

Ethics in Public Speaking

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Learning Objectives:

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define ethics and explain why ethics are important in public speaking.
- Differentiate between morality and ethical dilemma.
- Identify the three types of plagiarism and understand how to avoid them.
- Explain how to cite sources in written and oral speech materials.
- Develop responsible language use by avoiding hate language and using inclusive language.
- Use a speech platform to promote diversity, raise social awareness, and understand free speech.
- Employ ethical listening by readying both mind and body to avoid distractions.

- Develop patterns of ethical feedback through praise and constructive criticism.
- Apply ethical communication skills to public speaking situations.
- Apply module concepts in final questions and activities.

Chapter Outline:

- Introduction
- Defining Ethics
- Ethical Speaking
- Ethical Listening
- Conclusion
- Review Questions & Activities

Introduction

Maggie is helping her older sister plan for her wedding. She loves event planning and decides to give an informative speech to her classmates on “Selecting a Florist.” She knows all the other women in class will adore the topic and her visual aids (an assortment of flowers and a rose for everyone to take home). As Maggie begins the speech, she creates a listener relevance link that relates mostly to the women in the class. In fact, most of the speech is directed at female listeners.

As she moves through the main points of her speech, Maggie realizes that she is running out of time and only has 1 minute left or the instructor will penalize her. During her third main point, she skips over some citations but shares the statistics of saving money on a trustworthy florist. The listeners don’t notice that Maggie neglected to provide oral source citations, so she feels confident of the “expertise” she has derived. After Maggie finishes her final main point, she concludes and reminds the ladies to find her later if they have any questions about prices of quality of florists in the area.

When preparing for this speech, Maggie attempted an audience analysis. However, she failed to adequately involve all audience members by choosing a traditionally female topic and tailoring the language to females in the class. A second unethical decision made by Maggie was to omit oral citations, thereby failing to give credit to those who deserved it. Maggie’s practices in her speech are just a few ways in which unethical public speaking can occur. The evolution of ethics is central to public speaking because it is through communication that our ideas about right and wrong or good and bad are formed.

“Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do.” – Potter Stewart

Issues related to honesty, integrity, and morality are present in our everyday lives. We recognize the need for ethical communication when leaders make deceitful statements. For instance, we all remember President Clinton’s famous quote: “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” We recognize a crafty speaker when we hear one. Ethics, however, aren’t just important for

presidents and other public figures. Ethical concerns arise in a variety of public speaking contexts, as this chapter portrays.

The National Communication Association (NCA) suggests that communicators should be committed to following principles of ethical communication. The NCA Credo of Ethical Communication claims that “ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media.”¹⁴ Ethical communication also yields positive outcomes, such as truthfulness, respect, and accuracy of information. You can see that ethics is a very important part of the communication process. Likewise, it is an important part of the public speaking process.

Unethical communication can lead to poor decision-making or a lack of respect for self and others, and threaten the well-being of individuals and society. Early scholars of ethical communication, most notably Nielsen¹⁵ and Johannesen¹⁶ began to incorporate a discussion of ethics in all aspects of communication. These forerunners began exploring ethics in the area of public speaking. Communication experts agree that ethical communication is an important responsibility of the speaker.

Defining Ethics

*“But I want to say one thing to the American people. I want you to listen to me. I’m going to say this again: **I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.** I never told anybody to lie, not a single time; never. These allegations are false. And I need to go back to work for the American people. Thank you.” – President Bill Clinton (1998)*

Some of the early leaders in philosophy—Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato—spoke extensively about morality and ethical principles. Aristotle is frequently cited as a central figure in the development of ethics as we discuss them today in the communication discipline. Aristotle claimed that a person who had ethos, or credibility, was not only able to convey good sense and good will, but also good morals. Great philosophers have debated the merits of living well, doing good, and even communicating skillfully. Smither describes early Greeks and Romans as teachers of public speaking; these philosophers argued that public communication is “a means of civic engagement” and ethics are “a matter of virtue.” Ethics and ethical communication are not only an important part of our lives and our decision-making but also are crucial to the public speaking process. In 2011, when Representative Anthony Weiner faced accusations of sending sexually explicit photographs to a woman, he vehemently denied any wrongdoing and claimed that he had been set up. Shortly after, his denial turned to an admission and apology. This scandal called into question the ethics of Rep. Weiner, yet it was also his lack of ethical communication that exacerbated the situation.

“Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.” – Aristotle

Ethics and Ethical Standards:

Morality is the process of discerning between right and wrong. Ethics involves making decisions about right and wrong within a dilemma. For example, you might claim that stealing is morally wrong. But is stealing morally wrong when a mother steals a loaf of bread to feed her four starving children? It's this scenario that requires an understanding of ethics. In a moral dilemma, we apply ethics to make choices about what is good or bad, right or wrong. Sometimes, ethical dilemmas are simple. Other times, they require complex choices, such as the decision to report your immediate boss for misrepresenting expenses or the decision to move your grandmother into a retirement community. These scenarios are more complex than simple choices between right and wrong. Instead, these examples are ethical dilemmas because two "right" choices are pitted against one another. It's good to report an unethical supervisor, but it's also good to keep your job. It's good that your grandmother feels independent, but it's also positive for her to receive extra assistance as her health deteriorates.

As public speakers, we make ethical choices when preparing and delivering a speech. We can easily be faced with a moral dilemma over what information to provide or how to accurately represent that information. Knowing the speaking setting, the audience, and our knowledge of the topic, we are able to confront ethical dilemmas with a strong moral compass. This process is made easier by our ethical standards. Ethical standards, or moral principles, are the set of rules we abide by that make us "good" people and help us choose right from wrong. The virtuous standards to which we adhere influence our ethical understanding. For instance, followers of Buddha believe that communication should be careful—good communication should exhibit restraint, responsibility, and kindness.¹¹¹

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." – Dalai Lama

This stance informs one's ethical standards. In fact, Merrill (2009) explains that the holy Dalai Lama, the Buddhist spiritual leader, believes compassion is even more essential than truth. Therefore, it is justifiable to be untruthful when the deception is part of the process of caring for another. This example illustrates how one's belief system influences his or her ethical standards. These ethical standards are the guidelines we use to interpret rightness and wrongness in life, in relationships, and in public speaking. Wallace claims that "ethical standards of communication should place emphasis upon the means used to secure the end, rather than upon achieving the end itself."¹¹² This argument suggests that speakers must consider moral standards through every step of the speech process.

"Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate."¹¹³ Once we have identified our ethical standards, we can apply these to make sure that we are communicating ethically. Ethical communication is an exchange of responsible and trustworthy messages determined by our moral principles. Ethical communication can be enacted in written, oral, and non-verbal communication. In public speaking, we use ethical standards to determine what and how to exchange messages with our audience. As you read further in this chapter, you will begin to understand the guidelines for how ethical communication should occur in the public speaking process.

Ethical Speaking

*In January, 2012, an Australian politician, Anthony Albanese, presented a speech to the National Press Club. Several people criticized this speech, saying that he stole lines from Michael Douglas's character (the U.S. President) in the movie **The American President**. Several specific lines from Albanese's speech did seem to mirror Douglas's monologue, with only the names changed. The Liberal Party federal director, Brian Loughnane, claimed that this shows Albanese is "unoriginal and devoid of ideas." Others stated that he should be embarrassed and should apologize to the Parliament.¹¹*

What do you think about Albanese's speech? Was this a simple mishap? A funny prank? Something more serious? What do you think this says about Albanese's character? His reputation as a politician? Assessing your attitudes and values toward this situation is the same as considering how ethics play a role in public speaking.

Ethical public speaking is not a one-time event. It does not just occur when you stand to give a 5-minute presentation to your classmates or co-workers. Ethical public speaking is a process. This process begins when you begin brainstorming the topic of your speech. Every time you plan to speak to an audience—whether it is at a formal speaking event or an impromptu pitch at your workplace—you have ethical responsibilities to fulfill. The two most important aspects in ethical communication include your ability to remain honest while avoiding plagiarism and to set and meet responsible speech goals.

"Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people." – Spencer Johnson

Be Honest and Avoid Plagiarism:

Credible public speakers are open and honest with their audiences. Honesty includes telling your audience why you're speaking (thesis statement) and what you'll address throughout your speech (preview). For instance, one example of dishonest speech is when a vacation destination offers "complimentary tours and sessions" which are really opportunities for a sales person to pitch a timeshare to unsuspecting tourists. In addition to being clear about the speech goal, honest speakers are clear with audience members when providing supporting information.

One example of dishonest public communication occurs in the music industry where many cases of illegal melody lifting exist. For example, a famous Beach Boys song titled *Surfin' USA* is actually a note-for-note rendition of a 1958 Chuck Berry song. Though it may be common, the practice of not properly crediting an author for his or her work is unethical. Other examples of deceitful communication include political speeches that intentionally mislead the public. For instance, a former White House press aide, Scott McClellan, claims that President Bush misled the American people about reasons for the Iraqi war. McClellan claims that the President had manipulated sources in order to gain support for the war. Such claims can be damaging to one's reputation. Thus, responsible public speakers must actively avoid plagiarism and remain committed to honesty and integrity at all costs.

