

# Chapter 1

## How to Choose Speech Students



### I. Teaching in Excellence

1. Praise and Criticism
2. Respect for Individual Differences
3. Inspiration of Life and Thoughts

### II. Choosing the Students for Speech Class

1. Concept of “Polishing Jewels”
2. Procedure of Choosing
3. Some Difficulties

#### 内容提要

作者从讨论中西方不同的表扬与批评方式入手，将她训练中国大学生进行英语演讲的独特见解娓娓道来。作者指出，学生是“未经雕琢的璞玉”，教师应尊重他们的个体差异，观察、倾听他们的内心感受，并力

争做一名“人生的导师”。作者分享了她在遴选演讲学生（speech student）方面的实践经验，包括如何为演讲课程做广告，如何从众多报名的学生中缩小范围，找到适合参赛的选手等。



# I. Teaching in Excellence



*This part gives clues to the reader why I train speech students the way I do, and how I train them.*

## 1. Praise and Criticism



*Personal experience of praise and cultural observations of praise and criticism in China.*

### Experience of Praise

Writing a book about how to train speech students, or any students for that matter, causes one to recall which of their own teachers were really good, and which were just average and why they were different. The definition of a “good” teacher probably has similar characteristics all over the world. Each of them has their students’ welfare and learning at heart. Each teacher has a certain degree of strictness, when necessary, to help reiterate the things they have previously taught, making sure the students get the important information. Good teachers usually find creative ways to help their students really “learn” and better understand difficult material while they make it personal. Good teachers know how to properly praise their students when they do a good job, and how to give a stern push when it is needed to move them out of a funk or plateau that is hindering their continued learning. Those same teachers know how to help and encourage their students to show their strengths and to find ways to work with their students to overcome their weaknesses.

### Cultural Observations of Praise and Criticism in China

Although various cultures may have similar definitions of a “good” teacher, still at times they have different ways of showing or expressing those qualities that make a good teacher. The use of praise and criticism as a catalyst to learning is one of those differences.

I’m going to share with you a personal experience that allowed me to observe what the difference might look like in the lives of my students in China. Keep in mind that this is my personal experience and NOT from any extensive reading I have done on the subject.



## One cultural observation of praise and criticism

One of my closest students (like a son to me) had come over to my home bringing his mother who was visiting for a few days. We had a lovely time exchanging presents and sharing experiences while my student did all of the translation for us.

At one point I complimented his mother on what a wonderful son she had raised and how proud I was of him. At first he was very embarrassed to translate such a compliment due to the tradition of modesty in China, but I told him that he had to tell her what I said. I expected HIS response, but what I didn't expect was HERS. She said, "No, he's not now. He will be, and I will be proud of him when he completes his education, has a good job and is meeting his responsibilities."

I was shocked! In the English speaking culture and way of thinking, criticism would be tantamount to slapping him in the face in public and telling his teacher that he wasn't any good.

At first I thought that she was kidding, but she was serious. Then I looked at my poor student, waiting for him to break out in tears any second, but he didn't. He just looked at me and smiled, telling me that it was just their way, her way, of pushing him further ahead to success, encouraging him and letting him know that he could do better. This was her way of encouraging him! I couldn't believe it! If that had been me, while my mother was saying that to my teacher in front of me, I'd have died on the spot of embarrassment. I probably would have run out of the room, believing that my mother had a very low opinion of me. I would have thought that my mother had just told my teacher I was basically worthless where I was right now in my life and status. My student? He just let it "roll off his back" as if it was something that was very expected and normal. That's just one example I observed of seeing a mother using a form of criticism to reinforce the success of her son's future, and the son understood it perfectly. I didn't.



This situation was not with a teacher but a parent, but the concept is the same. It was not a big deal but it helped me in a small way to realize that I didn't understand what was really happening underneath, nor between them. We (the mother and the son from their culture and I from mine) were viewing what was happening and being said from two different vantage points and we each made assumptions based on our own cultural background and understanding. We each had preconceived ideas and varying views that affected how we reacted and what we did and thought about what was happening.

