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The Introduction of a Speech: Do Good Introductions Predict a Good Speech?

Valerie A. Whitecap

I remember being taught during the early years of my speech education that the "introduction" was the most important part of the speech and that in order to do well in the entire speech and to keep the attention of the audience, you had to "nail" the introduction. That involved, I remember, paying attention to mood and atmosphere and creating a "dramatic moment" worthy of remembering.

Having, hopefully, matured in my understanding, I began to wonder about this premise that the beginning is the essence and that, to quote the philosopher Mary Poppins, "Well begun is half done." If it is not begun well it is better to not have begun at all? If that premise is true, then it would be like saying that if the honeymoon doesn't have perfect mood and atmosphere and doesn't contain sufficient dramatic moments then the marriage is doomed.

If the introduction isn't as important as I have been teaching my students that it is, then how important, or unimportant, is it? Is a good "honeymoon" a predictor of forthcoming bliss? Does a successful speech follow a successful introduction? And finally, if a good introduction does not predict a successful speech, can anything be used as a predictor?

In thinking about these questions, beginning textbooks will be examined first to see what indeed is being taught about introductions. Then the results of the first speeches given by the freshmen and sophomores in a hybrid communication course will be studied to see if those whose introduc-

tions were well done also continued to do well during the rest of their speech. Finally, some other possible predictors to speech success will be discussed.

WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY?

Eleven textbooks, which can be divided into two categories, were examined: general communication texts (Adler, 1991; Berko, 1989; DeVito, 1991; Lane, 1991; and Verderber, 1990) and introduction to public speaking texts (Carlisle, 1991; DeVito, 1990; Fletcher, 1979; Gronbeck, 1990; Lucas, 1989; and Osborne, 1991). From these texts, a content analysis was conducted.

Table 1
Numerical Comparison

General Texts	Pages	Purposes	Ways
Adler	5	4	9
Berko	6	2	13
DeVito '91	3	2	7
Lane	2	3	5
Verderber	5	3	5
Speech Texts			
Carlisle	7	3	8
DeVito '90	8	3	15
Fletcher	27	6	11
Gronbeck	12	5	8
Lucas	12	4	7
Osborne	6	3	6

While all eleven texts covered the topic of giving an introduction, their treatments varied widely. As can be seen in

Table 1, they varied greatly in the number of pages devoted to the topic, the number of purposes (variously termed goals or criteria) of a good introduction, and in the number of ways and examples given.

Fletcher's was the only text which gave an entire chapter to introductions and devoted more to the topic than the space given by the next two highest texts combined (Gronbeck and Lucas). All of the speech texts spent more time on introductions than did any of the general texts except one. That exception was Berko (1989) who devoted six pages to the topic, the same number of pages given to the topic by the Osbornes (1991).

As to the purpose, (variously called goals or criteria) of the introduction, again the authors had divergent ideas. Table 1 shows that the texts vary from a low of two purposes (Berko, and DeVito '91) to a high of six (Fletcher). Table 2 is a list of the purposes as stated by the authors followed by the number of texts which listed this purpose.

Table 2
Purposes (Goals/Criteria)

Purpose	# of Texts
Get attention	11
Preview the speech	9
Gain credibility	6
Relate to audience	5
Set mood and tone	2
State importance of topic	1
Stimulate audience action	1
Reveal the topic	1
Lead into the body	1
Address speech occasion	1

The only purpose agreed upon by all of the authors was that the introduction must get the attention of the audience. And, to paraphrase Lucas, you have their attention when you stand up, its after you open your mouth that the trouble begin (1989).

All of the authors except two agreed that the introduction must preview the speech. Some stated that this preview should list the main points to be discussed, others did not get so specific.

Contrary to my previous assumptions, not all of the texts emphasized the importance of introductions to the extent that was expected. The authors either stressed how essential a strong introduction was or rather ignored the importance issue altogether. Additionally, they disagreed on so many items of purpose and content to a greater extent than could be attributed to semantic differences.

The writers also disagreed on the percentage of the speech that the introduction should represent. Of the general texts, only Adler and Verderber suggest a percentage. Adler said that the introduction and conclusion combined should only occupy 20% of the speech and Verderber said that the introduction alone could account for anywhere between 7% and 50% of the entire speech. Of the speech texts, Lucas suggests 10% to 20%, Osborne states that the introduction and conclusion combined should be less than 50% and Fletcher calls for 10% to 15%. Fletcher explains that for a four to five minute speech, the introduction would be around 113 words.

