

## Review of *Exploring public speaking*

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Tucker, B., Barton, K., Burger, A., Drye, J., Hunsicker, C., Mendes, A., & LeHew, M. (2019).

*Exploring public speaking* (4th edition). Communication Open Textbooks.

<https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/communication-textbooks/1>

With the cost of higher education steadily rising, it is important for us to consider open-source textbooks for their cost-saving potential. *Exploring Public Speaking 4<sup>th</sup> edition*, is available online as a worthwhile consideration for a variety of courses. This textbook, co-authored by Barbara Tucker, Kristin Barton, Amy Burger, Jerry Drye, Cathy Hunsicker, Amy Mendes, and Matthew LeHew provides engaging, outside-the-box ways to craft speeches and explore public speaking. What began as a resource for students at Dalton State College (1<sup>st</sup> edition), *Exploring Public Speaking* is now in its fourth edition and has been revised for public speaking students at any high-school, college, or university. Additionally, several of the chapters, which can be downloaded separately, would be beneficial for forensics courses, theater courses, English courses, and courses designed to teach college-level research skills. *Exploring Public Speaking* covers the necessary elements of introductory public speaking courses and then goes beyond the standard components in an easy-to-follow, conversational style.

The structure of this textbook follows a pretty standard format. Students begin with an overview of public speaking and then through each of the next fourteen chapters go in-depth into each step of the process (i.e., audience analysis, ethics in public speaking, developing topics, conducting research, organizing the presentation, supporting main ideas, introductions and

conclusions, presentation aids, language use in presentations, and delivering the presentation).

The lessons are scaffolded in such an order so as to flow logically through the process of giving a presentation, without being too dense for new students or too simple for more experienced speechcrafters.

The chapters themselves follow a clear pattern and were easy to navigate. Each chapter begins with a list of neatly stated learning objectives and a chapter preview to help situate students to the information that follows. For example, chapter four: developing topics for your speech's learning objectives are shown below in Figure 1. As a result of this chapter, students will be able to "write a specific purpose statement" and "write a thesis or central idea statement" among other objectives. Students know they will be "getting started with [their] topics" and learning some of the "problems to avoid with specific purpose and central idea statements" (p. 62). Following the preview is the text of the chapter, complete with useful visual aids (e.g., charts and photographs) and keyword definitions in the margins.

## Chapter 4: Developing Topics for Your Speech



### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Distinguish between the specific purpose, central idea, and main points of a speech;
- Differentiate between a speech to inform, persuade, and inspire or entertain;
- Write a specific purpose statement;
- Write a thesis or central idea statement;
- Distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable specific purpose and central idea statements;
- Compose appropriate specific purpose and central idea statements for informative, persuasive, and inspirational/entertaining speeches.

### Chapter Preview

- 4.1 – Getting Started with Your Topic
- 4.2 – Formulating a Specific Purpose Statement
- 4.3 – Formulating a Central Idea Statement
- 4.4 – Problems to Avoid with Specific Purpose and Central Idea Statements

Figure 1. Chapter Four’s Learning Objectives and Chapter Preview

This textbook invites students to higher levels of learning by ending each chapter with “Something to Think About.” This final section calls for students to engage with public speaking concepts, by critiquing, creating, or applying the information to various topics or scenarios. For example, chapter four’s scenario reinforces understandings of specific purpose statements by asking students to consider the impact of these statements on a hypothetical presentation that has passed the allotted time for their speech. Students may decide to narrow the hypothetical specific purpose statement in order to create a shorter, more focused presentation. In addition to “Something to Think About,” several chapters include case studies for further content exploration. Possible answers to these case studies are available for teachers and students in

appendix J. Through case studies, hypotheticals, text, charts, and photographs, *Exploring Public Speaking* provides opportunities for a variety of learning styles, beyond simply reading a textbook. There are also supplemental materials, added for the second edition and expanded for the third and fourth, thanks to two grants received by the authors, including lecture slides and flashcards, available to suit the needs of diverse learners. Not every student learns through reading and comprehending. Readers of this textbook will find multiple ways to absorb and understand this material.

