

About the Author

Language lover, ELL teacher, public speaking coach, and internationally renowned professional speaker Diana Watson reveals the “Speaking Seed” tools she uses to coach foreign language public speakers. *The Speaking Seed: Secrets to Successful Foreign Language Public Speaking* is the first book of its kind to focus exclusively on the techniques to help anyone, regardless of language level, confidently communicate a message to an audience in a foreign language.

In this book, Diana shares personal stories as well as her experiences as a teacher, speaker, and coach on why the old ways of learning foreign languages need to be rethought, and why Speaking Seeds are desperately needed in today’s global society to strengthen mutual understanding and working relationships, as well as promote peace in the world.



In *The Speaking Seed: Secrets to Foreign Language Public Speaking*, Diana Watson offers a fresh perspective on oral communication and foreign language learning. By following the strategies in this book, you will feel comfortable making phone calls, introducing yourself, telling jokes, and making full-length presentations.

Daunting as it may seem, becoming a foreign language public speaker is not impossible. There are tricks and techniques you need to know to help you get there. This book provides the step-by-step process of learning how to become a Speaking Seed. Some of the secrets Diana shares include: how to get your mind ready for the challenge, how to believe in yourself and your ideas, how to mind map any speech topic, and most importantly, how to overcome nervousness.

Do you love learning new languages?

Are you interested in turning your foreign language speaking skills into something that can change the world?

Diana Watson is masterful with her words but when it comes to writing about her passion, she is mesmerising! Her expertise in her subject is unquestionable and is made all the more interesting by the humour that peppers her writing.

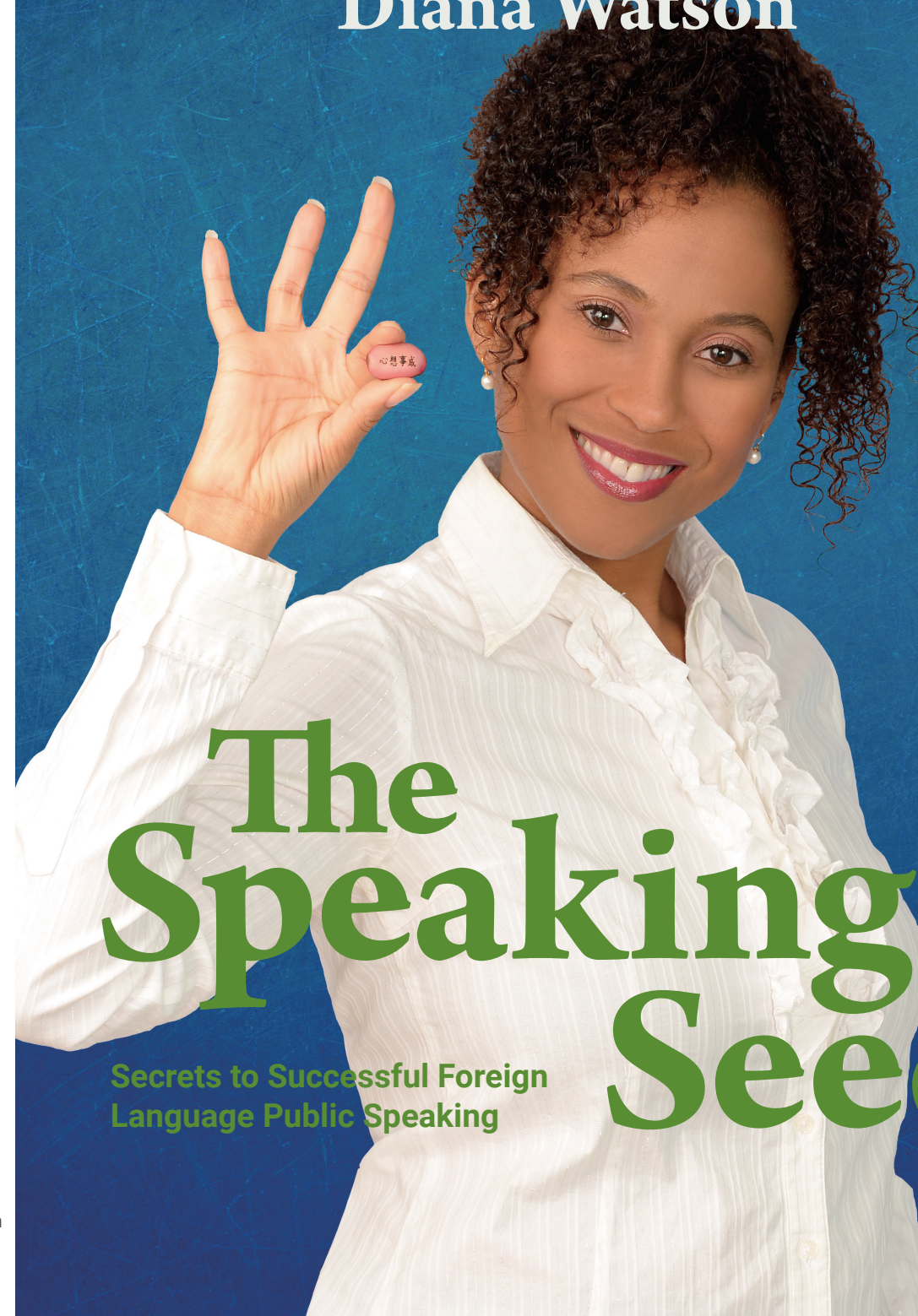
— Deepak Menon,
2018-2019 Toastmasters International President-Elect

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Diana
Watson

With over a Million Views on YouTube for Her Famous Mandarin Speech

Diana Watson



The Speaking Seed

Secrets to Successful Foreign
Language Public Speaking

The Speaking Seed
Secrets to Successful Foreign Language
Public Speaking

In your hands is the first book written about foreign language public speaking. Written by professional public speaker Diana Watson, *The Speaking Seed* reveals the secrets she uncovered through years of giving speeches in Mandarin and coaching foreign language public speakers before designing her own Speaking Seed program. Previously, she only shared these tips with clients, but now Diana is sharing them with you.

Diana has lived and traveled around the world. After learning four languages and earning several speech awards along the way, she discovered that public speaking, married with foreign language learning, opened possibilities to communicate missions and make an impact around the world. After three years of delivering speeches using this program, and still being only an intermediate speaker, she became the first foreigner to beat native Mandarin speakers in a speech contest in Taiwan.

This book is divided into six stages with exercises at the end of each chapter designed to encourage reflection.

The Speaking Seed stages in this book will help you to:

1. Understand the Speaking Seed concept.
2. Tackle the challenge of using a foreign language to speak in public.
3. Write your first Speaking Seed speech.
4. Practice your speech, use gestures and props, and handle nervousness.
5. Improve your language ability from speaking simple sentences to delivering full-length presentations.
6. Utilize tools and techniques to enhance your public speaking experience.

The Speaking Seed

Secrets to Successful Foreign
Language Public Speaking

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Diana Watson

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info@speakingseed.com

To my parents

**And in remembrance of my nephew,
Tyrese Isaiah Watson, some of the proceeds from the book will
be donated to a cancer foundation.**



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“If every seed turned into a plant, we’d be living in a very different world.”

— Hope Jahren

Preface

“Always do what you are afraid to do.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Wintertime is my favorite season in Taiwan... if I don't think about all the mosquitoes, of course. From April until November, the non-stop scorching humid weather drains all of my energy and makes my air conditioner my best friend. But with the winter comes cool breezes, 5 p.m. sunsets, and the chance to wear something other than tank tops and sandals. On this particular winter day, I had carefully chosen a nice blouse and comfortable pants, seeing as I was going to be nervous giving my first speech in a foreign language.

I was about to deliver a presentation in Mandarin at a Toastmasters club where all of the members were Taiwanese locals. The more I thought about what I was doing, the more worried I got. “Girl, even though you hate it sometimes,” I reminded myself, “you are a challenge junkie!” Since I was a child, I've forced myself to do things that I was afraid to do because I wanted to be better, stronger, different from others.

I kept scratching the sides of my legs even though they weren't itching. My stomach felt like I had eaten french fries slathered in tons of grease. My heart was pounding so fast I thought I would have a heart attack. But before I had a chance to convince myself that this all was a crazy idea and make a run for the exit, the last speaker finished. All eyes were now on me like searchlights in the dark.

I got out of my chair and peered at my audience before I went to the front of the room. I hadn't been this nervous since I lost my virginity. My stomach rumbled like it was full of rocks while the Toastmaster (the master of ceremonies for the evening) introduced me. I was one of the first foreigners

to join their club in over 15 years. Fifteen years? I realized at that moment that I was not a smart person.

I had spent the past two weeks practicing my short, four-minute speech with my Taiwanese roommate and my tutor. To be prepared, I thought it would be great if I wrote out my speech on four small pieces of poorly designed Snoopy paper. It was blue, adorned with graph lines that went all the way out to the edges of each sheet.

After I wrote the speech in English, I wrote it out in pinyin (Mandarin written in the Roman alphabet). While I practiced giving the speech, I soon became aware that I couldn't read pinyin that well. My sentences were simple, but my pronunciation and tones sounded like I was singing a horrible heavy metal song rather than a flowing Chinese opera. For the past two weeks, I had done nothing but practice my speech. I had tried to get my voice to climb high like a soprano, to stay high and flat on that mountaintop, to charge down quickly into a deep pit, to roll up and down like a roller coaster... But still, my erratic pauses caused me to stumble over phrases and skip parts of the speech. In short, even though I had practiced non-stop for two weeks, my delivery still sucked, and I knew it. Between the ridiculous papers I had clutched in my hands and my poor Mandarin reading skills, I felt certain that my speech was doomed.

I looked around the room. It was small enough to make me visible to everyone, but large enough that only the people sitting in the first few rows would be able to see my hands shake and my lips quiver. I began speaking, my eyes focused on a black spot I saw on the ceiling towards the back of the room — probably a roach. I figured that if I centered on that roach, then I wouldn't see the faces of my audience, and I wouldn't lose my place on my graph-lined Snoopy paper and wind up suddenly stopping. Becoming a silent statue would be the worst-case scenario. Yes, looking at something that normally grosses me out was definitely a good idea, I decided.

At the end of my speech, I finally mustered the courage to look at my audience. I couldn't believe it. All eyes were on me. Not a single person

The Speaking Seed

was looking at their watch or their cell phone. That was when I realized that Toastmasters clubs provide the perfect atmosphere for people to practice foreign language public speaking. Even if you deliver an almost incomprehensible speech, like I did, your listeners will be patient and attentive because none of them want to appear rude or, worse yet, miss out on something.

Those were the longest four minutes of my life... And then the silent pause after my speech was deafening. I guess my audience needed time to process my speech just as much I needed time to process the fact that I had completed my first speech in Mandarin. I thought to myself, "Finally, Diana, after two-and-a-half years of countless hours of study and practice, you can make a speech that locals can understand." Then, to my surprise, everyone stood up and clapped. I wanted to cry. Perhaps I did cry. I can't remember what I did exactly, but I do remember that I didn't die from a heart attack like I thought I would. Instead, I scanned the faces around the room and saw only smiles and applause.

That speech — my first one delivered in a language other than English — was over a decade ago. Ever since then, I've been digging my shovel into the earth of foreign language public speaking. I've become a Speaking Seed.

Introduction

“Always start with why.”

— **Simon Sinek**

Acclaimed author and public speaker Simon Sinek argues that although we might not always care about what we do, it is human nature to want to understand why. Since you’ve picked up this book, I assume you believe in the importance of language learning and public speaking. Perhaps you even want to explore how to incorporate public speaking into your language learning journey.

Most professionals find public speaking essential in today’s global economy. And with over 7,000 languages spoken in the world, if each of us chooses to learn one of those languages and to marry that language with public speaking – to share who we are, what we do, and why we believe in what we do – just imagine how many seeds we can spread.

Today more and more foreign language public speakers are in the spotlight. For example, there are more TED Talks with non-native English speakers who take the global stage, and there are more non-native speakers who have become Toastmasters World Champions. “But,” you might be saying, “we now have subtitles for TED Talks, live interpretation at conferences, and our wonderful friend Google at our fingertips. Why do we need foreign language public speaking?”

Imagine you are up for a promotion at work. Many people want the position because it pays 20% more. There is less drudge work to do, and there will be more opportunities to travel to Seoul, South Korea. Your boss says the person who will get this manager position must be confident, professional, and have excellent communication skills. But only people with good presentation skills who can communicate with clients in Korean will be considered. Could you apply for that job?

The Speaking Seed

Let's say someone in your family marries someone whose relatives are from Greece. Most, but not all, of the members of their family speak English. Weddings in this culture are a special time for celebrating two families joining together. You come up with the bright idea to give a toast in Greek at the wedding reception. By doing this, you know it would be a wonderful gesture to the family that starts off with trust and respect. Could you give that toast?

In today's global environment, you could easily find yourself in either of these situations, but are you ready to be?

The common thread throughout these scenarios is that foreign language and public speaking equal great opportunities to learn, connect, and share, so that you can better pursue your personal or professional goals.

To get an idea of how you can maximize your foreign language abilities and your public speaking skills, let's look at a short list of possible Speaking Seed careers:

- Salespeople
- Politicians
- Actors
- Teachers
- Lawyers
- International traders
- Hotel & restaurant managers
- Announcers & DJs
- Reporters & journalists
- Translators & interpreters
- Bilingual executive assistants & office managers

The list is impressive, isn't it? And there are many other careers that will need Speaking Seeds in the future. If you are interested in learning foreign language public speaking, you may be wondering what kinds of traits make

successful Speaking Seeds. Here are a few:

- Determination
- Confidence
- Storytelling skills
- A hardworking attitude
- A sense of humor
- A flair for the dramatic
- A willingness to take risks

Not all Speaking Seeds possess these traits at the beginning. Some take time to cultivate. The most important trait to develop though, is determination.

To be determined to do something you need to know why you are doing it. So what is your “why”? Is it a job you want? An organization you want to belong to? Is your community or hot love life encouraging you to embark upon a Speaking Seed adventure? Foreign language public speaking is no joke! It’s a tough journey, so you want to make sure that your “why” will be strong enough to push you through all of the hard work. Granted, the hard work isn’t necessarily fun, but there are so many cool parts. You’ll be able to communicate with people who speak another language. You’ll be able to express your ideas with less fear. You’ll make yourself more marketable, and you’ll increase your self-confidence.

My Speaking Seed Journey

In *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell writes about how a person's success is not only determined by hard work but also timing and the willingness to take advantage of the opportunities that can lead to success. Reading *Outliers*, I began thinking about how my life experiences have led me down my own path and why I've had success with foreign language public speaking:

My Personality

I was born with a loud, charismatic nature. In the 1970s, a new movement in parenting encouraged adults to be more patient with children and allow them to be who they were without punishment. That was lucky for me!

Childhood

I grew up at a time when children played outside all day. I was able to cultivate my independence and develop my street smarts. This gave me the courage to travel to other countries and feel comfortable engaging with different people. The positive results of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s led to the American education system opening more non-segregated schools, which became an opportunity for me to interact with all kinds of children my age.

My Sister

My sister, who is seven years older than me, received the same benefits of this educational system. It helped her, too, in developing a love of foreign countries, languages, and cultures. While I was growing up, she helped foster these interests in me.

African-American Storytelling

Since slaves were forbidden to read, they developed an art of telling amazing stories. When I was a kid, it was common for me to spend my Saturday afternoons listening to one of my grandmothers tell stories or my friends' parents lecture us on life. From the most embarrassing moments of their lives, to the stupidest moments, the proudest moments, and the saddest moments, they shared it all. Blacks — mainly black women — made me comfortable with being vulnerable and real in front of an audience.

Code-switching

Since I attended a diverse school system, I was accustomed to changing the way I talked to fit in with my environment. Later, I used this ability to develop my unique style of public speaking, which blends a professional approach with a down-to-earth style.

My Parents

I was fortunate to have parents who possessed a strong work ethic. My parents were teenagers in the 1960s and became the first generation in their families to earn a good income and push their kids to go to university. I didn't miss school, and they didn't miss work. After high school, my only option was to attend university. They could afford it, so I was able to go.

A Golden Time to Study Abroad

U.S. universities were starting to collaborate more and more with schools overseas, so much so that some universities began to make studying abroad a requirement for students in certain degree programs. This opened a window of opportunity for kids of conservative (or fearful) parents like mine to study overseas, and it was finally financially possible. I was one of those exchange students.

Work Overseas

I found employment at an international school in Indonesia when diversity had become an unspoken requirement for a school's accreditation. I can say with some certainty that I got that teaching job for two reasons: After the 2002 Bali bombings, fewer people wanted to go to Indonesia, and the school needed a black face on their teaching staff so that they could renew their accreditation.

My Appearance

I have a medium-brown complexion which has provided enough clarity for people to see that I am black, yet enough ambiguity so that I'm able to blend in everywhere I live. If I had been lighter or darker, my experiences of traveling and living in France, Nicaragua, Indonesia, and Taiwan might have been very different. At a quick glance, people are never sure whether I am a local or not. I have the benefit of the doubt (as opposed to people making assumptions) once I'm acclimated to my surroundings and figure out how to fit in.

The Obama Craze

Prior to Barack Obama's presidency, everywhere I traveled, I would have to share history lessons about the U.S. and explain how not every American is white with blond hair and blue eyes. After Obama became president, the need for the 30-second history lessons stopped. I benefitted from this greater international awareness, and more opportunities for non-white expats flourished.

Chinese Language and Culture

I arrived in Taiwan just when everyone was getting excited about the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Consequently, many people wanted to learn Mandarin but few had the ambition or the resources. I had both.

Toastmasters

In the past, only the educated, elite, and mature members of Taiwanese society belonged to Toastmasters clubs, but as the number of clubs grew, the less exclusive they became. Along with the economic recession of 2008, these scenarios paved the way for me to step into leadership roles and shine at speaking competitions.

Support

My mentor encouraged me to be the president of my Toastmasters club. Leaders saw my potential and pushed me to participate in speech contests. A national Toastmasters leader in Taiwan noticed my skill and interest in public speaking and became my coach, helping me to win numerous awards.

Today I have achieved success as a speaker and leader in Toastmasters, lived in four countries, and founded a foreign language public speaking business. Was it hard work? Hell, yes! But I can't deny that Malcolm Gladwell's argument supports the path my life has taken to this point. I was fortunate to attend a non-segregated school with teachers who told me that I could do and be anything I wanted even though I was black. That experience was not the experience my parents had in school. Whereas in the 1980s, international schools hired few if any black teachers because they didn't fit the "international school" image. I had the opportunity to go abroad, and I leaped at the chance to teach at an international school.

Throughout this book, I will show you how my life trajectory made me the right Speaking Seed to guide you on this lifelong process of personal fulfillment and growth. I wrote *The Speaking Seed: Secrets to Successful Foreign Language Public Speaking* to share how I've achieved success in foreign language public speaking and how I've coached others along their own Speaking Seed journeys.

Part of my success stems from me taking advantage of coincidences, both the good ones and the bad ones. I guard my life stories and struggles like medals of honor because they've made me into a courageous person, a relatable storyteller, and a confident trainer. And that's what public speaking is all about: sharing, teaching, and influencing. It all begins when you reflect on how your life experiences have shaped who you are today and think about how you can share these experiences with others.

I promise that if you embark on the Speaking Seed journey, you'll be able to:

- Discover who you are
- Have pride about where you came from
- Feel confident about sharing your ideas and opinions
- Help people from other cultures realize that you aren't so weird
- Persuade people to listen to your point of view
- Be an ambassador for your country (if you want)
- Decrease the level of madness in the world

And that list represents only a few of the many benefits of being a Speaking Seed.

You may already have someone acting as your coach. It may be your instructor, your boss, or even yourself. All Speaking Seeds are language lovers at heart who eventually give speeches as a means of sharing their ideas with others. This book might not be a bible for presentation skills or language learning, but it is a resource that you can utilize to help you along the way, a guide that can remind you that you're not alone.

How to Read This Book

“The book to read is not the one that thinks for you but the one that makes you think.”

— Harper Lee

As I was writing this book, I asked my friends, coworkers, Toastmasters members, and fellow Speaking Seeds the question, “What one thing could help you deliver foreign language speeches more effectively?” All of them said the same thing: “A coach.”

Since I can't be by your side to help you deliver speeches the way I have for many other people, instead I'll be your coach through these pages. Every time you want to give up, turn to a chapter that focuses on the challenge you face and reread that section of the book. Every time you think you are unprepared, review my suggestions and do your speech anyway. All of my tips and secrets are in this book — I'm not holding anything back. But know that this has been more than a decade-long journey for me... and I'm still not done. Mandarin is the most difficult language I've ever learned. One day I hope to accomplish my dream of speaking the language as fluently as I can and to share my experiences in Mandarin just as well as I can in English.

Now more than ever, people with strong presentation skills advance faster in their careers, are more self-confident, and have higher-level interpersonal skills. When most of us initially studied a foreign language as kids, however, it was probably a different story: We had to fulfill a foreign language requirement, so we did. Then again, some of us started learning a new language later in life and continue to study foreign languages for the pure pleasure of learning.

In the past, programs like Dale Carnegie's public speaking series concentrated on increasing the presentation skills of native speakers. Today, however, foreign language programs have recognized the need for

learners to get comfortable using their new language in front of an audience right away, even in beginner-level classes. Research has found this to be important, too, as practicing presentation skills right off the bat emphasizes the need for language learners to speak fluently with proper pronunciation in order to be understood.

This book is the first of its kind to combine the concepts behind public speaking with the concepts behind foreign language learning. It provides an overview for those who want to learn how to improve their foreign language and public speaking skills at the same time. Learning these practices and principles together is what leads to success in both. In the following chapters, you will find:

1. How I fell into foreign language public speaking and how it can help you.
2. How to get your head in the game. Half the battle of being a Speaking Seed is learning how not to psych yourself out. I share stories and tips on how to stay positive on the journey.
3. How to organize and write a basic Speaking Seed speech, with tips on how to use outlines and graphic organizers.
4. How to practice a speech, handle your nerves, and use props and gestures.
5. How to follow the Speaking Seed program, with a special section on PowerPoints. All of the public speaking exercises require you to focus on speaking to be understood by an audience under uncomfortable conditions.
6. How certain tasks, habits, and tools help Speaking Seeds grow.

Each Stage in this book is a seed that I want to plant in your head. Like any plant, seeds need to be given plenty of sunshine, water, and care to grow strong and be healthy. So to get the most out of this book, I suggest the following:

Read the entire book first.

Don't do any of the assignments. Don't practice any of the tips. Read the stories and get introduced to the seeds you'll be planting later on. If you jump ahead to the chapter about PowerPoints, you'll have missed how to organize a speech, and then you might feel frustrated. If you're not able to complete an assignment, then you might feel like quitting before you've even started. And I don't want you to quit. I want you to finish and win! That's why I wrote this book.

Get comfortable with repetition.

Once you have finished reading the book once, slowly read each chapter again. I know, I know — that may not sound very appealing. I don't like reading the same thing over again, either. But whenever I do read something again, I'm glad I did because I'll find details that I missed the first time and new vocabulary that makes more sense. Rereading content also allows us to retain important information. So get comfortable with doing things again and again and again. People who deliver great presentations know they need to practice, practice, practice.

After you've read this book a second time, answer the questions at the end of each chapter. They are there to get you to think and self-evaluate your progress. I often ask these same questions to my clients.

Practice each kind of speech in Stage 5 in order.

Each chapter in Stage 5 focuses on a certain type of Speaking Seed speech, and each of these exercises build upon the previous ones in terms of complexity. So don't skip to the next chapter until you have firmly planted the seeds from the previous chapter. Every assignment focuses on improving your soil (your language ability and your foundation), your confidence, and your basic presentation skills.

Find a language partner.

I was introduced to a language exchange partner by a coworker's girlfriend many years ago. Today she's one of my closest friends in Taiwan, and we continue to speak in both English and Mandarin together and help each other as we continue down our Speaking Seed paths. On bad days, over a hot-pot lunch, while I whine about how hard Mandarin is, she complains about the complexities of English grammar.

I can't emphasize enough how positive and beneficial a mutual language exchange can be for both partners.

Find a mentor or coach.

If you can find a person who takes an interest in you and wants to help you develop your language potential, grab them! Not many people are willing to help just for the sake of helping and without wanting anything in return, but some are, and they're precious. A mentor can help you stay on track or motivate you to keep going when you want to quit. I have two mentors in Toastmasters: one in my English-speaking Toastmasters club and one who helps me with Mandarin, my leadership skills, and contests. If you are lucky enough to find a mentor to work with you, listen to them. Appreciate them. You don't have to take all of their advice, but respect their counsel. And after each achievement, be sure to celebrate your successes with them.

Commit and stick to it.

Make a commitment to set aside 15 minutes every day to practice your target language. Yes, everyone is busy with jobs, children, friends, and social media. Just think of all the time we spend looking at our phones. Those who spend the most time in the garden reap the greatest harvests.

Record your speeches and practices.

Even before you start giving speeches, set up a video journal. You always want someone to record your practices and performances. I know... I used to cringe every time I saw or heard myself speak. But now I'm used to it. Recording yourself is really the only way you can see and hear what you're saying. You need to know what you look and sound like so that you know how to keep doing what's right and start fixing what's wrong. As far as tools to improve your public speaking skills, no other piece of equipment can beat a smartphone with a good camera, so get one if you don't have one already.

Celebrate after each project.

Each project is difficult. To find the courage to stand in front of people and share your ideas with others in another language takes guts. Most people fear public speaking in their own language, so every time you have the courage to get up there and deliver a speech in another language, treat yourself afterwards. Get in the habit

The Speaking Seed

of giving yourself a reward... But be careful not to make those rewards too fattening. I don't want to get emails from you complaining that your stream of chocolate rewards made you gain weight!

Take it easy.

I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard someone say that they learned Mandarin in six months. Don't pay attention to those people. Besides, I've asked many Mandarin teachers — some with more than 20 years of teaching experience — if it is, indeed, possible to learn the language in six months. All of them insist that it's impossible to learn Mandarin so quickly. Or perhaps you are learning Spanish, French, Korean, or Hindi and have heard that someone else gained fluency in a very short period of time. Don't let that deter you from your language learning goals. Because here's the thing — every person is different, and every person deserves patience. That includes you! We have patience for others, but we tend to forget to have patience with ourselves. It doesn't matter if it takes you one month or five years to complete the assignments in this book — just do your best. I'm sure some of you are saying, "But my boss wants me to start giving presentations in Japanese to colleagues in just a few months. I don't have time to wait." My response is this: putting more pressure on yourself will not make you learn any faster, so you might as well take your time and try to enjoy the learning process. There's simply no fast-forward button when it comes to learning and gaining experiences.

All of the seeds in this book are strategies and practices that I have personally tested and found effective. Some of them come from lessons that others have taught me, some come from years of being an English language public speaking coach, and others come from mistakes that I have made along the way. Most of these techniques should work for you whether you are learning to speak Swahili, Portuguese, German, or any other language, just like they work in both English and Mandarin. That's because learning a foreign language and practicing public speaking entail complementary skills that can help you wherever you are on your path in life. I hope this book serves as your guide on the tough yet admirable journey before you and, along with your determination, brings you Speaking Seed success.

Reflect for a moment...

1. What foreign language are you currently learning? Write a few things that you like about studying that language.

2. Write down three things that happened in your life that brought you to learn another language and prompted you to read this book.

Stage 1

Ready to Get Dirty?



“The tiny seed knew that in order to grow, it needed to be dropped in dirt, covered in darkness and struggle to reach the light.”

— Sandra King

Chapter 1: What Is a Speaking Seed?

Chapter 2: Learning a Foreign Language

Respecting the Language

Chapter 3: Showing Up

A Note about Determination

A Word about Fluency

Chapter 1

What Is a Speaking Seed?

It's time to officially define what I mean by "Speaking Seed". A Speaking Seed is someone who speaks in a language that they're not completely comfortable with in order to share information or experiences with an audience, thereby accelerating foreign language learning and promoting global understanding.

