**Sarah’s Essay in Process**

**Freewriting**

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| Don’t know, don’t know, don’t know. I’m afraid that I’m doing this wrong. Fears. Falling and bumping my head. Traffic jams. Aggressive dogs that are not on leashes. Speaking to large groups. I’m focusing on communications, and I think that I should do a public speaking course to develop my skill and overcome my fears, even though I may not want to. Courses. Courses that I need vs. courses that I want to take. Photography. Public history. Digital communications. I really like developing websites and updating my blog on cooking. I follow other blogs as well, travel, cooking, moms juggling work and family. My own blog on cooking has gotten a bit of attention recently and locally, because I focus on using local produce in different recipes, and have written about local farms and restaurants. Even asked to talk to some local groups in person, although I don’t know about that. It’s a real struggle sometimes. Writing, on the other hand, comes easily, at least in terms of blogging. Don’t know… maybe essay writing will be different, because of the length? Used to writing really short pieces for online. Photography is great to support those pieces. I took a photography intro course at the community college years ago when I started to take college courses. Really enjoyed it and want to take more. We’ll see… public speaking, though, is something that I’m afraid of. But I do know that I need to study it, especially as a student of communications, because it’s such an important method of communicating. And I am being asked to speak locally to some groups. Library lunchtime series, community college nutrition interest group for seniors, farm market program. Scares me, though. Talked to my husband about it. Again, we’ll see… |

**Sarah’s comments:** *After looking at this prewriting and a series of other prewritings, I saw that I was focusing on two topics, 1) my love of photography, and 2) my fear of public speaking. I decided to try to compare them, and started working with my prewritings in the following way.*

**Working with Prewriting**

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| **Photography** | **Public speaking** |
| Focuses totally on images – no words | Use images, but focuses on words |
| Important piece of communication | Important piece of communication |
| Can be done any time | Needs to have an audience – but can it be done any time for an audience to access asynchronously? |
| Like it because I am in control of the image | Don’t like it because I feel that I’m not in control of the audience |
| Calms me | Makes me anxious |

**Sarah’s comments:** *Because I came up with some comparisons, my initial impulse was to write an essay that compared photography and public speaking. The following is a very, very rough draft, trying to get my thoughts into more of an essay form.*

**Initial Draft**

Need an introduction…

Working thesis: Photography and public speaking are both similar and different.

Photography and public speaking are both important means of communication. Photos bring messages universally. Who hasn’t seen and responded to images of important events, ads, and more? Public speaking is also an important means of communication seen in the many press conferences on television and the many local events that attract others. Audience members interested in a topic are willing to go and hear a speaker talk about gardening or the history of immigration in the area or whatever – and they usually learn from the public speaker, just as they learn from any images.

Photography can be done any time and when I do it, I feel calm and in control. I can control the image, and can re-take it (if possible). Use examples here of images I have taken. Also bring in some public response?

Public speaking may not be done any time, and when I do it, which is as infrequently as possible, I do not feel calm and in control. Bring in examples of the few times I was asked to speak. My blogging is a form of public speaking, but that’s in writing and not in real time, so I am calmer and more in control.

**Sarah’s comments:** *I developed a working thesis, and then wrote this out relatively quickly. Then I got stuck. I knew I had a thesis, but what I wrote seemed kind of rambling to me, and kind of “blah.” I wasn’t writing about anything really insightful, not that I had to – I certainly could write about anything I wanted to, and absolutely did not have to write about world-important events. In fact, we were told to avoid “usual” college essay topics like television’s effect on children, alcohol/drug use, etc. But I just felt stuck and unable to go farther. I kept going back to the three-part thesis idea, and thought that I really didn’t have much insight here. I talked with my husband, and let him read my initial thoughts, to see if he could give me some ideas. He said something that sparked my thinking: “You don’t really have to public speak in real time anymore.” Hmmm… I mentioned to him that taking an online course, then, in public speaking, might be the route for me to conquer my fears, and his reaction was “Really? Even though you don’t have to speak in real time, don’t you have to learn public speaking in real time, and actually give speeches to people who are right there? Otherwise, how will you know you can do it?” This got me thinking. I now had more of a debatable topic and thought I could develop more of an assertion, and maybe even some insight for readers to keep thinking about. I developed my next draft.*

**Second Draft**

Public speaking teaching has moved from in-person to online. This has opened up a debate about just what public speaking is and if it’s worth it to study it online.

Online speakers. They can see their audience’s reaction and play to it. Technologies allow the speaker to still see what’s going on with other people and see what they need to do to reach them more effectively.

Speakers online can answer questions in the same way as they can in person. Mention the text box in a Skype or Zoom session.

Speakers online can learn to use gestures and body language. It may be different? The camera can capture the speaker’s facial expression so that everyone in the audience can see. In an auditorium or a different public speaking place, may not be able to see all expressions unless you’re sitting right up front? And more professional presentations, such as TedTalks, can actually be filmed so that the speaker’s whole body is shown as it moves around a stage, creating a feeling of actually being in the audience as a participant.

