

Review of *Public speaking: The virtual text*

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Schreiber, L. (Ed.). (2013). *Public speaking: The virtual text*. LibreTexts.

[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Public_Speaking/Public_Speaking_\(The_Public_Speaking_Project\)](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Public_Speaking/Public_Speaking_(The_Public_Speaking_Project))

There is surely no shortage of public speaking texts on the market. Some are marketed to communication practitioners, some appeal to hobbyists, but most are intended for the classroom. Although the content of the latter covers largely the same content and, aside from some cultural examples, rarely changes in a meaningful way, the book prices that postsecondary students must pay is a challenge with disproportionate effects. As such, communication educators should consider our time to be a kairotic moment that invites us to explore open educational resources (OER) and open-source textbooks as an opportunity to improve student equity and increase learning outside of the classroom by removing cost as a barrier in a course that many colleges and universities require for students to graduate.

When it comes to open-source textbooks for public speaking, *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* has been a pioneer and a standard-bearer. First appearing in digital formats for the public in 2013, this work was originally part of the Public Speaking Project with its own dedicated website, but in 2021 it was relocated to the Social Sciences Library section of LibreTexts, a leading database housing free educational resources. The change of location also altered its format; PDFs have been replaced by a user-friendly browser interface (with the option to download sections or chapters as PDFs if preferred). Rather than being written by one or a few

authors, *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* is comprised of 18 thorough chapters composed by different authors, allowing each to focus on their own particular expertise. Although this makes it a bit more like an edited volume, the overall product is organized and edited to present a consistent final product to the reader. On the whole, the text provides holistic instruction in researching, writing, and delivering speeches and presentations in different settings and for diverse audiences.

The scope of the content and structure of the chapters are comparable to most standard textbooks intended for public speaking courses but also include some additional areas of interest that are often neglected. Following the introduction, the first chapter outlines the history of public speaking in western civilization, from its origins in ancient rhetorical theory to its role in contemporary politics. The next several chapters introduce readers to what an orator must consider before developing their speech, including communication ethics, effective listening, audience analysis, and critical thinking. The book then turns to elements of speech writing, which covers researching, outlining, organizing, and using rhetorical devices. Moving beyond composition, the following four chapters consider different aspects of delivery, from developing confidence to a surprisingly thorough overview of visual aids to adapting to global audiences. The final chapters focus on different types of speeches and settings: special occasions, informative speeches, persuasive speeches, and group presentations. Each chapter includes discussion and review questions as well as glossaries for key terms .

Although the authors have done a commendable job in offering a standard public speaking text as an OER, there are some issues and limitations that instructors should consider before adopting it for courses. The most significant is that while it covers more than the typical content expected for a public speaking course, the work is perhaps too broad. The separated

digital chapters, though convenient, seem to disguise the density of the overall product—a print edition would be a hefty tome nearing 400 pages. This can eventually wear out the patience of some students while burying the preferred content of instructors deep within lengthy chapters. Navigation may be especially daunting to instructors who have preferred some of the brief handbook-style texts like Beebe and Beebe's *A Concise Public Speaking Handbook* or Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary's *The Speaker's Handbook*.

Similarly, like many multi-author volumes, *The Virtual Text* suffers from a bit of disjointedness between its chapters, especially when it comes to the redundancy of content. For example, readers encounter an in-depth exploration of logical fallacies in Chapter 6, only to be introduced to them again ten chapters later as though it were a brand-new subject. That sort of chapter-to-chapter inconsistency doubtlessly adds to the organizational issues stemming from the book's length. On the other hand, opportunities to explore topics that have more recently become essential staples in the basic communication course, like speech anxiety, diversity and inclusion, and (ironically) virtual presentations, are lacking or absent entirely.

Despite its problems, *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* boasts plenty of advantages that should encourage instructors to adopt it for their courses. Firstly, the aforementioned depth and breadth of content ensures that a variety of approaches to public speaking pedagogy can be supported; indeed, the book is substantial and eclectic enough to allow a grounding in communication theory, rhetoric, performance studies, ethics, and more.

Furthermore, the text's extensive length does offer chapters that are less common yet still useful. Peter A. DeCaro's "Origins of Public Speaking" chapter, for example, is far more than a simple historical account, providing an introduction to relevant concepts from rhetorical theory and philosophy. Sheila Kasperek also provides an exceptional chapter on designing and using

visual aids that's far more utile, especially in today's online environments, than the short blurbs included in most texts. Educators may also appreciate how the book extends beyond the standard chapters on ceremonial, informative, and persuasive speaking with Jennifer Woods' section on group presentations, which thoughtfully guides students in creating and delivering a consistent, coordinated project with their peers.

Of course, not all educators may include such content in their course design, but therein is one of the many advantages of an open resource like this one: chapters (or sections) can be left unassigned without the guilt of students "wasting" money on a complete textbook only to read certain segments of it. Similarly, although instructors cannot edit or add sections directly, any insufficiencies in the content can be supplemented through instruction or other materials. One of the greatest strengths of *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* is its cost, offering a completely free open-source textbook that alleviates the growing educational expenses in a class that is required for most students at many universities.

While some practitioners and casual readers may find this work useful, the audience who will benefit most is students. The writing and scope may be challenging for secondary education, but *The Virtual Text* is perfectly at home in postsecondary public speaking courses or their equivalent. Additionally, the ability to separate the chapters offers opportunities in other courses: the critical thinking chapter is a solid introduction to argumentation, and the group presentation chapter is beneficial for any course with such a project, to name just two examples.

Every educator, of course, has their own preferences regarding length, style, and content, but it is hard to imagine that anyone looking to adopt a textbook for the basic communication course would find this one to be anything less than sufficient and, thus, worth any trade-off from a preferred traditional textbook in light of price tags in the double or even triple digits. Overall,

the old adage of getting what you pay for is not applicable here, as *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* offers an impressive product that cuts no corners and instead offers far more than many of its pricey counterparts.