I thought of this concept in a coffee shop while I was brainstorming logos with a friend. As I looked around the café, I saw a poster with an image of a coffee plant and pictures of its stages of growth. As I studied the image, I realized that a seed faces the same kind of challenges that a foreign language public speaker faces in its struggle to grow and make an impact on the world.

Sometimes we make the decision to plant ourselves in a different soil so that we can become something bigger than what we are. And sometimes we are in a situation that digs the hole for us. Our jobs, for example, may push us to learn a foreign language, or even make speeches in a foreign language. Our personal situations may push us to do the same – encouraged by our love interests, cross-cultural backgrounds, or issues within our communities.

But to grow into plants, we have to come out of the soil and be exposed. That exposure is our audience. So what is an audience? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "audience" can simply mean "an opportunity of

being heard”. An audience doesn’t have to be a group of people in a room listening to you. It could be two or three people asking you questions in an interview and making you feel like you’re being put on the spot. It could be your coworkers asking questions about your life with wide-eyed anticipation of what you might say. An audience could even be a single person on the other end of the line, a friend talking with you on the phone.

My definition of “audience” is broad, so my definition of “public speaking” is broad, too. I believe that public speaking encompasses any time we speak and feel tense or nervous about the response we may receive. When we believe we will be judged based on how we communicate, then we are doing public speaking.



Remember, you don’t have to be a language superstar in order to be a Speaking Seed. Even if your language foundation is weak, don’t let that be a reason not to challenge yourself. Like the seeds of plants, we can grow into beautiful flowers and harvest great crops, even with mediocre soil. Every farmer has to start planting some time, and so does every speaker. Just be sure to make Seed Time, or practice, a priority before you deliver a speech in front of an audience. The more Seed Time a Speaking Seed has, the faster the Speaking Seed’s plants will grow.



Once the seed is in the soil, it needs sunshine to grow, and the sunshine feels *wonderful*. Sunshine is the encouragement that speakers receive from their listeners. Early on, you'll start hearing compliments like, "Wow, you spoke for over a minute! Good job." Experiences like this will give you the encouragement to make more speeches.



Rain showers are the evaluations from your listeners. No one likes to be evaluated, just like no one likes a rainy day, but we all know we need rain for water to drink and food to eat. Without rain, a seed could never survive, let alone thrive. The same goes for foreign language public speakers. We can only improve by speaking in front of others and getting their feedback. That's how we know if people are receiving our messages as we intended to deliver them... Or if they're not, then we need to work on improving our soil.



Sometimes life can be monotonous, and sometimes it can be full of whirlwind surprises. Some are good, and some are bad, but they all test our resilience. That's what wind does for our germinating plants. A sprouting baby plant is so small. It's just starting out in the world, and then the wind comes along and almost destroys it... Except that it doesn't destroy it but makes the sprout stronger.

All of us will deal with some wind resistance. These setbacks might occur at the beginning of your Speaking Seed experience, or you might encounter them later on. Strong winds of resistance are sure to blow more than once. But wind never lasts forever. Once it dies down, like most of the drama in our lives, the air becomes still again, and your foreign language public speaking skills will come out stronger than they were before.



It's our responsibility as Speaking Seeds to nurture our soil and take care of our plants. We have to keep up with our language learning and find opportunities to practice speaking in front of audiences. And we can't always choose our audiences or their temperatures.

Sometimes our perceptions of an audience can be wrong, too. I remember giving a speech in English when a woman in the audience was giving me a disgusted look the whole time I spoke, like she could smell my funk from where I was standing. The look on her face distracted me so much during my speech that I even made a joke about her awful facial expression.

Later, the person who invited her told me that he had encouraged her to come and try listening to some speeches even though her English was quite

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poor. When I heard that, I felt horrible for having made that joke. What I had thought was disgust towards me was actually confusion. I learned that day that although sometimes we might think that our audiences are hot or cold, it can be hard to know how they are feeling or taking our messages. Regardless of the temperature of our audience, we must learn resilience so we can mature into strong, healthy plants, comfortable speaking in all kinds of conditions. But that's balance — we need different kinds of weather to help us to grow and change.

Reflect for a moment...

1. How are “audience” and “public speaking” defined in this chapter?

2. What opportunities do you think you can receive from foreign language public speaking?

Chapter 2

Learning a Foreign Language

I started learning languages when I was 12 years old. I loved trilling my R's and softening my D's. I loved learning about birthday parties in Mexico and the bread in France. I often imagined myself banging all the candy out of a piñata or sitting at a Paris cafe eating a real baguette.

At the time, I thought I had a special knack for languages. I loved them. That was until I went to high school. One year, I got a Spanish teacher who was more interested in teaching the class than treating it like a hobby, which was what my previous language teachers had done. She spoke only in Spanish and always asked me questions. That annoyed me. Eventually, I put forth less effort and switched to French. I continued to learn other languages later, but I was never as serious as I could have been. I always knew when I was trying. And deep down, I knew I wasn't.

But everything changed when I started to learn Mandarin.

Mandarin, for me, was a monster-hard language to learn. So I didn't like having 12 different learning styles in one classroom, nor did I like old-school methods of teaching. After a year of taking classes, I decided that I would develop my own learning program, one that focused on oral communication and giving speeches at Toastmasters meetings. Once I was in a Toastmasters club, I finally understood why language learning had become so hard for me since high school: I neither respected the language nor the

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process. It wasn't until I moved to Taiwan and struggled to learn Chinese characters and tones and public speaking that I wished I could conjugate some Spanish verbs instead and never have to deal with any tonal language again. In the end, I appreciated the chance to learn, but I felt like a middle-aged dingbat who couldn't string two words together. Like most foreign language learners, what I wanted was this:

- Fluency of speech
- Natural intonation
- Native-level vocabulary
- Native-level pronunciation
- More vocal variation when speaking

But at the time, I didn't have it. So I was envious of everyone else who did. I had to ask myself, "Why isn't your Mandarin better, Diana?" Well, I could think of some reasons why:

- I chose not to study Mandarin until I moved to Taiwan.
- I chose not to do all of the written homework.
- I chose to spend three years studying for a PhD.
- I chose to engage in a lot of Toastmasters leadership work.
- I chose to spend time mentoring and coaching others.
- I chose to spend time working so I could have money.
- I chose to watch only TV shows in English.
- I chose to be lazy.

On the other hand, people who learned to speak fluently in Mandarin likely made some different choices:

- They chose to study Mandarin before coming to Taiwan.
- They chose to do all of the homework.
- They chose to study Mandarin at university.
- They chose to spend time practicing Mandarin as much as possible.
- They chose to focus on learning Mandarin instead of pursuing other interests.
- They chose not to work but study Mandarin instead.

- They chose to watch only TV programs in Mandarin.
- They chose to be proactive.

These reasons may seem entirely valid or not depending on how you look at the situation. The point here is that we all have reasons for where we're at in life. Some reasons might strike us as valid ones. Others might seem like cop-outs. But the choices we've made in the past aren't everything — what really matters is what we choose to do now.

Respecting the Language

There was a difference between Mandarin and the other languages I had learned previously. I dedicated hours to my Mandarin homework and pronunciation practice every week. I admired the complexity of the characters and the difficulty of mastering the tones. And once I joined Toastmasters, my respect and interest in Chinese reading and writing grew. Without a doubt, I cared about and appreciated the opportunity I had to learn, so I worked harder and reaped greater rewards.

Because I know it helped me, I believe everyone should practice public speaking from the moment they begin learning a foreign language. All too often we get lazy and forget the most important reason there is to learn a language: to communicate our ideas so we can connect with others. We can do this by saying something as simple as “My name is Diana Watson” or something as intense as “The biggest challenge we need to face this century is global warming.” Both are expressions of something we want to share with the world.

Another reason I support the use of public speaking during the language learning process is because I believe that if you speak in public, then your seeds are bound to spread faster and reach more people in a shorter period of time. Even if you're not seeking fame, speaking publicly will improve your confidence, which helps when you're speaking in any situation, even if it's

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only one person. That said, the secret to being an excellent public speaker is making audiences feel like you're speaking directly to them.

Now, let's consider all the time we put into learning a foreign language. We attend classes, do homework, take exams, and practice oral drills over and over and over again... Eventually, we reach a point where we start to become comfortable with the language. The healthier our soil becomes, the better our foundation for speaking a foreign language becomes. That doesn't mean you should wait a year or two before you practice your foreign language public speaking skills. If anything, you should test your soil on a recurring basis. You could start with speaking your new language in front of at least three people once each month.

The easiest in-person audience to find might be your classmates. But you can also look for teachers who require oral presentations in their classes. You can join a language group if you're in school, or you can sign up for a public speaking club like Toastmasters if there's one in your area. Test your soil by asking your audience if they can understand you. And don't expect to be a rockstar overnight. Creating a solid foundation of good soil takes time and patience. Just remember, you will continue to build on top of the foundation you lay. As time goes on, people will tell you that your pauses are less obvious and your pronunciation has become clearer. The more you speak, the more your confidence will start to shine.

Reflect for a moment...

1. In this chapter I argue that foreign language learners should practice speaking in front of audiences as soon as they start learning a foreign language. Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?

2. The Speaking Seed process is not easy. Who or what organization can help you reach your Speaking Seed goals?

Chapter 3

Showing Up

I remember when I first came up with the idea of delivering speeches in Mandarin. I knew I was being overly optimistic and that Mandarin was a language that would be ridiculously difficult to learn, but I didn't care. I've always loved challenges, and this would be the ultimate challenge. For me, Spanish felt too common, and French wasn't exotic enough, either. Mandarin, though, provided the difficulty and mystery all in one. This was a new thought for me. Years before, I couldn't understand why someone would want to learn Mandarin when there were so many other easier languages to learn.

In the beginning, I started taking classes twice a week, including every Wednesday evening after work. It was exhausting, and I struggled to learn the tones. The first two years of my Mandarin learning experience was a joke. I whined, complained, and fussed about everything to my teachers in class. I was a spoiled, lazy brat... I don't know how my teachers dealt with me! Looking back, though, at least I had made a commitment to myself: I was going to learn Mandarin no matter how long it took or how difficult it was. I figured everyone has to start somewhere.

I'm telling you my story to illustrate the fact that while some of us are natural linguists, a lot of us aren't. Some of us are passionate about languages but suck at public speaking. Others are natural public speakers but struggle to learn languages. No matter what your starting point is, to become a Speaking Seed, you must have two things: a love for the language you're learning and a

determination to keep practicing. That's it. You don't need to be a passionate linguist or a fancy speaker. You just need to be determined. The tortoise who consistently practices and perseveres always beats the hare who cuts corners along the way.

The most difficult part of any activity, whether that's learning a language or working out, is simply showing up. Four to five days a week, I work out on a small square in my den. I couldn't afford a fancy gym, but with the internet, I decided I couldn't make excuses for not working out in the comfort of my home. Some days I only work out for 10 minutes, but other days I exercise for almost an hour. Either way, each time I work out, I praise myself for showing up.

Few people make the decision as a child to become a foreign language public speaker. The Speaking Seed challenge is often a calling, perhaps inspired by your work or your community or your passions in life. And there has never been a more opportune time to share your thoughts and ideas with others in another language.

A Note about Determination

On New Year's, in 2017, I made a promise to myself that I was going to participate in the Mandarin Toastmasters humorous speech contest that fall. I had little expectations. My only goal was to enter, compete, and do the best I could. I also had another goal that year: to coach a Taiwanese woman for the Toastmasters International Speech contest. I did, and she won. Little did I realize that being her coach went from being a three-week commitment to a five-month adventure. I still treasure my memories of the time I spent coaching her, but the downside was that I didn't have much time to work on my own speech for the Mandarin humorous speech contest.

At the same time, there was a major change in my life because I began teaching at a new school. I had begun work before the school term started

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so that I would have extra time to plan my classes and get to know my coworkers. One day, when it was super hot in the non-air conditioned teachers' room, I felt tired and didn't feel like planning for my classes. I told my new Taiwanese coworker that I had to write a speech that day.

She said, "An English one?"

"No," I replied. "A Chinese one." To my surprise, she wasn't fazed at all. That made me think she believed my Mandarin was fluent enough that I could do it. And just like that, I wrote a 10-page speech in Mandarin, sharing all of my funny stories about being a black woman in Taiwan. It took less than two hours. My grammar was a wreck, my vocabulary was a disaster, and my handwriting was nearly incomprehensible because I was writing so fast, but I got it done. I had written my own speech without any help from my coach or a tutor. Sure, I needed their assistance later. But I took the first step and got something down on paper.

When I told my coach that I wanted to compete in the Mandarin contest, she said, "Diana, you have to be funny." That was code for saying that she loved me, but she didn't want me to face my worst fear: looking stupid on stage. When I told the woman I was coaching that I wanted to compete, she said, "Diana, Chinese is not like English. Are you sure you can do it?" That meant she didn't think my Mandarin was good enough. In a nutshell, the two Taiwanese women I spent most of my time with didn't think my Mandarin level was high enough to compete in the competition.

Three months later, I won the national title.

I share this story not because it mattered whether or not I won but because what mattered was that I put myself out there. Also, the fact is that sometimes the people who love you the most don't really know your potential. You don't even know your potential! People will try to be honest with you out of love, but we need to test our limits for ourselves to see how far we can go. If nothing else, we need to try things out of curiosity. And when I decided to compete, both of these women provided me with unbelievable support

when they saw my determination. That's another lesson: We shouldn't judge anyone by their first reaction.

I also share this story because in order to be a Speaking Seed, you need to be determined. You'll need to work hard to get others on board with your goal. Notice I say "goal" and not "dream" because if an intermediate-level non-native speaker can win a national Mandarin speech contest, competing against all native speakers, then any determined person can reach their Speaking Seed goals. Your determination doesn't have to only be a dream, and you don't have to obtain a trophy to celebrate your successes, either. The Speaking Seed experience starts the same way for all of us – with a small hand shovel.

A Word about Fluency

Don't worry about not being fluent – just focus on your attitude. I remember realizing this when I was visiting my best friend Liz in Jordan many years ago, back when she was serving there as a volunteer. When I arrived, I was tired and jet-lagged out of my mind. Liz and her boyfriend, a local, thought it would be best if they picked me up from the airport and took me to their friend Mika's house, which wasn't far, so I could get some rest. I'll note here that in many places in the Middle East, as well as where I was staying, it wasn't appropriate for women and men to be in a house together at the same time. However, I didn't understand the cultural norms that well, and frankly, I didn't care. I crashed on Mika's bed and fell asleep... until I was suddenly awakened by a loud commotion as Liz and her boyfriend rushed into the bedroom and closed the door.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Mika's neighbors decided to come and pay her a visit."

"So what?"

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“Men and women can’t be in a house alone here, Diana. She would lose respect in the community.”

So the three of us hid in Mika’s guest room for over an hour while she talked with her female neighbors. Mika had shared with me that her Arabic wasn’t very good, but that didn’t stop her from laughing and chatting. Liz and her boyfriend laughed, too, as they eavesdropped onto her conversation. She and her neighbors had fun talking, and they learned something about Mika’s volunteer organization, her family, and her culture, regardless of whether Mika’s Arabic was poor or not.

Mika is a great example of how someone with the right attitude can become a Speaking Seed. With a positive mindset, along with genuine effort, most people will respect you if you try to speak their language. Your pronunciation may suck, and you may stumble and search for words, or you may get nervous and feel like you’re at your wit’s end. But don’t let that stop you! People are curious about who you are, what you know, and how your unique experiences might be able to solve their problems.

There’s no reason to psych yourself out of being a Speaking Seed. It takes a lot of time and determination, yes, but few things are better than the feeling of people giving you their time and attention to hear what you have to say. And then there’s the amazing feeling of relief and satisfaction after finishing a talk. The high after doing a Speaking Seed presentation beats eating chocolate cake or a gorgeous day at the beach. It even beats sex! Well, I guess that depends on the person... But you get my point. Now pull up your sleeves, and let’s start planting!

Where You Can Start

I began my Speaking Seed experience with Toastmasters, but that's not the only place where you can find audiences to practice your foreign language public speaking skills. Potential Speaking Seed audiences are everywhere! Here are some examples:

- Going out with friends who speak your target language.
- Speaking in front of classmates at school.
- Eating in restaurants.
- Talking to colleagues at work.
- Joining classes or gatherings that are culturally connected to the language you're learning.
- Attending religious or social gatherings.
- Attending any events where large communities of speakers of your target language live.

The trick is to locate these groups of people so that you can practice. Some are easier to find than others. If you live in the United States, for example, it may be easy to find Spanish-speaking communities, but it may be more difficult to find Ethiopian communities who speak Amharic. Fortunately, even if no communities in your area exist who speak the language you want to learn, with the internet, you'll find websites that cater to all kinds of languages. But keep in mind, if you want to become a Speaking Seed, I will say that it's best to find opportunities that allow you to have direct contact with other people, whether that's online or in person.

One final thought... Time changes everything. If I have learned anything in life, it's that one day you can be on top of the world... and the next you want to crawl into a closet and die. The difference a day, a week, a month, a year can make in our lives is astonishing. Life has a way of blowing the wind so hard against you that you think you don't have the strength to

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straighten up yourself again. You may think that the seed you are planting cannot grow into a strong plant. Yes, you'll have many days like that on your journey. But one day you'll speak, and you will think, "That's someone else speaking that language. It's not me!" But it will be you speaking that language that previously sounded so strange. And you'll gaze at the smiling, agreeable faces looking back at you, and you'll know that all your effort and determination was worth it.

Why Not You? (How I Realized I Could)

One day at a coffee shop, I told a friend that I had delivered some presentations in Mandarin. Surprised, she said, "Wow! I always wanted to do that."

"So why don't you?" I asked.

I could see the many excuses running through her mind. Finally, she responded, "One day, I will. One day."

Have you ever given yourself any of these "I will one day" excuses?

"I'm too busy."

"I'm too old."

"I have no free time."

"I never get a chance to speak in front of people."

"I don't get many opportunities to interact with people who speak that language."

These thoughts sure sound familiar to me. I used to tell myself that I was too busy and too old to learn one more language (I've learned four). But then one

day, I decided that I simply wasn't going to be too busy or too old anymore! I was going to learn.

Granted, I was lucky. I had a good friend who pushed me to make my dream happen. I walked into a Mandarin Toastmasters club one day with nothing more than intermediate conversation skills and fewer than 2,000 characters in my brain. In that room, though, I was with all native speakers who used idioms, made jokes, and sometimes threw in Taiwanese, which is a completely different Chinese language.

I was nervous and scared and couldn't read anything on the agenda other than a handful of characters. "Holy shit!", I said to myself. "Seven years of Mandarin study, and I still can't read a basic meeting agenda!" I realized that making up your mind to do something is one thing, but putting yourself out there to get things done is another.

It seemed impossible. So often I pretended to know what someone was talking about when I really didn't have a clue. But nonetheless, I stuck with it. Now, I can deliver five-to-seven-minute speeches in Mandarin. I can answer impromptu questions. I can even evaluate speeches. Can I do it like a native speaker? No way! But can everyone understand me and respect my ideas? Some days are better than others but, yes. If you have a desire or a professional goal to make speeches in a language other than your own, then do it! Don't wait, and don't make any more excuses. I'm sure they are all good reasons, even — but who cares? It's time to make an impact in the world.

In short, as Speaking Seeds we're in the driver's seat on what we want to share in the world. We don't have to depend on someone else, even if we communicate like preschoolers. At least we know what we want to express, and we can practice until we get there. Plus, if we speak for ourselves, then we have the added benefits of learning by speaking and don't have to depend on others to act as our language bridge.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Think of the last time you showed up for something when you weren't ready. How did that situation turn out? What's something positive that came out of that experience?

2. In this chapter, I shared how determined I was to participate in a Mandarin contest, even though I wasn't ready. When was the last time you were determined to do something and how did it turn out?

Stage 2

Seeding



Before you plant a seed, a foundation needs to be set in place. You need to test the water and test the soil. Should you use a tray first, or should you plant the seed directly into the soil? The soil determines the success of the seed maturing into a plant. Some plants need to be covered. Others don't. But you can never be sure if a seed will mature into a plant without considering the condition of the seed.

Chapter 4: Ego

Chapter 5: Your Seed is Worth Sharing

Chapter 6: Focus

Meditation

Chapter 7: Fear

Chapter 8: Mirrors & Self-Love

Chapter 4

Ego

On the table, in front of my four guests, sat different colored mugs and two glasses. The plates of seafood, platters of vegetables, and bottles of wine had done their job. My friends were relaxed and ready for an after-dinner chat. That's the best part of dinner parties involving alcohol — a lot of truth-sharing happens. Once someone starts with a story, others start to build on it, and the person with the most humorous and captivating story gets the most attention and the loudest laughs. Hosting dinner parties at my house in Taiwan has given me many inroads into understanding the local culture. That evening, the topic of discussion was junior high school teachers.

I posed a question: "Why are students afraid to speak out in class?"

Everyone answered at once. "Because we don't want to lose face," one friend said. Another chimed in, "Because we never had the practice."

Confused, I pushed back: "But why couldn't you ask your teacher questions? She's a teacher."

Everyone erupted into laughter. "Ask the teacher *questions*, Diana?!"

They thought that concept was so hilarious. I already knew that teachers were both respected and feared in Taiwan, but now that my guests had alcohol in their systems, I could finally get the real story about why that was the case.

“Diana, when we were in elementary school, we could never ask the teacher questions,” one friend started to explain. “If we did, she would think, ‘Who do you think *you* are? I am the teacher. You are the student. You are not special. Write down what I say. Memorize it. And know it for the test tomorrow.’ And that was it. Before a test, the teacher would say, ‘Listen up, everyone. For every point you score under 80, you’ll get a hit from the paddle. So study.’”

My friends laughed so hard they held their stomachs. I let that sink in. Children, naturally curious, could never ask questions. With my personality, I would never have survived a Taiwanese childhood. I watched their expressions as they recalled their individual memories of teachers saying those exact same phrases to them.

Another said, “Yeah, I would go home and really memorize all of those words that night, too. I didn’t want that paddle. It hurt, especially on the hands.”

“Shit. I can’t ever complain about the teachers I had,” I thought. “Not ever.”

With a smile, the first one added, “Yeah, that’s the way it was... But it worked.”

“So you think it worked?” I said, surprised.

“Of course it did, Diana. There were over 50 kids on average in my class in elementary school, sometimes 70 when it was the dragon-year kids. That kind of teaching taught us from an early age to stay in our place and not cause trouble. It was easier. If you are a teacher with all of those kids in *one* class, the last thing you want is to have a ton of kids who each think that they’re special.” (I should note here that “dragon-year kids” comes from the practice of timing births so that children are born in the Year of the Dragon, which is considered a particularly lucky year.)

I could feel myself getting defensive. “What’s wrong with being special?” I wanted to say. But I didn’t. I knew my friend was alluding to the fact that Americans always think they’re special. As a powerful and influential country, I hadn’t realized how big Americans’ egos could be. “I know I’m special, but

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isn't everyone else, too?," I thought to myself. Every American kindergarten teacher teaches children that they're special. (And if they don't, their parents do.) During our very first year of school, teachers asked us to share stories with our classmates during show and tell. What we shared wasn't important. What was important was that all of us had a chance to share our "I" ego thoughts in class. But that's in sharp contrast to many Asian cultures.

Like so many things in life, there's both a positive and a negative side to the ego. It's up to us to choose how we use it. We all deal with embarrassment as we learn foreign languages, and most of us suffer from nervousness when we deliver speeches in any language. Setbacks and humiliation are guaranteed parts of the process. But if we embrace our egos for the confidence they give us, we can find the drive to overcome those setbacks, learn from our mistakes, and keep trekking on. To use a foreign language as a medium to connect with others, we must trust that our experiences matter, that our values matter, and that our unique selves matter. We must trust in ourselves to have the courage to share our stories.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Do you think you have a strong ego? How do you think your ego could help you become a Speaking Seed?

2. The Speaking Seed journey can be slow and frustrating. How do you plan to deal with setbacks and disappointments?

Chapter 5

Your Seed is Worth Sharing

Growing up, I was always an average student. I hated standardized tests. I got some A's but mostly B's on my report cards. I wanted to be super smart, but it just wasn't in my DNA, so I didn't end up in many honors classes. I remember I was bored out of mind when the teacher lectured. I wished I were somewhere else, some foreign, exotic place where I could meet interesting people. I always believed that anywhere else would be better than where I grew up. I guess that's why I left my hometown at 17, and other than a brief confusing time after college, I never moved back.

In high school, I recall the super smart kids sharing their progressive ideas about the environment, vegetarianism, and the importance of exercise — things a black family didn't talk about in the 80s, but I was intrigued. I realized by junior high school that the people around me influenced my ideas and level of intelligence — not only DNA. Reading, thinking, and socializing also affect what we know and do with our lives.

I wasn't able to convince my parents to enroll me in a fancy private school for my last few years of secondary education, but I did convince them to send me to one for six weeks one summer. It turned out that ritzy prep schools often offer extremely reasonable tuition rates to encourage middle-income families to try out their schools, and to get some extra income during the summer period. Even at that age, I was quite industrious. I found the program by opening the yellow pages of our Philadelphia area phone book. I called

all the private schools listed and requested information about their summer school programs. My parents chose the program that was closest to my house, and off I went.

The program crammed one year's worth of material into six weeks. I took a math and history course with only three other students in the class. Every evening I had hours of homework. That hell turned out to be a heaven for me, though, because finally I met unpretentious and worldly kids my own age. Since there were only four of us, we had to get along. At last, without judgment, I was able to learn about how beef had been contributing to global warming and how colonization and geography had been impacting developing countries like Bolivia. I asked questions, regardless of how stupid they were, and for the first time, I felt comfortable sharing my experiences as a black girl born to one parent from the ghetto and another from the suburbs. I learned that what I had lacked in classical education, I had gained in street-smart knowledge gathered from my family and my community. I may not have been a voracious reader, but I brought strong oral traditions and an emotional intelligence that my classmates found entertaining and insightful.

Until that experience, I never felt like I had anything to share that others would deem chat-worthy. I knew I wasn't well read. Neither Hemingway nor Shakespeare were my choices for leisure reading. Instead, I clung to Judy Blume and my dusty encyclopedias. And at that point in my life, I didn't know I had a knack for public speaking. But I was fortunate to have knowledge that people were interested in hearing about and experiences that were worth sharing. I'll never forget that summer – when I found confidence in myself and received validation of my thoughts and ideas. This provided the energy and determination I needed to get through high school and move away from my family for college, and with the international students at my university, I finally found a tribe of people where I belonged.

Every person has a seed worth sharing. We all have plenty of seeds that can provide answers to problems that other people wouldn't be able to solve because they don't share the same experiences. One of the great things about public speaking is that people actually want to hear your opinions, and

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they expect you to share your views. They may not always agree, and they may not accept your ideas, but public speaking is one of the few professions in which having an opinion about how to solve problems is something wanted, needed, and encouraged.

Reflect for a moment...

1. What seed do you believe you have that is worth sharing?

2. Do you remember a time when you shared a personal experience or something you knew a lot about with an engaged audience? What did you share? How did it feel?

Chapter 6

Focus

Years ago, I taught a high school entrance examination practice class once a week. The area where I was teaching was in the countryside of Taiwan, in an area where mainly aboriginal and some Hakka children lived. My four-student class focused on the English portion of the exam. The students needed to be able to read and listen for the test. But since they had a Speaking Seed teacher, one day I decided that they had to share three sentences about anything they wanted.

This did not go over very well.

They stared at me and froze silent like statues. I repeated what I wanted, and I knew they had understood. I had started by providing an example of my own: "I love teaching you. Today my lunch was good. Teacher Diana doesn't eat meat." Then, I asked questions to make sure they comprehended each sentence. They all did. I repeated my sentences.

I didn't want them to overthink or worry about losing face. I just wanted them to talk.

A student whose name means "talkative" in her mother tongue spoke first. "Hi. Today I am sleepy. I hate math. It is not scary to speak English. I am happy."

The others would feel more relaxed after that and be able to follow, I hoped.

