Practice with your visual aids.

In conclusion, we remind you that visual aids are powerful—and potentially fun—public speaking tools. As you plan and design your visual aids, keep your focus on the ways visual aids can assist and build civic engagement in a well-crafted speech.

Summary

Visual aids offer many advantages to speakers when they are well designed and effectively incorporated into a speech. However, when poorly crafted or mishandled, visual aids can do more harm than good. In this chapter, we established the following:

- Eight basic design principles will help you create visual aids that are thoughtful, strategic, and memo-

rable: Visual aids should be visual, less is more, consider spacing and positioning, use color strategically, consider what your visual choices suggest, strive for high quality, and follow copyright and academic honesty rules.

- Follow five usage principles to incorporate visual aids into your presentation effectively: Introduce and explain your visual aids, give the audience time to digest your visual aids, do not be afraid of a blank slide or screen, talk to the audience or camera rather than to your visual aids, and practice with your visual aids.

Key Terms

alignment
fair use
presented visual element
proximity
suggested visual element
visual contrast
visual harmony
white space

Review Questions

1. What are seven principles of design for visual aids?
2. Name five principles for using visual aids.
3. How can alignment, proximity, visual contrast, visual harmony, and white space improve your visual aid design?

Discussion Questions

1. Find an example of a visual aid that you think exhibits excellent design. Show it to your class and dis-

cuss with your classmates how it implements design principles.

2. What are some of the worst mistakes you have seen speakers make in their visual aid design? What design principle(s) did they violate, and how could they have improved their visual aid?
3. How does the use of visual aids affect the credibility of speakers? When do you think the judgments we make about speakers' visual aids are fair and when are they unfair?

30. Rhetorical Criticism as Civic Engagement

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Describe rhetoric as symbolic action.
- Complete the descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative steps of rhetorical criticism.
- Demonstrate five mentalities through their rhetorical criticism.

To this point in the textbook, our attention has focused on aiding your civic engagement through the creation and facilitation of speech. That is, we have primarily concentrated on producing *your own* rhetoric.



Created by Arif Hariyanto from Noun Project

We now turn to rhetorical criticism to closely examine *other* rhetors' messages. **Rhetorical criticism** (or its synonym, rhetorical analysis) is the description, interpretation, and evaluation of rhetoric to form judgments about its functions and consequences. In other words, rhetorical criticism equips us to investigate the rhetorical choices other people make.

Rhetorical criticism functions as a form of civic engagement. Through rhetorical criticism, we become better, more knowledgeable consumers of public information. In other words, we notice persuasive appeals in the messages that bombard us daily and think more deeply about their implications. We can use this knowledge to educate fellow community members. Such insights help us hold officials and speakers accountable, weigh policy options, and lend support for, or voice resistance to, plans and proposals. In sum, rhetorical criticism enables democratic participants to improve both our understanding of public communication and the decisions made by our communities.

In this chapter we first describe rhetoric as symbolic action. We then explain the goal and steps of rhetorical criticism, which helps illuminate a rhetoric's symbolic action. We end by describing rhetorical criticism as an intellectual discipline for which critics should adopt specific mentalities.

Rhetoric as Symbolic Action

In chapter 1, we defined rhetoric as a civic art devoted to the ethical study and use of symbols (verbal and nonverbal) to address public issues. Let's consider what we mean by "symbols." A **symbol** is something that expresses an idea or refers to something beyond itself. Our definition of rhetoric references *verbal* symbols (language, our words) and *nonverbal* symbols (facial expression, body language, etc.). Symbols can also be *visual* (images, graphics, signs, etc.) or *audio* (sounds, beats, etc.).

In this chapter we examine the use of symbols more closely to see how they act and what they accomplish. We take as our guiding inspiration the conception of rhetoric as symbolic action, which comes from the most influential rhetorical scholar of the twentieth century, Kenneth Burke. Burke contended that we see and understand our world and ourselves through the medium of symbols.

Symbolic action refers to the power of symbols to *do* things—that is, to shape our thoughts, values, and actions. As Burke explains, our words (as verbal symbols) are simultaneously reflections, selections, and deflections of reality:



Created by Eko Purnomo from Noun Project

- Words offer a *reflection* of reality—that is, they can be used to describe everyday situations, human society, our world, and the universe.
- Words offer a *selection* of reality because we can never describe everything about something or all the angles or perspectives that can be taken on it. Thus, all descriptions are incomplete selections of reality.
- Finally, words provide us with a *deflection* of reality in that all descriptions focus our attention on certain aspects and take our attention away from others.[1]

As a high school student, for example, you may have made plans to hold an event at your house while your parents were away. When you invited your friends, you might have described the event as a "party." This term *reflected* the event and *selected* the fun and possibly raucous aspects of the event to excite your friends to attend. However, when you described the event to your parents to gain their permission, you may have called it a "get-together" or "hangout." Those terms also *reflected* the event. But they *deflected* your parents' attention away from its possible raucousness and, instead, *selected* its social nature to focus upon.

We make language choices—as well as choices with our nonverbal, visual, and audio symbol use—because we recognize that symbols *do something*. Through selection and deflection, they shape the way we see and understand the world. You might even say they constitute our reality; that is, our symbols compose the world we know and act within.

Box 30.1 Symbolic Action in Practice

Imagine you are driving and hit another car. No one is hurt, but both vehicles are damaged, and the incident is reported to the police.



Image via Rawpixel, Public Domain.

- When you call your *automobile insurance agent* about the incident, you probably want to minimize what happened so your insurance rate does not increase. What do you call the incident? A "fender-bender"? A "bump"?
- When you call your *significant other* to tell them what happened, you may want to amplify what happened to gain their sympathy. What do you call the incident for them? Perhaps a "crash" or "collision"?
- Who else might you talk to about the incident, and what alternative words might you use to differently influence their perceptions of it?

1. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 59.

Consider: What does each label *deflect* listeners' attention away from? What aspects of the event do each of the words *select* for listeners to focus on?

Rhetorical Criticism

If symbols function persuasively, then how can you best study this symbolic action? Rhetorical criticism is designed to do just that! As we defined earlier, rhetorical criticism is the description, interpretation, and evaluation of rhetoric to form judgments about its functions and consequences.

Though it's easy to confuse "criticism" with complaint or fault finding, in rhetorical criticism, the word refers simply to analysis and study.

Through rhetorical criticism, we study how rhetoric—be it verbal, textual, visual, or material—acts persuasively. More specifically, we study how rhetoric functions through artifacts. A **rhetorical artifact** is an object of study in rhetorical criticism. By "object," we mean a specific instance of rhetoric that was produced for an audience at a particular time. A rhetorical artifact is the focal point of analysis. Box 30.3 discusses the National Debt Clock as a sample rhetorical artifact. In the next chapter, we provide guidance for selecting a rhetorical artifact to analyze.

The **rhetorical critic**, or person conducting the rhetorical criticism, seeks to understand how the artifact functions persuasively:

- How does the artifact create meaning for audiences?
- How does it invite audiences to perceive reality?
- How does the artifact attempt to persuade audiences?

When we say "audiences" in rhetorical criticism, we typically include an artifact's direct audience. As described in chapter 10, a direct audience consists of the people who are exposed to and attend to a speech—or, in this case, the artifact. However, we keep "audiences" plural, because a critic may want to differentiate how an artifact functioned persuasively for various types of audiences discussed in chapter 10: a target audience (those most likely to be influenced by, or to act upon, the message), an implied audience (those represented in the artifact), and/or an implicated audience (those impacted by the artifact if its persuasion is successful).

As a rhetorical critic, you will seek to discover how an artifact functions persuasively for audiences. To do so, you will analyze a rhetorical artifact in a thoughtful and systematic manner, following three basic steps: description, interpretation, and evaluation.

Description



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In rhetorical criticism, **description** involves noticing, identifying, and explaining a rhetorical artifact's content, form, and absence. In terms of rhetorical *content*, you examine the message or argument(s) that the artifact advances and the appeals used to do so. You ask what the rhetoric is claiming, conveying, or implying, and you try to provide specific answers.



Image by cottonbro studio via Pexels, Public Domain.



Just Stop Oil by Just Stop Oil via Wikimedia Commons, Attribution.

Rhetorical analysis also investigates the *form* that rhetoric takes. The form includes but is not limited to symbol type (verbal, nonverbal, visual, audio), organization, style, medium, and genre. For instance, it is one thing for an environmental activist to publish an editorial in the newspaper about fossil fuels, and it's another for the same activist to deface a museum or historical painting. In both cases the point being made—expressing opposition to climate change—is the same, but differences in protest forms likely produce differing reactions and understanding. Consequently, it's important for you to describe not just the content but also the form of the rhetoric being analyzed.

Finally, you may also describe anything significant the artifact *leaves out*. When describing a political advertisement that quotes an opposing candidate, for instance, it may be important to note if the quotation was cut off early or made more sense when the comments just before it are included. Sometimes absence can be as important to notice and describe as presence.

For your rhetorical criticism, use the prompts in box 30.2 and the example in box 30.3 for guidance and help with description.

Box 30.2 Describing a Rhetorical Artifact

- **Content:** What is the artifact's primary message, claim, or point? Does it communicate that message explicitly or implicitly? What types of appeals does it use to communicate (logos, pathos, ethos)?
- **Form:** What types of symbols does the artifact utilize (verbal, nonverbal, visual, audio)? How might you characterize the artifact's style? How is it organized or arranged? What medium or genre does it use?
- **Absence:** What does the artifact exclude or overlook that is significant?

Box 30.3 Describing the National Debt Clock

We engage in description regularly as we encounter messages of all types. For example, imagine you are visiting New York City, and as you walk near Times Square, you come upon the following large display:



[US National Debt Clock](#) *by Rafiq Phillips via Flickr,* [CC BY-SA](#).

If you were on your cell phone with a friend at this moment and wished to **describe** it to them, you might start by saying something like, "I am looking way up at a huge sign that says, 'Our National Debt.' It has a digital counter that keeps changing by increasing the dollar amount. It shows how much the national debt is growing and how much each family in America owes. It doesn't indicate, though, if the national debt has ever decreased."

That is **description** because it explains what you have observed about the sign's *content* (message), *form* (huge sign, changing digital counter, word choice), and *absence* (any historical decrease in the national debt).

Notice, too, that the display qualifies as a **rhetorical artifact**. It is the object (focus) of our analysis, and it is a specific instance of rhetoric that was produced for an audience at a particular time.

Interpretation

Interpretation is the second step in rhetorical criticism, though it often closely accompanies description. Interpretation involves making inferences about how an artifact's content, form, and absence function persuasively.

Returning to the notion of symbolic action discussed earlier, you make interpretations by asking, "What's that *doing*?" where "that" refers to the elements you described. For instance, how do pathos appeals invite the direct audience to perceive the situation? What do they emphasize? What does the artifact's organizational structure deflect the audience's attention away from? How might the artifact's absence of conflicting perspectives narrow the audience's memory of the topic or event? Your answers should use active verbs to accentuate the symbolic *action*. If you are not using verbs when interpreting a rhetorical artifact, then you are probably describing rather than interpreting its persuasive functions or symbolic action.

The prompts in box 30.4 and the example in box 30.5 give you further support and help with interpretation.

Box 30.4 Interpreting a Rhetorical Artifact

- How do the rhetorical artifact's content, form, and absence attempt to influence audiences' percep-

tions, values, or actions?

- What do the rhetorical artifact's elements emphasize or draw attention to?
- What do the rhetorical artifact's elements deflect attention away from?

Use active verbs when answering these questions to accentuate the artifact's symbolic *action*.

Box 30.5 Interpreting the National Debt Clock

Let's return to the phone conversation (started in box 30.3) with your friend about the National Debt Clock that hangs in New York City.

Fairly quickly after describing the clock, you would likely move to **interpreting** how its content, form, and absence function persuasively. You might exclaim the following:

- *Form:* "Wow, the size and height of that huge sign convey the enormity of the debt!"
- *Content:* "The use of the word 'our' on that sign drives home the shared burden all Americans have and stokes fears that we cannot pay it off."
- *Absence:* "But by not showing if or how the debt has decreased in the past, the sign implies it has only steadily grown."

Those are **interpretations** because they infer how the content, form, and absence are functioning persuasively. Notice that **active verbs** ("convey," "drives home," "stokes," "implies") capture the sign's symbolic action.

Evaluation

We clarified earlier that "criticism" in rhetorical criticism does not mean complaining or fault finding. However, rhetorical analysis does include evaluation.



Created by Imron Sadewo from Noun Project

Evaluation in rhetorical criticism involves making judgments *about the functions and consequences* of the rhetoric examined. Judgments are based on the artifact's rhetorical features: what they are (description) and how they function persuasively (interpretation) in the context. Evaluations are not about, nor based on, the critic's feelings about the artifact. Box 30.6 provides an example to make this distinction clear.

Box 30.6 Evaluating the National Debt Clock

To clarify appropriate from inappropriate evaluations for rhetorical criticism, let's return to the National

Debt Clock example we considered in boxes 30.3 and 30.5. Imagine what else you might say to your friend about the sign:

Not Appropriate Evaluations for Rhetorical Criticism	**Appropriate Evaluations for Rhetorical Criticism**
"That sign is ugly and old looking. I prefer newer billboards with sharp LED lights."	"That's a helpful sign because it reminds Americans what is happening every day, which is that each and every one of us is going further and further into debt!"
"Thinking about the national debt stresses me out. I don't need to be reminded about that when I'm just trying to sightsee. It's unfair to put that sign here."	"That sign is misleading because it makes increased debt seem unstoppable when some past presidents have played a role in successfully decreasing it."
These are **not appropriate** evaluations. Although they make judgments ("ugly," "unfair"), they *focus more on the critic's preferences and feelings* ("I prefer," "stressed me out") as support than on the consequences of the artifact's rhetorical elements.	These **are appropriate** evaluations because they make judgments ("helpful," "misleading") about the *ethical and pragmatic consequences of the artifact's rhetorical elements.*

You might wonder *why* rhetorical critics judge an artifact's functions and consequences. Typically, such evaluations teach us about ourselves, a particular group, or a specific rhetorical artifact.

The evaluation generated by rhetorical criticism can *help us see an aspect of our society we had not seen clearly before*. For instance, rhetoric scholar Michael Butterworth analyzed how the continued regular performance of "God Bless America" at sporting events since 9/11 promotes nationalistic thinking that places sport in the service of US militarism. In doing so, Butterworth helped us see deeper meaning in what we might otherwise consider a harmless and even soothing ritual.[2]



Andrew Scharnhorst Sings the National Anthem by U.S. Navy via Picryl, Public Domain.

Other times the evaluation *teaches us something about a particular group we had not known about or paid close attention to*. Examples include analysis that provides insight into the rhetoric of political and social movements ranging from Moms for Liberty to Black Lives Matter advocates. Here evaluation highlights the implications and ethics of tactics designed to move audiences and generate support for a cause.

Sometimes the evaluation teaches us about a *particular rhetorical artifact's potential dangers or benefits* on the beliefs, attitudes, and courses of action of those who experience it. This might range from a critic judging what they perceive to be the damaging gender stereotypes promoted in some Disney films to valorizing the depiction of superheroes,

2. Michael L. Butterworth, *Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity: The National Pastime and American Identity During the War on Terror* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).

such as Captain America, as embodying cherished values including freedom, equality, justice, and courage.[3] Evaluation is the most complex and significant component of rhetorical criticism.

Box 30.7 Evaluating a Rhetorical Artifact

- How does your rhetorical criticism help us notice and understand an aspect of our society we had not clearly seen before?
- What might your analysis teach us about a particular group, individual, organization, company, or institution?
- What can your rhetorical criticism illuminate about the dangers or benefits of a particular rhetorical artifact's potential impacts on audiences' beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action?

In sum, rhetorical criticism carefully investigates the symbolic action by a rhetorical artifact through the steps of description, interpretation, and evaluation. It is both a practice and an intellectual discipline, which we will consider next.

Rhetorical Criticism as an Intellectual Discipline

How do you know when your rhetorical criticism—following the steps of description, interpretation, and evaluation—has led you to the right answer? How do you know if your conclusions about a rhetorical artifact are correct? To answer, we need to characterize the discipline of rhetorical criticism. As we will explain, it is a systematic and reasonable as well as a creative and manifold field of study. And it requires critics to adopt a set of specific mentalities.

Systematic and Reasonable

On the one hand, rhetorical criticism is a *systematic and reasonable* discipline.

- *Systematic*: Your rhetorical criticism will more likely produce compelling insights if you systematically follow the three steps we discussed (description, interpretation, and evaluation) by answering the prompting questions we provided for each step.
- *Reasonable*: Critics ultimately make an argument about how an artifact functioned persuasively. As we discussed in chapter 26, an argument requires supporting claims with credible evidence. In rhetorical criticism, critics typically draw evidence from the artifact itself (i.e., quotations, descriptions, etc.), information about the artifact's historical context (which we explore in the next chapter), and possibly from the rhetorical method used by the critic (also discussed in the next chapter). Such evidence is required to give the audience reasons to accept your claims about the rhetorical artifact.

3. Mark D. White, "Captain America Reminds Nation of Shared Values," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 21, 2011, B7, https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/2011/07/21/captain-america-reminds-nation-of-shared-values/.

If you do not provide sufficient, relevant evidence to support your claims—discovered through your systematic analysis of the artifact—your rhetorical criticism may be insightful but not compelling. In other words, your work will be interesting but insufficiently supported.

Creative and Manifold

On the other hand, rhetorical criticism is also a *civic art*, much like rhetoric itself. That means it is a creative and manifold discipline.

- *Creative:* No matter how carefully or comprehensively you analyze an artifact, your criticism will be influenced by your own personality, interests, choices, experiences, and values. That's a strength of rhetorical criticism! Somewhat like painting a picture, your unique perspective can prompt creative insights and understanding about the artifact that other critics might miss.
- *Manifold:* Rhetorical criticism includes multiple, evolving methods, approaches, and conceptual lenses. Different critics will probably choose different approaches, notice different elements, interpret them differently, and/or offer different evaluations. That's another strength of rhetorical criticism! The more critics who analyze a rhetorical artifact, the more insights we can gain.

Thus, if you follow the process of rhetorical criticism too rigidly or focus too much on describing the artifact rather than interpreting and evaluating it, your claims are likely to be reasonable but not insightful. They will lack the awareness and knowledge that your unique perspective can bring to your audience.

Together, the systematic/reasonable and creative/manifold qualities mean there are no "right" or "wrong" answers or conclusions when conducting rhetorical criticism. Does that mean anything goes or that any rhetorical critique you produce deserves an A grade? No! Instead, we tend to measure rhetorical criticism according to its *strength*.

Stronger Rhetorical Criticism	
Reasonable: offers compelling evidence for claims.	
Insightful: helps people understand the artifact and its consequences in ways they might have missed.	

Notice we included arrows between stronger and weaker rhetorical criticism to indicate a spectrum or range of quality possible rather than two simple categories.

Mentalities to Adopt

Because rhetorical criticism is systematic *and* creative, critics must adopt particular mentalities to produce insightful and compelling rhetorical criticism. These five mentalities include the following:



- *Curiosity:* The persistent desire to understand how rhetoric functions for audiences. This curiosity drives you to go beyond what you want or expects to see to detailed observation

and analysis.

- *Imagination:* The ability to break apart and examine rhetorical artifacts from multiple perspectives.
- *Systematic examination*: The employment of a thorough and orderly approach when analyzing discourse by moving from description to interpretation to evaluation.
- *Discernment*: The ability to see beyond the surface of an artifact and shift from description to interpretation. You determine which rhetorical elements to focus on to generate the greatest insight into the functioning of an artifact.
- *Reasoned analysis*: The use of credible evidence, appropriate and representative examples, and an adherence to the standards of valid argumentation.

Summary

This chapter introduced rhetorical criticism as an intellectual discipline and form of civic engagement. It presented the understanding needed to appreciate what rhetorical criticism entails, such as the following:

- Rhetoric works as symbolic action as symbols have the power to shape thoughts, values and actions.
- Rhetorical criticism is the description, interpretation, and evaluation of rhetoric to form judgments about its functions and consequences. Description involves noticing, identifying, and explaining a rhetorical artifact's content, form, and absence. Interpretation occurs when you make inferences about how an artifact's content, form, and absence function persuasively. Evaluation involves making judgments about the functions and consequences of the rhetoric examined.
- Rhetorical criticism is a systematic and reasonable discipline as well as a creative and manifold field of study. Consequently, your work is judged based on its strength or weakness rather than its rightness or wrongness.
- To produce insightful and compelling rhetorical analysis, you should adopt such mentalities as curiosity, imagination, discernment, systematic study, and reasoned analysis.

Key Terms

description
evaluation
interpretation
rhetorical artifact
rhetorical critic
rhetorical criticism
symbol
symbolic action

Review Questions

1. What is meant by rhetoric as symbolic action?
2. What is a rhetorical artifact?
3. As part of rhetorical criticism, what does description, interpretation, and evaluation refer to?
4. How is rhetorical criticism systematic and reasonable? Creative and manifold? What happens when rhetorical criticism reflects one set of qualities but not the other?
5. What are the intellectual qualities necessary for a rhetorical critic?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that our symbols compose the world we know and act within? Can you think of an example that demonstrates that? What are the implications of this claim?
2. How is the process of rhetorical criticism similar to or different from scientific inquiry?
3. Which set of rhetorical criticism's qualities do you feel most comfortable with: systematic and reasonable or creative and manifold? Least comfortable? Why?
4. Which of the mentalities necessary to conduct rhetorical criticism have you already developed? Which do you need to strengthen?

31. Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and Democratic Principles

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Identify a rhetorical artifact that addresses a substantive public matter.
- Reconstruct basic elements of a rhetorical artifact's historical context.
- Evaluate a rhetorical artifact's impact on democratic principles.

In the previous chapter, we defined rhetorical criticism as the description, interpretation, and evaluation of rhetoric to form judgments about its functions and consequences. We equipped you with basic instructions to conduct a rhetorical criticism: Describe a rhetorical artifact's content, form, and absence, interpret its persuasive functions, and evaluate the functions and their consequences. We suggested that rhetorical criticism empowers you to account for an artifact's symbolic action—the power of symbols to shape our thoughts, values, and actions.

In this chapter, we supplement those basic instructions with a richer understanding of how to select a rhetorical artifact, situate the artifact in a historical context, and evaluate it against democratic principles.

Selecting Rhetorical Artifacts

In chapter 30 we defined a rhetorical artifact as an object of study in rhetorical criticism. We explained that it is a specific instance of rhetoric that was produced for an audience at a particular time. Today, the range of potential rhetorical artifacts is limitless! That was not always the case.

In the early twentieth century: The modern field of rhetorical studies in the US was referred to as "speech" with a narrow focus on public, political speeches.

Since at least the 1960s: The range of rhetorical artifacts studied expanded to include literature, art, film, television, social movements, the internet, and social media.

As the examples in box 31.1 illustrate, today a rhetorical artifact can be anything from a billboard advertisement to a Taylor Swift song to a Disney film.

Consequently, we might expand our understanding of the *rhetor*, which we defined in chapter 1 as a person who speaks publicly, to the author or creator of the rhetorical artifact under examination. Thus, a rhetor may be a speaker, writer, lyricist, filmmaker, and so on.

Box 31.1 Rhetorical Artifacts

To help you appreciate the array of rhetorical artifacts available, read through this wide-ranging list of examples. Perhaps it will help you discover a type of artifact you'd like to analyze! This list is by no means comprehensive; it's simply meant to spark your own ideas and discovery.

Artwork or photography
Billboard
Blog, editorial, or news column
Book or graphic novel
Commercial or marketing ad
Film
A particular space
Political declaration, manifesto, or campaign materials
Political or animated cartoon
Public address, lecture, or sermon
Social media post or meme
Social movement campaign materials
Song or music video
Statue or memorial
TV show
Video
Video game
Website

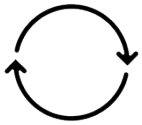
Choose a rhetorical artifact that meets the definition's criteria and, for the purposes of this textbook, that addresses a substantive public matter. First, the artifact must be a specific instance of rhetoric that a rhetor (speaker, writer, etc.) produced for an audience at a particular time. That is what makes a rhetorical artifact different from a topic or subject. Use the following table to better distinguish between rhetorical artifacts and topics.

Topics	**Rhetorical Artifacts**
Mental health	A YouTube video devoted to talking about mental health A clothing campaign that emphasizes mental health messages Pamphlets produced by your college's health and wellness office
Christianity	A sermon delivered by a pastor A music video by a Christian artist An altar inside a church building

Second, ideally choose a rhetorical artifact that addresses a *significant community concern or problem*. In other words, locate an artifact that engages a social, political, or financial issue that a community cares about and that carries notable implications for that community's welfare. Find a rhetorical artifact that attempts to influence how audiences view or act on that issue. Don't assume that only serious rhetorical artifacts qualify. An advertisement, a video game, or even a sports team mascot might be eligible if, for example, it engages a political issue or communicates a social message about gender, race, religion, and so on. If you're unsure if an artifact addresses a substantive public matter, ask your instructor for help.

Situating Rhetorical Artifacts in Historical Context

In addition to selecting an appropriate rhetorical artifact, you also need to situate that artifact in a historical context. **Context** refers to the conditions or situation within which rhetoric is produced. Critics are typically less concerned with a rhetorical artifact's lasting or enduring beauty and much more interested in its relationship with its particular context.



Created by Akbar from Noun Project

The Reciprocal Relationship of Artifacts and Contexts

All rhetorical acts take place in a historical context of some type—be that a particular social context, financial context, legal context, and so forth. That *context* influences the *rhetorical artifact's* nature, content, functions, and goals. For instance, consider the following example:

Context		**Rhetorical Artifact**
The ongoing Civil War, the setting of a battlefield, and the occasion of a dedication ceremony for the National Cemetery of Gettysburg	influenced ⇒	the content and form of President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

The relationship between an artifact and its context is reciprocal, however. Just as contexts influence rhetoric, rhetors produce *artifacts* to influence the *context*! A rhetor may hope to move an audience to improve a community problem, buoy a person into leadership, or strengthen community relationships. Let's return to the previous example:

Rhetorical Artifact		**Context**
Lincoln used his Gettysburg Address	to influence ⇒	Americans to end the Civil War and reunite as a nation.

Thus, just as the context shapes the artifact, so too the artifact attempts to influence the context.

Determining an Artifact's Historical Context: Six Questions to Answer

To determine an artifact's historical context, answer who, why, what, to whom, when, and where surrounding the rhetoric's production. Use the prompting questions in box 31.2 and the example in box 31.3 for help.

Box 31.2 Reconstructing the Historical Context

- **Who:** Who was the rhetor? What might audiences have already known about them?
- **Why:** What seemed to prompt this rhetoric? What was the rhetor's goal?
- **What:** What type of artifact are you analyzing? What are its major characteristics?
- **To Whom:** Who were the direct, target, implied, and implicated audiences for the artifact?
- **When:** When was the artifact produced, delivered, aired, or uploaded? What was the specific date? What might be useful to know about the time period in which it appeared?
- **Where:** Where was the artifact delivered, consumed, or uploaded? Name the medium it used and the physical location or the technological platform employed (YouTube, Snapchat, etc.).