There are many cultural differences that I have learned or run into since living and teaching in China. Giving and responding to praise and criticism is just one of them.

The quote, "The sweetest of all sounds is praise," comes from a man named Xenophon who was a student of Socrates. Both of our countries and cultures believe that statement to be true; but when it comes to understanding what we each mean, we need to negotiate the meaning of the word "praise." We also need to realize that there are different kinds of "triggers"<sup>1</sup> or types of incentives, encouragements and praise in different cultures, and in different families as well. Finding out what will cause an individual or a class to get excited about doing their best, excelling and moving forward in a particular task or event, takes careful observation on the part of the teacher. The better we know and understand our students' "triggers," the better teachers we can be. That's all part of learning to teach in excellence!

Although this is not a book about cultural differences, there are certain things to which I have had to adjust my teaching methods in order that my students might both understand and learn from me. That means that I have had to try to become more sensitive to what and how my students in China have already been taught, and how they learn, so that I can make changes from there. I'm learning, but it takes time, and I've experienced mistakes along the way and have tried to learn from them. My learning isn't over yet. As long as I'm living there will constantly be things I have to learn.

---

1 triggers: things that cause other things to happen; catalyst

## **2. Respect for Individual Differences**

### **Individual Differences Play a Big Part**

Although we deal with cultural differences I don't believe that is the most important issue of this book or my teaching. What is most important for us as teachers, coaches and even students is to watch, listen and communicate with each other what is really happening in our hearts, and share what each of us needs to do to accomplish a particular outcome. If we can do that, we can break down the walls that so often creep up between us and learn how to both benefit from our differences.

Individual differences and uniqueness of both the teacher and the students play a big part in the process of learning and of their relationship! Many of the things we experience in and out of the classroom have to do with individual personalities and differences within our various cultures. If there is an issue, open dialogue about the issue should be utilized. We need to be able to talk about our ideas and differences openly. The longer I am here, the more I'm starting to believe that it is because of our ability to discuss and appreciate our distinct differences that a large part of success is found.

### **I Am Different and So Is My Teaching**

What I teach and how I teach is so different from what my students have been used to; it causes my students to start thinking deeply about what that difference is. They'll ask questions of themselves and others like: Why is this class so different? Why is she so different? Is it because Connie Mom is a Westerner, an American, a foreigner, a mother, a grandparent, a woman, or what?

As both a teacher and a person I am often told that I am VERY different from the norm, whatever that means. Since it is me that they are speaking of, I usually don't understand what they are talking about, or how I am that different. But what I do know is that I am a passionate person, and I am passionate about the things I believe in and am committed to. I believe that passion is a critical part of following your life purpose or succeeding in reaching your goals and your dreams, but it is not everything. It takes a lot more than just passion, but that is for a later discussion.

The way that I teach is not better than the way the Chinese teachers teach; it is just different and many of the students are intrigued and enamored by it. But then



again there are those who just can't seem to adjust and accept the differences. Not everyone will and that's OK!

When I first came to China in 2000, one of my students who had a difficult time accepting my style of teaching wrote of me in one of his journals: "Now that you are in China, do as the Chinese do. You know the old saying 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.'" My reaction to that was, "China will soon be a member of the World Trade Organization, so you are right: 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.'"

Maybe that was a bit harsh but I wanted him to understand and know that I was here teaching in China to make a difference and not to do things the same way they have been done or there would be no purpose in my coming.

First, you need to know a few things about me. It's true that I am not an expert in English writing and that is what I am teaching, at least in my paid position. But I believe that when it comes to teaching itself, the techniques needed to be a good teacher transcends the subject being taught. That is true whether the subject is oral English, written English, finance and real estate, or even public speaking. I believe that I am a good teacher and one of the main reasons I believe that is because I have a passion for teaching and a passion and love for students and for people. But as I just mentioned, passion is great but it is not everything.

