

Fundamentals of

Speech Communication

The Credibility of Ideas

Bert E. Bradley

Third Edition

Bert E. Bradley
Auburn University

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**Speech
Communication**

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This book focuses on the introductory course in oral communication. Its major emphasis is on public communication, or what is commonly known as public speaking; but two forms of interpersonal communication—small group communication and interviewing—are also included. An effort has been made to achieve a balanced blending of theoretical principles and suggestions for practical application, the assumption being that students require theory to understand what they are doing and why, yet also need and want examples of practical application in order to develop an awareness of how that theory can be applied most effectively.

As a result of suggestions from users of the first two editions, this third edition has four objectives:

1. A more readable text. This has been accomplished by converting from third person to second person wherever possible, thus directly addressing and involving the student; by eliminating discussion of some duplicative empirical studies; and by employing a more economical style.
2. Up-to-date content, including current examples and the most recent research findings.
3. Chapters organized in the most usable order. The revised organization develops early the central theme of the book, and considers immediately fundamental principles needed by students to develop public communication messages. The new sequence reflects a compromise between the logical progression of topics and pedagogical considerations. Thus, the chapter on “Nonverbal Presentation,” which logically should be the last topic on public communication, is placed early in the sequence because most basic courses require students to begin communication assignments before they have studied all principles needed to develop effective messages. Also, in keeping with the theme of the book—the importance of the credibility of ideas—students are informed early about the ethics and responsibilities of communicators as well as the role and sources of a communicator’s ethos.
4. Additional material to help students understand and use effectively communication principles. In chapter 1, a clear definition of communication as well as the expanded discussion of communication as a process will assist students in applying principles developed in later chapters. In chapter 6, a sample preparation outline is converted into a speech and the differences between the two are examined. Some principles, such as the methods of changing attitudes, now are illustrated by examples of their use.

The fourteen chapters of this third edition are again devoted to the principles involved in creating an *aura of credibility* for a speaker's ideas. Two additional units, not directly related to this objective but of importance to students in many beginning courses, are again included as appendixes. The first appendix, "The Criticism of Speeches," is appropriate for those courses in which the student is expected to participate in oral or written criticism. The second appendix, "Understanding Stage Fright," should be helpful to those students who consider this aspect of public speaking a problem, as well as for those who want to understand the phenomenon regardless of whether or not it poses a personal problem. The final appendix, a speech rating blank, offers students specific guidelines for the constructive criticism of speeches.

The field of speech communication is the heir of time-proven principles discovered through scholarly study of communicative efforts by people widely separated in time, geography, and culture. As in the first two editions, this heritage will not be abandoned here. But where possible and appropriate, contemporary experimental research from the fields of speech, psychology, and sociology has been used in developing and supporting the theories presented.

An effort has again been made to avoid the technical jargon that is all too frequently used and to simplify the concepts for the beginning student. This does not mean that all technical terms have been omitted. In many instances the technical language normally employed serves better than any other, and some technical terms must be introduced to intellectually challenge and acquaint the student with commonly accepted terminology in the speech communication field. To avoid confusing the student, important concepts are presented in the most understandable language. Technical terms are used only when necessary. The intent has been to present the text material in the most comprehensible manner for the beginning student without oversimplifying essential concepts.

Throughout the text there has been a conscious effort to present examples of men and women equally. Since the English language does not provide a neutral pronoun, an attempt has been made to balance male and female references by alternating the use of *he* and *she*. In some cases, the traditional *he* has been maintained to avoid interrupting the flow of prose. This is not to suggest an indifference to sexism in our language, but a consideration of the students' need for succinctness and readability.

I am indebted to two colleagues who read and criticized various sections of this third edition: Martha Solomon and David A. Thomas.