Box 31.3 An Example of Establishing the Historical Context

In the previous chapter, we introduced the National Debt Clock that hangs outdoors in New York City. We used it to exemplify how you might describe, interpret, and evaluate a rhetorical artifact. What is its historical context? Based on our research, we discovered the following:

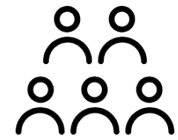
- **Who:** The clock was originally designed by New York real estate developer Seymour Durst, who

worried about the ramifications of governmental debt.[1]

- **To whom:** See box 31.4.
- **Why:** According to *The New York Times*, Durst "wanted a vivid way to show Americans how big the national debt was, and also to nudge elected officials to do something about it."[2]
- **What:** The display is an eleven-by-twenty-six-foot billboard with static (unchanging) words and digitally displayed numbers that continually change to reflect the US gross national debt and each American family's share moment to moment. It is more widely referred to as the "National Debt Clock."
- **When:** The display was installed in 1989 after two terms by President Ronald Reagan, under whose administration the national debt nearly tripled to $2.6 trillion.[3] During the early to mid-1990s, because the national debt decreased under President Clinton's administration, the clock's total went down. In the late 1990s, the clock's total went up again as President George Bush Sr. increased the national debt. The clock continues to run today along with a virtual edition.[4]
- **Where:** The billboard was originally hung on the side of a Manhattan building on Sixth Avenue between Forty-Second and Forty-Third Streets, just one block away from Times Square. It moved in 2004 but was repositioned near its original spot in 2017.

Notice how learning about the display's historical context enriches our understanding of the reciprocal relationship between a rhetorical artifact and its context. The *context prompted the clock's production* (as a response to the national debt tripling), and *the clock attempted to influence that context* (hoping to prompt legislators to lower the national debt).

Take special care when identifying the audience ("to whom") for your rhetorical artifact. Rhetoric creates meaning in relation to audiences; it is they who respond to, endorse, or reject a message.



To determine audiences, let's return to the ways we conceived of them in chapter 10. Namely, we differentiated among the direct, target, implied, and implicated audiences. Recall the following:

- The *direct audience* refers to the people who are exposed to and attend to the rhetoric.
- The *target audience* consists of specific members who are more likely to be influenced by the appeals and/or more likely to act on them.
- The *implied audiences* are the groups represented in the message.
- The *implicated audiences* refer to the groups affected by the message if it is successful.

1. Eun Lee Koh, "Following Up; Time's Hands Go Back on National Debt Clock," *New York Times*, August 13, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/13/nyregion/following-up-time-s-hands-go-back-on-national-debt-clock.html.
2. Koh, "Following Up."
3. Lou Cannon, "Ronald Reagan: Domestic Affairs," *Miller Center*, August 28, 2023, https://millercenter.org/president/reagan/domestic-affairs, archived at https://perma.cc/8NPG-F6R2.
4. Koh, "Following Up." A running total of the US national gross debt is available at "U.S. National Debt Clock: Real Time," U.S. Debt Clock.org, https://usdebtclock.org/, archived at https://perma.cc/T5M7-G67E.

Knowing who interacted with, was targeted by, was referenced in, or was potentially impacted by the artifact can help you make more specific arguments about how the artifact functioned. See box 31.4 for an example.

Box 31.4 An Example of Identifying Audiences ("To Whom")

Let's return to the National Debt Clock to discuss why identifying an artifact's audience can aid your rhetorical analysis. The clock's audiences included the following:

- **Direct audience:** For the National Debt Clock, the direct audience includes everyone who walks by and notices the clock, which likely consists of local residents, tourists, and nearly business workers and customers.
- **Target audience:** Based on Durst's original goal, the target audience was—and likely remains—elected officials who can lower the debt as well as Americans who can pressure their officials to do so.
- **Implied audiences:** Clearly Americans, particularly American families, are referenced by the billboard through the use of "our" and "your family share."
- **Implicated audiences:** Americans are among those affected by national debt, particularly when that debt exceeds the limit authorized by Congress. When exceedance approaches, Congress historically has voted to raise the debt limit to avoid defaulting on the nation's legal financial obligations. A default would send the economy into a recession, affecting not only families but also employers and a wide host of industries.[5] But even when default is avoided, elected leaders and their constituents are impacted every time the debt approaches exceedance. Republican and Democrat leaders negotiate (often aggressively) before they agree to vote to raise the limit, which can be stressful for all as the fear of default looms.

While the national debt display likely grabs the attention and concerns of the *direct audience* who walk past it, it may fail to adequately move the Americans—who are the clock's *target*, *implied*, and *implicated audiences*—to action. American families likely feel inadequate to slow or stop the looming and constantly increasing numbers, especially given the rancor between political parties every time leaders need to raise the debt limit. The sign, consequently, may amplify feelings of doom and powerlessness more so than encourage Americans or officials to decrease the national debt.

Box 31.5 Researching the Historical Context

How can you learn about an artifact's historical context? Look for answers to the six contextual questions in such sources as the following:

- **Reliable news sources:** Check for news stories about the artifact, the rhetor, or the occasion.
- **Opinion sources (blogs, editorials, social media posts, polls, etc.):** Discover what some audiences

5. "Debt Limit," U.S. Department of the Treasury, accessed June 27, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/.

knew about the rhetor, what they expected from the rhetoric, and/or how they reacted to the artifact.

- **Books:** Find a biography about the rhetor or a book about the time period or occasion.
- **Scholarly articles:** Discover what scholars have claimed about the rhetor, artifact, or similar types of artifacts.
- **Military or government websites:** If appropriate, discover information about the rhetor and relevant military or political efforts.

You can also research references made or names mentioned in the artifact.

Make sure to review chapters 8 and 9 for guidance on researching effectively.

Every rhetorical artifact takes place in a historical context. Understanding that context provides important insights into the rhetoric's functions.

Using a Rhetorical Method

Once you have identified a particular rhetorical artifact and researched its context, you must determine the most appropriate way to conduct your analysis. Often this means making use of a particular method. A **rhetorical method** is a perspective, approach, or orientation for analyzing an artifact.



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Each method focuses your attention on some elements of rhetoric and, thus, *away* from other elements. For example, within rhetorical studies there are methods that focus on metaphors, myths, and gender depictions, among many others. As each name suggests, the method directs your attention to the use and function of certain elements in an artifact. In the chapters that conclude this textbook, we discuss two methods for analyzing rhetoric for democracy and civic engagement: public communication analysis (chapters 32 and 33) and ideological criticism (chapters 34 and 35).

Box 31.6 Rhetorical Methods as Lenses

To better understand how rhetorical methods work, think about when you get an eye exam by an optometrist.

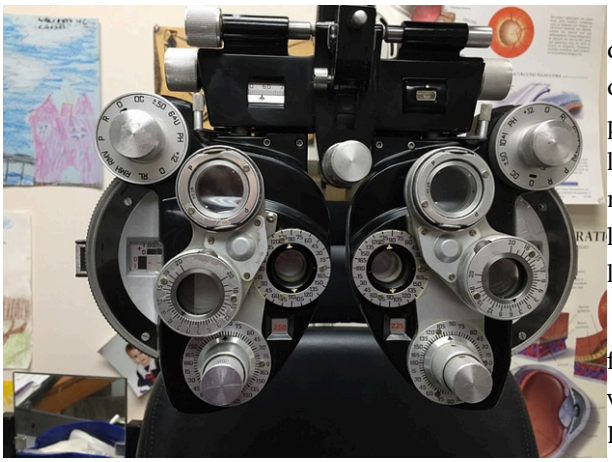


Image by ghcassel via Pixabay, Pixabay Content License.

Often in that setting, the optometrist checks your eyes to determine whether you need correction (through glasses or contact lenses). They place a series of lenses in front of your eyes as you look at the eye chart. If the optometrist has correctly measured your eyes and selected the right lenses, what was blurry comes into clear focus. The lenses change what you can see.

A rhetorical method is like using a powerful lens that focuses your attention and shapes your vision, resulting in new insights about an artifact. Different methods, like different lenses, change what you see. When done well, rhetorical methods help you provide profound insights into human communication.

Evaluating an Artifact's Impact on Democratic Principles

In the previous chapter, we named evaluation as the final step of the rhetorical criticism process. We explained that evaluation involves making judgments *about the functions and consequences* of the rhetoric examined. We suggested evaluations can help us see an aspect of our society we had not seen clearly before, teach us something about a particular group we had not known about or paid close attention to, or even reveal a particular rhetoric's potential dangers or benefits on those who experience it.

Here we add that your evaluation of an artifact can—and should—also judge how the rhetorical artifact impacts our democracy. By explicitly attending to this impact, you will strengthen the civic engagement function of your rhetorical criticism. To explain, we'll first recognize the power of rhetoric on democracy and then provide guidance for evaluating artifacts accordingly.

Rhetoric, Democracy, and Demagoguery

We believe rhetoric that addresses public affairs should strengthen democracy. This position—that great rhetoric aids democracy—has long been held by many Americans. In 1948, for instance, communication scholar Earnest Brandenburg noted,

> Every orator of sufficient prominence to be considered in the area of Statecraft has been a champion of democracy and the will of the people. Or, to state it another way, rhetorical critics and historians have seemed to decree that prominence be accorded to those who have championed democracy.[6]

6. Earnest Brandenburg, "Quintilian and the Good Orator," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 34 (1948): 28.



Martin Luther King Jr., *Public Affairs Office via U.S. Marine Corps Website*, *Public Domain*.

This commitment to speech that strengthens democracy held true in the early twenty-first century when rhetoric scholars Stephen Lucas and Martin Medhurst listed the top 100 speeches in that century. Most on the list, from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech to John Kerry's 1971 speech against the Vietnam War, clearly advocated democratic ideals.[7]

In contrast, notoriety accrues to rhetors who place their personal gain over democracy. Some speakers, for example, have practiced **demagoguery**, which is a rhetoric that explicitly claims to speak for the public's best interests but implicitly gains more political power for the speaker and exacerbates divisions among the public, thereby weakening democracy. People who employ demagoguery are called **demagogues**. Their discourse typically overly relies on emotional appeals (especially fear and hatred), exaggeration, and divisiveness to encourage listeners to blame others for their problems and to act before thinking through a matter. Demagoguery, such as in Senator Huey Long's 1934 speech "Every Man a King" and Senator Joseph McCarthy's 1950 speech "Enemies from Within," are considered important speeches but never great because of the ways they undermined and ultimately weakened democracy.



Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, *National Archives and Records Administration via Wikimedia Commons*, *Public Domain*.

7. Stephen E. Lucas and Martin J. Medhurst, eds., *Words of a Century: The Top American Speeches, 1900–1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), xi–xiii.

Evaluating an Artifact's Impact on Democracy



Facade of the Capitol Building by Ramaz Bluashvili via Pexels, Pexels License.

How do you decide if an artifact strengthened or weakened democracy? You should attend to the principles upon which democracy depends or, as rhetoric scholar Lloyd Bitzer states, the "higher principles of art, those that separate genuine public communication from propaganda, deception, power wielding, or self-aggrandizement."[8]

Democratic principles are the behavioral standards necessary for democratic governance to exist and thrive. Such principles include but are not limited to those outlined in box 31.7. Artifacts that prioritize, reinforce, and/or practice such principles strengthen democracy. Artifacts that discount, weaken, and/or violate them weaken democracy.

Box 31.7 Democratic Principles

- participation of ordinary people in civic affairs
- equality of all people (giving all people the ability to participate in civic affairs rather than discriminating based on race, religion, sexuality, etc.)
- tolerance of, and protection for, a variety of voices, including minorities or those with minority opinions
- open and thoughtful engagement of public issues, arguments, and positions
- freedom of the press to independently report on civic affairs, public leaders, and elected officials
- unity or shared identity of community members as the public or as "we the people"
- accountability of officials and public leaders to the will of the people
- transparency in civic affairs so the public knows what officials and leaders are discussing or deciding and why
- responsible and ethical use of power rather than using power for corrupt ends
- respect for, and protection of, the basic human rights of all people, including freedom of speech and the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness
- fair rule of law (everyone, including leaders, is subject to prosecution if they violate the law, and the law is fairly applied)

8. Lloyd F. Bitzer, "Rhetorical Public Communication," *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* 4, no. 4 (1987): 426.

Considerations When Evaluating an Artifact's Impact on Democracy



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As you decide how a rhetorical artifact impacts democratic principles, keep four considerations in mind: Consider the artifact's historical context, recognize that a rhetorical artifact can aid democratic principles while forwarding an ideology with which you disagree, be aware that the rhetor's conscious motive should not dictate your evaluation of an artifact's impact on democratic principles, and realize the success of a rhetorical artifact may not necessarily correspond with its impact on democracy. Let's briefly explore each of these considerations.

Box 31.8 Evaluating a Rhetorical Artifact's Impact on Democracy

When evaluating a rhetorical artifact's impact on democracy, keep four considerations in mind:

1. The artifact reacts to and impacts a specific historical context—that is, a specific community at a particular place and time.
2. A rhetorical artifact can aid democratic principles while forwarding an ideology with which you disagree.
3. The rhetor's conscious motive should not dictate your evaluation of an artifact's impact on democratic principles.
4. The success of a rhetorical artifact may not necessarily correspond with its impact on democracy.

Consider the Artifact's Historical Context

First, consider the artifact's *historical context* when judging its impact on democratic principles. The artifact was created at a specific moment for a particular audience or set of audiences. Rather than ask if the text strengthens or weakens democracy in a general sense, you need to more specifically ask whether and how it aided or hampered *these* democratic principles for *this* community at *this* place and time in relation to *this* issue.

Do Not Simply React to the Ideology Advanced by the Artifact

Second, a rhetorical artifact can aid democratic principles while forwarding an ideology with which you disagree. In fact, the inclusion of diverse perspectives and the tolerance for disagreement are two hallmarks of democracy. Demagoguery can become an overly used accusation to silence those with whom we disagree. A person's political stance, background, and vision do not necessarily make their rhetoric demagogic; rather, their expression, proposals, and appeals determine whether their rhetoric harms or aids democratic principles.

Thus, we need rhetorical critics who can carefully examine specific examples of rhetoric to determine how they are functioning. If we don't have these critics at work, we risk a cynical public who believes all politicians or public figures receive (and deserve) the same types of disparagement.

Motive Is Insufficient

Third, the rhetor's conscious motive should not dictate your evaluation of an artifact's impact on democratic principles. Senator Joseph McCarthy may have truly believed he was saving the United States from a communist takeover even as his speeches undermined democratic ideals by silencing dissent, creating division among Americans, and securing greater authority for himself. Alternatively, a rhetor may appear to be aiming to hurt American democracy, perhaps by aggressively critiquing the country, while their rhetoric actually strengthens democratic principles by pointing out violations.

Democratic Impact May Differ from Success

Fourth, the success of a rhetorical artifact may not necessarily correspond with its impact on democracy. It is possible that a rhetor might accomplish their goals but weaken democracy or vice versa. Box 31.9 offers an example.

Box 31.9 Evaluating the National Debt Clock

The case of the National Debt Clock offers an example of an artifact that failed to reach the desired objective but still reinforced a fundamental democratic value.

- Durst **failed** in using the clock to pressure lawmakers to lower the debt, given that it has increased from $2.9 billion in 1989 when the display was erected to over $30 trillion in the 2020s.
- However, the clock **encouraged**—and continues to encourage—**ordinary citizens to get involved in civic affairs**. It prompts us to pay attention to and question the debt amount.

Summary

This chapter provided additional tools to conduct an insightful and productive analysis of public communication. They included the following:

- Any rhetorical criticism begins by selecting a rhetorical artifact, which functions as the object of study.
- All rhetorical criticism situates the rhetorical artifact within its historical context, which refers to the conditions or situation within which rhetoric was produced. It addresses who, to whom, what, when, where, and why surrounding the production of the rhetoric.
- Rhetorical critics often use a rhetorical method to guide their analysis.
- Critics best use rhetorical criticism as a form of democratic participation when they explicitly focus attention on how rhetorical artifacts impact democratic principles.

Key Terms

context
demagogue
demagoguery
democratic principles
rhetorical method

Review Questions

1. What criteria should a rhetorical artifact meet?
2. What six aspects of an artifact's historical context should a critic research?
3. What does it mean to evaluate a rhetorical artifact's impact on democracy?

Discussion Questions

1. What are specific examples of rhetorical artifacts that address substantive civic issues and meet the definition's criteria?
2. How do you know when you have discovered enough historical contextual information? Not enough?
3. Should you evaluate an artifact's impact on democratic principles if it was produced in a country with a different form of governance? Why or why not?

32. Public Communication Analysis: Rhetorical Artifacts and Historical Context

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Identify an appropriate rhetorical artifact for a public communication analysis.
- Reconstruct the historical context for the rhetorical artifact.

What can you accomplish through speech? What does—or doesn't—rhetoric have the power to do?

It's tempting to name a popular (or notorious) speech—especially by a US president—and jump to its presumed effects. Some people may say, for instance, that President Ronald Reagan's 1987 Brandenburg Gate speech ("Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."[1]) caused the Berlin Wall to come down. Or that then–Senator John F. Kennedy's debating skills against President Nixon won Kennedy the 1960 election. Or that President Donald Trump's January 6, 2021, rally speech caused the ensuing attack on the US Capitol.

These uses of rhetoric are well known, but did they produce these outcomes? If so, *how*? Perhaps more importantly, how did the rhetoric impact democracy? Did the rhetorical features in speeches strengthen or weaken the principles on which democracy depends as we introduced and outlined in chapter 31? An advocate can successfully achieve their speaking goals without necessarily strengthening democratic principles.



President Ronald Reagan Gives a Thumbs Up at the Berlin Wall, *National Archives Catalog via Wikimedia Commons*, *Public Domain*.

Public communication analysis is an approach to rhetorical criticism that helps critics determine a rhetorical artifact's features and ascertain their likely consequences. It focuses on these *central questions*:

- Does the rhetorical artifact achieve the rhetor's goal? How or why not?
- Does the rhetorical artifact strengthen or weaken democratic principles? How?

1. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin" (transcript, West Berlin, Germany, June 12, 1987), *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum Archives*, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-east-west-relations-brandenburg-gate-west-berlin, archived at https://perma.cc/32J4-PSKV.

This approach expands and updates the traditional method of criticism known as Neo-Aristotelianism to address our interest in democracy and to include several more contemporary rhetorical concepts.

We see this critical approach as an important building block for you as a speaker and democratic participant. It is an approach that will cultivate your analytical sensibilities and enhance your understanding of public speaking fundamentals as you focus on how other rhetors have employed them.

In this chapter, we outline the principles of public communication analysis and give you the tools to set up a rhetorical critique. We will focus on the first two of four major steps: identifying an appropriate rhetorical artifact and reconstructing the artifact's historical context. The next chapter will focus on analyzing the artifact through the final two steps: describing and interpreting the artifact and evaluating the artifact.

Box 32.1 Public Communication Analysis Steps

1. **Identify** an appropriate rhetorical artifact.
2. **Reconstruct** the artifact's historical context.
3. **Describe** and **interpret** the artifact's rhetorical features.
4. **Evaluate** the artifact's effects in terms of achieving the rhetor's goals and strengthening democratic principles.

Identifying a Rhetorical Artifact

Recall from chapters 30 and 31 that a rhetorical artifact is an object of study in rhetorical criticism. It is a specific instance of rhetoric that was produced for an audience at a particular time. To begin a public communication analysis, we recommend you choose an artifact that meets the criteria in box 32.2. We offer these criteria because public communication analysis best illuminates such artifacts. Rhetorical artifacts that more heavily use visual or audio symbols are typically better suited to different rhetorical methods, such as ideological criticism described in chapters 34 and 35.

Box 32.2 Guidelines for Selecting an Artifact for Public Communication Analysis

- The artifact should address a **significant community concern or issue** (i.e., focuses on a problem that a community cares about and that carries significant implications for that community's welfare).
- Find an artifact that attempts to **persuade** an audience (i.e., not a purely informative artifact).
- The artifact should mostly use **verbal symbols** (i.e., uses more words/speech than images, music, etc.).
- The artifact you select should offer a **single "voice**" or manner of expression. Even if written by a group (such as a company), the artifact should express itself as an individual (i.e., the artifact should not be a group discussion, dialogue, or online exchange).
- Ideally, you should have a **complete transcript** of the artifact and, if relevant, **access to audio or video** of the artifact being delivered.

Recall that in chapter 30, we characterized rhetorical criticism as an act of civic engagement. Using public communication analysis will improve your ability to think critically about public messages, educate fellow members accordingly, and participate in democratic governance. As we explained in chapter 31, these outcomes are more likely, however, if you choose rhetorical artifacts that pertain to civic affairs (the first criterion in box 32.2) than to, say, a group's hobbies or interests. Our preference for public speech that addresses significant community concerns aligns with others who have identified such rhetoric as particularly valuable for democratic participation. Box 32.3 provides examples.

Box 32.3 Public Speech Should Address Significant Community Concerns and Issues

Rhetorical practitioners and scholars have often deemed rhetoric that addresses substantive public issues as essential for maintaining a healthy democracy.



Glenn Frank, *University of Wisconsin Archives via Wikimedia Commons*, Public Domain.

For instance, in 1919 as the Chautauqua circuits began to wane, the associate editor of *The Century* at the time, Glenn Frank, called on traveling lecturers to address the serious problems of the day in contrast to the then-popular lecturers "who tickle the fancy and flatter the prejudice of the crowd." He claimed the best speakers "will be able to introduce the community to the facts and principles of some underlying problem of our national life; and…[they] will be able to answer questions from the crowd and to stimulate a genuine community discussion."[2]

More recently, communication scholars Ferald Bryan and others have said the best public speeches are concerned with "worthy ideas to express, ideas that merit the attention and efforts of the speaker and the concern of the audience."[3]

Appropriate artifacts for public communication analysis can take many forms, including speeches and public statements by officials, concerned community members, and protesters; editorials and letters to the editor published in newspapers and magazines; and even relevant blog postings and websites.

In this and the next chapter, we will focus on President Trump's January 6, 2021, speech as a rhetorical artifact. We will use it to exemplify the steps of public communication analysis, beginning with explaining why it qualifies as an appropriate rhetorical artifact.

2. Glenn Frank, "The Parliament of the People," *The Century* 98 (1919): 416.
3. Ferald J. Bryan, R. R. Allen, Richard L. Johannesen, and Wil A. Linkugel, eds., *Contemporary American Speeches*, 10th ed. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 2010), 2, 4.

Box 32.4 President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech as a Rhetorical Artifact

A sample rhetorical artifact that meets the criteria is President Trump's January 6, 2021, speech in Washington, DC.

- It addressed a **significant community concern or issue**: the validity and legality of the 2020 national election.
- Its goal was to **persuade**: President Trump attempted to convince audiences that the 2020 presidential election was "stolen" from him and that they needed to "save our democracy" and "take back our country."[4]
- The speech **primarily used words** to communicate: Trump's vocal and nonverbal delivery are important to consider, as is the visual setting and backdrop, but the speech mostly consisted of his words.
- It offered a **single voice**: While it was written with speechwriters (as is typical for speeches by US presidents), the final, delivered speech featured Trump's voice and perspective—unlike, say, an interview that would also include the interviewee's questions and viewpoint.
- It is relatively easy to find a **complete transcript** and **video** of the speech online.

Reconstructing the Historical Context

Once you've identified an appropriate rhetorical artifact, you need to reconstruct its historical context. We defined *context* in chapter 31 as the conditions or situation within which rhetoric is produced. In that chapter, we said that context addresses "who, why, what, to whom, when, and where surrounding the rhetoric's production." The answers to these questions help the critic determine how the context prompted and shaped the rhetoric. In this section, we briefly explain how learning about the historical context enhances your public communication analysis, and we return to President Trump's January 6, 2021, speech to illustrate.

"Who?"



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Find out what audiences might have known about the rhetor (the "who"). In the previous chapter, we expanded the definition of rhetor to include the author(s) or creator(s) of the rhetorical artifact under examination. The rhetor's public reputation at the time the artifact was produced, the rhetor's position in society, and/or the rhetor's background could have influenced what audiences expected from them.

4. Donald Trump, "Speech at Rally Before US Capitol Riot" (transcript, Washington, DC, January 6, 2021), *Associated Press*, https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-donald-trump-capitol-siege-media-e79eb5164613d6718e9f4502eb471f27.

Box 32.5 President Trump as the Rhetor of the January 6, 2021, Speech

President Trump first became famous in the United States in the 1980s as a millionaire real estate mogul, known for his lavish lifestyle and his 1987 book *The Art of the Deal*, a *New York Times* best seller. Starting in 2004, he regularly appeared on TV's *The Apprentice* and *Celebrity Apprentice*, which he coproduced and hosted until 2015.



President Donald Trump, *U.S. Department of Agriculture via Rawpixel, Public Domain. Editorial use only.*

He successfully ran for president (for the first time) in 2016, using the campaign slogan "Make America Great Again." During his four-year term, Trump amassed large groups of supporters—and critics—for his stances and policies on immigration, climate change, transgender people, and the COVID-19 pandemic and for his granting of pardons, to name a few.

The 2020 election proved a close race against former Vice President Joe Biden, taking several weeks for final votes to be tallied and Joe Biden to be declared the winner in both electoral votes (306 to Trump's 232) and the popular vote.[5] During the time between that loss and his January 6 speech, Trump and his team sought to overturn the results through lawsuits and public appearances.

Therefore, audiences were likely very familiar with Trump when he spoke in early 2021 as a former real estate mogul and media celebrity and, more recently, as a controversial president.

"Why?" and "What?"



Consider what prompted the artifact and the rhetor's goal(s) (the "why") as well as the type of artifact the rhetor created (the "what"). Typically, a rhetor's goals and the artifact itself are responsive to the events, conditions, or forces that prompted the artifact's creation. Knowing the reason or motivating cause for the rhetoric's production, the speaker's goal, and the type of artifact created (including its major characteristics) can help guide your analysis as you look for strategies the rhetor employed to respond to the provocation and attempt to achieve their goal.

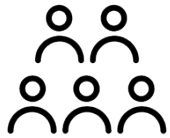
Box 32.6 The Prompt for, and Goals and Account of, the January 6, 2021, Speech

5. "Presidential Election Results: Biden Wins," *New York Times*, November 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-president.html.

- **Why (Prompt):** President Trump's January 6, 2021, speech was provoked by the outcome of the 2020 national election with Joe Biden being chosen as the forty-sixth president.
- **Why (Goal):** He hoped to incite enough negative public reaction to convince Republican members of Congress and, especially Vice President Mike Pence, to reject the states' certification of Electoral College vote counts.[6] The joint congressional meeting scheduled for January 6, where Congress would affirm the count, was the last legal step to confirm Biden as president.
- **What:** Trump delivered in person a nearly seventy-two-minute speech. His presentation addressed numerous subjects. Primarily, though, President Trump claimed the 2020 election results were fraudulent. He accused Democrats of committing the fraud and blamed the media for helping them. He promised his supporters that they would rectify the deception with the help of Vice President Mike Pence and other Republicans. Trump encouraged supporters to march to the Capitol to encourage these leaders to overturn the results.

"To Whom"

Research the artifact's audiences. Recall that in chapter 10, we differentiated the following:



Created by Yosua Bungaran from Noun Project

- *direct audience* (those who are exposed to and attend to the rhetoric)
- *target audience* (those the rhetor hopes to reach)
- *implied audience* (those who are represented in the message)
- *implicated audience* (those who will be affected by the message if it is successful)

We also considered whether the audience is

- *discrete* (limited to those who show up for an event at a particular day and time) or
- *dispersed* (unlimited by location and/or time).