As to the issue of importance. three texts (Berko, DeVito '90, and Osborne) did not address the issue at all. Of the other eight texts), two (Lane and Verderber) argued against its relative importance while the other six found the introduction to be vital. The authors arguing against the importance will be discussed first followed by those who argued for vital importance.

Lane spends the least amount of space (2 pages) discussing the topic (refer to Table 1) and. in a tie with

Verderber, contains the fewest number of ways and examples. Lane looks at the introduction as a part of a unified whole which is intended to draw a response which will remain constant throughout the speech. He does say that it requires careful preparation, which primarily consists of a gathering of knowledge about the audience, occasion and the attitudes that the audience members hold.

In his five pages, Verderber states that the introduction is a strategy of getting the audience to listen to the speech. "The introduction won't make your speech an instant success, but it can get an audience to look at you and listen to you. That is about as much as you have a right to ask of an audience during the first minute of your speech" (p. 309). That is as close as the author comes to talking about the importance of the introduction.

In arguing for the importance of the topic, Adler, and to a lesser extent, Lucas and Carlisle, quote famous orators. Adler includes quotes from, among others, Plato, "The beginning is the most important part of the work" (p. 348) and Euripides, "A bad beginning makes a bad ending" (p. 354). Lucas and Carlisle quote Clarence Darrow when he said, "Unless a speaker can interest his audience at once, his effort will be a failure" (Carlisle, p. 24 and Lucas, p. 169).

Adler argues for the importance of both the introduction and conclusion when he says they "are vitally important although they usually will occupy less than 20% of your speaking time. Listeners form their impressions of a speaker early, and they remember what they hear last, it is therefore, vital to make those few moments at the beginning and end of a speech work to your advantage" (p. 348).

Two of DeVito's texts, one for general communication (1991) and one for basic speech (1990) were examined. Again, contrary to expectations, the books differed in their approach to the topic. The basic speech text did not argue for the relative importance of the introduction, but the general communication text did. Where he stated, "The introduction to a

speech, like the first day of a class or the first date, is especially important: It sets the tone for what is to follow" (1991, p. 333).

Carlisle finds the introduction to be vital, in stating,

Just as you want to make a good first impression when meeting someone, you will want to make a good first impression in your speaking. In a speech your introduction makes that first memorable impression on your audience. Prepare it well because you never get a second chance to make a good first impression...Draw your audience members' attention to your topic at once and you will have a good beginning toward keeping them interested in your speech and topic (p. 24).

Gronbeck advises the student to take time to plan the introduction because "it is an investment, it will pay off handsomely, for strategically sound beginnings and endings prepare audiences and clinch your points" (p. 228).

Lucas and Fletcher make the strongest cases for the importance of the introduction. Fletcher, who also spent the most time on the topic, explains that he spent so much space on the lesson because "the introduction to a speech is so very critical ... it is your job, as you start your speech, to turn that daydreaming, diverse group of individuals into a concentrating, stimulated, involved, thinking, participating audience" (p. 229). At the same time, he cautions against over-rehearsing the introduction because doing so can sacrifice the fluency of the rest of the speech.

Lucas spends the most time the importance of the introduction and methods of preparing to deliver it which can help boost the confidence of the speaker. He suggests,

First impressions are important. A poor beginning may so distract or alienate listeners that the speaker can never fully recover. Moreover, getting off on the right foot is vital to a speaker's self-confidence. What could be more encouraging that watching your listeners' faces begin to register interest, attention, and pleasure? The hardest part of any

presentation is the beginning. If you get through the opening stages of your speech without blundering, the rest will go much more smoothly. A good introduction, you will find, is an excellent confidence booster...No matter how famous the speaker or how vital the topic, the speaker can quickly lose an audience if he or she doesn't use the introduction to get their attention and quicken the interest. Getting initial attention is usually easy to do—even before you utter a word. Step up and they will normally look. Wait until they do. Keeping the attention of audience once you start talking is more difficult...Practice it over and over until you can deliver it smoothly, with a minimum of notes and with strong eye contact. Get the speech off to a good start and it will give you a big boost of confidence" (pp. 168-170).

Berko, who doesn't deal with the importance of introductions directly, addresses them through the topic of attention. Contrary to Verderber's belief that the introduction is a strategy to get the audience to listen to the entire speech, Berko quotes the *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* from a report that says that the attention span is only about 20 seconds, so that the ability of the listener to focus attention is limited. He says that the listener cannot handle much beyond a fifteen minute time frame because, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, which he quotes, "It's entirely possible that our capacity for sustained attention and deliberate thought is being altered by television viewing" (p. 107). While this might be an interesting topic for further discussion, Berko drops the subject and moves on to a discussion of the ways in which to introduce a speech. He provides examples of 13 ways by which to successfully introduce the speech. His list is second only to the list provided in DeVito's speech text ('90). Again, DeVito varies the approach in his two books, with his general text only including 8 ways or examples.

