Mediated Public Speaking

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Because electronic and digital media have become such central parts of our everyday lives, we shouldn’t think of ourselves only as speakers who might be called upon to perform before in-person audiences. Many of the presentations you’ll have opportunities to give outside the classroom involve the media and information technology and don’t necessarily take place in real time. This chapter takes you through all the steps for making effective mediated presentations.

Today more than ever we have opportunities to inform and influence people by appearing on the mass media, the first topic we address in this chapter. But as information and communications technology have evolved we have developed other convenient and powerful new ways to address each other over long distances too. The second part of this chapter takes up how to make effective presentations using web-based technologies in a process we call distance speaking.
Mediated Public Speaking Today

Expanded opportunities for access to electronic and digital media allow you to broaden your ventures into public speaking and extend the influence your presentations can have. It’s crucial nowadays to know how to take full advantage of chances for getting your message across on the mass media—especially television. But traditional media make up only a part of the widening landscape of contemporary public speaking. Information and communication technologies offer a constantly-expanding world of opportunities in virtually every realm of professional and personal life. For instance, your employer may expect you to make a presentation as part of a web-based virtual meeting, perhaps using graphical material to illustrate your ideas. You might want to set up a website for yourself or for an organization where you deliver a welcoming introduction or other message by means of video streaming. You could prepare, deliver, and record a brief talk about any topic that interests you and post it on a video sharing site like YouTube or a social networking site like MySpace or Facebook. Or you may decide to join the legions of podcasters today who rant about politics, current affairs, sports, popular music, or anything else using state-of-the-art digital audio technology. These kinds of presentations may not have the look of traditional speeches, but to be effective they still require great preparation, practice, performance, and positivity—the “Four P’s of public speaking (Chapter 1).

SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS PRESENTATIONS

Mediated presentations fall into two basic categories—synchronous and asynchronous. **Synchronous presentations** occur when the speaker and the audience engage each other simultaneously in real time. This type of mediated presentation parallels what happens when you give a speech in the classroom. A mediated synchronous presentation may even involve a question-answer period, just as it often does in a classroom. Live speeches that are delivered on television, the internet, radio, or...
by podcast are common examples of mediated synchronous presentations.

Asynchronous presentations, as you can probably guess, occur when the speaker and audience do not engage each other simultaneously in real time. Giving the presentation takes place a considerable amount of time before it is received. For example, if you were to post a video recording of a speech online for viewing by anyone at anytime, that would be an asynchronous presentation. Much of everyday interpersonal communication takes place asynchronously. Emails, social network postings, web documents, file transfers, and traditional forms of communication like handwritten letters are authored and sent at a time that precedes the moment when they are received, considered, and answered. In asynchronous communication, message receivers control when the actual communication actually takes place. We open our email, web documents, files, and snail mail when we want. We read newspapers and magazines according to our personal schedules. We use answering machines and voice mail to filter incoming messages and to manage the timing of our phone conversations. We record TV programs to watch at our leisure.

While synchronous mediated presentations differ from asynchronous presentations we shouldn’t draw the distinction between the categories too strongly. Time is a flexible concept in a world of busy people, digital technology, and global connectivity. Consequently, public speaking today can be simultaneously synchronous and asynchronous. A presentation might be carried live on television or the internet, for instance, and then be made available for timeless access as a web archive. Or a videoconference might help a team of marketers generate ideas for launching a new product, then be stored as a file for the later training of new employees on the dynamics of collaborative product development.
Media Appearances

What kinds of media appearances are you likely to encounter? To answer this, first consider what’s happening today in the electronic media industries. The media’s appetite for program content has never been greater.\textsuperscript{1} The number of broadcast and cable television channels operating in the United States and around the world has grown tremendously in recent years. News and information make up a major part of the programming these channels transmit. Television news departments are the most active seekers of comments from media spokespersons. Electronic media channels compete with online news sources too—the web sites of established news organizations like CBS News or The New York Times, for instance, but also the sites of independent news organizations like slate.com and thousands of news blogs (Chapter 7). News organizations constantly search for credible and articulate spokespersons who can comment on a wide range of issues and events. And when they find reliable, media-friendly sources they come back to them repeatedly. Clearly, the ever-expanding media environment has opened up myriad opportunities for people trained in public speaking to contribute to many kinds of public discussions.