What is important to know and remember is that knowledge of the specific subject is imperative over the long haul to continue on week after week. To be a really good teacher, who teaches in excellence, you have to be able to pass on your knowledge to the students. You must have the depth of knowledge in the first place to back up the subject you are teaching.

Now it is true that you can learn as you go, and being a teacher is much like that for any subject. If you haven't been a teacher before or haven't taught a particular subject, to some degree you learn as you go. As a matter of fact, each classroom is filled with a different group of students, with different group personalities, and you have to adapt each lesson to the level and distinct needs of the individual classroom even if you've taught the subject for many years.

In English writing, knowledge of the subject is where I am terribly weak. Nowhere in my background do I have the expertise, or grammatical knowledge, to be able to answer the questions that the students learning English as a second language have a right to expect me to know.

I was an expert in real estate finance and credit issues for 23 years. That doesn't give me the right to claim to be an English writing teacher. In the beginning I felt so inadequate!!! Going from being able to write the curriculum outlines and approvals for the State of California Real Estate Mortgage Broker Business and being able to answer almost every question thrown at me, to not even knowing how to properly diagram a sentence structure for the most basic of sentences is really pitiful.

Most of my students know better than I do how to structure the grammatical layout of a sentence or at least the reasons why you do it that way. Me? I just know what sounds right because I am a native speaker. But THAT is the point. I AM a native speaker, and for my purposes here, helping my students to learn English and Western culture better, that IS sufficient. But it is by no means all that my work of becoming a good teacher teaching in excellence entails. Teaching is more than just having knowledge of the subject!

Because I know that my students already understand the basic principles of English writing structure, which they successfully learned through their very knowledgeable and capable Chinese teachers before me, I believe my first obligation in teaching writing is to GET them to write. Just like anything, practice makes the difference. Confidence in one's ability to perform and accomplish a task is found in the actual doing of a thing and seeing that they can do it. Then to improve and get better at it, they need to practice, practice, practice! This is the key to becoming good at anything, whether it's writing, jumping hurdles or speaking English and giving speeches.

### 3. Inspiration of Life and Thoughts



► I'm a life teacher.



I guess I see myself as a life teacher<sup>1</sup> more than a writing teacher. I use teaching English writing, and even speech, as a means to teach other subjects, like life skills, team cooperation, integrity and honesty. All the while I am trying to build up the students' self-esteem, so they are better prepared to face society and the future they have ahead of them when they leave me, and the sheltered life of the university.

Loving my students and challenging them to lift the bar of excellence, expecting them to do and be their best is what I do best. I guess that's one of the main reasons I am called Connie Mom. I'm not just their teacher. I truly believe that my students—any students given the chance—will rise up to the expectations that we have of them.

My standards are high and the students know that. They have even come to expect it. But we have to love them enough to allow them to fail, or to fall, and then encourage them to get right back up again and move on, pushing through and past the challenges that education and life bring their way.

I believe that given the chance, showing them how to perform a particular task, and giving them encouragement along with the opportunity to try, they will make it. First, they have to be given the freedom to fail without risking the abuse of rejection and scorn if and when they do fail!

They will accomplish great and amazing things if we help them to rest in the oasis of our belief in them and in the refreshing waters of time, allowing them to explore themselves and their talents. Once they see what they can do, they will be motivated to take the next step to keep on going. Just show them how, give them the chance, and they will take off and achieve what they were meant to achieve. They will find their purpose.

It is the learner's responsibility to learn and achieve his/her own work and our responsibility as teachers or tutors to facilitate the learning and not control it. If I just look back at my own best teachers in life, I can get a clue from them as to where to start. The list below shows the qualities or characteristics that I have noticed of my really "good" teachers who have taught in excellence over the years.

---

<sup>1</sup> life teacher: someone who teaches or shares information or gives practical experience that will be useful throughout life





## Each of my best teachers

1. Had my own welfare and learning at heart.
2. Was always repeating things and correcting me with a certain degree of strictness, to help ingrain previously taught lessons I needed to learn.
3. Spent time listening, loving, and showing me that each cared about my learning, my growth and the decisions I made.
4. Let me make my own choices, as I was capable of doing it.
5. Encouraged me and tried to provide the opportunity and support to follow my own “bent” in life.
6. Reinforced my own personal “uniqueness.”
7. Reinforced my dreams and abilities with positive feedback.
8. Believed in me.
9. Supported me.