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The second student tried, and I helped her. The third, who was very shy but very smart, shared three sentences with errors, and I gently corrected her. The last student only stared at me. She was my weakest student. It had been hard to convince her to take my class, and I had been told that she'd given up on English a long time ago, back when she was studying at another school. But I am a Speaking Seed. My students *had* to talk. Usually I helped her with her responses, but today she was going to do it by herself. I had given her enough time with training wheels. It was time to ride the bike. I was willing to be stubborn and wait forever. I prompted her, ever so gently, reminding her that she could say anything she wanted.

After three minutes...

"I..."

Jesus, finally!

"I am good."

Three minutes of waiting, and that was all I got. I had asked for three sentences and stipulated that they couldn't be super basic, like "My name is..." or "I like red" or "I don't like dogs."

She said, "I like red."

Irritated, I said, "No, I don't want to hear those kinds of sentences. Take a chance. Don't say the same sentences you have learned for the past six years!"

Shame grew on her face. Great — I had scared her. Now she'll never speak. But she insisted that she wasn't scared, she just didn't know what to say. I explained that learning a language is about communicating, and I told her that I could wait all day for her to communicate with me. I had had enough of one-sided teaching.

She still stared at me. I was getting impatient. I usually try to control that emotion, but I was tired that day. I explained to her that she had to speak out like everyone else. I couldn't let her get away with not sharing just because it was hard. Anything worth working for and having is hard.

I explained, "Look at my Mandarin. All of you hear me make mistakes all the time, right?"

They nodded. "But that doesn't stop me from speaking," I continued. "If I can learn Mandarin at *my age*, you can learn English at age 15. We will wait here the next hour until all of you talk."

Then I looked at the floor and waited. Her classmates started to try to help her, but she kept insisting that she didn't know what to say. Finally, I picked up a pencil.

She said, "Pencil."

I picked up her notebook.

She said, "Notebook."

I extended my arms to the sides to prompt her to use those words in a sentence.

She hesitantly said, "It is a notebook. It is a pen... It is a pencil."

"Now," I said, "look at my face." I made a happy face.

"Happy," she said. "I am happy."

I made a frown.

"I am sad," she said.

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“Okay,” I said. “Are you actually sad?”

“No!” she quickly said.

I said, “Give me a sentence.”

Finally, she said, “Today, I am happy. I go to the store.” Then she said the last sentence in Chinese. I interpreted it into English for her. Then, I had her repeat the three sentences again. This took over 10 minutes. In the end, she was embarrassed, and I was tired.

Many teachers allow students to not speak out in class, but I don’t allow it. Even if my student is a very, very slow learner, I demand that they participate. Why? Because I know everything that I ask for is achievable if my students are focused. Being able to focus on something is what many people now refer to as being mindful. “Mindfulness” refers to being aware of what you are doing and why you are doing it.

My student was so nervous that she couldn’t answer a simple question about her day. I asked her, “What did you do today? Did you like it? Why or why not?”

Foreign language public speaking is challenging, and it requires us to focus not only on our long-term foreign language goals but also the work that is directly in front of us. It is doable, but it can be downright scary if we can’t focus.

And scary it was for one of my students. Her fear reminded me that public speaking doesn’t only happen when a person stands up in front of others to speak. Public speaking happens any time people feel that others are concentrating on them and might judge them for what they say. For teenagers, it can be challenging to do that in their native language. In a foreign language, it can feel impossible. Like any other skill, you have to set aside Seed Time to become better Speaking Seeds.

Meditation

Many people suffer from nervousness before they deliver a speech. What is there *not* to be afraid of? All of those eyes sparkling with interest and anticipation staring at us, hoping that we'll offer the answer to that one question they all have: "Will you bore us or fascinate us for the next few minutes?" Of course, what you're probably thinking is, "Will I die from anxiety before this is all over?"

You won't die. And you know what else? Even experienced public speakers get nervous before speaking on stage. The difference between experienced speakers and rookie speakers is that experienced speakers have a strategy for how to use that nervous energy to make their presentations even better.

My stomach hates that I'm a Speaking Seed. So often my nerves turn my tummy into a bag of rocks. That's why before I speak, I meditate. Of course, these days everyone says they meditate, but unfortunately, many people don't actually know how. They just close their eyes, breathe, and think about how much their beds are calling their names or how much money is left in their bank accounts — important thoughts to ponder on, no doubt, but not the purpose of meditation.

The main thing that meditation entails is focus. That's why successful performers often talk about the importance of meditation: It trains your mind to do the one thing that it finds so difficult. To focus on nothing is a monster challenge, but yes, it can be done. Once you get into the habit of meditating, that kind of mental training enables you to accomplish tasks that require high-order, focused concentration. Just as exercise makes your body stronger, meditation makes your mind stronger. It doesn't cure everything, but I guarantee that if you practice meditation, even for five minutes a day, your presentation skills will substantially improve.

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So what do you actually have to do to meditate? Well, to meditate you need to focus your mind on how the air goes in and out of your body, namely through your nose. It takes practice to feel the soft sensations of air going in and out. Be patient. Relax for a little while, and when you are ready, practice counting to three without thinking about anything. Then, count up to 10 or even higher if you can. Repeat. Focus only on counting and the breath going in and out of your nose. Count quickly or slowly, but either way, focus. The secret to completing any endeavor is the ability to focus. Some people meditate with their eyes open; others close their eyes. Some people sit to meditate; others walk.

Before giving a speech, I suggest meditating for at least one minute. If you want to keep your eyes open, focus on something stationary. If you can close your eyes, focus on any image that pops into your mind. This meditation will help you practice the mental concentration you need to deliver your speech, and it will help you relax.

Reflect for a moment...

1. I suggest meditation as a practice that helps improve focus. What strategies do you employ to focus your mind or feel calm?

2. Try memorizing any four lines of a speech. Before you start, close your eyes and consciously think about how the air comes in and out of your nose. Make sure your mind doesn't wander to your speech, what's in your refrigerator, or your next day off. See if you can do it for five seconds, then 10. Then try to memorize those same four lines of your speech again. How do you feel? Do you think it made a difference?

Chapter 7

Fear

The mango was dark orange and very sweet, almost a little overripe. As I ate it, I stared at the entryway watching customers come in and out of the supermarket. One stopped, stared, smiled, and walked away. I didn't know if she had smiled at me because I was a foreigner or because she had recognized me from my video. Four months ago, my award-winning speech was posted on YouTube and went viral in Taiwan. At times, I enjoyed it when someone noticed me while I was out. Other times, I didn't.

That day, I definitely didn't.

At the time, I had developed a tendency to have borderline panic attacks whenever I was around a group of people other than my coworkers or students. I would breathe quickly as my stomach would turn over, and I would want to crawl into a closet and just stay there... But I couldn't let that happen that day. That day, I had to give a speech sharing my experience as a new YouTube celebrity and talk about how my life had changed. For once, though, I would be able to speak in English. I should have been more relaxed. I had given hundreds of speeches by that point in my life. Still, I felt like I was about to deliver my first speech to thousands of people.

As I ate my overripe mango, I thought about why I had developed this anxiety around groups of people. A few weeks before, my nephew had passed away from glioblastoma, a type of brain cancer. I cried daily, but I couldn't make the

connection between my grief over his death and why I was scared to make a simple presentation in front of a mere 20 people.

My mother had pushed me to give the speech. She said, "You have to get back out there. The longer you're gone, the harder it will be."

She was right. It's the same after you've had a car accident. You have to start driving again as soon as possible, or else the fear will paralyze you, and you'll never want to drive again. But I still didn't want to give a speech.

After she said that, I looked up forums dealing with tragic deaths so that I could read other people's stories of grief. I read heart-wrenching accounts of people who had lost loved ones, both young and old, from accidents, suicides, and illnesses. I read through many, many threads and found a common element that each person shared: They feared the memories. They feared that a memory would come into their heads at the most inopportune time, and they wouldn't have any way to stop the replay — at which point they dreaded the emotional paralysis that would follow, the uncontrollable emotions. That's when I realized what was triggering my fear of crowds: I was fearful that while I was around a bunch of people, a memory of my nephew's suffering would pop into my head mid-sentence, and I would be inconsolable in front of dozens or possibly even hundreds of pitying faces.

Once I knew exactly what my fear was, I realized I could deal with it. Relief poured through me. Despair often comes from not knowing. When you do know, you can deal with the problem.

I collected my things and headed to the meeting. In the car in front of the venue, I faced my fear: "Diana, you know what you are scared of now. Accept it! You might think of him and want to break out in tears. And you know what? That's okay. If you feel you need to cry in front of all those people, do it. You got this, girl! It won't be one of your best speeches, but you are getting yourself back in the game, and that's good enough." Then I took 10 long deep breaths and went inside.

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As soon as I walked in, I was bombarded with requests to record my speech. I hesitated. “Tape it, and send it to me first,” I said to the host. “Then I’ll let you know if I want you to upload it.”

He looked disappointed but was nonetheless understanding.

I reminded myself, “You are in control, Diana. Don’t be nervous. If you want to cry, cry. Share what’s in your heart and then leave right after your sharing.”

As I waited for my turn to speak, my fingertips shook. I was thankful that I only ate some fruit for dinner rather than a big meal. I looked at the clock. “I’m out of here in 30 minutes,” I said to myself.

The person who introduced me was so touching that I burst into tears before I even got onto the stage. No one had ever introduced me so passionately and eloquently before in my life, and that caught me off guard. I was mentally done before I even started my speech.

I looked around the room and could see that everyone was excited to hear what I had to say. I didn’t want to let them down or make them cry. I wanted to share my story.

I went to the front, and the first thing I said was, “Don’t ever let someone introduce you that way or else you’ll look like this before you speak!”

They laughed, and I laughed. Their laughter and smiles gave me the courage to start my speech. I shared the strangeness of becoming an overnight celebrity, the devastation that my nephew’s death was having on me and my family, and how the bitter always comes with the sweet. I made the audience laugh, and I made them sad. I made them think, and I surprised them.

After I finished, I went back to my seat, collected my things, and headed for the door. Before I could make my way out of the building, though, someone caught me to give her condolences. She said that I was brave for not canceling my speech. I replied, “When you’re a speaker, the show must still go on.”

My experience wasn't so different from the experiences of others. Even as a professional speaker, I could barely get myself to deliver an informal talk in English. Fear comes when we expect it, when we least expect it, and sometimes in between our expectations. It's an emotion designed to protect us from harm. Foreign language public speaking doesn't harm us, of course, but the attention we receive puts us in a vulnerable position that makes it easy to lose the self-esteem that took us so long to build.

Researchers have said that the fear of public speaking can be traced back to occurrences we had when we were children: a memory of students laughing at us in class when we said something that didn't make any sense, which then comes back to haunt us; a teacher mocking us for asking a "stupid" question, which then make us scared of being mocked again; or a time when we performed poorly in front of others, then got teased about it for years by our siblings or classmates. These childhood experiences undermine our confidence, sometimes forever.

Having a fear of foreign language public speaking is understandable. It requires speaking in a language that isn't your own, so you may not sound the way you want. You're sharing your thoughts and emotions, often with strangers, knowing that your audience may judge you. No one wants to look like an idiot in front of a bunch of people. We didn't want that as kids, and we sure don't want that now. But guess what? We are adults now, and even if we look like idiots, no one has the time or energy to keep track of our faults because everyone has plenty of their own. If anything, the older you are, the more people will want to hear about your success — because your success gives them hope.

Let's face it: We all experience fear. Whether we're doing something for the first time or the hundredth time, fear comes, and it's real. If someone tells you they've never been nervous about public speaking, don't believe them. Either they are lying to you, or they are lying to themselves.

But fear can be a good thing, too, and we can use it to become great Speaking Seeds. Fear comes through in the form of nervousness, and that nervousness

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brings energy to our minds and bodies before a speech. Imagine, if you delivered a speech when you were uninterested or tired, you and the audience would be bored in no time. A speech delivered with energy, even nervous energy, is better than a tired speech. This is one of the reasons why being nervous is okay.

At different points in our lives, each of us will handle fear differently. For me, when my nephew died, I hated leaving the comfort of my two main physical spaces: my home and my work. Being in any other place around groups of people made me nervous to the point of nearly having panic attacks... until I realized that my core fear was feeling a sudden need to grieve but being in an unsafe place for that to happen. Pinpointing my fear was key to figuring out a way to proceed. I made a deal with myself that if the worst were to happen — if I were to lose it and cry — that this worst-case scenario would still be okay. This leads me to the first step that I suggest you take in order to deal with fear:

Figure out exactly what you are afraid of and why.

We all have different fears, but when it comes to foreign language public speaking, we all share the same two major ones: speaking in a foreign language, and looking like an idiot; and making a speech in a foreign language, and sounding like a complete moron. These are valid fears. If you have other fears, determine exactly what they are. Then, when you know what your fears are, take the next step:

Make a deal with yourself.

Once I realized my fears — in this case, potentially having a grief-stricken breakdown — I let go of all that anxiety and gave myself permission to fall apart. Even though crying is one of the worst things you can do during a speech, I allowed myself to know that, yes, I would cry if I needed to. It had only been two weeks since my nephew had passed. To deliver a speech so soon afterwards, I decided that if I was going to lose it, so be it. Bawling in front of everyone was not a good idea, but what was my alternative? Skip out

on every speech until I felt better? What if I never felt better? What if I never wanted to deliver speeches again because my moment of grief paralyzed me from moving forward?

It's far better to fall down, get back up, and finish the race than it is to fall down and stay down. Foreign language public speaking is tough. You have to have tough knees from all the falls. But remember, those scars are your badges of honor.

Reflect for a moment...

1. What is your greatest fear?

2. How might being a Speaking Seed aggravate this fear?

Chapter 8

Mirrors & Self-Love

When you think of a mirror, what do you think of? A piece of glass that reflects yourself? An object that shows every wrinkle, zit, or hair on your face? Mirrors are commonplace today, but I still believe that they are one of our greatest inventions. Grinding stone creates an object that shows what we look like and — most importantly — who we are.

To learn a language, I've mentioned that you need to have a sense of humor. But to have a sense of humor, you need to love yourself first. You might be saying now, "OK, is this a book about foreign language public speaking, or is it just a cheesy self-help book?" Well, sorry to say, folks, I need to add a little cheese in here. If I didn't, I would be doing you a disservice. You're going to need a little cheese if you're really planning to conquer the challenge of foreign language public speaking.

Love yourself when you sound like a three-year-old. Love yourself for being willing to take on a monumentally challenging task like foreign language public speaking. Love yourself as you go through the process of building your foreign language skills. Love yourself as you develop your confidence as a public speaker. If you don't, then you'll quit early and get frustrated often. It's okay to get frustrated sometimes. Anything challenging and worth pursuing is occasionally frustrating. But you have to be able to look at yourself at the end of the day and say that you accomplished your goal for that day. Keep your eye on the prize, and be happy when you're that much

closer to accomplishing your goals than you were the day before.

So how can you love yourself? Most people say they already do love themselves, but I would like you to put that to the test.

Go to a mirror and say, "I love you," and say your name out loud.



Say your first name, last name, and as many middle names as you've got. Don't skip any part of your name! And when you say that to yourself in the mirror, don't look away. You must look directly into the mirror with your eyes totally focused on yourself.

When you do this, do not think to yourself, "I would love myself if I didn't have this zit on my face, or if I wasn't so fat, or if I had a little more money to..." Don't think about anything but yourself in the mirror, the way you are, with all your beauty and faults. And say your full name.

Don't say that you would love yourself given a certain condition. We love enough people conditionally already! So why not love ourselves unconditionally? If you can do this without any problem, I'm impressed. It

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took me years to do this simple yet so important self-loving task. But once I did, I found that my Mandarin speaking ability skyrocketed, and so did my English public speaking skills. Even if we are focusing on improving skills that people can see and hear, we want to make sure that we are focusing on what's going on inside of ourselves, too.

Now, if you can love yourself, you can use that handy mirror to practice your speeches, too. The first time you recite a speech in front of a mirror is a scary, distracting process. It seems like another person is speaking, especially when you recite a speech in a foreign language. But once you get the hang of it, you'll find that you'll have more confidence sharing that speech in front of your audience because you've already presented it in front of your most important audience member: yourself.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Try the mirror exercise that I suggested in this chapter. Write down how you felt after you completed the task.

2. Did you stop yourself with any “buts” during the exercise? What were they? Write them down so you can review them when you get discouraged and say positive affirmations to yourself in the mirror instead.

Stage 3

Planting



“Don’t prepare. Begin. Our enemy is not lack of preparation. The enemy is resistance, our chattering brain producing excuses. Start before you are ready.”

— Steven Pressfield

Chapter 9: Baby Speaking Seed Steps

Starting Out

Chapter 10: Get Your Seeds in a Row

Chapter 11: Writing Speaking Seed Speeches

Introductions

Body Paragraphs

Conclusions

Chapter 12: Stories vs. Experiences

Chapter 13: Creating & Revising Speeches

Chapter 9

Baby Speaking Seed Steps

One of the reasons I decided to use a seed analogy to explain foreign language public speaking is because most of us understand the process of something growing, whether we grew plants in a science class, watched gardening shows on TV, or have first-hand knowledge of gardening.

With gardening, sometimes we need to start with a simple project. If we begin by planting flowers that we like, that will motivate us to water the soil every day as we increasingly anticipate seeing our seeds sprout into blooming plants. Likewise, when we deliver speeches, we can be excited about using the foreign language we've learned with confidence in front of other people.

The problem with being a beginning gardener is that often we want to grow edible gardens full of pumpkins, corn, and beets right away – instead of starting small with flowers or a pot of lettuce. Trying to plant too much too soon can result in a poor harvest. The same goes for speeches. As a Speaking Seed, you don't want to be overambitious at the start. You want to take things slowly and start off small. For example, when you write your speech, choose a topic you know a lot about, one that includes vocabulary you already know. This is important. If you are using unfamiliar words when you write your script or you choose a deep topic like the philosophy of life it will become difficult to revise, practice, and share your speech with audiences.

Starting Out

There's more to learning a language than doing public speaking, of course. It's also important to spend a significant amount of time listening, reading, and writing in your Speaking Seed language. In this book, I use soil as the metaphor to explain the vital role that language ability plays in creating the foundations for foreign language public speaking. Many of you are probably asking yourselves, "Is my soil healthy enough?" You might even be saying, "I have the crappiest soil ever. I'll never learn how to deliver speeches in this language." But here's the beauty of learning how to make speeches in a foreign language: Giving a speech in another language doesn't require fluency. You'll reap the biggest benefits if you start easy and early on when you're learning a new language.

For the first month, your speeches should be short and only last for around 30 seconds. They can be something like this:

Hello. My name is Diana Watson. I am from the United States. I like to read books, watch movies, and have fun with my Toastmasters friends. I don't like rude people, stinky tofu, or dog poop on the street.

This mini-speech has an introduction: my name and a few details about me. Notice, too, that I started using triads right away. I share three things that I like: "to read books, watch movies, and have fun with my Toastmasters friends". Then, I share three things that I don't like: "rude people, stinky tofu, or dog poop on the street". Triads take advantage of the power of three. They are common in English-language writing and speeches, but not all languages use them as much. You might also notice that I inject some humor with "dog poop on the street". Humor is an important ingredient in speeches, so it's best to get into the habit of adding it into your speeches early on. Humor helps make speeches more entertaining while keeping audiences attentive and interested. (Find more information about humor in Chapter 21).

After you write a speech like this, allot some Seed Time for practice every day. I suggest rehearsing it least 100 times. That number might sound

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outrageous, but you'll probably want to practice that hard if you want to ensure the success of your first Speaking Seed performance. You have to become comfortable with drills and repetition. And really, repeating four sentences like this 100 times won't take you that long. If you say them 20 times a day for just five days, then you'll have done it.

Once you're into your second month of language learning, you should have a speech that is a little longer, say about 40–50 seconds long:

Hi, everyone! My name is Diana. Today I am good, but the weather is rainy. I know we need rain, but I don't like rainy days. On rainy days, it is hard to drive. On rainy days, it is hard to get up. But I love to sleep on rainy days and eat soup. Is it only me? Or do you do that, too?

This speech has a triad as well (you'll notice that I said "on rainy days" three times). In this speech, however, the triad is separated with a twist by saying something positive about rainy days. Also, I try to connect with the audience by saying that even though I hate rainy days, I do like to sleep and eat soup on rainy days. (Who doesn't?) The audience would expect the whole speech to be about how awful rainy days can be, but instead, I surprise them with a cozy, relatable rainy-day experience in the last part of the triad. Finally, I conclude with a question for the audience: "Is it only me? Or do you do that, too?" Ending a speech with a question is a common device that piques the audience's thoughts and connects them with the speaker.

After four to six months of consistent learning, practicing, and doing drills, you should challenge yourself to deliver speeches like this:

Do you love your family? I do. There are four other people in my family: my mother, father, little sister, and grandmother. Today I will talk about my grandmother. Some of you don't live with your grandmother. But many Chinese people do, and I like it. My grandmother cooks good food. She tells great stories. And when my teachers call home and say that I am bad, she never tells my mom or dad. My grandmother is like another parent, but she's cooler. I hope you liked my story about my grandmother.

Instead of ending the speech with a question, this time I present a question to the audience at the very beginning: “Do you love your family?” Then, I list my family members and share who I am going to talk about, namely my grandmother: “There are four other people in my family: my mother, father, little sister, and grandmother. Today I will talk about my grandmother.” Notice that I don’t talk about everyone in my family. That’s because it’s not necessary. As beginning foreign language public speakers, it’s important for us to be patient and learn to take baby digs in the dirt. No tractors just yet!

As with the two previous speeches, this speech is in the present tense. This time, however, we have three compound sentences and two complex sentences. In the first two speeches, we only have simple sentences. Foreign language public speakers will find that their writing will improve a great deal as they write more speeches because this practice requires us to be aware of verb tenses and embrace different styles of sentences. Changing sentence structures is important in public speaking. No one wants to hear the same kind of sentence over and over again. Not only is it repetitive, it’s also not easy on the ear. As you write your speeches, challenge yourself to write a blend of simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences.

Finally, if you want your audience to remember a specific part of your speech, try putting that part at the very beginning. If it’s a cluster of information, put it at the end. Here’s how I do that with my grandmother speech: “There are four other people in my family: my mother, father, little sister, and grandmother.”

To create even more emphasis on the part you want your audience to remember, add a pause: “There are four other people in my family: my mother, father, little sister, and... grandmother.” Placing “grandmother” at the end of the list and pausing beforehand will hint to the audience that the speech will be about the grandmother.

After the audience hears a brief introduction of the members of my family, they are now ready to hear about my grandmother. From the speech, we can see that I know my audience. I assume that most of them have never lived with their grandparents. By sharing this difference, I am able to connect

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with the audience. This is key. Because foreign language public speakers typically lack clear pronunciation and fluency as we are learning a language, it's critical for us to use the content of our speeches to connect with the audience right away.

Let's look at the next section of the speech: "My grandmother cooks good food. She tells great stories. And when my teachers call home and say that I am bad, she never tells my mom or dad." Again, we see the infamous triad. And again, we notice how the third point has a twist: Grandma is cool because she covers for her grandchild. The sentence is written in a simple way that also demonstrates the cute personality of the speaker. Finally, the rhyming of "bad" and "dad" is pleasing to hear.

Before the speech concludes, I share how my grandmother is different from my parents: "My grandmother is like another parent, but she's cooler." This shows a clear understanding of the kind of relationship the speaker has with her grandmother but without all of the details that I'm not yet fluent enough to explain. At the end, I conclude with an easy and simple sentence: "I hope you liked my story about my grandmother."

As you become a better speaker, you can challenge yourself to write more sophisticated speeches. Here's another example:

Hi, my name is Diana, and I am a teacher from Philadelphia, a city in the United States. I am 35 years old. I'm not married, and I don't have any children. I've lived in Taiwan for many years. I've traveled to over 30 countries. The countries I've lived in are: France, Nicaragua, Indonesia, and now Taiwan. Taiwan is my favorite country, though. That's why I have lived here for so long! I have learned four languages: Spanish, French, Bahasa Indonesia, and Mandarin, but I can only speak one language well — English! I enjoy exercising, writing, reading novels, and practicing my Mandarin. I hate rude people, stinky tofu, and scooters that spit out smoke. I hope to be a professional speaker one day and write books.

This short speech has more compound and complex sentences than the previous speech. As you become more comfortable speaking your target

language, you can challenge yourself to speak longer sentences. Saying longer sentences requires higher-level speaking skills that will come with practice. Before you tackle a speech with longer sentence structures, though, get out a colored pencil and divide groups of words with slashes where you want to create pauses. For example, this is how you should read this speech:

Hi, / my name is Diana, / and I am a teacher from Philadelphia, / a city in the United States. / I am 35 years old. / I'm not married, / and I don't / have any children. / I've lived / in Taiwan / for many years. / I've traveled / to over 30 countries. / The countries / I've lived in are: / France, / Nicaragua, / Indonesia, / and now / Taiwan. / Taiwan / is my favorite country, though. / That's why I have lived here for so long! / I have learned four languages: / Spanish, / French, / Bahasa Indonesia, / and Mandarin, / but / I can only speak one language well — / English! / I enjoy exercising, / writing, / reading novels, / and / practicing my Mandarin. / I hate / rude people, / stinky tofu, / and scooters that spit out smoke. / I hope to be / a professional speaker one day / and write books.

Notice where I didn't place a particular slash: "Taiwan is my favorite country, though." Although in written English we place a comma here before "though," it's appropriate to read the sentence without a pause, so I didn't put a slash there. Same for "That's why I've lived here for so long!" With this sentence, it's important to read through completely without a pause so that the audience can feel the effect of the exclamation point. If you break up the sentence with a pause, then it won't be as funny, and the end of the sentence would need a period rather than an exclamation point.

As you practice reading your scripts aloud, you might find that you're unable to take as many breaths as you normally would. In the beginning, this will be difficult. That's how you know you are improving. Still, I don't suggest that Speaking Seeds write long-winded sentences. If after 10 read-throughs, you find that you still can't read the sentences smoothly, then I suggest you break up some of those sentences to give yourself a chance to breathe.

Remember that as you work on becoming a Speaking Seed, you'll have to get used to the idea that you'll probably sound like an incomprehensible toddler

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at first... or at least you will if you're lucky! Get used to that idea, and develop a sense of humor about your poor speaking skills. No one who's learning a new language is going to speak eloquently in the beginning, so you might as well commit to sounding like a toddler and become the most determined preschool-level speaker of all time. You are doing what a lot of people don't have the guts to do: You got started!

Reflect for a moment...

1. What baby Speaking Seed steps can you take to help you get started making speeches?

2. Write a short five-sentence speech introducing yourself in your Speaking Seed language. Then, divide groups of words in your speech with slashes to note short pauses (in English, usually after commas) and longer pauses (in English, usually after periods). Once you've done that, recite your speech at least five times for a few days, making sure to breathe when you pause.

Chapter 10

Get Your Seeds in a Row

When I was in elementary school, a friend of mine got a Russian nesting doll set for a gift. It was a set of seven pieces, painted in beautiful, bright colors. I had seen them on TV, but I had never held one before. She said, “Open it up, Diana.” I opened it slowly, not sure what I would find inside. To my surprise, there was another doll there. It was so much fun opening the first and then seeing the second, and then opening the second then seeing the third. All the dolls looked the same, but each one got smaller and smaller until I got to the tiniest one. I gazed at the collection of seven dolls. They were gorgeous, but the experience of going from big to small made it all the more fun.

That’s what we should try to do when we give a speech. We should start out big and then work our way into the details. Since the audience can’t ask you questions while you’re talking, this way of organizing the speech will make it easier for your listeners to follow what you’re saying. If you go from smaller to bigger ideas, it will be more difficult for your listeners to know where you’re going with the presentation.

So let’s say I want to write a speech about kissing. First, I think to myself, “There’s nothing better than a great kiss and nothing worse than a horrible one. The soft, moist, gentle sensation of a kiss always brings shivers down my spine. A kiss can be more intimate than any other romantic act. It’s also the highlight of many movies and many dates. I wonder who doesn’t love kissing?”

