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## **An Acrostic Approach to Teaching Public Speaking in the Basic Hybrid Communication Course**

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*David W. Worley*

The basic hybrid communication course introduces students to a variety of emphases in communication, ranging from communication theory to mass media. While units in basic hybrid courses differ, most introduce students to human communication theory, public speaking, group communication and interpersonal communication. Given this number of broad topic areas, as instructors we often need to reorganize course content in view of the time constraints we face. Moreover, given that many of the popular texts for the basic hybrid communication course incorporate a considerable amount of material, we must often choose to emphasize particular concepts or skills and repeatedly face the need to briefly summarize important principles while also facilitating student learning.

Such is the case with public speaking instruction in the hybrid course. In a relatively short time, students are expected to read up to 150 pages of text explaining the principles of preparing and delivering a public speech and then understand and apply these principles to complete assignments which often heavily impact their grades. Additionally, as instructors we need to summarize a considerable amount of information in order to adequately prepare students for the graded

public speaking assignments. The pressure of time and the demands of effective communication pedagogy combine to create an instructional challenge for all of us and especially for the beginning teacher.

Therefore, an instructional approach which clearly summarizes the fundamentals of competent public speaking provides an important contribution to communication pedagogy for the hybrid course. In particular, an acrostic approach offers one way to teach the essentials of public speaking. This approach appeals to both students and instructors and may be easily adapted to the needs of individual instructors and classes. Furthermore, the acrostic approach to teaching public speaking I offer here has been classroom tested over a two-year period in a multi-section, basic hybrid communication course. Both instructors and students alike, express appreciation for this approach which integrates important public speaking principles while making the principles more easily remembered.

What follows is an outline summary of this acrostic approach organized around the acronym S-P-E-A-K which permits instructors to provide the emphasis, explanations and examples they wish to include when teaching public speaking skills. Therefore, I have purposefully omitted these aspects to allow for individualization of this approach. Rather than provide a prose description of these principles, a full-sentence preparation outline format works well for explaining the principles.

## OUTLINE

- I. **S** in S-P-E-A-K stands for the *subject and topic* of the speech.
  - A. Subject refers to a large area of knowledge while a topic refers to a specific portion of that area of knowledge.
  - B. Speakers select a subject or topic adhering to two general guidelines.
    1. Speakers may be assigned the subject or topic.
    2. Speakers may be able to choose any topic they deem appropriate to the audience and the occasion.
  - C. There are several perspectives to consider as speakers decide upon a topic. Andrews and Baird (1995) identified several perspectives to consider.
    1. The *personal* perspective allows speakers to inventory their own knowledge, attitudes, interests, experiences and beliefs to help generate speech topics.

2. The *audience* perspective calls upon speakers to analyze their audiences' demographics, attitudes, expectations, needs and motivations.

a) Ayers and Miller (1990) suggested considering the following in choosing a topic with the audience in mind:

D. Brainstorming can provide a good way to generate potential topics. Applying each of the perspectives discussed earlier can help narrow the number and identify the most suitable topic.

II. **P** in S-P-E-A-K stands for the *purpose* of the speech.

A. There are three general purposes for speaking.

1. One purpose is to entertain, inspire, and/or celebrate seen in a valedictory address, a Memorial Day address, a eulogy or a toast.
2. A second purpose is to inform or instruct with the goal of audience understanding. Lectures, training seminars, or demonstrations of a process illustrate an informative purpose.

- a) Informative speeches may explain abstract ideas or policies such as affirmative action, gun control, or tax reform.
  - b) Informative speeches may demonstrate a process by showing how to accomplish a particular task or explaining how something works.
3. A third purpose is to persuade in order to influence audience members' attitudes, beliefs or behavior.
- a) Persuasive speeches may stimulate and thereby reinforce audience beliefs or behaviors.
  - b) Persuasive speeches may seek to convince to alter audience attitudes, beliefs, or values.
    - (1) Attitudes are the pre-dispositions people have toward a particular topic, speaker or purpose which may be favorable, apathetic, interested, hostile or a blend of attitudes.

(2) Beliefs refer to what people hold to be true or false based upon facts, opinions and experience.

(3) Values refer to the orientations people hold as a way to organize their views of life and often provide a basis for their attitudes and beliefs.

c) Persuasive speeches may seek to actuate or influence audience behaviors.

**B.** The specific purpose of the speech is equally important.

1. The specific purpose is defined by a desired audience response. A sentence which begins with "I want my audience to ..." helps focus the specific purpose.
2. The specific purpose is summarized in the thesis or central idea of the speech which is variously described as:
  - a) the proposition or claim to be proven in the speech
  - b) the theme to be developed in the speech

III. **A** in S-P-E-A-K stands for the ***arrangement*** or organization of the speech.

A. The introduction of the speech should accomplish certain goals.

1. Begin the introduction with a device to gain the attention of the audience, such as:

- a) establishing common ground with the audience
- b) giving the audience an authentic compliment
- c) posing a rhetorical question
- d) using appropriate humor
- e) telling a story or providing an illustration
- f) using a combination of these techniques

2. Orient the audience to the topic.

- a) State the purpose clearly.
- b) Offer the audience a reason to listen.
- c) Establish credibility by answering this question: Why should they listen to you?