**Sarah’s Comments:** *I realized that I was “on to” something here, and that I had a more interesting idea to pursue. I started to read a little bit about teaching public speaking online, from very general sources, just to get some more ideas. The assignment was not for a full research essay, so I did not go deeply into research, although I found out that this topic actually could be researched more fully. I felt that I finally had something that I could develop on my own, based on my own experience and observations, and supported by a little bit of relevant research.*

**Third Draft**

Public Speaking courses, in college and in trainings from such respected sources as Toastmasters, often focus on the same key concepts knowing your purpose and audience, use knowledge of that audience to choose your content and approach, organizing your speech, use visuals, control your gestures, and responding to your audience’s comments and questions. The speaker’s awareness of and relationship to audience, in the moment, is critical. Public speaking of this kind has a long and interesting history, stretching back to Aristotle and the ancient Greeks, who were expected to be able to speak as informed members of the citizenry. Aristotle taught public speaking concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos as students gathered around him to learn to persuade others using public speaking. But Aristotle and others could not have imagined public speaking as it exists today: tweets, YouTube, Skype, all of which increase and complicate public speaking. Public speaking as we know it has changed drastically, and public speaking instruction has changed as well, moving from in-person to online. This has opened up a debate about the definition of public speaking and the validity of online instruction in this field, which I hope to explain and clarify in this essay.

Many people feel that public speaking cannot be taught online, because they say a speaker needs a live audience response as critical to the learning process. Wikipedia defines public speaking as “the process or act of performing a speech to a live audience.” Opponents of online public speaking courses argue the need for a live, real-time audience for learning public speaking. Speakers need to be able to see their audience’s reaction and adjust their tone and message accordingly. Speakers need to be able to address questions with some immediacy, whether or not they choose to address them as they go along or at the end of the presentation. Speakers need to have an environment in which they can move around and manipulate their body language and gestures to the desired effect. And speakers need to be able to manage the unexpected, which occurs in a live environment, to show their ability to analyze and adapt, two important skills related to public speaking.

If you look at these arguments one by one, you can see that these skills may be addressed online. The need to address questions with immediacy can be taught and learned online. Consider the text box in a Skype or Zoom session, which allows the speaker to see questions as they occur and to adapt and respond. The argument that tone does not come into play in written questions is not valid – you can often tell if the writer is confused or sympathetic or angry just by the words being used, and the speaker can reply. Skype and Zoom types of tools and delivery address the argument of managing the unexpected, as audience response is immediate, and needs to be addressed.

Public speaking can be taught online because online speakers may very well be able to see their audience’s reaction and adjust their tone and message accordingly. Skype, Zoom, and other technologies offer real-time, audio and visual experiences that link speaker and audience. Although they are dispersed and not in the same room the speaker can still see what’s going on with other participants and can see from their attitudes and expressions whether they are engaged and whether tone or content needs to be altered even in asynchronous environments, audience response may be so immediate that the speaker can respond in almost-real time (refer to Rosanne’s, the president’s, or any other public figure’s posts, quick audience reaction on Twitter, and her quick responses). The environment may not be exactly the same as a room with everyone in it, the skills of observation, situation analysis, and adjustment can still be taught and learned online.

Speakers online can learn to use gestures and body language. The camera can capture the speaker’s face so that everyone in the audience can see, unlike a live speech in which only audience members in the front rows may really get the full experience of the speaker’s expressions. And more professional presentations, like TedTalks, can actually be filmed so that the speaker’s whole body is shown as it moves around a stage, creating a feeling of actually being in the audience as a participant.

An important piece to learn in a public speaking course is how to manage anxiety as a public speaker. Studies have been done on anxiety levels and online learning of public speaking but many studies do show a lower anxiety occurs for speakers online.

Student performance is the main way to judge learning – do students in an online public speaking course perform as well as those who study public speaking in a traditional classroom? (mention a study here – need to go back and find it, it was a little bit old, so decide if it’s usable or not)

Finally, a dissertation study brought in evidence from students who judged their own learning in an online public speaking class. Linardopoulos (2010) concluded that students themselves felt that they learned as much or more in an online public speaking class than they would have learned in a classroom, and would recommend that learning format to others.

Public speaking can be taught – and learned – online.

Given that we now live in a digital age, and that a Pew survey (2018) shows that 77% of American adults are online daily, isn’t teaching public speaking online the responsible thing to do?

**Sarah’s comments:** *I knew that I had to do more to finalize this essay, but I felt at this point that I had something both workable and more interesting than where I started out. I ignored the draft for a day, and then tried to go back to it from a fresh perspective, in order to create the final version, which is what I handed in as my assignment.*

**Final Draft**

Public Speaking Online?