Since coming to China I will add one more thing to that list: a little criticism in love, for their cultural understanding as well as mine.

As a fellow teacher and coach, I hope that what I have learned and gleaned from being a foreign teacher in China these nearly seven years, and being a speech coach who has been blessed with a number of successful students, might be useful to you, and you might be able to adapt some of what I have created and used, to help your own students. We are in this together.

Blessings to you as you passionately work towards excellence, diligently creating your own lessons motivating and stimulating your students on to their success!

## II. Choosing the Students for Speech Class

### 1. Concept of “Polishing Jewels”



*So many students are just unpolished jewels.*

One of the most difficult parts of starting a speech class each year is choosing



the students. With the numbers of students in most universities in China today being in the multiples of tens of thousands, no one teacher can have the opportunity of personally hearing or even seeing all of the students who would like to participate and try out for a special speech class; it's impossible.

Speech students that consistently work hard, diligently practice their English (as a foreign language) and gradually rise to the top are hidden and usually start off as “unpolished jewels.” We'll call them “diamonds in the rough<sup>1</sup>.” Most of them are hidden away in the depths of untapped mines and need “miners” (coaches and trainers) to roll up their sleeves<sup>2</sup>, take their tools out and get in there to find them. When they do find them, then the teacher needs to “chisel” them out, form, polish and prepare them for placement in the proper setting. It's not easy work; it's not for everyone; but for those who choose to take on the job, it pays off in polished, priceless treasures of students who are “Jewels of Great Price.”

My university, Jiangxi Normal University, had approximately 10,000 students when I first arrived in August of 2000 and we had 8 foreign teachers. Now, in slightly over six years, we have grown to over 52,000 students with approximately 30 foreign teachers, only two thirds of them teaching English. That requires me to be almost completely dependent on my Chinese co-teachers and administrators to find speech students, at least in the beginning.

Sometimes when the new freshmen come to the university, they already have a good reputation of speaking good English, like Ai Lisha (“CCTV Cup” First Place Winner 2004) did, or I've gotten to know the student personally very well like Li Jiayu (“CCTV Cup” Second Place Winner 2002) and can see and hear firsthand how really excellent she is. Of course that helps a lot but it isn't the norm.

At every university there are literally hundreds of students from all over the university, both English and non-English majors who want to try out. You should work with English majors as well as non-English majors, as many competitions require that so many of the students be non-English majors. Every teacher has to search the campus to find those “jewels in the rough.”

---

1 diamonds in the rough: stones or people who are still in their natural state waiting to be polished or refined so that their true character or nature is revealed

2 roll up one's sleeves: get ready to work hard



► My very first official speech class plus Li Jiayu

## 2. Procedure of Choosing

### Advertising the Speech Class

My first speech class started with an advertisement put on a bulletin board. Here is a copy of what was used.



## Connie's Public Speaking Course: "Commitment to Excellence"



**\*\*\*This course is ONLY for those students who are willing to commit themselves to PASSION in EXCELLENCE!**

The students chosen for this "Special Course" have to be willing to work harder than most students can even imagine, committing both time and energy (above and beyond their regular class work and schedules), to learning the skill of public speaking and speech writing.

### Requirements:

1. Each student will be required to attend classes a minimum of once a week and sometimes twice a week.
2. Each student will be required to create, write and rewrite, as well as publicly perform, many different speeches throughout the year. (**NO plagiarism allowed.**)
3. Each student will perform their speeches for students of our university, as well as others, in front of administrators and officials, and at public places and events.
4. Each student will be required to give a minimum of at least one "outside" speech a month on top of all his or her other work. Often times there will be late evening or weekend "practice" sessions to work on pronunciation and question-answering skills for competitions.
5. Each student will be required to be a judge in one middle school speech competition and then tutor one of those students, chosen by competition, once a week for one month (four times), sometime during the second semester.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This part ended up not happening.

