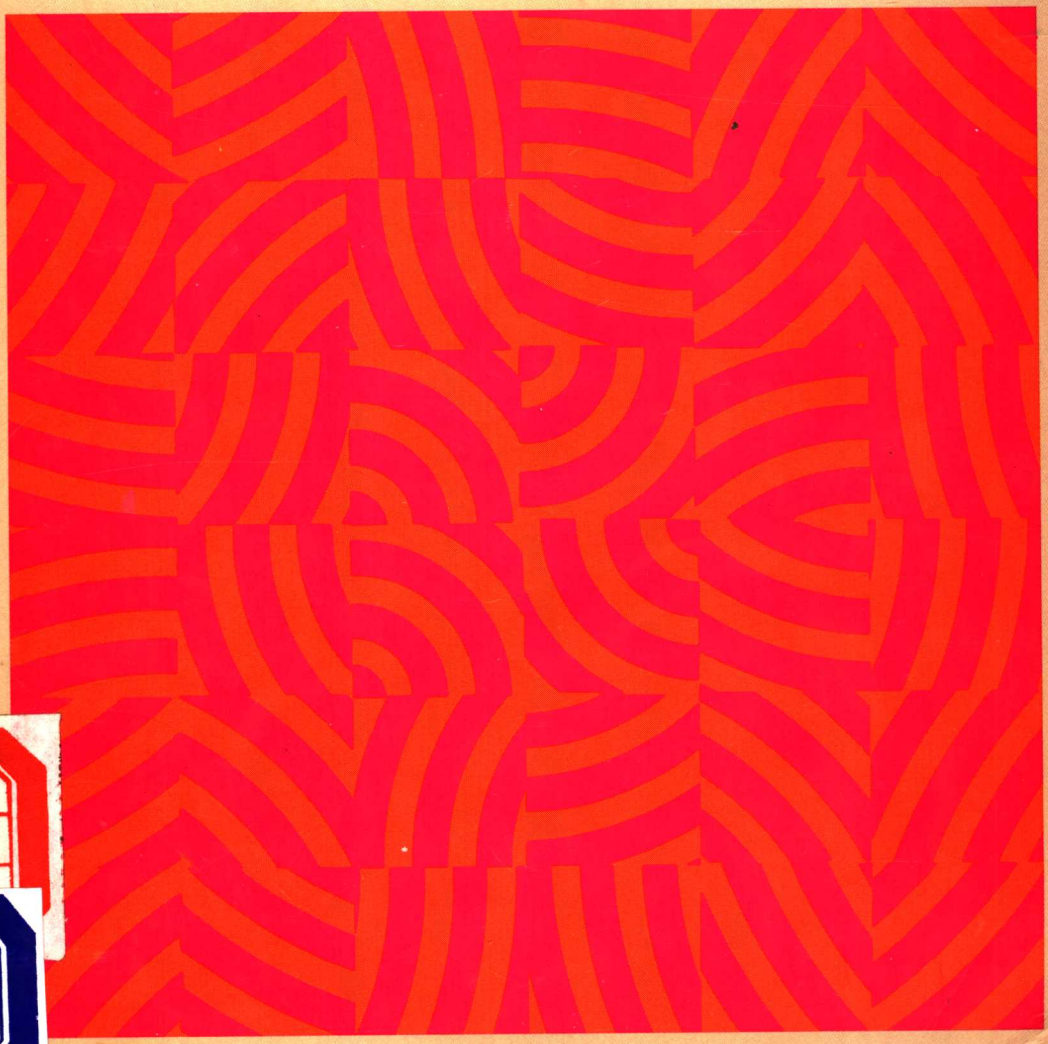
EUGENE E. WHITE

Practical Public Speaking

FOURTH EDITION



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Preface

In preparing the fourth edition of this book, I have sought to preserve the philosophy and approach that carried the first three editions to more than a score of printings. This edition, as were the earlier ones, is designed to be a practical, relatively complete guide to the preparation and presentation of public speeches.