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After daydreaming about my topic, I'll write down a few ideas:

- My last best kiss
- My first kiss
- The people I kiss
- What kissing means to me
- The difference between kissing family members and romantic partners
- Taboos about kissing

The next step is to plan out what I want to plant. I always plan out a speech before writing it, because part of what can make a speech beautiful lies in the care that the speaker takes in crafting the content. Part of this process entails thinking about how you want your audience to feel after listening to your speech. Here's the step-by-step planning process I often use to plan out the script of a speech:

1. Select a topic or the main idea.
2. Determine the general purpose or the intention.
3. Write a specific purpose or thesis statement.
4. Design a simple graphic organizer or mind map with subtopics and details.

As you figure out your topic and the general purpose of your speech, it's important to think about the people in your audience. Will you be delivering an icebreaker speech to an audience who has never met you? Or will it be a thank you speech to an audience who has developed a relationship with you over the years? Do you want to inform, entertain, or persuade your audience? For most work-related speeches, you may want to persuade, but if it's a presentation for a class, then you may want to inform or entertain. Either way, be sure to consider how your audience might relate to your topic.

After you settle on the topic and the general purpose of your speech, move on to the specific purpose. What information or idea do you want your audience to take home with them? What do you want to encourage your audience to do after hearing your speech? Think of something relatively simple and easy to remember, something that fits your topic and general purpose.

Once you have written out a specific purpose, your thoughts will be more organized as to what kind of speech you want to write and what you want your audience to gain from the seed that you spread. The next step is to tie it all together with a thesis statement. Here's an example of a plan for a speech about kissing:

Audience

Taiwan Toastmaster members

Topic

Kissing

General Purpose

To persuade

Specific Purpose

To persuade the audience that they should kiss their loved ones more.

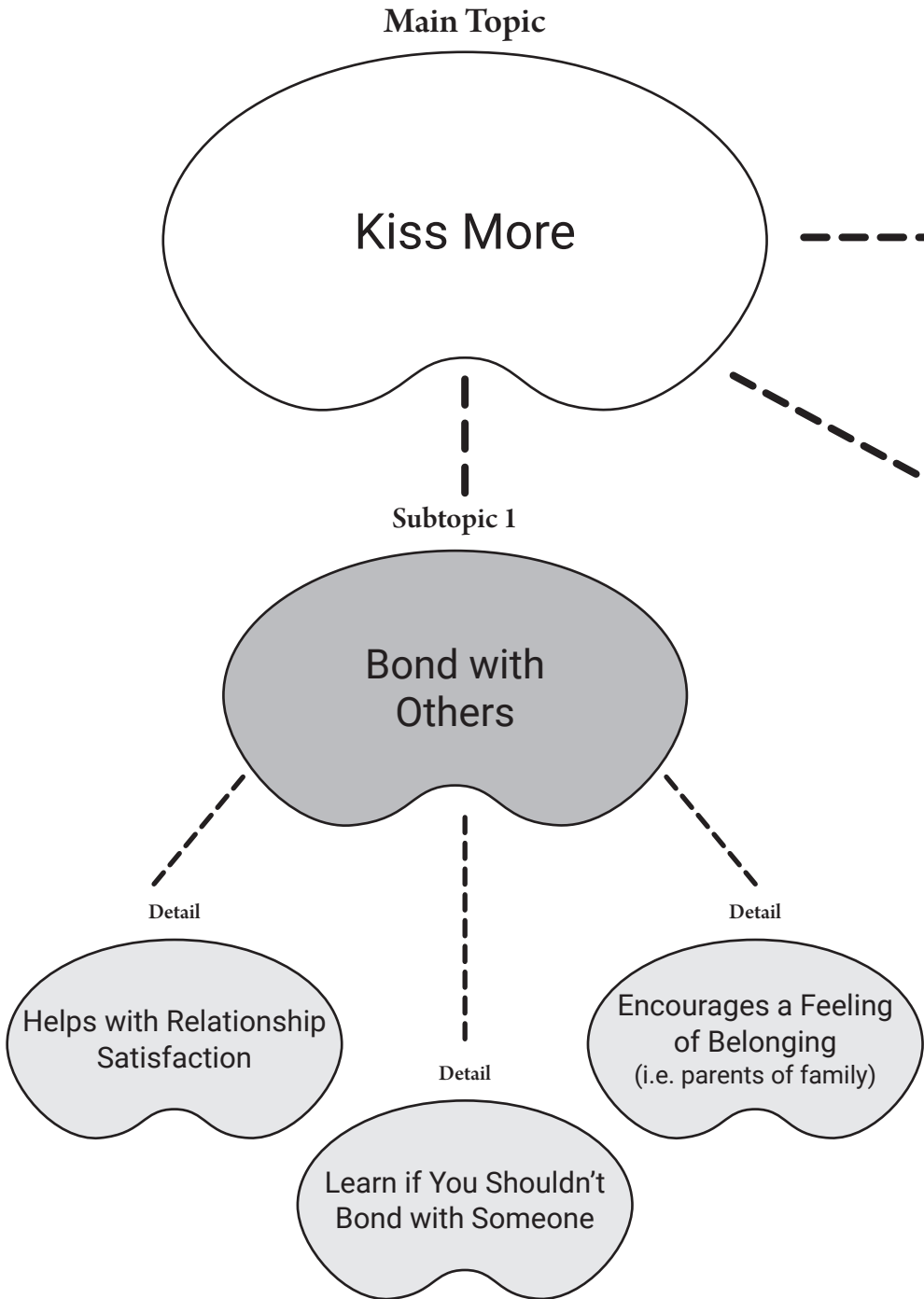
Subtopics

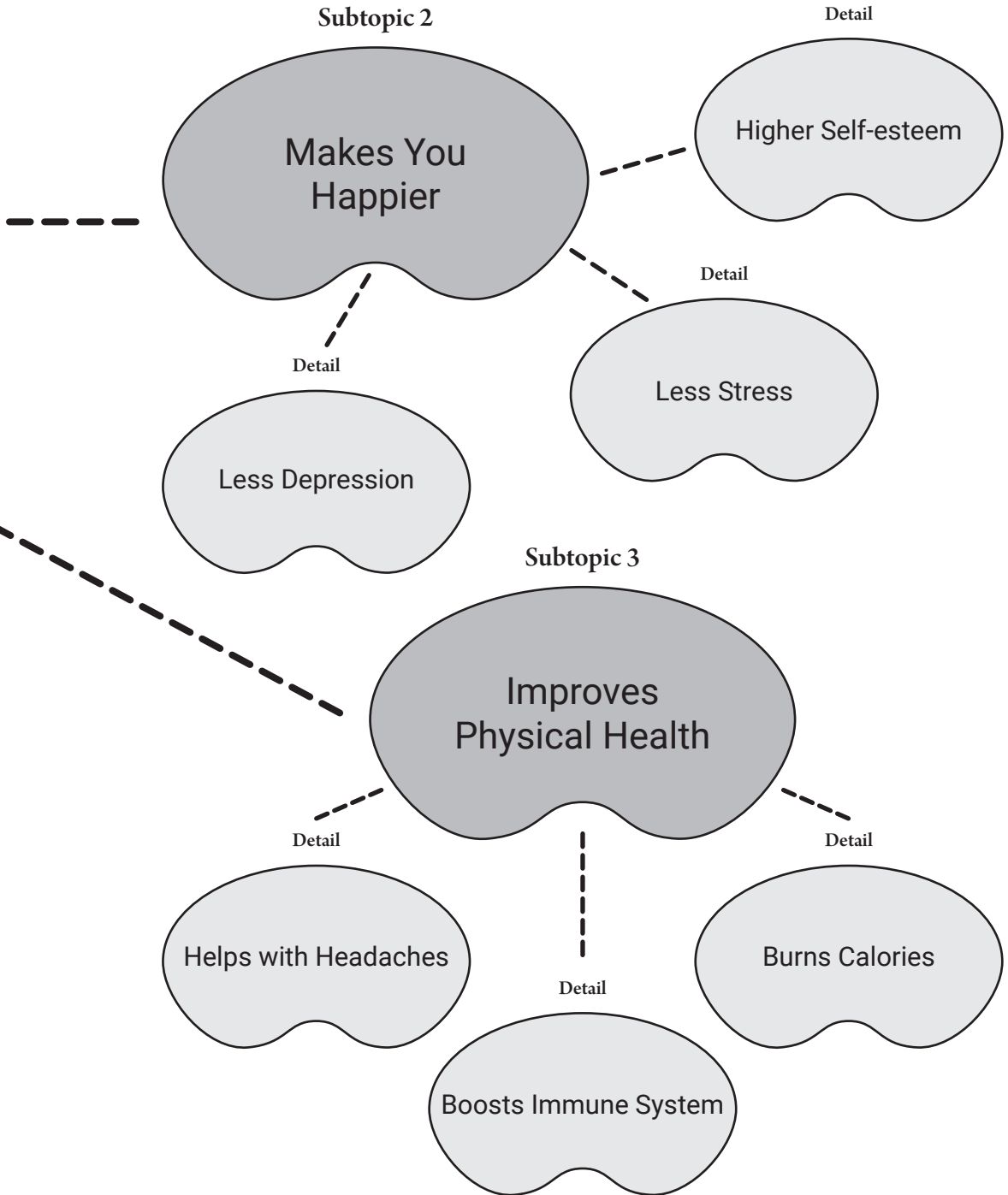
1. Kissing helps you bond with others.
2. Kissing improves your physical health.
3. Kissing makes you happier.

Thesis

Kissing is not only important for romantic relationships but also for our health.

After you have written out a plan, use a graphic organizer to mind map subtopics and additional details that pertain to the specific purpose and thesis of your speech. You may need to play around with this for some time to make sure the content flows in a logical way. You don't want the same details under different subtopics or vice versa. On the following page is an example of a graphic organizer for a speech about how kissing is not only romantic but promotes good health:





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From my experience, many Speaking Seeds spend about 20% of their time planning, 30% writing, and 50% practicing. When a speaker doesn't spend enough time planning their speech, it shows when it's time to deliver. A lack of planning leads to a speech that can seem disjointed, jumping from idea to idea, and that makes it more difficult for the speaker to achieve a fluent delivery.

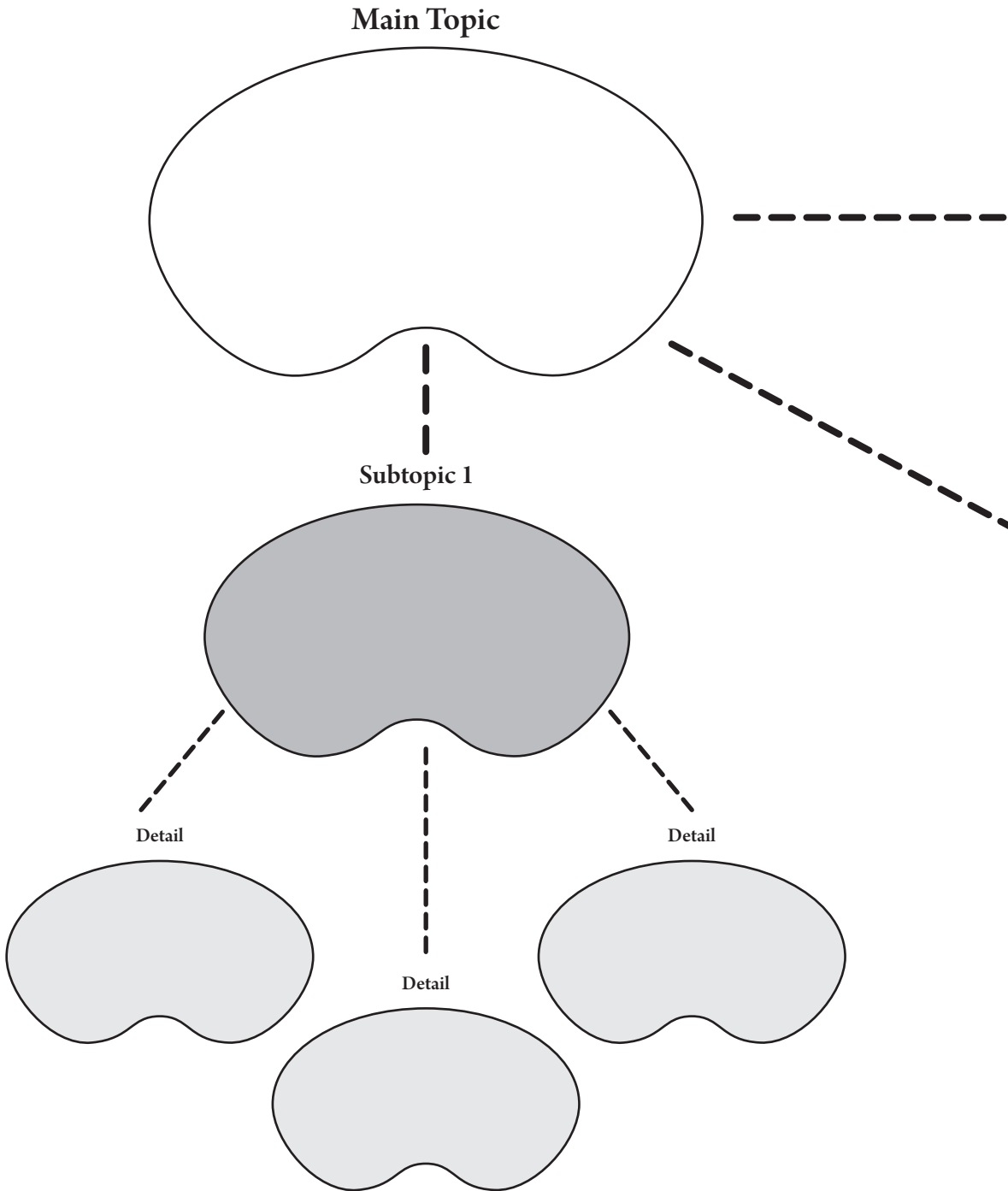
Remember, a good speech isn't a good speech because it's long. A good speech is good because it has good content. As you write your speeches, make sure that your purpose is clear and that you never provide more information than what your audience needs to hear. They will thank you for it.

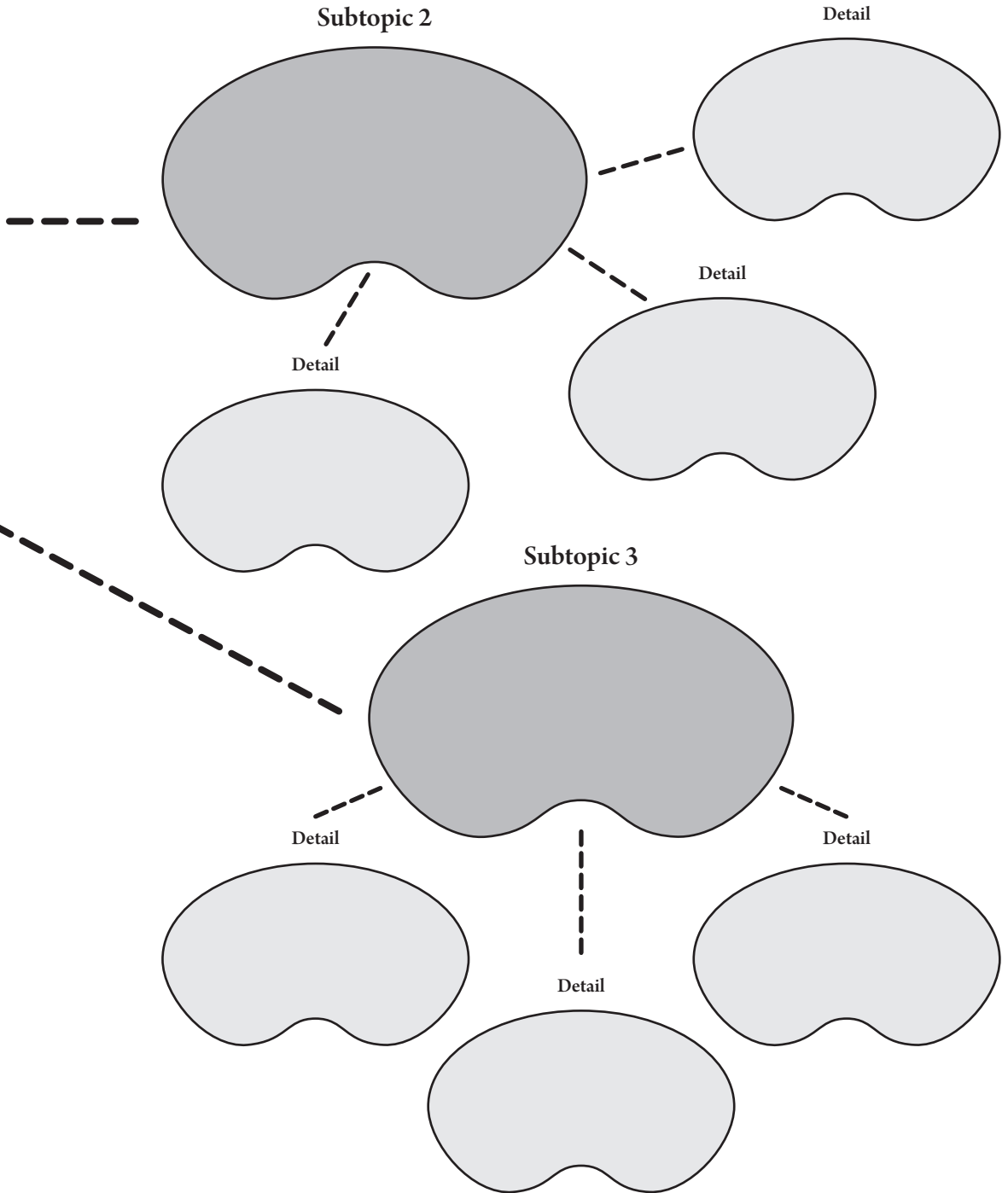
Reflect for a moment...

1. Think of a speech topic and use the Speaking Seed graphic organizer on the following pages to organize the speech.

On the graphic organizer, make sure to write down the following:

1. Audience (who will listen to the speech)
2. General Purpose (inform, entertain or persuade)
3. Specific Purpose (the topic)
4. Subtopics
5. Thesis (the specific purpose in a sentence form)





Chapter 11

Writing Speaking Seed Speeches

Introductions

Researchers have found that an audience will give a speaker 15 seconds to catch their attention. So if the beginning of your speech is dull nonsense, then rest assured that after those 15 seconds, everyone will be reading their horoscopes instead of listening to you. One way we can ruin our Speaking Seed speeches before we begin is by delivering an introduction that's too hard to say. Starting a speech with a word that we can barely pronounce is a sure-fire road to disaster. So before I tell you anything else about introductions – don't forget to make the first sentence easy to say. It doesn't matter how fancy or perfect that word or quote you found is, if you can't say it well, ditch it, and start with something else.

So, how can we get and keep our audience's attention? There are five main ways to begin a speech:

1. With a quote
2. With a question
3. With a story
4. With a fact (using a statistic from a good source, if possible)
5. With a joke (told after a fact or at the end of a story)

First, a powerful opening can begin with an intriguing quote, as relationship therapist and author Esther Perel does:

With a quote

“What’s responsible for love is our imagination, not the other person. The kiss they imagine giving is more powerful than hours of actual lovemaking.” In this speech, I will explain why people have affairs.

Without a quote

When we imagine having an affair, we think about how cool it would be to kiss another person besides our same-old spouse. Today I will talk to you about why people have affairs.

What an impact the quote has, especially compared to what my own opinion about love affairs might be!

Another option is to begin your speech by intriguing your audience with a question:

With a question

What story do you tell yourself about your life? Most of us believe that our lives turned out differently than what we had thought they would when we were children. Today I am here to share that, in the end, many of us are doing exactly what we dreamed of doing but not in the way we thought we would.

Without a question

As children, we painted stories of how we wanted our lives to be when we became adults. When our lives turned out differently than we expected, we became disappointed. Today I will explain that, in the end, you are doing what you always thought you would be doing, just not how you thought you would be doing it.

Starting with a question here intrigues us more because it has us reflect on the stories we tell ourselves about our lives. In the example without a question, the introduction requires no thinking from the listener. It also sounds depressing and creates zero connection between the audience and speaker.

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The third type of introduction we can use is a story:

With a story

Husbands can fly in and fly out. Mine gave me a large diamond ring instead of what I really wanted: divorce papers. Today it rains. When will this war between us ever end? I have no more emotional currency. Society needs to give me a loan.

Without a story

Society does not focus enough on what families need to stay together. We place too much value on material possessions and not enough on what families really need: more free time to spend bonding.

The introduction is much more powerful with a story than without one. Stories serve as a great warm-up and get your audience ready to hear what you have to say.

Next, you can begin a speech with an interesting fact:

With a fact

Judging is one of the worst parts of the human self. According to a survey by *Psychology Today*, over 75% of people admitted to having misjudged someone every month. Let's look at how we can improve ourselves by judging others less and loving ourselves more.

Without a fact

Judging is one of the worst parts of the human self. It's something that we want to stop doing but don't know how. Let's look at how we can improve ourselves by judging others less and loving ourselves more.

Which introduction do you like more? Both are impactful when read aloud, but the fact with a statistic has a much more powerful impact than the second introduction does. And bear in mind, when you look for a statistic to use in a speech, always find one from a reputable source.

Finally, we can begin our speeches with a joke. But use this with caution.

It's great to begin a speech with a joke if something went wrong before your speech got started, such as if the projector stopped working or if a loud noise pierced through the venue. But it's better if you can share a joke towards the end of the introduction. Otherwise, share it later in the speech once you've established some trust and earned your audience's laughter. Jokes are great because they break up initial tension, relaxing the speaker and the audience. Here's an example:

With a joke

At the beach, men are so polite... When women are walking by in their bikinis, they never look at the naked parts of their bodies, only the covered ones! So the next time you go to the beach, ladies, I challenge you to get those bodies into shape so your admirers are looking at your bare parts just as much as the covered ones!

Without a joke

We all love to wear bikinis. The summer season is coming, and what's a more motivating reason to get back into the gym and workout than bikini time? I challenge you to get back into the gym so you can show off your body this summer!

The introduction with the joke helps us to lighten up and stress less about all the work we'll need to do if we want to lose that weight. And the joke gives us a reason to keep listening. You may still feel too lazy to work out, but at least you might be reconsidering it with a smile on your face.

Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs are the flowers of the plant, and the examples in the body paragraphs are the stems. Each of these stems contains the specific ideas that give the rest of our speeches the primary support they need. They provide the ideas that get dispersed and shared with others.

The topic of any speech must be explained and supported. For example, if you want to talk about why smartphones are important to have today, you

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would need two or three details to support your reasoning:

Main Topic

Smartphones are important to have today.

Subtopic 1

We can get up-to-date information about what is going on when not at home (i.e., having a smartphone means we can always connect to the internet).

Details: weather, transportation schedules, social media

Subtopic 2

Smartphones have multiple functions that make life easier.

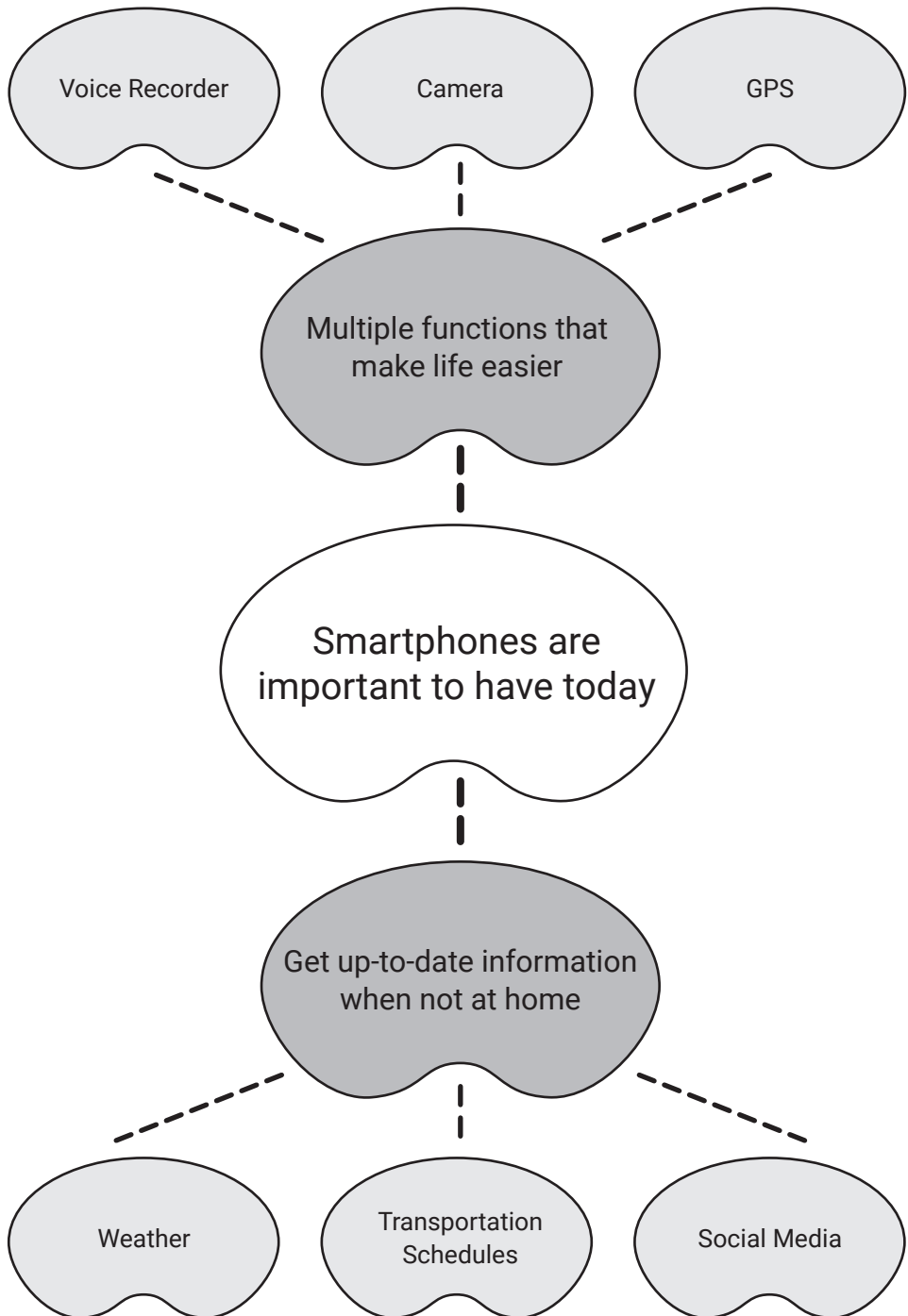
Details: voice recorder, camera, GPS

Now that we have two reasons, we need to explain those reasons again by giving examples:

Smartphones are important because we can get up-to-date information about what's going on when we are not at home. We can retrieve messages from people any time so that no one needs to wait for hours to respond to pressing questions or problems. We can use smartphones to know what time buses arrive and what's on our social media feeds.

Smartphones are important because they have multiple functions that can make our lives easier. If you don't want to forget something that someone says, use the voice recording function on the phone, and record what's being said. If we see something that we like or we see something written down that we want to remember, we can take a picture of it. Finally, we can use the GPS to get around and never need to ask for directions again. All of these reasons are why smartphones make our lives easier.

Now, let's frame this structure in a graphic way:



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The main reason I love graphic organizers is because they let us easily see how our ideas come together. As we look at the organizer, we need to ask ourselves, “Do these ideas connect? Am I repeating the same idea or reason twice? Are my ideas getting smaller and smaller, and more and more detailed?” Using a graphic organizer allows you to map out your talk, making it easy for listeners to follow your speech and easier for you to write it.

Conclusions

I hate movies that end abruptly, like many European ones do. I get all caught up in the characters, though confused about the plot, but still enjoying the ride, and then — BOOM! — the credits appear. Suddenly I’m disgusted. I feel cheated. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a book, movie, TV show, or relationship, I’m disturbed when events don’t end with proper closure.

For the same reason, I feel annoyed when I hear a speech that doesn’t end with a conclusion. Conclusions bring your audience back to a comfortable status quo. And similar to introductions, they go great with a call-to-action question, quote, brief story, or even a joke. The only difference lies in the words you use. One caveat: I don’t recommend sharing a new fact at the end of a speech. If you do this, then the audience may think you still have something to say when you’re actually trying to signal the end. Also similar to introductions, when you conclude your speech, you must repeat your thesis again. If you are sharing two main points about why it’s disgusting to eat mayonnaise, for example, then it’s usually best to share these same two points again in the conclusion.

