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**【Directions】** Read the text below to prepare for the interview and the writing test.

- 1) You will be asked to answer questions and to write an essay based on this text.
- 2) You can take notes in this booklet and bring them with you so that you can refer to your notes during the interview and while you are writing your essay.

Now, let me make a radical statement: the mission of education should not be to make students better at school but rather to prepare them for life. As schools focus on high-stakes testing, there is a tendency to forget that mission and to see the test as the ultimate outcome of our instruction. As a result, many important parts of a well-rounded education that do not directly contribute to the test score can end up on the cutting room floor\*, including art, music, physical education, home economics, health, and civics. Another skill commonly sacrificed is speaking.

There is some evidence that the atmosphere is changing. Colorado, my home state, revised its state standards in 2010. The 1995 standard “Reading and Writing” became “Reading, Writing, and Communicating,” and “Oral Expression” is the first thing mentioned under the standard. The Common Core State Standards Initiative suggests adopting the standard “Speaking and Listening.” More than forty states had adopted the Common Core Standards by the end of 2010. Some school districts have added formal speaking assessments to the curriculum, though such districts are still the exception, not the rule. I believe that, to a large extent, these changes are driven by a new concern for workplace readiness and a desire to think beyond the classroom and beyond the high-stakes test.

While speaking skills may have been somewhat underemphasized in schools, they have not been underemphasized in the real world. Look at the business section of your local bookstore. There are many, many books on the shelves about public speaking. Some focus on general presentation skills, some on specific skills like closing the deal, some on overcoming fear, and some on speaking in social settings. All of them recognize the importance of being well spoken.

Speaking well enables us to communicate clearly with coworkers and avoid misunderstandings on the job. Speaking well enables us to feel more confident and become more respectable. (I recall a conversation with our school psychologist, who told me that she felt my opinions had more power than those of my colleagues because I spoke so well. She didn't say my opinions were better. They just seemed better, which I suppose is still a compliment.) Speaking well enables us to be more impressive over the telephone and in video conferences. Speaking well is crucial to professional promotion. No CEO of a corporation can lead without strong oral communication. No attorney can persuade a jury, no politician can be elected, and no coach can motivate a team without strong speaking skills. Even in professions that we don't think of as highly verbal, oral communication matters. Wouldn't you prefer to do business with an electrician who speaks well? A landscaper? A hairdresser?

Why not make clear to students how important speaking is to professional success? Students often believe that what we teach in school has no relevance to their lives in the "real world," and to a large extent, they may be right. I'm willing to bet that people who speak well have more professional and social success in life than people who don't. That's relevance!

Every year, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveys employers to see what qualities they want most from college students they are considering for employment. Employers responding to NACE's Job Outlook 2011 survey suggest that "New college graduates looking to crack the still-tight job market need to hone their verbal communication skills ... verbal communication skills topped the list of 'soft' skills they seek in new college graduates looking to join their organizations" (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2010). Strong work ethic, teamwork skills, analytical skills, and initiative, while all critical skills, followed verbal communication in importance. If students master speaking, their chances of success increase dramatically.

Further support for the value of speaking skills comes from a study of 104 Silicon Valley employers. Silicon Valley is the home of many of America's high-tech firms, and you might expect that they would place a high value on math and engineering skills, right? Company representatives were asked several questions about desired qualities in prospective employees. The question "What additional business communication skills would you like to see in your recent college graduate new hires?" produced interesting results:

*Employers sought improved oral presentation skills more frequently than they did*

*written skills*. Their comments expressed a need for stronger skills in public speaking, enhanced interpersonal skills, increased confidence, and improved interviewing skills. Several wrote that students needed *more presentation skills*, highlighting the ability to use software tools like PowerPoint. This was surprising, because the popular press talks more about a lack of writing skills among college graduates than about insufficient oral skills. (Stevens 2005, 7; emphasis added)

On a personal note, my former student Kelly affirmed my belief in the value of teaching speaking. She looked me up twenty-one years after being in my middle school English class. She wanted to tell me about her marriage and her master's degree, and she wanted to let me know that I had influenced her more than any other teacher. Kelly took me out to dinner and told me that she believed that what I taught her in my English class was more responsible for her success than anything else she had learned. Of course, I was curious. Was it alliteration\*? The plot line diagram? Identifying main characters? Writing topic sentences? No, Kelly said the most vital skill she had learned from me was how to speak well and be comfortable in front of people. Let me be clear: I am not saying that we should forget about all those other critical language skills. But while those are all essential, Kelly picked speaking skills as the most important.

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\*end up on the cutting room floor: be thrown away

\*alliteration: several words which all begin with the same letter or sound