What is different about this edition? Among the more obvious changes, I have added a chapter (Chapter 2, "Understanding Basic Communicative Concepts") that focuses on what I believe are the most important pragmatic concepts involved in public speaking. I have grouped slightly differently the early chapters in order to emphasize the interaction between the demands (needs or requirements) exerted upon the speech by the audience, speaking occasion, the speaker, and the speech purpose (Chapters 3 and 4) and the answering of those demands by the strategies of speech development, rehearsal, and delivery (Chapters 5–16). I have also divided the treatment of developing the Body of the speech into three chapters, instead of the two found in the third edition. My reason for doing this is to improve the focus, to make clearer the critical concepts inherent in developing ideas clearly, interestingly, and persuasively.

Among the somewhat less obvious changes, I have updated illustrative materials; tried to incorporate advances in psychology, sociology, and related disciplines; attempted to sharpen the explication of the various concepts and their application, expanding explanation here and reducing it there; and sought to improve the capacity of the text to engage the reader in an ongoing dialogue concerning speech preparation and delivery—in essentially the same way that the effective speaker promotes a cyclical interrelationship between himself and the listeners, which continues throughout the speech.

Those who have used and liked the third edition will be pleased that this edition contains no sharp divergence in matter or form. In Chapter 1, as in previous editions, I have attempted to engage the serious beginning speakers' concerns and understanding. In subsequent chapters, by supplying answers to their felt—if unexpressed—questions, I have sought to help them grow, to extend themselves toward greater confidence and capability in speech preparation and delivery. Instead of ready-made formulas that tend to stultify original thought, I have tried to give the kind of specific guidance that will sensitize the readers, first, to a greater aware-

ness of the influences that may limit or extend their freedoms as a communicator in a given set of circumstances and, second, to the range of options that are available to them in responding to the various rhetorical demands with which they are confronted.

My intention in this edition, as in previous ones, has been to treat concisely yet comprehensively those principles that are basic to proper perspectives concerning public speaking and to effective speech preparation and delivery. With the student-reader foremost in my mind, my goals have been ready understandability, practicality, friendly and informal style, and brevity. To achieve a cumulative effect, principles are stated, explained, summarized, looked at from different points of view, and integrated—until they become a natural part of the reader's thinking. As each element of effective speaking is studied, the reader is constantly reminded of the ancient origins and honorable continuum of rhetorical theory and of the social and ethical responsibilities that must be assumed by the speaker.

Like the earlier editions, this one is primarily designed for use in the beginning undergraduate course and the adult public-speaking course in extension divisions or in industry. However, this edition will also provide self-help for individuals who are not enrolled in a formal course but who wish to improve their skills in speechmaking.

As in the previous editions, I have followed each chapter with exercises and problems that are intended to aid the teacher in planning assignments and to aid the student in putting principles into practice. The sequence and grouping of chapters have been designed to provide maximum utility and flexibility in usage. To enable the student to prepare and deliver a speech before reading large segments of the book, the fundamentals of public speaking are introduced in Chapter 1. A study of the detailed treatment of these principles in later chapters may follow several different approaches. For example, some instructors may apply the existing sequence of chapters; others who prefer to begin with a study of the techniques of delivery may assign Chapters 1 and 12–15 before Chapters 4–11; and still others may wish to consider one of the special types of speeches in Chapter 16 prior to a careful examination of speech preparation and delivery.

Regretfully I cannot thank individually here all those who contributed directly or indirectly to the preparation of this edition. However, I do wish to express my special appreciation to Lloyd C. Chilton, executive editor of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., for sharing generously of his time and wisdom and to my wife, Roberta Fluitt White, for providing—as always—wise counsel, encouragement, and, best of all, sprightly good humor. I am, of course, solely responsible for any shortcomings this book may possess.