Finally, conclusions should be short. Introductions tend to be longer because a speaker needs to warm up the audience and explain what the speech will be about. By the end, everyone has already heard the content, so they only need to be reminded of the main points and possibly be given a reason to spread the seeds of the speech to others. Let’s look at an introduction and a conclusion for comparison, to see how the two are similar and how they are different:

Introduction

Mayonnaise is made of eggs, oil, and lemon juice or vinegar. I enjoy all of these ingredients separately, but for some reason, when you put them together, I hate it. Yes, I hate mayonnaise. I hate it because it tastes too eggy. It's too rich, and it's extremely fattening.

Conclusion

To conclude, there's no reason to eat mayonnaise. There are many healthier alternatives we can choose that don't taste so eggy, are milder, and have fewer calories. So the next time you order a burger, try asking for some Greek yogurt or olive oil to put on the bun instead.

How do I start the introduction? With a fact: I share the ingredients in mayonnaise. In the following two sentences, I explain my dislike for mayonnaise. Then, in the last sentence, I shared my thesis and the main three points of my speech: "I hate it because it tastes too eggy. It's too rich, and it's extremely fattening."

For the conclusion, I restate that I hate mayonnaise. I share my opinion and short version of my thesis statement from the introduction. Then, in the last sentence, I end with a call to action: Try asking for some Greek yogurt or olive oil to put on the bun instead.

Give great care to writing your conclusion. As Speaking Seeds, we stress out over how to start our speeches, and we should. But we also need to spend time on finishing them properly. There's no reason to end a speech like a low-budget film that ran out of money before shooting the last scene.

Chapter 12

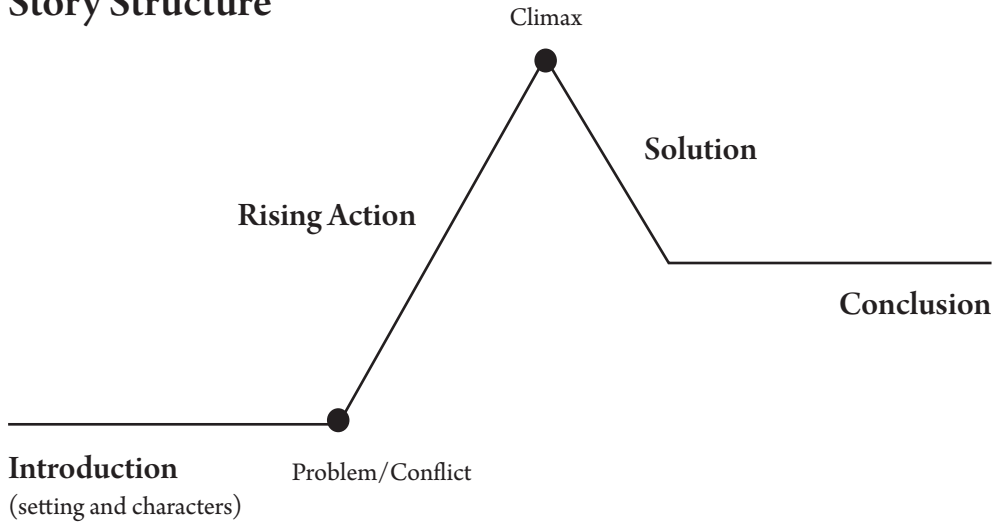
Stories vs. Experiences

All of my grandparents have passed, but their stories have stayed with me. African-Americans have a strong oral tradition that stretches back centuries from slavery. Since they were forbidden to read, slaves carried the stories of their family members and the lessons learned through those stories. Most of the time they were real, but all of them had a hint of fable inside of them to entertain.

Those stories could begin at one o'clock and continue on for hours, pieces added here and there as I helped my grandmother knead dough to make rolls, or as I rode around the gentrified neighborhoods of Philadelphia with my grandfather. And it wasn't only my grandparents. My friends' parents would share their personal stories about their triumphs or lecture us about the mistakes they made in their youth so that we could learn from them and also establish bonding experiences. I tell my clients that half of my education was from school and the other half encompassed the emotional and social intelligence I learned from the lessons in these stories I heard during my childhood.

So when people ask me if it's important to have stories in speeches, I always insist that it is. But then I reply, "Now, let's be clear. Are you talking about a full-length story or an experience?" Once I ask that question, they wonder what the difference is. Most of the time people think they are the same thing. They aren't. Here's an example of a basic story structure:

Story Structure



As you can see, telling a story well is a complicated process. In Toastmasters, there's a whole manual on how to tell stories – they're that important. You have to make sure you provide a setting with characters, have some kind of problem that builds up to a high point (the climax), then share what you learned from that problem, and finish it off. In my family, one story could last anywhere from 15 minutes to over an hour long. I would be on the edge of my seat listening to every detail, even the stories I had already heard multiple times, hoping to hear a new, juicy detail that was previously left out. Telling stories is an art, hard to master even if learned since childhood, and few people tell stories well, even in their native languages.

So imagine how difficult it is for a Speaking Seed to tell a story.

When Speaking Seeds tell stories, the problem is that it's easy for us to forget one or more parts of the story structure that we need for the audience to understand our stories. And since we're so consumed with memorizing sentences or focusing on pronunciation, we often don't have enough space in our brains to make sure we're telling a story right.

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Of course, we could read our stories from notecards, but I don't suggest it. There's something about hearing a story read off paper that makes the story seem fake, even if it is real. So my suggestion would be to practice sharing experiences first until you are ready to start telling stories.

Now that we understand what a story is, what are experiences? Everything we do is an experience. We eat, sleep, and steal our neighbors' flowers (if we don't like them). To share an experience we only need a paragraph. Less than five sentences will do. It's similar to a story, but many parts of a story can be left out. All you need to keep is the main purpose and the details that support it. Take a look at an experience from a speech here:

I hate to go to the mall around Christmas. Everyone drives so crazy! Once I drove to the mall at Christmastime, and I almost got ran over in the parking lot. I swore at the guy, went inside, and when I came back out, I had a flat tire.

Here, I have a setting, problem, and two characters. But there isn't a climax, only an ending. This leaves the listener with many questions if they are looking for a story because so many details are left out. But an audience will understand if they are hearing a four-sentence experience that supports an argument or is a short response to a question.

In the beginning, focus on sharing brief experiences to illustrate your points in your speeches. One paragraph is enough. With time, you'll be able to share longer experiences and eventually five-to-seven-minute or longer stories.

Chapter 13

Creating & Revising Speeches

When it's time to start writing a speech, you may feel lost. I've found that speed thinking, then later making a graphic organizer, works wonders for my clients and students. Speed thinking is when you get a piece of paper and pen, then time yourself for maybe one minute. During that minute, write down all of the ideas that pop into your head about a topic, or just free flow ideas. When you're done, scan through those ideas, and find one that you know you can talk a lot about.

After you've chosen a topic from this speed-thinking activity, write it into a graphic organizer. (See Chapter 10 for an example.) Make sure the writing process is not too difficult. If it is, then the speech topic itself is too difficult. Once you have your outline or graphic organizer done, then write out your speech and have a tutor, coach, or teacher review and revise it. When they revise it, odds are that 80% of the time they will add some transition words, expressions, conjunctions, or grammatical structures that you haven't yet learned. This provides the learning curve you need. Never consider using fancy words when you deliver a speech. That will only lead to you becoming frustrated, your coach feeling exhausted, and your audience growing impatient as they're straining to understand you.

The speech revision process gives Speaking Seeds a greater opportunity to retain the information in the script. How many times have you looked up a new word and then forgotten it 15 minutes later? (And that gets worse as we

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get older.) By having someone revise your script and suggest new words, you are more likely to remember your mistakes. But don't get too ambitious with the new vocabulary. Take your time.

The secret to remembering new words and phrases is simple: Write down your reviewer's suggestions, then repeat them aloud, and ask for clarification. Don't just say, "OK, thank you." You'll forget that way, and your brain won't process any of the information as clearly. You can also ask coaches or teachers to make changes to your speech on paper and return it to you later. Notice that it's "on paper". We tend to remember our mistakes better when we write them by hand rather than type or read them on electronic devices. It's best to rewrite suggestions and corrections, then repeat the process as often as necessary until it becomes natural to you. This applies to words, sentences, and even whole paragraphs.

Be sure to go through each part of your speech piece by piece rather than trying to tackle the entire thing at once. Our brains can only handle so much correction before we get overloaded. If your speech is 500 words long and each paragraph contains eight corrections, look at each sentence carefully, and work on each correction slowly, then review each paragraph. Finally, review the entire thing. That way, when it's time to practice the speech aloud, you'll be more familiar with the meanings of the words and their functions in the sentences. Your Seed Time will not just be practice, it'll be smart practice.

I always follow this process when I write Speaking Seed presentations. If I don't, my Mandarin speeches will be terrible. It's a laborious process (especially in the beginning), but once you get used to it, it becomes an effective learning routine.

Being a Speaking Seed is highly rewarding, but remember: It's important to begin gardening in pots. Don't jump right into an area of land and plant a field of corn.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to share long stories in your native language?

2. Which do you find to be a more satisfying listening experience, a story or an experience? Why?

Stage 4

Sprouting



For a plant to sprout, the temperature, sunlight, water, and moisture of the soil all need to be right. If the weather conditions are too hot or too cold, or if the seeds are too old, then the plant won't grow. Every seed has different needs. Some require a lot of light. Others don't. Farmers learn the magic of balancing all these elements perfectly.

Chapter 14: Oral Production & Speaking

Chapter 15: Practice, Practice, Practice, Nerves, Nerves, Nerves

To Memorize or Not to Memorize?

Seed Time

Chapter 16: Crutches & Supports

Chapter 17: Gestures

Chapter 18: Watering Your Plants

Chapter 19: Dressing Well

Chapter 14

Oral Production & Speaking

Although it was daytime, the night market's streets were crowded with scooters and street vendors selling barbecued foods, bubble tea, and all kinds of cheap clothes. I had to zigzag my way down the street. Where were all of the red lanterns and cool Chinese buildings I had always seen in the movies? I got lost driving my scooter around and finally had to ask someone for directions.

"Do you speak English?" I asked a woman carrying two bags. She pointed a finger, motioning me to wait. "What is she doing?" I wondered as she called someone. To my surprise, she handed me the phone.

A young, nervous voice asked, "Where do you need to go?"

Surprised, I said, "I'm looking for my Mandarin language learning center."

She replied, "Oh, OK," and then struggled to tell me to give the phone back. I stared as my savior talked to the young girl on the phone. "Aha," she said.

She turned to me and spoke, pointed, then spoke some more. I looked around at the vendors, buildings, cars, scooters, and all the people weaving in between. Where the hell was I? Everything looked the same. Seeing my confusion, she came up with another idea. She took out a piece of paper and drew a map of where I needed to go. It was roughly drawn, but she indicated

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locations with great precision by using 7-Eleven symbols as landmarks and writing down a few characters. She handed me the map and pointed again.

Finally I had an idea of where I needed to go. I thanked her profusely. “OK, OK,” she said.

I went four blocks down and looked to the left, as indicated on the map, and saw a parking lot. A 15-story building was on my right. I entered the building and saw no sign that a language program was there. Before I had a chance to ask the security guard where the class was, he pointed up and said in English, “Eight floor.” I thanked him and went up.

When I got off the elevator, I saw the sign of the language center in English and Chinese. I was thrilled. I felt like I had crossed the Amazon forest to get there. My teacher was already waiting for me at the front desk – I guess she was used to her first-time students being late. She guided me to our very small classroom. As we walked down the hallway, I peeked inside the other classes that had already started and heard students chatting and laughing in English and broken Mandarin.

We entered our small classroom, then my teacher sat down, stern and unsmiling. In her hands she held a book. She asked me a simple question: “How long will you live here?”

“Here? Taiwan?” I was thinking. “I don’t know...” “I had never lived anywhere longer than two years. Aloud, I said, “Three to four years.”

She popped out of her chair. “This book isn’t right for you. It’s a pinyin book.”

Pinyin? That’s Chinese written in the Roman alphabet. That’s what I wanted. What was she doing? I stopped her. “I want to learn pinyin! I heard that’s the easiest.”

I didn’t want to learn Chinese any other way – I had heard horror stories from other foreigners about learning characters. She turned around, sat back

down, and faced me seriously. She was obviously thinking carefully about what to say. "Listen, if you would be here one year or so, I say study pinyin. But you would be here more than two years, so learn bopomofo."

I do love challenges, but I knew from my research that learning bopomofo, the Taiwanese Mandarin phonetic system, would take twice as long as learning pinyin. I didn't have the energy to argue with her, though, so I gestured that it was fine.

She left and returned with a different book. I opened it with an anxious sensation as if I were opening a jack-in-the-box. Tiny pictures spread across the page. I gazed at the symbols, intrigued yet scared to death.

"Diana, what the hell are you getting yourself into?" I thought to myself. I was deep into my self-pity party, but my teacher snapped me out of it.

"Let's begin!"

At that point, my job as a student was to repeat after her. My first effort to make any Chinese sound was incorrect.

"No!" she would exclaim. "Again!"

I started to hate Mandarin class.

For six months, I did nothing but practice my pronunciation and tones by repeating after the teacher. I didn't know my numbers from one to 10, nor could I say, "Hi, how are you?" It was embarrassing. After eight months of study, an American friend, who had studied Mandarin years before, called me one day and asked me a very easy question. I tried to respond, but I was too embarrassed to admit that I couldn't understand a word she said.

I went to the language school the next day and whined to my teacher.

She said, "So what? Not important. What's important is that you speak and

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be understood. Too many foreigners speak and no one understands them. That's not going to happen with you or with any of my students."

She opened the book and we proceeded with drills... again. I came home with headaches from having spent so much time repeating the same words over and over. Her heart was in the right place. She focused on what she found was the biggest hurdle for Mandarin learners to cross: mastering tones. But I wished she could have understood that constant rote repetition leaves a student brainless and unmotivated. It would have been better had she understood how to marry listening and speaking to make for a more interesting learning experience.

But now I can look back and appreciate her tough, no-nonsense teaching style. I know that without her strict emphasis on pronunciation from the beginning, I wouldn't have accomplished all that I have today with learning Mandarin. So while all the sub-skills of foreign language speaking are important, I believe that Speaking Seeds should focus on pronunciation and fluency the most — because even if your vocabulary is like a two-year-old child's, you can find substitutes for words to get across what you want to say. If your grammar is a mess, the listener can still guess what you mean based on the vocabulary and body gestures you use. But for many languages, if your pronunciation is a nightmare, then it's too much of a strain on the audience to try to figure out what you're saying.

That's why I recognized the need for a foreign language learning program that emphasized public speaking throughout the learning process. To improve your speaking skills, you also need to practice listening, even if that means listening to your own speeches. If you make speeches to share with an audience, it puts your pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary skills all to the test right away. So when you practice, you have to listen to yourself, evaluate, and self-correct.

Structured training such as oral drills assist with better pronunciation. But I've also found that foreign language learners need real-time, real-life opportunities to speak and share their ideas. Off-the-cuff speaking is a nerve-

racking experience if you are a Speaking Seed, but it helps to improve your fluency and listening skills. Delivering prepared speeches helps hone your grammar, vocabulary, and fluency, not to mention your confidence.

So how do you work on your pronunciation and fluency? If you can, find a tutor who will do drills in addition to practicing conversation with you. I have discovered that while language partners are great for free-flowing conversation, if you want to improve your pronunciation, you need a drill sergeant. Pronunciation practice is the only way for our thick skulls to master these strange sounds.

While language exchange partners are another option, you may need to set some rules on how you'd like to be corrected when you're speaking. Foreign language correction is a tightrope — too much correction leads to fatigue, and too little means the learner might be incomprehensible. Experienced language instructors know how to balance the two, but if you're working with language exchange partners, you probably will need to train them on how to correct you so that you don't get burned out.

My rule for correcting students when I tutor or teach is to point out only one or sometimes two errors that my clients or students tend to make over and over again. I always correct pronunciation of key words recently taught. But if students use new and challenging words incorrectly, I first praise them for taking a risk and trying out new words, then I explain how to use the word correctly.

Another way to practice is to listen to native speakers talking and find words or pieces of words that you can then repeat to yourself. Do that again and again. I had a friend who would repeat every sentence I said after I had said it. It's an intense technique that some people use to practice, but it can drive the person you're talking to nuts. That's why I recommend only repeating words or phrases and preferably quietly to yourself. To my friend's credit, today she speaks beautiful English without ever having spent a cent on any formal English training.

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It can also help to write down words that you struggle to say. I know that sometimes I need a visual representation of a word. So when I hear a word that I can't say right, I'll write it down, look at it carefully, and repeat it a few times. Hearing a word just once and repeating it doesn't work for all of us, especially when it comes to words that are difficult to pronounce.

Finally, my last suggestion to practice pronunciation is to use your smartphone to record the word, then replay it in your spare moments. (More about how Speaking Seeds can use technology can be found in Chapter 29.)

To be a successful Speaking Seed, you will need to work on not only pronunciation but also fluency. Think of this as the nutrients in your soil. Without both, your soil would be useless. Sure, you might wind up with a flower here or a plant there – but not consistently and not for long. So plan on investing considerable Seed Time on your pronunciation, and find opportunities to have unstructured conversations with natives who speak your Speaking Seed language.

Chapter 15

Practice, Practice, Practice, Nerves, Nerves, Nerves

A friend of mine in Toastmasters produced a YouTube video series called *One Minute for Taiwan*. He found foreigners who had lived in Taiwan for many years and could speak some Mandarin to share what they love about living in the country.

I was honored that he asked me to be in the series, and even though I knew that my Mandarin wasn't that good, I still told him, "OK." So he came over to ask me questions. During the entire interview, I kept smiling, leaning over, and grabbing my legs as if they were being continuously bitten by mosquitoes. I was devastated to see how ridiculous I looked — and he still posted that awful video. Now years later, I laugh when I see it, and I'm happy that he asked me to be a part of the video series. My previous poor performance shows me how far I've come as a Speaking Seed.

Almost everyone experiences nervousness before a speech, even experienced public speakers. But there's a difference in how experienced speakers and rookie speakers handle nervousness: Whereas experienced speakers prepare for the inevitable, and they use that energy to make their presentations even better; rookie speakers may not know how to prepare, and they often let the nervous energy control them. In this chapter, I'll explore some strategies you can practice to help deal with nervousness when it comes time to deliver a speech.

To Memorize or Not to Memorize?

That is the question. I've read many books that discourage memorizing speeches because it's believed the speaker would lose his or her natural flow. Many researchers support this idea as well. But we need to remember that although research provides useful information, nothing beats having experience under our belts. When I ask some of my beginner and intermediate students to deliver memorized speeches in English, they think I've gone crazy, yet if I hadn't memorized some of my first speeches – in English or in Chinese – I don't think I would have survived them. My opinion on this matter is divided, but I think if you feel comfortable memorizing a speech, then you should memorize it. If you're not comfortable memorizing it, then don't. But you can't stay in that "no memorization" camp forever if you want to flower as a Speaking Seed. Eventually you will need to graduate to memorizing your speeches, especially in the later stages. (For information on more advanced speeches, see Chapter 26).

The first speech I delivered in graduate school was good but not great. I created a PowerPoint, showed all the research that I had done, shared my conclusions, and that was it. I didn't write out my speech in advance. I just used my PowerPoint slides as my cues and talked and talked until my time was up. Had I written out my speech in advance and tried to memorize some of it, I'm sure my performance would have been much better. But neither my professors nor my classmates memorized any of their presentations. They didn't have any interest in doing that, so all of us would sound like rambling robots spitting out our research.

It's important to remember that part of our responsibility as speakers is to respect the time we have on stage and show that we appreciate the opportunity to share our knowledge with people who are willing to listen. If your audience doesn't understand what you're saying, you'll be wasting their time and yours. I'm all for being true to yourself on stage, of course, but I believe that spontaneity needs to be balanced with getting your point across. The fact is, we are usually able to convey what we want to convey in a more effective way if we memorize our speeches.

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The second time I made a presentation in Mandarin, to my surprise, no one understood it. I memorized that speech because, after my first presentation, the only criticism my evaluator gave was to memorize the next one. At the time, I had noticed how Toastmasters members would berate anyone who used a script at meetings. That perplexed me. What was the big deal with using a script? In the U.S., even presidents use cheat sheets when they deliver their public addresses. Why couldn't someone practicing public speaking do that, too? Then I remembered that I'm living in Taiwan where people have been honing their ability to memorize material ever since they started school. While Western education tends to focus on process and application, Eastern education focuses more on knowing the information, even if only for one test. So I wondered what purpose memorizing served other than to meet the standards of the club.

As a Speaking Seed, your first priority should be to communicate your thoughts and ideas — regardless if that's by means of a piece of paper, a tablet, what you've memorized, or your body gestures. Your goal is to be able to communicate to others in a language different from your own. With the added pressure of being a language learner, the last thing you need is to feel more uncomfortable. What if I had read from a paper for my second speech? Maybe the audience would have understood everything that I had said with ease. Perhaps my pronunciation would have been clearer and my flow less stressful for my listeners. Memorizing my speech caused undue stress and discomfort for me and for my audience.

That said, memorizing does have its advantages. For one, if you memorize dialogues and tongue twisters, they can help ingrain grammatical structures and word order into your brain. Memorizing speeches can also help you with fluency by improving your ability to recall certain sentence patterns. So for all my baby Speaking Seeds out there, I suggest memorizing your script. But this comes with a caveat: You cannot bury your face in your paper. You still have to work on making eye contact with the audience and pausing whenever it's appropriate so that the audience can better follow your speech.

Memorization can be a major task, but if your language foundation is weak — perhaps you can't think of another way to express what you want to say out

of fear or because you don't know any alternative words — memorization is sure to help. If you do choose to memorize your speeches, I suggest that you also practice summarizing them with a friend as casually as you can. That way, if you forget a line, then you still should be able to continue talking.

If you feel comfortable challenging yourself to memorize your script, that's great. Then again, there's a fine line when it comes to the question of whether or not it's best to memorize a speech. If you start off with memorizing when you first prepare a speech, but then wind up wanting to deliver that speech in a different way than you had planned, you might feel like you wasted your time. But at least you already have a blueprint of what you want to say in your head.

Once you know the speech well, draft a rough outline. I recommend that every Speaking Seed at least create an outline before delivering a speech, regardless of how great your foreign language skills may be. Even in your own language, your thoughts will sound more competent and prepared after you have taken this step to organize them clearly.

Using the speech topic about smartphones from Chapter 11, here is what a rough outline of a speech should look like:

I. Thesis: Smartphones are important because they make life easier.

1. Subtopic: get up-to-date information

- a. Detail: weather
- b. Detail: transportation schedules
- c. Detail: social media

2. Subtopic: multiple functions make life easier

- a. Detail: voice recorder
- b. Detail: camera
- c. Detail: GPS

II. Conclusion: Smartphones are great because they help us to get current information, and they have cool functions that are convenient to use.

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Apart from the introduction, the outline should consist of short phrases, not single words or entire sentences, because single words provide too little information and sentences too much. Full sentences encourage memorizing the entire speech and not just the structure, which you don't want to do if you are challenging yourself to leave some room for spontaneity when you speak. If you are planning on memorizing your speech, then you can include entire sentences later on in the writing process. For the outline, phrases are a nice middle ground.

If you feel confident speaking without an outline, then go on stage with just your badass self! Being able to have a natural, uninterrupted rhythm and flow is a phenomenal skill to have as a Speaking Seed. Public speaking, as you know, can yield great results for anyone who's learning a foreign language. Skipping steps when creating a speech may feel like you're getting the speech done faster, but in truth, your foundation may be unsteady and unreliable. So take your time. Follow the steps, and repeat them if necessary until you feel like you have your speech down pat. With some of my baby Speaking Seeds, I encourage them to use scripts to help them with their flow. With some of my intermediate clients, I push them to try to memorize their speeches.

Seed Time

As I introduced in Chapter 1, Seed Time is the practice you need before you deliver your speech. Before my competition in the Toastmasters semifinals in Las Vegas, I was so frightened of not being prepared enough that I practiced 33 times at different venues over a 10-week period. Once I finally got to the competition, I was exhausted and had gotten sick, but I wasn't very nervous, and I didn't make a mistake. Although I didn't place, many attendees told me that no one else looked more poised and in control than I did. That comes from Seed Time, Seed Time, Seed Time. The less Seed Time you put in, the more nervous you'll feel.

Your First Audience Member: Yourself

Your first audience should be yourself, always. Practice delivering your speech while looking at yourself in the mirror. You'll be surprised at how nervous you might be at first. Some of the best actresses in Hollywood have commented that they use mirrors to perfect their craft. (See more on mirrors in Chapter 8.)

Practicing with a Partner

To alleviate some fear, I suggest practicing with a partner. Notice I didn't say "partners". It's best to practice in front of only one other person at a time. This person doesn't even need to speak the target language. You only need someone who will stare at you and make you feel nervous so that you are more prepared when the day to give your speech arrives. Depending on what language you're learning and where you live, you may or may not be able to find a practice partner who speaks the language of your speech. But in comparison to practicing on your own, you'll find that when you work with a partner, you'll progress three times more quickly.

Arriving Early

Make sure you arrive at the venue early so that you have time to practice on the same stage or location where you'll deliver your speech. Before any contest I participate in, I always find a way to practice on the stage ahead of time. I might sneak in to practice as late as midnight, as early as 6 a.m., or 30 minutes before everyone else arrives. It's important to find that pre-speech stage time even if there are people in the room who might watch you. Whisper a few of the lines to yourself. Look at the people who are already there. The key to becoming a successful Speaking Seed is not to pretend that your fear is not there but to deal with it head on.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Do you like to memorize your speeches? At what times do you think memorizing a speech is useful? At what times do you think it isn't?

2. This chapter includes some tips on how to prepare for a speech. Which tips do you plan on using?

3. When you feel nervous, what do you tend to do? The next time you feel nervous, what do you think you can do instead?

Chapter 16

Crutches & Supports

The Podium

Many professional orators believe that all speakers should stay away from podiums. I disagree with this advice. Some of the best speakers ever spoke with excellence and grace on the podium, from Martin Luther King to Michelle Obama, John F. Kennedy, and many ministers as well. They all used the podium correctly and with power. Ancient Greeks and Romans also used podiums to deliver speeches. The higher position from the rest of the audience made the audience respect the speaker, and the speaker felt empowered and protected. The problem with podiums stems from speakers not knowing when or how to use them.

As Speaking Seeds, this feeling of empowerment and protection can help us – we need it. But we still need to know when podium use is appropriate. For example, podiums are handy when you read poems, monodramas, plays, or longer speeches that aren't meant to be memorized but designed to be spoken with more vocal expression.

Another time to use a podium is if you lack control of your speech notes. Having a place to lay down those note cards comes in handy when you're nervous as hell. It's amazing how much easier it is to flip a card on a podium in comparison to shuffling pieces of paper in front of an audience with so many eyes watching your hands.

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Finally, a podium is great if you use it with power. Don't hold onto it for dear life, and don't stare down at your script the whole time. A podium might be a place to rest your hands between gestures, but don't make it an excuse for keeping them there. Every time you use a podium, be sure to use hand gestures, and don't forget to make eye contact with your audience.

So is a podium a crutch? Yes. Is using a crutch the worst thing in the world? No. A crutch is just that: a crutch. We use crutches when we break a leg to help us get to where we need to go until we are comfortable walking on two feet again. The same goes for podiums. If you are a new Speaking Seed, I'd rather you have index cards outlining your speech on the podium so that you can practice some hand gestures and eye contact instead of clutching your notes, grabbing at parts of your body, and losing your place every two seconds.

Props

Props can make or break a wonderful speech. They can provide excellent support material for the speaker, and they can be great eye candy for the audience — if you use creative, eye-catching props, that is.