Such information can help you later analyze whether and how the artifact was adapted to these audiences. We discussed audience analysis and adaptation in chapters 10 and 11.

6. According to the *Final Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol*, Trump "pressured Vice President Pence to obstruct the joint session of Congress on January 6th, falsely claiming that he had the power to refuse to count certain electoral votes. President Trump knew this was illegal but attempted to justify it with lies about the election." U.S. House of Representatives, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., *Final Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2022), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-REPORT/pdf/GPO-J6-REPORT.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/9EAM-SMZ8.

Box 32.7 The Audiences for the January 6, 2021, Speech

President Trump's **direct audience** included those in the **discrete audience** who joined his "Save America" rally in person at the Ellipse, a park near the White House in Washington, DC. His direct audience also included **dispersed** viewers who watched the speech live (or later recorded) on C-SPAN or *PBS NewsHour*. Trump likely recognized that while he could **target** his message at supporters, his speech would also be heard and viewed by critics and advocates of Joe Biden. These Biden supporters, as well as Pence and other Republican congressional leaders, composed Trump's **implied and implicated audiences**—those referenced by his message and impacted if his speech was successful.

"When?"



Consider the timing of an artifact (the "when"). **Timing** includes both the specific date and time for the artifact and the time period in which the rhetoric was situated. The latter is important to consider because communities may think and talk about public issues differently over time as new problems, information, and perspectives emerge.



2021 storming of the United States Capitol by *Tyler Merbler via Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY.

Box 32.8 The Timing of the January 6, 2021, Speech

President Trump delivered his speech on **January 6, 2021, at 12:00 p.m. EST**. The time period of this speech is important, especially as we look back years later. His claims about what would or should happen if he was not elected president rang differently in the lead-up to the 2020 election compared to before the 2024 national election.

Before the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, Trump's encouragement to "take back our country" or "fight" seemed more like fiery metaphors than literal instructions to inspire voter turnout.

After the attack, however, Trump's comments sounded more literal since we know what happened after his speech. The physical attack on the Capitol also colored his later threats—such as at a March 2024 rally, where he said "It's going to be a bloodbath for the country" if he didn't win that election.[7] In light of

7. Donald Trump, "Donald Trump Speaks at Rally in Ohio" (transcript, Dayton, OH, March 16, 2024), *Rev*, https://www.rev.com/transcripts/donald-trump-speaks-at-rally-in-ohio, archived at https://perma.cc/EHX2-RNFZ.

January 6, such rhetoric sounded more nefarious or potentially threatening (and was criticized as such).

Whether you think Trump's rhetoric contributed to the January 6 attack or not, a critic studying Trump's January 6 speech would need to differentiate between audience members who heard the speech live and audiences who watched a recording of the speech later (after the Capitol attack occurred), since their responses might differ accordingly.

"Where?"

Reflect upon an artifact's location (the "where") to help you later analyze how the rhetor adapted to it. **Location** can include the following:



- the specific place the rhetor delivered or disseminated the artifact (e.g., the geographic location and/or actual building or street)
- the medium by which the rhetor distributed the artifact (e.g., face-to-face, television, YouTube, newspaper, online blog)

All locations pose limitations on and offer opportunities for how a rhetor can most effectively present their message. In chapter 10, we touched on the environmental factors a speaker must adapt to, such as the time of day, audience size, and communication medium, and we suggested ways a speaker may adjust to them.

Box 32.9 The Location of the January 6, 2021, Speech

The location for President Trump's January 6 speech gave him challenges and opportunities. It's difficult to hold a large crowd's attention for long, especially when speaking in person **outside on a cold January day**. At one point, Trump worried, "I hope you don't get bored," and he later acknowledged, "It's freezing out here."

Trump was also being **broadcast**, and the rhetorical choices a speaker might make for the immediate physical conditions—such as speaking more loudly, talking directly to the immediate crowd, and trying to keep them fired up—may not translate well to television viewers who are experiencing the speech differently.

Yet Trump could take advantage of the **physical setting**. The Ellipse is a grassy area between the White House (which could be seen behind Trump) and the Washington Monument. It butts into the National Mall and is just a few blocks from the US Capitol, where Congress would convene one hour after Trump began his speech to approve the Electoral College's votes. At one point, Trump even said, "Right over there, right there, we see the event going to take place." So in addressing the crowd, Trump could capitalize on their physical proximity to the Capitol to help stress the urgency of the moment and the importance of walking to the building after the speech.



Image, The U.S. National Archives via Picryl, Public Domain.

Reconstructing an artifact's context helps the critic determine whether and how the artifact achieved the rhetor's goal(s). The context explains the pressures, influences, and/or problems addressed or negotiated through the artifact, which can enable the critic to better understand how the artifact functioned in that moment. This is also particularly important when considering the artifact's impact on democratic principles, which we discussed in the previous chapter. While we can talk about democratic ideals in general or broad terms, a community defines, prioritizes, and enacts those principles in relation to a specific issue at a particular moment in time.

Box 32.10 Questions to Ask About Historical Context

- What might the audience have known about or expected from the **rhetor**?
- What **prompted** the rhetor to produce the artifact?
- What was the rhetor's **goal(s)** for the artifact?
- What **type of artifact** did the rhetor produce? What medium did it use?
- Who were the **audiences** for the artifact, and how did the rhetor need to adapt to them?
- What was the **timing** of the artifact?
- What was the artifact's **location**, and what restrictions or opportunities might that have created for the rhetor?

Contextual information informs the critic's analysis of the artifact as they interpret how the artifact was shaped by and helped shape its context. In the next chapter, we will turn to analyzing the artifact itself by providing instruction on the next two steps of public communication analysis.

Summary

Public communication analysis is an approach to rhetorical criticism that enables you to determine whether and how a rhetorical artifact achieves its goals and whether and how it strengthens democratic principles. The approach assumes that rhetoric that addresses public issues should strengthen democracy. This chapter provided the first two methodological steps necessary to conduct such an analysis.

- You begin by identifying a suitable rhetorical artifact. For public communication analysis, such an artifact must address a significant community issue or concern and should be persuasive, verbal, and expressed in a single voice.
- You then reconstruct the historical context for the artifact by discovering what the audience might have known about the rhetor; what prompted the artifact and the rhetor's goal(s); the type of artifact developed and its medium; the audience(s) exposed to the artifact, targeted by the artifact, referenced in the artifact, and impacted by the artifact if its message succeeds; and the artifact's location and timing.

Key Terms

location
public communication analysis
timing
voice

Review Questions

1. What kinds of rhetorical artifacts are best suited to public communication analysis?
2. Which aspects of an artifact's context should you discover? Why?
3. What does an artifact's location and timing refer to?

Discussion Questions

1. How can you find a transcript of a rhetorical artifact? How might you create one if it doesn't already

exist? What software might be helpful?

2. What opportunities and limitations do you think each of the following media poses for rhetors: in-person speech, television broadcast, social media post, online blog, social media post?
3. Do you think artifacts always develop in response to preexisting issues, or can rhetors create the *perception* of issues that need responding to through their artifacts? Can you think of instances of public discourse for each?

33. Public Communication Analysis: Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Describe and interpret a range of rhetorical features in a rhetorical artifact.
- Evaluate the artifact's success or failure in achieving the rhetor's goals and in strengthening or weakening democratic principles.

The previous chapter defined public communication analysis as an approach to rhetorical criticism that helps critics determine a rhetorical artifact's features and ascertain their likely consequences. It guided you through the first two steps of this rhetorical method: identifying an appropriate rhetorical artifact and reconstructing its historical context.

In this chapter, we focus on analyzing the artifact itself by describing the next two steps of public communication analysis. First, we will explain how to describe and interpret an artifact's rhetorical features. Then we will instruct you on how to evaluate an artifact's functions and consequences, focusing on whether or not the artifact achieved the rhetor's goals and strengthened democratic principles.

Describing and Interpreting the Rhetorical Features

Public communication analysis begins with description. In chapter 30, we defined *description* as noticing, identifying, and explaining a rhetorical artifact's content, form, and absence. In this chapter, we will introduce you to more specific types of features, from argumentation to delivery. Some of these features focus more on an artifact's content (e.g., pathos, ethos) while others emphasize its form (e.g., organization, style), though many features consider both aspects (e.g., argumentation). You should find, label, and observe each feature with specificity. You should also always ask what might be missing or absent from the artifact.

Public communication analysis follows description with *interpretation*. In chapter 30, we defined interpretation as making inferences about how an artifact's content, form, and absence function persuasively. Interpretation explores the artifact's symbolic action, which we defined in that same chapter as the power of symbols to *do* things—to shape our thoughts, values, and actions.

Notice that critics *infer* interpretations; you can rarely prove your inferences as definitively as you can describe rhetorical features. For example, you can name an artifact's organizational structure ("Notice how the speech moves chronologically from past to present to the future"), but you infer how that structure functioned ("By moving chronologically, the speaker shifted the audience's attention from the past crisis to the more hopeful future, leaving them feeling more optimistic and comforted").

Remember the insight we provided in chapter 30: A critic's interpretations should use *active verbs* to accentuate the symbolic action. If you are not using verbs when interpreting a rhetorical artifact, then you are probably still describing, rather than interpreting, its persuasive functions or symbolic action.

Box 33.1 Describing and Interpreting a Rhetorical Artifact

For each rhetorical feature,

- **find** the feature in the artifact,
- **describe** the feature with specificity, and
- **interpret** how the feature may have influenced the audience's beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action.

Not every rhetorical feature you examine will be important or even present in every artifact, but you cannot know that until you closely attend to the artifact and determine its central features. We recommend you conduct your rhetorical criticism by initially describing and interpreting each element systematically and then deciding which elements provide the most important rhetorical insights to share with others.

We now turn to specific rhetorical features to describe and interpret for your artifact. They include the following: argumentation, appeals to emotions and loyalties, rhetor's credibility, construction of the desired audience, construction of the undesired audience, organization, style and framing, and delivery. For each, we will explain the feature, provide prompting questions for your own description and interpretation, and offer an example.

Argumentation

Recall from chapter 26 that an argument is the advocacy of an idea, position, or course of action that is supported by evidence. Drawing from Stephen Toulmin's model, we identified the three main components of any argument as including a claim, data (evidence), and warrant(justification for using the data to support the claim).[1] In chapter 25, we noted that Aristotle considered argumentation to be a form of proof he called logos.



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Box 33.2 Argumentation Reminders

1. Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

Patterns of Reasoning

- deductive reasoning
- inductive reasoning
- reasoning from example
- reasoning from analogy
- reasoning from cause
- reasoning from sign
- reasoning from authority

Reasoning Fallacies

- hasty generalization
- faulty analogy
- faulty cause
- slippery slope
- appeal to authority
- appeal to popularity
- appeal to common practice
- begging the question
- ad hominem
- false dilemma

Describing an artifact's argumentation does *not* mean simply restating its main point(s) or message. Rather, it means doing the following:

- carefully identify the artifact's claims, data, and warrants to determine the type and validity of the argumentation
- note the patterns of reasoning utilized as well as any inclusion of fallacies, which we described in chapter 27 as flaws or defects in reasoning that undermine the validity of an argument
- consider whether and how an artifact includes counterarguments to its claims or proposals

Rhetorical criticism requires going beyond merely describing these aspects, however, to *interpreting* how they may have persuaded (or failed to persuade) an audience to accept the rhetor's position. Box 33.3 offers questions to help you describe *and* interpret your rhetorical artifact's argumentation.

Box 33.3 Questions to Ask About Argumentation

Description

- What claims, data, and warrants did the artifact provide or not provide?
- Did the artifact use valid and sound arguments, or did it make use of fallacies? How so?
- What patterns of reasoning did the artifact include?
- How well did the artifact identify and reasonably respond to counterarguments?

Interpretation

- How might the artifact's claims, data, and warrants have resonated—or failed to resonate—with the audience(s), given the historical context?
- How might the argument(s) have persuaded, or failed to persuade, the audience of the speaker's viewpoint, given the historical context?
- What kinds of attitudes, values, conclusions, or actions did the argumentation encourage or discourage?

Box 33.4 Argumentation in President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech

In the previous chapter, we turned to President Trump's January 6, 2021, speech to exemplify the criteria for an appropriate rhetorical artifact and how to identify its historical context. We return to this artifact in this chapter to illustrate how to analyze each rhetorical element. Descriptive labels are bolded, and interpretations are underlined.

In his January 6 speech, President Trump constructed an argument about the 2020 election using **inductive reasoning**. Early in the speech, he made his **thesis** clear: "Today, I will lay out just some of the evidence proving that we won this election, and we won it by a landslide. This was not a close election." His **data (evidence)** included the three common types of evidence explored in chapter 26: example, statistics, and testimony. Trump alleged specific **examples** of illegal actions in several swing states that resulted in fraudulent votes for Biden, cited numerous **statistics** for ballots illegally counted against him in those states, and occasionally integrated **testimony**, mostly from unnamed people like a "real pollster," "eyewitness testimony," and "a career employee" of Detroit. Indeed, Trump provided **no sources** for his examples and statistics of fraud, and most of his sources for testimony were **vague references** ("people," "an eyewitness," "a real pollster," "poll watchers," "a career employee" of Detroit).

By inundating listeners with multiple forms of apparent evidence and repeatedly referring to them as "the facts," Trump created the impression of validity and truth. He encouraged the audience to accept his **inductive conclusion** that, based on the numerous instances he named, he easily won the election and that Democrats were lying and "stealing" the election for Joe Biden.

This claim, however, required the audience to place tremendous trust in Trump to have ethically researched the topic and presented his findings—a trust undercut by many legal decisions. By January 6, 2021, the Trump administration, lawyers, and supporters had presented their evidence in courts to support lawsuits to overturn the election; they lost sixty-one cases and won one.[2] Indeed, the House of Representatives Committee that later investigated the US Capitol attack concluded that Trump had been made aware by this point that his claims of fraud were baseless but persisted anyway with the "Big Lie," making false claims "more than 100 times during his [January 6] speech."[3]

2. "Results of Lawsuits Regarding the 2020 Elections," *Campaign Legal Center*, accessed 15 May 2024, https://campaignlegal.org/results-lawsuits-regarding-2020-elections; U.S. House of Representatives, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., *Final Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2022), 210–13, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-REPORT/pdf/GPO-J6-REPORT.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/9EAM-SMZ8.
3. U.S. House of Representatives, *Final Report*, 197, 204-10, 232.

Consequently, Trump's use of argumentation was likely only persuasive to supporters who already accepted the claim or wanted it to be true. For those listening critically, Trump's lack of sources to support his evidence and his use of **reasoning fallacies** significantly weakened his claims. Trump relied on multiple fallacies, including **false dilemma**. He offered listeners only two possible outcomes based on whether they accepted or rejected his thesis that he won the election. Acceptance would "save our democracy" while rejection means "our country will be destroyed." Such a false dilemma appeared as reasoning but actually played, instead, on American's feelings for their country. It also ignored additional possible outcomes, such as helping save the country by rejecting his attempt to alter official election results.



Logical Fallacies by *SkepticalScience via Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY-SA .

Thus, in place of sound argumentation, valid reasoning, and verifiable evidence, Trump's speech made points that sounded like arguments but offered falsehoods instead.

Appeals to Emotions and Loyalties



Rhetorical artifacts typically appeal to the audience's emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness) and loyalties (e.g., liberty, family), or what Aristotle called pathos. As we explained in chapter 25, pathos is concerned with the psychological state of the audience; it is a measure and reflection of the extent to which we are moved by and feel invested in a topic and a message.

Describing an artifact's appeals to emotions and loyalties means that you identify

- the *specific* emotions and/or loyalties elicited by the artifact and
- *how* the rhetor appealed to these emotions and loyalties.

You then *interpret* how the pathos appeals functioned persuasively. Infer how soliciting particular emotions and loyalties may have aided (or hurt) the rhetor's goal, such as by

- relating pleasurable feelings and allegiances with the rhetor's position or
- associating painful emotions and the disloyalties the audience rejects with counterproposals, a standing policy, or a problem (as described in chapter 25).

You might also pay attention to the balance or imbalance of positive and negative appeals to emotions and loyalties as well as to the balance or imbalance of these appeals with argumentation. Recognizing an artifact's extensive reliance on fear appeals, for example, may indicate that a rhetor attempted to frighten the audience into accepting their position.

Box 33.5 Questions to Ask About Appeals to Emotions and Loyalties

Description

- Which specific emotions and/or loyalties did the artifact invoke or appeal to? Where? How?
- Which pleasurable emotions and/or loyalties did the artifact associate with the position advocated?
- Which painful emotions and/or disloyalties did it associate with counterviewpoints or the problem itself?
- To what extent did the artifact balance positive and negative emotions and loyalties?

Interpretation

- How might the artifact's appeals to emotions have made the audience(s) feel moved by and interested in the message—or failed to do so?
- What did the rhetor gain or lose from the emphasis or de-emphasis on appeals to emotion and audience loyalties?
- How did the emotional appeals focus the audience(s)' attention? Toward what? Away from what, given the historical context?

Box 33.6 Pathos in President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech


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In his January 6 speech, President Trump elicited **pleasurable feelings of pride and the loyalties of patriotism and democracy** by praising "the magnitude of this crowd" and calling his audience "patriots" who "love our country," "do not want to see our election victory stolen," and want "to save our democracy." Trump's language—magnitude, patriots, victory, democracy, save—instilled feelings of righteousness and confidence in rejecting the election results. He lamented that "weak" Republicans like Mike Pence lacked such "courage and guts." He ended his speech by encouraging his audience to walk to the Capitol and give the "weak" Republicans the same "pride and boldness that they need to take back our country." He implied that insufficient *feelings* of courage and pride were what prevented congressional leaders from rejecting the Electoral College votes.


Created by Alice Design from Noun Project

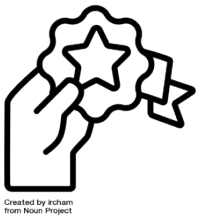
Trump paired such appeals with **painful feelings of anger, outrage, and even hate**. His very first sentence—"The media will not show the magnitude of this crowd"—immediately expressed outrage at the "fake news media" for allegedly refusing to show the audience's size. He associated the news media with the disloyalty of communism, comparing their "suppression" with "what happens in a communist country." He went on to accuse Democrats of "stealing" the election by "cheating," stoking anger at the election outcome and hatred toward the opposing political party.

By pairing such extreme and antithetical emotions (pride and shame, love and hate) and loyalties (democracy and communism), Trump left little room for Republican supporters to accept the election results. To do so was to no longer love your country and to side with despicable criminals and even communism. He also amplified the magnitude of Congress's January 6 meeting as a historical moment in the battle between courage and shame: "We're going to see whether or not we have great and courageous leaders or

whether or not we have leaders that should be ashamed of themselves throughout history, throughout eternity, they'll be ashamed."

This showdown of feelings corresponded closely to the false dilemma analyzed earlier as part of logos, revealing that Trump's speech emphasized feelings over sound argumentation and verifiable facts. Trump implied that the crowd might help these leaders choose the "courage" to deny the election. He encouraged his audience to demonstrate the "strength" of their feelings to congressional members, "because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong."

Rhetor's Credibility



A third feature typically found in rhetorical artifacts are appeals to credibility, or what Aristotle called ethos. In chapter 5, you learned that ethos refers to the state of a rhetor's public character or persona. This definition should draw your attention to the rhetor's credibility as a rhetorical creation. That means the following:

- Analyzing ethos involves examining how the artifact presented the rhetor as a *character* that the audience(s) would perceive as credible.
- Although a rhetor's previous reputation plays a role in this perception, the critic is more interested in how an artifact *strengthens, modifies, or builds the rhetor's credibility through the public message under examination*. Beginning critics can make the mistake of merely explaining a rhetor's prior reputation without examining the artifact itself.

Box 33.7 Credibility in President Obama's July 19, 2012, Speech

President Obama addressed the nation on July 19, 2012, a few days after George Zimmerman was found not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin. Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch coordinator for his Sanford, Florida, community, fatally shot Martin, a seventeen-year-old African American boy who was walking home through the neighborhood.



[President Barack Obama] by David Lienemann via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Saying Obama had credibility when speaking because he was the president would ignore the persona he emphasized *in the speech* as an **African American man**: "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago....There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the expe-

rience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me."[4] Looking to the speech for ethos reveals that Obama **drew upon his personal experience as an African American man and as a member of the African American community** to depict himself as an authoritative source on race conflicts.

As box 33.7 exemplifies, you must specifically *describe* what *kind* of credibility or persona the rhetor attempted to construct *within the artifact being analyzed* and *how that credibility was developed*. In chapters 5 and 25, we suggested rhetors typically try to establish their credibility in terms of one or more qualities:[5]

- competence (expertise, preparation, intelligence)
- trustworthiness (moral standing, integrity)
- goodwill (having the audience's best interests at heart)
- dynamism (charisma).

Rhetors may use a variety of rhetorical means to establish any of these qualities, including but not limited to all the other rhetorical features highlighted in this chapter: argumentation, appeals to emotions and loyalties, construction of the audience and the other, organization, style, and delivery.

Box 33.8 Questions to Ask About the Rhetor's Credibility

Description

- What type(s) of credibility did the rhetor try to cultivate through the artifact? How?
- What type of character did the rhetor present for themselves? How?
- What overall impression did the rhetor attempt to create for themselves?

Interpretation

- Why might the rhetor have chosen to develop the credibility they did, given the historical context?
- How did the rhetor's credibility appeals leave the rhetor vulnerable to attack or refutation?
- How did the qualities emphasized in the rhetorical artifact relate to the rhetor's reputation at the time?

4. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Trayvon Martin" (transcript, Washington, DC, July 19, 2013), *President Barack Obama White House Archives*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/19/remarks-president-trayvon-martin, archived at https://perma.cc/4HH8-2CQC.
5. See Richard D. Rieke, Malcolm O. Sillars, and Tarla Rai Peterson, *Argumentation and Critical Decision Making*, 7th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2009), 155–56.

Box 33.9 Credibility in President Trump's January 6, 2021 Speech

In his speech, President Trump developed at least three types of credibility through a variety of rhetorical features:

- **Competence:** His reference to multiple examples and statistics cultivated the impression that he was well researched on election fraud; he even claimed that "nobody, until I came along, had any idea how corrupt our elections were."
- **Goodwill:** His expression of outrage, along with praise for advances made by his presidential administration, suggested he wanted what was best for the country.
- **Dynamism:** His use of humor and coarse language—such as "They're all running around like chickens with their heads cut off....Nobody knows what the hell is going on"—suggested a gregarious and straight-talking personality.

Together, these three qualities—competence, goodwill, and dynamism—presented Trump as a forceful spokesperson against the election results, helping cultivate some audience members' trust in his claims and evidence.

Of course, these very rhetorical appeals also *hurt* Trump's ethos in the eyes of critics and those who acknowledged the courts' decisions against his claims of fraud. His use of unverified evidence weakened perceptions of his competence, his outrage at the election results reflected someone willing to hurt the country's democratic process, and his coarse manner of speaking reflected someone unfit for the presidency.

Construction of the Desired Audience


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In addition to analyzing how an artifact developed the rhetor's credibility, you can also examine how it constructed the desired audience. You might think of the desired audience as *another character* the artifact constructs, similar to how it develops the rhetor's own persona. In chapter 11, we explained that through speech, a rhetor can offer a vision of a desired audience—that is, of an audience that does not yet exist. That vision may emphasize key qualities and attitudes the rhetor wishes actual audience members to adopt. It might also attempt to unite listeners into an idealized community for a better future.[6]

Box 33.10 Questions to Ask About the Desired Audience

6. This rhetorical feature is based on the "second persona" developed by Edwin Black and "the people" developed by Michael McGee. Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 109–19; Michael Calvin McGee, "In Search of 'the People,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1976): 235–49

Description

- Who was the desired audience? Who was the "you" or "us" the artifact associated with positive qualities?
- What positive qualities or characteristics did the artifact associate with the desired audience? How? Where?
- Through what strategies did the artifact construct the desired audience?
- What kind of relationship did the artifact create between the rhetor's presentation of themselves (ethos) and their desired audience?

Interpretation

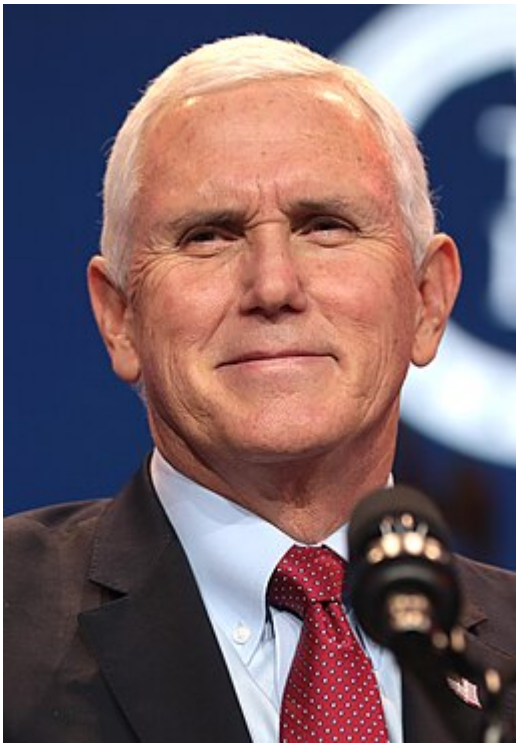
- How did the desired audience encourage those who actually heard, viewed, or read the artifact to think or act?
- How did the construction of the desired audience attempt to entice actual listeners to adopt its qualities or perspective?

Box 33.11 Construction of the Desired Audience in President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech

President Trump developed two different desired audiences in his January 6 speech.

First, he presented a desired audience of **Republican leaders who would reject the Electoral College votes** to overturn the election results. He particularly identified **Vice President Mike Pence** as becoming part of this group:

> I hope Mike is going to do the right thing....I hope so, because if Mike Pence does the right thing, we win the election....All Vice President Pence has to do is send it [the electoral vote tally] back to the states to recertify, and we become president, and you are the happiest people." Trump also included in this desired audience currently "weak" Republicans who needed to become "strong" by supporting this effort: "So we're going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue...to try and give our Republicans, the weak ones, because the strong ones don't need any of our help, we're going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country.



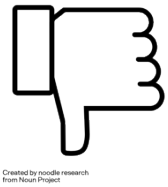
Mike Pence by Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA.

This desired audience functioned as not just an invitation to but also pressure on Republican leaders to execute Trump's wishes to remain in the good graces of Trump and his supporters. For politicians, the fear of losing public support—and thus their political office—was real and ongoing.

Trump constructed a second desired audience of **supporters who would give these Republicans the "courage" to reject the election results**. This audience consisted of true "**American patriots**" who would remain committed, together, to "stop the steal" because they "cannot take it anymore." Trump frequently constructed this audience with "**we**": "We will never give up. We will never concede." "We're gathered together in the heart of our nation's capital for one very, very basic and simple reason: to save our democracy." Trump constructed this desired audience as **victims** of the "fake news media," "big tech," Democrats, and many others who conspired to "steal" the election for Joe Biden. Rather than give in or admit defeat, Trump's desired audience would remain banded together with Trump to buoy Republican congressional leaders to overturn the election results.