Identify Your Sources:

The first step of ethical speech preparation is to take notes as you research your speech topic. Careful notes will help you remember where you learned your information. Recalling your sources is important because it enables speaker honesty. Passing off another's work as your own or neglecting to cite the source for your information is considered **plagiarism**. This unethical act can result in several consequences, ranging from a loss in credibility to academic expulsion or job loss. Even with these potential consequences, plagiarism is unfortunately common. In a national survey, 87 percent of students claimed that their peers plagiarized from the Internet at least some of the time.^[2] This statistic does not take into account whether or not the plagiarism was intentional, occurring when the writer or speaker knowingly presented information as his or her own; or unintentional, occurring when careless citing leads to information being uncredited or miscredited. However, it is important to note that being unaware of how to credit sources should not be an excuse for unintentional plagiarism. In other words, speakers are held accountable for intentional and unintentional plagiarism. The remainder of this section discusses how to ensure proper credit is given when preparing and presenting a speech.

"A liar should have a good memory." – Quintilian

There are three distinct types of plagiarism—global, patchwork, and incremental plagiarism.^[3] **Global plagiarism**, the most obvious form of plagiarism, transpires when a speaker presents a speech that is not his or her own work. For example, if a student finds a speech on the Internet or borrows a former speech from a roommate and recites that speech verbatim, global plagiarism has occurred. Global plagiarism is the most obvious type of theft. However, other forms of plagiarism are less obvious but still represent dishonest public speaking.

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." – Mark Twain

Sometimes a student neglects to cite a source simply because she or he forgot where the idea was first learned. Shi explains that many students struggle with plagiarism because they've reviewed multiple texts and changed wording so that ideas eventually *feel* like their own. Students engage in "patchwriting" by copying from a source text and then deleting or changing a few words and altering the sentence structures."^[4] **Patchwork plagiarism** is plagiarism that occurs when one "patches" together bits and pieces from one or more sources and represents the end result as his or her own. Michael O'Neill also coined the term "paraplaguing"^[5] to explain how an author simply uses partial text of sources with partial original writing. An example of patchwork plagiarism is if you create a speech by pasting together parts of another speech or author's work. Read the following hypothetical scenario to get a better understanding of subtle plagiarism.

Three months ago, Carley was talking to her coworkers about expanding their company's client base. Carley reported some of the ideas she'd been pondering with Stephen and Juan. The three employees shared ideas and provided constructive criticism in order to perfect each notion, and then mentioned they'd revisit the conversation over lunch sometime soon. A week later, Carley shared one of her ideas during the company's Monday morning staff meeting. Carley came up with the idea, but Stephen and Juan helped her think through some of the logistics of bringing in more clients. Her peers' input was key to making Carley's client-building idea

work. When Carley pitched her idea at the company staff meeting, she didn't mention Stephen or Juan. She shared her idea with senior management and then waited for feedback.

Did Carley behave unethically? Some would say: “No!” since she shared her own idea. Did Carley speak honestly? Perhaps not because she didn't account for how her idea took shape—*with* the help of Stephen and Juan. This scenario is an example of how complicated honesty becomes when speaking to an audience.

The third type of plagiarism is **incremental plagiarism**, or when most of the speech is the speaker's original work, but quotes or other information have been used without being cited. Incremental plagiarism can occur if, for example, you provide a statistic to support your claim, but do not provide the source for that statistic. Another example would be if a student included a direct quote from former president Ronald Reagan without letting the audience know that those were Reagan's exact words. Understanding the different types of plagiarism is the first step in ensuring that you prepare an honest speech.

Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): APA Guide for Citing Sources

Cite	Don't Cite
Words or ideas presented in a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium.	Writing your own lived experiences, your own observations and insights, your own thoughts, and your own conclusions about a subject.
Information you gain through interviewing or conversing with another person, face to face, over the phone, or in writing.	When you are writing up your own results obtained through lab or field experiments.
When you copy the exact words or a unique phrase.	When you use your own artwork, digital photographs, video, audio, etc.
When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other visual materials.	When you are using common knowledge—things like folklore, common sense observations, myths, urban legends, and historical events (but not historical documents).
When you reuse or repost any electronically available media, including images, audio, video, or other media.	When you are using generally accepted facts, e.g. pollution is bad for the environment.