Big business organizations as well as major institutions such as universities, hospitals, and government agencies often hire professional communicators—media and public relations specialists—to make media appearances for them. But the huge demand for effective public communicators who can work with the media is not limited to salaried professionals. There is a growing need for people with excellent speaking and communication skills to represent all kinds of organizations and groups—and not just in English. For example, a group of soccer fans in San Jose, California, has formed an advocacy group called Soccer Silicon Valley. Several members of the organization appear frequently on local television and radio, some in English, others in Spanish, to promote the area’s professional soccer team. Classroom instructors who belong to the teacher’s labor union in New York volunteer to express their views about budget issues on television news broadcasts throughout the state. Unpaid advocates for medical marijuana, increased border security, and for protecting victims of domestic violence throughout the United States regularly make their pleas for public support on the media.
Career Opportunities Knock

As we know, effective communications skills rank among the top qualifications required for almost any kind of employment today. Your public speaking class is designed in part to help you develop and sharpen those skills. But why stop there? Becoming an accomplished public speaker can also help serve as an excellent foundation for finding interesting and lucrative work as a professional communicator in public, media, or corporate relations—all among the true “growth industries” in today's fast-changing, information-based economy.

BECOMING A MEDIA SPOKESPERSON

Today’s robust technological environment offers unprecedented opportunities for you to use your public speaking skills to great advantage. To be successful at this, like everything else in life, requires motivation on your part. With the right attitude and energy you’ll be able to enter into a wide world of possibilities. But you might be able to use a few good suggestions along the way. In this section we’ll help you learn how to become an effective media spokesperson—someone who is qualified to make media appearances on behalf of a group—and how to prepare for, perform, and follow up on the valuable opportunities that await you in the dynamic media environment.

What kinds of opportunities are we talking about? How might you personally become involved with media to promote the interests of any group you would like to represent? To get

media spokesperson
someone qualified to make media appearances on behalf of a group
started, let’s make a key distinction. Media initiatives are pro-active attempts by groups to gain attention and get access to the media. As the name suggests, the motivation for creating the appearance originates with the group. Media responses, on the other hand, refer to media appearances that are requested by the media themselves. In either case, taking a pro-active approach to media coverage is crucial.

Consider your own interests and the concerns of any groups to which you belong. Do you think you could make media appearances on their behalf? Right from the start positivity comes into play when deciding to become a **media spokesperson**. Becoming a media spokesperson requires a ready willingness to accept a kind of responsibility that many people shy away from. Unless the organization is large enough to hire professionals to make media appearances, volunteers assume these roles.  

Individuals in their roles as members of groups who have specialized knowledge, interests, or a particular agenda will be called upon to explain specific work, ideas, or positions accurately and confidently to non-specialists—the general public. For example, a software engineer for a start-up high technology company might describe a new product, a professor from the local university could respond to an inquiry about some hot-button issue in the news, and an advocate for immigrant rights might be asked to explain the group’s position on legislation being considered by lawmakers.

By considering potential media appearances as valuable opportunities, individuals can advance the goals of their groups and promote their own personal and professional interests too. Helping to create a visible, positive profile for an organization brings attention, recognition, and respect for the group—especially in today’s competitive, media-saturated environment. At the same time the person who takes the initiative to make such media appearances becomes more visible inside and outside the organization, and a more valuable member of the group.
Groups of all kinds actively seek media sources to help get their messages out or to present positions on various issues in the community. At other times the media approach experts and organizations seeking comments. Whatever the circumstances, media appearances offer great opportunities to reach a broad audience. Imagine that you are a member of a group trying to win public approval for passing a new bond measure supporting “safe campuses” in your school district, or the construction of a new community music hall. Someone in the group would assume the role of media spokesperson and the group would vigorously solicit the media to interview that individual.