When comparing *Exploring Public Speaking* to the public speaking textbooks I've used or considered, I appreciated the several instances throughout that challenge students to think outside of the box for their presentations. Chapter nine, presentation aids, provides an example of this. Presentation aids rather than visual aids is not a unique contribution from this textbook. Although, in the age of technology when PowerPoint has become the de facto standard, a step away from instinctively favoring visual aids and towards "presentation aids" is a useful reminder that presentations can be aided by all five senses, including olfactory, the sense of smell and gustatory, the sense of taste (p. 157). The rest of this chapter does focus mainly on audiovisual, aligning it more with other books, but I found the reminder for us to be less limited, nonetheless, beneficial.

One of the major strengths of this textbook is the writing style. Tucker and her co-authors should be commended for the writing style that informs without patronizing students at any level of public speaking ability. I've taught many sections of this course and still found myself engaged. Students may appreciate the conversational style found throughout this book, as they explore the why in addition to the what and how. Why is it important to practice delivery (p. 211) or to employ ethical public speaking (p. 46)? Why can persuasion be difficult to accomplish

(p. 261)? The questions “why should I” and “why would I ever need to know this” are answered, priming students for a more engaged reading of the text.

*Exploring Public Speaking* was written for public speaking students of today. The advancements of today’s public speaking, whether an evolving audience or changing technology, are intentionally included, rather than added as an afterthought in a new, more expensive edition. There are clear sections for conducting research from a wide variety of sources. This does include library databases, but it also includes tips for checking the credibility of sources found elsewhere online. As the sources of news and information continue to evolve, it is important to have a textbook that was written with this evolution in mind.

Appendix C: public speaking online demonstrates the authors’ focus on public speaking students of today. With the pandemic came a proliferation of online public speaking and a flurry of instructors working to adapt their courses. The textbook I was using during the transition to online teaching was not written with online courses in mind. It was adequate for other reasons but without being written intentionally for today’s speakers, it felt outdated as I tried to adapt it to an online format. Appendix C of *Exploring Public Speaking* addresses the needs of online public speaking students, deliberately. There are online-speaking-specific tips for visual aids, preparation, and delivery (e.g., keep your visuals simple; prepare the background; practice working with the technology, etc.). It can be used in conjunction with the text, or it can be downloaded as its own standalone chapter for a multitude of speaking purposes.

There are two noticeable opportunities for improvement. The first is an obvious lack of diversity in the chosen photographs. The images work well and directly relate to the text; they are not superfluous by any means. However, as the textbook continues to expand worldwide, the images need depict more diverse students. While there are dozens of white students and

presenters, the number of people of color can be counted on one hand. The all-white writers of *Exploring Public Speaking* may see themselves and the majority of students at Dalton State College, where this textbook originated, represented, but this book has evolved from its first edition as a department-use text to an open-source book downloaded over two-hundred thousand times worldwide. Significantly more diversity is needed. Students need to see themselves in academia. This is lacking in this textbook.

The second opportunity for improvement is in chapter ten: language. This section includes a useful guide for gender-diverse language (e.g., avoiding the universal he), but could benefit from a more expansive discussion of the why, how, and what for gender-diverse language that moves beyond the gender-binary into the significantly more varied realm of gender identities and expressions. Again, the authors may see themselves in this language, but this won't be the case for every student. This book really does appear to be student-centered, so I am hoping these areas for improvement will be addressed.

There are many similarities between this textbook and others I've encountered. It does cover the standard content for public speaking. However, the writing style, modern-day lessons, and adaptability are great strengths that set *Exploring Public Speaking* apart in a fairly saturated market. Another strength is the price. This textbook covers the same ground as significantly more costly books, for free. *Exploring Public Speaking 4<sup>th</sup> edition* is worth considering for your public speaking courses.