The Speaker's Handbook

Fifth Edition

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Douglas Stuart

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Speeches adapted with permission for use in Appendix by John Poulakos, Karen Lynn McNeil, Patrick Kan Wong, Jade Pham, and Raymond W. Smith.

Preface

The Speaker's Handbook, Fifth Edition, is at once a reference guide for the individual speaker and a textbook for use in the public speaking course. It is a compendium of principles, examples, and exercises that covers the issues one commonly confronts in preparing and delivering a speech. What distinguishes *The Speaker's Handbook* from other books on public speaking, though, is its flexibility: Each of the twenty-nine chapters stands by itself, so that speakers need consult only those parts of the book covering the aspects of speechmaking with which they need further help.

About the Handbook Approach

In a sense, a book about public speaking is a contradiction. Public speaking is a lived, performed, embodied event that draws its special qualities from the immediate context, the personality of a particular speaker, and the response of a certain audience. Is there really any useful general advice about so specific an act?

Apparently so. For as long as people have felt the need to speak in public, they have turned to others for advice on how to do so more effectively. Early evidence from Egyptian tombs shows that leaders gave serious thought to the choices they faced in speaking to their followers. The oral tradition captured in Homeric legend hints that the giving and taking of this advice predated the written word. The increasing supply of information about the ancient cultures of China, India, and the Americas shows that these peoples had culturally distinctive ways of speaking, which some analyzed and discussed. These observers then formulated advice for others in their culture. Such advice usually came in two forms: Those who had vast experience as speakers told stories about what worked for them; others looked beyond what worked and theorized about why it worked.

Both forms of guidance are still present. Leading platform speakers write books about their experiences. The popularity of such books year

after year suggests that people find benefit in the personal and experiential approach. At the same time, university libraries continue to accumulate academic treatises on rhetoric and communication. Here, too, the vitality of these lines of research after thousands of years suggests that much is left to be said and investigated.

There is a third form, one that we differentiate from both those kinds of books and place within another venerable tradition that is over two thousand years old. This form is neither a narrative account of personal success stories nor a scholarly theoretical tome. This is the *handbook*. The first written handbooks for speakers were probably produced by the Sophists in the Greece of 200 BCE. In any field, a handbook represents a particular blending of theory and practice displayed in a concise format. There are scouting handbooks and birding handbooks and managing handbooks and meditation handbooks. In all these cases, a handbook is a distillation of the experience and theory of many people and many eras.

The particular usefulness of handbooks can be found in their characteristics.

Handbooks are brief.

They fit in a person's hand. They are supposed to be as small as practicable to remove the impediment of size for easy carrying, storing, and referencing. The implication of this is that we have tried to distill the most meaningful advice, avoiding bulking the book out. The sample speeches in the **Appendix** are called on over and over again in the text in both examples and exercises. Putting in as many sample speeches as usual in standard textbooks, interspersed throughout the body of the book, would defeat the advantages offered by the handbook format. Cartoons and photographs, likewise, take up too much space.

Handbooks are reference books.

The contents of a handbook are meant to be used in any order. The progression of the chapters, as we have arranged them, is not random, but then again, a reader or teacher does not necessarily have to follow that order. We have written the chapters to be as self-contained as possible to make the book more adaptable to the differing needs of its various users. Long before the information superhighway or menu-driven computers or the invention of the phrase *random access*, people liked to learn things as they needed them.

Adult learners have their own way of designing their learning programs, whether they are setting up a computer or understanding a new job. Most people who buy a computer do not take a course on how to use it. They try a few things, glance at the manual, and work until they get into trouble. Then they look at the manual again, but only for the specific information they need to get beyond the current problem. In effect, they don't worry about the things they don't have to worry about, but they won't know that a thing to worry about exists until they discover it. Public speaking is like that. Until people start speaking, they cannot be sure of all the areas in which they may need improvement. Therefore, users should approach this handbook with a spirit of flexibility, taking what they need in the order they need it. Each teacher brings to the classroom a different experience set and an understanding of the values, needs, and capabilities of the students who attend a particular institution. Therefore, each teacher may choose to assign chapters in an order that fits his or her perception of the best way to increase the skills of those students. Whether users are teachers, students, or businesspersons, we think that they will find some benefit in every chapter of this handbook, but we don't dictate to them in what order they find that benefit.

Handbooks are handy.

When people haul out the book that came with their computer, they want to find the section on changing printer types quickly, not read about the architecture of the system to find the bit that refers to communications between the computer and printer. A good user guide compartmentalizes related information and then tries to make that information as accessible as possible through a variety of pointers and references, using design tools to make things easy to find. We have included aids to let users get to where they want to be, from the quick index and checklists on the end-papers to the use of color and typeface weight in the text itself.

