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## Best Practices of Teaching Public Speaking Online

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**Best Practices of Teaching Public Speaking Online**

by

Sally Dufner

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Minnesota State University Mankato

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree

Master of Science

in Communication Studies

CMST 694 Alternative Paper Plan

May, 2022

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## **Abstract**

Teaching public speaking online has been highly contested by communication studies instructors. The need for having a live audience has been a staple in public speaking from its inception. The COVID 19 pandemic forced many reluctant public speaking faculty members to teach this pivotal course online. Communication studies departments were required to examine their stance of offering it online or not. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to answer the following three questions: (1) Is there validity in teaching public speaking online? (2) What are best practices in teaching public speaking courses online? and (3) How do best practices differ for teaching public speaking online either synchronously or asynchronously? Using a basic qualitative research design, I interviewed 10 technical and community college instructors who had taught public speaking face-to-face and online to investigate these questions. The findings from this study indicate there is validity in teaching public speaking online. Best practices for teaching public speaking online include being student focused, being committed, and finding a mentor. Best practices for teaching synchronously versus asynchronously were similar including keeping students active, building community online, and being extremely detailed.

## **Acknowledgements**

To my advisor and committee chair, Kristi Treinen. For your support and insight. I am forever grateful.

To my committee member, Laura Jacobi. Thank you for your support and insight.

To Justin Rudnick. Thank you for patiently guiding me through IRB and showing me the way.

To online community college faculty members who persevered through the numerous challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Your willingness and ability to remain dedicated to student learning is admirable. Your flexibility, creativity, and passion for online students is an inspiration.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

### **Introduction**

Controversy surrounds the topic of offering public speaking courses online (Miller, 2010). Many communication scholars debate the quality of the online modality (Nicolini & Cole, 2020). Can online public speaking courses be as effective as face-to-face public speaking courses? While teaching public speaking courses online is a common practice, many instructors struggle with course design and often teach it the same way as they instruct a face-to-face course (Morreale et al., 2019). Challenges with teaching public speaking online have been noted as achieving immediacy with students, students finding a live audience, and pressures to offer the course completely online (Allen, 2006; Nicosia, 2005; & Bejerano, 2008).

While the literature is rich in studies examining online course design, online student interaction, online student satisfaction, and other areas of online teaching and learning; little consensus has been reached toward establishing standards of excellence in online teaching of public speaking courses (Miller, 2010; Ward, 2016). This leaves an online instructor struggling with “trial and error methods” (Miller, 2010, p. 155).

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Teaching and taking public speaking courses online has created dissonance within the communication discipline and challenges for students (Ward, 2016). The concept of shifting public speaking, a traditionally face-to-face course, to an online course presents unique challenges to instructional pedagogy (Butler, 2017). Students noted the primary challenges of taking an online public speaking course as lack of motivation, anxiety management, appropriate setting for the speech, technical difficulties, and adapting to a live audience (Ward, 2016). The growth of offering public speaking online courses is a reality that must be addressed.

In many academic disciplines, there is one introductory course that presents the foundations of the discipline. While the communication field offers a variety of introductory courses such as interpersonal communication, introduction to human communication, and group communication, introduction to public speaking is most frequently offered as the introductory course (Engleberg et al., 2017). More than half of all introductory communication course students take a public speaking course (Engleberg et al., 2017).

While the literature on face-to-face communication teaching is generous, little research has addressed online instruction in the basic public speaking course (Westwick et al, 2015). Considering the rapid growth of the online public speaking course as well as heavy resistance to teaching public speaking online, research is warranted for best practices in teaching public speaking online.

### **Conceptual Framework Theories**

Two theoretical frames were used to structure this study. The frames included Quality Matters and Community of Inquiry. While Quality Matters and Community of Inquiry provide guidance for online course design, Community of Inquiry also includes student learning. Both frames are applicable for online teaching and learning of public speaking.

#### **Quality Matters (QM)**

Quality Matters is a faculty-based, peer review process designed to assure quality design in online and hybrid courses (Swan et al., 2012). The question of how to most effectively design a public speaking course in an online learning environment presents a unique challenge to instructional pedagogy (Butler, 2017). The QM course review process is based on a rubric originally developed through a grant to MarylandOnline (Swan et al., 2012). The rubric, now in the sixth edition, is structured around instructional design principles focusing on eight higher



education general categories: course overview and introduction, learning objectives, assessment and measurement, instructional materials, learning activities and learner interaction, course technology, learner support, and accessibility and usability (Quality Matters, 2018). Quality Matters has 300 college and university subscribers in 44 states, including 11 statewide systems (Swan et al., 2012).

Within these eight categories, the Quality Matters Rubric consists of 42 individual standards that are assigned different points depending on their relative importance. The maximum number of points is 100. To meet the Quality Matters review expectations, the course must confirm all three point essential standards and result in a total overall score of 85 or higher out of the 100 points (Quality Matters, 2018). A major strength of the process is that comments are provided to the instructor by the reviewers of the course for each standard that is not met. The instructor has the ability to redesign the course.

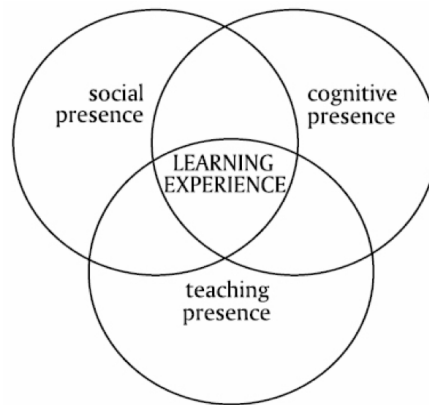
While Quality Matters addresses course design, it fails to address the process of learning (Swan et al., 2012). The lack of addressing the learning process warrants the necessity of the second frame to be used in this study, Community of Inquiry.

### **Community of Inquiry (CoI)**

The Community of Inquiry framework is one of the most extensively used frameworks in online teaching and learning (Jan et al., 2019). This framework originates from research on potential opportunities for communication between online and blended learning students and instructors (Akyol et al., 2009). It includes three elements: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Akyol et al., 2009). Cognitive presence assumes critical thinking as the goal of any educational experience (Garrison et al., 2000). Social presence is defined as the ability of learners to feel connected with peers through computer-mediated communication

(Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching presence is defined as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Arbaugh et al., 2008, p. 5).

#### Components of the Community of Inquiry Framework



*Figure 1. Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000).*

#### **Research Question**

Since online public speaking courses will continue to be offered and little research has been conducted on best practices, further research on best practices for teaching online public speaking courses is critical. This research study was guided by the following research questions:

Question 1: Is there validity in teaching public speaking online?

Question 2: What are best practices in teaching public speaking courses online?

Question 3: How do best practices differ for teaching public speaking online either synchronously or asynchronously?

#### **Summary**

Maintaining the status quo of a lack of defined best practices in teaching public speaking courses online adds to the contested debate of offering public speaking courses online. Given the popularity of online courses, speech communication instructors will be asked (if they already

have not been asked) to teach public speaking courses online. Their pedagogical practices should be based on practices that have been defined as “tested and true” instead of “trial and error.”

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the research study regarding best practices of teaching public speaking courses online. The purpose and significance of the study, problem statement, theoretical framework, and research questions were presented. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used for this study. Chapters 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 presents the implications of the study as well as future research suggestions.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

Chapter One presented the purpose and significance of this study, the statement of the problem, conceptual framework theories, and research questions. Chapter Two presents a literature review of the history of public speaking, the pros and cons of teaching public speaking online, best practices in online teaching, and best practices in online teaching of public speaking,

### **A Brief History of the Public Speaking Course at the College Level**

Prior to the eighteenth century, public speaking (as it is known today) was studied and written under the term of rhetoric (Bailey, 2019). Public speaking was originally more formal than it is today and was rooted deeply in oratory (Bailey, 2019). From its beginning, public speaking was an interaction between audience and speaker with the goal of shifting the audience's opinion in one direction or another (Bailey, 2019). "Public speaking" as a phrase was not used until the eighteenth century (Sproule, 2012, p. 563).