University Park, Pennsylvania Eugene E. White

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SECTION I

Developing the Proper Perspectives

Essential Purpose of Section I: to enable the reader to adopt proper perspectives about public speaking by approaching speechmaking positively and by understanding certain basic communicative concepts

CHAPTER 1

Approaching Public Speaking Positively

So you're going to make a speech! That entails facing an audience, something you may not have done since a childhood performance in a school play. You may recall the anxious faces of your parents as their lips moved with your words and their relief when your lines came out letter-perfect. Possibly your last speaking appearance was the giving of an oral book report or the reading aloud of a theme in a freshman English class. Very likely you are beginning the study of public speaking with mixed feelings: although possibly disturbed at the prospect of speechmaking, you value the opportunity to develop speech skills and want to do well.

Why are you enrolled in a course in public speaking? If you are a typical college student beginning a regular college course, you probably recognize the need for effective oral communication in almost any career you may pursue. As you move upward from your initial job experience to greater responsibility, increased opportunity to help others, and higher pay, your professional growth will be tied to your ability to communicate with others. Of more immediate concern, you may wish to understand and solve communicative problems you now have as a student. Perhaps you have been elected fraternity president and you need to energize the fellows to cooperate for the benefit of the order; member of the student senate and you have to propose and defend pieces of legislation; secretary of the Cavers Club and you must read the minutes and give reports. Maybe you have been appointed resident counselor and you are required to hold weekly meetings with the girls on your floor. Your curriculum, say in

architecture, may necessitate your giving frequent oral reports and you feel that you don't represent yourself or your ideas as well as you would like. Or, possibly you have wanted occasionally to ask questions in large lecture-classes, but have had the nerve to do it only once—and then someone tittered as your tongue got twisted up.

Common to thousands of persons who each year enter the beginning course in public speaking is the knowledge that man is a talking animal and that speaking is our most prevalent form of communication. For every word we write, we speak thousands. It has been suggested that the American people utter some seven trillion words daily! And each time we talk—on the street, in a neighbor's home, across the conference table, before an audience—we are judged not only by *what we say* but also by *how effectively we say it.* In increasing numbers, people are realizing that the ability to communicate well may mean greater economic efficiency in a highly competitive world, more rewarding social relationships, increased personal satisfaction, and more responsible citizenship.

Misconceptions About the Study of Public Speaking

Before a positive philosophy for the beginning speaker can be presented and methods for achieving it suggested, several erroneous conceptions should be examined.

"You Either Have It Or You Don't"

Without remembered effort, most of us learn to talk early in childhood. Persons who speak volubly and effortlessly are labeled "born with the knack." Those who have less verbal facility may be tabbed "the quiet type." Like blue eyes or curly hair, the ability or inability to talk fluently is accepted by many as a hereditary trait. Subscribers to this theory point to Bill Jackson, who can always say "a few well-chosen words" at any time, before any audience, on any subject. In contrast, Professor Ellsworth Fox drones ineffectually to his classes and to women's clubs on his specialty, medieval art. Fox has lectured for fifteen years, is highly educated, and once took a course in public speaking. Jackson, on the other hand, has had no formal speech training, little education, and, until his "talent" was discovered, had had almost no public speaking experience.

Indeed, cases such as these exist. Possibly you can cite similar examples. Without training and apparently without conscious effort, some persons become adequate and, occasionally, exceptional speakers. Corresponding aptitudes, of course, occur in other endeavors—in music, art,

drama, and athletics, for instance. Nevertheless, those with high aptitudes in these arts nearly always profit from study. Evidence refutes the claim of some people that speaking ability is easily acquired as a by-product of conversation, committee leadership, or recitation. To develop into skilled public speakers, most of us need concentrated effort, preferably under skilled supervision.

"You Can't Trust an Effective Speaker"

Since the time of Socrates, and possibly before, some persons have been skeptical of speech training, attacking it upon ethical and moral grounds. Perhaps because they have been deceived by a "high-pressure" salesman or a "slick operator," the skeptics distrust an individual who is articulate and persuasive, and believe that a stumbling, halting speaker is more sincere and trustworthy. Many years ago, however, Aristotle pointed out the absurdity of assuming that the misuse of speaking skills by some speakers constitutes an indictment of the skills themselves: "If it is urged that an abuse of the rhetorical faculty can work great mischief, the same charge can be brought against all good things (save virtue itself), and especially against the most useful things such as strength, health, wealth, and military skills. Rightly employed, they work the greatest blessings; and wrongly employed, they work the utmost harm."