Decide When to Cite:

When speaking publicly you must orally cite all information that isn't general knowledge. For example, if your speech claims that the sun is a star, you do not have to cite that information since it's general knowledge. If your speech claims that the sun's temperature is 15.6 million Kelvin,^[2] then you should cite that source aloud. Ethical speakers are not required to cite commonly known information (e.g., skin is the largest human organ; Barack Obama was elected President of the U.S. in 2008). However, any information that isn't general knowledge must be orally cited during a speech. The same is true in the text of a speech outline: cite all non-general information.

The OWL, an online writing lab at Purdue University, provides an excellent guide for when you need to cite information (see Table 3.1). Understanding when to include source material is the first step in being able to ethically cite sources. The next step in this process is to determine how to appropriately cite sources orally and in written materials.

Cite Sources Properly:

You've learned the importance of citing sources. Now that you know why written and oral citations are important to the ethical process of public speaking, let's focus on *how* to cite supporting speech material. Studies show that oftentimes students do not cite a source because they're unsure of how or when to cite a reference. Shi's study describes some typical responses for why students did not cite sources, such as "I couldn't remember where I learned the information," or "I had already cited that author and didn't want the audience to think all of my information was from some outside source." Though these rationales are understandable, they are not ethical.

Understand Paraphrasing and Direct Quotations:

Next, it is important to understand the process for paraphrasing and directly quoting sources in order to support your speech claims. First, what is the difference between paraphrasing and directly quoting a source? If you research and learn information from a source—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for instance—and then share that information in your *own* words; you don't use quotation marks; but you do credit the CDC as your source. This is known as a **paraphrase**—a sentence or string of sentences that shares learned information in your own words. A **direct quote** is any sentence or string of sentences that conveys an author's idea word-for-word. According to the APA (American Psychological Association), when writing speech content, you must include quotation marks around an author's work when you use his or her keywords, phrases, or sentences. This would be relevant for a speech outline, a handout, or a visual aid. It is also important to specify a direct quote when you are orally citing during your speech. This indicates to the audience that you are using the original author's exact words. While it is acceptable to use the phrases "begin quote" and "end quote" to indicate this to your audience, such phrases can be distracting to the audience. One way to clearly and concisely indicate a direct quote is to take a purposeful pause right before and after the quoted material. This differentiates between your words and the source material's words. See Table 3.2 for

examples of how to paraphrase and directly quote an author, both in written speech materials and for an oral citation.

Written and Oral Citations

	Written Citations	Oral Citations
Original Text	You cannot do a nonstop flight to the second half of life by reading lots of books about it, including this one. Grace must and will edge you forward.	Your best defense against influenza—and its possible complications—is to receive an annual vaccination. In fact, CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get an annual flu vaccination.
Paraphrase for Written Speech Materials	It is through the practice of showing grace that we grow and develop as individuals (Rohr, 2011).	The CDC (2008) suggests that people get a vaccination at least once a year to avoid the flu.
Direct Quote for Written Speech Materials	According to Rohr (2011), “Grace must and will edge you forward” (p. 2).	There is something you can do to avoid the flu. The CDC states that, “Your best defense against influenza—and its possible complications—is to receive an annual vaccination” (para. 6).
Oral Citation for Paraphrase	In Rohr’s 2011 book, <i>Falling upward: A spirituality for the halves of life</i> , he discussed how we show grace to others which allows us to grow and develop as individuals.	According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (2008), people should get a preventative vaccination at least once a year to avoid the flu.
Oral Citation for Direct Quote	Rohr (2011), in his book <i>Falling upward: A spirituality for the two halves of life</i> , stated that [pause] “Grace must and will edge you forward” [pause].	On their website, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2008) states that, [pause] “your best defense against influenza—and its possible complications—is to receive an annual vaccination” [pause].

Develop Accurate Citations:

Ethical speakers share source information with the audience. On written materials, such as handouts or speech outlines, citations are handled much like they would be in any essay. In addition to written citations, oral citations provide source information to audience members who may not see your written speech. In all citations, enough information should be given so that the audience can easily find the source.

You may choose to briefly describe the author before citing him or her to lend credibility to your supporting information. Writing style guidebooks, such as APA or MLA (Modern Language Association), teach that a source's credentials are not necessary in the text of your paper. We can interpret that the same is true for providing oral citations in a speech—the author's occupation, the source website, or the journal name are not required but may be helpful verbal cues to explain the legitimacy of your chosen source. You should provide enough information so that an audience member can locate the source. For instance, it might be useful to describe the doctor as a leading pediatrician—after which you would state the doctor's last name, year of publication, and the quote or paraphrase.