In 1776, the United States had only seven colleges, but by 1850, there were over 200 colleges and rhetoric was taught at most of them (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Following the pedagogical practices of Professor John Quincy Adams, many professors shifted their teaching of rhetoric away from oral to written and then from persuasive to more fiction and poetry (Bailey, 2019). The nineteenth century created numerous educational and speaking opportunities for diverse groups of individuals. At that time, the preferred speaking style was more formal (Bailey, 2019).

The biggest change to public speaking occurred in the early 1900s though technological advances that revolutionized communication (Bailey, 2019). With telephones and radios infiltrating homes, a new more informal mode of public address emerged. In 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered fireside chats via the radio with the public. Dale Carnegie became

famous in 1936 when he published the still popular *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Carnegie emphasized self-improvement and personal success over elocution (Bailey, 2019). Colleges had practical public speaking courses in the early and mid-twentieth century (Bailey, 2019).

The formality of public speaking continues to relax and modes of communication continues to expand through the internet. PowerPoint presentations have become an important skill required for public speaking. Ted Talks often include personal stories.

Public speaking remains the most common form of the introductory communication course (Morreale et al., 2016). A 2006 survey of the introductory to public speaking course asked about the number of institutions that taught the course online and found that 62 of 306 (20.8%) responding institutions offered it online (Morreale et al., 2006).

COVID-19 demanded that public speaking courses move online (McGarrity, 2021). Social distancing eliminated the preferred method of having students assemble live audiences to deliver their speeches (McGarrity, 2021).

### **Core Competencies for Introductory Communication Courses**

What should students learn in online and face-to-face public speaking courses? Engleberg et al., (2017) researched 125 participants and identified seven core competencies for the introductory communication course. These competencies were noted as the basis for any and all introductory communication courses. The competencies include: monitoring and presenting yourself, practicing communication ethics, adapting to others, practicing effective listening, expressing messages, identifying and explaining fundamental communication processes, and creating and analyzing message strategies.

## Debates over Public Speaking Online

Communication faculty are torn about offering a public speaking course online. Helvie-Mason (2010) noted many communication instructors are cynical of teaching public speaking online. Not all public speaking instructors believe the internet is an effective tool for a basic speech course. Professors have concerns if online delivery of public speaking courses should or even could be taught online effectively (Ward, 2016). Half of the respondents in a survey of public speaking instructors strongly disagreed with the statement “Public speaking should be offered online” (Ward, 2016). Hunt (2012) is a strong advocate of only teaching public speaking face-to-face and asserts the following:

First, the way I currently teach public speaking seems to work very well. Actually, from my understanding of the history of rhetoric it has worked well for thousands of years. The second reason concerns my vocational calling. My perception of effective teaching involves being with students in real physical space. In other words, I am called to the classroom, not the computer screen. My third reason – not unrelated to the first two – concerns the notion of embodiment. I am persuaded that embodied teaching, especially with a subject that centers on the use of the body and voice, is superior to disembodied teaching. My reason for not wanting to teach public speaking online would be identical to why I do not think sculpting or tennis should be taught online. (Hunt, 2012, p. 163).

There is much debate over whether or not public speaking should be taught online. Some advocates argue that it must be taught online. Benefits include providing students flexible options and the ability to gain new technical experiences.

### Pros

Advocates argue that offering online courses has many benefits. Online education

improves access to education and reduces costs associated with face-to-face instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Ward, 2016). Additional benefits include flexibility, degree completion for completely online programs, and gaining technical experience (Ward, 2016). Lind (2012) argues that incorporating a digital assignment in the public speaking course allows educators to increase students' collective reach. Lind (2012) also believes that in order for the public speaking course to remain relevant, students in the course need not only be trained in rudimentary oratory but also in digital oratory.

### **Cons**

Communication faculty members are hesitant to teach public speaking online for numerous reasons. A primary goal of an introductory public speaking course is to reduce speaking anxiety (Kinnick et al., 2011). Faculty members reluctant to teach public speaking online also noted technology concerns, (Linardopoloulos, 2008; Vanhorn, et al., 2008), time and workload required to manage the course, (Vanhorn et al., 2008) and immediacy with students (Ward, 2016).

There is strong reluctance to teach public speaking online often due to the concern that the online classroom does not provide a live audience needed for student growth in overcoming anxiety (Vanhorn et al., 2008). Steinfatt (2016) argued, "It is absurd to believe that public speaking classes taught via the internet involve public speaking. Public speaking refers to speaking in public. Standing alone in a bedroom talking to a camera is not public speaking." Sarapin (2016) concurs noting, "I think that teaching students public speaking online is the communication field's most obvious oxymoron. If it weren't so counterintuitive and unhelpful, it would be laughable. I am ashamed that educators think this is acceptable and get credit for it." Huneycutt (2016) ridiculed online public speaking classes as "Skype speaking in pajamas" (para.

4). Horan (2016) stated, “It’s unreal that this is considered an appropriate modality for public speaking, when the biggest challenge students face is fear of speaking to a live audience.”

McGarrity (2021) argues against the assertion that a live audience is necessary for effective public speaking courses. He argues that if we assume the main benefit of a public speaking course is skill development, “adopting a skills perspective highlights that recording speeches should be encouraged rather than discouraged” (McGarrity, 2021, p. 204). He also argues that in-class audiences are rarely “robust publics” (McGarrity, 2021, p. 208).

### **Best Practices in Teaching Online**

Teaching online is different than teaching face-to-face. Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) listed the following as best practices for teaching with technology: frequent student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, emphasize time on task, communicate high expectations, and offer diverse ways of learning. Boettcher and Conrad (2006) noted that in online classrooms the identity of the instructor has to shift to that of coach, guide and mentor.

As colleges continue to transition face-to-face courses into online courses to remain competitive and increase student access, the need for trained faculty willing to develop courses and teach online increases (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). Research studies have been completed to identify successful online teaching characteristics. The instructor’s role in the online learning environment has been coined “guide on the side” (Baran, Correra, & Thompson, 2013, p. 429).

Gail Marcus (2021) a health care instructor reflected on what she identified as best practices teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Marcus notes that using the identical face-to-face class syllabus and teaching approach is not effective with online. Her recommendations offer practical suggestions that can be quickly implemented. Marcus



advocates for the use of frequent learning quizzes built with a gaming tool like Kahoot! that can provide students with immediate feedback. She also recommends the use of group breakout rooms and faculty to move among the groups. Synchronous classes were much more effective when students and faculty kept their cameras on during class.

Carrillo and Flores (2020) reviewed the literature on online teaching and learning practices. In their review of online teaching and learning in the context of teacher education published between January 2000 and April 2020, they identified several themes in relationship to the Community of Inquiry framework – the use of social, cognitive, and teaching presence. The “ability of teachers and learners to engage affectively in relationships showed to be central to meaningful educational experiences” (Carrillo & Flores, 2020, p. 476).