Acting as a formal group greatly increases the chances for drawing media attention. Individual persons acting alone can rarely get media coverage to promote an idea or agenda, no matter how compelling their message may be. Even if just two or three people share an idea or value and want to promote it through the media, they must form a group, give it a name, and register it when appropriate. That’s how Lou Sheldon and his counterparts managed to attract attention to their organization, the Traditional Values Coalition, a group that opposes gay rights, for instance. Many other conservative groups interested in this issue have taken the same media-savvy approach. Gay rights advocacy groups also abound—the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Alternative Family Project, and Queer Nation, among many others. A thousand detractors or supporters of gay rights without a name will not
attract the same degree of media attention that a handful of well-organized people with a formal name can. Calling a television station to ask them to cover an activity or to interview you on a controversial subject will likely get you nowhere if you identify yourself simply as a concerned citizen. But if you make that same request as the media spokesperson on behalf of a legitimate organization that carries a formal name, you’ve got a much better chance of winning and keeping the media’s attention.

Guide for Making Media Appearances

Anyone who hopes to capture attention and present ideas on the electronic media or the internet must be well versed in the practical aspects of those processes. In this section, we provide useful suggestions for helping you become a successful speaker in your media appearances.

TELEVISION AND WEBCASTS

Television remains by far the most popular mass medium for informing and influencing the general public. Internet industries are expanding rapidly too, of course, and the technology and content of television and the web converge more and more every day. Much of what first appears on television gets posted on network or station websites. Video production companies create content directly, even exclusively sometimes, for the web. But the internet industries still lack the economic and technological infrastructure of television. This means that most internet appearances develop from personal initiative, like creating visual streaming for a webcast or blog or uploading a homemade production to a file-sharing site.

Television and the internet will grow even to each other in the future. So what we recommend for making successful television appearances applies to many kinds of presentations that are made on the internet too.
Making Contact

Sometimes media appearances are planned in advance, such as when an organization announces a new proposal or wants to assert an opinion into the debate on a public issue.\(^3\) In these situations, the organization contacts the media to request coverage. But at other times the media attempt to contact organizations that have become visible and credible to get the comments they want. Under these conditions, spokespersons often have to respond to media inquiries with very little time to prepare. Media spokespersons must always be ready to make a clear statement and a positive impression, even when pressed to perform with little notice.

When requesting a media appearance for television—a media initiative—the group’s media spokesperson should check with the targeted media channels directly to learn their preferences for establishing this kind of communication. The media outlet’s website will likely have contact information. If a name and telephone number (or just a number) is provided, the spokesperson makes the call (and backs it up with an email when an address is available) to request an interview. The spokesperson explains that he or she would like to make an announcement or express the group’s position on a topic or issue, and briefly describes what the message will be in a way that will stimulate interest. Sometimes the media initiate the contact with the group, asking for a response by the spokesperson to some issue or development. The news editor or reporter calls or emails the group (or the media spokesperson directly) to request an interview. The specific time and location for the interview is normally arranged during this initial contact.

Television news coverage can be roughly divided into two categories: hard news and feature stories. Hard news refers to developments and events such as accidents, political developments, crime, natural disasters, and the like. The explosions that killed several miners underground in West Virginia is a classic example of a hard news story. Feature stories—also sometimes called “soft news” or “human interest” stories—have less immediate news value and report on something the editor thinks will interest a general audience. Getting to know a disabled Iraq War veteran who plays on the United States Wheelchair Basketball team, for instance, would be a feature story. Media spokespersons may be called on to comment on either kind of news story, or to appear in less news-oriented situations such as TV talk shows, public affairs programs, or community involvement programs.
Because television news gathering operates in a fast and often unpredictable way, the editor or reporter may expect a spokesperson to be ready to go with comments in a few hours, sometimes in just a few minutes. The location selected may be the TV studio or a place in the community that provides a visually-attractive and appropriate backdrop for the interview. Broadcast journalists often like to place the media spokesperson in the office or on the grounds of the organization being represented, or at the scene of the event or controversy being reported. Media spokespersons should be ready to suggest possible locations before they contact, or are contacted by, the media.