Although in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle deplored both the chicanery sometimes employed by speakers and the susceptibility of some persons to dishonest persuasion, he stated categorically that the way to prevent the triumph of fraud and injustice was to *increase* speech training, not to abandon it: "The art of rhetoric . . . is valuable, first, because truth and justice are by nature more powerful than their opposites; so that, when decisions are not made as they should be, the speakers with the right on their side have only themselves to thank for the outcome. Their neglect of the art needs correction." The only way to combat fraudulent advocates is for honorable persons to develop ability in speaking and in analytical-evaluative listening.

Golden Voices and Silver Tongues

The studied, oratorical kind of speaking that was common some generations ago is as outdated today as tickets to last year's World Series. Effective speaking is not a "performance" staged to display the ability of the speaker; it is a communicative process designed to stir up desired responses from a particular audience assembled at a specific time and place. To secure these responses, you must learn to recognize the freedoms and restraints that characterize the particular speaking situation. You

must develop the ability to identify the rhetorical needs with which you are confronted and to select and apply the rhetorical means that will satisfy, as well as possible, those needs. You must acquire the faculty of encouraging listeners to engage in a creative sharing with you concerning items under discussion; facility in linking your ideas to values, wants, and interests of listeners; proficiency in organizing and developing your ideas in the most effective logical and psychological manner; as well as the ability to speak clearly, precisely, and fluently.

Instead of flowery language, gestures on cue, pompous posing, and other trappings of the old-fashioned orator "out on display," your study will concentrate on those principles and skills that will promote the effective sharing of your ideas and feelings with your listeners.

A New Personality?

Obviously a single public-speaking course is not capable of satisfying all student needs. For instance, a student occasionally enrolls in a speech course with the hope that it will cure some personality or adjustment problem. A deep-seated emotional problem will not be solved by limited training in public speaking. Although the increased confidence and poise resulting from improvement in self-expression may alter a person's typical behavior patterns, it would be unrealistic to anticipate a personality metamorphosis as a consequence of a semester course in public speaking.

A Philosophy for the Beginning Speaker

As you approach the preparation of your first speeches, many thoughts may enter your mind. If you have had little or no previous public-speaking experience, you may ask yourself, "What can I talk about? How shall I prepare? Shall I write out the speech and read it, commit it to memory, try to talk from an outline, or what? Shall I rehearse? Where? How often? Should I begin with a joke? Could I get away with using last week's English theme? Should I drop the course?" These questions are typical. If you experience any of these feelings, you may be comforted to know that many beginning speakers share your uncertainty.

Of course, if you have had some successful speaking experience, you are probably more positively oriented. You may be thinking, "I'm beginning to enjoy this. I'm looking forward to giving my speech."

To secure maximum benefit from your speech training, you should minimize uncertainty or apprehension by adopting appropriate attitudes.

Confidence Can Be Acquired

A common initial reaction of the beginning speaker is that of apprehension, commonly termed "stage fright." Some students let trembling hands and knees, perspiring palms, dry mouths, tremulous voices, breathlessness, loss of memory, and "butterflies in the stomach" serve as stubborn roadblocks to improvement. Further elaboration of the symptoms of stage fright is probably unnecessary. A student once confessed that until his high school teacher described in vivid detail the symptoms of stage fright he had felt reasonably confident about speaking. Upon hearing of the panic felt by some at the prospect of facing an audience, he became fearful that a barrage of similar reactions might attack him. This apprehension triggered a fear reaction each time he spoke thereafter. Before you tend to react similarly, let us leave the symptoms of stage fright and look for its causes and remedies.

