The Quotation Exercise: A Prescription for Treating Speech Anxiety on the First Day of Public Speaking Class

Martin McDermott
Brookdale Community College
765 Newman Springs Road
Lincroft, NJ 07738
732-224-2101
ComArtz1@cs.com
G.I.F.T.S. Presentation
National Communication Association Convention
Boston, MA
November 2005

Purpose:
The Quotation Exercise provides speech instructors with an engaging and effective way to structure the first 15 to 20 minutes of the initial meeting of the basic course. This exercise decreases speech anxiety, builds esprit de corps, encourages active participation, and generates positive expectations at the outset of the course.

Steps:

Provide Rationale for Exercise - tell students that Public Speaking is a skill-based course, one where they will "learn by doing"

Introduce Quote - select a quotation that is appropriate for the class. Consider seasonal, regional, topical (e.g., related to the course or current events), aphoristic, humorous and other themes

Have Class Repeat Quotation

a. Seated - have students say the quote in their seats.

b. Standing by seats - have students say the quote standing by their seats

c. Standing in front of room - have students go to front of room and say quote.

d. Standing in front of room with gestures - have students spread out and say the quote with gestures

Generate Discussion - With students still standing in front of the room, process the experience. Some discussion prompts to consider: Why did we say that quote? Why do you think the class started this way?
How is what we've done like public speaking? How is it different? What is it like for you being in front of the room?

Key Points - there are two key points to make during this discussion period:

- You've already done public speaking!
- You have the skills to succeed in this class coming in the door--you can already stand up and speak--the rest of the class will be refining those skills.

Sample Quotations:
"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt (32nd U.S. President)

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."
- Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (Act 3, Scene 2)

"Failure is impossible."
- Susan B. Anthony

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."
- Lao Tzu, *The Way of Life*

"The dog days of summer are upon us." (seasonal quote)
- Origin unknown

"All great achievements require time."
- Maya Angelou

"It takes a thousand voices to tell a single story."
- Native American saying

"I have a dream"
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The best way out is always through"
- Robert Frost

"You were born with wings."
- Rumi (13th century Persian poet)

"I'm the king of the world."
- Jack Dawson, *Titanic*