There is no standard media appearance. Some appearances are initiated by a group or media spokesperson, others take the form of responses to inquiries from the media. Some appearances are planned well in advance, others occur without much notice at all. Media appearances can last an hour or more, or they can last for a minute or less. At times the media spokesperson talks one-to-one with an interviewer; at other times the spokesperson may be part of a group or panel. Media appearances may occur in a studio or at another location. But what actually happens when a media appearance takes place? Some basic principles and procedures apply to all these situations.

**Preview the Questions**
The media spokesperson should get a firm understanding of what to expect during the interview by inquiring beforehand about what kinds of questions will be asked. Just as public speakers in the classroom or elsewhere benefit greatly from knowing what to expect about the audience and the setting, good media spokespersons learn as much as possible about what will transpire *before* the interview begins. One way to make sure this happens is to ask during the initial contact what kinds of questions will be posed, about how long the interview will last, and—for studio or staged interviews—if an audience will be present.

**Get Your Sound Bites Ready**
The media usually look for short and to-the-point comments—*sound bites*—from spokespersons representing their groups. Although speaking in sound bites often fails to treat most topics with the complexity and sensitivity they deserve, the reality of...
media appearances is that very little time is usually made available. The media spokesperson must be able to boil the message down to its most crucial elements and articulate those key points clearly and convincingly in a matter of seconds.¹

Many politicians are expert sound bite creators. They get the message they want to convey across in the limited time frame that the electronic media provide. And many of them not only respond to questions from the media in sound bites, they also make sure to say what they want to say during the media appearance, sometimes almost ignoring the questions they are asked in order to do so. The lesson that any media spokesperson can take from all this is to develop a short list of key talking points, prioritize them, and emphasize them in media appearances.

**Appearing on Camera**

As a media spokesperson, you want to project an image that is appropriate for the group you represent. The general rule about how to dress for public speaking applies to media appearances too (Chapter 12). Just as you run the risk of undermining the impact of your presentation in a classroom or anywhere else, you can seriously undermine your credibility if you present yourself in the media in a way that can be interpreted as lack of respect for your audience. To avoid any chance of this happening, most guests who appear on television present themselves rather formally. Of course the rule for proper dress is not without exceptions. A neat, “professional” look might not be appropriate for a rapper, rocker, or Rastafarian promoting a concert tour or the release of a new album, for example, but for most of us dressing for media appearances in a more conventional way is the best solution. Your appearance should enhance, not distract from, the message you want to communicate.

Blue is the color that comes across best on television. Dark colors (but not black) work better than light colors overall, and solid colors should be worn rather than prints or patterns, which cause distracting “visual noise” on the television screen. Pay greatest attention to your shirt, jacket, blouse, or tie because in most situations you won’t be shown below the waist. If your media appearance will take place in a television studio, the production crew may apply some makeup to your face to help reduce glare from the harsh lights. For studio appearances, women may want to wear more makeup than usual.
If the media appearance occurs in another setting—an office, home, or outside location, for example—then the same rules about color and texture of clothing apply, but the need for additional makeup becomes less important.

**Speaking on Camera**
A television interview is a special kind of interpersonal communication that is staged for a camera or cameras. If the interview takes place in a television studio, you, the interviewer, and any other invited guests will appear on camera. As the time nears for the interview to begin, the person in charge of audio will place a small microphone on you and conduct a sound check. Camera operators will be positioning their equipment. Someone in charge of the studio floor—the “floor manager”—will organize the set and communicate with the director in the booth. Don’t be distracted by all this. Stay focused on what you expect to be asked and what you want to say. The interviewer will probably instruct you on what to do during the interview, but keep the following general guidelines in mind:

- Write a brief presentation outline with key words and phrases that you can quickly review just moments before the interview begins, prompting you to stress the most important points you want to make;
- Listen carefully to the questions and reply directly to the interviewer, not the camera;
- Limit your physical movement, but try not to look stiff or uncomfortable;
- Be assertive, confident, and to the point, but present yourself as thoughtful, reasonable, comfortable, and friendly;
- Speak clearly, with good volume, and not too fast;
- Don’t use jargon or acronyms that only specialists or others who are knowledgeable about your topic understand.

