

Chapter Two
Personal Responsibilities in a Democratic Society
from
Public Speaking: An Idea Focus
W. Clifton Adams
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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:

1. understand three key skills essential to fulfilling your personal responsibility in a democratic society.
2. appreciate the importance of using these skills.
3. use abstraction in solving problems.
4. realize more confidence.

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. create an abstraction ladder.
2. order statements according to their level of abstraction.
3. relate abstraction and evaluation.
4. differentiate abstraction and evaluation.
5. supply parallel and functional equivalent statements to ones in an abstraction ladder.
6. define induction and deduction.
7. explain the arch of assertiveness.
8. discuss the role of assertiveness in public speaking.
9. describe systematic desensitization.
10. list six bad listening habits.
11. state two suggestions for establishing a good listening foundation.
12. define seven propaganda techniques.
13. define reserved listening.

In everyday life we must face many challenges and problems that are best solved by speaking with other people. Unfortunately, we are often reluctant to use communication to resolve these difficulties. We explain away this reluctance in many ways. However, the main reason is usually that we don't have confidence in our ability to communicate. Some people fault communication for being ineffective, but, that argument implicitly belies a lack of confidence in one's ability to use the modality.

In the previous chapter, I argued that to be a responsible citizen in a democratic society, you must be willing and able to engage in strategic communication interactions. This means you must have the *skills* and *confidence* to do so. In this chapter, we discuss essential concepts to help you

develop your skill as a communicator. I trust, however, that you will not view this chapter, or even this book, as the end of your instruction in communication.

Indeed, this chapter discusses only three concepts. I chose these three concepts because they are important and because they are difficult to find in other texts.

Overall, this text helps you to develop only those competences most relevant to public discourse. No doubt, you will want to read books and take courses that focus on the other arenas of communication.

For most of you, the development of skills will be all that is required to supplement your confidence. Still, I do, in this chapter, provide suggestions for those of you who feel that your stage fright is in the extreme. If you are in a class, your teacher may well need to direct you to sources where you can find additional assistance with your communication apprehension. In all cases, you must supply the determination.

Concept 1: Abstraction in language and thought

Inset 2-1

“It is obvious, then, that interesting speech and interesting writing, as well as clear thinking and consequent psychological adjustment, require the constant interplay of higher and lower level abstractions,”

S. I. Hayakawa

The most under-taught concept is abstraction. Yet, its understanding is most helpful in being an effective communicator. Perhaps, the concept is often avoided in education because it is generally misunderstood. (Obviously, this misunderstanding only increases when the topic is avoided). When the topic is covered, the stress is on how to avoid abstract language instead of using it correctly.

Dictionaries, textbooks and even scholarly treatments of the subject define abstraction as if it is a characteristic of some, not all, language. Abstract words, then, are said to be vague and, at best, difficult to understand, or, at worst, impractical to the point of being harmful. That’s because these sources examine the process of abstraction from a fixed view without looking at its desired end. The process of abstraction is one of leaving out details. From that perspective, it is easy to cast abstraction in a negative light. However, by looking at abstraction from the standpoint of what is produced, we can see how it is essential that we learn to do it well.

Inset 2-2

“The usual assertion is that, when speakers use a word, they are simply exploiting one of the word’s fixed dictionary meanings....But this assumption won’t do....What they mean by a word often goes far beyond what could ever be found in the word’s dictionary entry.” Herbert H. Clark

Abstraction, in overlooking irrelevant details, permits us to capture more of our reality in symbolic form. The knack, of course, is in knowing which, and how many details, to overlook at the particular time. The key and positive result is the formation of symbols, symbols that can represent something fairly concrete or, by leaving out more detail, something more abstract.

Abstraction, in thought and hence in language, then, permits the grouping of similar things or events into a class which is mostly exclusive of other classes. For example, we have a class of rap songs which we distinguish from soul music. These groupings then can be arranged in some ascending or descending order. In ascending order, we can combine both groups, with other groups, simply as music. In descending order, we subdivide the category into smaller classes. Soul music can be either southern or psychedelic. The more items in a class (ascending), the more abstract, or general, the category is said to be. The fewer items in a class (descending), the more specific or concrete, we term it.