- d) Offer a preview which enumerates the main points.
- B. The body of the speech also requires arrangement.
- 1. Speakers need to employ a clear organizational pattern.
    - a) Typical patterns include:
      - (1) A *chronological pattern* which organizes a speech according to time.
      - (2) A *spatial pattern* which organizes a speech according to space.
      - (3) A *topical pattern* which organizes a speech according to various ideas linked to the thesis.
      - (4) A *cause-effect pattern* which organizes a speech according to reasons for a phenomenon.
      - (5) A *problem-solution pattern* which organizes a speech by demonstrating the problem and then providing a solution, several solutions,

or a composite of solutions.

b) Additional specific patterns include:

- (1) *The State-the-Case-and-Prove-It* pattern which provides a clearly stated thesis that is then systematically supported with arguments and evidence.
- (2) *Monroe's Motivated Sequence* which arouses attention, demonstrates the need, presents satisfaction that meets the need, visualizes the results, and concludes with a call for action.
- (3) *The Sales Presentation Model* pattern which establishes the speaker's identity and credibility, purpose and sets the climate in the introduction. In the body of the speech, the speaker identifies the needs of potential customers and presents an overview of a product or service that

meets these needs. In the conclusion, the speaker summarizes the benefits of the proposed product or service, offers reasons for choosing the product or service and opens for questions (Andrews & Baird, 1995, p. 443).

(4) *The Refutative Design* identifies opposing arguments and then attacks faulty reasoning, insufficient evidence, or other weaknesses in the reasoning or motives of opponents (Osborn & Osborn, 1994).

2. Main points should meet certain criteria.
  - a) Main points should be clear, simple sentences.
  - b) Main points should act as the skeleton of the speech.
  - c) Main points should present one significant idea.
  - d) Main points should support the thesis and organizational

pattern of the speech.

3. To assist audiences in following the organization, the speaker uses transitions between the main points.
  - a) Transitions are bridges, connecting ideas.
  - b) Methods for transitions include:
    - (1) internal summaries which review ideas already discussed in the speech and preview ideas to come.
    - (2) an ordinal approach which numerically identifies main points (e.g., first, second, third).
    - (3) posing questions which provide steps to the next main point (e.g., "But, how does ...?").
    - (4) using the organizational pattern to develop transitions between the main points (e.g., if using a problem-solution pattern one could say, "Now that we've considered the problem,

let's turn to look at possible solutions.")

C. The conclusion should also accomplish specific purposes.

1. The conclusions review and summarize the main points.
2. The conclusions provide a “clincher” for the audience which brings the speech to a close and emphasizes the thesis. This can be done by offering a challenge, a reinforcing story, a quotation, visualizing the future or referring back to the introduction.

IV. The phonetic “**K**” in S-P-E-A-K stands for ***crafting*** the speech.

A. First the speaker’s outline needs to be crafted.

1. Two kinds of outlines are important.
  - a) The preparation outline is a working outline which represents the content of the speech.
  - b) The presentation or speaking outline is a key word and/or phrase outline used by the speaker while speaking extemporaneously.

2. Outlines can be formal or conceptual.
  - a) Formal outlines use Roman numerals, letters and numbers
  - b) Conceptual outlines may use a flow chart, mind mapping or conceptual clustering.
3. Effective outlines demonstrate several qualities.
  - a) *They are simple.* Each portion of the outline contains a single idea phrased in accessible language.
  - b) *They are coordinated.* Ideas at each level of the outline are equally emphasized.
  - c) *They are subordinated.* The ideas at each level of the outline are logically related.
  - d) *They are parallel.* The main points are similarly phrased.
  - e) *They are balanced.* The main points receive equal emphasis.

B. Second, the speaker's delivery needs to be crafted.

1. There are three main types of delivery.

a) In manuscript delivery the speaker reads from the text of the speech.

b) Impromptu delivery requires speakers to speak with only minimal preparation.

c) Extemporaneous delivery combines preparation and practice before the actual presentation, but employs a conversational approach.

2. There are two important elements of delivery.

a) The verbal component considers the use of language and voice.

(1) Concrete, clear, concise and considerate language works best.

(2) Varying pitch, volume, rate and emphasis helps the impact of the speech.

b) The nonverbal component focuses on the use of posture, gestures, eye contact and facial expressions.

(1) Speakers should usually stand erect and straight.

(2) Speakers should use spontaneous gestures which fit the words that are spoken.

(3) Speakers should usually make direct and comprehensive eye contact with all audience members.

(4) Speakers should employ facial expressions appropriate to the occasion and the main ideas in the speech.

C. Third, the speaker's appeals need to be crafted.

1. Speakers should make their personal credibility clear to their audiences (ethos).

2. Speakers should offer sound reasoning backed with credible evidence (logos).



3. Speakers should appreciate and employ emotion appropriate to the speech (pathos).
4. Speakers may relate to the values, rituals, and heroes of the audience or employ mythos (Osborn & Osborn, 1994).

## CONCLUSION

Although these principles of public speaking are not new, teaching them with an acrostic approach offers beginning instructors and students alike in the hybrid basic course a way to enhance learning without sacrificing thoroughness. Furthermore, even though I have offered this approach as a way to teach the public speaking section in a basic hybrid communication course, it may also be applied in other settings. These include short seminars or workshops, continuing education classes, and short academic terms.

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