Paloff and Pratt (2011) identified several characteristics that distinguish excellence in online teaching. The ability to accomplish all of the items on the list through the use of technology without meeting students in person is what sets excellent online instructors apart. The characteristics (several of which are applicable to all instruction regardless of format) include the following:

- Understands the differences between face-to-face and online teaching and can effectively implement them into development and facilitation of online classes
- Committed to this form of teaching and uses the online environment to his or her advantage in delivering an online class
- Able to establish presence early in the course and encourages students to do the same
- Highly motivated and in turn is a good motivator for students
- Understands the importance of community building and devotes time at the start of the class to that function

- Promotes interactivity between students through development of good discussion questions that engage them and encourage them to seek out response material on their own
- Incorporates collaborative work into the design and delivery of an online class
- Respects students as partners in the learning process
- Is active and engaged throughout the course, providing timely, constructive feedback throughout
- Open, flexible, compassionate, responsive and leads by example (Palloff & Pratt, 2011, pp. 13-14)

### **Best Practices in Teaching Public Speaking Online**

While research is limited on best practices in teaching public speaking online, a few recommendations have been suggested. Ward (2016) contends public speaking online must be a completely new course, one that focusses on speaking in digital context (Ward, 2016). The hybrid format has been suggested as a way to teach public speaking partially online (Clarke & Jones, 2016). Another suggestion is to assess online students prior to taking them taking the course. This is based on the belief that online public speaking courses are best suited for students who are familiar with video recordings and the online environment (Linardopoulos, 2008).

Morreale et al., (2019) recommended that faculty use the Fink (2005) Integrated Design Model to design their online public speaking course. Fink's (2005) Integrated Design Model emphasizes learning situations, contexts, the nature of the subject, learner characteristics, and instructor characteristics. Fink's (2005) Integrated Course Design model is based on the premise that good course design combines the components of instructional design into "a relational, integrated model rather than a linear one" (p.1). Fink asserts instructors should examine four

components in course development: situational factors affecting any course, learning goals as the course foundation, teaching and learning activities, and feedback and assessment.

There is limited information in public textbooks about delivering online speeches (Weismann, 2020). Out of well-known public speaking textbooks, only one chapter was located that addressed online public speaking which was found in Stephen E. Lucas' *The Art of Public Speaking Thirteenth, Edition*. (Weismann, 2020). In Chapter 19, Presenting your speech online, Lucas' discussion includes the following: the special nature of the online environment, kinds of online speeches, guidelines for online speaking, and technology (Lucas, 2020).

### **Summary**

Introduction to public speaking course delivery has traditionally been a face-to-face format. While public speaking courses continue to move to online formats, some faculty members struggle with the effectiveness of teaching public speaking online. This chapter summarized a brief history of public speaking, pros and cons of teaching public speaking online and best practices.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to identify best practices while teaching public speaking online. This research is significant because whether faculty members like it or not, many institutions are offering public speaking online. Communication faculty members will benefit from learning best practices for teaching public speaking online. The literature review showed a lack of research on best practices in teaching public speaking online. This study was guided by the following research questions:

Question 1: Is there validity in teaching public speaking online?

Question 2: What are best practices in teaching public speaking courses online?

Question 3: How do best practices differ for teaching public speaking online either synchronously or asynchronously?

This chapter presents an overview of the research design. Specifically, this chapter provides an overview of the population. It explains data sources and collection methods used. It describes instruments, coding and analysis, limitations, and the role of the researcher.

#### **Research Design**

I used a basic qualitative research design for this study. Qualitative research was best suited for this study as I was addressing research problems in which I did not know the specific variables. I did not know specifically what best practices are recommended for teaching public speaking online. Exploring a problem is an element of qualitative research (Creswell, 2015). The literature yields little information on best practices to teaching public speaking online. Qualitative research relies more on the views of the participants in the study and this study detailed several views of the participants (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative research is applicable to a study which aims to improve practice and the results of this study aimed to improve online

teaching by identifying best practices in teaching public speaking online (Merriam & Simpson, 1984).

### **Population/Sample**

This study was conducted using a convenience sample and a snowball sample. Convenience sampling is one of the most common sampling plans because it is short, convenient, easy, and relatively inexpensive to access (Tracy, 2020). The participants of this study included 10 faculty members of community and technical colleges in Minnesota who have taught public speaking both face-to-face and online either synchronously or asynchronously. Faculty members were adjunct, full-time or part-time. No other criteria such as gender, age, race or length of teaching was considered in the sampling process. The faculty members were employed at one of 23 Minnesota community and technical college campuses and were currently teaching public speaking online. These community and technical colleges were chosen as they were similar to my current institution.

Faculty members were contacted via email and asked to voluntarily participate in the study. I interviewed 10 faculty members. Seven faculty members were confirmed through the convenience sampling process and three faculty members were gained through a snowball sampling process. All procedures were conducted in accordance with and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University Mankato. The interviews were completed in the academic year ending 2022.

Table One highlights participants' background information.

Table 1: Participants' Background Information

Pseudonym	Years teaching public speaking face to face	Years teaching public speaking online	Teach public speaking synchronous, asynchronous, both synchronous and asynchronous, or hybrid	Gender
David	10 years	2 years	Synchronous	M
Tami	24 years	7 years	Both	F
John	20 years	10 years	Synchronous	M
Larry	11 years	1.5 years	Both and Hybrid	M
Steven	15 years	2 years	Asynchronous	M
Tim	21 years	2 years	Synchronous	M
Charlie	16 years	2 years	Synchronous	M
Linda	33 years	20 years	Both	F
Katie	23 years	19 years	Asynchronous	F
Connie	22 years	5 years	Asynchronous	F

### Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were read thoroughly at least twice and the audio recordings were played at least two times to verify the content of each transcript. After reading the transcripts in their entirety, the data collected from the interviews was coded. Coding allowed me to get intimate with details in the data and gave an overview of the large data sets (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 228). Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method of data collection. This involved “comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 32).

The data was analyzed for themes following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process which includes (1) becoming familiar with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) selecting themes for inclusion in the final report. I used this process as I found it a straightforward and very logical process to determine the answers to my research questions.

The first step of the Braun & Clarke (2006) six-step process, becoming familiar with the

data, was accomplished through “repeated reading of the data” (p. 16) and writing a summary of each interview. The second step of the process, generating initial codes, was accomplished through careful readings of the transcripts to initially code interesting quotes and stories. At this stage, I organized data into meaningful groups. The data was segmented and labeled to form broad themes based on key phrases and terms of participants’ meanings. Step three, searching for themes, began after I initially coded and collated and had a long list of different codes. This phase focused on sorting different codes into related themes. In step four, I reviewed and refined the themes. I reviewed each theme and considered whether each theme appeared to form patterns. I selected specific data to use and eliminated data that was not relevant to this research study. I reviewed each text fragment within each code and compared and evaluated the text itself, not the codes. During step five, I defined and named the themes by identifying the “story” that each theme told in relation to the research questions (p. 22). Sub-themes were identified during this stage. A test was completed to see if I had clearly defined the themes by seeing if I could clearly describe the theme in a couple of sentences. Names were given to the themes that would “immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about” (p. 23). The final step was to “tell the story of the data in a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account” (p.23). This was accomplished through numerous quotations from the interview transcripts which included vivid examples, compelling illustrations, and analytical narratives.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were three main limitations to this study. The first limitation was the study was limited to community and technical college instructors. It did not include faculty members from four-year institutions. The second limitation to this study was it included faculty members from only one state. The third limitation to this study was it only included faculty members from

public not private colleges. The importance of these limitations is that the results of this study may not be applicable to four-year institutions. Readers should be aware that this study was conducted in one state involving the experiences of 10 community and technical college faculty members.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My beliefs towards taking and teaching public speaking courses have been formed through my educational background and teaching experiences. I earned my Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communications in 1993 when online courses were not an option. I currently am a full-time communication studies faculty member. I teach public speaking courses face-to-face and have a strong preference for face-to-face teaching. I was aware of my biases toward teaching public speaking online. I would not be a candidate for this study as I have not taught public speaking courses online. I had a marketing course nationally certified through the Quality Matters rubric and believe in the Quality Matters quality assurance standards in online learning and teaching.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three outlined the research design used in this study. A basic qualitative research design was completed through Zoom, semi-structured interviews. This research study was conducted to identify best practices in teaching public speaking online. The sample population consisted of 10 faculty members at a Minnesota community and technical college. The faculty members were full-time, part-time or adjunct instructors who have taught public speaking online face-to-face and online either synchronously or asynchronously. There were three limitations to this study.



## Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 identifies the themes generated from analyzing the interview transcripts. The purposes of this study were to question the validity of teaching public speaking online and identify best practices of teaching public speaking online either synchronously or asynchronously. Using a basic qualitative research design, I interviewed 10 communication studies faculty members.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the 10 interviews and the themes that emerged during the data analysis. These themes and subthemes are presented below in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4.

### Results of Primary Research Question

#### Is there validity in teaching public speaking online?

The main theme that emerged from repeated reading of the transcripts and listening to the transcripts was that despite much reservation, teaching and taking public speaking online can and does work.

Table 2: Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes Research Question 1

Theme	Sub-Theme
It can work	Teaching philosophy/satisfaction
	Less satisfying than face-to-face

### Online Public Speaking Works

The participants noted several surprises when teaching public speaking online. Surprises were defined as unexpected and unanticipated areas that faculty members never considered

before teaching public speaking online. The overall surprise noted by most participants who were originally reluctant to teach public speaking online was that it can and does work. There were strong opinions as to whether it works only synchronously to have a live audience. Only a few participants agreed that the asynchronous format can be conducive to teaching public speaking online.

### **Teaching Public Speaking Online Works**

Participants who were originally reluctant to teach public speaking online were quick to point out that they were surprised it worked. Steve mentioned, “The biggest surprise was probably that in general, I feel like it worked and I feel like they are getting a good experience if they try.” Charlie who was reluctant to teach public speaking online because he didn’t think students would get nervous online without a live audience stated,

I was dead wrong. I watched student after student after student visibly nervous and deploying apprehension mitigation skills. I was like, this is working, this is absolutely working.

Tim who was also against teaching public speaking online stated, “It worked. I bought into it, it worked and I wasn’t sure it would. And I am a believer in that this class can be taught through zoom.” Even Katie who has been teaching public speaking online for 19 years, recalled, “I was one of the first online public speaking teachers and I really didn’t think it could be done. I proved myself wrong from my students.”

### **Teaching Philosophy/Satisfaction**

Faculty members noted that one should contemplate their teaching philosophy of public speaking and what they enjoy about teaching public speaking prior to teaching it online.

Teaching philosophy was identified as to what an instructor wants the students to get out of a

public speaking class. This philosophy may determine if one should agree to teach the online class synchronously or asynchronously.

Charlie and Tim were adamant it could only work if offered synchronously to provide for a live audience. Tim stated, “Now the asynchronous. If they are not speaking to a public and they’re not speaking live, I don’t buy into it. If it isn’t in front of a public, that’s not public speaking in my opinion.” Charlie who only teaches public speaking asynchronously noted,

As far as giving advice for new instructors in online public speaking, before you decide on a format, I would say the most important thing is to take a good look at yourself and how you work best. Because I think the two experiences, I mean they could almost be different courses, synchronous and asynchronous public speaking. You have to ask yourself, ‘what do you want your students to get out of public speaking?’ My teaching philosophy is giving students a chance to have community.” Charlie further noted, for my philosophy, there’s still something about the teaching and giving a speech in real time.”

Tami felt a synchronous environment was needed for building community stating, If I can avoid it, I will never teach again online asynchronously. I think, that for most students, they need the comfort of a support group to get past the barrier of self-consciousness. They need a place to practice their voice and become more comfortable with others and I don’t think technology is going to ever allow that. Synchronous is much, much more fitting to public speaking.

Steven, who agreed that asynchronous online public speaking can work, had another teaching philosophy. He wanted his students to realize the importance of practice and rehearsal and “practicing it 20 times and doing it brilliantly once.” The asynchronous format gives students a chance to do this in a way that the synchronous format cannot provide. He stated

students were surprised at how much they had to practice a speech. He stated,

A lot of students said that if they had just been in a face-to-face class, they would go ahead and wing it. If they weren't ready, they'd be like, well, that was fine. That was a rough five minutes of my life. Whereas with this, they actually are like, oh, I didn't know how I said that or how I did that. And so a lot of them will actually practice it more and redo it.

Charlie stated, "I think the two experiences, I mean they could almost be different courses, synchronousness and asynchronous public speaking." Linda agreed with Charlie, stating "They are different beasts completely." Tami concluded our interview by stating, "The face-to-face class will never be online and online will never be face-to-face. They are different experiences and are not equal. While students deserve to have the same experience, that's not going to happen because those worlds are different."

While David has only taught public speaking synchronously, he pointed out the advantages for students to take it asynchronously by stating, "Recording and posting speeches is certainly a useful skill." Steven stated,

I've been a bit of a convert on it (teaching public speaking online asynchronously) and I think it teaches some different things and in a different way, face to face versus online asynchronous. Really the only thing that feels lost is the pressure of a live audience with eyes. But a lot of them still feel that pressure. I still know I'm performing for an audience. And the things that are gained are things like being able to spend more time developing the ideas, being able to spend more time practicing if they choose, being able to watch themselves many, many times and fix things in real time, if they choose. I think that the strengths and challenges really kind of balance out in that way.

Linda recognized the importance of keeping with the current way we communicate with each other. She stated,

You know, like we used to say things such as will you'll have to give a speech at some point in your career. Now it's, you're going to have to give a zoom conversation at some point in your career. I think the students who take the online public speaking class will gain something new. So, I started doing online speeches even in my face-to-face classes.

Linda got burnt out on teaching public speaking synchronously online stating, "It's just so much energy and zoom fatigue. It's completely different so different that I don't like teaching synchronous. Tami stated,

I love teaching public speaking to watch students grow over time. To see them do something that many of them don't enjoy or are scared to do or never thought they could do. I think that's fulfilling. I can't say I find that asynchronously online. I didn't notice that as much as I did in the classroom or synchronous and I think part of it has to do with the community of other students that witness this happening.

Participants who were vehemently opposed to teaching public speaking online were surprised that it worked. They were also surprised that they would be willing to teach public speaking online even after COVID 19 and would not be mandated to do so.

### **Less Satisfying than Face-to-Face**

Eight instructors noted they prefer teaching public speaking face-to-face due to the community built in the classroom. John noted, "I find it (online teaching of public speaking) far less satisfying (than teaching public speaking face-to-face). I don't learn about the students, they're not learning from each other in the same way, and so it's a very detached experience but I won't say it's less effective." Tami quickly stated,

I much prefer face-to-face much, much, much prefer. Again, I think a lot of it boils down to the communication and why you don't have the community of support from the other students, one on one, it becomes hard to both be a supporter of others and also to grow as a class.

Tim noted,

I prefer face-to-face without a doubt. And it's because of the energy, it's more realistic, it gives students a much better experience and a sense of community, they are more nervous to speak in front of a live audience, but I also think they ultimately get a better connection with their classmates in that live audience."

Two faculty members appreciated the convenience of teaching from home. David noted, "It's awfully fun to lecture from my house, but the experience of being in front of an audience is much more salient, more powerful for students. It's a much better learning experience in a room." Katie was one of the few participants who preferred teaching public speaking online noting,

Well, I've been doing it online for so many years. Yeah, I kind of like teaching from home. I like having my space and so it's really nice not to have to go out when it's 40 below I live in Northwest Minnesota and this morning, you know the wind show was 35 below, and that was a warm up. So I like teaching online actually."