Ethical speakers provide written, oral, *and* visual citations. Visual aids, discussed in Chapter 13, include posters, objects, models, PowerPoints, and handouts. Visual aids are used to enhance your speech message. Visual aids, just like speech content, must be displayed ethically for the audience. In other words, if you use a poster to display a famous quote, then you should cite the author on your poster (see Figure 3.1). Similarly, you should cite sources on your PowerPoint *throughout the presentation*. It is not sufficient to include a "Sources" or "References" slide at the end of your PowerPoint because that does not accurately link each author to his or her work. Instead, ethical presenters provide an author reference on the slide in which the cited content is shown.

Speakers should also carefully select and correctly cite images displayed in their visual aid. Images should be relevant to the keywords used on your PowerPoint slide. In other words, captions are not necessary because the image can stand alone; images you display should obviously correlate with your speech content (a caption is typically used because the picture *needs* explanation). In other words, the presence of a caption typically means your image does not directly correspond with the verbal speech material. Images should support, not distract, from the verbal or visual message. Hence, there is no need for blinking, rotating, or otherwise distracting visual aids.¹¹¹ Images should be simple and relevant. All pictures should be cited, unless the presenter uses a personal, clipart, or purchased stock image. To cite an image, simply include the credit (or web link) to that picture; note, however, the font size of the link should be reduced so that it is visible to the audience without distracting from the content in your visual aid. Seeing an image link should not be distracting to audience members.

It's also important to understand how copyright law might affect what and how you include information in your speech and on your visual aid. The fair use provision allows for copyrighted information to be shared if it is used for educational benefits, news reporting, research, and in other situations. Nolo explains, "In its most general sense, a fair use is any copying of copyrighted material done for a limited and 'transformative' purpose, such as to comment upon, criticize, or parody a copyrighted work. Such uses can be done without permission from the copyright owner."¹¹² In order to determine if the use of content falls under the fair use provision, there are four factors to consider:

1. How will this be used?
2. What is to be used?
3. How much will be used?

4. What effect does this have?^[13]

You can find more about these four factors at the U.S. Copyright website.

Ethical citing includes crediting authors in the text of your written speech materials, acknowledging authors aloud during your speech, and citing images and sources on your visual aid. However, ethics in public speaking encompass more than crediting source material. It's also necessary to strive for responsible speech goals.

"Ethics and equity and the principles of justice do not change with the calendar." – David Herbert Lawrence

Set Responsible Speech Goals:

Jensen coined the term "rightsabilities" to explain how a communicator must balance tensions between speaker rights and responsibility to others. Ensuring that you have responsible speech goals is one way to achieve ethical communication in public speaking. There are several speech goals that support this mission. This section will focus on five goals: 1) promote diversity, 2) use inclusive language, 3) avoid hate speech, 4) raise social awareness, and 5) employ respectful free speech.

Promote Diversity:

One important responsibility speakers have is fostering **diversity**, or an appreciation for differences among individuals and groups. Diversity in public speaking is important when considering both your audience and your speech content. Promoting diversity allows audience members who may be different from the speaker to feel included and can present a perspective to which audience members had not previously been exposed. Speakers may choose a speech topic that introduces a multicultural issue to the audience or can promote diversity by choosing language and visual aids that relate to and support listeners of different backgrounds. Because of the diversity present in our lives, it is necessary to consider how speakers can promote diversity.

One simple way of promoting diversity is to use both sexes in your hypothetical examples and to include co-cultural groups when creating a hypothetical situation. For example, you can use names that represent both sexes and that also stem from different cultural backgrounds. In the story about Carley and her co-workers, her co-workers were deliberately given male names so that both sexes were represented. Ethical speakers also encourage diversity in races, socioeconomic status, and other demographics. These choices promote diversity. In addition, ethical speakers can strive to break stereotypes. For instance, if you're telling a hypothetical story about a top surgeon in the nation, why not make the specialized surgeon a female from a rural area? Or make the hypothetical secretary a man named Frank? You could also include a picture in your visual aid of the female surgeon or the male secretary at work. Ethical speakers should not assume that a nurse is female or that a firefighter is male. Sexist language can alienate your audience from your discussion.^[14]

Another way that sexist language occurs in speeches is when certain statements or ideas are directed at a particular sex. For example, the “Selecting a Florist” speech described at the beginning of this chapter may be considered sexist by many audience members. Another example is the following statement, which implies only males might be interested in learning how to fix a car: “I think that fixing a car is one of the most important things you can learn how to do. Am I right, guys?” Promoting diversity is related to using inclusive language, discussed in the following sections.