These guidelines apply to media appearances that occur outside the studio too. For “on location” appearances, some other considerations should be kept in mind. When television reporters cover stories or conduct interviews on location, they typically arrive with a camera operator who also manages sound and lighting. As the media spokesperson being interviewed, you should first establish excellent rapport
with the crew. Make the experience enjoyable for everyone. That will help reduce any nervousness you may feel. A good experience will also encourage the reporter to contact you again in the future.

The reporter and camera operator will have preferences for the kinds of settings they like to use when videotaping the interview, but you may also want to suggest particular spots as well. Think about these possible settings for the shoot before the crew arrives. For example, if you were to be interviewed at the place where you work, volunteer, go to school, or live, consider what kind of backdrop might be appropriate for the story—an office, meeting room, library, or living room, for instance. Feel free to suggest any settings you have in mind when the crew arrives. They’ll consider your suggestions when deciding what setting to use.

You should already have an idea of what questions to expect when the crew arrives. The reporter will likely remind you of the questions to be asked, but don’t hesitate to be reminded. Except under the most unusual circumstances—such as a fast-breaking story that requires a real time transmission by a satellite uplink—on-location media appearances are recorded, edited, and integrated into other video material before they appear on the air. For example, an interview conducted in the afternoon might be edited for use as a story on the TV station’s nightly newscast. You may spend as much as an hour or more with the crew taping the interview, only to find that the station uses only a ten second sound bite or two when the story appears on the news. That’s one compelling reason to have your best sound bites ready. With such extremely limited time, you want to be sure to get your most important message out there. If you were not able to say what you think is most important during the interview, inform the reporter of this. You will almost always be given a chance to make the point you want to emphasize. Of course there is no guarantee that the reporter will choose to use what you would like to get across to the TV audience, but you greatly increase your chances by having short and compelling ways of explaining your most important ideas and making sure they are included in the interview.5

**Follow-up**
Groups of all kinds can benefit greatly from cultivating and maintaining excellent relationships with television reporters and program producers. And for their part, the media tend to rely on proven, readily-available sources. It’s to everyone’s advantage, therefore, for media spokespersons and the media themselves to establish and nurture good and lasting relationships.
When an interview goes well, the reporter—who is under great pressure to produce good stories—will be thankful to the media spokesperson for helping make that happen. The media spokesperson hopes that the television station will be pleased with the result and will want to call on her or him again in the future. So after the interview is finished—in the studio or on location—the media spokesperson should thank the interviewer and ask to exchange business cards. This exchange personalizes the experience for both and creates a positive expectation for future contact as a media initiative prompted the group, or a media response instigated by the station or network. It also helps make the group’s media spokesperson look professional, which can be particularly important for low-budget, community-based organizations.

After the interview is concluded the media spokesperson should ask when the interview is likely to appear on the air so it can be digitally recorded or videotaped. A recording of the media appearance can then be used in ways that continue to benefit the organization involved. By reviewing the recording, the media spokesperson can learn what seemed to work and what didn’t during the interview. This helps the spokesperson prepare for subsequent opportunities. Copies of the recording also can be distributed to others in order promote the group’s interests. And inside the group, the recording can be shown to inform and help boost the morale of the members.

RADIO

Radio was the first electronic mass medium to be invented and it has been evolving ever since. When television then became the most popular national source of news and entertainment, radio became more of a local medium. Cable TV—especially music videos rotating on MTV—further increased competition for radio audience members’ time. Today the internet attracts even more listeners away from traditional radio. Throughout history it has seemed that competition from the visual media—TV, cable, the internet—might make radio irrelevant.

That hasn’t happened. Although the size of radio’s overall audience has decreased significantly over the past decade, Arbitron—the industry’s ratings service—reports that more than ninety percent of Americans still listen to traditional radio an average of nearly 20 hours a week. New technologies don’t
just compete with radio and steal their listeners; they also extend the audio medium’s reach. Many radio stations in large cities today broadcast over websites that expand coverage to global proportions, and archive programs and features for listener access 24/7. When Howard Stern left over-the-air broadcasting for an uncensored slot on Sirius satellite radio, he greatly boosted the popularity of what was then a new delivery system for audio.