The ability to distinguish whether a thing or event fits into one category or not is essential to the development of all communication-related skills; it is the bases for language itself. For example, a child must understand what events are included in the concept of danger before her or his parent can effectively safeguard the child. In like manner, a person must be able to adapt his or her thinking to the appropriate level of abstraction when interacting with others. In order to reach a common understanding with someone else, we must have developed the ability and willingness to think at the same level of communication abstraction as that person. Otherwise, we are like ships passing in the night.

As you study communication more, you will find that the understandings of abstraction will help you in group discussions, debates, business transactions, etc. Indeed, as we proceed into specific areas of this text, we will use your understanding of abstraction to assist you to be a better listener, researcher, organizer of content, developer of arguments, and persuader.

Simply to illustrate how an understanding of abstraction will help you in developing skills that are taught in other courses and venues, consider the topic of conflict resolutions (taught in most interpersonal communication courses). Authorities tell us that there are six major styles of dealing with conflict. For sake of this example, we consider three that lead to a resolution, the first two of which are commonly used and understood. The first is competition where the winner generally takes all. The second is compromise, where each person gets something of what he or she wants, but also must give up something in exchange. The third means of resolution, the one most recommended for resolving conflicts in interpersonal situations where the relationship is of importance to both individuals, is termed integration. Integration is impossible to understand, and to distinguish from the other two, without understanding abstraction: In integration, the couple moves the discussion from one of specifics, on which they can not agree, to a more abstract level on which they can agree.

Given a conflict where a couple of students are in disagreement about how to spend their spring break. One wants to go to Mexico; the other does not. Now, the argument may focus on the cost involved or on alternative destinations

or on alternative use of the time, like to do term papers. Whatever the focus of the quarrel they are having, the content is likely to be on the specifics. “We really need a break from all this school work...” verses, “If we don’t do our papers that week, I don’t know when we’ll find time once we get back.” In competition, they could continue arguing until one person wore the other one down or even reduce the decision to a flip of a coin to see what they would do. In compromise, they might spend half the week in Mexico or go to a quiet resort near the campus that required less time in travel and presented fewer distractions, thus permitting some time to write. Integration would require that the couple “step back” from the specifics and look at the “big picture;” i.e. to be more abstract, to consider more factors in general. In the more abstract approach, the couple would examine what objectives they are trying to accomplish, why are they at college, why are they together, what do they want to accomplish as a couple, overall, not just as a result of spring break.

Interestingly, their decision (one made through integration) might seem the same as one reached from competition or compromise; or it could be something unexpected like they decide to spend spring break apart or end the relationship completely. The key difference that results through integration is that both individuals reach the same conclusion that the course of action they select is the right decision to help them, if they stay together, to reach their long-range goal; or to help each reach his or her respective goal if they part.

Abstraction Ladders

S. I. Hayakawa introduced the concept of an abstraction ladder, which has been most helpful in illustrating the nature of abstraction. Figure 2-1 is an example of a ladder. I have modified Hayakawa’s illustration to reflect the thinking of Ogden and Richards, who also linked language to reality in thought.

In the illustration, the concept is on the left; on the right are drawings to symbolize all the various objects that may be included in the concept. You do have to help in completing the pictures, but the ladder does symbolize what happens in our mind as symbols are linked to reality. The ladder is, then arranged in ascending order from specific at the bottom to general at the top

So, the most specific term shown on the ladder is a dinner plate. Does “dinner plate” represent only one item? No, there are hundreds of dinner plates in the world. “Dinner plate” is, into itself, abstract. We could make it more specific by adding descriptors such as ivory dinner plate; etc.; the concept would still be abstract. As is, dinner plate distinguishes the group from the next item shown on the ladder, “plate,” which, in this context would include salad plates, bread plates, etc. Likewise with “table piece,” that in this context would include other “china,” “silverware” and “crystal” (even made of paper). Table piece would not include sinks, right? But, neither would it include books, which can obviously be found on many tables, but generally, we must admit they don’t belong there.

Figure 2-1
An Abstraction Ladder



Inset 2-3

“The interesting writer, the informative speakers, the accurate thinker, and well-adjusted individual, operate on all levels of the abstraction ladder....”