The primary prerequisite to recovery from emotional stress, psychologists tell us, is to understand its nature and what brings it upon us. What is the cause of this tension felt in some degree by nearly all of us when arising to speak—and by some when merely thinking about making a speech? Why are we afraid? We are in no physical danger. Audiences rarely shoot or lynch speakers, we tell ourselves. A little introspection will remind us, however, that there are many kinds of fear that are not the result of imminent danger to one's physical person. When we begin to speak, and perhaps even for some time before a performance, we may feel *social fear*. If this happens to you it may remind you vaguely of your first school dance, when you were so concerned about your appearance and so anxious to please your date that you didn't have much fun—at least during the early part of the evening. Perhaps you looked forward to the party with some eagerness; yet you feared the possible disapproval of others who would attend. Similarly, when we face an audience, we may experience uneasiness or anxiety in being the focus of attention; we may fear a negative response from our listeners and, hence, lowered self and group status. Most of us apparently are victims of a strange paradox: we desire audiences and yet fear them. Part of the tension we feel may result from the conflict of these antagonistic forces. We may not fear the process of speaking as such—but rather the consequences of it, particularly the possibility of a negative reaction from the audience.

Although the causes of speech fright are varied, complex, and inadequately understood, effective treatment can be offered. However, do not expect to receive advice that will make public speaking entirely "risk free." No interaction among individuals is totally without risk to one's ego or group status. You would not want it otherwise. If all elements of chance, or uncertainty, were removed from life, we would lead a boring existence indeed. Nevertheless, the following section contains suggestions that have proved helpful to students in reducing emotional stress. After

applying these guides, if you think that your degree of tension is unusually severe, talk over your problems with your speech instructor. He, or she, will be pleased to help you help yourself.

First, Choose Subjects that You Strongly Wish to Discuss with Your Listeners. Do not summarize an article that catches your eye in the latest magazine digest or Sunday supplement. Instead, by following the advice given in Chapter 4, "Analyzing Demands: The Speech Purpose," you should be able to discover a variety of topics that *excite you*—that have *vivid personal meaning to you.* Now, from among these possibilities select those topics that should be *keenly interesting and meaningful to your listeners.* Chapter 3, "Analyzing Demands: The Specific Speech Situation," and Chapter 4 contain advice that should help you adjust your speaking purpose to the interests, desires, and experiences of the auditors so that you can encourage them to be continuing, creative, active—though silent—participants. A final screening process: out of the potential topics that are meaningful and interesting to both you and your listeners, settle upon the one that you most strongly wish to share with the audience. If you are eager to communicate a particular message, negative tension is much less likely to build up.

Second, Prepare Thoroughly. To slight preparation is to invite tension. Chapters 5–11 contain detailed advice for organizing and developing the speech in the most effective logical and psychological manner. Chapter 13 contains suggestions for rehearsing the speech. If you have earned the right to talk by acquiring a thorough understanding of the subject, by carefully organizing and developing the speech, and by rehearsing until you know the sequence of the ideas you will present, you will possess the solid comfort of knowing that you have done everything possible to prepare yourself intellectually for the speaking assignment.

Third, Prepare Yourself Psychologically. Practice good mental hygiene by giving yourself psychological "shots in the arm" such as the following.

Your speech will do something for your listeners. If you have followed the advice offered above, your subject will be interesting and meaningful to your hearers. It will do something *for them.* Your concern to be helpful to your listeners—to provide them with a service—to do something for them will help divert your attention from negative apprehensions.

You know more about the subject than your audience does. This is so because of your strong interest in the subject and your long-term and immediate preparation for the speech—as described. In "real-life" speaking situations, a person is rarely asked to speak unless it is believed that he has special knowledge or experience, or represents an important view-

point. In the classroom, if you possess keen interest in your subject and have prepared thoroughly, you are probably better informed on the subject than most of the listeners. Confidence born of enthusiasm and solid preparation is a basic bulwark of poise.

