



# Practically Speaking

*By J. Dan Rothwell*

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## **Practically Speaking** By J. Dan Rothwell

Practically Speaking aims to address four key objectives for students: 1) readability, 2) clarity, 3) applicability, and 4) affordability. Regarding the first objective--readability--the wisdom of Samuel Johnson seems apt: "What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure." Maximum effort has been devoted to writing a textbook that might ignite the interest of student readers, not induce a coma. Textbooks are not meant to read like Stephen King novels, but they do not need to be a horror by reading like an instruction manual for setting up your new flat-screen TV. Consequently, I attempted to practice what I teach about gaining and maintaining attention by using the attention strategies discussed in Chapter 5. There are novel and humorous examples, stories, quotations, photos, and cartoons; intense, dramatic, and poignant illustrations; colorful and vivid language and metaphors; startling statistics and historical facts sprinkled throughout every chapter. The writing style is conversational and the perpendicular pronoun "I" is used when relating personal narratives. First-person singular is more engaging than impersonal references such as "this author experienced" or "a student in the author's class." In addition, second-person pronoun references to "you" are employed frequently to address readers directly.

A second objective--clarity--is addressed in a variety of ways. The organization of each chapter follows the rules of good organizational logic presented in Chapter 7. Such logic can be examined by perusing the Table of Contents. In addition, headings and subheadings are carefully chosen and worded to produce maximum clarity as well as originality. Finally, copious illustrations and explanations are provided to clarify all important public speaking concepts and processes.

A third objective--applicability--requires concerted effort to demonstrate the practical utility for students of becoming competent public speakers. The first chapter addresses in detail such applicability. The remaining chapters elaborate on this important objective. Numerous pop culture references and newsworthy events are used as illustrations, further revealing the applicability of competent public speaking for students.

A fourth objective--affordability--has become a national issue shared by students and faculty alike. A 2012 Oxford University Press national survey of 327 professors who teach public speaking at U. S. universities and community colleges revealed that almost 75% of respondents viewed price as an "extremely or very important" feature of a public speaking text. I am a longtime member of

the bookstore/textbook committee on my campus that strives to find ways to make textbooks more affordable for students. Every effort has been exerted to make Practically Speaking an attractive but affordable alternative to other much more expensive choices. Oxford University Press is a non-profit publishing company, so this alone provides considerable price advantage for students surviving on tight budgets. The lean size of Practically Speaking also helps reduce the price.

Practically Speaking aims to address six different objectives for teachers of public speaking: 1) sound scholarship, 2) standard yet innovative coverage, 3) brevity, 4) recency, 5) logical organization, and 6) useful ancillaries. The first objective, sound scholarship, is critically important. Providing substantial theory and research to bolster the advice offered to novice student speakers counters the oft-heard, naive claim that public speaking is just "common sense." Without such theory and research, advice provided will appear as little more than the personal opinion of the author, easily trivialized or ignored and often at odds with the opinions of others. It is bound to strike the more alert student readers that authors who insist on inclusion of research and evidence for student speeches but include little research and evidence to support their advice offered in a textbook seem contradictory. We never want students to equate relatively short texts such as Practically Speaking with being "lightweight" or insubstantial. The careful scholarship in Practically Speaking is evident in every chapter. More than 500 references are cited and the communication competence model, carefully developed in Chapter 1, serves as the theoretical basis for all advice offered. In addition, Chapter 9 on skepticism is the only chapter of its kind in public speaking texts that so thoroughly explains the theoretical underpinnings of critical thinking for public speakers.

A second objective for public speaking teachers--standard yet innovative coverage--is addressed in several ways. All standard topics found in any reputable public speaking text and identified in the Oxford survey previously referenced are thoroughly developed in Practically Speaking. Innovative coverage includes the opening chapter on communication competence. There is a separate chapter on speech anxiety, offered in only a few public speaking texts. A full chapter on gaining and maintaining attention, not typically found in other public speaking texts, emphasizes that speakers must do far more than merely gain immediate attention of their audiences. The much greater challenge is to keep that attention throughout a lengthy speech. A full chapter on skepticism, already mentioned, is yet another innovation of Practically Speaking. Finally, two full chapters on persuasive speaking provide both a theoretical explanation for how persuasion works generally and specific strategies for persuading public speaking audiences. Results from the Oxford survey showed that three-quarters of respondents believed that a chapter on foundations of persuasion is "extremely or very important." A chapter on persuasive speaking strategies was similarly embraced by 85% of respondents.

A third objective--brevity--was identified by 72% of respondents to the Oxford survey as variously "important" to "extremely important." A significant 85% of respondents in the same survey also noted that "preparing students to start speaking right away" is important. In standard, lengthy texts, students have to read hundreds of pages before they learn the basics for a simple first or second

speech. Standard texts typically do not cover introductions and conclusions, for example, until almost 200 pages of text have been read. Students will have read the bulk of Practically Speaking when they reach 200 pages. Practically Speaking gets students "up and running" quickly. Another related concern in the Oxford survey identified by almost half the respondents was that students do not read the text. Reading a textbook of 500 pages or more can be daunting. Practically Speaking is about half the size of most standard-sized public speaking texts. Its brevity is far less intimidating and more likely to be read.