While eight instructors noted they strongly prefer teaching public speaking face-to-face, they stressed they teach it online because it works and works well for some students. While hesitant instructors pointed out that teaching public speaking online can work, they had different opinions on how it can work. Steve mentioned it only worked if the students try. John stated, "I think there are different students who need different things and learn in different ways, and so if

you have the right student in the right class, then it can be wildly successful.”

### **Summary**

Instructors noted one has to trust that regardless of one’s preconceived notion of online teaching of public speaking, it works. Participants who were originally dead set against teaching public speaking online realized it can and does work. This was six participants’ biggest surprise. There were four instructors who argued the course needs a live audience and should not be taught asynchronously.

## **Results of Research Question Two**

### **What are best practices in teaching public speaking online?**

Several themes emerged from repeated readings of the transcripts, listening twice to each audio recording, and coding. A summary of themes and sub-themes is presented below in Table 3. The section following table two discusses the findings related to the second research question, “What are best practices in teaching public speaking online?” Five themes were discovered in this study: Be student focused, be committed, find a mentor/resources, advice, and technology.

Table 3: Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes: Research Question 2

Theme	Sub-Theme
Be student focused	Empathetic/understanding
Be committed	Invest lots of time
	Detailed instructions, detailed rubrics
Find a mentor	Review an instructor’s course
	Have discussions with other instructors
Advice	Students
	Department

Technology

Faculty

Students

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### **Be Student Focused**

While being student focused is a good best practice for all teaching, instructors in this study particularly stressed the importance of being student focused while teaching public speaking online. Linda meets one-on-one with her students at least three times each semester. Katie noted,

So, I do a lot of one-on-one meetings with students. Rather than a large group, I have in my classes, it's called the private one on one with Katie it's a discussion forum that's private just myself and one other students. And they reach out to me through that and if they have a question about something we'll have a brief conversation. also have a general questions area where somebody has a question about something they put it in there, and I say you know if you're wondering about it nine times out of 10 somebody else's too so just put it out there, so I'm really having to rethink how they're going to receive the information so.

She summed up her advice to faculty teaching public speaking online with these words,

Flexibility, interaction, attentiveness, and balance. Be open to change. Be prepared to be challenged and surprise. Becoming comfortable with not being perfect. Paying attention to what's really important with students and connecting with them where they are. And, never losing the key element of empathy and compassion.

Larry agreed one must teach public speaking online with empathy stating,

Being mindful what it's like for the students. Be more like 'You came to my class with a



lot of really cool experiences, a lot of pockets of knowledge that I don't have access to.

How can we work together for you to be able to share those in an effective way?"

Charlie suggested one should be more understanding when teaching public speaking synchronously noting,

The dog comes in, grandma comes in, that is the biggest challenge. Because with offline face-to-face public speaking, we can shut the door, I can put a sign on it that says, 'Knock before you come in speeches in progress.' That doesn't happen in a synchronous format. So developing strategies to be a little more forgiving, both from me to the students and the students amongst each other, when stuff like that happens.

Tim stated "you have to be very, very patient, And I would also say a big thing is to work on community."

Tami recommended asking students for feedback frequently. She stated,

I think that's always important but I started putting a short questionnaire maybe five questions at the end of every module. It helps them open up a little bit and develop trust, because I think trust is an important issue when it comes to online.

Words such as understanding, patient, and forgiving were noted by six faculty members who described what was needed in teaching public speaking online. While instructors need to be student focused regardless of modality, the participants of this study recognized the importance of forgiveness for students in the online modality.

### **Be Committed**

Another theme and surprise when offering advice for teaching public speaking online is for instructors to be prepared to spend more time teaching it online than face-to-face. The time commitment included detailed assignments and feedback.

Tim noted he had to take extra time to revisit new challenges presented online. He stated, “I had to include a component called Zoom Management because I think they should learn how to present themselves professionally. I feel like I’m writing a technical manual to tell them how to submit assignments.” Connie added,

What I've realized, and what I had to put way more time into than I initially thought was a structure of the actual practical application of how to set up taping yourself at home and all of those things. Like I remember one of the first times that top public speaking online I was getting people recording their speeches sitting down, I was like Oh, my gosh I’ve never told them, they have to stand up, you know it was like It was so interesting was like one of those no brainers but I had enough students sitting down, and I was like clearly I didn't say this. I spend so much time with that prep like here's what your environment should look like, before you give your speech. You should you know just like if you were in the classroom you should create you should create your space And you should set your space up for success and you should have a clear space if it's your kitchen table if it's your countertop it, you know I spent so much time now with like. Those things because I had so many interesting videos submitted.

Steve also noted,

And so it takes a lot of time to figure out the short cuts that they are going to try to take, like the ways they are going to cheat. You just have to create a whole new syllabus, essentially, a whole new assignment sheet. For example, you have to be visible from here up. I have to be able to see your eyes with the lighting. So it ends up a little bit trickier in that respect.

Charlie added,

With any online teaching I think the most caring thing that an instructor can do for a student is to be clear, so clear about expectations, and for your online environment that you establish. Students much prefer structure over no structure. So I always make it clear at the beginning what our standards are going to be for speaking.

There was a concern for the amount of time it takes to give student feedback in teaching public speaking online. Connie noted, “Feedback. It is more time-consuming watching speeches at home than in the classroom. I wasn’t prepared for that workload.” Steven mentioned the same thing by stating, “I think it takes a lot more time to grade because when I would teach it in person, I would get through most of my grading rubric while they gave the speech in class.” Steven’s concern was the time it takes to watch all the recorded videos which are required in an asynchronous class and the detailed explanations he needs to write to ensure students understand the requirements of the assignments. Steve stated, “the downside of recorded speeches is it takes a lot more time to grade them then when I would teach in person.”

Five faculty members noted that teaching public speaking online requires much more time than teaching it face-to-face. They mentioned that amount of time required for detailed assignments, technology requirements, zoom management, and watching recorded speeches.

### **Find a Mentor**

The participants agreed that faculty members should be well informed prior to teaching public speaking online. Steven advised,

I would say for starters, if you have someone who’s willing to walk you through their course shell and show you what’s worked for them, take advantage of that. Rather than having to reinvent the wheel or learn things the hard way, I would say, let them show you what they’re doing. You don’t have to use it, but at least it’ll get your wheels turning.

Connie added “probably the best thing you could do, which is asking people and talking to them.” John stated, “Consult peers and do shop talk.” Linda stated. “Review with another person. Have like a mentor.” Larry noted,

If you have someone willing to walk you through their course shell and show you what’s worked for them. Take advantage of that. Rather than having to reinvent the wheel or learn things the hard way, I would say, if you have someone who is willing and feels like they’ve had a pretty good experience with it, let them show you what they’re doing. You don’t have to use it, but at least it’ll get your wheels turning of like, what are some of the issues they are heading off? What are some of the things they encountered?

Six participants mentioned that faculty members who will be teaching public speaking online should have either a mentor or the ability to review a learning management system online course shell prior to teaching the course online. Those faculty members who were reluctantly forced to teach public speaking online during COVID mentioned they wished they had been given this opportunity.

### **Advice**

Advice was given for offering public speaking online. Advice was defined as recommendations for improving the public speaking class based on their experiences and observations. Advice was offered for students and communication departments.

### **Students**

Some participants mentioned ensuring students were prepared for the online course. Advice for students included the need to be extremely self-motivated and able to read and follow detailed directions. Steven mentioned when discussing successful students online,

I think it takes a lot more self-direction and I think that it is less community based and

more individual skill based. So, I think the students who take it seriously and read everything and try to follow it along and stay on top of the game and complete every discussion and do all those things will benefit.”