You appear more confident than you feel. It is a truism that we do not see ourselves exactly as others see us. Such is the case when we face audiences. Upon finishing his first speech, a student who had appeared poised and confident told the class with a sigh of relief that he was "glad that was over." He confessed to extreme stage fright and admitted that he had doubted he would be able to complete the speech. Although initially reluctant to believe that he had appeared in control of himself and the situation, he was finally convinced. His attitude then became, "If I can feel that terrible and look that good, I suppose I can put up with tension and fear." He no longer had to "put up with" agonizing apprehensions, however; once he realized that his nervousness was not conspicuous and that the audience had accepted him as a poised, efficiently functioning speaker, the major cause of his tension was eliminated.

Not all instances are as striking as this one, but be assured that "butterflies" are usually undetectable, muscle tremor is so minute it is unnoticeable in most cases, and only a surgeon sees a racing heart. If you recognize that you may appear more confident than you feel, you may quickly experience a diminution of fear reaction.

Others share your misgivings. It is said that misery loves company because company reduces misery. To be singled out as the only youngster in the block to come down with measles may be an excruciating experience; but if an epidemic strikes and no one can romp and play, a child may not be quite as unhappy at the prospect of being quarantined.

You may be relieved to discover not only that many of your classmates are as uncomfortable as you but also that many distinguished and successful actors, musicians, lecturers, and athletes are chronic sufferers of stage fright. Some of them testify that they have never been without nervous tension in public appearances. In an interview with the author, the renowned minister Norman Vincent Peale explained that his problems with stage fright stimulated him to want to become a public speaker. "I doubt that anyone was ever less likely to become an effective speaker than I," he said. "I definitely was not endowed with superior linguistic skill. In fact, as a boy in Ohio, I was exceedingly shy and inarticulate. One of my most important early battles was to acquire adequate poise in ordinary social situations." In describing his fears during his first public speech, Dr. Peale said, "When I stood up, I became literally stiff with fear. I couldn't get the first words out. In the embarrassed silence, a little girl in the front row giggled to her mother, 'Gosh, look at his knees shake.' That made me so angry that I found my voice and gave a spirited speech."

When asked if he still experienced nervousness, Dr. Peale replied, "Ocassionally I get a little apprehensive before speaking. Last Sunday, for example, I fidgeted with my outline while the hymn was being sung, and then I thought how foolish I was being. If I didn't know what I was going to say by then, I never would know."

Harry S. Truman once told the author that he always experienced some nervousness before a speech and that in his early career this had caused him concern. As he acquired experience he learned to control tension. "My first speech was a complete failure," he admitted. "It took a lot of appearances after that before I felt at home on the platform and could put my ideas across the way I wanted."

A complete list of performers who have suffered to some extent from tensions before performances would include virtually all persons who speak, act, sing, play, or compete in public. When you are convinced that you do not differ significantly from a host of others who appear publicly, many of them successful and famous, you have given yourself one of the best antidotes for excessive apprehension.

Audiences are friendly. Inasmuch as the novice may be more apprehensive about the possibility of unfavorable listener reaction than about the act of speaking itself, the audience may be the focal point of his fear. Students sometimes think that listeners look bored and "poker-faced," seem to smirk, and in other ways noticeably indicate their disapproval. Such negative judgments often represent errors in interpreting the feedback from the audience. Unless hearers are actively hostile to you or to your subject, they are unlikely to show overt signs of disapproval. This is especially true in the public-speaking class; since everyone in the audience has to speak repeatedly during the term, he is motivated to follow Artemus Ward's quid pro quo, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yourn"—"You listen positively to me and I'll do the same for you."

Heightened feeling is essential to effective speaking. When it is controlled and utilized, nervous energy is a friend to be welcomed—not an enemy to be feared and resisted. Heightened feeling is essential in toning the neuromuscular system for maximum efficiency. Just as the successful athlete is "keyed up" before a game, so the effective speaker is emotionally charged to meet the requisites of the speaking situation. Your goal should not be to eliminate tension, but so to temper and regulate it that it works for you rather than against you. If at first you have excessive amounts of nervous energy, you should recognize that this is nature's way of preparing you for an emergency. If you are typical, your tension will decrease with successful experience.

Tension usually decreases with experience. The majority of students steadily and rapidly acquire poise throughout a course in speech. By the