Props can be used for all kinds of speeches, but like podiums, it's important to know how and when to use them. If you deliver an informative speech on backpacking, for example, you could bring different types of camping supplies from a backpacking trip. This could create more interest in your topic and build a stronger connection with the audience. Humorous speeches can be even funnier when someone pulls out a prop and connects it with a joke. If you present a persuasive speech, an excellent prop can make the difference between someone taking your side or not.

Let's say you want to deliver a how-to speech about making cocktails. It would be helpful to bring in some glasses, liquor, ice, and juice for a real demonstration rather than only talking about it. And after the demo is over, your audience will love you if you share your props with them.

Handmade props are visually stimulating as well. Instead of showing PowerPoint slides, displaying props that you made yourself provide an authentic experience. Plus if your language skills are weak, you might also find that props can be an effective way to help you communicate what you want to say in your speech.

In short, use props if you want to help your audience connect to what you want them to remember. But take care when it comes to what props to use and how you use them. Bad props serve as a poor distraction and do more harm than good, but good props can provide that big boost of confidence you may need to bring your speech from an OK one to a great one.

Reflect for a moment...

1. How do you feel about podiums? When do you think they would help you? At what times do you think they would hinder your speaking progress?

2. Do you think using props will make you more or less confident with speeches? Why or why not?

Chapter 17

Gestures

When I was a little girl, I wanted to be an actress. I would watch cartoons, TV programs, and movies with earnest. I decoded how the actors screamed and how the animal characters collapsed onto the ground. My family thought I was hilarious. But I took my craft seriously. Evenings, when my mom wanted some entertainment, she would call me to her bedroom and ask me to reenact a scene from one of my favorite shows. After I was done, my mom would give me applause. I always felt ready to do another, even if she had had enough.

Today I am still an actor, though now I call it teaching. So all of the acting that I loved to do as a kid turned into my dynamic teaching style. I've been teaching ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) to students from preschool through university for over 20 years. And it doesn't matter whether my students are three-year-olds or 63-year-olds, they all love a good show. This type of instruction can be exhausting, but the better attention and higher rate of comprehension my students and audience receive are worth the effort.

Research by Jana Iverson and Susan Goldin-Meadow has found that children use gestures as they learn a language, as gestures provide a kinesthetic way to help with learning new vocabulary. Goldin-Meadow has also done research with Martha Wagner Alibali on how gestures place less demand on memory. In my personal experience, gestures have helped me calm my

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nerves and keep track of certain points in my speech, and I have received better feedback from my audiences after using more gestures.

While gestures can help any Speaking Seed to be better understood and more dynamic, that's not to say that all gestures will make a speech great or that we should just throw our hands around. We should all take the time to look at our speech scripts and decide at least one or two gestures to emphasize in each paragraph. I know what you're thinking: "It's hard enough to speak this language. How will I ever be able to give a speech and use gestures at the same time?" Just like I suggested that you take baby Speaking Seed steps toward writing a Speaking Seed speech, you should do the same with your gestures. Let's look at some common gestures that are easy to apply in most speeches:

To Count Numbers

Use your fingers to express numbers in your speech. Different cultures have different ways of using fingers to count. Learn the way your audience knows, and they will be impressed with how much you know their culture.



"6" in the U.S.



"6" in Taiwan

To Express Liking or Loving

Place hands over heart gently to express you like something. Make fists and put them to your heart to show you love something.



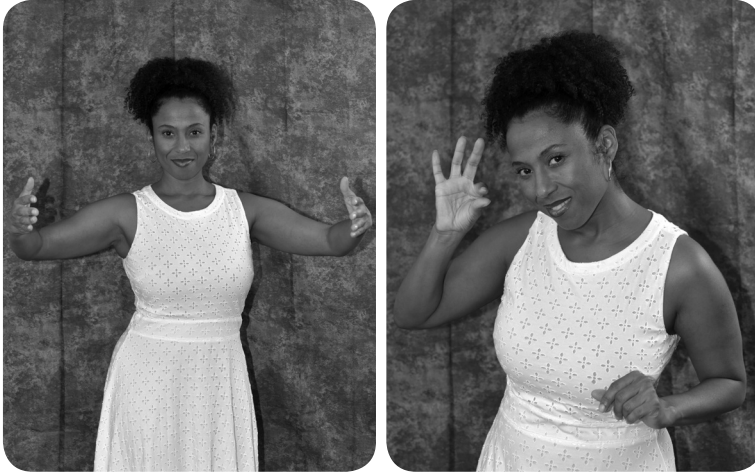
To Show Dislike or Disapproval

Cross your arms into an X to show you don't like something. If you really hate it, then cross your arms and shake your head from side to side for greater emphasis.



To Contrast Big vs. Small

Open your arms wide to make a big gesture. Contrast that by bringing your arms together and using your fingers to imitate a small object.



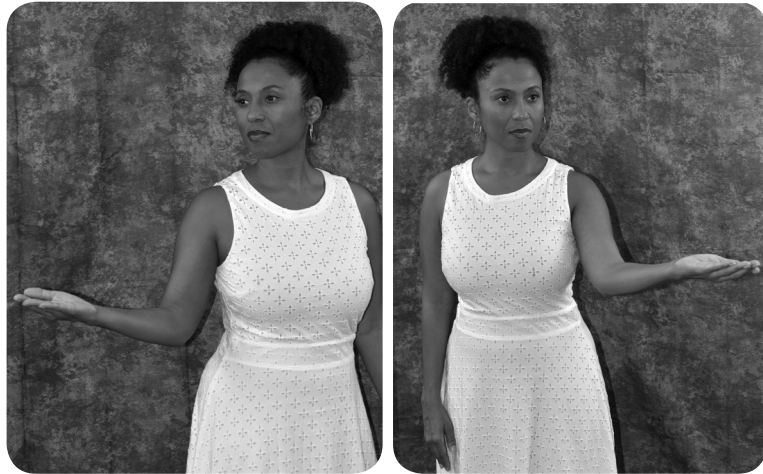
To Make a Point

Open one of your arms out to the side, with your hand relaxed and fingers spaced apart. I don't suggest pointing directly to the audience.



To Compare Opposite or Separate Things

Lift up your hands, one first, then the other, and both slightly cupped. Make sure you use the same hand for the same thing each time you speak about it.



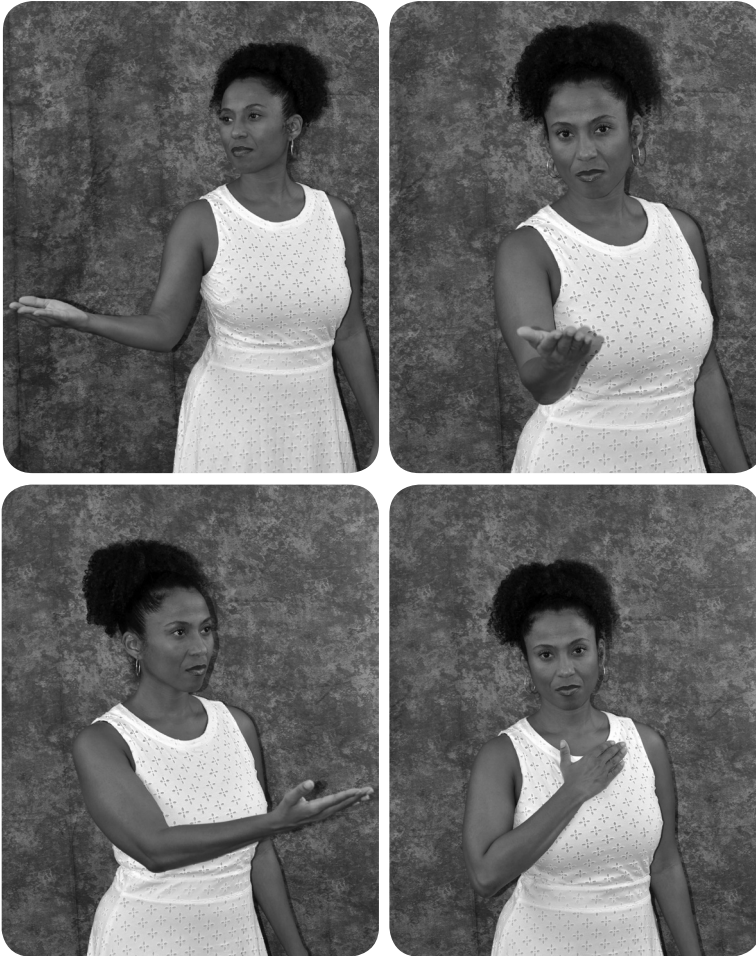
To Express Thinking or Remembering

Point to your head, not to anyone else!



To Express “We” or Being Together

Lift one hand towards your heart. Then, make a circle that connects your audience back to your heart. This is great to use in the conclusion if you want your audience to follow your advice or call to action.



As Speaking Seeds, sometimes we say things incorrectly, so it’s important to try to match what we want to convey with our gestures. Again, this will help with memory and with the audience’s understanding. Keep your hands

on your cards if you have them (with or without a podium), and keep your hands towards the middle of your chest or at your sides if you aren't holding anything. An easy rule for walking is to be on one side of the stage or room for one part of your speech, then move to the other side when you transition. This way, you'll know you aren't walking all over the place for no reason. Remember to start using gestures as soon as you can. Gestures are not like memorizing a speech. Embrace them early, and you'll be surprised how quickly you improve.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Of the eight body gestures I mentioned in this chapter, write down three that you feel comfortable enough to start using right away in your next Speaking Seed speech.

2. What can you do with your hands if you're nervous during a speech?

Chapter 18

Watering Your Plants

After living in a semi-tropical country where more than half of the year the temperature is above 35 degrees Celsius, I have developed a new love for and appreciation of water. When I work out, I'm thrilled to have a sip of water. When my allergies aggravate me, I crave hot water to soothe my congestion. When plants dry out, they need water to grow and thrive.

So we need to keep watering our plants, both figuratively and literally. We can live without food, but we can't live without water. The beverages below are examples of drinks Speaking Seeds should do without before a speech:

Dairy

I remember how I had gotten a bad cold when I was in Peace Corps in Nicaragua. One of the fellow volunteers told me to not consume any dairy products or else I would need to deal with even more mucus. She was right. After I drank milk, I would use tons of tissues. I realized that when I consumed dairy products and drinks with milk, I would have more mucus in my throat. Before I stopped, when I was still a novice Mandarin speaker, each time I spoke to a Taiwanese person, I made many errors from constantly having to swallow.

Coffee

Anything with caffeine is detrimental to our vocal chords. Some public speakers get away with drinking a cup of coffee before hitting the stage, but I would never suggest this to a Speaking Seed. Because we are speaking in languages that are

foreign to us, our mouths are already unrelaxed. Drinks with caffeine not only dry out your vocal cords, the caffeine can cause the blood vessels in your throat to constrict. After you have a caffeinated drink, it's easy to suffer from some dehydration, and your mouth will feel dry. That's the last thing you want before you give a speech.

Cold Drinks

In the beginning, I admit, I didn't believe cold drinks were that terrible. But I never was a big drinker of them, either. So when I moved to Taiwan, I would get irritated when I occasionally brought a cold drink on a scorching hot day to class. My teachers would scold me each and every time because they knew cold drinks would aggravate my throat.

After having lived in Taiwan for over a decade, I am stunned to see so many people in America drinking water with tons of ice in it, even in the wintertime. Ice water is disastrous for your throat, particularly if you plan on speaking.

I only figured this out after a Toastmasters member told me to do an experiment. She told me to give a speech after drinking something cold to see how it felt. Then, try only room-temperature water and make a speech, and see if there's any difference. I conducted the experiment on myself several times. The difference was so dramatic that I switched to the "room-temperature water" team.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey's Water Science School, our bodies are almost 75% water. Even our bones, according to H.H. Mitchell, are about one-third water. To illustrate further, Peter Mattsson's research has found cold water as a cause for migraines, and Kiumars Saketkhoo has found that there might be a correlation between cold water and how much mucus we collect in our throats. And in Chinese culture, it's been a long-held belief that cold water was at the root of many imbalances of qi, or energy, in our bodies.

Now, I'm not saying that you need to stop drinking anything that tastes good. I'm sure some of you can't live without your morning coffee or evening beer. I do understand. But consider this: Since you're speaking in a language that is

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foreign to you, your mouth is already unrelaxed. So it's better to help yourself in any way you can.

If you drink the wrong beverages before a speech, it could turn a promising presentation into an uncomfortable one. Warm water will help lubricate your throat and make it easier to have smoother intonation. To recap: no sugar, no milk, no caffeine, and no cold drinks before a Speaking Seed speech. Stick to warm or room-temperature water, and wait until after your speech is over to celebrate with that cosmo or macchiato.

Reflect for a moment...

1. In this chapter, I mention that water is the elixir for our throats. Do you drink water often? How many glasses do you drink per day?

2. Do an experiment. Just before you deliver a speech, drink something cold, sugary, or with a lot of caffeine. Pay close attention to how you speak and how you feel. Then refrain from any cold, sugary, or caffeinated drinks for a few hours before your next presentation, and note how you feel. Do you think there was a difference between the two? Why or why not?

Chapter 19

Dressing Well

When I was a little girl, I had a love-hate relationship with Easter. Let's face it — what seven-year-old understands the concept of a man they have never met dying horribly on a cross? I hated sitting in an especially long church service, eating those tiny pieces of white bread, drinking the three drops of grape juice, and watching everyone else do the same thing for 30 minutes.

Sunday school teachers gave us all cheap candy and tacky spring-colored eggs. Okay, I did enjoy getting those once-a-year treats. But do you know what I loved more? The chance to dance around in my brand-new dress, hat, gloves, and super shiny white patent leather shoes. I felt like a princess for one day out of the year — the day I could wear the prettiest clothes and model them for anyone who so much as glanced in my direction. To me, my Easter dress was like a wedding dress. My mother let me wear it from sunrise to sunset — and it was a fight to get me to take it off before I went to bed that night. You know that song, “I Got You (I Feel Good)” by James Brown? That was me all day on Easter.

Nowadays, I teach my students the lyrics to “I Feel Good” because it's easy to pick up, and it's a fun way to learn more about their personalities. Lots of things can make us feel good — a fun date, a favorite dish, a good book — but I'd argue that nothing makes us feel better than how we dress before we go out into the world. If you care about how you look and take pride in your appearance, then the confidence and love you have for yourself will attract

others to you. Dressing well before giving a Speaking Seed speech helps us to feel good even before we present.

This idea about dressing well to feel good works for all kinds of presentations, not just Speaking Seed speeches. For a number of years, I've judged an English speech contest where the best and brightest students from high schools across central Taiwan area come to deliver their speeches. As a VIP judge, and the only foreigner on the panel, I'm always asked to share my observations and suggestions. The first piece of advice I always give them is "Dress like you respect your audience, and dress like you respect yourself." It's simple advice but rarely appreciated. (An exception, of course, would be if a person dressed in an outfit or costume that fit their presentation.) Far too often I see speaking contestants who deliver amazing speeches but dress poorly. And I always deduct points for that as a judge — not just a few, but major points.

This is a generalization, but I find that fewer and fewer people are making the effort to dress well. It's a shame because it often conveys an "I don't care" attitude. As Speaking Seeds, we need to acknowledge that people often judge us more harshly because of our non-native language abilities. So if you dress in a T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, you're more at risk of sending the message that you don't respect your audience and don't respect the opportunity to give a speech. You're saying that you can wear the same clothes you wear all the time, that this day and this stage are nothing special.

I remember once presenting a training session at a Toastmasters club about how to deliver effective evaluations. My clothes were ridiculously baggy. My face lacked any color, and my hair looked like I was Medusa's sister. I figured, hey, I knew everyone, and besides, it was just a club meeting. A year later, I happened to find a video on YouTube of me giving that training and looking horrible. I was flabbergasted. I was pissed at the audience member who hadn't thought to ask first before recording me and putting the video online. But mostly I was pissed at myself for not being smart enough to know that there's always a chance someone will take pictures or record a training session. I should have made sure I looked good before I faced an audience.

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Looking back, I can accept that, yes, I was very tired from my work and study load... But would it have killed me to put on some lipstick? I could have at least taken 10 minutes to put on something nice that fit properly. Now that bloody video will be out there forever! My content was excellent, but I don't want to share that video with anyone because of how it makes me look.

Now I always wear a dress or nice slacks and a blouse for my presentations. I always do my hair and wear makeup no matter what. Makeup is crucial — especially these days since everyone takes pictures or video and you never know where your image will end up. Men should always wear a formal shirt and have a good haircut. You can get away with wearing jeans if they are ironed and neat, but if they aren't, then stick to wearing slacks. Again, your attire does depend on the venue and the speech topic. If you give a speech at a hip-hop convention, by all means, wear a sports jersey. If you are going to a Star Trek convention, sure, dress like Captain Kirk. Still, your hair needs to be neat, and your clothes can't be wrinkled or dirty.

Dressing our best makes us feel special, important, and prepared to stand before an audience. That said, sometimes we find reasons for not dressing well. Perhaps it's because you don't expect to see anyone you know, or maybe you are in a bad mood. But regardless of the reason, the way you dress will suggest to others how you feel inside, and it's easy to wind up projecting something negative if that's how you feel when you speak.

With that in mind, every time you deliver a presentation, whether it's to two people or 200, make sure you put some effort into what you are wearing. But just as important, remember to wear shoes, clothes, and accessories that are comfortable. It is very disturbing to deliver a presentation wearing underwear that you want to keep pulling at, a bra that scrapes your sides, or shoes that pinch your feet. Leave the princess attire at home. Dress well but comfortably. And beware of wearing flashy or revealing clothing. You want to make sure people are focusing on the ideas coming out of your mouth, not dreaming about what lies underneath your clothes. We are Speaking Seeds, not fashion models after all.

Reflect for a moment...

1. What did you wear the last time you gave a speech? Looking back, are you happy with what you wore? Why or why not?

2. Do you agree that dressing well for a speech is important? Why or why not?

Stage 5

Growth



“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

— Anais Nin

Chapter 20: Short Responses

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Chapter 20

Short Responses

Thirty seconds can feel like an hour when you're a Speaking Seed. I'll never forget the first time I had to answer a question during a Table Topics session (a round of impromptu question and answering) at a Mandarin Toastmasters club. The session master, a playful, middle-aged woman with a big grin, posed a question to the audience.

Without really scanning the audience for a victim, her eyes met mine, and she said, "Tang Hua-xuan", my name in Mandarin. She looked excited to call on me, but my heart sank. I had told the club that I wanted to speak and participate like all the other members. That's what I was paying for. But at the same time, I didn't want to participate because I was scared. I approached the front slowly trying to remember her question. Embarrassed, I asked her, "Can you repeat the question, please?" She did. But I still didn't understand. Then I asked her to repeat it again slowly. With patience, she did. Finally, I was able to restate her question, and she emphatically declared, "Yes!" But by that point, I was so nervous and spent that I didn't feel like answering the dag-on question. Still, I took the microphone, tried to smile, and answered the best I could.

Thank goodness my response was correct, but I said the same thing *three times*. After I couldn't think of anything else to say, I assumed the one-minute minimum response time had passed. It hadn't. The timer told me I still had to stand there. So I looked around at everyone and started rambling about

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my day. The audience looked confused, but they still clapped after I hit that 60-second mark. I was thrilled and rushed back to my seat.

My short response techniques are better today than they were in the beginning, but every day is different. One on one, I tend to do better. But if someone makes me nervous because they have that I-don't-want-to-be-bothered-with-a-stupid-foreigner-who-can't-speak-my-language-today look on their face, I often freeze up and stutter. Other times, though, even in live interviews, I amaze myself by how fluently I manage to respond in Mandarin. So regardless of my state of mind or the mood I'm in, I grab any chance I can to have conversations with people who will spur short, impromptu questions at me. Even in your native language, the ability to think on your feet and respond to questions in an organized manner will make you sound articulate and intelligent. As a Speaking Seed, you will get even more respect.

Although short responses are short, they should still be organized. First, make sure you understand the question. If you are in an informal situation, try to listen for three key words in the question. Depending on the language you are learning, usually they are the subject, verb, and adjective or adverb. If you hear one or two words you don't understand, take a stab at answering the question anyway. Even if your response is slightly off, most people will nod their heads if you give a good enough response.

If you are in a formal situation, like on stage, in an interview, or some other place where many people are watching you and putting you on the spot, repeat the question, rephrase it, and check if you understand the meaning of the question. If you still don't understand, chances are that the person you're talking to will explain it again in a more watered-down, preschool version for you. Embarrassing, yes. The end of the world, no. More humiliating would be answering the question incorrectly and seeing those eyes of wonder looking back at you.

You can think of answering a short question like giving a mini speech. First, repeat the question again as a statement. This will be the introduction. Give your "yes", "no", or other response. Then, provide one or two reasons why, and

end with a concluding sentence. Here's an example question:

"What was the last movie you watched? Why or why didn't you like it?"

This kind of question is tricky. It trips up my students all the time for two reasons: because it's a two-part question and the second part is a "why" question, which requires higher-order thinking skills to answer. This means we need to do more mental processing to create an appropriate response.

Before jumping to answer a question, think about what you want to say. Speak slowly. The slower you speak, the clearer your pronunciation will be. Remember, this is one of the most important Speaking Seed characteristics to have. Instead of one reason to explain your "why", provide two or three. To end your answer, talk about something related to the topic, something you feel comfortable talking about. Here's an example of a short response:

The last movie I watched was Ghost. I like romantic movies. I laughed, and I cried. I liked it so much that I want to see it again. But one movie I didn't like was Titanic (1997). Did you like Titanic? Well, I didn't. I know it's a romantic movie, too, but I thought it was stupid. A poor boy with a rich girl on a boat? It didn't feel real. Anyway, I did like Ghost. Thank you.

The founder of Toastmasters, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, realized that the importance of Table Topics was practicing this on-the-fly skill of short responses. It's vital for Speaking Seeds because we are bombarded with unexpected questions all of the time, and we are often judged by our answers. Being able to formulate a well-constructed response is even harder in a foreign language, but it's not impossible. Remember, short responses are your friend, the first step to poke your head out of the soil. It's difficult to break through, but you can do it.

Reflect for a moment...

Prepare answers to these questions in your Speaking Seed language:

1. What brings you the most joy?

2. What is your favorite food and why?

3. When did you start learning your Speaking Seed language? Why did you start learning it?

Chapter 21

The Funny Farmer

As a kid, I was mature and serious about most things, like my father, while my mother was the opposite. She was silly. She enjoyed laughing and telling cheesy jokes. Although we lived in the suburbs with a nice home and garden, 1980s America could still be hard for an African-American mother with three strong-willed kids. But she dealt with all the pressure of keeping up with our teachers, friends, and heartbreaks by using humor. I remember once while she was watching Oprah, she looked over at me and told a joke. After she finished, I stared at her expressionlessly, bored, and a little annoyed. Eventually, I said, "I don't get it, Mom." Exasperated, she replied, "I know you don't, Diana. You really don't understand jokes, do you? You need to learn how to have a sense of humor."

Looking back, my mom saw something I didn't know about myself at the time: I had no sense of humor. I found it hard not to take everything so seriously. And to be honest, I didn't have the aptitude to understand her jokes, either. I didn't even understand the punchlines of most jokes until I joined Toastmasters. I slowly began understanding jokes when I lived overseas and heard them spoken in foreign languages. *Go figure.*

During every meeting, we would have a joke session, and people would often ask me to tell jokes, but I hated preparing them. I always had to read from my paper, so the joke never sounded natural. My pauses were always in the wrong place, or they were too short or too long. Sometimes I would

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give away the joke by explaining it before I gave the audience enough time to figure it out for themselves. They were often confused, and I was often embarrassed for having tried.

My mother was right. Learning how to be funny is not just an important public speaking skill, it's an important life skill. I'm not saying that you have to be like those people who tell joke after joke after joke, or the kind of person who makes it hard to tell if you're joking or being serious. What I'm talking about is learning how to have a sense of humor — because learning how to laugh at yourself is important. Life is serious enough as it is. Why not take advantage of one of most therapeutic remedies out there?

For an assignment, I once asked my intermediate-level students to find a one- or two-liner joke to share with the class for homework. The next class, no one wanted to be the first one to share a joke, so I called on a model student in class to tell her joke after I told a joke of my own. After that, more students raised their hands to participate. We had so much fun. I couldn't remember the last time every single student in my class, whether they were usually moody or sweet, mature or silly, all laughed so hard. While one student practiced speaking, the others practiced listening, and I explained words they didn't know. Jokes are now my favorite warm-up activity because they put everyone in a good mood at the beginning of class.

So let's take a look at how to create a joke:

A Basic Joke Structure

1. Setup (supplying the background information for the joke)
2. Pause (creating tension and giving the joke its timing)
3. Punchline (adding a twist that makes the joke funny)
4. Facial Expression (the key to delivering the irony of the joke)

This basic joke structure is like any other, except I believe that the facial expression needs to be emphasized. Far too often I see people tell jokes

and laugh at them before the audience has a chance to get the punchline. If you always laugh at your own jokes before the audience has a chance to, however, then it can leave them feeling cheated, and the joke will often be less funny.

Try writing your own jokes until you get the hang of this three-part structure: the setup, pause, and punchline. You can start by telling one- or two-liners like this:

Setup

Why did the turkey cross the road?

Pause

...

Punchline

To prove that he wasn't a chicken.

Short, funny, and cute, this type of straightforward joke can challenge the audience's listening comprehension skills, build your confidence as a speaker, and it's fun. In this book, I'm not going to share any of the naughtier jokes, but you should feel free to use any joke you want so long as you're not worried about offending your audience. Then, once you feel comfortable telling one- or two-liner jokes, graduate onto longer ones and different kinds of jokes. Once your jokes are three or four sentences long, all it takes to make them work is rehearsing the lines several times.

Let's look at an example from my "Am I Strange?" speech:

Setup

In Taiwan, the weather in the summer is very hot, so I don't wear a lot of clothes.

Here is bare. There is bare. And here (gesturing to the the center of my sleeveless dress with cleavage), only a little.

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The vegetable lady at the market asked me, “You’re not scared of getting tanned?”

Pause

...

Punchline

Why would I be afraid? I’m already a black person!

Before you write your joke, work out the opposite of what you want your audience to think. It’s common for Americans to want tans. But in Taiwanese culture, many people fear the sunshine and getting darker skin. So this joke plays with the standards of what these cultures dictate as beautiful.

Remember that everyone has their own style of jokes, so you should devote some Seed Time to writing some. Don’t be hard on your yourself if you get stuck in the beginning. Like anything else, it gets easier. And if all else fails, ask for help. Sometimes we have to learn from others before we can do things ourselves.

When it comes to public speaking, the golden rule for success is simple: Be funny. You don’t have to go overboard with your humor, but you should get comfortable telling jokes, telling funny stories, and even laughing at yourself when you say something incorrectly. When you inject humor into a speech, you can release the audience’s anticipatory tension, which starts building the moment you begin your speech. Once the audience laughs, they can release that tension. They’ll be more relaxed and so will you. Knowing how to tell jokes in front of an audience is the first, crucial step to feeling comfortable being a Speaking Seed. Don’t skip the cultivation of this Speaking Seed skill.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Go online and find three one- or two-liner jokes in your Speaking Seed language. Write them down, and practice telling them to other people.

2. Identify which part of the joke structure you struggle with the most, and write it down. Then, mark the places for the setup, pause, and punchline in each of the jokes you found.

Chapter 22

Making Telephone Calls

Every time I visit my parents' home in the U.S., I go downstairs to my father's man cave and take a good look around to see if anything has changed since my last visit. Nothing ever does. Faux wood wall panels still grace the sides of my father's basement where large glass lamps and coffee tables from the seventies still know their place. I look around for the exercise mat and weights that I use to work out during my stay. And then, I catch a glimpse of my father's antique black rotary phone.

Each time it rings, it has that special high-tilting sound at the end, which takes me back to when cordless phones first came out. When I was in elementary school, I was so happy that I didn't have to be stuck in one place anymore when I was talking on the phone. I could get away from my mom and talk to all the boys I wanted to. And the ring of that cordless phone sounded so much more high-tech and trendy than the ring of that boring old rotary phone. Fast-forward to now, and I have a fondness for all those sturdy, vintage, and still useful things.