Many commercial radio stations function mainly as background sound for passive listening. But a positive trend that enhances more active public communication has developed in recent years. News and talk stations have become extremely popular outlets for presenting information and opinion. These stations depend on input from the community for program content, so they constantly look for legitimate, articulate spokespeople to represent issues. Campus radio stations and public broadcasting stations also constantly search for a wide variety of guest speakers, providing you with excellent opportunities for getting ideas and information out to the community.

Would you have an opportunity to make a conventional speech on a radio station? Probably not. More likely you’d be invited for an on-air interview or to participate in a panel program. Being able to respond to interview questions skillfully or present your views succinctly as a panel member should be part of the public speaking skill set you’re developing. Public speaking in the twenty-first century reflects the culture we live in—fast and frenetic with precious little time to waste!

**Visual Radio?**

Radio has always been a visual medium. Before television arrived, many of the first radio programs were soap operas and action dramas that prompted listeners to imagine what was taking place—to visualize the scenes. Rush Limbaugh, Don Imus, Dr. Laura Schlesinger, Howard Stern, and other famous radio personalities today perform in front of cameras that feed cable television programs.

Radio has become visual in yet another way. Like all businesses, radio stations can’t compete in big markets if they don’t maintain a dynamic web presence. That means that another audiovisual channel has opened up for potential input from you. If you have an opportunity to present your ideas on the radio in the future, be prepared to be heard and seen. Whatever the situation, be sure to follow the Guidelines for Media Appearances that apply.
Distance Speaking

Media appearances represent only part of exciting current developments in communication. Much public speaking today does not take place in public, nor on the media, and a lot of it does not much resemble conventional oratory at all. The ability of communications technology to overcome barriers posed by geographical distance provides speakers with many new opportunities to use their presentational skills. Distance speaking refers to the planned and structured presentation of ideas transmitted from one physical location to other locations by means of information and communications technology.

Many of the most useful applications of technology for distance speaking take place at the institutional level. Businesses, educational institutions, governments, and civic organizations all use technology in ways that establish new forms and patterns of internal communication—the exchange of messages within the organization. The CEO of a multinational corporation, for instance, might announce employee layoffs or introduce a new business plan by means of an intranet interactive video presentation that thousands of employees in various locations can watch and respond to on their computers—on site or at home, in real time or later. Anthropology graduate students from universities around the world can gather in a virtual meeting room every week to analyze the findings of their team fieldwork. The policy committee of a State government might convene online to vote on an emergency issue facing the community, and then archive a recording of the meeting on its website. The director of a local civic organization could hold monthly telephone conferences to mentor new members about how to implement the group’s plans and policies.
VIDEOCONFERENCES AND GRAPHICAL ONLINE PRESENTATIONS

A **videoconference** allows people at two or more locations to communicate simultaneously by means of interactive video and audio transmission. Sometimes videoconferences take asymmetrical form. In these cases, an individual makes a presentation much like a speech or lecture to other participants in the conference. The “audience members” listen and ask questions in a manner that approximates the student-teacher relationship in distance learning. Other kinds of videoconferences are more symmetrical. A boss or manager, for instance, might lead a meeting where she calls on several individuals to present informational reports or give their opinions about the topic under discussion. Participants can jump in at various junctures during the meeting to contribute to the discussion or ask questions of the other “presenters.”

A **teleconference** may refer to exactly the same thing as a videoconference—interactive visual and audio transmission between and among participants at various locations, but not always. We tend to think of a teleconference as visual because the term reminds us of television. But that’s not really accurate. The prefix *tele* comes from the Greek language and means “distance” or “far off.” Some teleconferences involve the two-way transmission of visual imagery by television or computer over geographical distance, but others are limited to distance interaction by voice only. Because videoconference is a more specific and useful term, let’s keep things simple and stick with that. We’ll discuss audio-only distance speaking later.
Split-screen images of the individual participants have traditionally been the most common visual components of a videoconference. But as nonbroadcast television technology became more sophisticated, videoconference coordinators began to integrate other kinds of graphical material appropriate to what was being discussed. Now, television and web technology make it easy to cut back and forth between speaker and graphical material or project multi-screen images that show participants and graphics simultaneously. Computer screens have replaced television monitors as the hardware necessary for holding videoconferences.