**\*\*\*If a student misses any of these classes or sessions without a legitimate excuse or special doctor's slip, they will be out of the class.**

**“I’ve considered the ‘Costs’ involved and I still want to join. How do I?”**

Each applicant is required to hand in a **TYPED**, one-page paper, on **WHY** they desire to be considered as one of the **TWELVE** students chosen for this course. The paper should have their English as well as their Chinese names, their class or level, and their phone numbers on the very top of the paper.

Each applicant is required to hand in a **TYPED**, personally created speech (no more than three minutes long), with a title chosen from the following selections:

- 1. Authentic Love Is Tough Love**
- 2. Real Riches Are More Than Just Earning Money**

## **Narrowing the Numbers Down**

It’s impossible for a teacher or coach to work with every student that wants to be in a “special” speech class, so it becomes necessary to find a way to narrow the numbers down to a size that is manageable. Every school or group might have different ways of doing this. It usually starts with signups or tryouts, narrowed down by teacher recommendations from different classes to department heads. From there the students might compete within their departments and the top winning names from there will be passed on to those in charge of the department or group that will conduct the special class.

In my university, to narrow the numbers down, usually the teachers in the individual classes choose two or three students that they feel are the best and pass their names on to the leader in charge of their department. From there they have smaller contests to narrow it down even more. The semi-finals might take two days and many teachers would go to judge those speeches. Usually it is only the Chinese



teachers who do this part. There is one room for the English majors and another for the non-English majors. They don't compete with each other. Not at this stage anyway. I usually give the students a choice of two topics to choose from for their speech.

The finals are conducted with both foreign and Chinese teachers being the judges. There is a very large group now but it has been lessened. The students give their speeches to the crowd. I am there at this point and am also one of the judges. After each speech they are asked two questions. This contest will “narrow the field<sup>1</sup>” to about 25 students, made up of both majors and non-majors. The winners are announced later, usually the next day or two.

Each year I've tried to improve the process, learning from each change I've made, trying to incorporate what's good, or throw out what isn't. The description below has both specifics and generalities from various years put together to give a basic overview or idea of what has happened in my university.

Now the real process starts. A few days later or the next weekend, all the finalists, approximately 25 students, meet again. The students come into the room. They are congratulated for making it this far and given a short speech. The instructions are given as to how this part works. “Lots” are drawn choosing their order. When their turn comes they draw a piece of paper that has an individual topic. Their topic is written down and they take the paper with them. (It is NOT put back to potentially be redrawn by someone else.)

The students are allowed to take their materials with them into a separate room where they prepare their speeches alone for 20 minutes. Two rooms are provided so two students are preparing at once, alternating each classroom every ten minutes. Example: One student is sent into one room for their 20 minutes; 10 minutes after the first student is sent in, the next student is sent into a different room to start their 20 minutes. When the time comes, the assistant goes and gets the first contestant, who comes in before the judges and gives their three-minute speech and answers two questions. The student has one minute to answer each question. From here on, you as a speech teacher will have to decide how you will narrow it down to the winners for your own class, but you can read on and find out how I proceed to choose mine.

At this point the judges are all foreigners. For some years I have mostly

---

1 narrow the field: an elimination process—the competition eliminates many contestants

foreigners with a few specially handpicked, trained Chinese judges who know exactly what I want and what I am looking for. For instance, Li Jiayu is one of the people I use to help me at this stage of the process. She has been through numerous competitions herself on many levels and she is an excellent judge! She knows what it takes. Her insight as both a Chinese, and a past winning participant, gives me a different perspective.

When all of the students have finished and cleared the room, the judges and I meet together with our marks and notes on each student and we discuss them. Everyone makes recommendations. At this point it is not just about the marks. As a matter of fact, we don't really use the marks except as a benchmark to remind us how we compare each student. Since the marks are never shared outside the room, it doesn't matter what they are. What does matter is the very lengthy discussion we have about each student and why we either agree or disagree about who should be in the class, or not, and why. This part is usually done over dinner by only a very few teachers—three or four of us. I deeply respect the thoughts and opinions of my co-teachers and I take their opinions seriously, taking them into account when I make my final decision. The final decision is mine alone!