S.L. Hayakawa

Abstraction vs. Vagueness

A distinction between abstraction and vagueness might be helpful since the two are often used as synonyms. As language becomes more general, and refers to more phenomena, it is said to be more abstract. The more abstract the language, the more “things” the language identifies. Vagueness in language denotes lack of clarity; i.e., what concepts are referred to by the term or phrase isn’t clear.

The two concepts are related: often vagueness is the result of excessive abstraction. However, it would be more beneficial to discuss the problem as vagueness and not contaminate the beneficial nature of abstraction by using the terms interchangeably. As one improves his or her ability to think clearly at appropriate levels of abstraction, his or her clarity should improve and the resulting vagueness should be reduced.

By recasting the abstraction ladder to the much more practical form of sentences, you can see the distinction between vagueness and abstraction more clearly. Consider the following sentences:

1. A man weighs more than 100 lbs.
2. A man is fat.
3. A man weighs more than 250 lbs.
4. Joe weighs more than 250 lbs.
5. Joe weighs 264 lbs.

Do you agree that these sentences are listed from most abstract to least abstract? If you have a problem with any item in the list, it probably involves the placement of item #2. Item 2 is the most vague of the statements. It requires a judgment on our part as to what constitutes being fat. Some of you might argue that there are fat men who weight less than 100 lbs. If you were to win that argument, we’d have to reduce the number of pounds in #1. In any case, I’d hope you’d see the point. All the statements are to a degree vague: i.e., we don’t know who Joe is. However, the vaguest statement need not be the most abstract.

Evaluation vs. Abstraction

Above, we noted that the interpretation of, “A man is fat.” requires more judgment in establishing the group than the other statements. For most of us, the meaning goes beyond judging the man’s weight. Our meaning includes another judgment of good and bad. To distinguish this second judgment from the first, we say that the second one is an evaluation. Evaluation is a different mental function than classifying, but once the evaluation is made, it must be a

limiting factor in the classification. Thus, evaluations make statements less (not more) abstract. Consider the following example:

1. Mother is a cook.
2. Mother is an excellent cook.
3. Mother bakes many pies.
4. Mother bakes good apple pies.
5. Mother bakes the best apple pies.

In the example, by evaluating mother as an excellent cook, we restrict the number of individuals to whom the statement could be applied. Hopefully it applies to your mother, but we all recognize that not all mothers who cook would deserve the adjective, “excellent.” By the same token, regardless of our personal scale for judging apple pies, we should say of very few that they are the best. The evaluation adds a dimension to the meaning of the sentence; it also, in restricting its scope, makes the sentence less abstract.

Parallel and Functionally Equivalent

If your mother is one of those excellent cooks, you might be creative and express it as a metaphor, “Mother is a chef.” Admittedly, you have a slight risk that we might take you literally; alas, there is some ambiguity in most creative expression. However, given we understood the evaluation implied in your word, “chef,” we would understand it to mean, “Mother is an excellent cook.” In that case, your statement is said to be functionally equivalent to item 2 above.

Say though the statement is literal; your mother is a pastry chef in a restaurant. “Mother is a pastry chef,” could, then, replace #2 above. It would not mean the same thing as #2, but it would be approximately on the same level of abstraction. Statements that are approximately at the same level of abstraction (but not in the same abstraction ladder) are said to be parallel to one another.

“Mother is an accountant.” and “Mother is a police officer.” are parallel thoughts. “Mother is a member of the big blue line.” should serve as a functional equivalent of “Mother is a police officer.”

Deduction and Induction

We have illustrated how we can ascend and descend the abstraction ladder. Induction can function equivalently for ascending and deduction for descending. However, often their meanings denote some particular procedures for moving up or down the ladder.

In the next chapter, we use deduction to represent the reasoning process in which a person starts with a general principle and uses it, along with some specific information, to reach a specific conclusion. It is moving from the abstract to the specific. In that context, induction is the combining of several bits of similar information to generalize a principle. Again, induction is moving from specifics to the general.