“Excellence is the best deterrent to racism or sexism.”— Oprah Winfrey

Use Inclusive Language:

Avoiding sexist language is one way to use inclusive language. Another important way for speakers to develop responsible language is to use inclusionary pronouns and phrases. For example, novice speakers might tell their audience: “One way for you to get involved in the city’s *Clean Community Program* is to pick up trash on your street once a month.” Instead, an effective public speaker could exclaim: “One way for all of us to get involved in our local communities is by picking up trash on a regular basis.” This latter statement is an example of **“we” language**—pronouns and phrases that unite the speaker to the audience. “We” language (instead of “I” or “You” language) is a simple way to build a connection between the speaker, speech content, and audience. This is especially important during a persuasive speech as “we” language establishes trust, rapport, and goodwill between the speaker and the audience. Take, for example, the following listener relevance statements in a persuasive speech about volunteering:

“You” language: You may say that you’re too busy to volunteer, but I don’t agree. I’m here to tell you that you should be volunteering in your community.

“We” language: As college students, we all get busy in our daily lives and sometimes helpful acts such as volunteering aren’t priorities in our schedules. Let’s explore how we can be more active volunteers in our community.

In this exchange, the “you” language sets the speaker apart from the audience and could make listeners defensive about their time and lack of volunteering. On the other hand, the “we” language connects the speaker to the audience and lets the audience know that the speaker understands and has some ideas for how to fix the problem. This promotes a feeling of inclusiveness, one of the responsible speech goals.

Avoid Hate Speech:

Another key aspect of ethical speaking is to develop an awareness of spoken words and the power of words. The NCA Credo of Ethical Communication highlights the importance of this awareness: “We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.”^[15] Words can be powerful—both in helping you achieve your speech goal and in affecting your audience in significant ways. It is essential that public speakers refrain from hate or sexist language. Hate speech, according to Verderber, Sellnow, and Verderber, “is the use of

words and phrases not only to demean another person or group but also to express hatred and prejudice.”¹¹⁶ **Hate language** isolates a particular person or group in a derogatory manner. Michael Richards, famous for the role of Cosmo Kramer on *Seinfeld*, came under fire for his hate speech during a comedy routine in 2006. Richards used several racial epithets and directed his hate language towards African-Americans and Mexicans.¹¹⁷ Richards apologized for his outbursts, but the damage to his reputation and career was irrevocable. Likewise, using hate speech in any public speaking situation can alienate your audience and take away your credibility, leading to more serious implications for your grade, your job, or other serious outcomes. It is your responsibility as the speaker to be aware of sensitive material and be able to navigate language choices to avoid offending your audience.

“No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.” – Robin Williams

Raise Social Awareness:

Speakers should consider it their ethical responsibility to educate listeners by introducing ideas of racial, gender, or cultural diversity, but also by raising **social awareness**, or the recognition of important issues that affect societies. Raising social awareness is a task for ethical speakers because educating peers on important causes empowers others to make a positive change in the world. Many times when you present a speech, you have the opportunity to raise awareness about growing social issues. For example, if you’re asked to present an informative speech to your classmates, you could tell them about your school’s athletic tradition *or* you could discuss *Peace One Day*—a campaign that promotes a single day of worldwide cease-fire, allowing crucial food and medicine supplies to be shipped into warzone areas.¹¹⁸ If your assignment is to present a persuasive speech, you could look at the assignment as an opportunity to convince your classmates to (a) stop texting while they drive, (b) participate in a program that supports US troops by writing personal letters to deployed soldiers or (c) buy a pair of TOMS (tomsshoes.com) and find other ways to provide basic needs to impoverished families around the world. Of course, those are just a few ideas for how an informative or persuasive speech can be used to raise awareness about current social issues. It is your responsibility, as a person and speaker, to share information that provides knowledge or activates your audience toward the common good.¹¹⁹

One way to be successful in attaining your speech goal while also remaining ethical is to consider your audience’s moral base. Moon identifies a principle that allows the speaker to justify his or her perspective by finding common moral ground with the audience.¹²⁰ This illustrates to the audience that you have goodwill but allows you to still use your moral base as a guide for responsible speech use. For example, even though you are a vegetarian and believe that killing animals for food is murder, you know that the majority of your audience does not feel the same way. Rather than focusing on this argument, you decide to use Moon’s principle and focus on animal cruelty. By highlighting the inhumane ways that animals are raised for food, you appeal to the audience’s moral frame that abusing animals is wrong—something that you and your audience can both agree upon.