## **Department**

A few participants voiced concern with implementing all the department’s requirements of the face-to-face course to the online course. Participants expressed legitimate concern regarding how students could deliver an impromptu speech in an asynchronous format. Steven noted,

I think something that departments are going to have to figure out is, in terms of the common course outline, we’re required to do an impromptu speech. As so that’s one of those that took me a lot of time to figure out the logistics of that and how to make that work. It it’s online, how do we make that a requirement? How do we help instructors who maybe get thrown in and don’t have enough experience running these in-person to figure out how the parts can translate online? So, I think there’s stuff like that, this is worth just kind of thinking about.

Tim mentioned his frustration with the impromptu speech in his online class this way,

Impromptu speeches, in the face-to-face class, students create topics and they go into a hat, I collect them and then I pass them out and the cannot speak on their own topic. We can’t do that online. At least I haven’t found a way to do that in this class. So, when we do impromptus, I send them three topics and then they have to choose from a list I get them. This is another tedious thing, it’s so slow.

The above quotations offer advice for online public speaking. The topics of advice

offered in this study include reviewing department requirements for offering public speaking courses online.

### **Technology**

Technology concerns for faculty and students were mentioned in several interviews. Technology ranged from D2L management to making sure students were competent with the technology requirements for the course.

### **Faculty**

Technology was mentioned by several participants as something to consider when moving your course online. Larry noted,

I think use technology wisely. So D2L, there's some really good features, there's some really onerous ones that are annoying and take a lot of work. So just kind of picking and choosing submission expectations and these sorts of things based on what actually improves student learning versus what helps enhance convenience of the instructor.

John noted, "Getting to know the software platform as thoroughly as possible is to your advantage, and doing it as soon as possible is to your advantage."

### **Students**

Faculty members encouraged being understanding and supportive of your students. Tami cautioned, "When you don't know the students' technology backgrounds, you can't assume that they know how to set up a YouTube account." Charlie added,

Speaking effectively in an online format requires a different set of skills, you have to manage technology and you have to wrangle your physical environment in the most effective way possible. You just have to consider that whole constellation of variables in an online public speaking format that has to do with technology, and camera angle, and

can they hear me? And working the microphone volume, and all of that stuff.

John added instructors much be patient with students noting,

There's technological errors that come up every semester that you've never heard of.

There are students who require a lot of support, either because it's there first time, they've never seen an LMS (Learning Management System) like D2L in our case, they don't have great tech at home.

### Summary

The results presented in this section answered the question: What are best practices for teaching public speaking online? Five themes were discovered in this study: Be student focused, be committed, find a mentor/resources, advice, and technology.

### Results of Research Question Three

#### How do best practices differ for teaching public speaking online either synchronously or asynchronously?

While there was debate whether public speaking should be taught online asynchronously or just synchronously, best practices were encouraged for both modes and similar themes emerged for both modes. Best practice advice ranged from keeping students active to building community in both formats to being extremely detailed in your speech delivery expectations. It was noted by four participants that more energy and enthusiasm to keep students motivated were required in synchronous learning environments than asynchronous.

Table 4: Summary of Themes Research Question 3

Theme	Sub-Theme
Synchronous/Asynchronous	Keep it active
	Build community

## Be detailed

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### **Synchronous/Asynchronous**

#### **Keep it Active**

Tami pointed out in the synchronous environment,

The key is to keep it active and keep the students talking. They need to be responsible for answering questions and contributing to conversations. So while some students will try to turn the camera off, you know I will call on them and if they don't answer, I'm assuming they are absent or wandered off. So they know that I will call on them and ask their opinions on things and then also to keep it engaged, so I do a variety of peer reviews of outlines and public speeches. They talk about their experiences putting it together and share ideas and they do that in breakout rooms. So lots of activity, and interactions are so much easier to do in breakout rooms than it is on discussion boards for an asynchronous class as they are more detached.

Charlie recommended offering peer critiques of speeches. He stated,

I also put the onus on the audience members, I know you're not here with us physically, but you need to be here 100% mentally. So that means I can see everyone, you can't be on your phone, you can't be muted and have a side conversation with someone that's in the living room. I always set ground rules at the beginning for how speaking and listening is going to look in a synchronous environment.

Larry agreed with peer reviews noting,

One of the more valuable things that I started doing is realizing that I'm not the only voice of what good speeches should have. So for the speeches that are submitted, every



student can weigh in on every students' work. Sometimes I make it anonymous, sometimes later in the semester, when we realize that it's okay to give and receive feedback, it becomes more personalized. This helps a lot for encouragement. It becomes more of a cheerleading at the beginning of the semester and then as we get into the more technical speeches of the research-based, persuasive and informative, the feedback becomes really, really good.

Tim stated group work was important so students get to know each other. "That's how they get to know each other and they build community and find we are alike." Tami also noted,

As a teacher it's tough to maintain the same enthusiasm and passion and concern and care for your students online as you would face to face. I find it much easier to do that synchronously than I do asynchronously. For the synchronous classes, I try to have them come prepared having done a lot of readings and videos all in advance. So that when they come to class, we can maintain the activity that would interest them if we were right in class, so I don't do a ton of lecturing if I can avoid it. And I like for them to have time just to discussion and practice speeches to get ideas from others. I will show videos and then critique them as a class and we will talk about what observations were made. So I try to keep it moving, especially if it's not a short class if it's a longer class than to try to break things up keep people interested and engaged. I think the biggest struggle is just getting people to keep their cameras on. Keeping your camera on if it's synchronous. For the synchronous classes, I try to have them come prepared having done a lot of reading and all that in advance. So when they come to class we can maintain the activity that would interest them, so I don't do a ton of lecturing if I can avoid it and I like for them to have time to discuss and have discussions with others and practice speeches to

get ideas from others. I try to keep it moving. I think the biggest struggle was just getting people to keep their cameras on.

John has changed his stance on audience requirements noting,

I used to have an audience requirement pre-pandemic, but then we were all quarantining, and some people live alone and it seemed like it was for more cumbersome restrictions, so I ended up removing it. So in place of that, students have to do peer critiques and that speeches all have to be posted publicly. So it's definitely not the same, I'm trying to give them at least some of that public accountability. I want them to know that people are watching their speeches, these are not just academic exercises, but they in fact have real world consequences.

Linda concurred and recommended "using breakout rooms, having something specific to do that's interactive short speeches to watch, or doing peer reviews of their materials and then me doing a round robin with the groups."

In order for online public speaking students to successfully complete the course, instructors much keep them active in the learning process. Suggestions include peer reviews, breakout rooms, group work, and keeping cameras turned on.

## **Community**

Building community in an asynchronous environment was just as important as in a synchronous environment. Tami stated, "I try to establish community in asynchronous through feedback in the discussion boards" Katie recommended using discussion forums and engaging students with discussions. She noted,

I've tried to schedule times for students to meet together as an option. I don't have required times for them since it is coded as asynchronous, but I do offer times where we

can just get together let's say a student needs an audience. I also have a general questions area where somebody has a question about something and we'll have a brief conversation.

Feedback was important in either format. Larry said "giving them really good feedback and or specific feedback and fairly quickly feedback." Linda said, "We have to be mindful to build relationships with online students. If you let them videotape everything, I don't think you see much of a personal transformation and as much progress, I just think public speaking is very relational." Tami said "I try to establish a community it it's asynchronous for their feedback in our discussion boards. It's the building of community I think is important."

Keeping students active and building community and student connections were key for teaching students public speaking online. Challenges in the synchronous environment occur when students do not keep their cameras on. Building community can be attempted through breakout rooms and peer reviews.

