

THA 15B – Public Speaking: The Art of Oral Communication
Summer 2009, Mondays 6:10pm-9:30pm
Jennifer Cleary, Lecturer in Theater Arts
Spingold 15, jacleary@brandeis.edu
Office Hours: To Be Announced.

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

Public Speaking is about human communication, consisting of both talking and listening. To become a strong speaker, you must begin at the foundation of where speaking lives in our daily lives: with our families, friends, classmates, colleagues, and in our professions. Naturally, we choose different communicative skills depending on our environment and audience.

Public speaking isn't only about presenting a speech from behind a podium. This form of speaking is something this course will address and practice, but it is just a small part of what speaking in public is all about. In the course, we will define what "public" means, realizing that in all of our speaking engagements, we will always have an audience, whether it is an audience of one or one-hundred.

We will also talk about ourselves, our fears, our strengths, and our challenges when we think about speaking in front of others, and we will use these personal profiles as our foundation for our study. Each student will be able to use the flexibility of the assignments to work at his or her own pace and develop skills from whatever place you are coming from. This course is appropriate for a variety of skill levels, from the novice and more fearful speaker, to a more comfortable speaker looking for a place to focus and develop stronger skills. All will find a place in THA 15B.

The overall course goal is to allow each student to feel comfortable, confident, and prepared to succeed in a variety of speaking engagements, and to overcome any fears of public speaking through practice, discussion, and collegial support/feedback.

This course is much like a lab in speaking and listening, and your classmates are as much a part of your learning as your own work and motivation are. Listening and learning from each other, as each person develops in his/her own way, is a huge part of this course.

Finally, our focus is on speaking and presenting effectively, and working through your strengths and challenges as a speaker. If you want a course that will help you become an expert in PowerPoint presentations, this is not the course for you.

II. CONTENT AND GOALS

Speaking Environments/Audience

By the end of the summer, students will hone already-existing skills in how to communicate effectively in a variety of situations. We will focus on three speaking environments/audiences:

1. One-on-one conversation, in a personal environment and in a professional setting, such as preparation exercises for a job interview.
2. Small and large group discussions, such as what you would experience in a class setting or in a professional meeting setting, with everyone participating but where individual speakers exist.
3. Speaking effectively in front of a group, whether in a formal, podium-style setting, or in a more informal but professional roundtable situation.

Speaking Formats/Types

Extemporaneous speaking is the professional speaking format we will focus our study on. You will prepare notes, research, and practice, but the speech itself is conversational in nature and allows the

speaker to connect more fully with the audience. We will have one *verbatim* assignment, a speech written and delivered from behind the podium.

Much of the speaking you will do in your life will take place away from a podium, be it in front of a classroom as a teacher, in front of a jury as a lawyer, or in front of family members in the hospital waiting room as a doctor. All of these instances are public speaking, or “professional” speaking. We will focus our study on a variety of speaking assignments. Keep in mind that each of these speeches has variety in the way they can be prepared and delivered, depending on the environment, purpose, audience, etc. For our class purposes, I have indicated the manner in which we will study each:

1. Storytelling/Impromptu/Discussions – No formal preparation. Done in every class meeting in the form of a warm-up.
2. Informative Speeches – Teaching about something of personal or professional interest.
3. Critic as Speaker – Film, Book, Art Critic, for example. Personal opinion.
4. Persuasive Speeches – Taking a position, using research.
5. Final Formal Personal Speech – as a motivational/inspirational speaker, for example. Written and delivered verbatim.

Within these forms of speaking, we will vary the environment in which the student will present. It may be behind a podium or sitting in a circle on the same level as the audience. We will talk about how the position of the speaker and audience can affect the overall nature and effect of the speech. Students will get practice speaking in the variety of environments and will be given the chance to self-evaluate their work, as well as to receive feedback from the instructor and colleagues in class in a safe and supportive manner.

The Individual as Speaker: Content, Voice, and Body

Within each speaking format, we will focus on each individual student as speaker. No matter how amazing your written speech is on paper, your voice, body language, and ability to deliver your message are vital to the success of this work and the continued development of your speaking skills. We will create personal profiles, accessing our self-awareness in speaking situations. Do you know that you talk too fast? Tap your fingers when nervous? Are you quiet-spoken? Do your hands sweat, making it difficult to hold onto note cards? We will address all of these issues and talk about ways to face these challenges head-on, tailoring our work to each individual student. Topics we will address:

1. Speaking Skills: tone, diction, breathing, inflection, meaning-making, speed, volume, emotive speech.
2. Body Language Skills: position of body, posture, hand positions, nervous movements, eye contact, facial expression, addressing the audience, moving the speech off the page and to the audience, keeping the eyes off the page and on the audience.
3. Content Skills: quality of written speech, resources, presentation aids, use of notecards, ability to create language with little preparation (such as in an impromptu speech).

III. COURSE STRUCTURE

We will conduct our course in a discussion-based seminar format. Weekly, every student will speak in class, tell a story, create an impromptu presentation, or participate as a speaker in our discussion. Each week will then focus on a different aspect of speaking. This is a course about doing, so we will all be up and speaking from day one. Practice is the only way to become a better speaker.

Students will work together on preparing speeches and will also learn how to provide effective feedback to classmates. Being able to critique and help others grow through constructive feedback will allow students’ own awareness and skill development to succeed.

IV. ASSIGNMENTS

Required Texts

There are no required texts for this course.

Assignments

Students will be required to complete prepared speeches/presentations in class, based on the speaking assignments listed above. In addition, students will be required to complete informal but essential self-evaluations, as well as evaluations of a fellow student's work, which will require a depth and breadth of understanding of the course content and the ability to give feedback in a constructive way.

I will also evaluate you as a listener over the course of the semester. 15% of your grade is based on your efforts and improvements as a listener.

You will also be asked to do a variety of weekly assignments that connect you to your work and the goals you set for yourself. Reflection is a very important part of becoming more aware of yourself as a speaker. These assignments may be in the form of a verbal preparation to discuss in class or a short written assignment.

You will also be required to attend one-on-one meetings with me outside of class to receive instructor feedback on your speeches. Sign-ups will be done in class.

If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis and you wish to request a reasonable accommodation for this class, please see me immediately. Please keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are not provided retroactively.

V. GRADING

You must attend class. You must attend class. You must attend class.

Because we only meet once per week for 3 hours, we cover entire topics on a weekly basis, and all assignments are based on work done in class. For every course meeting missed, your grade will be affected by one whole letter. If you have an extenuating circumstance, illness, or emergency that prevents you from attending class, you must let me know BEFORE the course meeting that you will be missing, if possible. I will address such instances on an individual basis, but must be convinced that a missed class was essential. Keep in mind that I do not want you in class if you are very sick, but just let me know. It will be up to you to find out what you missed and obtain notes from a classmate. Keep in mind that there may be work that would be impossible for you to make-up, even if the absence is approved. You will not receive credit for this work.

There is no final exam in this course – each speech assignment is equally weighted. Weekly class discussions, storytellings, impromptu work, and the interviewing exercises are all part of your class participation grade.

Your grading is based on PERSONAL BENCHMARKS that I will establish with you, through getting to know you, your goals, and hearing your first speech. In other words, you will not be graded against a common scale as a class; rather, each of you will be graded based on your own improvement over the course of the summer, how hard you worked to achieve your goals, and your commitment to the class and to our classroom community. If you have questions about this grading policy, please let me know.

Speech Assignments:	50%
Class Participation:	25%
Homework Assignments:	10%
Listening Skills:	10%