Hearing a phone ringing is a strange phenomenon for me these days. No one calls me anymore. In fact, I expect to get a text message before someone calls and sometimes I find calling to be rude if it intrudes on my time. When I'm back visiting my parents, it takes a day for me to get used to the neighbors, my family, and all of those telemarketers calling all day. Then, I actually appreciate the freedom and surprise that picking up the phone

and talking to someone brings, even when you have caller ID. When that happens, I forget what I am working on and enjoy the moment I have to chat about life with the caller.

In the 1980s and 90s, telemarketing was the most common way to make money from phone calls. When I was 16, I remember going in for an interview at a telemarketing company, being asked to read something off a piece of paper, and the next day sitting behind a desk at 5 p.m. Telemarketing work was well-paid but soul-crushing work. If you couldn't get people to donate money to firefighters or buy accidental death insurance, you went home feeling defeated, like a loser.

I was one of the youngest employees there. I sat in a cubicle wearing a headset in front of a computer and reading scripts off the screen. Many of the workers were people in their late 20s, but we had gray-haired grandfathers, too. Some did telemarketing as their primary work, but most used telemarketing as a side hustle. Lots of my coworkers looked like they were from other countries and had not yet adjusted to American cultural norms. I had never been around so many foreigners in my life. It was like working at a telemarketing version of the United Nations. But one thing that I noticed right away – they were the ones who worked the hardest. Each time they read their scripts, it felt like listening to a TV talk show host. But when someone asked a question that wasn't on their scripts, I could see them freeze up, thinking carefully about how to respond. They also had to keep their accents in check – because as much as Americans hated telemarketers, they really hated telemarketers who were immigrants. For me, tired in the evenings after a long day of high school, I didn't have the energy to call people, most of whom would politely say, "I'm not interested, honey" after 20 seconds then hang up. That hurt my ego and made me more tired. So between calls, I would just watch my coworkers, amazed by how determined they were to make each sale.

Sometimes we have to look back to appreciate what we have in front of us. Eventually, 25 years later, I could understand why some of my coworkers might have chosen to be telemarketers. It was an opportunity to constantly

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practice speaking the language they were trying to master. A phone-based job meant constantly cold-calling people, tackling unexpected questions, and delivering clearly articulated responses. As convenient as technology is today, especially for learning languages, I've found that one of the best ways to improve your language learning on the cheap is through the good old-fashioned practice of making phone calls.

Not everybody wants to be a telemarketer, of course, but all Speaking Seeds can benefit greatly by making the telephone their favorite communication tool. I mentioned previously that my definition of public speaking covers any time a person is put on the spot and speaking in front of an audience, whether that's an audience of one or 100. A person who makes telephone calls in another language feels the same anxiety that public speakers do. Whether the audience can see you or not doesn't matter. If our audience judges what we're saying and how we're speaking, then we're doing public speaking. Frankly, if you can't incorporate body language and gestures into your speaking, you'll feel even more pressure to be accurate — because if you don't use proper intonation and pronunciation, the listener will have no idea what you're talking about.

Furthermore, phone calls typically entail a combination of prepared speech, impromptu speech, and roleplay. We can't look up the words we need at the last minute. We can only practice key vocabulary that we think we'll need before making the call. We might have no idea what the person on the other end of the line will ask, how fast they will talk, or if they will have an accent we're not accustomed to hearing. Unless I'm too tired to properly focus or fearful of receiving incorrect information on an important matter, I prefer calling people rather than messaging them. Not even the highest level classroom experience can give you the listening and speaking opportunities that a phone call can.

I remember when I made my first phone call in Mandarin. I got my notebook, wrote down all the words that I thought I would need to know, and practiced going over them a few times. Then, I quickly made the call before I could chicken out. Out of all the calls I've made since, only a handful of times has

a caller been impatient or made me feel stupid. Most of the time, I hang up from phone calls feeling quite proud of myself.

So how can you start talking on the phone? I suggest you call someone to talk about something easy. In Taiwan, many businesses still hire customer service representatives to answer phones. (You can find that in America, too, although it's a lot more difficult. Trying to get a person on the phone in America can be like navigating through a corn maze.) If you find a business that answers calls in person, give them a call instead of emailing, texting, or sending a message. If you don't really have a reason to call — hell, make one up! Thankfully, not everything is automated... at least not yet.

Although being a Speaking Seed entails foreign language public speaking, any type of oral communication is just as much about listening. Speaking and listening are like reading and writing: They are spouses in a marriage, which together will make your language capabilities twice as good as they would be if you only ever focused on one half of the partnership. Making phone calls, you'll have to focus equally on both.

The final and best benefit to using phone conversations to practice your language skills is, if you screw up, no one will know or remember or care. It's much better to make mistakes over the phone than in a meeting, at an interview, or during a formal presentation. So what are you waiting for? Pick up a phone, and start making some calls.

Reflect for a moment...

1. In Chapter 1 I shared that public speaking for a Speaking Seed is any time we challenge ourselves to communicate by speaking in a foreign language. Do you believe that a person you talk to on the telephone is an audience? Why or why not?

2. Call a person, office, restaurant, library, or other organization, that uses your Speaking Seed language and ask a question. Only one question. After you get the answer, say, "Thank you," and hang up. How did it go? How did it feel?

Chapter 23

Reading Poetry

“Poems are meant to be spoken, not silently read.”

— Laurence Perrine

There were many guests in the audience, people who looked at me with welcoming eyes and curious minds. When the Toastmaster of the evening introduced me, I approached the front of the room, ready to share three beautiful poems in Mandarin. When it came time to recite the poems that I had prepared, I was nervous — but not as nervous as I usually am when I have to deliver a speech. Perhaps the main reason for this was because I didn't need to memorize and recite the poems but only read them aloud off the page.

First, I began to explain the poem. Then I started to read it. As I was reading the first poem, my coach walked towards me. I thought something was wrong, but instead of talking to me, she walked past me and to the whiteboard where she wrote “ventriloquist” in Chinese so that everyone would understand what the poem was about. Later she admitted that “ventriloquist” is so rarely spoken in Mandarin that hearing the word from a foreigner with a thick accent made the word practically incomprehensible to my poor audience.

I read the poem with all the emotion and intensity I could muster. After I read it, I explained what it was about, and everyone smiled, trying to be polite. I could hear my coach writing something on the whiteboard again. She

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motioned to me, “Keep going.” So I recited the next poem.

The second poem was about preservation. I knew as I read it that it was better than the first. Still, I could see the audience had on the same big smiles and puzzled faces. My mentor kept writing beside me. Finally I recited the last poem, which had simpler characters that were easier to pronounce. I knew everyone would understand that one. Again, I explained the poem, telling the audience about the care the poet had taken in choosing the metaphors within it.

I saw the red flag, which meant my time was up. Everyone clapped. I took my seat and asked the person next to me if he had understood what I had read. “Yes!” he answered enthusiastically. “How much?” I asked. “Only half,” he admitted.

But that wasn’t entirely my fault, I realized. Taiwanese people rarely read poetry. Even after I showed the poems to the person who was going to evaluate me, she still didn’t fully understand them. So I explained them a second time, and she was amazed that I could articulate the complexities in the meanings of the poems. She said that I spoke beautifully but that I still needed to practice my tones (which is typically the biggest struggle for anyone learning tonal languages). Otherwise, she said, the flow and fluency of my speech was so eloquent that at times she had become engrossed in the plot of the poem. “An almost success!” I thought.

From this assignment, I learned that poems are by far one of the best ways to get comfortable with speaking on stage. There are several reasons for this: First, you don’t always have to memorize poetry because it is often expected to be read off the page; second, the deep meanings of poems can help you get engrossed in and more passionate about what you are saying; and finally, reading poetry aloud helps improve your flow and fluency in a language. If you can learn to speak a language the way you would read a poem in that language, the way you speak will sound more soothing and pleasing to an audience.

Let's take a look at an example of a poem that a Speaking Seed could start sharing:

Tell Me Truly, For I Yearn to Hear

To you I humbly inquire:

What is your heart's desire?

Your greatest delight?

The crowning achievement

Of your entire Life?

What moves you to tears?

Brings out your smile?

Pleases your ears?

And sprinkles upon you

the sweetest dreams?

Tell me truly, For I yearn to hear!

— Brian Chung

In this short poem, a Speaking Seed can feel successful because it's easy to understand. It has rhymes, short clauses, and verbs that create clear pictures of what the poem is about. Short clauses ensure that a Speaking Seed doesn't have too long before taking a breath. The groups of rhymes ("inquire... desire", "tears... ears... hear") help with oral production and fluency. The nouns are simple, and the verbs create imagery in our heads. For any poem, being understandable is the first step to being liked. So I suggest, for any poem you decide to read to others, it should be a poem that you can grasp, a poem with literary devices you can easily identify (like the poem above), and a poem that has some repetition to help you learn cadence and flow.

Reading poetry aloud can help Speaking Seeds do the following:

Improve intonation

Intonation is the lyrical sound we have when we speak. Developing a pleasing tone as we're learning a foreign language is important, especially when we use a foreign language for public speaking.

Understand how to pause

Pauses create emotion. Pauses are critical to encapsulating the emotions within the words. Poetry provides good practice for this.

Develop better pronunciation when reading

Meter helps speakers develop a smoother flow.

Understand the sounds and patterns of words

Alliteration is one example — where each word begins with the same letter. Assonance is when words have the same repeated vowel. Repetition occurs when you hear the same patterns in each line. Parallel structure is when subjects and verbs are repeated in the same place in the same way.

Learn new vocabulary and develop an understanding of the culture

Poetry helps foreign language learners appreciate the deeper meanings of words and provides inroads into understanding the cultural context behind them.

Examples of English Poems for Speaking Seeds

Author	Title	Best Example of
W.H. Auden	“Funeral Blues”	rhyme, assonance, repetition
Gwendolyn Brooks	“We Real Cool”	cultural, assonance, rhyme
Robert Frost	“The Road Not Taken”	rhyme, assonance
Rudyard Kipling	“If”	inspiration, repetition

Remember when choosing poems to read, always choose ones you can understand, with fewer than five unfamiliar words. You don't want the poem to be too easy or too hard – you want a moderate challenge so that the learning process will stay fresh and interesting.

Reflect for a moment...

Prepare answers to these questions in your Speaking Seed language:

1. Look online to find an easy poem in your Speaking Seed language.
Write the title and the author's name here:

2. What is the poem about?

3. After you have understood the poem, practice reading it aloud five times.

Chapter 24

Learning with Dialogues

After two years of living in Taiwan, I decided I had had enough of teaching rich kids at international schools. I wanted to live a normal, non-expat kind of life, learning the local language and making local friends. For the first time in years, I decided not to have a full-time job. My full-time work was going to be learning Mandarin.

Mandarin is my fourth foreign language, and it's also the hardest one I've ever studied. Before the first day of class started, I had heard several students praise my new teacher for her methods and vivacious personality. And I already felt like I knew her from a friend of mine who had taken her Mandarin-language teaching course. I was nervous but excited to meet this infamous teaching queen.

When the bell rang, she entered with the grace and confidence of an actress. Her hair was short. She had a slender build. And she walked with a relaxed assurance that plainly said she knew what she was doing. I thought to myself, "Wow, I chose the right teacher!" She asked us to go around and say our names in Mandarin. I shared mine and heard everyone else's, but I forgot those names within seconds.

By the end of class, I had a headache. That was the effect Mandarin had on me for the first few years. The pronunciation, the tones, the stroke order... It all put my mind into overdrive. Relieved that class was almost over, I was

hopeful the homework would be something a little more interesting.

“Turn to page 19,” she said. We all turned our books to the page and looked at the long dialogue that filled it. Each of us prayed that we wouldn’t get called on to read. Thankfully, she started reading it herself then asked us to repeat it together. Once we had finished, she said, “Memorize this dialogue over the weekend. This is your homework.”

I had been hoping she wasn’t going to assign memorizing the dialogue as homework. At that point in my life, I had been an ESL teacher for many years, and I didn’t see any good reason to have students memorize dialogues like that. After class, I whined like a little kid.

“Wang Laoshi ... Why do we have to memorize the dialogue?”

“Because I’m the teacher, and I told you to.”

“But Laoshi, I have a really bad memory. I can’t learn this way.”

“Yes, you can.”

“No, I can’t. I’m an American. We didn’t have to memorize many things in school.”

“Well, now you do.”

I pouted. I threw in the age excuse: “But I’m not young like the other students. I’m in my 30s. I’m too old to memorize dialogues.”

“Then why did you take the class?”

Who could argue with that? So I quickly asked, “How does memorizing a dialogue help us learn a language?”

“Memorizing dialogues will help you learn Mandarin faster.”

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I wasn't buying it. She quickly gathered her things. It was a Friday afternoon, and she was ready to go. "I'll see you on Monday," she said and darted off.

I went home and called my friend to complain about how much her teacher's teaching sucked. Of all the things to give us for our first homework assignment, she was making us memorize a bloody dialogue! It wasn't even a cloze exercise, for goodness' sake. "That's what I get for choosing a Mandarin language center around the corner from my house," I lamented.

But my friend argued, "She's considered one of the best and most experienced Mandarin teachers in all of central Taiwan."

I said, "Well, in the U.S., she would never be able to get away with teaching like that unless she was teaching in a public school. Even then, if a principal observed her doing that, they would complain that too little planning was involved."

"She doesn't need to plan. She's been doing this for many, many years."

"Good teachers still always plan and then modify their lesson plans!"

The other end of the phone went silent. I knew what she was probably thinking: "Foreigners think they know everything." But she didn't say it. I could see I wasn't going to make my point, so I hung up and tried to memorize that freakin' dialogue.

For three days, I struggled to learn it. Every time I practiced with a friend or my tutor, they said that my tones were wrong or that I was grouping my words together in the wrong way. I kept forgetting key words, too. But by the time I was on my way to class on Monday, I had memorized most of the dialogue. I told Wang Laoshi when I saw her that the dialogue had been one of the hardest homework assignments of my life. She laughed.

Everyone went around and recited the dialogue with a partner. Some students sounded more fluent than others. Some hadn't done their homework at all.

When it was my turn, I was nervous, but I also knew that I had spent more time memorizing the dialogue than most of my classmates had. As I spoke, I realized that my pronunciation was better than everyone else's. My tones still needed work, but I could tell from the teacher's face that she was pleased. After class, when everyone had left, she had me do the dialogue with her again.

I exhaled a long breath and told her that reciting the dialogue was incredibly stressful.

She said, "Next time, it will be less stressful."

"Does this really help?"

Frustrated, she started to ask me some questions. "Is it easy to find a parking space?" Once I answered that, she asked, "Where did you drive from?" The next question was, "Where are you going?"

I kept answering, and she kept asking. I realized that all of the questions she was asking were related to the dialogue I had spent all weekend memorizing. When she asked me those questions, I was able to answer spontaneously and without thinking. Not perfectly, no, but I could answer with confidence.

Finally, she said, "That's why I make my students memorize dialogues." Wang Laoshi had made her point.

Regardless of where you are on your Speaking Seed journey, dialogues can help you. Many of you can find them in your language textbooks or online for free. But it's important to choose dialogues that are applicable to your life or cultural activities that interest you. And there's no need to start off too hard. Start with a simple dialogue like this:

A: I will be happy when my test is finished.

B: Me, too. Then we can go home for Thanksgiving.

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A: Yes, four days of no school!

B: Which day are you traveling?

A: I will leave school on Wednesday so I can have dinner with my family on Thursday.

B: Nice. For Thanksgiving, I am going to my sister's house.

A: Why are you going to your sister's house?

B: Because her house is very beautiful in the autumn. The trees are all red, orange, and yellow.

A: Nice. Can your sister cook?

B: No, she can't.

A: Oh, no. Then you won't have a feast for Thanksgiving!

B: My sister can't cook, but her husband can.

A: Happy Thanksgiving!

B: Happy Thanksgiving!

Dialogues are linguistic and cultural learning opportunities wrapped into one. You can learn vocabulary, grammar, sentence order, oral production, and more. I often tell my clients and students that old-school and new-school teaching methods both still have their place in learning a language. You don't need to be an arrogant middle-aged student like me and challenge an experienced teacher. Accept that dialogues are a part of language learning, and make them a normal part of maintaining your Speaking Seed language foundation.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Do you have a memory of learning dialogues in a language class? Do you believe that this sort of exercise has been helpful on your Speaking Seed journey? Why or why not?

2. Create a dialogue with at least three questions including those that people in your target language are constantly asking you. Then write the answers that you really want to give, not the responses you normally provide because they are easier to say. Practice with a language exchange partner.

Chapter 25

Monodramas

When I was a child, I had a flair for the dramatic. As I mentioned in Chapter 8, I loved mirrors. They helped me to study how to pretend to be like other people. When my family members were bored, they would always ask me to come and imitate someone. I would ask, “Who do you want me to be?” My sister loved it when I imitated characters from *The Bugs Bunny Show*. My mom liked it when I imitated Janet or Chrissy from *Three’s Company*. When I was in kindergarten, I could play multiple characters in a cartoon. In elementary school, I became more sophisticated with my amateur acting. I started imitating one character who had a long speech in a pivotal scene of the movie or show. I eventually lost interest when I started to believe I didn’t have a future in acting. But when I joined Toastmasters, my interest rekindled, and I got reacquainted with my trusty old friend: my full-length mirror.

Performances that consist of one character communicating his or her thoughts to an audience are monodramas or monologues. And monologues, like poems, are fine to read aloud in front of an audience, as long as the paper doesn’t become a distraction. Monologues also provide great opportunities for Speaking Seeds to practice intonation. We know when we use languages that we aren’t completely comfortable with, it’s easy for our speeches to fall flat, sound choppy, monotone, or be boring in some other way. That’s why intonation is important to remember. And audiences will infer different meanings based on the way you speak — if your voice rises high or drops low, if the pace is slow with deliberate pauses, or if the pace

is fast in quick procession. With a monodrama, you can practice varying your intonation while pretending to be a character you like or an actor you admire. Sometimes it's even more fun than being yourself. Besides, life often demands a little acting.

Finding monologues or monodramas is easy — television shows, movies, and books all provide great material we can use. For me, I prefer to choose scenes from a film that I enjoyed, often one in which the heroine has an epiphany that becomes a turning point in the story. Podcasts can provide great monodrama material, too. If you have a digital file, being able to track back or forward to the parts you want to repeat makes practicing all the more convenient. You can mimic what you like, and you can find your own style of facial and body expressions as you see fit.

Examples of Hollywood Monodramas for Speaking Seeds

Actor	Movie Title	Best Example of
Morgan Freeman	<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i>	sadness, intensity
Julia Roberts	<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	anger, emotion
Meryl Streep	<i>The Devil Wears Prada</i>	bitchiness, villainy, fun
Queen Latifah	<i>Set It Off</i>	desperation, emotion
Anthony Hopkins	<i>The Silence of the Lambs</i>	slow, soft, and creepy speech

Now, I know what you are thinking: "I'm not an actor. I only want to learn how to give a presentation in Spanish for my job! Why would I want to practice a monodrama?" There are many reasons. First, people make decisions based on emotions, not just facts. Speakers who have the ability to tap into the emotional heartstrings of their listeners will win over the minds of the audience and will have a better chance of getting that proposal approved.

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Second, you want to sound natural. As I explained earlier, the best way to sound natural is by practicing your vocal variation. The more you practice speaking emotively, the more natural your vocal variety becomes. And if you don't have a lot of chances to practice your target language, pre-tailored speeches can greatly expedite the process of building confidence and improving intonation.

Another good reason for practicing monologues is that they force you to learn fixed word order, grammar, and pacing. For example, in Mandarin, if my word order or pacing is off – even if all of my tones are right – the audience won't understand me. Why? Because when we have a conversation with somebody, we usually pause between phrases and sentences to give the other person time to digest what we're saying. We tend to forget this when we give speeches, however, which puts our listeners in a difficult position because they can't interrupt to ask a question and get clarification.

Finally, practicing intonation with monologues will help you develop your personality within your target language. Your intonation is what will clue listeners in and let them know if you are being funny, serious, rude, or considerate. Let's face it. We can never practice intonation by reading grammar books aloud to teachers. It's too boring.

So with all of those advantages in mind, try practicing your intonation and vocal variation with monologues. They're ready-made speeches that we don't need to write ourselves. All we need to do is perform them, having fun while pretending to be someone else for a little while.

Chapter 26

Advanced Speaking Seed Speeches

After you've performed the exercises from the previous chapters for some time, you might feel ready to move on to full-length speeches, or as I call them, Advanced Speaking Seed Speeches. The exact time you'll be ready, of course, depends on your language foundation and how often you take advantage of Speaking Seed opportunities. For me, it took seven years before I felt ready to join an all-Mandarin Toastmasters club. And when I did, I still wasn't ready to deliver full-length presentations. I started with short responses, jokes, and poems. Later I pushed myself to deliver advanced speeches even if I sounded like a moron. With challenging languages like Mandarin, you may get sick of being stuck in one place in your learning. You may feel like you have to put yourself out there. If you feel that way, then do it.

The common goals of every speaker are the same as those of every writer: to inform, entertain, or persuade. No matter if the content is a minute or an hour in length, when we go before an audience to speak, we are almost always trying to fulfill one of these three goals.

For most people, the easiest type of speech to write and deliver is an informative one, especially when the purpose is straightforward and requires little creativity. We hear this kind of public speaking often: a librarian teaching students how to search for books, a chef explaining the rules of the kitchen, a lawyer summarizing all the ways a potential client could get sued for something. These speeches not only communicate information such as

facts and statistics, they also tell stories and provide supporting materials that give answers to questions. For Speaking Seeds in their early stages, it's best to start with speeches that focus on something you're familiar with: your hobbies, your work, or your guilty pleasures. Most importantly, though, when you deliver an informative speech, make sure to meet your audience where they're at. In most cases, it's safe to assume that they don't know as much as you about your topic. Even though you might know all about how Tinder dates usually go, that doesn't mean your audience does.

Once you feel comfortable with informative speeches, challenge yourself to make speeches that are designed to entertain the audience. Not every line of your speech has to be funny, but you can share information in a humorous way. It helps to choose a subject matter that you care about but also don't take too seriously. You want the audience to feel light-hearted and have some fun while they listen to your speech. The trick is to think like a funny farmer, injecting a joke here and there. To go back to our Tinder example, you could give an entertaining speech about all of your nightmare Tinder dates. You should care that you wasted so much of your time on a dating app, but it should be funny now since you've moved on to bigger and better ways of finding love instead of swiping left or right. I know many Speaking Seeds who have mastered entertaining speeches. In my opinion, it's the best method for us to spread our seeds.

Next come persuasive speeches. Persuading people to think or buy or vote or do anything almost always centers on one or both of two things: money and power. There's money to be made in convincing people to buy the newest phone that they didn't need. There's power to be gained for politicians who get into office and can make decisions that they couldn't make before. Persuasive speeches, if done well, provide information that puts both sides of a problem to the test. For instance, I could say that no one should watch television because of all the harm it does to our eyes and brains. But I could persuade you more if I said this:

Sure, it's fun to watch a sitcom and relax after a busy day. I can't argue with that. We've all had those days when we don't even have the energy to read a book. But to

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get ahead in life takes a willingness to put in work even when you'd rather be lazy. And that 30 minutes or so of television every day adds up quick. It's not only takes a toll on our eyes, it takes a toll on our lives.

Have I persuaded you to kick the TV to the curb? Consider the limitless possibilities for Speaking Seeds who can persuade others well.

For a persuasive speech to be effective, there are four major things that we need to achieve. First, the audience needs to like you. Second, they need to believe your facts. Third, they need to agree with your reasons. And finally, most importantly, they need to be pulled in by your emotional strings. The best politicians and salespeople have nailed down all four of these traits. Notice that none of the four characteristics listed above must entail real, concrete facts. The audience only needs to *believe* your facts – which is not to say that I support alternative facts. You should always be ethical and do your best to provide accurate information only from reputable news sources and peer-reviewed journals.

When you start to feel comfortable with all three of these kinds of speeches, you can finally challenge yourself to create an inspirational speech that includes an urgent call to action, encapsulating informative, entertaining, and persuasive speaking techniques all in one.

Reflect for a moment...

1. This chapter covered informative, entertaining and persuasive speeches. Which type of advanced speech intrigues you the most? Why?

2. Which type of speech do you think would be most useful? Why?

Chapter 27

Poisonous PowerPoints

One secret I'll share with you is this: I'm a PhD dropout. After years of studying in a program that didn't align with my teaching and language-learning interests, I decided to stop and start making money again instead. During my time as a PhD student, I learned how to scan research papers and find the information I needed quickly, sometimes synthesizing up to 70 sources of information for one 25-page paper. But the most important skill that I learned how to do poorly was make PowerPoints. I would copy and paste my research onto some slides with bulleted points, and *voilà*: I would have a PowerPoint that I could deliver to anyone, anywhere, at any time with little preparation.

We know that not all seeds grow into healthy plants that we should eat or even touch. Some seeds grow into plants that we can enjoy in only small amounts. One type of plant that you can occasionally consume, with caution, are PowerPoints. I used to love PowerPoint slides — the ultimate cheat sheets for delivering presentations. Neither my audience nor I would mind, particularly audiences who didn't speak English natively. They appreciated that they could read what I was talking about and relax. They were cheating, too, because they didn't have to work on their listening comprehension skills. They could just sit back and glance at the slides while they perused their social media feeds.

Now that I am a professional speaker, however, I realize how toxic PowerPoint slides were to my audiences and to me.

Whether it's an ice-breaker, a persuasive speech, or an inspirational speech, poisonous PowerPoint slides horribly delivered make a lasting impression that the speaker was too lazy to practice to spend a little Seed Time practicing the speech beforehand. That means your audience will be bored... Or worse, they'll hate listening to you speak. Within a few minutes, their focus will switch to what they will have for lunch, what got on their nerves that day at work, or anything and everything other than your speech. For the polite ones who do try to listen, they'll probably be disappointed and remember you that way. This leaves your audience with an unfavorable impression of you.

So how do you avoid poisonous PowerPoints? In my speeches today, I occasionally do use some bulleted slides, but very few and only in certain circumstances. With my university students, for example, I use bullet points because I know their collective English proficiency can vary when there's 60 students in a class. If I don't provide bulleted summaries of my most important points, many students miss too much information. I prefer, however, to use pictures with one-sentence descriptions, interspersing each of these slides with all-black slides that redirect the audience's attention to me when I'm sharing stories or reiterating important points. If you need to use bullets, then don't have more than four brief bullet points on one slide.

An Example of
a Poisonous PowerPoint Slide



An Example of
an Effective PowerPoint Slide



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If you are going to deliver a PowerPoint presentation as a Speaking Seed, you can employ certain tricks to make them more interesting for your audience. (I look to renowned speech coaches Nancy Duarte and Gary Genard for some of my ideas.) Start creating your PowerPoint slides by doing what you would do with any other speech: Write it out. First, write the general purpose and specific purpose. Then, complete a graphic organizer. (See the section titled Organize Your Seeds in Chapter 10.) Don't write your introduction yet, though. Start writing the body paragraphs first. They should be easy to write.

Writing the introduction is the tricky part. When we write an introduction, we need to look over our graphic organizers again. Then, decide the most interesting way to begin, whether that's a story, a quote, a question, or a fact. But remember, the beginning of a PowerPoint-based speech can forecast its death if it starts off poorly. You should find a picture that connects to your introduction, but only choose one picture and only display it after you've said the first few lines of your speech. You want the audience to look at you first, not the screen. Visual aids make PowerPoint presentations come alive, but overdoing them keeps the audience from understanding the message that the speaker wants to convey. Remember that PowerPoint slides are used to complement a speech, not replace it.

Repeat the process for each paragraph of your speech, choosing only one picture for each paragraph. If you have a process that you need to explain, make sure you have a picture for each process with arrows to explain the process. None of this needs to be fancy. Actually, the more basic the better.

Sure, you might want to learn how to use the design and animation functions PowerPoint offers. But then again, it's easy to go overboard with those graphics. The fancy gadgets really aren't necessary. You want your audience to look at your images and connect to what you are saying, not be overwhelmed. Keeping graphics simple and at a minimum means your audience will be more likely to listen to you instead of reading slides and looking down at their phones.