In chapter 7, we use deduction as the recommended way of organizing a speech. Here, in deduction, the speaker tells the audience the main idea, which is general, and then uses specifics in the form of supporting material to help the audience better understand and accept the general idea. The speaker starts with

the general and moves to the specific. In some cases, the speaker may talk about the specifics and then tell the audience the point of the supporting material. That is inductive organization. The essence remains the same although the procedures vary: deduction starts with the general; induction starts with specifics.

Inset 2-4

Deduction: Moving in one's thinking from relatively abstract, to more specific

Induction: Forming a generalization from observing similar events

Remember: PIG (from particulars to general) has an I for induction. But also remember, "particulars" is plural

Inset 2-5

SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL BLOCK

Example 1

Consider the following statements:

- a. George makes bad grades in math.
- b. Some students take math.
- c. Some students have trouble in math.
- d. George takes math.
- e. George is in Math 105.

Q: Which two statements stand out as being more abstract than the others?

A: Items b. and c.

Q: Between b. and c., which would apply to more students? (Okay, perhaps it wouldn't apply to many more, but some students do, do well in math.)

A: Item b.

Q: Among the three statements about George, which is the most general?

A: Item d.

Q: Between item c. and e., which involves the larger number of classes?

A: Item c.

Q: So, which statement is the most specific?

A: Item e.

Q: If Math 105 is named, "Introduction to College Algebra," what statement would be the functional equivalence of item e.?

A: George is taking Introduction to College Algebra.

Q: In terms of biology, what would be a parallel statement to #b?

A: Some students take biology.

Example 2

Consider the following statements:

- a. Our weather is seldom nice.
- b. We have our best weather in the fall.
- c. I like best the weather in October.
- d. October of last year was especially pleasant.
- e. We get lots of snow in January and February.

Q: Which statement is functionally equivalent to, "Our weather is usually bad?"

A. Item a.

Q. In arranging the statements deductively, which item has to move? Where does it belong?

A. Item e needs to be moved to third since it covers two months and b. subsumes three months.

Q. Which statement would function the same as "I like best the weather in the fall?"

A. Item b.

Q. Which statement would be parallel to, "I like sledding best in January?"

A: Item c.

Concept 2: Assertiveness

To be a responsible citizen, you do need to speak out both to inform and to persuade. You do need to be assertive, yet refrain from being aggressive. You may think that I'm asking you to avoid crossing a line: that assertiveness is moderated aggressiveness. However, please note that assertiveness is not on a straight line between submissiveness and aggressiveness.

Submissiveness and Aggressiveness

Yes, submissive behaviors and aggressive behaviors can be placed at opposite ends of a continuum. Aggression is characterized by force; the person takes what she or he wants. Submission is characterized by accommodation; the person gives what is asked.

However, on examination of the philosophy and driving forces underlying both sets of behaviors, we find that the submissive and the aggressive individuals are very similar. The easiest course of action for the bully is to use coercion; the easiest course of action for the doormat is to yield to the pressure. Both actually lack confidence to do it any other way.

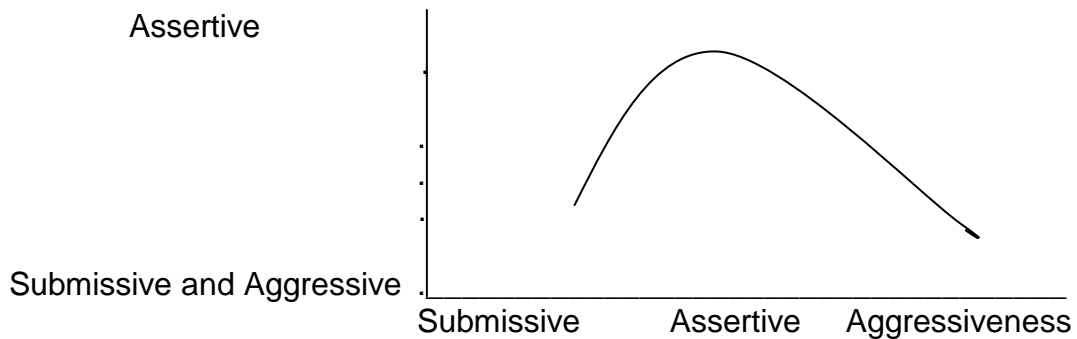
They both resort to methods of control that are **not** based in communication. Perhaps neither has faith in reason or in others' willingness to be reasonable. Perhaps they both lack in self confidence. Perhaps they don't believe they can use communication effectively. For whatever reason, while on

one continuum they are far apart, on one that focuses on being courageous and ethical, they both are at the bottom.