“If we lose love and self-respect for each other, this is how we finally die.” – Maya Angelou

Employ Respectful Free Speech:

We live in a nation that values freedom of speech. Of course, due to the First Amendment, you have the right and ability to voice your opinions and values to an audience. However, that freedom of speech must be balanced with your responsibility as a speaker to respect your audience. Offending or degrading the values of your audience members will *not* inform or persuade them. For example, let's say you want to give a persuasive speech on why abortion is morally wrong. It's your right to voice that opinion. Nevertheless, it's important that you build your case without offending your audience members—since you don't know everyone's history or stance on the subject. Showing disturbing pictures on your visual aid may not “make your point” in the way you intended. Instead, these pictures may send audience members into an emotional tailspin (making it difficult for them to hear your persuasive points because of their own psychological noise). Freedom of speech is a beautiful American value, but ethical speakers must learn to balance their speech freedom with their obligation to respect each audience member.

“Fortunately for serious minds, a bias recognized is a bias sterilized.” – Benjamin Haydon

Ethical Listening

Just as you hope others are attentive to your speech, it is important to know how to listen ethically—in effort to show respect to other speakers.

Jordan stood to give his presentation to the class. He knew he was knowledgeable about his chosen topic, the Chicago Bears football team, and had practiced for days, but public speaking always gave him anxiety. He asked for a show of hands during his attention getter, and only a few people acknowledged him. Jordan's anxiety worsened as he continued his speech. He noticed that many of his classmates were texting on their phones. Two girls on the right side were passing a note back and forth. When Jordan received his peer critique forms, most of his classmates simply said, “Good job” without giving any explanation. One of his classmates wrote, “Bears SUCK!”

As we can see from the example above, communicating is not a one-way street. Jordan's peers were not being ethical listeners. All individuals involved in the communication process have ethical responsibilities. An ethical communicator tries to “understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.”¹⁴ As you will learn in Chapter 4, listening is an important part of the public speaking process. Thus, this chapter will also outline the ethics of ethical listening. This section explains how to improve your listening skills and how to provide ethical feedback. Hearing happens physiologically, but listening is an art. The importance of ethical listening will be discussed first.

Develop Ethical Listening Skills:

The act of hearing is what our body does physically; our ear takes in sound waves. However, when we interpret (or make sense of) those sound waves, that's called **listening**. Think about the last time you gave a speech. How did the audience members act? Do you remember the people

that seemed most attentive? Those audience members were displaying traits of ethical listening. An **ethical listener** is one who actively interprets shared material and analyzes the content and speaker's effectiveness. Good listeners try to display respect for the speaker. Communicating respect for the speaker occurs when the listener: a) prepares to listen and b) listens with his or her whole body.

One way you can prepare yourself to listen is to get rid of distractions.^[2] If you've selected a seat near the radiator and find it hard to hear over the noise, you may want to move before the speaker begins. If you had a fight with your friend before work that morning, you may want to take a moment to collect your thoughts and put the argument out of your mind—so that you can prevent internal distraction during the staff meeting presentation. As a professional, you are aware of the types of things and behaviors that distract you from the speaker; it is your obligation to manage these distractions before the speaker begins.

In order to ethically listen, it's also imperative to listen with more than just your ears—your critical mind should also be at work. According to Sellnow,^[3] two other things you can do to prepare are to avoid prejudging the speaker and refrain from jumping to conclusions while the speaker is talking. Effective listening can only occur when we're actually attending to the message. Conversely, listening is interrupted when we're pre-judging the speaker, stereotyping the speaker, or making mental counterarguments to the speaker's claims. You have the right to disagree with a speaker's content, but wait until the speaker is finished and has presented his or her whole argument to draw such a conclusion.

Ethical listening doesn't just take place inside the body. In order to show your attentiveness, it is necessary to consider how your body is listening. A listening posture enhances your ability to receive information and make sense of a message.^[4] An attentive listening posture includes sitting up and remaining alert, keeping eye contact with the speaker and his or her visual aid, removing distractions from your area, and taking notes when necessary. Also, if you're enjoying a particular speaker, it's helpful to provide positive nonverbal cues like head-nodding, occasional smiling, and eye-contact. These practices can aid you in successful, ethical listening. However, know that listening is sometimes only the first step in this process—many times listeners are asked to provide feedback.