Public Speaking courses, in college and in trainings from such respected sources as Toastmasters, often focus on the same key concepts: knowing your purpose and audience, using knowledge of that audience to choose your content and approach, organizing your speech, using visuals, controlling your gestures, and responding to your audience’s comments and questions. The speaker’s awareness of and relationship to audience, in the moment, is critical. Public speaking of this kind has a long and interesting history, stretching back to Aristotle and the ancient Greeks, who were expected to be able to speak as informed members of the citizenry. Aristotle taught public speaking concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos, which are still taught today, as students gathered around him to learn to persuade others via public speaking. But Aristotle and others could not have imagined public speaking as it exists today: tweets, YouTube, Skype, and various forms of digital media, all of which increase and perhaps complicate the speaker’s relationship to the audience. Public speaking as we know it has changed drastically, and public speaking instruction has changed as well, moving from in-person to online. This has opened up a debate about the definition of public speaking and the validity of online instruction in this field. However, I believe that public speaking can be taught online.

Many academics and rhetoricians do feel that public speaking cannot be taught online, citing the need for live audience response as critical to the learning process. Even Wikipedia defines public speaking as “the process or act of performing a speech to a live audience.” Opponents of online public speaking courses argue the need for a live, real-time audience for learning many aspects of public speaking. Speakers need to be able to see their audience’s reaction and adjust their tone and message accordingly. Speakers need to be able to address questions with some immediacy, whether or not they choose to address them as they go along or at the end of the presentation. Speakers need to have an environment in which they can move around and manipulate their body language and gestures to the desired effect. And speakers need to be able to manage the unexpected, which occurs in a live environment, to show their ability to analyze and adapt, two important skills related to public speaking.

Yet if you look at these arguments one by one, you can see that these skills may be addressed online, albeit in a slightly different way. Public speaking can be taught online because, first of all, online speakers may very well be able to see their audience’s reaction and adjust their tone and message accordingly. Skype, Zoom, and other technologies offer real-time, audio and visual experiences that link speaker and audience. Although they are dispersed and not in the same room the speaker can still see what’s going on with other participants and can see from their attitudes and expressions whether they are engaged and whether tone or content needs to be altered. Even in asynchronous environments, audience response may be so immediate that the speaker can respond in almost-real time (think of Rosanne’s posts, quick audience reaction on Twitter, and her quick responses). The environment may not be exactly the same as a room with everyone in it, the skills of observation, situation analysis, and adjustment can still be taught and learned online.

Just as with the need to see an audience, the need to address questions with immediacy can also be taught and learned online. Consider the text box in a Skype or Zoom session, which allows the speaker, who most often is the one hosting and controlling the session, to see questions as they occur and to adapt and respond. The argument that tone does not come into play in written questions is not valid – you can often tell if the writer is confused or sympathetic or angry just by the words being used, and the speaker can reply accordingly. Skype and Zoom types of tools and delivery also address the argument of managing the unexpected, as audience response is immediate, and needs to be addressed.

While it is true that good digital presentation, either live or taped, may not allow as much movement around a stage or podium, speakers online can learn to use gestures and body language effectively. The camera can capture nuances in the speaker’s facial expression so that everyone in the audience can see, unlike a live speech in which only audience members in the front rows may really get the full experience of the speaker’s expressions. And more professional presentations, such as TedTalks, can actually be filmed so that the speaker’s whole body is shown as it moves around a stage, thus creating a feeling of actually being in the audience as a participant.

Studying public speaking online, and having to speak online, also brings additional benefits to the learner as well as his/her audience. An important piece to learn in a public speaking course is how to manage anxiety as a public speaker. In a dissertation study, Gill found that “results from the entire participant sample did indicate the online public speaking course might assist in lowering participants’ public speaking anxiety levels.” Other studies have been done on anxiety levels and online learning of public speaking, with varied results, but many studies do show a lower anxiety occurs for speakers online.

Student performance is the main way to judge learning – do students in an online public speaking course perform as well as those who study public speaking in a traditional classroom? A study by Clark and Jones showed “expert evaluations of students’ public speaking ability at the end of the course did not differ significantly for the two formats” (109). Online tools have evolved drastically since 2001; it may be safe to assume that these findings still hold true in an environment in which working online and digitally is so much easier and more intuitive.

Finally, another dissertation study brought in evidence from students themselves, who judged their own learning in an online public speaking class. Linardopoulos concluded that students themselves felt that they learned as much or more in an online public speaking class than they would have learned in a classroom, and would recommend that learning format to others.

Public speaking can be taught – and learned – online, especially if you use Merriam-Webster’s definition of public speaking: (quoted from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/public%20speaking>)

1. the act or process of making speeches in public
2. the art of effective oral communication with an audience

Given that we now live in a digital age, and that a 2018 Pew survey article by Perrin and Jiang shows that 77% of American adults are online daily, isn’t teaching public speaking online the responsible thing to do?

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