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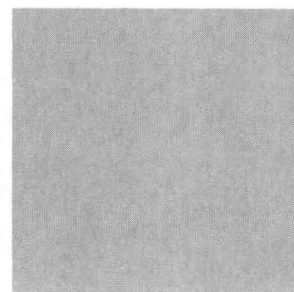
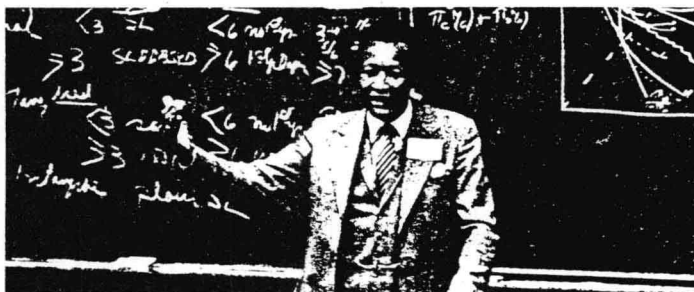
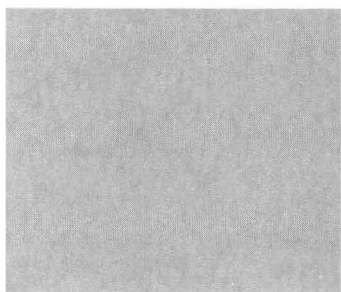
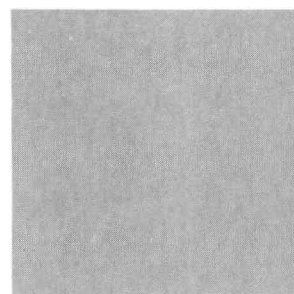
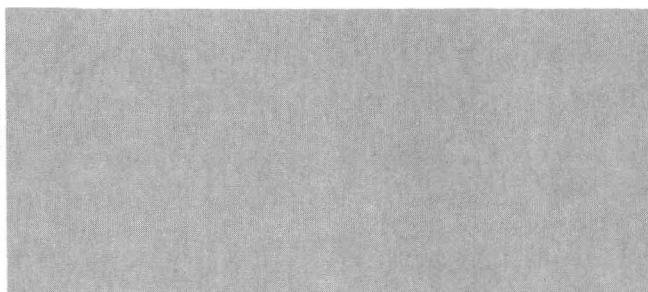
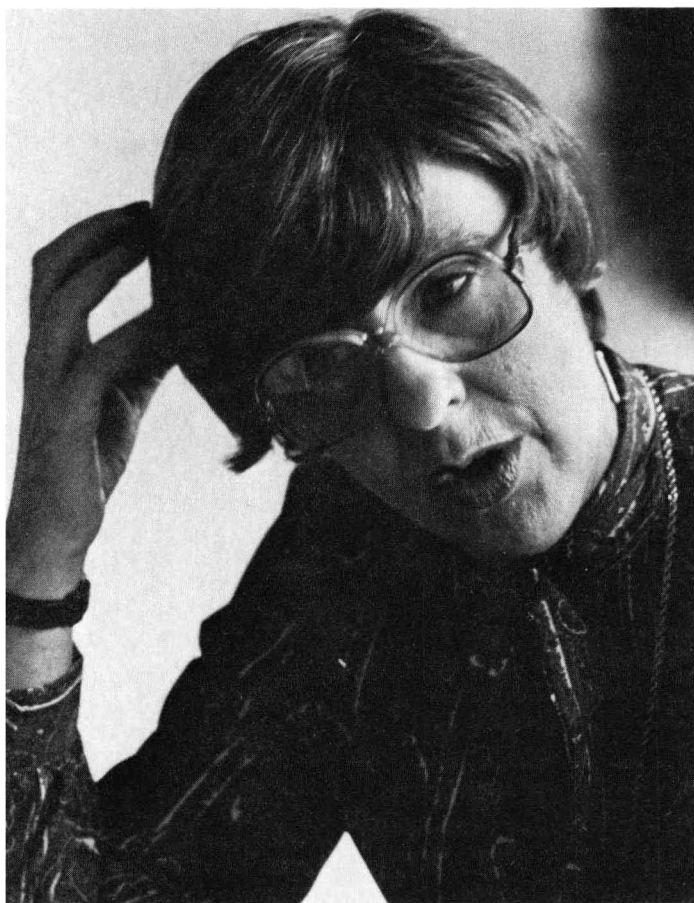
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Fundamentals of
**Speech
Communication**

1 The Communicative Process



In recent years human communication has been an object of study in a number of disciplines. A moment's reflection reveals why: It touches human beings daily. Through communication a math teacher explains algebra to students, a stranger finds directions to the home of a friend, a parent lets a child know he is loved, an air traffic controller brings an incoming airliner safely onto the runway through rain and fog.

If communication is faulty, severe damage may result. If a diner orders a steak cooked medium and receives one well done, he experiences only a mild palatal disappointment. But if the air traffic controller's report that the altitude of an airplane is 100 feet is received as 200 feet, a tragic crash may occur. If the parent's message of love is misinterpreted by the child, a serious personality problem may develop.