If attempting to pick a general text which most sufficiently covers the topic, Berko would be the choice for length and examples, and Adler would be the choice for the number of purposes. For a speech text, Fletcher spends the most time

of the topic and provides the most purposes for the introduction, and DeVito '90 provides the most complete set of ways and examples.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCTION AND SPEECH GRADE

This comparison of the introduction of the speech and the subsequent grade on the speech was done as a preliminary "think piece", so no attempts were made to determine statistical significance. The analysis asked "what's out there", and will hopefully lead to more controlled statistical analyses. In thinking about whether or not a good introduction can predict a good speech the grades for the first speech given by 54 college students enrolled in two sections of a general communication class were examined. There were 100 points on the speech evaluation. Twenty of those points were available for the introduction (See Table 3).

All of the students were evaluated by the same person using the same grading criteria. Of those 54 students, 25 received a 100% score on their introduction (a raw score of 20). Of that 25, only 8 received a grade on their speech of 90% and higher. Fifteen students received a score between 90% and 99% on their introduction. Of these fifteen, only one received a grade on their speech of 90% or higher. In all but three cases, the percentage on the introduction was higher than the percentage on the entire speech. In four cases, the percentage on the introduction and the entire speech was the same. Of the eleven students who scored 75% or below on their introduction, only one scored above 75% for the entire speech. A prediction could be made here. While a good introduction might not predict a good speech, most probably, a poor introduction will be followed by a poor speech. While Table 3 seems to show a directional trend, only 4 of the scores fall on the line which would show a direct relationship. It is

again acknowledged that no attempt was made to do statistical correlations.

Table 3
Comparison of Introduction and Speech Grade

Speech %	Introduction Raw Score										
	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10
100											
95-99	2										
90-94	6		1								
85-89	6		3	1	1						
80-84	3	4	3	1	1		1				
75-79	6	1	2								
70-74	2	1		1		3	1				
65-69											
60-64							1	1	1		
55-59											1

OTHER PREDICTORS

Given a lack of a definitive answer as to what would predict speech success if it was not doing a good introduction, I began looking elsewhere. It could be suggested that since practice makes perfect, students who reported having given more speeches or other oral presentations to an audience before entering college should get higher grades on their first speech in college than those students who did not give many speeches before entering college. Of the 54 students whose scores were studied, 46 filled out a survey listing the number of speeches they had given before entering college. This number was then compared with the score received on their first speech in communication class (See Table 4).

Table 4
Speech Score Compared with Prior Speech Experience

Speech %	Number of Previous Speeches							
	30+	25-29	20-24	15-19	10-14	5-9	1-4	0
100								
95-99					2			
90-94				2	1	1	1	1
85-89			1	1	4	2	2	
80-84	1				5	2	2	1
75-79						1	1	2
70-74	1			2	1	1	2	
65-69								
60-64				1	1		1	
55-59						1		
50-54								

The first reaction to this chart was distressing. Over 45% of these students, who matriculated primarily from high schools in Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio, gave less than ten speeches before entering college. Only three gave the equivalent of two or more oral presentations a year during their elementary and secondary schooling. While this chart does not show that previous speech experience brought about a higher speech score, as a sidelight I compared the grades on the second speech with the first speech grades and found that all but five of the 54 students rallied their grades on the second speech. While this may be more a factor of gaining knowledge about the expectations of the professor than of actual improvement, the professor's ego would rather attribute the improvement to teaching skill rather than to the ability of the students to "scope out" the teacher.

If previous experience cannot adequately predict college speech success, what about the student's major? Could it be hypothesized that students who choose majors which will require them to speak in public after graduation will score higher on their first college speech than students who choose majors which will probably not require them to much public speaking? Do those students who choose majors which are "verbally oriented" (VO) perform better on their initial college speeches than those who choose majors which are, primarily, "not verbally oriented" (NVO)? Of the 54 students, 44 listed their majors. The majors were then divided into three categories. those judged VO (including Telecommunication, English, Education, Business and Foreign Language), those judged NVO (including Psychobiology, Psychology, Biology, Physics, Environmental Science, and Computer Science) and those judged as mixed or not available because the major could be specifically designed to obtain a teaching degree (including Math, History, Art and Music) or because the student had not yet declared a major. The scores of those students were not included in this analysis. The majors of the remaining 35 students were compared with their speech scores (See Table 5).