“Constructive criticism is about finding something good and positive to soften the blow to the real critique of what really went on.” – Paula Abdul

Provide Ethical Feedback:

Ethical speakers and listeners are able to provide quality feedback to others. **Ethical feedback** is a descriptive and explanatory response to the speaker. Brownell explains that a response to a speaker should demonstrate that you have listened and considered the content and delivery of the message.^[5] Responses should respect the position of the speaker while being honest about your attitudes, values, and beliefs. Praising the speaker's message or delivery can help boost his or her confidence and encourage good speaking behaviors. However, ethical feedback does not always have to be positive in nature. Constructive criticism can point out flaws of the speaker while also making suggestions. Constructive criticism acknowledges that a speaker is not perfect and can improve upon the content or delivery of the message. In fact, constructive criticism is helpful in

perfecting a speaker's content or speaking style. Ethical feedback always explains the listener's opinion in detail.

Ethical statements *explain* why you find the speaker effective or ineffective. Another guideline for ethical feedback is to “phrase your comments as personal perceptions” by using “I” language (Sellnow, 2009, p. 94). Feedback that employs the “I” pronoun displays personal preference regarding the speech and communicates responsibility for the comments. Feedback can focus on the speaker's delivery, content, style, visual aid, or attire. Be sure to support your claims—by giving a clear explanation of your opinion—when providing feedback to a speaker. Feedback should also support ethical communication behaviors from speakers by asking for more information and pointing out relevant information.⁶¹ It is clear that providing ethical feedback is an important part of the listening process and, thus, of the public speaking process.

“A man without ethics is a wild beast loosed upon this world.” – Albert Camus

Conclusion

This chapter addresses ethics in public speaking. As ethics is an important part of our daily lives, it also plays a significant role in any public speaking situation. This chapter defines ethics and provides guidelines for practicing ethics in public speaking and listening. An ethical public speaker considers how to be honest and avoid plagiarism by taking notes during the research process, identifying sources, and deciding when it is appropriate to cite sources. Ethical public speakers also cite sources properly by understanding how to paraphrase and directly quote sources. In addition, they know how to cite in written speech materials, during oral presentations, and on visual aids.

Ethical speakers strive to achieve responsible speech goals by promoting gender, racial, and cultural diversity, using inclusive language, refraining from using hate speech, raising social awareness about important issues when possible, and understanding the balance of free speech with responsibility to audience members. Lastly, this chapter discusses ethical listening. Listening is an important part of the public speaking situation. Ethical listeners consider their responsibilities when both listening and providing feedback to speakers. Ethical listeners should prepare to listen by removing distractions, avoiding prejudging the speaker, and listen with the whole body by giving supportive nonverbal feedback to the speaker. Ethical feedback is explanatory and descriptive. Ethical feedback can include both praise and constructive criticism. With this improved understanding of how to prepare and present a speech ethically, you can accomplish the goal of ethical public speaking. Consider ethics as you learn about the public speaking process in upcoming chapters.

Review Questions & Activities

Review Questions:

1. Where did ethics originate? How are ethics used in public speaking?
2. What is plagiarism? What is the difference between global and patchwork plagiarism?
3. What is the difference between paraphrasing and directly quoting a source?
4. What free speech rights are granted to a speaker?
5. Why is raising social awareness an ethical concern when preparing a speech?
6. What are some ways to use language ethically in presentations?
7. How is listening used in the public speaking setting? What are some guidelines for being an ethical listener?

Activities:

1. Think about your ethical standards. Create a list of sources from which your ethical behaviors have originated. Who or what has influenced your ethics?
2. Review the National Communication Association's (NCA) Credo of Ethics. How do you interpret this credo? How can you use the principles in your public speaking?
3. Split into groups of three to five students. As a group, develop 5 example situations of unethical behavior in public speaking. Once you are finished, switch situations with a different group. Decide how you can make changes to create ethical public speaking behavior.
4. Think about the following scenarios involving an ethical dilemma. How would you react?
 - You attend a political debate on campus. The candidate's speech contains many ideas that you don't agree with. How can you be an ethical listener during the speech?
 - You are preparing to give a speech on a topic and realize that you have lost the citation information for one of your important sources. You can't seem to find this source again. What would you do to ethically prepare for the speech?
 - When practicing your speech on influential sports figures, you realize that you refer to the audience, your co-ed classmates, quite often as "you guys." Is this ethical language use? What changes would you make?
5. When preparing for your next speech, create an ethics journal. Write down the various ethical dilemmas as you encounter them. How did you decide what to do in these situations? What was the outcome?