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## Introduction

### Importance of Public Speaking

Every word you say to another person is speech. While you might not be standing in front of a large audience to give a State of the Union Address or a commencement speech, the same principles apply to your telephone conversations and casual chat with friends that apply to the President of the United States and president of your university. The message must be appropriate and comprehensible. Otherwise, what's the point of speaking at all?

A public speaking course is focused on three primary elements: the speaker, the audience, and the message. In order to understand the importance of speaker credibility on the message, we study the speaker and the message separately. What are the elements that make a speaker good? Better? The best? How much influence does the speaker's appearance have on the message? How about the way they pronounce their words? Whether you can hear them?

Does the audience have any responsibilities other than to sit quietly until the speaker is done? What does the speaker "owe" the audience and what does the audience "owe" the speaker? By separating these elements of the

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public speaking situation, we can look at each in depth and answer these questions. We study these elements separately so that we understand them thoroughly, and then we put them together when it is time to give a classroom speech.

If you interview for a job; if you give presentations at work; if you hope to enter graduate school; if you wish to create messages that are clear and comprehensible to your listeners in any situation, then your class in public speaking will serve you well for your entire professional life.

### Functions of Public Speaking

Without making a real effort to sit down in front of C-SPAN or seek out events in distant cities, we have few opportunities to observe public speaking here in the rural South outside of our churches, the occasional national televised addresses of our political leaders, and during national election campaigns that are televised. While preaching is certainly one form of public speaking designed for an audience of like-minded people, we study and create messages in this class that are aimed at general audiences. In the past, public speech was just about the only way to bring together communities and cement public opinion when media had fewer outlets and no one blogged. Before television,

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before radio – skilled speakers would travel from community to community giving prepared speeches on the issues of the day. Those speeches were both community entertainment and community building. Audiences may have agreed with the speaker and roared their approval. Some audiences may have disagreed and thrown rocks or rotten vegetables at the speaker. But opinions – public opinions – were expressed verbally by individuals who were given the opportunity to stand before an audience and share ideas, repeat common themes, and look for agreement among supporters.

Even today, speakers remind their audiences of their shared values and common needs. We all have our own dreams, but the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. articulated brilliantly in 1963 a common dream for our American community.

The public speaker, then, represents a large number of people and gives a public voice to those who may not have an opportunity to share their opinions widely.