I will call approximately 10 to 13 students (more or less), to congratulate them and tell them that they have made it to the next step. I make individual appointments with each student. They have to come into my office or I meet them at the coffee shop and I interview them for about 15 to 20 minutes, asking them questions about themselves and why they want to be in my class. I listen carefully to their ability to think clearly and express their thoughts and ideas. I talk to them about all that the class involves and what their level of commitment will be. When I've met with every student, I review all of my notes and decide which students will be in my class for that year.

For various reasons, in some years the class is chosen at the end of the spring semester for the following school year, and other years this has to wait until the beginning of the fall semester. Each year seems to be different according to the circumstances.



## Story of Huang LiHua (Tricy), a student

Huang Lihua (Tricy) is a law student. I met her in my third year when I started up the actual speech class. At the time, all my students were English majors. Huang Lihua was SO motivated that she asked one of my other students if she could



► Me hugging Tricy

come to my writing class with her. On the first day of the semester she was sitting there. After class she came up to me and asked if it would be OK if she audited my class to improve her English. Ever since she had heard of me she wanted to be my student, my “adopted daughter.” At the time, none of the students were allowed to choose classes; they were assigned their classes by the department. This meant that she would NEVER have the chance to take my class, had I not agreed to have her. I told her that it was fine to join my class, but if she were going to come every week, she would have to participate in class like a regular student, actively participating in all the work and joining one of the “Hector Groups” with which I use to teach Project/Task-Based Education. She didn’t have to take the final but would have to do all the regular homework and be active in the same small group like anyone else. She couldn’t just come for a month and then give up and quit. She would have to count the cost of being a part of the class from the beginning and stick to it. She took the challenge and joined, staying the entire year.

When it came time for the competition to join my first speech class, which at the time was just advertised to our English majors, she came to me and said, “Mom, could I try out for the speech class, too, even though I am



a law major?” I responded with a “Yes” and she tried out and was chosen as one of the 12 winners. She was the only non-English major in the class, but what a worker! They ALL were! The first year’s advertising for my speech class literally scared students away, but NOT her.

Huang Lihua was a member of the class and worked as hard or even harder than the English majors, being involved in competitions and moving on and through even if she didn’t win. She never cried or fell apart if she didn’t win. She never got embarrassed or worried about what her peers were going to think about her winning or losing. She always just “sucked it up,” “rolled up her sleeves” and “just kept plugging away<sup>1</sup>” with a smile. I’m not saying that she didn’t have hard or disappointing times, but for her it was the process. I guess she figured that since she wasn’t an English major and wasn’t supposed to be there in the first place, this was all just extra. She was in the class for the learning, NOT for the winning. But in the end she was one of my greatest winners. She worked, learned, fell down, got back up again, and learned some more, again and again. All with a smiling attitude and a smile on her face as well.

In the summer of 2004 she joined a competition for non-English majors. She was part of the first place winning debating team for a national competition and was also voted “Best Debater” for the entire contest. She never stopped no matter how many times she lost. She understood what process means. “Never give up, don’t ever give up” became the motto she lived. She was in the speech class for a year before entering her senior year, graduating and moving on in life—a life I know will be wonderful, for she is both beautiful on the inside and the outside alike and she’s still plugging away, working hard at improving herself.

---

1 plug away: keep on going



### 3. Some Difficulties



*It's more and more difficult to find the unpolished jewels.*

Every year it becomes more and more difficult to find the unpolished jewels and choose the students who are going to be in the class. The question remains, “How does the teacher find the best students for the class and still keep it fair to all?” It always seems to go back to the fact that “life isn’t fair” and for some, no matter how you do it; there are those who are deeply disappointed because they are not chosen to be in the class. All you can do is to tell the students to just keep trying and be all they can be. The particular class or event they are trying to get in, or win, might not come to be what they wanted it to be, but if they keep plugging away and never give up, their time will come and the blessings will flow their way. It just might look different from what they thought it would. It’s critical to always keep the process as being important in front of the students and not have them focus solely on the “mark” or the “win.” That way they will understand the importance of learning and growing for life rather than for just the fleeting moment of any event or contest.