This desired audience functioned as a savvy adaptation to Trump's target audience. Trump's supporters likely felt defeated and deeply disappointed by the election outcome—even confused by it. Trump's vision offered a clear action they could take (walk to the Capitol) to remain on the winning side and overcome their sense of victimization.

Construction of the Undesired Audience



Yet another rhetorical feature you can examine is how the artifact constructed the *un*desired audience. This is the audience the rhetorical artifact negates by denying or dismissing their relevance or existence.[7] Artifacts typically construct an undesirable audience in one of two ways:

- First, they may silence a group by *failing to include them*, even though that audience is directly affected by the artifact. (We referred to this group in chapter 10 as the implicated audience.)

  A history textbook that relates the United States' westward expansion without ever referencing the perspectives of Native American peoples, for example, negates these groups' existence and silences their voices, thereby making them an undesired audience.

- Second, a rhetorical artifact may construct an undesired audience by *characterizing it negatively*, typically associating the person or group with the "characteristics, roles, actions, or ways of seeing things to be avoided," making the undesired audience the opposite or flipside of the rhetor's desired audience.[8] (We referred in chapter 10 to groups spoken for as the implied audience.)

If the history textbook referenced earlier included Native Americans in its explanation of the United States' westward expansion but presented a racist depiction of them as bloodthirsty, unreasonable, and uncivilized, then it would negate the Native Americans' human existence by portraying them as animalistic and, thus, undesirable—possibly in contrast to the qualities ascribed to the white settlers. Of course, just like the rhetor's credibility and desired audience, the undesired audience is a rhetorical construction that does not necessarily bear resemblance to the actual existing group it represents.

Recognizing undesired audiences can help you discover how artifacts rationalize favored positions, foster unity among the desired audience by creating a common enemy, or discourage the adoption of alternative perspectives.

Box 33.12 Questions to Ask About the Undesired Audience

Description

- Whose perspective or voice, if any, was missing from the artifact that could or should have been included?
- Who was the "they," "them," "he," or "she" the artifact associated with negative qualities?
- What negative qualities, actions, or viewpoints did the artifact associate with the undesired audience?
- How did the artifact relate the desired audience with the undesired audience? Typically, they are presented as opposites. How did the artifact offer such a construction, or what other kind of relationship did it build?

7. This rhetorical feature is based on the concept and theory of the "third persona" as developed by Phillip Wander, "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory," *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984): 210.
8. Wander, "Third Persona," 209.

Interpretation

- What attitudes and actions might the construction of the undesired audience have attempted to rationalize or encourage (or debunk/discourage)?
- What type of community did the undesired audience help unify (against it) or define?
- How did the construction of the undesired audience possibly mobilize actual listeners to adopt qualities of the desired audience?

Box 33.13 Construction of the Undesired Audience in President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech

In his January 6 speech, Trump used negative characterizations to construct an undesired audience consisting of **the "fake news media," "big tech," "radical left Democrats," and many others**. He depicted these groups as wanting to "steal" the election. The news media and "big tech" "suppress[ed]" thought and speech and downplayed the size and success of Trump and his supporters. After "years" of getting "away with election fraud" and enacting poor policies, Democrats "us[ed] the pretext of the China virus and the scam of mail-in ballots [to]…attempt the most brazen and outrageous election theft." Trump also included in this undesired audience any "weak" Republicans who allowed Democrats to succeed.

In so doing, Trump presented all groups who might oppose, counter, or hold Trump accountable as detestable, representing the worst elements of society and driven by widely rejected vices: personal greed, unchecked power, and corruption. This portrayal attempted to justify their undoing through an overwhelming and outraged public response.

Organization

An artifact's organization can also be a useful feature to analyze. The ordering of points or arguments—what Aristotle called arrangement—can do the following:



- Reveal the rhetor's logic or way of thinking. In chapter 13, we explained that patterns of arrangement depict common ways of thinking.
- Identify the rhetor's presumptions about the audience: as knowledgeable or ignorant about the topic and as favorable, apathetic, or hostile toward the rhetor's thesis.
- Suggest what the rhetor deemed important or unimportant, based on the amount of time or space the rhetor devotes to each topic, reason, emotion, and so forth.

One of the best ways to determine the artifact's organization—especially its pattern of arrangement—is to create an *outline* of the artifact, noting its main points and sections. Doing that will help you avoid the mistake of simply restating what the rhetor said in the order they said it: "She started by saying…then she claimed…and she ended by concluding that…" Notice that such statements do *not* describe or interpret the artifact; they merely summarize or restate it.

Once you identify an artifact's pattern of arrangement, you can *interpret* how the organization took the audience on a rhetorical journey. Infer how each part of the artifact, starting with its beginning, may have shaped or influenced how the audience received what came next in the artifact; how that section of the artifact then affected how the audience received what followed; and so on until the artifact concludes.


Created by Eko Purnomo from Noun Project

Such rhetorical movement is like what rhetoric scholar Stephen Lucas has called the **textual context**, which is the evolving environment created *within* an artifact that conditions the audience's responses to the artifact from its beginning to its ending. Lucas explains that "a text [artifact] creates its own internal context as it unfolds in time and is processed by the listener or reader."[9] The textual context is quite different from how we used the word "context" earlier in this chapter, for textual context exists entirely *within* the artifact itself. It forces the critic to infer how the structure may have impacted the audience's reaction to the text *because of* the organization. It prevents organization from being undervalued by suggesting that how a rhetor moves strategically from the beginning to the end of the artifact matters.

Box 33.14 Questions to Ask About Organization

Description

- What pattern of arrangement did the artifact follow? How would you label the structure employed by the artifact?
- What logic or way of thinking was suggested or encouraged by the artifact's organization?
- What parts of the artifact received the most emphasis or time? The least?
- What presumptions about the audience(s) were revealed by the artifact's organization?

Interpretation

- How did the artifact rhetorically build, flow, or grow from beginning to end (or fail to do so)? How might each part have influenced the impact or meaning of the part(s) that followed?
- How might the artifact's structure have impacted audiences' impressions of the topic/issue?
- Why might the rhetor have chosen the structure, given the historical context?

Box 33.15 Organization of President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech

9. Stephen E. Lucas, "The Renaissance of American Public Address: Text and Context in Rhetorical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988): 249.



President Trump's speech at first seems to be organized a little like stream-of-consciousness, jumping from idea to idea. After a more careful inspection, however, the speech appears to come closest to the **nonlinear pattern of a star**. We explained in chapter 13 that a star pattern provides multiple main points—like the tips of a star—that may appear disparate from one another, but all support the thesis.

Interestingly, Trump's speech emphasized **five main points** that focused on the problem (the election result was fraudulent, and the news media are suppressing that information) and the solution (we will stop the steal, but Mike Pence and other Republicans need to reject the electoral vote count, which is why we need to march to the Capitol and give them the courage to do that). These points made logical sense together and supported the thesis, "We will 'stop the steal.' Today, I will lay out just some of the evidence proving that we won this election, and we won it by a landslide."

In a star pattern, one main point is typically focused upon and developed at a time, though the ordering of main points can be altered for different audiences and situations. In his speech, however, Trump **frequently moved back and forth among the five main points** in various orders. That gave it the feeling of stream-of-consciousness as he bounced from one point to the other in no predictable pattern. By doing so, Trump could speak in a somewhat impromptu manner, which some might have interpreted as more authentic and engaging than reading a manuscript speech, while also emphasizing his thesis and main points. Indeed, the five main points became so interrelated that the structure may have helped audience members remember each point. However, speakers who repeatedly shift from point to point run the risk of sounding disorganized, appearing frenetic or undisciplined, and boring the audience through repetition.

Style and Framing



We defined style in chapter 16 as language or expression. You are already analyzing an artifact's style when you consider the rhetorical features previously discussed. To enhance your analysis of an artifact's style, however, you can attend to at least three additional aspects of an artifact.

First, examine the *level or type of language* the artifact employed. You might *describe* the simplicity or complexity of the language (e.g., folksy versus grandiloquent), the informality or formality of the style (e.g., colloquial versus learned), or even the type of voice—manner of expression—it reflects (e.g., lawyerly, sermonic, motherly, etc.). Then *interpret* how these choices may have shaped the audiences' impressions of the rhetor, the audiences themselves (how they were addressed), and the topic or issue.

Second, consider the *stylistic devices* the artifact employs. Recall from chapter 16 that such devices are language techniques and literary tools that clarify meaning, express ideas in a compelling manner, and appeal emotionally to an audience. Identifying and *describing* these devices can aid you in *interpreting* how the artifact used them to create a sense of rhythm, encourage visualization, enhance argumentation, or develop a sense of community.

Finally, analyze the artifact's *persuasive framing* of the issue addressed. In chapters 21 and 25, we defined framing as the use of language to order and make sense of the world. We explained that framing is how we employ language to help shape perceptions of reality. Use guidance in chapter 25 to *describe and interpret* how the rhetor framed the *problem* and its *cause* (i.e., who's to blame) in ways that appear worthy to the audience and logically set up the desired *solution*.

Analyzing how an artifact framed the issue enables you to determine how its presentation of the problem

matched, or failed to reflect, the actual issue that prompted the artifact (the "why" in the historical context). Drawing from chapter 25, you can also consider whether the framing appears to be an honest attempt to persuade the audience to adopt the rhetor's solution or a potentially dishonest effort to win supporters by intentionally confusing the audience's understanding of the issue.

Box 33.16 Questions to Ask About Style and Framing

Description

- What level or type of language did the artifact adopt?
- What stylistic devices did the artifact employ?
- How did the artifact persuasively frame the issue (define the problem, cause, and solution)?
- How well or poorly did the artifact's persuasive framing reflect the issue that motivated the artifact? How did the framing relate to (or contrast with) alternative framings of the same issue at the time?

Interpretation

- How might the artifact's style and framing have shaped audiences' impressions of the issue? How might those impressions have encouraged audiences to adopt the rhetor's perspective (or not)?
- How did the stylistic devices create a sense of rhythm, encourage visualization, enhance argumentation, or develop a sense of community?
- How did the style and framing complement or contradict the other rhetorical features, such as argumentation, appeals to emotion, and the desired and undesired audiences?

Box 33.17 Framing and Style in President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech

President Trump's framing of the election explicitly defined the problem, its cause, and the solution. As mentioned previously, he identified the **problem** as mass election fraud; the **causes** as Democrats' corruption, the news media's suppression efforts, and "weak" Republicans' failures to respond; and the **solution** as supporters' pressure on Republican leaders to overturn the election results.

This framing dishonestly diverted attention from the actual problem—Trump lost the election—to an invented problem of election fraud. That diversion whipped his supporters into outrage and action instead of acceptance and contemplation. Trump's framing also left somewhat unclear what that action or their pressure on Congress should look like. Trump encouraged rally attendees to "walk" and "march" to the Capitol and even once said "to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard." Yet his framing emphasized the causes of the fraud as so despicable, coordinated, and strong that peacefully marching and protesting would be an insufficient solution, leaving open the possibility that supporters might need to escalate their response.



Image by Kris via Pixabay, *Pixabay Content License*.

Trump's **stylistic choices** contributed to that escalation. Trump drew heavily on the stylistic device of **metaphor**. One of his most heavily used metaphors likened the election results to **theft**: "You don't concede when there's theft involved." "Democrats attempted the most brazen and outrageous election theft. There's never been anything like this. It's a pure theft in American history." "They want to steal the election." "We must stop the steal." "This is a criminal enterprise." By likening the results to a crime, Trump's metaphor depicted himself and his supporters as innocent victims of nefarious lawbreakers; thus, they were justified in defending and retrieving what was rightfully and legally theirs.



Image by Lee Murry via Pixabay, *Pixabay Content License*.

How they might do that was informed by a second popular **metaphor** in Trump's speech: Their response was like a **physical fight**. Trump instructed, "And we fight. We fight like hell and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." He characterized the Republicans who objected to the results as "warriors" who were "fighting. The House guys are fighting." He criticized the "weak" Republicans who "are constantly fighting like a boxer with his hands tied behind his back. It's like a boxer, and we want to be so nice. We want to be so respectful of everybody, including bad people. And we're going to have to fight much harder." Through this metaphor, Trump likened their response to an unrestrained physical assault that was both required and justified to win. Some supporters took this metaphor literally.

Delivery

To analyze a rhetor's delivery of an artifact, you must have access to an audio or visual recording. In chapter 17, we defined delivery as the actual means of expression: "It is how a speaker physically conveys words and ideas, verbally and nonverbally, to the audience." You can *describe* a rhetor's



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- vocal delivery (how the voice and mouth are used to deliver words),
- nonverbal delivery (how the body is used to communicate),
- televisual delivery (how a speech is presented through a screen), and
- use of memory (how one stores and recalls the information shared in a speech).

You should then *interpret* how the rhetor's delivery functioned persuasively, given the historical context. As explained in chapter 17, delivery is situational; its effectiveness depends on the rhetor's ability to adjust to situational factors (e.g., occasion, purpose, audience composition, and size) and conditions and constraints (e.g., distance from the audience, use of a camera, the arrangement of the speaking platform or lectern, etc.). You can identify the delivery choices the rhetor made for their speaking situation and infer whether and how they met the demands of that situation to achieve their persuasive goal.

Box 33.18 Questions to Ask About Delivery

Description

- How would you characterize the rhetor's vocal delivery in terms of their volume, tone, rate, pauses, articulation, pronunciation, and vocal fillers?
- How would you characterize the rhetor's nonverbal delivery in terms of their eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and movement, and appearance?
- If the artifact was delivered through a screen, how would you characterize the rhetor's use of, or adaptation to, the camera's framing, angle, and distance; the lighting and background; and the camera's movement or steadiness?
- How did the rhetor adjust their delivery to suit the historical context, or how did they fail to do so?
- What mode of delivery did the rhetor adopt (extemporaneous, memorized, impromptu, manuscript)?

Interpretation

- How might the rhetor's delivery have influenced audiences' impressions of the rhetor? How might those impressions have compared or differed if audiences watched in person or via a screen?
- How might the rhetor's delivery have aided or hurt their attempt to persuade their audiences?
- How did the rhetor's delivery complement or distract from the artifact's other rhetorical features?

Box 33.19 Delivery of President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech

President Trump's speech delivery appeared to strengthen his claims by depicting him as presidential. **Dressed** in a black, long overcoat with a white collared shirt and red tie, he looked presidential. The **setting** helped. His podium featured the presidential seal, American flags waved in the breeze on either side of him onstage (and in the camera's frame), and the White House was easily visible behind him. The stage placed him physically above audience members, reflecting his power over them.

His nonverbal delivery was restrained. He remained **standing** behind a podium. He frequently **gestured** to underscore his points, such as shrugging his shoulders, pointing at the crowd, or dropping his hand with specific words. But his gestures were made fairly close to his body. His **vocal tone** and **volume** stayed rather consistent, with only occasional vocal emphases on particular words or phrases. While the speech was scripted and teleprompter screens stood on both sides of him, Trump appeared to mostly **look** out at the crowd and cameras. He **paused** occasionally when the crowd cheered or chanted.

Consequently, Trump's delivery depicted a man who was—and was ready to remain—the US president. He talked directly to the people as their leader and their choice.

Evaluating the Rhetorical Artifact



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Once you have systematically described and interpreted your artifact for features such as the ones listed previously, you can judge the artifact's functions and consequences. Focus on whether the artifact successfully achieved the rhetor's goals (or not) and strengthened or weakened democratic principles. We will discuss both assessments in turn.

Did the Artifact Achieve the Rhetor's Goals? Why or Why Not?

You should judge if and why the artifact achieved the rhetor's goals. Use

- your research and understanding of the historical context (i.e., evidence from outside sources) and
- your description and interpretations of the rhetorical features (i.e., evidence from the artifact)

to argue how the artifact helped the rhetor achieve their goals or why they fell short.

Of course, determining success can be complicated. What counts as success, with what audience, and how quickly must it occur? As a critic, you must decide and ultimately argue how to define success or failure for the artifact, given its context.

Speech scholar W. Norwood Brigance claimed, "The success of any speech is determined, not by whether it carries the day, but by how far it moves toward that goal."[10]

Box 33.20 Evaluation of Whether President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech Achieved His Goals

President Trump's speech **fulfilled his immediate goal** of motivating rally attendants to march to the Capitol and pressure Republican congressional leaders to object to the Electoral College votes. After

10. William Norwood Brigance, "What Is a Successful Speech?," *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* 11 (1925): 376.

Trump's speech, a large portion of the approximately 10,000 people in attendance joined the tens of thousands of protesters already gathered near the Capitol.[11]



Tear Gas outside United States Capitol by Tyler Merbler via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY.



Image by Sherrod Brown via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Unfortunately, their presence strengthened a physical attack on the building that had already begun. According to the House of Representatives Select Committee's final report, "The Proud Boys and other extremists initiated the attack shortly before the joint session of Congress was set to begin at 1:00 p.m. The rioters who streamed down Pennsylvania to the U.S. Capitol from the Ellipse then provided crucial momentum for the attack."[12] In that attack, over 140 law enforcement officers were injured, five people died (on that day or soon afterward), $2.9 million in damages was done to the Capitol, and congressional leaders had to end their meeting suddenly and be escorted by police to safe hiding spaces.[13] According to NPR, "The FBI has estimated that around 2,000 people took part in criminal acts on Jan. 6," and they continued to investigate and make arrests through 2024.[14]

Did Trump's January 6 speech cause the Capitol attack? On the one hand, the answer is **no**. The attack started before his speech ended, and most people who walked to the Capitol did not directly engage in violence or enter the building. He never told his audience to enter the building or attack congressional leaders or Capitol police officers.

On the other hand, the answer is **yes**. His *speech* contributed to his previous rhetoric that encour-

11. Jie Jenny Zou and Erin B. Logan, "Key Facts to Know About the Jan. 6 Insurrection," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 2022, https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2022-01-05/by-the-numbers-jan-6-anniversary.
12. U.S. House of Representatives, *Final Report*, 612.
13. "The Jan. 6 Attack: The Cases Behind the Biggest Criminal Investigation in U.S. History," *All Things Considered*, updated May 14, 2024, https://www.npr.org/2021/02/09/965472049/the-capitol-siege-the-arrested-and-their-stories.
14. "Jan. 6 Attack."

aged supporters to travel to Washington, DC, to stop congressional leaders, especially Pence, from certifying the votes. He whipped up his audience's outrage through *false evidence and fallacies* as well as *contrasts of love and hate*. He depicted the encounter as a *showdown between patriots and enemies* and encouraged his supporters *to "fight" the "thieves" to "save" the country*. Such rhetoric overly simplified the situation and downplayed the weighty implications of attempting to overturn a democratic election.

While Trump did not overtly tell the crowd to attack the Capitol, he stoked feelings and beliefs that helped justify such violence. As one professor noted for the BBC, "He clearly knew there were people in that crowd who were ready to and intended to be violent, and he certainly did nothing to discourage that. He not only did nothing to discourage it, he strongly hinted it should happen."[15] Several investigations made a similar conclusion, resulting in Congress impeaching Trump for a second time and the Justice Department indicting him on four counts, including the "Obstruction of and Attempt to Obstruct an Official Proceeding."[16]

Trump's speech **failed to fulfill his ultimate goal** of overturning the 2020 election results. Congress reconvened the following day to finish their certification of the Electoral College votes, officially confirming Joe Biden's election victory as the forty-sixth US president.

Did the Artifact Strengthen or Weaken Democratic Principles? How?

In addition to assessing the artifact's ability or failure to achieve the rhetor's goals, public communication analysis requires you to also consider the artifact's impact on democratic principles.

15. Garrett Epps, quoted in Sam Cabral, "Capitol Riots: Did Trump's Words at Rally Incite Violence?," BBC, February 13, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55640437, archived at https://perma.cc/GS8F-6EZQ.
16. Charlie Savage and Adam Goldman, "Trump Jan. 6 Indictment, Annotated," *New York Times*, August 1, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/08/01/us/politics/trump-jan-6-indictment-2020-election-annotated.html, archived at https://perma.cc/3X8U-9ZTB.



Facade of the Capitol Building by Ramaz Bluashvili via Pexels, Pexels License.

We argued in chapter 31 that rhetoric that addresses public affairs should strengthen democracy, and we suggested that critics evaluate an artifact's impact on democracy by determining whether it strengthens or weakens democratic principles. In that chapter, we defined democratic principles as the behavioral standards necessary for democratic governance to exist and thrive, and we gave examples such as the participation of ordinary people in civic affairs, the equality of all people, and the tolerance and protection of a variety of voices. Artifacts that prioritize, reinforce, and/or practice such principles strengthen democracy.

To help you assess your artifact's impact on democratic values, we will delve into this idea a bit further by considering, separately, how an artifact might support democratic principles directly *or* indirectly.

How Did the Artifact *Directly* Support or Hurt Democratic Principles?

A rhetorical artifact might *directly strengthen* democracy by advocating for or addressing one or more democratic ideals. We might think, for example, of Martin Luther King Jr.'s calls for freedom and equality in his "I Have a Dream" speech. Alternatively, an artifact can *directly weaken* democratic principles by explicitly calling for their dismissal, subjugating them to other values, or refusing their application to particular groups of people.

How Did the Artifact *Indirectly* Support or Hurt Democratic Principles?

An artifact can *strengthen democracy indirectly* by modeling or practicing democratic principles. Any artifact that qualifies as *responsible public discourse*, for instance, reinforces democratic principles. Recall in chapter 4 we defined responsible public discourse as public communication that draws on the qualities of productive discourse to produce a more inclusive and equitable public sphere. It may or may not be polite or civil. Alternatively, some artifacts *indirectly weaken democratic principles* by practicing irresponsible public communication that uses the qualities of unproductive discourse and restricts the public sphere in inequitable ways.

A rhetorical artifact may fall along a *sliding scale* between strengthening and weakening democratic principles. Most artifacts probably improve some principles and hurt others. Clearly, the more ways a single artifact strengthens democratic principles, the better. You will need to decide in which direction your artifact tends by paying close attention to the artifact's rhetorical features and historical context.

Box 33.21 Evaluation of the Effects of President Trump's January 6, 2021, Speech on Democratic Principles

President Trump's speech **directly hurt** democratic principles. Though he claimed to "save our democracy," his speech called to overturn a democratic election. That directly violated such principles as the rule of law, the importance of the common good in balance with personal gain, and the accountability of officials and public leaders to the will of the people.

Trump's speech also **indirectly weakened** democracy by making heavy use of division, dichotomous thinking, certainty, combativeness, and winning and by attempting to restrict valid voters to those Americans who voted for him.

Summary

This chapter provided the final steps necessary to conduct a public communication analysis. After identifying a suitable rhetorical artifact and reconstructing its historical context, you should continue to analyze the artifact itself:

- You describe and interpret several rhetorical features, including argumentation, appeals to emotions and loyalties, the rhetor's credibility, the desired audience, the undesired audience, organization, style and framing, and delivery.
- You next make two types of judgments about the artifact, using what you learned from the historical context and rhetorical features. You evaluate whether the artifact was successful or failed to achieve the rhetor's goals, recognizing the need to argue for what counts as success or failure. You also judge whether the artifact strengthened or weakened democratic principles by considering the principles the artifact attempted to directly reinforce (or violate) and indirectly practiced or modeled (or failed to do so).

Key Terms

textual context

Review Questions

1. How do you describe and interpret an artifact's argumentation, appeals to emotions and loyalties, organization, and style and framing? What mistakes should you avoid?
2. What is the difference between the rhetor's construction of themselves (credibility), the desired audience, and the undesired audience?
3. By what means might you evaluate an artifact's success in achieving its goals?
4. By what means might you evaluate an artifact's impact on democratic principles?

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the rhetorical features seems most important to analyze? How should you decide which to focus on or to include when sharing your work?
2. What kinds of evidence best support a critic's interpretations of an artifact's rhetorical features? How does a critic know when their inferences are right? How should we judge the merit of a critic's interpretations, especially when two critics disagree about how a rhetorical feature functioned?
3. How can you ever really make judgments about an artifact's success or failure or impact on democratic principles? What kinds of evidence does that require?

34. Ideological Criticism: Rhetorical Artifacts and Historical Context

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Identify a rhetorical artifact suitable for ideological criticism.
- Reconstruct the historical context for the rhetorical artifact.

At the center of ideological criticism is ideology. When you hear that word, what comes to mind? Perhaps you associate it with ideas or beliefs, like those shared by a group. Maybe you think about the kinds of beliefs and values that drive extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan or Antifa. Or maybe your mind goes to the most recent political conflict between Democrats and Republicans as a clash of ideologies. Or perhaps you're simply unsure what to think.

In this chapter, we define an **ideology** as a set of shared beliefs and values that forms an interpretation of the world and suggests appropriate ways to act in it. We all adopt ideologies—not just extremists or political actors. In fact, ideologies are so plentiful and common that we often overlook their influence in our everyday lives. That's where ideological criticism can be useful. **Ideological criticism** is a method of rhetorical criticism that exposes the ideology communicated by a rhetorical artifact and interprets how the artifact uses the ideology to exercise power and control.

Ideological criticism aids democratic participation in several ways. It allows you to notice and think critically about communication. That includes recognizing how an artifact expands or contracts civil liberties. When you discover artifacts that restrict participation, ideological criticism provides you the ability to resist and even produce artifacts to counter that work. We'll more fully explain each of these benefits.

First, by making ideologies visible in rhetorical artifacts, ideological criticism enables you to thoughtfully respond to such messages. Without conducting ideological analysis, you are less likely to *notice* an artifact's ideological functions but just as likely to be *influenced* by them. Ideological criticism helps you recognize and investigate an artifact's ideological work.



Racist sign, Oregon Oregon Historical Society *via Wikimedia Commons,* Public Domain.

Second, ideological criticism can illuminate how some artifacts communicate ideologies that limit democratic participation. For instance, a Black rhetor—a speaker, singer, or public figure—in the 1950s had few opportunities to participate civically due to the prevailing societal ideology of racial segregation (i.e., racism). That ideology was promoted in numerous artifacts at the time (films, novels, speeches, etc.). Consequently, ideological criticism can sensitize us to see which artifacts contribute to restricting some members of society from fully engaging in public life.

Finally, ideological criticism empowers the public to enact social change. We can resist artifacts that promote ideological messages that inhibit democracy. We can even produce our own rhetorical artifacts that communicate counterideologies that expand and strengthen democratic principles and enhance community engagement.

In this chapter, we will walk you through the first two steps of conducting an ideological critique of your own rhetorical artifact: identifying an appropriate artifact and reconstructing the artifact's historical context. The next chapter continues with three more steps: describing the artifact's ideological message, interpreting how the artifact uses the ideology to exercise power and control, and evaluating how the ideology strengthens or weakens democratic principles.



March on Washington by *Unseen Histories via Unsplash*, *Unsplash License*.

Box 34.1 Ideological Criticism Steps

1. **Identify** an appropriate rhetorical artifact.
2. **Reconstruct** the artifact's historical context.
3. **Describe** the artifact's ideological message.
4. **Interpret** how the artifact uses ideology to exercise power and control.
5. **Evaluate** how the artifact's ideology strengthens or weakens democratic principles.

Identifying a Rhetorical Artifact

The first step of ideological critique is to identify an appropriate rhetorical artifact. Recall from chapters 30 and 31 that a rhetorical artifact is an object of study in rhetorical criticism. It is a specific instance of rhetoric that was produced for an audience at a particular time.

