Chapter 5
Research Considerations: Establishing Premises
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Public Speaking: An Idea Focus
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General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:
1. consider key factors in researching a speech topic.
2. reflect on limits of knowledge.

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should
       be able to:
1. list and discuss three "places" to find information for a speech.
2. state nine questions to ask about sources of information.
3. identify two types of information a speaker might acquire from other people.
4. advise how to conduct interviews of experts.
5. state six questions you should ask about any information.
6. list, define and provide examples of four methods of validations.

       In today's information age, finding ideas for your speech and support for an idea are easier than ever. However, like the prospector looking for gold, we must be careful of the quality of what we find. The prospector might be able to pass off his or her fool's gold to many individuals, but at some point the community is going to find out that the prospector is either a fool or a scoundrel.

       The practical consideration involved in others believing that you mislead them is indeed a serious one. I will discuss corrections in terms of image related to this problem in Chapter 12. Still, I hope that the ethical and philosophical issues involved would transcend the damage to image that can result. We do not want to mislead others any more than we want to be misled. At the heart of building the best of possible worlds is our willingness and ability to use the very best arguments in reaching democratic decisions. To build the best arguments, we need the best ideas and the best premises.

       Extending our analogy, the best prospector is not only an assayer but is also a jeweler: She or he knows how the gold is best used. So, in doing your research, you need to be aware of factors which influence the use of different types of supporting material discussed in Chapter 6.

       Below, we will first consider briefly where we find ideas and resource materials for a speech. Then, we will reflect on the limits of our ability to know and to express truth in symbolic form.

The Internet/library

Until recently, this would have been two categories; however, presently, online information is comparable to that found in the typical brick and mortar library. In addition, most libraries are now media centers whose holdings are more digital than hard copy. These centers continue to support the lone researcher with all types of searches. Media centers have the advantage, for most users, of institutional subscriptions to digital periodicals. They make possible access to such data bases as Lexis/Nexis. In addition, librarians can be invaluable in helping you to find indexes and material.

It all starts with a search. Knowing about abstraction ladders (Chapter 2) is at the heart of searches. You need to define your research question at the best level of abstraction to be efficient. You want to be sufficiently specific to yield relevant information and, yet, sufficiently abstract so as not to exclude key material, and perhaps divergent opinions. You gain specificity by defining your question in more concrete terms. Of course, you can increase specificity in your search by placing quotation marks around any string of words used in the search. Beyond that, you should learn about three key terms of Boolean logic, *and, or* and *not* which allow you to combine and restrict fields of concepts in key ways.

Inset 5-1

Some Questions to Ask about Sources
1. Is the source identified?
2. Is the source knowledgeable?
3. What are the biases of the source?
4. Is the source primary, i.e. reporting first hand information?
5. If a primary source, was the source in a position to observe clearly?
6. If a primary source, did the source have the knowledge and ability to observe, interpret and report the information accurately?
7. If a secondary source, did the source identify the primary source?
8. If a secondary source, did the source have the knowledge and ability to interpret and report the information accurately?
9. Do other sources corroborate the information?

Other people

Two means exists for getting information from other people: surveys and interviews. Survey results, especially when they come from members of a large audience or people similar to the audience, can add spice to a speech. When the results are used in this way, we can be less concerned with how scientific they are. However, if the findings are intended to provide substantive support for an idea in a speech, great rigor should be exercised in conducting the survey. Dillman's Total Design Method should be followed and the responders should be experts on the topic. Of course, surveys can also provide information about your

audience's characteristics, beliefs and attitudes. Again, these surveys should follow Dillman's instructions. In addition, a book such as Babbie's, on measurement techniques should be studied before designing the survey instrument.

Interviews both of members of your audience and with experts can provide valuable insights and supporting material. If the audience is an immediate audience with which you interact on a regular basis, conversations with the members can yield the appropriate information. You simply need to ask relevant questions and listen carefully.   For more distant audiences, you should be prepared to ask questions, as indicated in Chapters 11-15. These interviews may be with the person who assigns you to speak or with the person making the arrangements for the speech. Again, listening is essential. These interviews, then, could be as formal as those with experts on the topic.

When interviewing an expert, the chances are that the person is in some position of importance which will require your using good judgment in arranging an appointment for the interview.   Dressing appropriately for the interview is also helpful. Appropriate dress need not mean business casual. If the interview is conducted in a business setting, business dress would be expected; however, in other context, it is just as important not to be overdressed. In all cases, you should be clean and neat.

You should be prepared for the interview with relevant questions in hand. These questions should include ones that permit short answers (closed ended) and those that allow the person to elaborate (open ended). After the initial greeting and introductions, you might remind the person of the purpose of the interview and the type of information you need. This orientation may be all that is required for the person to provide you with the content you want. If not, one or two closed-ended questions may be needed. Always give the person an opportunity to give any additional comments and thank the person in leaving.

Other public-speaking texts suggest securing permission to tape the sessions so as to be sure you get the wording correct. Certainly, you don't want to misquote the expert. However, the more important value of the tape may be in capturing the intonation that can alter, ever reverse the meaning of the words. In additions, taping can free you from taking notes permitting you to watch mannerisms that may suggest areas where the person may want or need encouragement to expand into difficult areas. With taping, it is important that you listen to the tape while the total experience is fresh on your mind.

Inset 5-2
Some Questions to Ask about the Information
1. Is it relevant to the ideas you're developing in your speech?
2. Is the information consistent with previous beliefs on the topic?
3. Is the information internally consistent?
4. Is it the most recent information on the issue or have changes/updates occurred since?
5. Is it from a reliable source or is the source an expert in the field?
6. Did I accuracy record and process the information?