Not only is communication important in simply conveying information, it is also an especially important problem-solving device. By means of arbitration meetings, labor and management can explore each other's positions and ultimately may resolve their differences. By means of small group communication, a city council can analyze the city's need for a new water plant, examine alternative proposals, and finally adopt what it judges the best solution. By means of debate, direct or indirect, proponents of different views can take their cases to the people concerned.

Some, recognizing its importance, have suggested communication as a panacea for solving problems in our society. Thus we hear almost daily that if only two groups could "communicate," they could resolve their problems. Without in any way denying the importance of communication, we know it will not automatically solve every problem in our world. In some instances, it may even exacerbate the difficulty by revealing that the points of difference are greater than had been assumed.

Human communication takes many forms, such as interviews, conversations, small group communication, public communication, and mass communication. In this book, we will consider three of these forms: public communication, small group communication, and interviews. Greatest attention will be directed to public communication, but most of the principles are applicable to other modes as well.

Credibility and the Communicator

The main theme of this book is that successful acts of communication—whether one-to-one, one to a few, or one to many—depend upon the participants' developing an *aura of credibility*.

Credibility means capable of being believable. *Aura* (according to *Random House Dictionary*) means “a distinctive and pervasive quality or character; atmosphere”; or “a subtly pervasive quality or atmosphere seen as emanating from a person, place, or thing.”¹ In other words, an *aura of credibility* is “a subtly pervasive quality or atmosphere” of credibility “seen as emanating from” a communicator and the message. Substituting the term *credibility* for *aura of credibility* does not, therefore, convey the same meaning because an aura of credibility encompasses the many elements in a communicative effort which may contribute to its success. Consequently, *aura of credibility* is a more useful term because it is broader in scope.

The importance of establishing an aura of credibility for effective public communication has been stated explicitly by columnist Carl T. Rowan. After an encounter with Jimmy Carter following the 1976 Democratic National Convention, Rowan wrote: “Intellect, or a newsman’s natural sense of cynicism, told me that Carter has probably told 10,000 people: ‘I intend to make you proud of me.’ But the way he said it in that hotel lobby made it seem like a very personal pledge to me, and that made it believable. I am sure that all the others who have heard similar words have felt that special aura of credibility.”²

The student of speech communication who learns the principles of creating an aura of credibility is apt to communicate with others more effectively and to analyze the communication attempts of others more intelligently. This aura of credibility may stem from one or more of several sources: the content of the message; the organization of the message; the language of the communicative effort; the situation in which the communication occurs; the communicator’s delivery; the communicator’s attributes. An aura of credibility is seldom created by a single factor alone. Usually several factors must work together.

The remainder of this book will discuss the principles by which a communicator can establish an aura of credibility.

Definition of Communication

Communication is the process by which one or more individuals develop and share meaning. This definition precludes no form of human communication—from two people’s developing and sharing meaning for the sheer joy of communicating, to the public communicator’s developing and sharing meaning in order to influence the attitudes and behaviors of others.

Figure 1.1 shows the elements that are involved in the communication process. Before discussing those elements, however, we need to clarify their roles and relationships by considering six characteristics of the process itself.

1. Communication is *dynamic* rather than static. The elements act individually and also interact with each other. Communication is not a discrete act but consists of a number of actions that produce certain effects, which in turn produce results, and so on. In any communication effort, therefore, you must be constantly aware of the other elements involved and continually adapt to their changes.
2. It is *continuous*. There is a continuity of each of the parts. Your understanding of the world begins the day you are born and continues until the day you die. Throughout this time you communicate with others, and they communicate with you. Even as you express ideas to a listener, your mutual understanding of those ideas is developing, both as a result of the listener's response to them and your own reaction to that listener's response. Furthermore, communication persists after you and the listener go your separate ways, as each of you continues to think about and respond to what the other said and did. There is no beginning and no end to communication. Though your death may terminate your role as receiver, it does not end your role as source.
3. It is *complex*. Many naively perceive the act of speech communication as a simple one: Somebody speaks and somebody listens. Therefore, they reason, communication has taken place. Initiating efforts to communicate may be easy, but achieving communication is difficult. Some even speak of the transfer of ideas from one person to another. Nothing could be further from the truth. Don't expect to transfer your ideas to another; the best that can be done is to stimulate a hearer to think about the meaning expressed. Even if you cause the listener to think, you cannot always impel that listener to think about the meaning you have in mind, because communication occurs at many levels and reflects many influences. The listener may not be stimulated to think about the meaning in the way you wanted.
4. It is *irreversible*. Just as the process of turning iron into steel cannot be reversed, the process of communication cannot be turned back. Once a message has been sent and received, the effect it produces becomes a factor in all later messages.
5. It is *nonsequential*. The elements in the communication process are not rigidly patterned; they are not necessarily in a linear, circular, helical, or