### **Be Detailed**

A theme for teaching asynchronously was to be much more detailed and explicit in your assignment instructions. Tami stated,

Be very explicit about your expectations for how you want the video to look. Include the angle of the camera, how much of the body to show. The ideal I settled on was three fourths of the body, so they have to step back and find a good spot even in they have to stack books up and put their laptop on there. I made a diagram of that I should look like. About lighting, you know somebody would stand in front of their fluorescent light and you can't see their face.

Larry noted,

It's a lot more detailed assignment sheets. How do I present all of this information in a way that they are actually going to take the time to read and that they're going to be able to process and understand?

Online public speaking instructors were adamant that instructions for online public speaking course assignments, either synchronously or asynchronously, should be more detailed than face-to-face courses.

### **Summary**

There were little differences in best practices noted from instructors regarding online asynchronous or synchronous modality. Whether the course was taught synchronously or asynchronously, instructors noted they needed to keep the students actively engaged, build community, and be extremely detailed. A big challenge noted in synchronous was making sure students had their cameras turned on.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the previous chapters. It overviews the study's findings, suggestions for future research studies, and implications for theory and practice. This study researched the validity of teaching public speaking online and best practices for teaching public speaking online. These findings can help faculty members teach public speaking online and understand the differences between teaching it online versus the traditional face-to-face format.

### **Importance and Summary**

Little research has been conducted on online instruction for the basic public speaking course (Westwick et al, 2015). The purpose of this study was to identify best practices in teaching public speaking online. The study was conducted using a basic qualitative research design that included semi-structured Zoom interviews with 10 communication studies faculty members. It answered the following three research questions:

Question 1: Is there validity in teaching public speaking online?

Question 2: What are best practices in teaching public speaking courses online?

Question 3: How do best practices differ for teaching public speaking online either synchronously or asynchronously?

The literature review presented the history of public speaking, the pros and cons of teaching public speaking online, best practices in online teaching, and best practices in the online teaching of public speaking. Two frames were used to structure this study include Quality Matters and Community of Inquiry. The population includes ten communication faculty members from community and technical colleges in the state of Minnesota. The study confirmed research question one. Yes, there is validity in teaching public speaking online even if one is vehemently opposed to the idea. Best practices in teaching online included being student-

focused, being committed, finding a mentor and the right resources, offering advice, and using technology. Best practice advice for teaching asynchronously versus synchronously was similar ranging from keeping students active to building community to being extremely detailed in your speech delivery expectations.

### **Implications for Theory**

Two theoretical frames informed this study, Quality Matters and Community of Inquiry. Community of Inquiry was more applicable to this study than Quality Matters. Quality Matters was only mentioned by one participant of this study, Katie. She mentioned the fact that her course has been nationally certified through the Quality Matters Rubric gave her the confidence that she is teaching a quality-designed course. Deans may want to promote Quality Matters to reluctant faculty members to build confidence. Participating in Quality Matters may help in changing negative perceptions towards teaching public speaking online.

The following four categories of Quality Matters were mentioned throughout this study: course overview, assessment, learning activities and learner interaction, and course technology (Quality Matters, 2018). Quality Matters stresses, “Communication expectations for online..are clearly stated” (Quality Matters, 2018, p. 10). Instructors were adamant that teaching public speaking online requires extremely detailed expectations. Faculty members also recommended providing detailed rubrics on how speeches should be delivered electronically. This theme ties into Quality Matters recommendation, “The course grading policy is clearly stated at the beginning of the course. Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners’ work and their connection to the course grade policy is clearly explained” (Quality Matters, 2018, p. 20). Participants in this study recommended providing detailed feedback which aligns with Quality Matters guidance that, “The course provides learners with multiple

opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback” (Quality Matters, 2018, p. 22). Keeping students engaged in an online course was mentioned as a best practice. Quality Matters echoes this theme by suggesting, “Learning activities provide opportunities for interactions that support active learning” (Quality Matters, 2018, p. 28). Quality Matters also recommends, “Learners are provided with detailed, clearly worded information regarding the technologies they will need throughout the course” (Quality Matters, 2018, p. 12). Technology concerns were mentioned as a theme and providing detailed instructions on how to use technology was noted in this study.

All three elements of The Community of Inquiry framework were found in this study. The three elements are cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Akyol et al., 2009). Cognitive presence assumes critical thinking as the goal of any educational experience (Garrison et al., 2000). Social presence is defined as the ability of learners to feel connected with peers through computer-mediated communication (Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching presence is defined as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Arbaugh et al., 2008, p. 5).

Several best practices to create a cognitive presence online were noted in this study. These practices include providing many low-stakes formative assessment opportunities, having students lead discussions, developing group work, providing peer-review assignments with detailed rubrics, developing grading rubrics that clearly indicate the assessment process, posting examples of exemplary speeches, and providing frequent feedback.

Best practices were also identified for creating a social presence in an online public speaking course. A few examples include creating acceptable rules such as netiquette, designing

courses to be flexible, requiring students to participate in group discussion boards, requiring class participation, encouraging peer-to-peer and peer-to-instructor relationships, and using audio and video feedback.

Best practices to improve teaching presence were found in this study. Faculty members mentioned numerous ways this can be achieved in an online public speaking course. These recommendations included the following: clearly explaining assignments, providing detailed and timely feedback, making students feel comfortable with technology, requiring students to turn on their cameras, encouraging student engagement such as using the “raise hand” function in Zoom, using discussion prompts to engage students, and coordinating breakout rooms.

### **Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether teaching public speaking online was legitimate and to discover best practices in teaching public speaking online. Little research has been conducted on best practices in teaching public speaking online. The results of this study showed that those who were vehemently opposed to teaching public speaking online had a different attitude once they were forced to teach it online due to COVID. These results should be shared with reluctant faculty members. The findings from this study can be used by institutions to improve their teaching of public speaking online.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research examining online public speaking courses would prove useful. First, researchers should study the learning outcomes and or completion rates of students in the traditional face-to-face format versus the online format. Next, a study could be conducted on best practices for online public speaker students and the perceived usefulness to students. Finally, while instructors in this study did not explicate any significant differences in best practices for



synchronous versus asynchronous public speaking courses, a future study could examine the impact of these courses on perceived student learning. Future research should continue to investigate whether or not there are differences between synchronous and asynchronous speaking course and the impact on both teachers and students.

### **Conclusion**

Online education is a staple in higher education. The debate over teaching public speaking online may continue; however, the results of this study show that even the most reluctant faculty members' perceptions changed once they taught it online. It is my hope that reluctant faculty members consider the results of this study before refusing to believe teaching public speaking online is valid. Instructors need to understand that it can and does work. They also need to be well versed on best practices in teaching public speaking online.

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## Appendix A: Definitions of Terms

*Asynchronous learning* “supports work relations among learners and with teachers, even when participants cannot be online at the same time” (Hrastinski, 2008, p. 51).

*Distance education* is defined as ““planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, requiring special course design and instruction techniques, communication through various technologies, and special organizational and administrative arrangements” (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 2).

*Face-to-face education* is defined as courses where no online technology is used and content is delivered orally or in writing (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

*Hybrid* is a “course that blends online and face-to-face delivery” (Allen & Seaman, 2008, p. 4).

An *online public speaking course* is defined as “a course that is taught completely online without any requirement or option to attend face-to-face class sessions for additional instruction and/or to deliver speeches” (Ward, 2016, p. 223).

*Synchronous* is defined as “sent and received instantly and simultaneously” (Beebe et al., 2017, p.17).