While videoconferences usually take for granted that participants will be visible, much distance speaking today does not make that assumption. The other major form of distance speaking, **graphical online presentations** are graphics-based talks delivered to an audience by computer and the internet where the speaker is heard but does not appear on the screen.

Many graphical online presentations take place in virtual meetings held by major corporations and other modern organizations around the world. To facilitate a graphical online presentation, every participant’s computer is linked to a shared web address so everyone sees the same visuals. Participants dial in on a special phone number or connect by online audio—Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP)—in order to establish voice contact with everyone else. After the conference begins, the group leader calls on someone to present. That person launches a sequence of prepared slides and gives the audio part of the speech over the telephone line or VOIP connection. Virtual presentations like this become a series of slides that are narrated by an unseen speaker.

Videoconferences and graphical online presentations frequently involve participation by people who already know each other personally or share something important, like working for the same company, government agency, or non-governmental organization. When conducted effectively,
mediated meetings can be even more interactive than face-to-face conferences. Individual videoconferences and online presentations often form part of a regular, ongoing series of virtual meetings, so participants frequently get to know each other quite well in the process, though they may never meet in person.

**TELEPHONY**

It’s actually often better in distance speaking for participants not to see each other, and frequently there is no need for the use of graphics either. Lots of important ideas and information can be presented vocally over the telephone. But can we consider vocal participation in a group meeting over the telephone really a “speech?” It certainly helps to think of it that way. Need we prepare and practice for such occasions? Yes!

Telephone meetings involving multiple participants can be extremely good ways to get feedback on ideas, clarify issues for team members, suggest ways to solve problems, make assignments, set deadlines, and arrange schedules. Telephone meetings keep everyone in touch with each other, helping to make sure everyone has the same information as they begin or continue work on a project. Talking with each other keeps people engaged not only about the work being done, but with each other as people. Good human relationships invariably improve the quality of any shared task. Communication is the key to making that positive development happen.

For all these reasons, many organizations schedule regular, frequent telephone meetings. Some managers prefer to arrange them only on an “as needed” basis. Under any circumstance, participants should be ready to perform effectively during these calls. Know what will be expected of you beforehand. Develop an informal key word outline to keep close at hand for use during the call. Practice ways of concisely expressing your views with impact. Listen attentively to everything that is being said during the phone meeting so you can offer relevant input or respond to questions directed to you or to the group.
This kind of distance speaking may not much resemble a presentation given to a live audience in a classroom, a public venue, or the mass media. But by applying the principles of public speaking to these less formal but equally important occasions you’ll make your participation in meetings more valuable to others and more satisfying to yourself.

Guide for Distance Speaking

A real challenge that faces us today is learning how to smartly adapt traditional speaking skills to nontraditional communication settings and situations. Most of the fundamental principles and techniques of public speaking still apply, but in today’s communication environment we need to develop new ways of thinking and skills to become successful distance speakers too.

PREPARATION AND PRACTICE

Just because you don’t normally stand in front of a live audience when taking part in a videoconference or graphical online presentation doesn’t mean you don’t have to prepare thoroughly. In some respects, you’ll have to prepare more rigorously than you would for a classroom speech or public presentation. Imagine that you work as a graphic designer for an advertising agency, for example. You’ve been brainstorming with your colleagues in marketing to develop an approach for a television advertising campaign to launch a new product. You’ve created what you and your bosses think is an effective concept. Now it’s time for you to present your design ideas to the client for approval. The agency manager, marketing director, sales manager, media production supervisor, and the client, all in different locations, maybe even in different countries, meet with you by videoconference. Acting as host of the meeting, the agency manager calls on you to present your series of graphical images—a storyboard that shows what the television commercials would look like if they were to be produced. When introduced, you make a presentation by introducing the idea vocally and then showing and describing each slide.
That kind of performance is what anyone who takes part in a videoconference or teleconference would be expected to do. Are you ready for that kind of real-world challenge?