Here again the search seems fruitless. If those students scoring above 90% are compared, 20% of the VO students and 30% of the NVO students scored at that level. Sixty eight percent of the VO students scored at the 80% level and above compared to 80% of the NVO students. In fact the highest two individual scores were earned by NVO students.

Table 5
Verbal Level of Majors Compared to Speech Score

Speech %	VO	NVO
100		
95-99		2
90-94	5	1
85-89	9	1
80-84	3	4
75-79	2	1
70-74	4	1
65-69		
60-64	2	1

FINAL THOUGHTS

If a successful introduction does not predict speech success, and if pre-college speaking experience does not predict speech success, and if the verblity of the chosen major does not predict speech success, where does that leave us. Are we reduced to looking toward other variables, like hair color and height? (Maybe the most successful speech makers are like the successful presidential candidates ... taller.) The academic side of me rejects those notions.

Further study needs to be done to ascertain what will predict or even bring speech success. We have found that textbook authors disagree on how to even begin successfully.

Perhaps the best thing to say about the end of a speech (or a paper) is to quote Lord Mancroft, "A speech is like a love affair. Any fool can start it, but to end it requires considerable skill" (Adler, p. 383).

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The Use of Role Models in Teaching Public Speaking

Lauren A. Vicker

INTRODUCTION

The use of role models in teaching is a topic which has been examined extensively in education, psychology and sociology. For speech communication instructors, our basic understanding of how we learn from others must be extrapolated from other disciplines. This educational strategy is especially utilized in public speaking instruction, where students are routinely required to analyze the speeches of others, with the expectation that these exercises will help them in their own speech-making.

As a relatively new discipline in the social sciences, speech communication is still in a process of theory-building on its own. The discipline's base is borrowed from many fields in social science, business and the humanities. While we have examined many human communication phenomena in our own research studies, we still have great gaps. Gustav Friedrich has maintained that we need more original research and seminal work defining the basic characteristics of our discipline (1985). In an earlier work, Friedrich had specified the use of role models in the teaching of public speaking as an important question for research (1983).

This author's particular interest in the topic, however, had been brewing for some time before this. As a member of a Speech Communication Department which hosts a major

forensics tournament each year, it appeared that our undergraduates who volunteered to serve as time-keepers during the tournament did a better job on their classroom speeches than those who did not attend the competition. While it may be argued that the better students might volunteer for such an assignment, and thus give better speeches anyway, this did not appear to hold true in the majority of cases.

Thus, this study was an outgrowth of personal experience and its resulting curiosity, and is also a response to a call for such research by scholars in the field.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the use of role models and the teaching of public speaking. Most public speaking teachers offer students examples of public speaking for review and analysis. These samples may take the forms of videotapes of famous speakers, such as John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, or requiring students to attend speeches on their campuses or in their communities, or it may simply be a critical review of fellow students' speeches within the speech class. But whatever the form, the underlying assumption is that such opportunities will ultimately help the student to prepare and present a better speech than he or she might have done without the experience of observing others.

The research question for this study is as follows:

Does the observation of role models in public speaking allow a student to prepare and present a better speech than he might have been able to give without the role models?

Since public speaking instructors have assumed this to be the case, we will advance the following hypothesis:

Students who observe role models in public speaking will present a better speech than students who have not observed the role models.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It is surprising that no studies have been done on the use of role models in teaching public speaking. Colleagues in the discipline seemed sure that someone must have looked at this topic; and yet, several separate searches of the literature failed to locate even one study which examined this question.

Friedrich (1983) has done a credible job relating the work of A. Bandura and others who pioneered our understanding of the use of role models in a variety of educational settings, to the arena of public speaking. His review includes studies which examined the use of role models in treating speech anxiety. Friedrich goes on to lament the lack of research base which leaves us unable to answer questions about the effectiveness of using role models as a skill development strategy in public speaking classes.

The single study on the use of model speeches in the basic speech course (Matlon, 1968) is a survey drawn from doctoral dissertation research done 25 years ago. Matlon found that 62% of the responding speech teachers did use models for instruction in the basic course. Respondents indicated that they used models primarily "to illustrate principles of public speaking, to demonstrate speaking of noteworthy individuals, to add to one's knowledge of the humanities, and because the models appeared in the textbook" (p. 51). Matlon's study, however, was primarily a data gathering mechanism, and not an analysis of the effectiveness of role models as an instructional strategy.