## **Appendix B: Recruitment Email Message**

### **Recruitment Email Message IRBNet ID 18102731**

I am looking for volunteers to participate in my research study. Community college faculty members (unlimited full-time, part-time, adjuncts) teaching introduction to public speaking face-to-face and online either asynchronously or synchronously, are needed for a qualitative study on online teaching.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

Is there validity in teaching public speaking online?

What are best practices in teaching public speaking online?

What are best practices in teaching it synchronously and asynchronously?

Interviews should take approximately one hour at a location of your choice.

Please contact Sally Dufner, master of communication studies student at 763-777-0800 or [sally.dufner@normandale.edu](mailto:sally.dufner@normandale.edu) if you are interested in participating in this research study or know of someone who might be interested. Thank you for your support and interest.

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent**

### **Best Practices in Teaching Public Speaking Online**

#### **Informed Consent IRBNet ID 18102731**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sally Dufner, graduate student in communication studies, supervised by Dr. Justin Rudnick and Dr. Kristi Treinen, from the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of this study is to understand best practices in teaching introduction to public speaking online, and you will be asked to answer questions about that topic. If you have any questions about the research, please contact Sally Dufner at [sally.dufner@normandale.edu](mailto:sally.dufner@normandale.edu) or Dr. Rudnick at (952) 358-9219 or [justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu](mailto:justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu) or Dr. Treinen at (507) 389-5535 or [kristi.treinen@mnsu.edu](mailto:kristi.treinen@mnsu.edu).

Research studies include only people who choose to participate. Please take your time to make your decision. Discuss your decision with your family or friends if you wish. If you have any questions about this project, you may ask either Sally Dufner or Dr. Rudnick or Dr. Treinen.

You have a right to a copy of this consent form. You will be provided an electronic copy prior to beginning the research interview. If you would like a paper version, please contact the researchers.

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online interview (estimated time: 60 minutes at a time of your choosing). The researcher will ask you to reflect on your understanding of best practices in teaching public speaking online. With your permission, the researcher will audio record your conversation. After the interview, the researcher will type a transcription of what was recorded and remove any mention of names. The sound recording will

then be destroyed, immediately following or after one year from the date of the interview, whichever comes sooner. If you do not wish to be recorded, you may still participate in the study. The researcher will take notes during the interview instead of recording. A transcriptionist (or transcribing service) will be (or may be) used to transcribe the voice-recorded data collected for this study. The researcher(s) will ensure the protection of your confidentiality and privacy with the transcriptionist(s) involved.

### **Can I stop being in the study?**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. The decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242.

You can decide to stop at any time. To withdraw from the study, simply inform the researcher of your desire to withdraw during the interview, or after the interview at the email address listed above. Please note: because the researcher does not collect any identifying information from you, there is no way to withdraw from the research once the interview recording has been transcribed and deleted.

### **Will I be compensated for taking part in this study?**

You will not be compensated for taking part in this study.

### **What risks can I expect from being in the study?**

The anticipated risks for participating in this research are minimal, but may include some emotional discomfort for reflecting on personal experiences. These risks are anticipated to be no greater than what you would be exposed to in your everyday life.

**Are there benefits to me or others by taking part in the study?**

Participation in the study will provide you with an opportunity to share your experiences about teaching public speaking online. These stories will also help the forensic community better understand how to teach students the basics of public speaking when this course is taught online.

**Will information about me be kept private?**

We will do our best to make sure that the personal information gathered for this study is kept private. However, we cannot guarantee total privacy. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used. Instead, a pseudonym will be assigned to you at the time of your interview and used in any reference to you in presentations or publications. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. Following that removal, the data we collect could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

Taking part in this study is your choice. You may choose either to take part or not to take part in the study. If you decide to take part in this study, you may leave the study at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

**Who I contact if I have questions about the study?**

If you have any questions about this research study, you are encouraged to contact Dr. Justin Rudnick (Principal Investigator) at either ([Justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu](mailto:Justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu)) or (952-358-9219). If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242. If you would like more

information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato IT Solutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

### **Consent to Participate in the Research Study**

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Sign below to indicate your willingness to participate in this research study and to indicate that you are at least 18 years of age.

I agree that the interview may be audio and video recorded.

A copy of this consent form can be obtained from Sally Dufner.

---

Signature

Your Name (printed)

Date

## **Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I have scheduled this meeting for one hour.

Does that still work for you? What you share with me today will be kept confidential. You may be identified in my final paper with a pseudonym. Please tell me what you think and feel about best practices in teaching public speaking online. This will be helpful in identifying ways to improve teaching public speaking courses online. I would like to tape record these interviews and transcribe them to make sure I accurately describe and summarize your views. May I have permission to tape record the interview? (If the interviewee does not give permission, I will take notes instead). I will be taking notes. I would also like to have some of my participants review my findings. Would you be willing to review my report to ensure it is accurate?

### **INTERVIEW INFORMATION**

Date of interview:

Time from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

First name:            MI:            Last name:

How long have you been teaching public speaking?

How long have you been teaching face-to-face public speaking courses?

How long have you been teaching online public speaking courses?

What do you like best about teaching public speaking?

When you were asked to teach public speaking online, what were the circumstances?

How do you feel about teaching public speaking online as opposed to teaching it face-to-face?

How do you define effective online teaching of public speaking? What does it mean to you?

How do you know you are teaching effectively online?

What strategies are essential to teaching public speaking online? Do these strategies change if

the course is taught synchronously or asynchronously?

What changes, if any, did you need to make when moving your face-to-face public speaking

course online?

What recommendations would you give to first time online instructors teaching public speaking?

How do you assess student learning outcomes in a public speaking online course? Is it different

than a face-to-face assessment?

Is there any other information about teaching public speaking online that you think would be

useful for me to know?

What question did I not ask that you think I should have asked?

What was the most important thing we talked about today, and why?

### **CLOSING THE INTERVIEW**

Thank you very much for your time and participation. This information has been very helpful. I will be transcribing this interview and providing you a summary. (If the participant agrees for the interview to be taped). Would you prefer I provide the copy via email, postal mail or both? If you have any further thoughts before you receive the summary, please contact me at [sally.dufner@normandale.edu](mailto:sally.dufner@normandale.edu) or 763-777-0800. (I will send thank you cards via the mail with my email address, address and phone number after the interviews).



## Appendix E: Institutional Review Board Approval



October 28, 2021

Re: IRB Proposal [1810273-3] Qualitative Research - Online Best Practices Review  
Level: Exempt (Level I)

**Congratulations! Your Institutional Review Board (IRB) Proposal has been approved as of October 28, 2021.**

Please remember that research involving human subjects under the purview of the IRB should adhere to the most current COVID-19 guidelines available, as set by [MSU, Mankato](#) and the Minnesota Department of Health.

On behalf of the Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB, we wish you success with your study. Please remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study (<https://research.mnsu.edu/institutional-review-board/proposals/process/proposal-revision/>).

Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcomes, you are required to report them immediately to the Associate Vice-President for Research and Dean of Extended Campus at 507-389-1242.

When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must submit a Closure request. All documents related to this research must be stored for a minimum of three years following the date on your Closure request (<https://research.mnsu.edu/institutional-review-board/proposals/process/proposal-closure/>).

If the PI leaves the university before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for ensuring proper storage of consent forms (<https://research.mnsu.edu/institutional-review-board/proposals/process/leaving-campus/>). Please include your IRBNet ID number with any correspondence with the IRB.

Be well,

Julie Carlson, Ed.D., Co-Chair  
of IRB

Jeffrey Buchanan, Ph.D.,  
Co-Chair of IRB

Jason A. Kaufman, Ph.D., Ed.D.,  
Director of IRB

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB's records.

**APPENDIX F: List of Tables**

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