Expressions of ideology pervade nearly every aspect of human society; they are present in our social and religious rituals, our political lives, our intellectual commitments, our economic choices, and our forms of entertainment. This means you might find rich artifacts among advertisements, popular music, social media posts, video games, or political cartoons—just to name a few possibilities.

We have found, though, that artifacts best served by ideological criticism tend to meet the criteria in box 34.2.

Box 34.2 Guidelines for Selecting an Artifact

- Uses **verbal**, **nonverbal**, **visual**, or **audio** symbols—or a combination.
- **Elevates** or **challenges** a common way of seeing the world.
- Attempts to **persuade** an audience to live or act in a certain way.
- May be familiar to your audience, but your **audience has not reflected on its ideological assumptions**.

Uses Verbal, Nonverbal, Visual, and/or Audio Symbols

An appropriate rhetorical artifact for ideological criticism can use any combination of verbal, nonverbal, visual, and audio symbols (movies, television episodes, songs, viral videos, commercials, etc.).

Elevates or Challenges a Common Way of Seeing the World

A second criterion to consider for ideological criticism is finding an artifact that elevates or challenges a common way of seeing the world (or both!). Let's briefly consider each possibility.

Elevates

Many artifacts elevate widely held sets of values and beliefs. Sometimes that ideological work is hard to notice, however, because we've become blind to it. Think, for example, of the video game that reinforces militarism or a music video that upholds heteronormativity. Push yourself to observe how everyday artifacts might promote ideological messages.

Challenges

Some artifacts challenge common ways of seeing the world by calling them into question. These may be easier to notice because they "call out" a widely held perspective, such as the example in box 34.3.

Box 34.3 An Artifact That Challenges a Common Way of Seeing the World

Have you seen the pilot episode of AMC's 2021 television series *Kevin Can F**K Himself*? It first appears to be a typical sitcom: Kevin McRoberts and his friends are in a brightly lit living room where they tease his wife Allison while we hear canned laughter. However, when Allison leaves the living room, the show quickly becomes a disturbing drama. It focuses on Allison's pained expressions. It features an ominous soundtrack and dark lighting while using a single camera (as versus the traditional three-camera setup). If the pilot episode was your artifact, it would probably grab your attention! Its scenic contrasts seem to challenge the casual sexism encouraged by sitcoms when women are consistently the butt of the jokes.



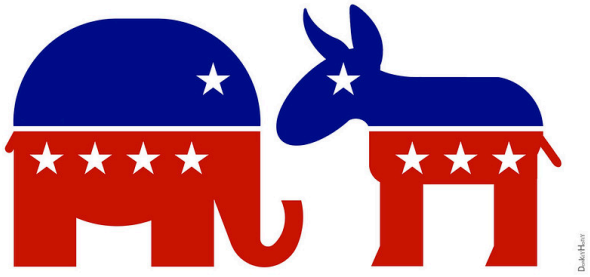
Image made using Google Gemini 2.5 Flash.

Elevates and Challenges

Sometimes artifacts both elevate and resist common ways of seeing the world at once. Consider the example in box 34.4. Such artifacts can provide rich grounds for an ideological criticism, though you must recognize its multiple functions.

Box 34.4 An Artifact That Elevates and Challenges a Common Way of Seeing the World

You have likely seen advertisements for US political candidates that promote American patriotism while challenging the conservatism or liberalism of an opposing candidate. In these cases, a commonly held value (patriotism) is upheld, while a widely held set of beliefs (conservativism or liberalism) is called into question.



Republican Elephant & Democratic Donkey by DonkeyHotey via Flickr, CC BY.

The bottom line is that the best choices for ideological criticism are artifacts that reinforce a widely accepted way of seeing the world, challenge that widely accepted way of seeing the world, or both.

Attempts to Persuade

Additionally, identify an artifact that tries to persuade an audience to live and act in a certain way. Such persuasion might appear explicitly or implicitly. A political ad, for example, might

- *explicitly* critique liberalism by telling viewers the opponent is "a liberal" while writing that word across the screen in large, red letters or
- simultaneously promote patriotism *implicitly* by showing the candidate dressed in red, white, and blue and standing beside waving American flags.

Steer away from artifacts that are informative or educational in purpose unless you can find implicit persuasive statements related to communal thought or action. Otherwise, you may become frustrated because you can find little about ideology to critique in the artifact.

Familiar but Not Reflected Upon

Finally, you may find it particularly fruitful to look for an artifact you believe is familiar to your audience but that your audience has not yet reflected on its ideological assumptions.

- Perhaps the lyrics of your favorite rap musician are violent toward women, yet you see friends rapping along without thinking about what messages they are coming to view as normal.
- Maybe you notice friends laughing at a particular Super Bowl commercial that presents a newer, more expansive view of masculinity. You might help them look past the humor to see what is compelling in the message.

The key idea is that it's likely your audience has missed these messages or given little thought or attention to them or the artifacts themselves.

Box 34.5 #IfTheyGunnedMeDown as a Rhetorical Artifact for Ideological Criticism

An example of an appropriate artifact emerged in the days and months following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old African American man in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014. Brown was killed by white police officer Darren Wilson in a confrontation on a residential street that had few witnesses and no video footage.

In the days that followed the fatal shooting, tension emerged about how Michael Brown was portrayed in the media:

- His family and friends stressed he was a recent high school graduate and a good kid who was about to begin college classes.
- Police spokespersons, however, released video footage that appeared to show Brown stealing cigars from a convenience store on the morning of his death, and they suggested he had physically attacked the police officer who shot him.[1]

Our rhetorical artifact is a Twitter (now X) campaign under the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown that was most immediately a response to a photo of Brown that NBC News tweeted the day after his shooting.[2] The photo portrayed Brown without a smile, in front of a brick building, with a hand gesture that some have said was a peace sign and others interpreted as a gang sign. In other words, in the photograph, Brown could be read as unfriendly and even aggressive.

> Corrected Link: Unarmed Missouri teen killed by officer after 'physical confrontation' http://t.co/JITP7e9iJa pic.twitter.com/t4CNLdq6C4
>
> — NBC News (@NBCNews) August 10, 2014

To protest this media representation of Brown, many Twitter (now X) users, particularly young people of color, started tweeting photographs of themselves under the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. They each posted pairs of photographs of themselves. One photo depicted the subject as partying, smoking, making an offensive hand signal, or looking at the camera in an especially provocative way. In the second photo, the same subject was shown in their military uniform, wearing their graduation cap and gown, caring for their children, smiling or looking friendly, or perhaps reading a story in an elementary classroom. The visual contrasts were striking, and they made powerful statements about the choices news outlets make when they select and publish photographs.

> Yes let's do that: Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunnedMeDown pic.twitter.com/Ng0pUlxWhr
>
> — C.J. Lawrence (@CJLawrenceEsq) August 10, 2014

These photo pairs tweeted for the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown social media campaign meet the criteria for an appropriate artifact for ideological criticism:

- They used **verbal and visual symbols** by combining two photographs, the hashtag caption, and often a version of the question "Which picture would the media use?"
- They **challenged a common way of seeing the world**, of viewing news photographs of Black people that are racially biased as unbiased reflections, while **elevating another perspective**, of the humanity of people of color.
- They clearly **attempted to persuade viewers** to scrutinize more closely how people of color are represented by the media.
- For **audiences who had not previously reflected on images like the one publicly shared of Brown**, an ideological critique of the photo pairs would help listeners recognize and consider their ideological messaging.

1. See, for example, Mark Berman and Wesley Lowery, "Police Say Michael Brown Was a Robbery Suspect, Identify Darren Wilson as Officer Who Shot Him," *Washington Post*, August 15, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/08/15/ferguson-police-releasing-name-of-officer-who-shot-michael-brown/.
2. NBC News (@NBCNews), "Unarmed Missouri teen killed by officer after 'physical confrontation' nbcnews.to/XaZEd1," Twitter (now X), August 10, 2014, https://x.com/NBCNews/status/498526729728565250. This post is archived at "Michael Brown's Death—Image #809, 359," Know Your Meme, https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/809359-michael-browns-death.

Reconstructing the Historical Context

Once you have located a suitable artifact, the next step in ideological criticism is to reconstruct the artifact's historical context. The context helps you understand why the artifact looks and sounds the way it does, which will aid your analysis later. It assists you in recognizing how the artifact was a product of, as well as a *participant* in, its time, place, and culture.

To determine the artifact's historical context, find answers to the questions we established in chapter 31: who, why, what, to whom, when, and where? Use box 34.6 for guidance.

Box 34.6 Questions to Ask About Historical Context

- **Who** was the rhetor for this artifact—that is, the person or entity most invested in how the artifact looks, sounds, and was received by audiences? Is there anything compelling in the rhetor's biography that led to the creation of this artifact?
- **Why** was the artifact created? What social, economic, or political realities prompted its creation? If there are earlier or historical references in the artifact, what connection might the rhetor have hoped audiences would see between the past and the artifact's present?
- **What** type of artifact was created? What were its major characteristics?
- **To whom** was the artifact addressed? What visual or textual clues in the artifact hint at the target, implied, and implicated audiences? Whom did it reach? Who was the direct audience, and were they discrete and/or dispersed?
- **When** was the artifact's timing? That is, what date was it delivered, produced, or published, and what was occurring politically, socially, or economically that may have influenced audiences' response to the artifact? How did the artifact compare with or differ from similar types of artifacts that preceded it?
- **Where** was the artifact's location? In other words, what was the specific place it was delivered or disseminated, and/or through what medium did it circulate?

"Who?"



Created by Mira Iconic from Noun Project

Who was the rhetor for the artifact? In previous chapters about rhetorical criticism, we have defined the rhetor as the author(s) or creator(s) of the rhetorical artifact under examination. Depending on the artifact, the rhetor might be obvious. However, artifacts such as photographs, popular songs, video games, or television commercials can make the rhetor harder to pinpoint. Your rhetor may be the photographer, the songwriter, the production team, or the director, for instance. Who was most responsible for the rhetorical artifact's production?

Box 34.7 Rhetors of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown Posts

The rhetors for the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown posts are the **Twitter (now X) users who posted** pairs of photos of themselves. **C. J. Lawrence** sparked the trend one day after Brown's death,[3] but many more X users quickly followed his model.

Having said that, Lawrence's tweet caught on because it was retweeted by people with large followings, so it's possible to think of **those who retweeted**—possibly while adding their own additional messages or photos—as rhetors as well.

The question of "who" the rhetor is can be potentially complicated if you choose social media artifacts, since audience members can resend posts and alter or comment on them (thus, creating a slightly different artifact). Ultimately, think of the rhetor as the person or entity most responsible for the artifact's creation and intending to influence others' thinking or behavior.

"Why?" and "What?"



Second, answer "why" by looking for the specific social, economic, or political events that led to the creation or circulation of your rhetorical artifact. This is where you ask why the rhetor made the arguments they did in the ways they did. If possible, unearth the rhetor's goal. Third, answer "what" by clarifying what type of artifact the rhetor produced in response to the events that prompted it and by naming its major characteristics.

Box 34.8 Prompts for, and an Account of, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

Why: In an interview about #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, Lawrence—who posted the original tweet—explained his **motivation**: "The questions began to resonate in my mind that, how are people being convinced that the prey is the predator?...And then I decided that it has to be directly attached to appearance. So I began to think about, what type of social commentary can be jarring to the extent that we can begin to challenge the narrative, that whether I look one way or the other, you cannot capture or embody who I am as a human being on a snapshot....The point was to disrupt people mentally."[4]

What: Lawrence created the original social media post and uploaded it to his Twitter (now X) feed. In it,

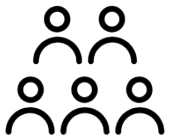
3. C.J. Lawrence (@CJLawrenceEsq), "Yes let's do that: Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunnedMeDown," Twitter (now X), August 10, 2014, https://x.com/CJLawrenceEsq/status/498537843170353152, archived at https://perma.cc/2GHV-NNGE.
4. Ethan Zuckerman, "#iftheygunnedmedown Six Years Later, and Just as Vital—an Interview with Activist C. J. Lawrence," *Ethan Zuckerman* (blog), June 5, 2020, https://ethanzuckerman.com/2020/06/05/iftheygunnedmedown-six-years-later-and-just-as-vital-an-interview-with-activist-c-j-lawrence/, archived at https://perma.cc/Z7RC-AMVF.

he paired two very different photographs of himself: In the first, he was speaking outdoors at a graduation ceremony with President Clinton laughing in the background. In the second photo, Lawrence was inside a house or apartment, dressed in black and wearing sunglasses while holding up what looks like a liquor bottle. Lawrence paired the photos with the caption, "Yes, let's do that. Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunnedMeDown."

Answering "what" is much easier than explaining "why" an artifact was created. If you cannot find a credible source that explains the rhetor's goal, that's OK. Knowing the rhetor's goal is not necessary for ideological criticism. You can, instead, identify the social, economic, or political realities that may have motivated the artifact's production and circulation. For example, imagine we did not find the interview with Lawrence (highlighted in box 34.8) to identify his goal for #IfTheyGunnedMe Down. Without that, it would be fairly easy to conclude that the social and political contexts for the Twitter (now X) posts were established in reaction to Brown's death *and* the ensuing media coverage. Knowing why an artifact was produced can help you notice and later analyze rhetorical features chosen by the rhetor(s).

"To Whom?"

Third, consider who the audience was for the symbolic action. Recall in chapter 10 (and chapter 32) we differentiated the following:


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- *direct audience* (those who are exposed to and attend to the rhetoric)
- *target audience* (those the rhetor hopes to reach)
- *implied audience* (those who are represented in the message)
- *implicated audience* (those who will be affected by the message if it is successful)

We also considered whether the audience is

- *discrete* (limited to those who show up for an event at a particular day and time) or
- *dispersed* (unlimited by location and/or time).

Researching and understanding audiences can help you later analyze how the artifact's ideological messaging might have functioned similarly or differently for each.

Box 34.9 Audiences for #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

Returning to our artifact, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown posts were initially viewed by a **dispersed** audience of

Twitter (now X) users. According to Lawrence, it was fellow members of "Black Twitter"—a vibrant subset that communicates about race-centered issues—who retweeted his post, causing it "to catch a fire."[5] By the following day, the hashtag had been used so many times—over 168,000[6]—that a Tumblr blog was created to collect the tweets[7] and several major news organizations reported about the hashtag campaign.

Consequently, while the **target** audience was Twitter (now X) users, the **direct** audience ultimately encompassed a much wider group of news media consumers and companies. Interestingly, this reach matched the posts' **implied** and **implicated** audiences: the news media (for selecting photographs of the subjects they report), news consumers (to become more aware of these choices), and Black Americans (who too often were depicted negatively by the news media).



Newspapers by Jon S via Flickr, CC BY.

"When?"



The next step is to consider the artifact's timing. In chapter 32, we explained that timing includes both the specific date and time for the artifact and the time period in which the rhetoric was situated.

- What date was the artifact produced, delivered, or published?
- What was happening politically, socially, or economically that may have influenced how audiences responded to the artifact?
- How did the artifact relate to similar types of artifacts that preceded it or to other types of commentary on the issue it addresses?

5. Zuckerman, "#iftheygunnedmedown Six Years Later."
6. Tanzina Vega, "Shooting Spurs Hashtag Effort on Stereotypes," *New York Times*, August 12, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/13/us/if-they-gunned-me-down-protest-on-twitter.html.
7. "If They Gunned Me Down," Tumblr, August 11-12, 2014, https://iftheygunnedmedown.tumblr.com/, archived at https://perma.cc/2SC5-N9QU.

Understanding how your artifact relates to a broader time period or history of similar artifacts can give you greater awareness of its ideological functions.

Box 34.10 Timing of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

Brown's death and NBC News's tweet with his photograph occurred on **August 9, 2013**. The **next day**, tweets using the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown first appeared.

However, we know that NBC's photograph did not appear in a historical vacuum. Media critics and civil rights activists have **long noted that the news media visually portray some minorities—and African American men in particular—with a negative bias**. Portrayals of violent or threatening men of color will sell news, this protest contends, and these negative portrayals, in turn, feed cultural perceptions of African American men as dangerous and untrustworthy.[8] As a result, we as media consumers are much more likely to encounter images of African American men as criminals than as teachers, fathers, soldiers, or political leaders.

Given this long-running critique of media portrayals, some Twitter (now X) followers viewed the NBC News–circulated photograph of Brown as yet another occasion where a mainstream news organization chose a threatening-looking photograph of an African American man when they could easily have chosen a photograph that showed Brown smiling or in his graduation cap and gown. As blogger P. J. Vogt wrote, "A photo can be an argument, and the photo NBC News tweeted made a different argument than a more typical victim photo (at a graduation or at home) would have."[9]

"Where?"



The final element of context to consider is the artifact's location. In chapter 32, we described location as including both/either the specific place an artifact is delivered or disseminated and/or the medium through which it circulates. The latter can help you determine whether the artifact reached its target audience and who its *unintended* audiences might have been. Is your artifact a confidential or classified document that was later leaked to the press? If it is a document or film, has it been translated into other languages? Is your artifact a video or internet meme that went viral?

Thinking about circulation will help you consider more fully how ideologies infiltrate cultures. You may begin to explain how certain beliefs or values come to be shared and widely held—or how certain forms of resistance gain wide adherence—when you identify how artifacts spread among groups.

8. For example, see Ronald L. Jackson, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); Kirk A. Johnson and Travis L. Dixon, "Change and the Illusion of Change: Evolving Portrayals of Crime News and Blacks in a Major Market," *Howard Journal of Communications* 19, no. 2 (2008): 125–143.
9. P. J. Vogt, "If They Gunned Me Down," *On the Media Blog*, August 11, 2014, https://www.onthemedia.org/story/if-they-gunned-me-down/, archived at https://perma.cc/MC3G-MTMW.

Box 34.11 Location of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

Twitter (now X) was the medium of communication for the original #IfTheyGunnedMeDown post. According to Lawrence, who produced that post, two Black Twitter users with large followings quickly retweeted his post, which helped it go **viral**.[10] After that, the tweets began appearing in **other social media** (resulting in a devoted Tumblr blog) and in many **news media reports** about the campaign. Eventually several scholars **published research** on the campaign, often including examples of tweets in their work.[11] We can also include **this textbook** as a location that is further disseminating the campaign and its original tweet!

Consequently, while the original rhetor distributed his post on Twitter, it—and the tweets that followed—circulated and spread in ways and in places he probably could not have anticipated or imagined. What began as one man's post to resist racist depictions of African Americans by the news media resulted in a large and well-publicized protest campaign.

When you take time to research your artifact's historical context—answering who, why, what, to whom, when, and where—you gain important clues. You discover what contributed to the artifact's production and what it attempted to influence. These clues are invaluable as you describe, interpret, and evaluate the artifact to illuminate its ideological functions. We explain those next steps of ideological criticism in the following chapter.

Summary

As a method of criticism, ideological analysis seeks to understand how a range of rhetorical artifacts shape our understanding and use of ideologies. To provide such understanding, critics using ideological criticism must keep in mind the following concept and steps.

- Ideology is a set of beliefs and values that forms an interpretation of the world and suggests appropriate ways to act in it.
- You begin by identifying a suitable rhetorical artifact. For ideological criticism, such an artifact uses verbal, nonverbal, visual, and/or audio symbols; elevates or challenges a common way of seeing the world; attempts to persuade an audience to live or act in a certain way; and may be familiar to your audience, though they may not have reflected on its ideological assumptions.

10. Zuckerman, "#iftheygunnedmedown Six Years Later."
11. For example, see Christopher R. Campbell, "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown: Postmodern Media Criticism in a Post-Racial World," in *Race and Gender in Electronic Media: Content, Context, Culture*, ed. Rebecca Ann Lind (Routledge, 2017), 195–212, https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/41387/1/9781138640108_oachapter12.pdf; Roni Jackson, "If They Gunned Me Down and Criming While White: An Examination of Twitter Campaigns Through the Lens of Citizens' Media," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 3 (2016): 313–19, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616634836.

- You then reconstruct the historical context for the artifact by discovering what audiences might have known about the rhetor, what prompted the artifact, the rhetor's likely goal(s), the type of artifact produced, the audience(s) for the artifact, and the artifact's location and timing.

Key Terms

ideological criticism
ideology

Review Questions

1. What is an ideology?
2. Describe the characteristics that make a rhetorical artifact a good selection for ideological criticism.
3. Which aspects of an artifact's historical context should you discover?

Discussion Questions

1. What might be advantages and challenges of analyzing a rhetorical artifact that mostly uses visual symbols compared to verbal symbols? One that mostly uses audio or nonverbal symbols?
2. Is it easier to find rhetorical artifacts that elevate or challenge common ways of seeing the world—or those that do both simultaneously? What are examples of each?
3. Are you comfortable conducting an ideological critique if you do not know the rhetor's goals for the artifact? Why or why not?

35. Ideological Criticism: Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation

Chapter Objectives

Students will:

- Describe an artifact's ideological message.
- Interpret how an artifact uses ideology to exercise power and control.
- Evaluate how a rhetorical artifact's ideology strengthens or weakens democratic principles.

The previous chapter introduced you to ideological criticism. We explained that it is a method of rhetorical criticism that exposes the ideology communicated by a rhetorical artifact and interprets how the artifact uses the ideology to exercise power and control. We defined an ideology as a set of shared beliefs and values that forms an interpretation of the world and suggests appropriate ways to act in it. We also guided you through the first two steps of ideological criticism: identifying an appropriate rhetorical artifact and reconstructing its historical context.

In this chapter, we will explain the next three steps: describing the artifact's ideological message, interpreting how the artifact uses the ideology to exercise power and control, and evaluating how the ideology strengthens or weakens democratic principles.

Describing the Artifact's Ideological Message

In ideological criticism, the *description* step entails determining your artifact's ideological message. To do that, name and describe the ideology your artifact communicates (i.e., the artifact's content) as well as the rhetorical features it employs to communicate it (i.e., the forms it uses).

Name the Ideology

Critical to ideological criticism is naming the ideology the artifact elevates or challenges. As mentioned previously, an ideology is a set of shared beliefs and values that forms an interpretation of the world and suggests appropriate ways to act in it. Notice that an ideology consists of a *set* or *collection* of beliefs and values that coheres into a perspective. Students often mistake a single value or belief for an ideology.



Hello My Name Is by Gordon Dillon Johnson via Openclipart, Public Domain.

Not an Ideology	**Is an Ideology**
Devotion	Patriotism
Devotion is a single value.	Patriotism consists of a *set* of beliefs and values: • devotion • sacrifice • pride • attachment to one's homeland • belief that one should do what's best for their country and its inhabitants

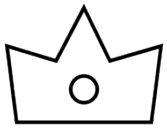
You will know you are naming an ideology when you can identify the collection of interrelated values and beliefs that form the outlook. Box 35.1 offers a list of sample ideologies to help you get started.

Box 35.1 Examples of Ideologies

Agricultural sustainability
Atheism
Buddhism
Christianity
Collectivism
Conservativism
Consumerism
Democracy
Egalitarianism
Environmentalism
Fair trade
Feminism
Hegemonic masculinity
Heteronormativity
Hinduism
Humanism
Idealism
Imperialism

Individualism
Islam
Judaism
Liberalism
Libertarianism
Locotarianism (food movement)
Marxism
Nationalism
Neoliberalism
Nihilism
Pacifism
Patriotism
Racism
Realism
Sexism
Social Darwinism
Socialism
Technological utopianism

Hegemonic Ideologies



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In addition to naming the ideology, identify if it is hegemonic or resistant. A **hegemonic ideology** is an ideology that has become a predominant way of seeing the world and serves the interests of those who hold institutional or social power. You will know an ideology is a predominant viewpoint because it is promoted, practiced, or reinforced through institutional (social, economic, educational, political, and religious) practices and policies, and it is likely reflected in majority opinions.



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Hegemonic ideologies typically privilege people who hold positions of power and/or who have dominantly situated positionalities. In chapter 7, we drew on standpoint theory to explain that our social identities influence our knowledge of the world and our perceptions of what is "true" or "normal." Dominantly situated identities—such as those perceived as white, able-bodied, or native English speaking—occupy positions of social privilege. They are granted more social power and prestige than their marginally situated counterparts, such as those perceived as nonwhite, physically disabled, or nonnative English speaking. Hegemonic ideologies typically promote values and beliefs that reinforce the power of dominantly situated identities, though we often are unaware of this function.

Indeed, hegemonic ideologies are so predominant that most people perceive their values and beliefs as given. That is, these ideologies seem natural, commonsensical, or even ordained by god. In the United States, for example, we might identify such hegemonic ideologies as the following:

- Christianity
- individualism
- heteronormativity

You might support and adhere to one or more of these ideologies. We all support some hegemonic ideologies because we find their beliefs valid and their values laudable. Frankly, it's very difficult to reject all hegemonic ideologies and belong to a society.

Remember, though, that hegemonic ideologies typically serve the needs and interests of dominantly situated

positionalities while ignoring, downplaying, or rejecting the needs and interests of marginally situated positionalities (locally or globally). We'll return to this notion when we discuss the step of interpreting your artifact's ideological work. The point here is that it is helpful to identify if the ideology communicated by your artifact is hegemonic and, if so, if your artifact reinforces this ideology or calls it into question.

Box 35.2 Naming Hegemonic Ideologies in #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

In the previous chapter, we introduced you to a Twitter (now X) campaign named #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. It began on August 10, 2014, one day after Missouri police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed a young, Black man named Michael Brown. The campaign sought to highlight the news media's repeated habit of publicizing pictures of Black people that make them appear potentially menacing.

In tweets, African American participants paired two photos, with one photo presenting themselves in a potentially negative light and the other photo depicting themselves in a more positive light (as graduates, parents, public servants, etc.). In most cases, the person posting included the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to provoke viewers to wonder which photo the news media would publicize if a police officer killed the person posting.

> Yes let's do that: Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunnedMeDown pic.twitter.com/Ng0pUlxWhr
>
> — C.J. Lawrence (@CJLawrenceEsq) August 10, 2014

We return to this example in this chapter to illustrate the description, interpretation, and evaluation steps of ideological criticism. Here we begin with description by naming the ideologies the tweets elevated or challenged.

In the case of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown tweets, we can identify **racism** as the **hegemonic ideology** communicated *and* challenged.

In each tweet, the rhetor provided a photograph that portrayed a person of color in ways that **could *trigger racist associations*** of Black people with criminality. In the US, racism is hegemonic, sadly; its ongoing influence can be found in social, legal, educational, political, and religious institutions, and it serves the dominantly situated positionality of whiteness by associating it, in contrast, with purity and innocence.[1]

The tweets ***challenged* racism** by pairing each photograph with a second that portrayed the same person in roles and activities we typically celebrate (as a soldier, graduate, parent, etc.). The pairing made clear that the racist associations with one set of images were unfair and racially biased.

1. Lisa Flores, "Between Abundance and Marginalization: The Imperative of Racial Rhetorical Criticism," *Review of Communication* 16, no. 1 (2016): 4–24.

Resistant Ideologies



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Just as there are hegemonic ideologies, there are also resistant ideologies. A **resistant ideology** is one that directly challenges a hegemonic ideology. To revisit our earlier examples,

Egalitarianism	resist(s)	heteronormativity.
Collectivism		individualism.
Alternative religious systems (Hinduism, Islam, etc.) or nonreligious ideologies (atheism)		Christianity.