any order. They may occur in any of these sequences or they may occur in a random order. The positions of the parts in the communication model below are not fixed; they can be and are constantly interchanging. Figure 1.1, for example, shows the source before the message; yet the message may have been developing in the mind of the source over a long period of time, possibly even for years, before it is presented to another person. The placement of barriers in the figure does not clearly indicate that they can begin to take effect even before the source begins the message. Nor does the figure indicate that the message and channel are interrelated and generally are inseparable. Moreover, feedback can begin before the source initiates a message, although the figure does not reveal this.

6. It is *unrepeatable*. We cannot re-create an act of communication. Since participants are changed because of it, they cannot repeat the process because they bring altered meanings to any subsequent acts of communication. As Heraclitus said long ago, a man cannot step into the same river twice because both the man and the river are different the second time. Because other factors do not remain static, their changes also preclude the repetition of communication.³

In short, communication is a process consisting of a number of independent and interdependent steps leading to the attainment of an end. In speech communication that end is the developing and sharing of some specific meaning by one or more persons. But the simplicity of the end should not obscure the complexity of the process.

Elements of the Speech Communication Process

The complex, complicated process of speech communication must be understood if effective, meaningful communication is to occur. We can understand the process better if we break it into its constituent parts and diagram them in a model, as in figure 1.1. We must realize, however, that a model is not a *replica*, but an *analogy*, of the communication process. We must also keep in mind that the speech communication process is different from certain biological processes in which the parts cannot interchange and must occur in a fixed sequence. Consequently, we must be aware that, in some important ways, we distort the communication process when we discuss the elements in isolation.

Basically there are seven elements in the process: (1) the source, (2) the message, (3) the channel, (4) the receiver, (5) barriers, (6) feedback, and (7) the situation.