A fourth objective--recency--is always a challenge because of the lag period between finishing a manuscript and completing the textbook production process that typically takes months. As someone with a Bachelors degree in American history, I value the use of historical examples for illustrations. I also see the applicability of recent events to clarify concepts and processes in public speaking. I have included both, some examples as recent as 2013 and others centuries old. Great speakers and powerfully illustrative events do not occur in only one brief time period. We can learn from both the old and the new. This is true for references as well. About half of the more than 500 references are between 2008 and 2013 while many of the rest are more "classic" citations.

A fifth objective--logical organization--produced some juggling of chapters. There is no perfect organization for any public speaking text. Practically Speaking is organized similar to most such texts. Several reviewers of Practically Speaking, however, suggested moving the chapter on delivery to early in the text. Their advice and rationale seemed cogent. Delivery is an immediate concern of students when they give their first speech. Addressing this concern early seems warranted. Consequently, the delivery chapter was moved from Chapter 13 to Chapter 3. Likewise, speech anxiety is addressed very early in Chapter 2 because it is an immediate and significant student concern. With the exception of Chapter 1 on communication competence, all chapters can be moved to a different order if so desired.

A final objective--useful ancillaries--is addressed in several ways. An instructors' manual accompanies Practically Speaking. Dozens of activities and assignments are provided to supplement what most teachers already use. A test bank is provided. A glossary of key terms is also included at the end of the text. Videos of student sample speeches are an additional ancillary.

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## **Practically Speaking By J. Dan Rothwell Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"The length is perfect. The chapters are easy to read and are full of relevant examples that are sure to capture students' attention. The author covers all of the usual topics dealing with public speaking, but does so in a unique and interesting dialogue with the reader."--Valerie Manno Giroux, University of Miami

"Rothwell's new text includes the most comprehensive, vitally important content on speech anxiety I have ever seen in a public speaking text. This book digs deeper than other texts into what students need to grasp while also providing techniques that they can readily apply."--Marilyn Simpkins Brimo, Mt. Hood Community College

"I love this book. I love the tone, content, and writing style and find it appropriate and engaging for college students. Overall great scholarship--way more than most other texts! Practically Speaking takes public-speaking texts to a new and exciting place. It is unlike any other public-speaking book I've encountered and I enjoyed and appreciated the breath of fresh air."--Brandi Quesenberry, Virginia Tech

"The sense of humor is brilliant, edgy, topical, and smart. I found myself literally LOL-ing numerous times."--Andrew Herrmann, East Tennessee State University

"Practically Speaking is fresh, current, and concise-a winning combination."--Scott McLean, Arizona Western College/Northern Arizona University-Yuma

"It is very rare to read a textbook and not want to put it down; a unique situation I found myself in as I read Practically Speaking. It is a refreshing new textbook that reads more like an informative narrative without succumbing to the fate of being simply entertainment. The text does not speak down to students; it talks to them and engages them in a way that only a good storyteller could do. All-in-all, this book is a great read!"--Matthew Sciarrino, St. John's University

"The text is very accessible and written in a conversational style. The stories are effective and current, which will help students relate to the material. Even with the goal of brevity, this textbook has the most developed section on persuasion and effectiveness that I have seen so far in introductory speaking textbooks."--Donata Nelson, Rockingham Community College

"I'm a fan of Rothwell's writing style--and my students are as well. Thumbs up again and again for writing style. His style is concise, yet full of substance and even humorous. It's not 'dumbed down.' The text is chock-full of terrific research, current and even edgy examples, and solid advice for students learning the art of public speaking."--Jill Alcorn, Green River Community College

"The writing style encourages/invites/compels students to continue reading."--Quinton Dale Davis, University of Texas at San Antonio

"The writing style is excellent--very straightforward, easy to understand, clear, and concise. The author previews his points and then makes them in a very direct manner, using vivid examples."--Kathy Berggren, Cornell University

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#### About the Author

J. Dan Rothwell is chair of the Communication Studies Department at Cabrillo College. He has a BA in American history from the University of Portland (Oregon), an MA in rhetoric and public address and a PhD in communication theory and social influence, both from the University of Oregon. He has authored four other books besides *Practically Speaking*. They are: *In Mixed Company: Communicating in Small Groups and Teams* (Cengage), *In the Company of Others: An Introduction to Communication* (Oxford University Press), *Telling It Like It Isn't: Language Misuse and Malpractice* (Prentice-Hall), and *Interpersonal Communication: Influences and Alternatives* (with James Costigan and published by Charles-Merrill). Dr. Rothwell has received numerous teaching awards, including among others: the 2010 "Ernest L. Boyer International Award for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Technology"; the 2010 Cabrillo College "Innovative Teacher of the Year"; the 2011 National Communication Association "Community College Educator of the Year" award; and a 2012 official resolution by the California State Senate acknowledging Dr. Rothwell's excellence in teaching. In 2012, the Western States Communication Association awarded the Cabrillo College Communication Studies department, under the leadership of Dr. Rothwell, the "Model Communication Studies" award. The immensely talented faculty in the Communication Studies department at Cabrillo College, however, deserves most of the credit for this last award.

#### Users Review

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**Thomas Kelly:**

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