Since Bandura's seminal work, research into the use of role models in other social science disciplines has proceeded at a consistent pace. Many of the studies have centered around life role models of teachers and counselors for elementary and high school students. Fewer studies have involved college students. These include studies of college professors as role

models and motivators for their students (Stake and Noonan, 1985; Erkut and Mokros, 1984). A single study was found related to communication performance. Barth and Gambrill (1984) studied social work students who had the opportunity to observe role models conduct interviews with clients, and then were given feedback on their own interviewing skills. Results of the study suggested this was a worthwhile experience and more opportunities of a similar nature needed to be made available to students.

While role models have not been systematically observed in the speech communication classroom, the literature suggests that their use might be beneficial for students. Our current practice of using role models without empirical evidence of their effectiveness, however, should be questioned.

PROCEDURES

The subjects in this study were students in two introductory speech communication classes at a small liberal arts college located in New York. The classes were offered consecutively, during the day, and seemed to draw a relatively homogeneous group of students (i.e., the students were of similar age, there were a few minorities in each class, and there were no non-traditional students). Instructor effect was controlled by having the same instructor for both classes. Course content was carefully planned and presented to ensure that both groups received essentially the same instruction.

This speech communication course was a hybrid design, with public speaking as its final component. For the experimental effect, a single day in the semester was chosen. The experimental group viewed a videotape of students making informative speeches. The instructor was not present and no one gave additional instruction or comments. The control group class did not meet that day, but was given the day for "speech research". They were told that the instructor would be

available for any questions during class time, but no students took advantage of this opportunity.

The videotape that was observed by the experimental group was a tape of seven informative speeches given by upper division public speaking students. The group was from an evening class held during the previous semester, and most of the students were part-time and had little contact with the day students in the research groups. Several other instructors were asked to view the tape before it was shown to the experimental group, and they concurred that the public speaking ability of the students represented a wide range.

The following week, the students in the control and experimental groups gave their own classroom speeches. These speeches were videotaped and retained for evaluation. After all the speeches had been completed, a total of 12 speeches were videotaped and used from each class.

The evaluations of the speeches were done by a group of 12 senior-level speech students at a different small liberal arts college in New York. The students watched the tapes as a group and rated each speech on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 representing the best speech overall and one representing the weakest.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data obtained from student raters were converted to a mean for each of the 12 speakers in each group. These means were analyzed using a two-sample t-test. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 1.

It is interesting to note that the differences between the two groups are not in the direction hypothesized: the control group actually did somewhat better on their speeches than the experimental group. The differences between the groups are significant at the .05 level, but not at the .01 level. Thus, we can conclude that the hypothesis was not supported.

Table 1
Analysis of Means for the Effect of Role Models

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	SE Mean
Control Group	12	6.75	1.79	0.52
Experimental Group	12	5.06	1.31	0.38

T = 2.64

P = 0.015

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study did not support the hypothesis that watching role models improved a student's ability to prepare and present a classroom speech. This directly contradicts conventional thought and common practice of public speaking instructors, who routinely include the analysis of speeches as part of the instructional process. There are several possible explanations for the findings of this study.

One possibility is that there were some extraneous factors which influenced the results. Even though course content and instructor effect were carefully controlled, the classroom dynamics can often produce differences in course content. The initiative of individual students to seek out further information and other public speaking experiences, or the ability to capitalize on past experience (such as a high school course or a club office which requires much public speaking experience) may also produce students who give more effective speeches. Students in the control group may have indeed used the "Speech Research Day" to do research for their speeches, and thus improve performance. Thus, we can never perfectly control the factors involved.

A second explanation for the findings of this study is that the group doing the ratings of the speeches were influenced by the speech content, the group setting for the evaluation, or the

forced compliance involved in this task. While their instructor reported that they were willing to participate, many factors may have affected the reliability and validity of their ratings. In examining the raw scores, it is interesting to note that the students were quite consistent in their ratings: the range used on the 10-point scale was generally not more than four points.

A final but significant explanation for the findings is that the instructor's role in public speaking instruction may have been underestimated. It may indeed be true that watching speeches helps a student to learn, but only when this viewing is accompanied by critical class analysis led by the instructor. Without the "expert" teacher available to comment and point out significant factors which affect performance, the novice student may be unable on his own to truly learn and internalize lessons from the role model. Thus, the comments of the instructor may be a crucial factor in helping a student sort through preparation and performance options available in public speaking.

Clearly, this study was a pilot study, an attempt to begin an investigation into an area speech teachers take for granted, but have never truly tested. The logistics involved in conducting such a study make it difficult and time-consuming, but the results of this study should encourage others to work to better define the answers to questions so basic to our teaching. Such definition will benefit our students and enhance the status of the discipline as we attempt to build a theoretical base of our own.

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