Artifacts that challenge hegemonic ideologies often (but not always) also promote a resistant ideology.

Box 35.3 Naming Resistant Ideologies in #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

We might argue that the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown tweets promoted the resistant ideology of **humanism** as they sought to challenge the racial bias in typical photographs circulated by the media of Black individuals. By pairing two very different photographs of themselves, the rhetors reminded viewers of how **we all pose and appear differently** in varied contexts. They prompted viewers to realize we all have at least two images of ourselves that might prompt very different conclusions about us. In doing so, the tweets **promoted the belief** in our common human experience as well as the **value** of emphasizing our shared connections.

Describe the Artifact's Rhetorical Symbols That Communicate the Ideology

In addition to naming the ideology communicated by the artifact and identifying it as hegemonic or resistant, you must specify *how* the artifact communicates the ideology.

Focus on the artifact's *verbal*, *nonverbal*, *visual*, *and audio symbols* that convey its ideological message. For instance, if your artifact is a photograph,



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- How is it visually framed or cropped?
- Is it in black and white or color?
- What is the eye drawn to first?
- Is there text within the photograph itself or superimposed on the photograph?

If your artifact is a music video,

- What lyrics accompany what scenes?
- How are scenes visually shot?
- How is the singer or character in the video dressed?
- What does the lighting emphasize or what is placed in the shadows?
- How does the music change in volume and tempo as the video progresses?

Also consider who or what is *missing* from your artifact. Use your reconstruction of the historical context to notice conspicuous absences. Overall, look closely at the artifact and help your audience understand how its rhetorical features and absences communicate the ideology.

Box 35.4 Rhetorical Symbols to Describe and Interpret in Ideological Criticism

- **verbal symbols**: word choice, juxtaposition of words with visual or audio features
- **nonverbal symbols:** appearance, facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact, physical movement
- **visual symbols:** color, lighting, framing, font of text in the image, camera angle, distance, editing or juxtaposition of images, symbols, materials used, size
- **audio symbols:** sound quality, tempo, pitch, volume, juxtaposition of sound with visual or verbal features
- **absence:** based on your reconstruction of the context, who or what is conspicuously missing or downplayed by the artifact

Which Comes First? Naming the Ideology or Describing the Artifact's Rhetorical Symbols?

Describing an artifact's rhetorical symbols goes hand in hand with identifying the artifact's ideology. You can tackle them together.

However, you may find it helpful to *begin with* the artifact's rhetorical *symbols* and use them to help you name the ideology the artifact communicates. You can, in other words, *work backward* from the rhetorical symbols to naming the ideology:

- Spend time with your artifact and list its most striking rhetorical *symbols*, whether they are verbal, nonverbal, visual, or audio, as well as any glaring absences.
- Identify the *belief or value* each symbol communicates or challenges. This may take some time.
- Then look over your list and decide what *ideology* pulls the beliefs and values together into a coherent perspective. You may find it helpful to look back through the sample ideologies in box 35.1 or talk with your instructor for help.

Box 35.5 Moving from Describing the Rhetorical Symbols of, to Naming the Ideologies Communicated by, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown Posts

If we were unsure of what ideologies the Twitter (now X) posts communicate, we might focus initially on their rhetorical symbols. We would probably begin by listing patterns in the **visual and nonverbal contrasts** between the photographs coupled together, including their differing

- physical settings,
- lighting,
- facial expressions,
- camera angles, and
- ways the subject is depicted in their attire, expression, gestures, or activity.

We could then move to the **beliefs and values** these features communicate.

- We might notice, for example, that the visual imagery in one group of photographs can be read through a racist lens as suggesting a threat (or guilt).
- The other group of photos communicates innocence by depicting success, pride, joy, and devotion.

We might next consider the consistent **verbal feature** in the posts. The hashtag "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown" returns to **beliefs** of guilt and innocence but flips the racist script. It suggests that "They" (the police) are guilty of killing or harming "Me," the innocent Black person depicted in both photos. Through visual, verbal, and nonverbal features together, then, the tweets promoted the **belief (and values)** that if the police unfairly acted violently against the rhetor, one photo would showcase the rhetor's innocence while one might imply the victim was the perpetrator.

The tweets' communication of these beliefs and values, *along with their historical context of appearing the day after NBC News publicized a particular image of Michael Brown*, can help us piece together the ideologies they communicate. They illuminated and challenged the **hegemonic ideology of racism** at work in photos more often selected by the media by pairing them with photos the media *could have selected* that communicate the **resistant ideology of humanism**.

Taking time to carefully list all the significant rhetorical symbols of your artifact—and identify what value or belief each communicates—will serve you well. Most directly, it will help you *name the ideology* communicated by the artifact.

In addition, such work will aid you in identifying and explaining to your audience the *specific beliefs and values* that compose that ideology. It's not enough to name the ideology; you need to briefly define and describe its contents as well.

Further, such preparation will also help you name and point out *specific rhetorical symbols* that communicate the ideology. You may want to pair your descriptions with well-designed visual aids or include an audio or video clip that focuses attention on specific rhetorical symbols. They can help supply evidence needed for your claims about the artifact's ideological messaging. If you jump to your interpretations without pointing out the presence of ideological features in your artifact, your interpretation will lack validity.



Created by cheed from Noun Project

Finally, listing your artifact's rhetorical symbols will set you up well to make *interpretations*, which is what we turn to next.

Interpreting How the Artifact Exercises Power and Control

If you only identify an artifact's ideology and rhetorical symbols but don't interpret how they function persuasively, you will mostly have summarized or narrated the artifact. You will miss its symbolic action.

To *interpret* an artifact using ideological criticism, infer how it uses an ideology to exercise power and control. We will unpack what that means—and explain how to do it—by providing the concept of agency as well as additional factors to consider when your artifact supports a hegemonic ideology, when it resists a hegemonic ideology, and when it does not neatly do either.

Agency

Agency is an individual's ability to act freely or to independently intervene in a situation, their own life, and the world. When you analyze an artifact for agency, you interpret how the *artifact depicts* an individual or group's freedom to act. Agency is particularly important in ideological criticism because it helps you discover how artifacts employ ideologies in ways that attempt to expand or contract the liberty of others. You can also reveal the ways democratic participants can resist such messages.



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Box 35.6 Agency in #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

If we return to the tweets, we see how the paired photographs drew attention to the **agency exercised by major news corporations** like NBC News over the images they select to report stories involving people of color. The posts suggested that of the photographs publicly available, **the news media *chose*** an image that could be damning when reporting about crime or violence. Relatedly, the posts highlighted the ***lack* of agency that people of color**, such as Brown, have over how they are depicted by the news media.



Image by John Hain via Pixabay, *Pixabay Content License*.

By posting the paired images, however, **Twitter (now X) users asserted their own agency** and invited audiences to join them in seeking social change. C. J. Lawrence sparked the broad participation through his original tweet when he said, "Yes let's do that: Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunnedMeDown." He later shared in an interview that "When I say, 'Yes, let's do that,' my intention was that people would

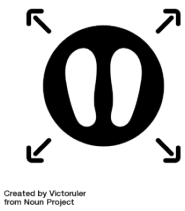
participate."[2] His use of "let's" **called out to readers who shared his frustrations to join the campaign**. As they did, they promoted positive images of Black individuals, **reclaiming some of their agency** and **circumventing the major news media's gatekeeping**. These photos helped promote the ideology of humanism by depicting themselves in ways all viewers could relate to and identify with.

When you interpret your artifact's persuasive functions, ask how it renders an individual's or group's agency, using the prompts in box 35.7. Your interpretations of agency can and should contribute to your analysis of how your artifact supported hegemonic ideologies, resisted hegemonic ideologies, or both.

Box 35.7 Questions to Ask About Agency

- How much and what type of freedom does the artifact depict people as having or exercising? Which people?
- How does the artifact depict an individual or group as lacking freedom or being controlled by or under the power of others?
- Does the artifact conspicuously exclude anyone? If so, how might their exclusion attempt to restrict or expand their or others' agency?
- How does the artifact's depiction of agency help justify or challenge a particular ideology, especially given the historical context?

When Your Artifact Supports a Hegemonic Ideology



Created by Victoruler from Noun Project

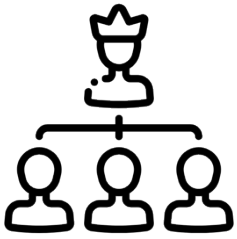
Remember that a hegemonic ideology is a set of values, beliefs, interpretations, and assumptions that becomes a predominant viewpoint and serves the political and economic interests of dominantly situated positionalities. Consequently, they are typically used to portray and legitimize those standpoints as superior to marginally situated positionalities.

If your artifact reinforces a hegemonic ideology, then interpret how the artifact uses that ideology to exercise power and control. Use the questions in box 35.8 to guide your interpretations.

2. Ethan Zuckerman, "#iftheygunnedmedown Six Years Later, and Just as Vital—an Interview with Activist C. J. Lawrence," *Ethan Zuckerman* (blog), June 5, 2020, https://ethanzuckerman.com/2020/06/05/iftheygunnedmedown-six-years-later-and-just-as-vital-an-interview-with-activist-c-j-lawrence/.

Box 35.8 Questions to Ask When an Artifact Supports a Hegemonic Ideology

- Who or what does the artifact depict as desirable, moral, innocent, trustworthy, normal, and/or good-natured? Are they dominantly situated positionalities? How does the artifact encourage audiences to side with them?
- Who or what does the artifact define as undesirable, immoral, guilty, sneaky, abnormal, and/or threatening? Are they marginally situated positionalities? How does the artifact encourage audiences



Created by agus raharjo from Noun Project

to reject or disapprove of them?
- What way of acting or behaving in the world is highlighted—or even praised—in the artifact? What ideas, beliefs, or values does the artifact obscure or hide—or perhaps overtly discredit?
- What **hierarchies**—unequal ranking(s) of people or groups—does the artifact produce through its ideological messaging? Hierarchies can consist of multiple, ranked groups.
- How does the artifact use hierarchies to try to justify or legitimate particular actions or policies? To serve the needs of those in power? To ignore, downplay, or reject the needs of marginally situated positionalities?
- How does the artifact present the ideological beliefs, values, and depictions as natural or normal? How does it discourage audiences from questioning it?

Box 35.9 Interpreting How News Media Imagery Exercises Power and Control

When the news media include a picture of the subject they are reporting about in their story, they don't typically encourage consumers to reflect on this choice. Little or no information is given about where journalists found the picture or its original context (e.g., at a Halloween party, goofing around). Consequently, their selection implies that's who the person depicted "is."

Depictions: As we've established, NBC News publicized a photograph of Brown wearing a Nike Air tank top, staring down at the camera with no smile, and showing a hand signal. This picture is innocuous on its own. But paired with the tweet's caption, "Unarmed Missouri teen killed by officer after 'physical confrontation,'" the photo could be read as implying that Brown, though unarmed, prompted or even participated in the confrontation. This reading is encouraged by and reinforces the hegemonic, racist depiction of African American men as threats. By implication, this reading also implies that the (white) police officer who killed Brown acted reasonably.

Hierarchy: Together, the image and caption suggest a legal and racial hierarchy where the white police officer is depicted as morally and legally superior to the African American teenager.

Support for powerful people and institutions: Such depictions implicitly (and unfairly) attempt to justify or explain police officers' use of violent force against African American men. Thus, images and captions like the one NBC News used for Brown serve the interests of those in positions of power (such as police officers) within the legal system.

Normalization: By selecting yet another potentially damning image of a Black man, the NBC News post helped renaturalize the association of Blackness with crime. It perpetuated racism.

When Your Artifact Challenges a Hegemonic Ideology

Artifacts can, alternatively, *challenge* a hegemonic ideology, often by exposing the hegemonic ideology as a social construct. A **social construct** is a category, idea, or description that humans have created to explain reality. The important idea here is that a social construct is a product of human language and interactions rather than something biological, natural, or ordained by God.



Gender: Social Construct by Steve Rhodes via Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA.

The goal of artifacts that challenge hegemonic ideologies is to expose them as social constructs that are human rather than natural conceptions—and therefore alterable. Do women make inferior soldiers, or is that a social construct? Are fathers inherently less nurturing than mothers, or does that explanation enable fathers to spend more time in the workplace and mothers more time at home with children?

For artifacts that challenge hegemonic ideologies, explain to your audience how your artifact exposed a hegemonic ideology as a human (and flawed) production that can and should be changed.

Artifacts that challenge a hegemonic ideology often do so by advocating a resistant ideology. Recall that a resistant ideology is one that directly challenges and counters a hegemonic ideology. In such cases, the critic may also ask how the resistant ideology offers an alternative depiction (or counterpresentation) of dominantly and marginally situated identities. Does the resistant ideology replace a hierarchy with a new hierarchy (perhaps with the groups' positions switched) or a more equitable or egalitarian depiction?



Created by uyun from Noun Project

Box 35.10 Questions to Ask When an Artifact Resists Hegemonic Ideology

- How do the artifact's verbal, nonverbal, visual, or audio symbols challenge a hegemonic ideology? What does the artifact suggest is wrong with our collective way of seeing?

- What social constructs does the artifact challenge or expose?
- What hierarchy does the artifact resist?
- How does the artifact promote a resistant ideology that runs counter to a hegemonic ideology?
- What does the artifact replace the hierarchy with: a new hierarchy (that depicts a dominant group in an unflattering way and/or presents those with less societal power favorably) or a more equitable or egalitarian depiction of individuals and groups?

Box 35.11 Interpreting How #IfTheyGunnedMeDown Exercised Power and Control

Challenge hegemonic ideology: The tweets posted under #IfTheyGunnedMeDown directly countered the racism perpetuated by the news media's choice of potentially damning images of Black people by promoting the resistant ideology of humanism. This ideology was communicated through the pairing of photographs.

Replace hierarchy with an egalitarian depiction: As we established earlier, by pairing contrasting photos, the rhetors reminded viewers of how we all pose and appear differently in varied contexts. All of us have selfies that may not reflect positively on us when viewed out of context. This belief directly resisted the racist hierarchy that oppressed African Americans as threats.

The other set of photos invited viewers to identify with Black subjects through their depiction in roles (as parents, graduates, soldiers, etc.) and doing actions (nurturing, graduating, serving, etc.) that we collectively celebrate. Such identification produced egalitarianism in our shared humanity.

Reveal a social construct: By countering racism with humanism, the paired photos revealed depictions of Black people as threats *as* a social construct—one that could easily be replaced with depictions of the same people as productive members of society.

But What If My Artifact....?

Perhaps your artifact does not neatly fit into the two previous categories. Not all artifacts wholly reinforce or resist hegemonic ideologies.



Teacher Asking a Question by Max Fischer via Pexels, Pexels License.

You may choose an artifact, for instance, that offers resistance but not in the ways we've established. Some rhetors seek to redefine the meaning or application of a hegemonic ideology. Imagine a YouTube video that refers to public school teachers as exemplars of patriotism and recognizes their sacrifice and dedication to their country. Such a video might leave intact the values and beliefs associated with the hegemonic ideology of patriotism but resist its typical narrowed application to military veterans or government workers. As a critic, you might use the guidance in the previous sections to consider how the artifact *both upholds and resists* a hegemonic ideology.

Other artifacts challenge resistant ideologies and seek to reinstate hegemonic beliefs and values. You might hear a sermon, for example, that critiques egalitarianism when it comes to gender nonbinary people and upholds a gender binary by supporting religious fundamentalism. In such cases, use the guidance provided in the previous section for *when artifacts reinforce hegemonic ideologies*. You might add to that your consideration of how the artifact strives to counter a resistant ideology by depicting *it* as a social construct.

A final word of caution about interpretation in ideological criticism: Not everything that is interesting about your artifact and its context may make it into your critique. You are looking, in particular, for one of two things:

- First, you might explain how symbols in your artifact reinforce a particular set of beliefs and behaviors as "natural" when, in fact, these beliefs or behaviors are socially constructed, and how that ideology produces a hierarchy among individuals or groups, perhaps to try to justify a policy or action.
- Second, you may illuminate how symbols in your artifact explicitly challenge a hegemonic ideology and suggest that we can and should think and act differently—especially for the benefit of those groups that are traditionally silenced, overlooked, or politically and economically oppressed.

Box 35.12 Gender Critique as a Form of Ideological Criticism

Questions and assumptions about gender are often rooted in ideology. Philosophers and rhetorical critics see many commonly held ideas about gender as social constructs.

If this is a topic that interests you, you might wish to focus your critique on how gender is portrayed and prescribed in your artifact. Does your artifact reinforce the hegemonic belief about gender as a binary (i.e., men and women as separate and different), or does it challenge that assumption, such as by depicting gender as fluid or as existing along a spectrum? Do you see your artifact's portrayals of people as limiting or policing what's considered appropriately masculine or feminine? Do you want to argue that your artifact is working to expand what the culture defines as acceptable behavior and gender expression? If your answer to these (and similar) questions is yes, then your ideological criticism is performing a gender critique.

Evaluating the Rhetorical Artifact

We wrote this chapter because we are interested in educating civically engaged critics. We believe you are more able to participate in and shape democratic organizations when you can recognize how rhetoric and ideology influence ideas and exert social control.

With this in mind, the final step to any rhetorical critique is to help your audiences understand how your artifact relates to democratic principles and practices. In chapter 31, we defined democratic principles as the behavioral standards necessary for democratic governance to exist and thrive, and we gave examples such as the rule of law, the unity or shared identity of community members, and the open and thoughtful engagement of public issues, arguments, and positions.

In your ideological criticism, make certain to argue how the artifact strengthens or weakens democratic principles so your audience members are equipped to be fuller participants in a democratic society.



Facade of the Capitol Building by Ramaz Bluashvili via Pexels, Pexels License.

Did the Artifact Strengthen Democratic Principles? How?



Created by Wilson Joseph from Noun Project

In chapter 33, we explained that an artifact can strengthen democracy *directly* by explicitly advocating democratic principles or *indirectly* by modeling or practicing the principles. We further explained that any artifact that practices *responsible productive discourse* indirectly reinforces democratic principles because it, as defined in chapter 4, draws on the qualities of productive discourse to produce a more inclusive and equitable public sphere. You might, then, illustrate how your artifact strengthens democratic principles by showing the following:

- how it explicitly advocates for specific democratic principles
- how it illustrates qualities of productive discourse
- how it sparks discussion about an overlooked and ongoing societal problem
- how it expands the public sphere by including historically marginalized members of the public and empowering them to act as democratic participants
- how it questions the power of historically dominant members of the public rather than unreflectively granting their perspectives authority

Did the Artifact Weaken Democratic Principles? How?

Artifacts that weaken democratic principles tend *not* to do the things we just listed. You likely have an artifact that discourages democratic principles if you see that your artifact

- explicitly calls for the dismissal of democratic principles, subjugates them to other values, or refuses their application to particular groups of people;
- exemplifies qualities of unproductive discourse;
- quells discussion about an overlooked and ongoing societal problem;
- restricts the public sphere by actively excluding or denigrating historically marginalized voices; or
- preserves the power of historically dominant groups by uncritically accepting their perspectives.

Box 35.13 Evaluating #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

The Twitter (now X) phenomenon that paired photos of young people of color **supported** the democratic principles of **free speech and the participation of people in civic affairs** by **empowering** the young people—whose voices had historically been largely excluded from news coverage—to tell their own stories. Participants' posts **sparked a discussion** about the ongoing but often overlooked issue of racism in the news media and **questioned** the media's historic power to shape audiences' perceptions of the people they cover. The tweets also imagined **equality** by offering images that better matched the news media's typical, and more humanizing, photographs of white individuals.

By revealing how such posts upheld democratic principles, an ideological analysis of the paired images can help viewers better understand the photographs as rhetorical artifacts functioning persuasively in our world.



People protesting by Vlad Tchompalov via Unsplash, *Unsplash License*.

The important point is that ideological criticism is ultimately interested in *social change*. Will a critique of Twitter (now X) posts change the way US news outlets select pictures for their publications? Maybe not. Perhaps all an analysis of the Twitter/X feed will do is plant a seed of awareness that will move some audiences to think differently about the way they receive news and the way members of their community are portrayed in the media. Such seeds of awareness, however, have the power to grow and reshape culture when enough people take notice. The power of consciousness raising should not be ignored, as it encourages the sharing of diverse opinions, talents, and knowledge for the good of the whole.

Ultimately, however, ideological critique is most powerful—and most true to its roots—when it opens avenues for more people to participate in their society, culture, and government. An ideological critique should move people to respond and to respond with action. The original proponents of ideological criticism wanted their analyses to help change social structures and material conditions.

As you craft your ideological critique, invite your audience to participate in an action or protest to counter

the form of ideological control you analyze or to support the challenge you investigated. You might model such action by producing and publicizing your own artifact that ideologically counters the one you analyzed. Similar to Lawrence's original tweet, invite your audience to join your efforts. Whatever you do, make your insights available to the public, and invite them to *move* on this evidence.

Professor of communication James Arnt Aune makes the point this way:

> There remains the risk…of the scholastic illusion that "raising consciousness" will create liberation, failing to recognize the inertia which results from the inscription of social structures in bodies.
>
> Radical social change—dare I say "revolution"?—appears to come when bodies learn to move in different ways, when Rosa Parks refuses to move, when drag queens riot at Stonewall, when Egyptians take to the streets against Mubarak, or when workers of all kinds shut down the Wisconsin State Capitol Building.[3]

Summary

As a method of criticism, ideological analysis exposes the ideology communicated by a rhetorical artifact and interprets how the artifact exercises power and control. But this method is also deeply invested in the health of our democracy and social change. Ideological criticism's goal is to help audiences resist ideological messages that constrict democratic participation and support those that expand such engagement.

- To analyze an artifact, the critic names the ideology communicated by the artifact, identifies it as hegemonic or resistant, and describes the verbal, nonverbal, visual, and audio features that convey the ideology's beliefs and values.
- When an ideology gains enough adherents that it becomes a predominant viewpoint and serves the interests of those in power, we say it is a hegemonic ideology.
- Ideologies can also be resistant. Those that are established to counter or challenge a hegemonic ideology are called resistant ideologies.
- The critic interprets how the artifact uses the ideology to exercise power and control.
- Because ideological criticism is deeply invested in social change, it is important that critics evaluate how the artifact's ideological assumptions elevate or challenge democratic principles. These evaluations themselves can function as acts of resistance and open ways for democratic participants to enact social change.

3. James Arnt Aune, "The Scholastic Fallacy, Habitus, and Symbolic Violence: Pierre Bourdieu and the Prospects of Ideology Criticism," *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 4 (2011): 432.

Key Terms

agency
hegemonic ideology
hierarchy
resistant ideology
social construct

Review Questions

1. Explain the difference between hegemonic ideology and resistant ideology.
2. What kinds of rhetorical symbols might you describe when arguing that an artifact communicates a particular ideology?
3. What types of questions might you ask and answer when interpreting how a hegemonic ideology exercised power and control? A resistant ideology?
4. What is the ultimate goal of ideological criticism?

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a current television commercial or music video that bothers you for some reason (for example, the way it portrays a group you belong to or a group you don't belong to). Explain to your classmates why you find the commercial problematic. Can you identify an ideology at work in the artifact?
2. What ideologies do you think are good or useful? Which are bad or harmful? Explain.
3. What is an example of an artifact exercising power and control? Over whom? How?
4. Does resistance work? In other words, can you think of a time when resistance to a hegemonic ideology made a marked difference in people's lives?

Appendix A: Sample Preparation Outline for an Informative Speech

Note: This outline is modeled on the informative speech for deliberation that we teach in chapter 20. There we suggest you think of this speech's pattern as a problem-alternatives-solution arrangement without the solution. This is ultimately what makes it more of an informative than an advocacy speech.

Javon's Speech to Inform Community Members About Multiple Perspectives on High School Football and Concussions Before They Engage in a Deliberative Discussion

Pattern of Arrangement: Problem-Alternatives-Solution (Without the Solution)



Football players by Muyuan Ma via Unsplash, Unsplash License.

Specific purpose: To inform community members about the problem of concussions in high school football and a range of approaches to solving the problem they should consider before they deliberate on the topic.

The purpose statement is not spoken in delivery, but it can add focus to the outlining process—it reminds you what your speech should do.

I. Introduction

A. Three weeks ago, after our favorite local quarterback, Brian Ramos, suffered a severe concussion during the homecoming football game—the fourth football player on our team to suffer a concussion this season—it seemed everyone in Columbus was an expert on concussions.

Begin decisively and get attention. Javon chooses the strategy of naming a well-known local figure and reminding the audience of an important event in their recent past (the injury to a local high school football player). This helps him connect with his audience.

1. Parents blamed coaches for not protecting "our" kids.
2. Coaches claimed school districts did not provide adequate funding for athletic trainers and on-the-field medical care.

Notice that each element in this outline is phrased as a full sentence. This helps ensure (and illustrates to your professor) that you have outlined a complete thought.

3. Parents and coaches both blamed players who downplayed their injuries so they wouldn't be cut from games.
4. If you turned on the TV, it seemed Americans across the country were blaming "football culture" for glorifying violence and aggression at the expense of players' health.

B. As "the great concussion debate" came to our town, we all agreed that Columbus needed fewer concussions,

but at the same time, many of us feared the beloved game of football might suffer under a cloud of reactionism and misunderstanding.

Javon compels his audience to listen by appealing to a common feeling.

C. As a member of the football team and as a concerned friend, I would also like to see fewer concussions on the field. But while changes in high school football programs and culture may be needed, we know that looking at a problem from only one angle is a poor way to make community decisions.

By stating his own stake in the problem, Javon builds his ethos and increases the audience's trust that he will approach the topic thoughtfully.

D. **(Thesis)** So the *first thing* we in Columbus need is a fuller understanding of the problem, as well as multiple perspectives on addressing concussions in high school football, before we are ready to advocate and implement specific changes. With this goal in mind, *the question that guides my speech this morning is, How can we best address the issue of concussions in high school football?*

State and clearly label the thesis. In an outline to inform your audience in advance of a deliberative discussion, the thesis is a focusing or guiding question. See Riley's outline in Appendix B for a more traditional thesis.

E. I will first outline the problem of concussions and youth sports and then turn to three different approaches for how to solve this problem. The three approaches include, first, redirecting resources away from the football program and toward healthier sports and activities; second, changing the culture of football; and third, providing more funding for medical expertise.

The preview is an element that also signals the end of the introduction. It tells the audience where the speech is going and what to listen for next.

* **(Transition)** I will begin, however, by outlining the problem we face as a community.

Transitions are clearly marked.

II. There is no denying that concussions are a real danger in football and youth sports in general. They are considered a mild type of traumatic brain injury (or TBI).

A. According to an October 29, 2024, report entitled "TBI Data" produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are more than 586 traumatic brain injury–related hospitalizations and 190 TBI-related deaths per day ("TBI data"). Football is a contributor to these numbers.

Sub-subpoints are outlined as separate points rather than written together as a single paragraph.

1. According to a study published in the 2021 edition of *Sports Health*, the sport most likely to see concussed male athletes is football (Chun et al.).

2. A February 23, 2021, study published in *Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach* by a group of eight coauthors found that kids aged six to fourteen years old who played tackle football experienced nearly fifteen times more head impacts during a game or practice compared to kids who played flag football (Waltazman et al.).