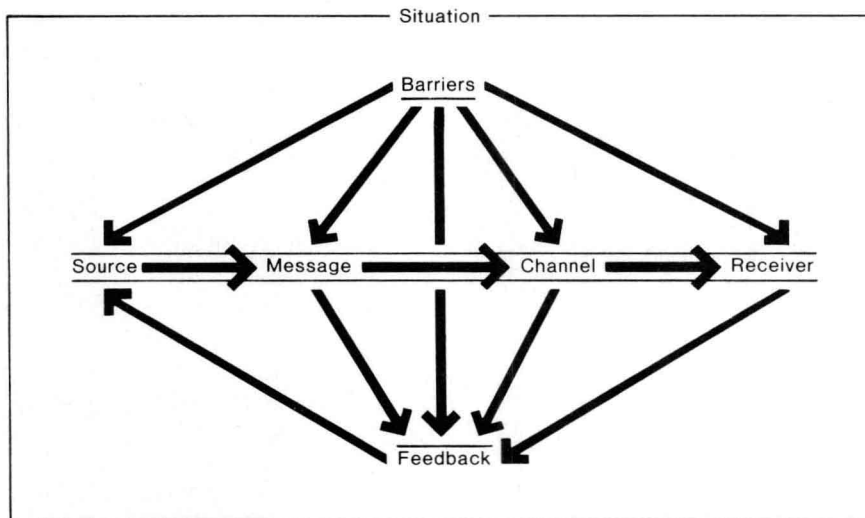
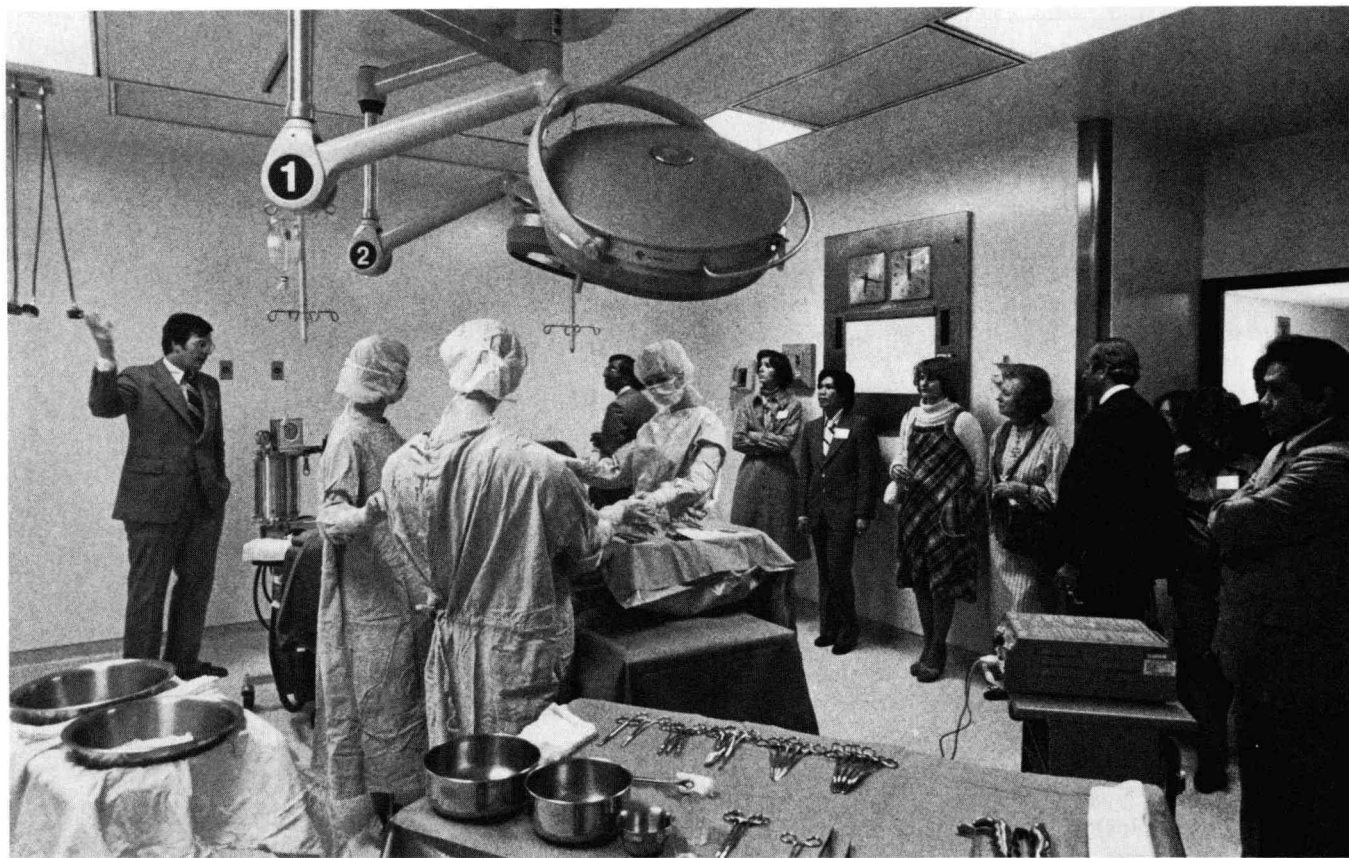


Figure 1.1
A model of the speech communication process.

The source in speech communication is the person who makes the decision to communicate. As a communicator you may decide to communicate with yourself (intrapersonal speech communication), with another person (interpersonal speech communication), or with a number of other persons (public communication). You may have one or more of three intents: (1) *to inform* as when you tell a stranger how to get to a particular place in town; (2) *to entertain*, as when a stand-up comic delivers a monologue; (3) *to persuade*, as when the president telecasts a speech advocating increased federal funding for higher education. In some instances you may have more than one purpose because you are talking to more than one audience. A labor leader explaining to the union members how an impending strike will be carried out if negotiations break down is attempting to inform them. However, if television cameras are present to carry these remarks to the nation, the labor leader may be trying to persuade management and the nation's public that the union is serious and unyielding in its contract demands.

The Source

The purpose of a speech is determined by you—not by the form or method of the speech or by the reaction of the listeners. You may give a speech for the purpose of informing or entertaining listeners, but they may end up being persuaded. The purpose of the speech is still to inform or to entertain. Or you may give a speech to persuade, but the listeners may only be informed as a



result of the speech. In some instances your purpose may be to persuade, but the speech is given as an informative one. Although many informative and persuasive speeches use communicative principles similarly, there are some speeches in which the principles are applied in different ways, as explained in chapters 12 and 13.

You are limited to the information you have accumulated on the topic through experience and investigation. Your ability to generate a message is further circumscribed by your perceptions, your thoughts, and your feelings.

Significantly influencing the impact of the message will be characteristics that make you appealing or unappealing to the particular audience being