



A Handbook of Public Speaking

Letteri, Richard
[Allyn & Bacon](#), 2002
272 pages
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Sergeant Joe Friday would wholly approve of the new breed of public speaking handbooks that offer “just the facts” about the speechmaking process. Richard Letteri’s [A Handbook of Public Speaking](#) is one such text that approaches freshly basic public speaking pedagogy with its “filler-free,” comprehensive, quick-reference presentation. Educators using this handbook will encounter freedom to apply foundational public speaking concepts in their own instructional style. Students will no longer wade through sidebars, stories, or color photos in order to rapidly reach concepts and theories pertinent to their course of study.

Whereas most basic public speaking textbooks initially introduce the reader to communication models, or even the benefits of public speaking study for one’s personal and professional life, this handbook is so “no-nonsense” that it immediately immerses the reader in speech building. Bundled under the subject “Research,” Chapter 1 encompasses such topics as critical thinking, audience analysis, topic selection, electronic and traditional research, as well as source credibility.

Chapter 2 does not backtrack into generalized content about communication or public speaking, but further steeps the reader into the intricacies of speechmaking and evaluation. Case in point: The reader is plunged into proof, evidence, and arguments—topics that many public speaking educators delay until mid- to end-of-semester persuasive speeches. [Allyn & Bacon](#) and Letteri both credit the handbook’s emphasis on “classical rhetorical principles” as a key feature, which makes the all-inclusive nature and early presentation of this 61-page chapter (the lengthiest chapter in the handbook) unsurprising. Letteri’s treatment of evidence and argument has a depth and breadth not usually found in most basic public speaking textbooks. He dissects thoroughly such topics as syllogisms and fallacies, while conversationally exploring strengths and

weaknesses of argumentative tactics and complementing every explanation with relevant examples.

The remaining five chapters contain subjects familiar to the basic public speaking course—visual aids, organization, speech types, and delivery mechanics—still without fluff, and somewhat as fortified with concrete explanations and examples as the first two chapters. For instance, with a firm rooting of evidence and argument identified early in the handbook, Letteri applies aspects of these topics to speech genres other than persuasive speaking. He encourages readers to consider a “rhetorical purpose” when selecting a thesis statement and to use the four modes of proof when informing an audience. Letteri raises the bar, once again, as he introduces an ample “Figures of Speech” section. Students will perceive themselves as quite the scholar when they identify how “antanaclasis,” “epanalepsis,” and “chiasmus” linguistically enhance a presentation. While using the handbook, readers will find a user-friendly design, which includes concise chapters and an easy-to-navigate table of contents, and brief content listing located on the back cover. Emboldened subheadings, abundant bullet points, and concise paragraphs further encourage quick, yet substantive reading.

Whereas advanced treatment of several pertinent topics serves as one of the handbook’s strengths, educators may perceive limited coverage of certain basic areas as a deficiency. The patterns of organization section includes descriptions of common outline formats, but not sample outlines, which novice speech students require for reference. Sample student speeches and outlines located in the handbook’s appendix are prefaced by brief preview of their content, but outline format is not discussed, which would be helpful. Another limitation of this text is the absence of end-of-chapter activities and exercises. Educators who rely heavily on fundamental applications must truly devise their own “instructional support” since the accompanying Instructor’s Manual only includes comprehensively outlined “study guides” and a test bank.

The infusion of thorough, yet quick-to-reference public speaking handbooks, such as A Handbook of Public Speaking, provide a welcome alternative for communication educators who already possess an arsenal of pedagogical material and prefer for their students to independently study the “nuts and bolts” of the subject. Given Letteri’s sophisticated exploration of evidence and argument and other pertinent areas of speech construction, this affordable handbook would complement a basic speech course taught from a rhetorical perspective or an advanced public speaking course. For use in a 101-level public speaking course taught from a practical perspective, educators may welcome the opportunity to develop creative sideline activities and exercises for supplemental use.