B. Athletes who have three or more concussions experience an enduring negative impact on cognitive function. According to a 2023 report by Donna Lu and Stephanie Convery for *The Guardian*, a study found the following:

1. Three concussions can permanently affect a person's ability to plan and pay attention.

2. Four concussions negatively impact memory and processing speeds.

3. Dr. Matthew Lennon, the study's lead author, clarified, "If you have multiple concussions in your teens, 20s, 30s and 40s, you will still be feeling the effects when you're 70 or 80" (Lu and Convery).

C. Despite these serious medical concerns, experts worry that many head injuries in high school sports go unreported (Breslow).

1. One reason may be the culture of football. A widely cited and NFL-funded study published in 2014, titled *Sports-Related Concussions in Youth*, reports that athletes are reluctant to report concussions and even are lax about following treatment plans when they have been diagnosed because it may not be perceived as "manly" to follow the doctor's orders (Graham et al., 7).

2. A second reason some concussions go unreported may be due to too few medical personnel being available for teams. According to a 2020 study of Massachusetts high schools that was published in

Arthroscopy, Sports Medicine, and Rehabilitation by six coauthors, "55% of the high schools" studied didn't "have a full-time athletic trainer and 50% did[n't] have a team physician" (Kahan et al.).

* **(Transition)** Now that I have covered the growing problem of concussions and the long-term medical risks that come with them, I will move to the first perspective on how to solve this problem.

III. The first solution that is gaining proponents in Columbus is to redirect resources away from the high school football program and toward healthier sports and activities.

A. This solution argues that the growing medical research on lifelong cognitive effects of concussions requires adults to make tough—even painful—decisions for kids' safety. Many parents are already effectively making this decision for kids by encouraging them to pursue sports like basketball and track and field. You now hear parents say, "My son can play any sport but football."

The principle of subordination is illustrated here and throughout the outline. The items listed as 1, 2, and 3 all refer to and support A.

1. One suggestion for implementation suggests the school district reallocate funds currently dedicated to football to developing other athletic activities and club sports that students can participate in *for a lifetime*.

a. Football—which has high rates of injury—is a sport players tend to outgrow with age and often leaves them with lingering ailments.

b. Clubs and teams that create skills and enthusiasm for hiking, golf, and canoeing teach students to love a physical activity they can participate in for years to come.

2. Another sample action—recognizing the loss of community spirit if we were to end our football program—would explore moving fall volleyball matches to Friday nights.

3. The value prioritized in this first solution is lifelong health. The approach embraces the necessity of sport and physical activity in the lives of young people, but it places more value on those sports that have a better track record of long participation and a pain-free lifestyle into adulthood.

Parallelism is also at work in this outline. Notice that under point A, there are three subpoints, and under point 1, there are two sub-subpoints (a and b). This is what we mean by "every little one has a little two."

B. The benefits of this approach are many, but I will name two of the most salient:

Each time Javon plans to orally cite a source, he includes the full spoken citation in what he will say. He also adds an in-text written citation in parentheses to help the professor find the source in the bibliography that follows his outline.

1. First, kids would still gain physical fitness while reducing head injuries and avoiding pressure to return to play quickly after a concussion. As Chase Ray explains in their 2018 article published in *City Scene Magazine*, "Non-contact sports…still provide all the same health benefits without encouraging physical collision between players" (Ray).

2. Second, we would invest as a community in students' lifetime involvement in low-impact sports. This turns schools back into educational institutions that put their resources into teaching and modeling lifetime physical fitness. It downplays what can sometimes feel like an obsession with varsity athletics, which provide a community pastime but can compete with the curriculum.

C. As with any approach, there are drawbacks to this one, and I will outline two of the most central.

1. First, football teaches many important lessons that are not easily replicated in another team sport and are certainly not taught in more individualized physical activities like hiking and canoeing.

2. Second, many, like Jonathan Chait in his 2014 column in *New York Magazine*, argue that football doesn't feed or promote aggression; rather—and especially in high school—it may provide a suitable channel for kids to express aggression. This outlet for aggression is not the same in other team sports like diving or golf (Chait).

* **(Transition)** Now that I have covered the first approach to the problem of concussions and youth sports in Columbus, I will move to the second approach.

Transitions continue throughout the speech. They only refer to the two sections of the speech they connect.

IV. The second approach to the problem of concussions in high school football calls for a change in football culture.

A. This approach argues that we need to change the culture of toughness that dominates football, for this pressure is a major contributing factor in concussions. The *Sports-Related Concussions in Youth* study I referred to in the introduction calls for a change in culture as one of its official recommendations. Players, parents, and fans can work together to make this change.

1. One sample action is to encourage players to express their feelings and create comfortable spaces for these conversations. Teams can mimic programs similar to Men of the House in Pittsburgh, which helps players redefine healthy masculinity, and by pointing athletes to NFL players who model and encourage such sharing, such as Bobby Wagner, Dak Prescott, and A. J. Brown (Stimmel; Vogt).

2. Another sample action encourages parents and fans to help by creating new mottos and catchphrases about safety. To counter mottos like "No pain, no gain," a new motto—like the one prominently placed on the CDC's *HEADS UP* educational materials—could be spread. It reads, "It's better to miss one game than the whole season" ("Concussion Poster").

3. This call to change football culture prioritizes the value of education. It believes that fans, parents, coaches, and teammates all need to learn that the game and the team cannot go on if individual players are expected to sacrifice their safety or welfare.

Notice that each solution requires Javon to articulate a common value that solution prioritizes. We discuss more about the specifics of this type of speech in chapters 20 and 21.

B. This approach foregrounds two benefits.

1. It tries to address the unhealthy aspects of hypermasculinity within football culture, like ignoring pain and ignoring the recovery protocols that may slow the chances of repeated concussions.

2. The education extends beyond players and coaches to include parents, fans, and community members who often perpetuate attitudes that celebrate players who sacrifice their bodies for the game.

C. But there are also drawbacks to this approach.

Notice that because this is an informative speech, Javon outlines the benefits and drawbacks of each solution. This will help his audience focus on the impact of a given solution during a deliberative discussion.

1. Many question whether the emphasis on the team and winning are so ingrained in football culture that they cannot be extricated. Cory McCune of The Bleacher Report stated a popular belief that there are two types of football cultures: "A winning culture and a losing culture. There is no in between." Though he was talking about collegiate football, many feel the same about high school sports (McCune).

2. The second drawback is time. Changing culture is a long project, and given the growing concern about football and concussions, we may need a quicker, more decisive solution.

* **(Transition)** Having looked at a second approach to the problem of concussions and youth sports in Columbus, I will move to the third and final option.

V. The third solution is to increase player safety on the field by helping coaches get better, more consistent medical care for high school players.

A. Advocates for this solution argue that increased access to trained medical professionals is likely to result in higher reporting of concussions and better postconcussion rehabilitation.

1. The first suggestion for this approach stresses that coaches encourage parents and community members to advocate for more and higher-quality student-athlete health care from school boards and community partners.

Internal signpost words like "first" and "second" remind the audience of the speaker's well-thought-out organization.

2. A second sample action mandates that schools should require football programs themselves to fund athletic-training services and on-the-sidelines medical expertise. For a football budget to be approved, a certified athletic trainer must be available to supervise and follow up with injured students both during the game and in the weeks after the injury.

3. This approach prioritizes the value of safety and insists that easy access to skilled medical care must be evenly distributed among players; it should not be a luxury.

B. I would like to highlight two of the many benefits of this approach.

1. First, it better ensures safety and good medical care for players and takes some of the burden off high school coaches. In a February 8, 2019, report for *InvestigateWest*, Lee van der Voo reported that a study of Oregon high schools discovered that high schools with athletic trainers were much more likely to diagnose concussions in high school football players.

2. Second, it is a fairer system. The risks of football are the same whether a student plays for a school with access to good medical care or not; we would end a two-tiered system of care for those who play by making sure every football program or school district offers skilled care to players.

C. There are also drawbacks to this approach.

1. The first is cost. Skilled personnel are costly, and many school districts might have to take money away from other programs if they were forced to provide skilled trainers or more nursing staff for athletics.

2. The second drawback is the possibility of medical personnel being pressured to not report concussions. A 2019 survey of college and university athletic trainers by the National Athletic Trainers Association found that 10% reported being pressured "to make a decision that was not in the best interest of a student athlete's health" (*Only Half of Collegiate Sports*).

* **(Transition)** Now that we have examined a third solution to the problem of concussions and high school football, I will conclude by reviewing what my speech has covered and then turn this topic over to you—the concerned community members—for deliberation.

VI. Conclusion

The conclusion is clearly labeled, and the content that follows is subordinated to the Roman numeral and label. In this conclusion, Javon reminds the audience of the problem that leads to the need for deliberation. He restates the focus question that appears as part of the thesis.

A. **(Thesis)** When Brian Ramos was injured during the homecoming game, it was clear our community was ready to *do* something about high school football and concussions. But *how* can we best address concussions in high school football? My speech today has used this focus question to explore three different solutions.

Next, Javon briefly summarizes the three solutions he covered.

B. The first solution we explored was to divert resources from the high school football program and invest in clubs and sports that kids can pursue for a lifetime. The second solution was to change the culture of football, specifically the aspect that encourages players to downplay or ignore their injuries. The final approach stressed the necessity of better-trained medical care to support coaches and players.

Javon closes by turning the question for deliberation over to the audience.

C. Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages. As you consider these solutions and weigh the values they prioritize, what do you think is the best way for Columbus to address our shared concern for our football players?

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A bibliography is an absolute must in ethical speech preparation. Ask your instructor about which citation style you should use.

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Appendix B: Sample Preparation Outline for a Persuasive Speech

Riley's Advocacy Speech for Animal Welfare Activism

Pattern of Arrangement: Problem-Alternatives-Solution



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Purpose statement: To urge audience members to become animal welfare educators in our county.

The purpose statement is an important focusing step in the speech-writing process but will be eliminated in delivery.

I. Introduction

A. In 2020, the Netflix documentary series *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem, and Madness* aired and became widely popular.

1. The series featured Joe Exotic, who owned an Oklahoma roadside zoo that mostly housed tigers and big cats. According to Sharon Guynup's January 4, 2020, *National Geographic* report, it was "one of the largest tiger breeding and cub-petting photo op attractions in the U.S." (Guynup).

2. *Tiger King* followed Exotic's feud with Carole Baskin, who ran a cat sanctuary and accused Exotic of animal abuse. Her threats caused Joe to attempt to murder Baskin by hiring two hitmen.

3. On April 2, 2018, Exotic was found guilty of two counts of murder-for-hire as well as seventeen wildlife charges. Specifically, according to Guynup, "Joe Exotic was convicted of killing five tigers, shooting them in the head to make room for other cats. He sold and trafficked tigers and other endangered species and falsified government documents to hide his activities in violation of federal laws" (Guynup).

The introduction should get attention. Riley chooses the strategy of naming a popular Netflix show that some audience members may recall.

B. Many of you may have heard of or even watched *Tiger King*, or you may have laughed at parodies and memes of Joe Exotic and Carole Baskin. But how many of us have focused on the animals who were treated cruelly?

C. Today I want to talk about this issue that is of great importance to me, and I know to many of you as well. I'm an animal lover, and I became aware of animal abuse in our county through my volunteer work at the animal shelter. I was saddened by the *Tiger King* story and was motivated to do something locally.

By turning from the national stage to the local county, Riley raises a need for their community to think about these issues. Stating Riley's own investment and acknowledging that some audience members care about animal rights helps Riley build credibility and audience engagement.

1. Animal abuse is not only an issue in Oklahoma or for big cats; we see animals abused right here in Montgomery County.

2. But the good news is, there are ways we can quickly and tangibly change the lives of local pets.

D. **(Thesis)** There are several ways to support our local animal control agency's power to remove and care for

abused animals in Montgomery County, but the most important thing you can do is to *increase awareness in our county so more people know what counts as abuse and how to report it.*

Thesis is clearly marked and stated.

E. In my speech, I will first establish the problem of animal neglect and cruelty in our county and state. Next, I will examine a frequently proposed solution and tell you why it will not make an immediate difference in the lives of our animal friends. Then I will advocate my preferred approach of educating the public about animal abuse, and I'll tell you specific ways you can help spread the word.

The preview is an important signpost. It tells the audience where you are going and helps them know what to listen for.

* (**Transition**): Let me begin with the problem.

II. Animals are being abused and neglected in our county and state.

A. According to a January 28, 2016, news report by WUSA9, a Rockville woman was discovered with sixty-six dogs in her home. Three of the dogs had to be euthanized immediately because of neglect. The woman was fined $1,000 and given six months in jail with the possibility of owning dogs again in the future ("Woman Arrested"; WUSA).

B. In the fall of 2023, dozens of cats and kittens were dumped in the Wheaton area. A group of animal rescuers said the cats were "scared and hungry" (Davison).

C. On March 18, 2024, Greg Wehner reported for Fox News that two Maryland men were charged with animal cruelty after the charred remains of seven dogs were found in a burn pile on their property along with the skeletal remains of several additional dogs (Wehner).

D. These are just the cases that drew news attention in our state. How many acts of cruelty do we not know about? Clearly, we need to do better for our animals.

* **(Transition)** Having addressed the problem of animal cruelty in our county and state, I will now turn to a potential solution to this problem.

This transition contains a mini summary and mini preview.

III. A frequently proposed solution in our county is that we stiffen penalties against abusers.

A. Advocates say the current legislation isn't tough enough.

1. According to the Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center, the current minimum fine of only $500 is given to anyone who fails to provide for their pet "proper vet care," "proper food or water," "proper space," and "proper shelter" ("Animal Control").

Here we see the required spoken citation of the source for the quotation that Riley includes.

2. The WUSA9 report I mentioned earlier states that the current penalty for people who neglect animals to the point that the animals have to be euthanized, like in the Rockville case, is a $1,000 fine and ninety days in jail.

B. Some people propose we toughen these penalties.

1. According to Lindsay Watt, in a March 9, 2022, report for Fox 5, Maryland Senate Bill 672 sought to increase the penalty for neglect to a $5,000 fine and three years in prison (Watts).

2. In 2018, the Maryland legislation considered a bill to outlaw the selling of cats and dogs at retail pet stores in order to end the existence of puppy mills that breed dogs in cruel conditions (Chason).

3. Advocates hope such laws would show that we take animal welfare seriously and deter offenders.

C. While I support tougher penalties, I don't think they are the best solution for increasing the quality of life for pets in our county for a couple of reasons.

1. First, they are hard and slow to pass. For example,

Riley uses internal signposts (first, second) to help the audience follow the progression of their argument.

a. Maryland's Senate Bill 672 died in committee.

b. The state bill against retail stores selling dogs and cats was signed into law in 2018, but it was then tied up in courts for two years until a judge upheld the ban (Chason).

2. Second, laws are difficult to enforce.

The principle of subordination is at work here and throughout the outline. Those items listed as a, b, c, and d are all in support of item 2.

a. Local animal control and welfare agencies must have knowledge of animal mistreatment in order to intervene, but much abuse takes place on private property, where witnesses are unlikely to see or hear it.

b. In addition, animal welfare agencies tend to lack personnel to look for and ticket those breaking the law.

c. Researchers refer to all of this as the "enforcement gap." In a 2022 article published in the journal *Animals*, M. B. Rodriquez Ferree explains that the "enforcement gap" occurs "between welfare legislation as declared, and the actual enforcement of that legislation." Rodriquez Ferre declares that this gap is "well-documented" (Rodriquez Ferre).

d. In a 2020 article in the same journal, Rochelle Morton and three coauthors identify causes for the enforcement gap occurring at multiple stages of the process, from reporting the abuse to court determinations (Morton et al.).

3. Consequently, passing tougher laws to address animal cruelty is difficult, slow, and hard to enforce.

* **(Transition)** Now that I have critiqued a popular solution for decreasing animal abuse in Montgomery County, I will next turn to my preferred approach.

IV. Instead of focusing more time and energy on changing laws, I recommend we take the more immediately effective approach of increasing awareness in our county so more people know what counts as animal abuse and how to report it.

A. A 2020 study published in *Animals* reviewed previous research on the enforcement gap (Morton et al.).

1. One study reviewed found that 27% of respondents did not know how to appropriately report a case of animal cruelty.

2. Another study reviewed discovered that the public did not understand what legally qualified as animal abuse.

3. The reviewers suggested that "rectification of reporting issues is likely best achieved through public education, focused on the identity of the appropriate enforcement agency and what constitutes an animal welfare offence" (Morton et al.).

B. There are also several ways you can participate in raising awareness to help the public know what counts as animal abuse and how to report it.

Notice how Riley ends their speech with a clear call to action and one that encourages civic engagement.

1. Use social media to broadcast pet news in our county.

a. Spread news about pet abuse and neglect to broaden awareness of this issue.

b. Spread news about current laws protecting animals.

c. Publicize agencies and phone numbers residents can call if they witness abuse or neglect.

d. Follow the Montgomery County Humane Society on Instagram and "like" them on Facebook.

2. Also, make and circulate posters and fact sheets about animal protection laws and phone numbers concerned residents can call if they are worried about the life of a local animal.

C. The solution of spreading awareness can have an effective, more immediate impact on the lives of neglected pets than waiting for the laws to change.

1. When residents are frequently reminded about the existing laws, they become more watchful of the needs of animals in their neighborhoods.

2. When they know where and how to report animal abuse, they are more likely to follow up on something they witness.

* **(Transition)** I explained what I believe to be the most viable and immediate solution to the problem of pet abuse and neglect, and so I turn to my conclusion.

Signaling the conclusion often makes the audience more attentive—but don't abuse this verbal device by using it more than once or using it too early in the speech.

V. Conclusion

A. **(Thesis)** In my speech today, I have argued that we should spread awareness about what counts as animal abuse and how to report it.

B. I explained that animal neglect and cruelty sadly exist in our county and state. I contended that we should not spend more time and energy on stiffer laws to penalize abusers because this approach is too difficult, slow, and hard to enforce. Instead, I encouraged you to spread awareness through social media posts and posters.

Riley restates the thesis and mentions their main points.

C. We can make a big difference in the lives of many animals and doing so is good for us. As the famous medical missionary Albert Schweitzer said, "Until he extends the circle of his compassion to all living things, man"—or we might say *humans* today—"will not himself find peace" (Global Animal).

Riley ends decisively with a memorable quotation.

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Appendix C: Sample Presentation Outline for an Extemporaneous Delivery

Javon's Speech to Inform Community Members About Multiple Perspectives on High School Football and Concussions Before They Engage in a Deliberative Discussion

Notice there is no purpose statement. Purpose statements are important for thinking and planning but are not part of the oral presentation itself.

I. Introduction

A. Brian Ramos's injury

1. Parents blamed coaches.
2. Coaches blamed school districts.
3. Both blamed players.
4. Media, whole country blamed "football culture."



[Football players](#) *by Muyuan Ma via Unsplash,* [Unsplash License](#).

Complete sentences are condensed. There is just enough for Javon to recall the thoughts he wants to convey. Not writing everything out word for word will encourage him to look up and connect with his audience, especially at the start of the speech.

B. Needed fewer concussions; feared football's benefits misunderstood.

C. Member of the team and a friend. Looking at a problem from one angle is a poor way to make decisions.

The thesis, however, is written out because it's important to get it right.

D. **(Thesis)** So the *first thing* we in Columbus need is a fuller understanding of the problem itself as well as multiple perspectives on concussions in high school football before we are ready to advocate and implement specific changes. With this goal in mind, *the question that guides my speech this morning is*, [SLOW DOWN] *How can we best address the issue of concussions in high school football?*

Javon added a delivery note here to remind himself to slow down so the audience will not miss his thesis statement.

E. Start by outlining problem. Then three solutions: **first** redirecting resources, **second** changing the culture of football, **third** more funding for medical expertise.

Notice that Javon put the different elements of his preview in bold so he can easily spot them during delivery. The bold print will help Javon see the parts of a longer point if he glances down at the notes partway through.

* **(Transition)** Begin by outlining the problem.

II. Concussions a real danger. Mild type of traumatic brain injury.

A. According to an October 29, 2024, report entitled "TBI Data" produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are more than 586 traumatic brain injury–related hospitalizations and 190 TBI-related deaths per day. Football is a contributor.

The keyword outline includes spoken citations, written out for accuracy. Javon underlines these citations as well to ensure he can easily find them while speaking extemporaneously. There is no need to include written in-text cita-

tions in a presentation outline, since you do not say those out loud. The presentation outline also does not include a bibliography.

1. According to a study published in the 2021 edition of *Sports Health*, the sport most likely to see concussed male athletes is football.

Notice that the information cited can also be written out for accuracy. However, Javon refers to eight coauthors rather than naming every one of them.

2. A February 23, 2021, study published in *Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach* by a group of eight coauthors found that kids aged six to fourteen years old who played tackle football experienced nearly fifteen times more head impacts during a game or practice compared to kids who played flag football. [PAUSE]

Javon includes a note to pause here to allow the prevalence of concussions to sink in for the audience before moving to his next subpoint.

B. Athletes with three or more concussions experience enduring negative impact. According to a 2023 report by Donna Lu and Stephanie Convery for *The Guardian*, a study found that:

1. Three concussions permanently affect ability to plan and to pay attention.
2. Four concussions negatively impact memory and processing speeds.
3. Dr. Matthew Lennon, the study's lead author, clarified, "If you have multiple concussions in your teens, 20s, 30s and 40s, you will still be feeling the effects when you're 70 or 80."

The coordination and parallelism of the outline remain. If Javon loses his place within point B, subpoint 1, he can more easily locate subpoints 2 and 3 to find his way again.

C. Many head injuries in high school sports go unreported.

1. One reason: The culture of football. A widely cited and NFL-funded study published in 2014, titled *Sports-Related Concussions in Youth*, reports that athletes are reluctant to report concussions and even lax about following treatment plans when they have been diagnosed because it may not be perceived as "manly" to follow the doctor's orders.
2. Second reason: Too few medical personnel available. According to a 2020 study of Massachusetts high schools that was published in *Arthroscopy, Sports Medicine, and Rehabilitation* by six coauthors, "55% of the high schools" studied didn't "have a full-time athletic trainer and 50% did[n't] have a team physician."

* **(Transition)** [LOUDER] **Now that** I covered the problem of concussions, **I will move** to the first perspective.

Javon adds a reminder here to say the transition a bit more loudly so the audience will take note of the shift to solutions.

III. First solution: Redirect resources.

A. Argues that adults make tough decisions. "My son can play any sport but football."

1. Sample action 1: Reallocate funds to sports students can play for a lifetime.
    a. Outgrow football but live with lingering ailments.
    b. Hiking, golf, and canoeing.
2. Sample action 2: Move volleyball to Friday nights.
3. Prioritizing value: Lifelong health.

B. Benefits:

1. Gain physical fitness and reduce concussions and pressure. Chase Ray explains in their 2018 article published in *City Scene Magazine*, "Non-contact sports…still provide all the same health benefits without encouraging physical collision between players."
2. Invest in lifetime fitness. Schools refocused as educational institutions.

C. Drawbacks:

1. Lessons of football.
2. Important outlet for ritualized aggression. Jonathan Chait, in his 2014 column in *New York Magazine*,

argues that football doesn't feed or promote aggression; rather—and especially in high school—it may provide a suitable channel for kids to express aggression. Not the same in diving or golf.

* **(Transition)** [PAUSE] **Having covered** the **first** solution, I will **move to the second solution**.

IV. Second solution: Change in culture of football.

A. Argues we change the culture of toughness that dominates football. The *Sports-Related Concussions in Youth* study I referred to in the introduction calls for a change in culture as one of its official recommendations.

1. Suggestion 1: Encourage players to express their feelings. Mimic Men of the House in Pittsburgh. Point to NFL players as models.

2. Suggestion 2: New catchphrases; CDC's *HEADS UP* educational materials: "It's better to miss one game than the whole season."

Direct quotations are written word for word so Javon states them accurately.

3. Prioritizing value: Education.

B. Benefits:

1. Addresses hypermasculinity.

2. Extends to parents, fans, and community members.

C. Drawbacks:

1. Possible? Change the game beyond recognition?

2. Time.

* **(Transition)** [LOUDER] **Having looked** at a **second** solution, I will **move to the third** and final solution.

Signposting language in transitions is bolded to help orient Javon during delivery.

V. Third solution: Better, more consistent medical care.

A. Argues that increased access likely to result in higher reporting.

1. Sample action 1: Advocate for better medical care with school boards and community partners.

2. Sample action 2: Require football programs to fund a certified athletic trainer.

3. Prioritizing value: Safety.

B. Benefits:

1. Ensures good medical care; takes some burden off coaches. In a February 8, 2019, report for *InvestigateWest*, Lee van der Voo reported that a study of Oregon high schools discovered that high schools with athletic trainers were much more likely to diagnose concussions in high school football players.

2. Fairer. Would end a two-tiered system of care.

C. Drawbacks:

1. Cost.

2. Medical personnel being pressured to not report. [SLOW] A 2019 survey of college and university athletic trainers by the National Athletic Trainers Association found that 10% reported being pressured "to make a decision that was not in the best interest of a student athlete's health."

Javon knows he tends to say this citation too quickly, so he leaves a note to slow down here.

* **(Transition) Now that** we examined a **third** solution, I will **conclude**.

VI. Conclusion

A. **(Thesis)** [LOUD] Brian Ramos's injury was the final straw. We had to do something. *But how can we best address concussions in high school football?* This has been my focus question.

The thesis is written fully out again.

B. The **first** solution: Divert resources. The **second** solution: Change the culture of football. The **third** solution: Advocate for better-trained medical care to support coaches.

C. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

[PAUSE] **What do *you* think is the best way for Columbus to address our shared concern for our football players?**

Javon concludes by turning his guiding question over to the audience for a deliberative discussion.