Once you've finished creating your presentation, you may find that one of the pictures that you chose is not the best way to explain what you want to say. Perhaps a statement would be stronger. If you discover this, then add that statement to the slide, but don't make a bulleted list. Try using a single word, a phrase, or (if absolutely necessary) a sentence. One sentence on a slide is more powerful than three bullet points.

If you have the time, towards the end of your presentation, you can give your audience a fun quiz to see if they were listening. Depending on the length of your speech, the quiz can last for 20 seconds or five minutes. I always encourage Speaking Seeds to have quizzes with prizes at the end of their speeches. For one thing, since you're speaking in a foreign language, you want to ensure that your audience is able to understand your presentation. And if you're too shy to ask for suggestions from your audience afterwards, giving them a quiz can allow you to quickly discover if they have understood you – and what parts of your speech that you'll still need to practice if they didn't. Second, by having a quiz, especially if you hand out prizes, your listeners are more likely to walk away with a favorable last impression of you. And that's what we all want, right?

That said, I don't believe that quizzes should be at the very tail end of a speech. I suggest having the quiz towards the end. Then, after the quiz, you can conclude your speech.

I've seen so many Poisonous PowerPoints in my life, especially from Speaking Seeds, that I thought it was imperative to discuss the topic in this book. PowerPoints are great. But like anything great, it can become toxic if it's used too much, destroying the purpose of what it was created for in the first place. So don't cheat the speechwriting process. Write the script, practice, and use the PowerPoint like an accent of beautiful but poisonous flowers on a table – expected to be seen and appreciated but not ingested. Use some visuals on each slide, but don't get carried away with too many graphics. Have a fun quiz near the end to check for understanding, and most importantly, *don't have more than four brief bullet points per page.*

Reflect for a moment...

1. Are you guilty of creating a poisonous PowerPoint? What rule did you break that is mentioned in this chapter? Why?

2. What Plan B do you think you could employ if your computer crashed during your powerpoint presentation?

Stage 6

Speaking Seed Tools



“All the great speakers were bad speakers at first.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Chapter 28: Vocal & Physical Exercises

Chapter 29: New Technology

Smartphones & Apps

Video Sharing & Streaming Platforms

Virtual & Augmented Reality Technologies

Video Chat & Webinar Platforms

Chapter 30: Goals and Rewards

Give Yourself an Early Reward

Chapter 31: Slow & Steady Growth Wins the Race

Chapter 28

Vocal & Physical Exercises

I was born with a mouth that people could hear down the street. When people outside of the U.S. hear my high-pitched voice, they always think I must be one of those amazing black gospel singers they've seen on TV. "With a voice like that, strong vocal chords must lie in there somewhere," one person told me. My mother even took me to the doctor to test if I had a hearing problem. "Nope," he assured her, "only a distinctive, strong voice." This characteristic, which some people find annoying and which I used to hate about myself, later came in handy when I became a teacher and a professional speaker.

But not everyone has a mouth that works out well for them in the end. Once I worked with a boy who suffered from an oversized tongue that affected his ability to speak clearly and even swallow. His native language was Mandarin, but he attended an English kindergarten, which only compounded his difficulties. Every week we would practice making S sounds, repeat tongue-twisters, and work on exercising his tongue muscles with games. We were always exhausted afterwards.

Working with this student made me realize the importance of warm-ups. If we didn't do some warm-up drills first, the whole session would be a disaster. I quickly learned that a little bit of time in preparation goes a long way in returns. No runner runs well without stretching. No writer writes well without a few crappy sentences. And no Speaking Seed speaks well without first

preparing their mouth and throat for the arduous task of public speaking in a foreign language.

Before I make a Speaking Seed speech, I've gotten into the habit of doing a vocal warm-up in both English and Mandarin. For the first warm-up, I start with my native language and repeat a string of rhyming words in quick succession. For example:

we — three — me — see — we — three — me — see

Next, I pronounce words with exaggerated vowel sounds in order to get my tongue and jaw comfortable moving in different positions. For example:

bay — bee — by — bow — boo

Since S and R are two of the hardest sounds for anyone to make in English, I also try to fit in a tongue twister if I have time. For S, I say, "Silly Sully sees sneaky Sammy swimming." For R, I say, "Ridiculous Ralph reads regularly." Tongue twisters are a fun way to get the mouth moving and ready for the big task ahead.

After I do these exercises for 30 seconds or so, I do warm-ups in my Speaking Seed language. Although it varies depending on your target language, start with sounds that are similar but hard to distinguish. Then, move on to words that can be challenging to say. This will help train your brain to connect to your mouth and prepare for what it needs to do.

For Mandarin, I follow that with a warm-up to practice my flow, using simple rhymes and repetitions as well as many variations in tones. I start easy then move on to harder sounds, doing warm-up after warm-up for two or three minutes. It helps to find warm-ups that you can easily memorize, do quickly, and make into a routine that you enjoy.

Before you speak, be sure to stretch any and all problem areas in your body. Common sore areas include the upper back, shoulders, and neck. To stretch

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your back, put your head down while pulling your arms back. To stretch your shoulders, raise them up and down while opening and closing your arms across your chest. For your neck, roll it from left to right and side to side. Stretch out your jaw, too. You'd be surprised how easy it is to pull a muscle during a speech. I've seen it happen a lot, especially when Speaking Seeds participate in speech contests. Part of the reason that speakers pull muscles is because they rarely hydrate properly before they get on stage, out of fear that may pee their pants.

In short, recognize that when you deliver a speech, your body will likely be in a very tense state. It's common for Speaking Seeds to become overly animated if we don't have confidence in our oral delivery, and then we'll pull a muscle without even realizing it until the adrenaline fades hours later. You don't want that to be you. So take three minutes to perform a vocal and physical warm-up before your speech. You'll be surprised how much this practice will assist you in being ready to step into the spotlight.

Reflect for a moment...

1. Create a Speaking Seed warm-up by making a list of five to eight sounds that are hard to distinguish. Put them in order if you can. Then, list three to five words that are similar except for one subtle difference that's hard for you to master in your target language (for example: bad, bed, bid, bod, bud).

2. Write down three of your favorite stretches. If you don't have any yet, check out an office yoga video online and find some. Write down the title of the video and the URL so you can reference back to it later.

Chapter 29

New Technology

During my junior year of university, I was required to study abroad in France for a year. The program arranged all our classes from Tuesday to Thursday, so every Thursday night my friends and I were off on a night-owl train to Venice, Amsterdam, or Spain for a long weekend. I loved it. I didn't miss my family at all, but they really missed me. The only adventurer in my family who was willing and able to trek off to visit me was my maternal grandfather. So my parents arranged for him to come and perform his duty: to check up on the baby of the family and make sure I was behaving myself.

After I picked him up from the airport, we found a typical quaint French café with chairs and tables outside that overlooked century-old buildings and statues. As he glanced at the beautiful French faces and their styles of clothes, he shared stories of how much France had changed since the last time he was there post World War II. I shared my own stories of my long-weekend travels and what I had learned about French culture. Then, after an awkward pause, he asked the big question:

"Are you still with your boyfriend, John?"

"Sure," I replied, surprised he would ask such a question.

"So he writes you often?"

“No, I’ve only gotten maybe one letter from him. But he calls me every week.”

He shook his head as he looked at me carefully. “Don’t ever forget that nothing beats the feeling of getting a letter in the mail,” he said. “Nothing. I don’t care if he calls you every day – tell him to start writing you.”

He was so forceful with that advice that the memory has stayed in my head until this day. Sure, my grandfather came from a generation when you couldn’t easily make phone calls – back then, a 45-minute phone call from France to the U.S. could have cost US\$100. Everyone relied on letters. But his message was clear: If you want to reap the greatest rewards, communicate in the most powerful way you can. In his mind, if my boyfriend wanted to keep me from finding a sexy, hot Frenchman, then he should have been exercising all forms of communication: calling, writing, and even visiting me. Later, I told my boyfriend what my grandfather had said, and for years after that, he always wrote me letters and sent cards.

My grandfather’s advice still holds true today. As Speaking Seeds, we should take advantage of all the avenues available to us to speak to people, which means using all the types of technology and platforms available to us. I know some of you like the good old-fashioned way of speaking in person. But what if that’s not possible? That’s not a reason to stop practicing your Speaking Seed skills. Not all of us have the means to travel or have access to a ready-made audience who will listen to our speeches, but most of us have access to some technology.

Of course, while we should still embrace face-to-face encounters, both formal and informal, we can also incorporate technology into our Seed Time. As you read through this section, I encourage you to give these tools a try so you can discover which ones suit you best. Although some of them cost money, these tools can help you progress quickly and at a reasonable price in comparison to paying for a language tutor or coach. But remember, your primary goal is to use a foreign language to communicate with people in different types of situations and environments, not just in a classroom or on a smartphone or in front of a Toastmasters group. If you use technology to enhance your

Speaking Seed journey, it will give you the experiences you need to be able to take advantage of today's global society. It could be anywhere at any time.

Smartphones & Apps

Smartphones have all kinds of features and apps that you can use for your Seed Time. You can record audio of your speech and practice by replaying it while you are driving, cooking, or before you fall asleep. Recording video of your speech is another convenient and useful way to help you practice. Without recording ourselves in any way, it's easy to get to a point where we feel comfortable. But when it's time to do it in front of our phones, we freeze up and make mistakes. Being able to deliver your speech well while recording yourself is great practice for when you give the speech live.

While audio recordings can help you memorize your speech and practice your vocal delivery, video recordings help you become more aware of the body language and facial expressions that you use when you speak. As a coach, I can tell you that some people frown when they say something interesting, or they laugh when they say something serious. And often people don't even realize these habits. Recording video of your speeches gives you an easy way to see how you look when you perform.

If you want to hear another voice giving your speech, which can be an illuminating experience, there are many dictation apps that can be downloaded for free or for a small fee. There are also speaking apps that use AI (artificial intelligence) to detect filler words and measure your rate of speech, how often you pause, the clarity of your articulation, and the energy level of your voice. If you're a beginning Speaking Seed or if you can't find or afford a coach, you might want to do a search for this kind of speaking app. Not only can these apps help you improve your fluency, they offer a convenient way to practice your language anywhere you want, whenever you want. No app is perfect but most are affordable, if not free, tools that can help us cultivate our skills.

Video Sharing & Streaming Platforms

Whenever I deliver a speech, I ask someone to record it for me, and then I upload it to YouTube. I don't have the guts to make all of my speeches public, though. Some I keep private so no one else can view them but me. This way, I have a vlogging library of all my speeches in one place, regardless of whether or not I want to make them public. Some people also use Vimeo and other video-sharing platforms instead of YouTube for a variety of reasons. Even if you take this alternative route, I would still suggest YouTube for the videos you want a lot of people to see. There are two reasons for that: the advantages of Google's vast platform and Google's SEO (search engine optimization).

Whenever I save a speech, I always title it with the name of the speech and the date that I gave it. In the description field, I share the objectives of the speech. But remember, although you can use YouTube as your main video library, it's critical to backup your videos in another location, if not two. Should Google disappear one day, you don't want to lose your Speaking Seed memories.

Although YouTube is the king of video streaming, other social media programs have gained traction in the video clip arena. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and other platforms make it easy to share short videos with anyone. Most of them are free and offer a convenient way to get yourself out there as a Speaking Seed.

Virtual & Augmented Reality Technologies

Every time I come home I run into people who all ask me the same question: "What do you do over there in Taiwan?" Bored, I try to be polite and reply, "I

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teach English, and I'm a professional public speaker." Now intrigued, they probe me for details. But recently I find that fewer people are curious about my adventures as a teacher. They're more curious about my experiences as a public speaker.

All of us suffer from nervousness at some point when we speak. In Chapter 15, I've encouraged different exercises to help deal with this emotion. Two new options that I have explored are VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) technologies. Max North, a pioneer in the field of VRT (virtual reality therapy), has conducted numerous studies into the benefits of VRT for individuals who suffer from public speaking anxiety. Some of this research has shown that using VR to practice presentations can help to reduce a person's fear of public speaking. For Speaking Seeds, this is great news, especially since our fears stem from the nervousness of being in front of an audience as well as the insecurity of speaking a foreign language. If you have the opportunity, I encourage you to try this technology and see if it helps you build confidence in preparation for a speech.

Video Chat & Webinar Platforms

After I had worked at international schools for a few years, I decided to study Mandarin full-time and go from teaching to tutoring on the side. It was an easy transition. Many mothers requested that I tutor their children. They knew me. Their kids were comfortable with me. And they appreciated my no-nonsense teaching style. One mother in particular was very persistent. I needed to return home and visit my family, but she wanted me to start lessons for her child right away.

I said to her, "I'm sorry, I can't work with your daughter until I return. I'm going to the States to visit my family, but I'll start working with her when I get back."

"Why can't you work with her when you're there?" she wanted to know.

I started to think that either she was rude and didn't care about my family

time or that she didn't understand what I was saying. I paused and then said, "I won't be in Taiwan, and I need to be here to work with your daughter."

"Why?"

"Why... Why?" I echoed, confused.

She proceeded to tell me about Skype. "You use that, right?" she asked.

This was at a time when Skype was just starting to be used as an online teaching tool. Many considered online teaching to be less effective or too impersonal to create a good learning experience, but that mother was more forward-thinking than I was at the time. Suddenly I realized that I could work as a teacher from anywhere. It was like a light bulb came on in my head. Today I find that I enjoy having my Mandarin classes over Skype even more than I enjoy attending class in a coffee shop. When I'm using Skype at home, I can eat what I want, save on gas money, and have access to all of my materials without having to lug them around.

There's also the conference webinar app Zoom, a direct competitor of Skype, which gives you the feeling of a professional online meeting experience by letting you privately connect with others and create conferences with multiple hosts. This is possible with Skype, too, but you'll often run into camera issues depending on your internet speed.

Who says that public speaking can't be done through the internet? With all the video chat and webinar platforms available today, it's easier than ever before to find an audience. Some Toastmasters clubs have even started using a hybrid system of online and in-person meetings.

Chapter 30

Goals & Rewards

Most people don't face their fears. They would rather avoid discomfort any way they can. Taking a chance and trying something new takes courage, and learning two skills at once requires an incredible amount of determination, drive, and faith. These attributes makes all the difference when it comes to achieving our dreams and not just talking about them. I once heard a person say on a podcast, "I don't know what I want to do for the rest of my life, but I know what I want to do next."

That's the kind of mindset you have to have. Big goals are great, but it might take you longer to get there than you expected. So every time you achieve a Speaking Seed goal, no matter how small or how big, make sure you treat yourself. It can be anything.

Over the years, I've served as a mentor to three people in my Toastmasters club. I made a deal with one of them that if she joined, I wanted her to finish 10 speeches and be an officer for one year. After every speech she finished, I promised to accompany her for a late-night snack to celebrate the accomplishment.

It worked. She struggled to get through every speech, but she did it. And after every speech, we talked about how she had prepared for the speech, how she had felt just before giving it, and how relieved she felt afterwards.

The Speaking Seed

I asked her, “Has it gotten any easier?”

She said, “No, I’m still super nervous all the time.”

She would say that after every speech. The fear didn’t stop, but soon she told me that she had felt something change. “I know I’ll be nervous,” she said, “so I’m getting used to that feeling. I know I can’t eat much before a speech. I know I won’t sleep much the night before. I know there’s a big chance that I’ll forget one of my lines and look like a ‘silent statue’, but now I know that I can do it. Knowing that has helped my confidence a lot.”

Later on, my mentee became a president of the club and had the courage to go to the U.S. for a year to learn organic farming and work on organic farms. During her time in the States, she was invited to be a panelist to talk about her experiences as a Taiwanese farmer in the U.S.

“I didn’t do a good job with the panel discussion,” she told me, “but I agreed to participate. I shared what I could, and now I can say that I did it! I would have never had the courage to do that before joining Toastmasters — even just a few years ago. Before, I would have turned down any opportunity like that right away.”

Her story encapsulates the incredible adventure of becoming a Speaking Seed. The fear never totally goes away. We have to learn to live with it, just like we learn to live with getting older or dealing with climate change. But we can celebrate that we’ve made progress and that we have the courage to make seemingly impossible dreams come true. We can be proud of sharing a piece of ourselves with other people in another language, sometimes even in another part of the world.

Give Yourself an Early Reward

Given my newfound YouTube fame, I am often asked to do interviews. I feel excited when I’m approached at first, but then my excitement quickly turns to

dread when I know I'll have to do the interview in Mandarin and not English. I remember how, in the past, I had been so nervous doing interviews that I couldn't say a single sentence correctly. Now I have every producer give me a call to chat about the topic of the interview before officially arranging it. That way, they can decide for themselves if my language skills are good enough.

I remember one particular interview very well. The reporter came to my house with her assistant and a videographer. I had hired a gardener who made my yard look fabulous, and miraculously my country house did not have even a single dead ant on the floor when the crew first arrived. I felt proud of myself. I could tell from their faces that they were impressed with where I lived, how I lived, and the accomplishments I had made... until it was time for me to talk, that is.

A huge camera and lights were positioned less than a meter away from my face. The reporter and her assistant smiled at me. I realized that I didn't want to talk. All that work to arrange the interview, and suddenly I didn't have the guts to go through with it.

I pushed myself anyway. "Ehhh..." I paused. I tried again. "Ehhh..."

I couldn't string two sentences together. A two-year-old could speak better than I could. Finally I touched the reporter's hand and said, "Let's do a shot. I need a shot." A Mexican friend had visited me the year before, and I still hadn't finished the tequila she had given me. Normally, I'm not a drinker, but that day, the bottle was calling my name:

"Diana, Diana, I know you need me..."

I got the lime, the salt, and the shot glasses. Together we took a shot — only one, but it did the job. The warm sensation went down my throat, right to my stomach, and in an instant my nerves stopped racing. I calmed down and was finally able to speak. Our interview lasted for over two hours. I had such a good time with the crew that I didn't want the interview to end. Thank goodness I didn't send them home right away.

The Speaking Seed

Now, I'm not suggesting that you do a shot before you do a presentation. I'm only sharing that, on that particular day, tequila saved me from my greatest fear: looking like an idiot. Rather than treating myself to a shot after the interview was done, I gave it to myself in advance because that's when I needed it. And I'm so glad I did.

If fear still comes the day of your speech, identify it and make deals with yourself about what you'll do after you're done with your speech. That way, you'll feel like you did everything you could to make your speech a success. If you don't invest in Seed Time, then fear arises, and you'll panic.

Reflect for a moment...

1. What app or program are you interested in using to help you achieve your Speaking Seed goals?

2. Write down a small Speaking Seed goal that you know you can achieve within the next three months. Then, write it down again on another piece of paper and hang it up on a surface that you'll see all the time to remind yourself of your commitment.

Chapter 31

Slow & Steady Growth Wins the Race

One day I saw myself on TV and felt shame about my body. My birthday was less than two weeks away, and rather than wait for a new year to make a list of unrealistic resolutions, I decided that my birthday was as good a day as any to set three goals: to get up at 5 a.m., meditate, and do 30 burpees every day as part of my workout routine. “For how long?” I wondered to myself. “Forever,” I hoped.

My goals were not so difficult. At the time, the weather was still hot, so waking up early wasn’t too hard. I had been meditating for years, although I would get lazy on occasion. And I’ve always worked out, just not every day. Sometimes my “resting days” would last three days or even a week. But I had gotten into the habit of listening to Tim Ferriss podcasts on my way to work. Once, I heard them discuss how people can achieve more than they could imagine by setting low expectations coupled with consistent, self-motivated effort. “Low expectations” sounded just like my speed.

If I didn’t manage to get up at 5 a.m., then I made sure to get up early enough so I could at least meditate each day, whether that mediation would last for five minutes or 50. I did 30 burpees every day, too, no matter if I was hungover, sick, or tired. I needed the consistency of the daily commitment. I knew that if I did those 30 burpees without fail (which were a moderate challenge for me to do), then I could accomplish other challenges or goals I had for the day.

The Speaking Seed

Because I suffered from insomnia, part of my motivation was to organize my life. Insomnia, I couldn't control, but doing burpees, meditating, and getting up early, I could. After a month of holding myself to my commitments, I noticed that other areas of my life were improving as well. I finished lesson plans well in advance, rather than the day before, and every night I wrote out to-do lists for the next day. I cleaned out my house Marie Kondo-style so I could think more clearly and focus on writing the book you're reading now. With my newly concentrated efforts, tasks that would normally take weeks only took me a few days.

And this method has worked for my clients, too. I tell them, "Don't set absurd goals. Make them small and achievable, and you'll see the difference. In my case, I have lost some weight. I'm not quite where I want to be, but I am pleased that I took action to address something that troubled me, and for now that's good enough. Whether or not you get what you anticipated doesn't matter. What matters is getting up each day and getting started on achieving your goals. It's not that we can't do more than that, it's that we need to plant slowly. We need to take baby Speaking Seed steps first because we know that fast growth can lead to unstable plants that fall over and die with the first hard winds or get sick as soon as bacteria comes along. So we build up our skills slowly, ensuring steady and solid progress.

Conclusion



“Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”

— George Bernard Shaw

The sweat continued to drip down the side of my face as I waited in line to go through immigration at an airport in Amman, Jordan. The air felt dry, tight, and almost unbreathable. I couldn't locate a single fan anywhere in the airport, and the oversized air-conditioner looked like it had retired long ago. I glanced at the women in the line beside me. They were covered in black from the tops of their heads to the bottoms of their feet. Like a good tourist, I wore white cotton. For me, the Middle Eastern summer heat seemed no different than being stuck in an oven. But Jordanians didn't seem to pay much attention. My friend and I were the only ones who looked hot and tired.

The immigration official motioned his hand for me to approach. I did. He checked my passport. "Diana Watson?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

He looked at the cover of my passport. "You're American?" he inquired.

"Yes, I'm American."

"Where are your parents from?"

"America," I replied.

"Where are your parents' parents from?"

"America," I said. "Where are your parents' parents' parents from?" he pressed.

"Jesus!" I heard my friend faintly mutter from where she was standing behind the designated line.

But I stayed focused on his face. He stared at me hard. He said, "You don't look American." Knowing that this was coming, I took a deep, deliberate breath and explained, "My ancestors were slaves from Africa and were brought to America hundreds of years ago. Most of my family has lived in the U.S. for 300 years."

The Speaking Seed

Suddenly, he must have recalled history or the brotherhood some Muslims feel for blacks in America due to Muhammed Ali or Malcolm X. Whatever it was, I could feel his iciness melting. I was relieved.

He smiled, stamped my passport, and let me through. After I was done, my Italian-American friend who was behind me got through with only a few questions asked. She rushed over to me. “Don’t you get sick of that? I’m sick of people quizzing you, and it’s not even me!”

I nodded in agreement. This was the late 1990s and the biggest stars in the world were African-Americans. During my time there, billboards of Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, and Michael Jordan were everywhere. But I understood the disconnect. Those pictures were only images — not real until we make that actual connection that makes them feel real.

Fast-forward 10 years later, and I was standing in front of an all-Taiwanese audience reading an icebreaker speech off of Snoopy paper. No one in that audience questioned whether I was American or not, but they all felt the same curiosity that the immigration official in Jordan had felt about me years before. And that is the mission of a Speaking Seed: to establish those real-life connections with people who speak and think differently than you do.

Throughout this book, I’ve written about the importance of preparing our minds, writing our scripts, practicing our speeches, and keeping ourselves motivated, as well as the critical role that coincidence and support plays in the Speaking Seed process. I’ve also shared the importance of having a coach and how my unique life experiences enabled me to write this book, with the hopes of helping you on your foreign language public speaking journey. But in the end, the work has to come from you. If you’ve made it all the way through this book, I hope you can take away at least a few key points:

Language Learning Is No Piece of Cake

Learning a language is hard. Damn hard. Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying to you or else they’re wizards in languages — and few of us are. So if you want to be a Speaking Seed, you must put in the hard work, just like a farmer does. I have

never met a lazy farmer. All the ones I've met work hard. And you are the farmer of your own garden. You must dig and provide the fertilizer, water, seeds, and care for your plants to obtain a bountiful harvest. There's no shortcut. Speaking Seeds need consistent language practice and study to produce speeches in foreign languages.

Teachers Aren't Everything

As I mention in Chapter 24, I thought after all my years as a language teacher that I knew more modern and better teaching methods than my Mandarin teacher did. She put me in my place when I learned that memorizing a dialogue did give me the magical ability to respond to her questions with relative ease. But later I still decided to stop taking classes because I wanted a blended learning experience more tailored to my needs. I wanted to discover which learning methods would work best for me. So today I have a tutor who knows my weaknesses and teaches me in the comfort of my home, using video conferencing. I have a coach who helps me with my Mandarin speeches. I have language exchange partners, and I belong to a Mandarin Toastmasters club. So I don't have all my eggs in one language-class basket expecting it to give me the shiny gold star of Mandarin fluency. I have many baskets.

Real-Time Learning and Progress Is Best

In Chapter 29, I explored how important it is to video all your speeches and keep them in your portfolio to review later. It's critical to self-monitor and evaluate as you go on your journey, even if you have a coach or mentor. When we do this, we can note our progress, which encourages us to continue. As a Speaking Seed, the road is a long one, and the only person who can keep you from veering off that road is you. This book provides the basics on how to track your progress as well as real-time learning opportunities — if you answer the “Reflect for a Moment” items at the end of most of the chapters. Video journals of public speaking experiences and any written observations provide proof of our hard work and progress.

The Proof Is in the Pudding

Seeing is believing. If you say you can speak a language on a résumé, there's a strong chance that when you go to the interview, someone will test you on that skill. Better yet, they will want to see evidence on your résumé before they even call you for the interview. Today with the internet and all the multimedia resources available, it's easy to provide evidence of your language learning progress by sharing it online.

Being a Speaking Seed Is the Trend

Ever since my Mandarin speech contest video was posted on YouTube, I have received emails from people all over the world saying how I inspired them to participate in Mandarin speech contests and asking me for advice. A lot has changed. When I was in school, we didn't even have English speech contests. Now, thanks to the popularity of political leaders and public figures on social media as well as TED talks, demonstrating the ability to handle pressure and speak articulately in front of an audience has become mainstream.

There's a Future for Foreign Language Learning & Leadership

Speaking another language is cool. Public speaking is cool, too. Combine the two together and *ahhhh* — magic happens. Now more than ever before, people are going overseas to travel, volunteer, or live and work. The future of leadership in the 21st century will center around people who want to network and establish long-lasting relationships with people around the globe. Real connections with people never happen through an interpreter. To facilitate these kinds of relationships, people need to have direct communication with one another, and by doing so, we empower others as well as ourselves.

Today people want a different kind of language learning experience — one that blends individual learning and responsibility with cooperation and collaboration while focusing on building strong interpersonal skills. People want to spread ideas fast and reach as many people as possible in the shortest time. There's no better way to make a difference in this world than to become a Speaking Seed.

In the introduction of this book, I provided a timeline to give you a clear picture of how I became a Speaking Seed. Now think about yours. How has your curiosity about foreign language public speaking been shaped by your personality, upbringing, environment, education background, work experience, personal interests, or other life experiences?

I hope now that you've come to the end of this book, if you've decided to continue on your journey as a Speaking Seed, you can:

- Develop a better understanding of who you are
- Know more about your country and culture
- Foster good mental habits
- Educate others about who you are and where you're from
- Facilitate relationships with people different from you
- Achieve foreign language public speaking success
- Believe the seeds you have to share are seeds that others want to hear

I would have never thought in a million years that a little black girl from suburban Philadelphia who struggled to read a speech off a small piece of Snoopy paper would one day be the first foreigner to beat a field of all-native Mandarin speakers in a speech contest. But I did. And I never thought I would be here encouraging people to use their foreign language speaking skills as a way to diminish the level of ignorance in the world. But that's what I'm doing. I've developed a passion for this: to create a world with more mutual understanding and tolerance, a place that's better for us all.

The power to change the world lies in the seed that's waiting inside of you, the seed that wants to be spoken and take root. I've given you the shovel. Ready to start digging?

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