Yourself

Do not overlook yourself as a source of both information and opinions on the subject. This is especially true if you have been invited to speak on the subject. In all likelihood, the audience is most interested in what you know and what you think about the topic. Even if you choose the topic, something in your experience has led you to the issues involved.

Inset 5-3
The Flat Earth
Most of us accept that the earth isn't flat. Yet, we walk on floors, drive highways and even cross bridges built on engineering principles that are based on the earth being flat.

The Myth of Fact

When we recognize that all symbols, regardless of how specific, are abstractions of reality, we have to accept that any description of reality, regardless of how honest and even how scientific, is only an approximation of that reality. We cannot distinguish fact from opinion, as is too often taught, on the basis of a truth criterion. We can distinguish *statements of fact* from *statements of opinion*. Statements of fact purport to describe some aspect of reality where statements of opinion extend beyond that which can be sensed either directly or with instruments of observation. Statements of opinion depend on interpretation, inferences and intuition. Both statements of fact and statements of opinion depend on judgments.

As researchers, we need to be constantly aware that statements of fact, even those from respected sources, are never completely true. Speculation, especially from a well informed expert, may capture an essence of truth. We must adopt a provisional attitude as we read and listen to the sources we consult in our investigations. A provisional attitude says, "I think I understand how this phenomenon operates and I will act on the basis of that understanding until, and only until, I learn differently."

Inset 5-4
When 9 + 9 = 6
Of course, you make calculations like this daily if you live with a 12 hour clock.

Methods of Validation

From Bruner and his colleagues we have a system that can help us understand how we arrive, in our minds, at truth. The system has four methods of validation, i.e., assuring the label is correct for the phenomenon.

Ultimate Criterion

When we compare an event or object with a predetermined standard to prove it falls into a specific category, we are validating the correctness of applying the name of that category through the method of ultimate criterion. We use this method often with measurement. A ruler, a measuring cup and a scale represent established means of validating. These examples are clear. They are also easy.

Once we move away from measurements of weight, distance and volume, examples are more difficult. In criminology/law, people work to apply independent criteria in solving cases. Say, for example, a person is shot to death and the medical examiner rules the shooting a homicide. Investigators start by looking for someone with motive, opportunity and means. If someone is in the area of the shooting, with no alibi, has reason to want the person dead and owns the murder weapon, the person is most likely to be convicted of murder. Of course, we know, with good basis due to advances in DNA analysis, that many innocent individuals have been convicted based on these independent criteria.

More germane to this chapter, we attempt to apply ultimate criteria in research. Insets 5-1 & 2 contain questions that speak to these independent criteria. If the information is reported by several reliable sources, is internally consistent and consistent with previous knowledge and conditions haven't changed to reduce the relevance of the information, we feel good in believing it is true; that is as long as we maintain a provisional attitude.

Consistency

When we examine an event or object to judge if it is in the appropriate context to see if it fits a specified category, we are validating that label using the method of consistency. When we grab a jug of milk from a cooler at a store and accept the readings on the pump when we buy gas, we typically use the method of consistency. That's clearly the case when we compare our jug to others and check the gauge in the car for confirmation that we're getting a fair measure.

In our crime example, investigators may have to use circumstantial evidence to infer that the person was in the area at the time of the murder. They may show that the person's behavior indicated consistently that he or she wanted the victim dead. This type validation, of course, uses reasoning as explained in Chapter 3.

In research, we often have to connect the dots to reach conclusions that aren't supplied directly by the sources. The efforts that lead to revelations in the Water Gate break in stands as an excellent example.

Consensus

When we seek agreement from others as to how we should label an event or object, we are validating that label using the method of consensus. If we ask

our friends and the sales clerk if a garment is a good fit, we are using the method of consensus.

In our criminal example, our forefathers put faith in this method by establishing trials by juries. In research, we are more likely to accept information as true if we can find it reported by the preponderance of sources.

Affect Congruence

When we judge the appropriateness of a label for an event or object based on whether the name feels right to us, we are validating that label using the method of affect congruence. Many of your clothes buying decisions are made on this basis, I'm sure.

In our crime example, if we are to believe at all fictional portrayals, many murders are solved because the detective had a primitive instinct as to who was the killer. In doing research, we can keep in mind what we know about sources and what we know about the topic in general, but, in the end, we probably do need to see if it all seems right to us.

Inset 5-5

Don't Assume?

You've seen it, right? Don't ass/u/me because you'll make an …. Of course, it's cute but it is illogical. It assumes that it's possible not to assume!

It also assumes that if you can make a pun on a word, the pun is true. It's as logical as concluding there's trouble in River City because there're pool tables there. It makes as much sense as not seeing a therapist (even a physical therapist) because therapist can be changed to yield the/rapist!

Problems occur, not from assuming, but from not knowing what you're assuming or the assumptions of your sources.

Watch, though, and you'll find that most times when a person says, "I assume….," there is some basis, an observation and some knowledge, for the statement being made. The person is actually reasoning to a conclusion. It would be more accurate if the person said, "I conclude, tentatively,…." The assumption is in the knowledge (i.e.: *the bridge*), or the idea that the knowledge applies to the observation.

Summary

In this chapter, we have considered some of the issues involved in finding and processing information for a speech. We considered media centers and I encouraged you to consult with librarians to find quality print and digital sources. I instructed you to listen, via surveys and interviews, to both audience members and experts to gain useful information about the audience and about your topic. I encouraged you, further, to reflect on your experiences in the area of your topic. Then, I exhorted you to maintain a provisional attitude toward everything you read and heard. Finally, we reflected on a system of validation that might be useful to you as you access the quality of the research materials you find.

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