Glossary of Key Terms

accessibility: Whether and how easily an author can directly publish their work.
accuracy: The truthfulness or veracity of the information provided by a source.
active listening: When an audience participates in the speech by listening closely, critically, and constructively.
ad hominem: A fallacy that occurs when the person, rather than the argument, is attacked.
agency: An individual's ability to act freely or to independently intervene in a situation, their own life, and the world.
alignment: The deliberate placement of elements within a given visual aid slide or frame.
alliteration: The repetition of a single consonant in a sentence or series of sentences.
analogical reasoning: A type of reasoning in which there is an effort to prove a claim by comparing two situations or cases. Also known as reasoning from analogy.
anecdote: A form of evidence that offers a story or extended example in narrative form.
antithesis: The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, typically in the same sentence.
appeal to authority: A fallacy produced when the source is not a qualified authority on the topic, does not have firsthand knowledge of the issue, is perceived to have excessive bias, and/or their assumptions do not match the speaker's own.
appeal to common practice: A fallacy that occurs when the validity of the claim is based on the commonality or tradition of a belief or activity without any more specific offering of justification.
appeal to popularity: A fallacy that occurs when the validity of the claim is based on its popularity alone without any more specific offering of proof.
appearance: How a speaker looks while speaking.
appreciative listening: An attitude that allows for the enjoyment of a presentation, its aesthetics, and its style.
approach: In deliberation, this is a broad category of similar opinions on how to address a wicked problem, typically gathered around a shared logic and value.
argument: The advocacy of a belief, attitude, or course of action that is supported by evidence.
articulation: When a speaker says each word with clarity.
assertion: A claim that lacks an evidentiary basis and is offered without reason, support, or data.
attitude: A feeling or moral judgment about what is good or bad, right or wrong.
audience adaptation: Ways a speaker alters their speech, using audience analysis cues, to better achieve their speaking goals.
audience analysis: The practice of assessing factors that are likely to influence an audience's reception of a message.
audience-interactive visual aids: Visual aids that rely on the audience's input in real time to produce imagery.
authority: The expertise, power, or recognized knowledge a source has concerning a topic.
average: A type of statistic that seeks to numerically represent what is typical or common. An average may be calculated in terms of the mean, median, or mode.
background: Everything the audience can see behind or around a speaker within the camera's frame when they are speaking through a camera lens.
balance: In speech outlining, this dictates that each main idea receives roughly the same amount of time and attention in the speech.
begging the question: This fallacy occurs when the speaker fails to provide evidence for their claim and, instead, restates the claim in place of additional data. Also known as circular reasoning.
belief: An audience's conclusion about, or confidence in, what is or is not true or real.
bias: A predetermined commitment to a particular ideological or political perspective.
body movement: Positioning and motion of a speaker's body.
camera angle: The slant or viewpoint of the camera on the speaker when speaking through a camera lens.
camera distance: The length of space between a speaker and their camera when speaking through a camera lens.

camera framing: When speaking through a camera lens, this is the edges of what the camera allows the audience to see and what it cuts out from their visibility.

camera steadiness: The motion or stillness of the camera's frame when a speaker presents through a camera lens.

captive audience: An audience that is required to be in attendance.

categorical arrangement: A linear pattern of arrangement that uses a "category" of elements—such as parts, forms, functions, methods, characteristics, perspectives, or qualities of a topic—as its organizing principle.

causal reasoning: A type of reasoning in which a speaker claims an event is caused by a particular circumstance or action. Also known as reasoning from cause.

cause-effect arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that describes an existing situation or condition and then identifies or predicts the effects of that situation or condition.

certainty: In unproductive discourse, the exhibition of sureness about a position without recognizing its weaknesses or drawbacks. Lacks self-reflexivity or room for doubt.

chronological arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that uses time as its organizing principle.

citation: The provision of a source's basic identifying information.

civic: Those matters that relate to the city or citizens.

civic engagement: Participation in community organizations, institutions, and groups with the goal of contributing to the public good.

civil speech: Communication that maintains decorum by being respectful, dispassionate, and polite.

claim: What a speaker attempts to prove and wants an audience to accept.

closed question: A type of question that prompts a single, one-word answer.

combativeness: In unproductive discourse, the use of aggressive behavior toward other participants and alternative perspectives, such as repeated interrupting, emotionally charged labels and terms, yelling, and personal attacks. Lacks empathy toward other participants and views dissenting opinions as the opposition to be defeated.

common ground: Any perspectives, interests, values, or concerns shared by some or all members of a deliberative discussion.

communication apprehension: The fear or anxiety that arises when a speaker anticipates public speaking.

community standards: Expectations of ethical behavior agreed to implicitly or explicitly by a specific community or organization.

compiler: A service that gathers information from multiple sources and makes it available.

conclusion: A speech's closing.

concrete language: Words that ground ideas in examples from the physical world.

context: The conditions or situation within which rhetoric is produced.

contingency: A condition in which events and circumstances are dependent on several variables that evolve in unpredictable ways.

coordination: In speech outlining, this is the visual representation of the proper relationship between ideas.

counterargument: A claim or reasoning that opposes a speaker's own claim.

counterpublic: A gathering of people excluded or dissuaded from the public sphere. Raises issues ignored or trivialized by the broader public.

course of action: An audience's choice, behavior, or support for specific policies or procedures.

data: Material and reasons supporting the acceptance of a claim. Also called evidence.

database: An organized online storehouse of information that can easily be searched to retrieve desired sources.

deductive reasoning: Reasoning that moves from valid premises to a specific conclusion, often appearing in the classical form of the syllogism.

deliberation: In productive discourse, participants' critical engagement of arguments and positions rather than the people themselves. Participants seek and accept critique. They consider multiple solutions rather than a singular focus. In moderated discussions, this consists of a deliberative presentation of a problem and multiple options and a subsequent deliberative discussion of those options. Also referred to as the deliberative process.

deliberative discussion: A group conversation through which a community, guided by one or more moderators, examines a complex public problem and range of available solutions to ultimately arrive at a choice or conclusion.

deliberative framing: The naming or defining of an issue in a way all parties can agree upon and that encourages the fair and direct comparison of approaches.

deliberative presentation: A speech that strives to fairly and evenhandedly describe a civic problem and multiple approaches to solving the problem. Emphasis is placed on the benefits and drawbacks of each approach.

deliberative process: A deliberative presentation of a problem and multiple options and a subsequent deliberative discussion of those options. Also referred to as deliberation.

delivery: A speaker's physical conveyance of words and ideas, both vocally and nonverbally, to an audience.

demagogue: A person who employs demagoguery.

demagoguery: Rhetoric that explicitly claims to speak for the public's best interests but implicitly gains more political power for the speaker and exacerbates divisions among the public, thereby weakening democracy.

democracy: A political system that locates control and power in the people.

democratic participant: A person who participates in public conversations about issues in a democratic society.

democratic principles: Behavioral standards necessary for democratic governance to exist and thrive.

demographic factors: Personal characteristics that are likely to shape an audience's views and perspectives on a topic.

description: Noticing, identifying, and explaining a rhetorical artifact's content, form, and absence when engaging in rhetorical criticism.

dichotomous thinking: In unproductive discourse, debate between two (and only two) diametrically opposed and extreme positions instead of exploring additional perspectives or middle ground.

direct audience: The people who are exposed to and attend to a speech.

direct questions: Questions that target one individual and should be used sparingly to draw out timid group members.

discrete audience: An audience that is finite in number, typically limited to those individuals who show up for the speaking event at a particular day and time.

dishonest framing: The persuasive use of language that manipulates facts and promotes disinformation.

disinformation: The deliberate attempt to spread wrong information to mislead listeners.

dispersed audience: An audience that is unlimited by location and/or time.

distrust: In unproductive discourse, the suspicion of other participants' motives or goals. The presumption that they have a hidden agenda and thus a lack of faith in the honesty or authenticity of what they say.

division: In unproductive discourse, this refers to when speakers highlight and accentuate differences with other participants and their positions.

dogmatism: In unproductive discourse, the expression of familiar and even predictable talking points. Entrenched, predetermined positions.

dominantly situated positionality: A knower that does not occupy a position of social oppression (i.e., one that enjoys social privilege and power). They likely know *less* about oppression because they don't likely experience it.

empathetic listening: Listening that seeks to see the message and point from the speaker's perspective. It adopts a sense of care and responsibility that extends beyond self-interest.

empowerment: In productive discourse and persuasive speaking, the enablement of people to do something positive and effective for the community.

enthymeme: An informal, incomplete syllogism in which a speaker relies on the audience to use its knowledge and experience to supply missing information that completes the argument.

enunciation: A speaker's fullness of articulation (or lack thereof).

environmental factors: Elements of the speaking situation such as time of day, size of audience, and communication medium.

ethical code: A set of rules or guidelines agreed to by a culture or group to regulate behavior.

ethical language: Language that recognizes the value and humanity of others by using accurate language and recognizing one's identity.

ethical listener: An audience member who demonstrates responsibility to the speaker and to the society in which they live through how they listen.

ethical listening attitude: A positive disposition in which an audience member approaches discourse with an open mind and without fixed opinions.

ethical research: Research that utilizes proper practices for locating, using, evaluating, and citing research and sources.

ethics: A set of moral principles governing human conduct as it pertains to motives, ends, and the quality of one's actions.

ethnocentrism: The belief that one's own culture is superior to others.

ethos: An audience's perceptions of a speaker's public character or persona; what we commonly call credibility.

evaluation: In rhetorical criticism, making judgments about the functions and consequences of the rhetoric examined.

evaluative listening: Also called critical listening, it means thinking critically about a speech's content and testing its claims in order to form judgments about its ideas.

evidence: Data and backing in the form of examples, statistics, and testimony used to support a claim.

example: A type of evidence that provides a concrete instance in the form of a fact or occurrence.

extemporaneous delivery: A speaker's use of trimmed-down notes to recall the speech's structure, key ideas, and any direct quotations or source citations.

eye contact: This occurs when a speaker looks into the eyes of audience members.

facial expressions: A speaker's use of their face to communicate emotions or reactions to an audience.

fair use: A legal doctrine that allows copyrighted material to be used without explicit permission, based on four factors: the purpose and character of use, the amount of substantiality of use compared with the work as a whole, the nature of the copyrighted work, and the effect on the potential market for sale or value of the copyrighted material.

fallacy: A flaw or defect in reasoning that undermines argument validity.

false dilemma: A fallacy that occurs when it is suggested that there are only two conclusions available although in reality other possibilities or options exist.

familiarity: The degree to which an audience already knows or is ignorant about the speaker and topic.

faulty analogy: A fallacy that occurs when an argument rests upon comparing two situations that possess more differences than similarities and are not reasonably comparable.

faulty cause: A fallacy that occurs when there is a faulty attribution of cause and effect. Also called post hoc.

framing: The use of language to order and make sense of the world.

freemium: Visual aid software that allows users to freely use a few basic features but requires payment to access more sophisticated or advanced tools.

gender-neutral language: Words that do not specify a particular gender.

gestures: Movement of a speaker's hands.

groan zone: During a deliberative discussion, this is a stage of confusion and frustration that results from the broad representation of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas shared.

groupthink: A phenomenon that occurs when members' desire for harmony outweighs their willingness to critically examine alternative perspectives.

hallucinate: When artificial intelligence makes up something (such as a source) that does not exist.

hasty generalization: A fallacy that occurs when the examples used to support a claim are not representative or sufficient in number.

hegemonic ideology: An ideology that has become a predominant way of seeing the world and serves the interests of those who hold institutional or social power.

heuristics: Specific strategies for generating new ideas when writing a speech.

hierarchical communication: In unproductive discourse, communication from the "top" decision-makers (officials, leaders, spokespersons, or experts) down, which subjugates everyday individuals' preferences or insights.

hierarchy: An unequal ranking of people or groups.

honest framing: The persuasive use of language that is ethical, open, and trustworthy, having the public good in mind.

hypothetical example: An example that is based on a plausible event or occurrence but that does not represent a specific, actual instance.

identification: The degree to which individuals or groups find themselves joined or linked.

ideograph: A culturally specific term that has great emotive power in that it represents a deeply held value or vice within a culture.

ideological criticism: A method of rhetorical criticism that exposes the ideology communicated by a rhetorical artifact and interprets how the artifact uses the ideology to exercise power and control.

ideology: A set of shared beliefs and values that forms an interpretation of the world and suggests appropriate ways to act in it.

imagination: In productive discourse, a creative way of approaching and rethinking the issue at hand.

implicated audience: A group that is affected by the speaker's message if it succeeds.

implicit biases: Unreflective beliefs about a group of people based on your background, personal experiences, and social stereotypes.

implied audience: A group that is represented in the speaker's message.

impromptu delivery: A speaker's reliance on instant recall because they speak without advance preparation or warning.

incivility: Offensive and rude behavior.

inclusiveness: In productive discourse, participants' construction of a discussion that is multivocal rather than two-sided.

inclusive pronouns: Pronouns that create community and unity between the speaker and audience.

indirect questions: Questions that target an entire group.

inductive reasoning: A form of reasoning in which a speaker uses a series of examples, instances, or cases to support the likelihood of a conclusion. Most associated with reasoning from example.

informative speaking: Speech that educates the audience about a topic without leading them toward a particular position, conclusion, or outcome.

interpretation: The second step in rhetorical criticism, this involves making inferences about how an artifact functions persuasively.

intersectionality: A theory that suggests our social identities consist of multiple features that combine in meaningful ways to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression.

introduction: A speech's opening.

invention: The process of investigation and thought that produces the content of a speech.

irony: The use of words in a way that is opposite of their intended or normal use.

lack of listening: In unproductive discourse, listening to an alternative perspective only to find weaknesses in it.

lateral communication: In productive discourse, speech that originates and evolves among members of the public who talk to one another in spontaneous, unorchestrated settings.

learning: In productive discourse, the search to better understand the issues, the multiple perspectives, and the people involved in an issue.

lighting: The amount and placement of brightness or darkness on the speaker.

linear: A progression of main points that moves in a "straight line"—with one step logically leading to the next—all clearly in support of a thesis that is stated early in the speech.

listening: In productive discourse, the attempt to hear and understand alternative perspectives and to incorporate those perspectives into the whole.

listening to comprehend and retain: An orientation in which the listener seeks to understand and remember the content of the speech.

listening to improve: Listening that involves concentrating on the speaker's mechanics—organization, argumentation, source quality, delivery, style—with an eye toward how one can improve one's own speech performance.

listening to learn: An approach to a speech as a learning opportunity, a way to gain new information and perspective.

location: In rhetorical criticism, the specific place a rhetor delivered or disseminated a rhetorical artifact and/or the medium by which the rhetor distributed the artifact.

logos: Logical or reasoned basis of an appeal.
main points: The major ideas or claims that compose a speech's body and support the thesis statement.
manuscript: A fully written version of a speech.
manuscript delivery: A speaker's use of a fully written text to deliver a speech.
marginally situated positionality: A knower that occupies a position of oppression. They are granted less social power and privilege but likely know *more* about oppressive systems and practices because they and their peers experience them.
margin of error: The uncertainty or potential variation in a polling result that reflects the sampling error or margin in which there is less confidence about the accuracy of the survey result.
marketing: The deliberate promoting and selling of products or services to consumers.
maxim: A statement of a general truth or rule of conduct believed by a culture.
mean: A representation of the statistical average serving as evidence that is calculated by adding together all of the data and dividing the sum by the total number of data points.
median: A representation of the statistical average serving as evidence that compensates for outliers by representing the data point in the exact middle of a sample; it is the middle result among all data points.
memorized delivery: A speaker's precise recollection and delivery of a speech word for word without the aid of notes or a manuscript.
memory: A speaker's storage and recollection of the information they share in a speech, such as whether and how much they depend on notes.
metaphor: A comparison of things that are essentially different.
misinformation: In unproductive discourse, research sources, and deliberative presentations, the unintentional propagation of inaccurate or false claims that lack sufficient or valid evidence and/or identifiable and credible sources.
mode: A representation of the statistical average serving as evidence that is the data point that appears most frequently in a set of data points.
modes of delivery: Methods by which a speaker delivers their information.
Monroe's Motivated Sequence: Named after Alan H. Monroe, this pattern of arrangement first catches the audience's interest before convincing the audience that something is wrong. It then provides the audience with a solution, lets the audience envision the future with and without the solution enacted, and gives the audience an action to take.
mutability: The likelihood of changing.
mythical norm: Coined by Audre Lorde, the values, beliefs, and identities a culture perceives as normal and against which it measures deviations negatively. The mythical norm is associated with societal power and privilege.
narrative arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that tells a single, detailed story to compel the audience to accept the speaker's thesis.
nonfluency: Sound or word spoken repetitively that does not add content to a speech. Also called a vocal filler.
nonlinear: An organizational approach that adopts a more circuitous or indirect route to, or support for, a thesis.
nonverbal delivery: A speaker's use of their body to communicate.
open question: Inquiry that calls for more than a one-word response, making possible a range of answers.
organization: The ordering of points in a speech and the use of verbal connections between those elements so an audience can follow.
outline: A sketch or condensed version of a speech.
parallelism: In verbal style: A series of ideas that are constructed in a similar way. In outlining: A principle that dictates that there must be at least two relevant and worthy subordinate ideas to subdivide a point.
pathos: Appeals to an audience's emotions and motivations. Also referred to as emotional appeals.
pattern of arrangement: A specific guide, or template, for choosing and organizing the main points of a speech.
pattern of reasoning: Structure of reasoned argument derived from what kind of data or evidence is selected and how that data or evidence is used to prove a claim.
pause: The strategic choice not to speak and to allow a momentary silence instead.
people, the: Coined by Michael Calvin McGee, a rhetorical construct that is called into being by an advocate. A speaker

can use rhetoric to transform an audience from a mass of individuals into a collective—"the people"—with a defined purpose.

personal stakes: Each individual's financial, material, and/or psychological investments that could be improved or worsened based on how a topic is addressed.

personification: A reference to an inanimate object or an abstract concept as if it were alive.

persuasion: The strategic use of verbal and nonverbal symbols to influence the beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action of an audience.

persuasive framing: A speaker's strategic naming or defining of an issue in a way that sets up their desired outcome as effective and reasonable.

plagiarism: The unacknowledged use of another's words and ideas as one's own.

policing discourse: The use of rhetoric to determine preferred or appropriate ways of talking together when deliberating public issues.

polling data: A form of statistical data that seeks to represent the opinions or beliefs of a large group of people by collecting data from a representative random sample that is similar in its demographics to the greater population.

positionality: A person's location (or position) in relation to others in social categories of difference, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, physical ability, religion, citizenship, socioeconomic class, occupation, and so on. Recognizes that social identities typically carry and communicate cultural meanings through their distinctions from others within that category.

post hoc: A fallacy that occurs when a faulty attribution of cause occurs only after the fact. Also called a faulty cause.

premium: Visual aid software that costs money to use.

preparation outline: The outline a speaker drafts to plan and organize their speech. It includes all arguments, support, transitions, and citations in full sentences.

presentation outline: A brief sketch of a speech, designed to help a speaker deliver their speech as free from notes as possible. Also referred to as speaking notes.

presentation software: Computer programs that speakers can use to design digital slide shows.

presented visual elements: Coined by Sonja K. Foss, the major physical features of an image.

preview statement: A sentence that elaborates on the thesis by announcing the main points of a speech in the order they will develop as the speech progresses.

problem-alternatives-solution arrangement: A pattern or arrangement that documents the nature, extent, and source of the problem. It then names and counters one or more alternative solutions before advocating for the desired solution.

problem-cause-solution-solvency arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that identifies the nature and extent of the problem, addresses the source of the problem, names the solution, and discusses the practicality, or costs and benefits, of implementing the solution.

problem-solution arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that documents the nature, extent, and source of the problem before advocating a solution.

productive discourse: Public communication that is responsible to one's community and manages differences constructively.

pronunciation: The manner in which particular words are spoken or given sound.

provisionality: In productive discourse, the recognition that conclusions are never final because ideas, insights, and possibilities will evolve within the process of public discussion.

proximity: A visual design principle that suggests items that are similar should be placed next to one another.

psychological factors: An audience's predispositions related to their mental state, attitude, personal stakes, interest in and experience with the topic, occasion, and speaker.

public: A collection of people who are joined together in a cause of common concern.

public communication analysis: A method of rhetorical criticism that helps critics determine a rhetorical artifact's features and ascertain their likely consequences.

public discourse: Rhetoric that is publicly offered to address a significant community concern or issue.

public judgment: A community's thoughtful choice about its desired approach or next steps to address the problem based on the public knowledge developed during a deliberative discussion.

public knowledge: Participants' shared and improved understanding of the wicked problem and possible solutions as they offer and hear multiple points of view during a deliberative discussion.

public speaking: The process of forming and delivering rhetorical content to an audience in the hopes of persuading or informing that audience.

public sphere: The gathering of community members to discuss matters of common concern.

purpose statement: In an outline, the overarching goal or objective for a speech.

rate: The speed at which a person speaks.

raw number: A single number or figure that captures the breadth of an occurrence.

read laterally: A research technique of finding and reviewing several sources about the same topic.

reasoning from analogy: In this reasoning pattern, there is an effort to prove a claim by comparing two situations or cases. Also known as analogical reasoning.

reasoning from authority: In this pattern of reasoning, a speaker supports a claim with the testimony or credibility of a qualified source.

reasoning from cause: Also known as causal reasoning, in this pattern of reasoning, a speaker claims an event is caused by a particular circumstance or action.

reasoning from example: In this reasoning pattern, one or more examples are used to demonstrate the claim. Also known as inductive reasoning or generalization.

reasoning from sign: In this pattern of reasoning, circumstantial evidence, or signs, is used to demonstrate a claim. It occurs when a sign reliably indicates a connection between data and claim.

recency: How up to date the information is that a source provides.

recursive: When an organizational process moves forward and backward as the speaker develops a speech.

reference to the unusual: An unbelievable story or a startling statistic or fact to catch people's attention and interest.

reflection period: The end stage of a deliberative discussion that allows discussants to reflect on the conversation they just had and shifts them toward public judgment.

refutative arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that focuses on the counterarguments the audience brings to the rhetorical occasion before advocating a thesis.

relay question: A question that encourages discussants to share their personal experiences.

relevance: The degree of association between a source, a speaker's topic, and the audience.

reliable information: In productive discourse, claims that are backed by evidence and shared sources. Facts are not exaggerated or presented out of context in ways that misconstrue their meaning.

repetition: The restatement of a word, sentence, idea, or theme.

research: The process of learning about a topic by discovering what credible sources have said, written, or recorded about it.

research as inquiry: The process of studying a topic with the desire to learn.

research as strategy: The process of studying the topic only to find sources and evidence that support a preferred solution.

resistant ideology: An ideology that directly challenges a hegemonic ideology.

responsible public discourse: Public communication that draws on the qualities of productive discourse to produce a more inclusive and equitable public sphere.

reverse question: Reflects a question back to the group. Used by facilitators to avoid answering questions themselves.

rhetor: The one who speaks publicly. In rhetorical criticism, the author or creator of the rhetorical artifact is under examination.

rhetoric: A civic art devoted to the ethical study and use of symbols (verbal and nonverbal) to address public issues.

rhetorical artifact: An object of study in rhetorical criticism.

rhetorical critic: The person conducting the rhetorical criticism. They seek to understand how a rhetorical artifact functions persuasively.

rhetorical criticism: The description, interpretation, and evaluation of rhetoric to form judgments about its functions and consequences.

rhetorical ethics: Expectations for how speakers and audience members behave and interact as they communicate about matters of the public good.

rhetorical method: A perspective, approach, or orientation for analyzing an artifact.

sample size: The number of people or data points used to determine an average or the number of participants surveyed to determine final polling results.

satire: A particular form of ridicule that is typically used to attack people or ideas or to highlight human vices and failings.

signpost: Cuing language to alert audiences to a transition.

simile: The comparison of things that are essentially different. Uses keywords (e.g., *like* or *as*).

slide deck: A set of visual aids in a digital slide show.

slippery slope: A fallacy that occurs when a speaker seeks to use causal reasoning to argue that a single event or action will lead to a chain reaction of cause-and-effect events but fails to provide the necessary support for each step or action in the chain.

social construct: A category, idea, or description that humans have created to explain reality.

source: An original communication product that has been written by one or more human authors and published for an audience.

spatial arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that is sequential. Demonstrates how we get from point A to point B or what is similar and different as we move from point A to point B.

specific example: A factual example; an example that has actually happened or is being experienced.

speech body: Typically the largest or longest part of a presentation. Includes everything except the introduction and the conclusion.

spiral arrangement: A pattern of arrangement where the main points circle around the thesis, building tension and strength along the way.

spoken citation: A vocalized identification of a source's basic identifying information during a speech.

stakeholders: Groups and organizations that have vested interests in a wicked problem and its outcome because of the impacts on their lives.

standpoint theory: Emerging from feminist philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s, a theory that suggests that a person's standpoint—which is produced by their social identities—influences their knowledge of the world.

star arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that provides five main points—like the tips of a star—that appear disparate from one another but that all support the thesis.

statistics: A common form of evidence that represents information in numeric form according to size, quantity, or frequency.

stereotype: A generic categorization of individuals and groups based on the inaccurate conclusion that people sharing a particular characteristic will automatically possess similar qualities and beliefs.

style: The language or words a speaker uses.

style guide: Instructions for writing and formatting sources.

stylistic devices: Language techniques and literary tools used to present a speaker's ideas.

subordination: When outlining, the practice of making material that is less important secondary to more central ideas and claims.

suggested visual elements: Coined by Sonja K. Foss, the concepts, ideas, themes, and allusions a viewer infers from the presented elements in an image.

syllogism: A classical three-step proposition that consists of two premises and a conclusion. If the premises are valid, it follows that the conclusion must be true. Also known as deductive reasoning.

symbol: Something that expresses an idea or refers to something beyond itself. Symbols can be verbal (language), nonverbal (facial expression, body language, etc.), visual (images, graphics, signs, etc.), or audio (sounds, beats, etc.).

symbolic action: The power of symbols to shape thoughts, values, and actions.

tame problem: A simple issue that can be solved with expertise.
target audience: The specific members of a direct audience a speaker focuses on.
televisual delivery: The presentation of a public speech through a screen.
testimony: Evidence in the form of facts or opinions drawn from the words, experiences, and expertise of another individual.
textual context: In rhetorical criticism, the evolving environment created within a rhetorical artifact that conditions the audience's responses to the artifact from its beginning to its ending.
thesis driven: When the thesis is presented early in a speech and "drives" or determines the route it takes.
thesis seeking: When the thesis is reserved for later in the speech. The introduction and main points build up to (or "seek") the thesis, which comes toward the end.
thesis statement: The central statement of the speech. It states the key idea or claim the speaker wants the audience to accept or adhere to.
timeliness: In research, how fast or slow the process took to finalize and publish a source.
timing: In rhetorical criticism, the specific date and time a rhetorical artifact emerged as well as the time period in which the rhetoric was situated.
Toulmin model: Named after Stephen Toulmin, a model for understanding and critiquing arguments that consists of seven parts that seek to capture the range or elements found in full arguments used in regular or everyday communication.
trade-offs: The relative advantages and disadvantages that accompany every approach to a wicked problem.
transition: A connector that moves listeners from one main point in a speech to the next.
trend statistic: A statistic that represents meaning over a specific period of time.
triangle arrangement: A pattern of arrangement that provides three main points—like the corners of a triangle—that appear disparate from one another but that all support the thesis.
trust: In productive discourse, the assumption of general goodwill rather than listening with suspicion, assuming participants are speaking from a hidden agenda.
uncivil speech: Rhetoric that violates decorum because it is disrespectful, angry, and/or impolite.
unproductive discourse: Purposefully sensational public communication designed to promote division and to misrepresent the complexities of public issues.
value: A principle or quality that human beings are committed to and upon which they base their thinking and decisions for important issues.
value dilemma: A difficult choice among competing values, especially those associated with policy options.
value hierarchy: A list of values ranked from the most to the least important.
video: A recording of moving images.
visual aid: Anything optical that enhances speech or even functions as speech.
visual contrast: In visual aids, this refers to optical difference.
visual harmony: The pleasure produced by colors that complement or go well together on a visual aid.
visual imagery: A way for speakers to describe their ideas with word pictures so the audience can see in their mind's eye.
vocal delivery: How a speaker uses their voice and mouth to deliver words.
vocal filler: The sound or word spoken repetitively that does not add content to a speech. Also called a nonfluency.
vocal tone: The sound or pitch of a speaker's voice.
voice: In rhetorical criticism, a rhetorical artifact's manner of expression.
volume: The loudness of a speaker's voice.
warrant: A statement, often implied, that justifies the connection between data and claim.
white space: The empty space between elements on a visual aid.
wicked problem: An issue that is difficult to resolve because it involves diverse values and perspectives about what the problem is, who is responsible, and how it should be addressed.
winning: In unproductive discourse, a fixation on getting one's way, rather than learning or the common good, as the goal of communication.

written citation: The written identification of a source's basic identifying information. Typically included in a preparation outline as in-text citations and a bibliography.

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