Assertiveness

Yes, assertive behavior is between submissive and aggressive on one continuum, but on the continuum most related to instruction in this book, assertive is at the top while they both are at the bottom. If we plotted all behaviors on these two continuums, we'd get something that approximated an arch (see figure 2-2)

Figure 2-2
Adams' Arch of Assertiveness



Assertiveness is directed to finding the best for everyone involved. The focus is less on self and more on others. The assertive individual uses her or his communication ability to reason with others to find the best course of action and to persuade others to help bring that course of action to fruition.

To be assertive you need to believe that what is best for everyone is in the end also best for you. That is, you must operate from a position of enlightened self interest. You must also have faith in the reasonableness of others. You must have faith in your skill of communication and the courage to use those skills. Obviously, to be assertive, you need to manage your communication apprehension.

Managing Communication Apprehension

Knowing that you have adequate skills will increase your courage to act, and to make good judgments as to when to act. Apprehension, of course, is an inhibitor for most of us. Experience does help in dealing with the excessive energy generated by the apprehension. We learn how to make the energy work for us. Public communication is an energy demanding act. Your body provides

the extra energy for a reason, you need it. If you recognize this fact, it will help, well at least some!

Hopefully, you'll also realize that the more you focus on communicating your message to the audience, the less important their focus on you will become. That realization is most difficult when your main reason for giving the speech is to earn points toward a grade in a course or even toward a promotion or professional recognition. However, you are wise if you think about others and their need to listen to your message. Hopefully, this text, in placing the stress on the oral dimensions of communication, will help you to maintain that focus on ideas.

Still, we know that for some of you, there will be a need for an extra effort, perhaps even individual work with someone trained to assist you in refocusing your energies. Perhaps that person will use a process of systematic desensitization (SD). This method has been proven effective and can be combined with other methods as needed.

Short of working with someone or if you cannot find someone equipped to provide this aid, you may want to try a modified form of SD on your own. You will need a quiet room where you will not be interrupted. Headphones playing relaxing music will help. Your goal is to learn to control the tension in your body. First, you'll tell yourself to relax overall. Once you feel relax, progressively **increase** the tension in individual parts of your body. You might start with your feet and work upwards. Once the part, like your foot, is tense, you will note that you have controlled that tension. Then gradually release the tension from that part. You should observe that you control the tension. Repeat this session daily for a couple of times. On the third session, once your total body is relaxed, note that your mind is still alert, in control. Then, you will focus on becoming even more relaxed. Visualize a location, such as a gentle stream, that you consider a calm place. While in this deep relaxation, remind yourself that you are in a class where you will be required to give speeches. If you feel tension returning to your body, you will visualize that calm place and tell yourself to relax. Once relaxed you should end session 3. In future sessions, once you can reflect on being in a speech class without becoming tense, you are ready to continue to the next phase which is focusing on your first assigned speech. Gradually, over several sessions, you'll walk yourself through each phase from having the speech assignment a week into the future, to visualizing standing before an audience, to visualizing giving the entire speech and walking to your seat to the applause of the audience.

In other chapters, particularly Chapter 10 on delivery, we'll consider other suggestions that may make the process easier for you. In all events, you should realize that the energy is there to help you; it is a nearly universal experience and millions of people, just like you, have spoken in public and survived.

Concept 3: Listening

To be responsible as a citizen of a democracy, you must listen well. As an educated person, you should expect of yourself that you will stay well informed. You will seek out sources of information to **read** and you will **write** to express yourself to others. However, more of your time will be spent listening than either of these two, and possibly more than both of them combined. You should, also, listen more than you speak. You will listen to gain information and insights; you will also listen to arguments and advertisements to help you make better decisions and to identify pitfalls in them so as to be able to help others not to be misled by them.

Of course, quality listening is difficult. You must do more than position yourself so that you can hear the messages. You must focus your attention and refocus it because your mind, with greater capacity to process incoming message than it needs, will wander. Then, you must process the information so that it can be of use to you when needed. Yes, you must retain it and be able to remember it. It is difficult.