With this compartmentalization, users do not have to read everything at once. A student may be preparing to give an informative speech for a class and is thinking of including some humor. The student could jump ahead and read Chapter **16a(4).** It is not that long. A businessperson may be giving a presentation to the board on the adoption of new technology but feel uncertain if he or she has covered everything and in the most effective order. That person could read Chapter **7** on transforming his or her ideas into points and Chapters **19** and **20** on informative and persuasive strategies.

We do have a few specific recommendations, however, on preliminary steps that will help students and other readers get the most out of this book. First, such users should read Chapter **1**. It provides an orientation to communication and helps them crystallize their self-definition as speakers. It helps them diagnose their skill level and gives them an approach to mapping out a skill-development plan for themselves. The format of this book is based on the assumption that speakers cannot be conscious of everything at once. In designing a skills-development program, speakers *should not* be conscious of everything at once. Trying to do everything, in parallel, will frustrate their purpose and inhibit their skill-building. As we say in **1e,** speakers should avoid being overly conscious of their manner of speaking or their message's exact language. But if a speech is different from just another conversation, as we also say, how do public speakers become *just enough more conscious* of the craft of speaking to improve their skill without breaking the conversational bond? The secret lies in having a very clear plan of what their priorities are and in deciding on a limited number of goals to pursue consciously at any one time. The handbook approach lets users pick one or two important skills to work on, and when those are mastered, move to another set.

About Writing This Book

We approached this writing task with an unusual combination of perspectives. In her twenty-five years of teaching public speaking, visiting the classes of other teachers, and consulting, Jo Sprague has observed that there are many "right ways" to approach a course. Doug Stuart, as a vice president of a technical and marketing publications department, has learned how to take even the most complex material and make it clear and accessible to readers. It became evident to us that there was a need for a different kind of book on speaking, one based on what we knew about how adults learn. *The Speaker's Handbook* proceeds from the premise that people like to focus first on the area of greatest concern and then design their own learning experience outward from that point.

About the Fifth Edition

We have been gratified with the response to the first four editions of *The Speaker's Handbook.* And we are pleased that the handbook format worked for students and their instructors, as well as for people who give

presentations in their business or community roles. In this edition, we have once again responded to user suggestions on how to make the information even more accessible. We have streamlined both the book and the **Appendix.** Material on humor, for instance, is now incorporated into **16,** Attention and Interest. The Guidelines for Special Occasions **(22)** have been limited to the kinds of occasions that users have identified as truly special. In the **Appendix,** we have included only those sample speech materials that most concisely illustrate the key principles of the book.

As this edition has been trimmed, it has also been updated. Throughout, we have tried to capture the changing contexts and topics for public speaking. We address directly the opportunities (and the risks) posed by information technologies like the Internet and new presentation aids.

Practice Sessions has been made its own chapter **(24),** and moved to the Presentation section, where it serves to guide speakers through the important process of rehearsing, receiving feedback, and orally refining their ideas.

The greatest substantive change from earlier editions is the new chapter on Speaking Ethics, **21.** Here we pull together implications from all aspects of preparing and delivering a speech, inviting readers to think about the obligations they take on when they assume the power of a speaker. The chapter does not provide simple answers to complex ethical questions, but rather emphasizes the importance of respect—for oneself, one's audience, and the integrity of ideas—while balancing short-term effectiveness and long-term integrity.

Finally, though we have received compliments on the inclusiveness of the first four editions, we strive to make each subsequent edition of the *Handbook* more attuned to the diversity of contemporary life. In our treatment of language, reasoning, and vocal and physical delivery, we attempt to show how social forces shape, and are shaped by, speech. What is appropriate, or clear, or persuasive constantly changes as society changes. The effective speaker will be open to the subtle cultural variations in speech situations. If there were no differences between people, communication would be unnecessary. If there were no similarities, it would be impossible. The great strength of oral communication is that its many dimensions offer people ways to seek out connections in the midst of difference; its immediacy allows for on-the-spot adjustments.

About Listening

Being a good speaker and being a good listener go hand in hand. If speakers master the techniques in this "speaker's" handbook, we guarantee that they will be better listeners. They will be more appreciative of good speaking when they hear it, recognizing the art and craft that come into play to create a successful and satisfying speaking event. They will also be more critical of speaking that fails to measure up to the standards they insist upon for themselves. Also, they will begin to notice what they admire in effective speakers and what works and what does not work for them as a part of the audience. Being a good, critical listener is a powerful tool for moving toward speaking competence.

Chapter **13** and sections **14d, 18d,** and **20e** and **f** are particularly relevant to learning to be a critical listener. Empathic listening enters into the skills discussion in Chapters **4** and **29** and in section **5d.** In fact, every chapter of this handbook has implications for listening as well as speaking.

Acknowledgments

<div align="right">Jo Sprague
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