Videoconference presenters prepare their slides well in advance just the way good public speakers do for classroom speeches. Good presenters in any situation prepare note cards based on a keyword outline. Before the meeting they practice what they’re going to say when they display the visuals, just like they rehearse a speech before they give it to an in-person audience.

SUCCESSFUL PRESENTING

Unless you are simply going to give a speech by standing or sitting in front of a video camera, the success of your distance presentation will depend largely on the quality of your visual material, how well you display it, and how effectively you come across vocally. Whether projecting visuals in a classroom or transmitting them digitally in an online meeting, the basic principles of visual design remain the same (Chapter 11). Because audiences for distance speaking often see graphical visuals only, some additional suggestions can help you:

- Online audiences tend to tune out unless something interesting is happening on screen. Do everything you can to avoid boring your audience by making the slides visually captivating. The basic principles of visual design—minimal text, easy-to-read fonts, compelling images, complementary colors, etc.—will help.
- When designing slides, use ample white space on each side so that none of your information will be lost because of browser differences.
- Configure, upload, and practice with your slides well in advance of your presentation. Test annotation tools, make speaker notes, and prepare any URLs or other applications you intend to share with the group.
- Just as in classroom presentations, never just say what’s on the screen. Provide important detail to fill out and strengthen the ideas that are summarized in the visuals.
• Pre-programmed animated slides on presentation software do not translate well into most virtual environments. To liven up your visuals, annotate the slides as you speak by using circling and highlighting techniques instead.
• If possible, keep track of how the audience is reacting to your presentation as you go along by setting up sidestream survey questions that allow participants to discretely give you feedback while you speak. Adjust your presentation accordingly.
• Encourage participants to ask you questions after you present.
• To further stimulate active involvement, inform your audience about various tools at their disposal. The “question manager” and “hands up” features of professional online meetings, for instance, facilitate smooth interaction between the speaker and the other participants.
• To insure speed and machine compatibility, ask all participants to close other applications they may have running on their computers before you begin.
• Especially when the meeting or conference is large (20 or more participants), insist that participants’ phone lines be muted to avoid background noise.
• Visuals suffer when the audio goes bad. Be sure you speak clearly and with sufficient volume into the phone or mouthpiece.
• Just as audience members have ethical responsibilities to the speaker and to each other in classrooms and other settings, so too must they participate responsibly in videoconferences and graphical online presentations. Ask questions. Provide clarifying comments. Support good ideas. Demonstrate appreciation for good work and impressive presentations.
• Online presentations are often made to native speakers of diverse languages. Stay away from colloquialisms, humor, or local examples. Use language that travels understandably from one language and cultural group to another.
Summary

In the dynamic, globalized world we live in today new opportunities for public speakers open up all the time. The extraordinary growth of the mass media industries and the ready availability of information and communication technologies have changed the landscape of public communication to your great advantage. In this chapter you’ve seen how you can benefit from these decisive developments. You’ve learned strategies for gaining access to the electronic and digital media and how to make a positive impression when you create the opportunity for a media appearance.

You’ve been introduced to the idea of distance speaking—videoconferences, graphical online presentations, and telephone conferences. Detailed guides that can help you navigate your way through media appearances and distance speaking engagements were presented. More than ever, your success as a public speaker depends on you. The Communication Age gives you many more channels to work with. By adapting the fundamentals of traditional public speaking to media and information technology you’ll create a host of new ways to communicate and impress.

Critical Challenges

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

The questions below can also be found among the book’s online resources for this chapter, where you have the option of emailing your responses to your instructor, if required.

1. How do synchronous and asynchronous presentations differ in the world of mediated public speaking?
2. How can you or your group best get the attention of the mass media for your causes or interests?
3. How does presenting on television differ from giving a speech in the classroom?
4. Why do some forms of distance speaking not require that you appear on camera?
5. Which of the guidelines for distance speaking are unique to this form of modern communication?
References