I wish that I could simply tell you that you'll have to practice listening and you'll become a perfect listener. Obviously, practicing bad listening behaviors only make them permanent. You need to become aware of any bad habits you have and replace them with better ones.

Bad Listening Habits

Nichols and Stevens discuss six bad habits that certainly represent a good starting point. These six are:

1. Faking attention: Do you nod your head as if you're listening while your mind wanders?
2. I-get-the-facts listening: Do you concentrate on getting all the details while missing the speaker's main points?
3. Avoiding difficult listening: Do you not even attend because you think that you won't understand?
4. Premature dismissal of a subject as uninteresting: Do you not pay attention because you know the speech will be boring?
5. Criticizing delivery and physical appearance: Do you pay more attention to how the speaker looks and flinches than her message?
6. Yielding easily to distractions: Do you let your mind focus on irrelevant occurrences instead of the discussion?

I trust that understanding abstraction will help you to avoid the I-get-the-facts listening. By comprehending the main ideas that a speaker makes, you'll be able better to understand the essence of the speech and to supply missing parts as needed. Having the main ideas also gives you a structure for placing the details. Information that is placed in our brains around a structuring theme is more likely to be remembered.

Establishing a Listening Foundation

Beyond replacing bad habits, you will want to develop a good mental foundation. Listening ability is only moderately correlated with intelligence. Still, the correlation that does exist between the two is probably a result of language ability. By increasing your familiarity with language, as with the nature of abstraction, you will continually improve as a listener.

During this course, you should begin (if you haven't already) a life-long program of increasing your language repertoire. A good place to start is by focusing on the idea structures in the speeches of your fellow students. If you are in a speech class, your teacher will help you in this regards at least by encouraging you to comment on the speeches of others. Of course, you should avoid the bad habit #5 in the previous section.

Your listening foundation certainly needs to contain an ever increasing vocabulary. As you listen to speeches and read books, you should keep a running list of words with which you are not familiar. Allot some time each day to constructing sentences using these words. You'll be surprised at how often you'll hear others using these words. Obviously, knowing their meanings will make your listening easier and more effective.

Use Reserved Listening

When listening to significant discourse, you need to maintain the appropriate mental set. You should know that you will need to attend to much information and ideas that you already know in order to obtain a small gem that will be helpful to you in the future. This fact is especially true given the redundant nature of speech; still, the redundancy help you correctly position the information once you obtain it.

You will want to remember that you're listening for important ideas. That should help you to ignore poor delivery and unpleasant mannerisms. You want to maintain the same mental position as is obtained in systematic desensitization: mind alert while avoiding tension from all directions. You can give warm cues to the speaker indicating that you are listening and understanding while remaining mentally cool.

I call this type of listening, reserved, because you want to keep any positive as well as negative reactions in reserve. That's not to say that you will not be aware of areas of strengths or weaknesses in the person's speech, you will be. Indeed, in taking this course, you will learn much that will help you to identify both strengths and weaknesses in the content of any presentation. You'll also be aware of issues of agreement and disagreement; you just don't want to react to them at the moment. You'll want to hold them in reserve until you have time to reflect on them.

Inset 2-6

Helpful Information for Listening

The Institute for Propaganda Analysis' Seven Propaganda Techniques

1. Name calling: labeling something or someone in bad terms to discredit it or him/her.
2. Glittering generalities: using a label to cast an argument, cause or person in the most favorable light.
3. Transfer: frequently using the name of someone the audience admires without saying where that person stands on the issue.
4. Testimonial: quoting or having a famous, well respected person, with no expertise on the subject, say he or she supports the cause.
5. Plain folks: making it appear that the speaker is the same as the audience, and the cause is actually their cause.
6. Card stacking: discussing only the most positive aspects of one's case.
7. Band wagon: talking as if the issue has already been decided because everyone else has already supported it.

Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed three concepts that I believe can help you to be a more competent communicator and, thus, be better equipped as a responsible member of a democratic society. I trust that you will see the understanding of these three concepts as only the beginning and that you will seek ways to develop and use them throughout this course, other courses, and throughout your life.

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