I think the most important thing we as coaches need to keep in mind is that the majority of us will NOT have the winning student, and if we are blessed enough to have that student, it won’t be every time. We need to keep the deeper values and perspectives in mind both for our own understanding and that of ALL the students we teach daily and yearly, and that is this:

Most of our speech students are “unpolished jewels” when they come to us. We have to hunt for them like we would look for a diamond in the rough. It is our responsibility as teachers or coaches to polish **and help prepare them for their placement in the right setting, where they will shine the brightest for their individual use and purpose in the world in which they will live. Not everyone is a diamond but they are all jewels that have been entrusted to us to help polish and prepare for a life of purpose.**

Another example of a jewel but one that was not so rough as most:



## Putting passion and diligent study into work—Ai Lisha

My student Ai Lisha is an exception to many of the students we coaches start with. She came to me pretty much already “cut and shinning.” She has been working for a very long time on her English before she came to me. I had already heard about her when she arrived as a freshman. When I first heard her speak, I knew



► Ai Lisha and I at the reception during the International Relations Conference in Oxford

that her English was very good, but it was in getting to know her personally that I saw her commitment to excellence and her desire to win and be all she can. Passion has to start within the student’s heart. Some already have it and for others we need to help cultivate it. Ai Lisha is one of the ones who came to me with it. So, how did I help her?

In preparation for the many contests that have been a part of Ai Lisha’s journey to winning the first place in the “CCTV Cup” English Speaking Contest 2004, I helped her with her presentation, how she dressed, and her speeches. She in turn followed my many suggestions, changing where I thought she needed to change. She read a lot! She read what I gave her, or suggested and she did a great deal on her own initiative as well. She is one of the most highly driven and disciplined individuals I’ve met in China. She follows through on her commitments and obligations. She is a woman of her word. She takes it upon herself to set up goals to both improve herself and others as well.



After competing and graduating she has passed on the knowledge that she has learned from me, and others, adding to what she has acquired on her own, to a group of children, so that they too could learn and become excellent students. She gives back to the community she lives in. I'm proud of who she is and who she is becoming!!! The point is, Ai Lisha is a passionate person, and what's more, she's learned how to use her passion to go further. She is a good, diligent "workman" and she has studied hard to show herself approved.

Here are comments regarding selection of speech contestants from Nanjing University's teacher/coach Zhang Yi.

### Zhang Yi's comments on speech student selection<sup>1</sup>

As far as I know, most universities and colleges participating in speech contests attach great importance to the training of their contestants. My university, of course, is no exception. Still, there is one thing that my university pays attention to. That is the selection of speech contestants. To choose the right contestant, to some extent, is even more important than training him. That is why in my university, far more professors and teachers participated in the selection of speech contestants than in the training afterwards.

When we examined potential speech contestants, we took into consideration the following two criteria.

**No.1: Enthusiasm.** Good preparation is the prerequisite for outstanding achievement in any speech contest. A speech contestant must have enough enthusiasm so that he can give up basically everything else and concentrate on preparing for the contest. He has to be able to resist any temptation that his peers may easily fall prey to, such as preparing for TOEFL, dating, shopping, and computer

1 This part is extracted from section one of his letter to me. The entire letter can be read in Appendix I.

games. When I trained Simon, the international speech champion, we prepared together more than one hundred off-hand speeches, which covered almost every aspect of life. In the actual contest, it's not difficult for him to connect the topic to a speech that we had prepared.

**No.2:** Analytical ability and scope of knowledge. English majors are good at language skills, but in terms of analytical ability and scope of knowledge, they are weak. In choosing a speech contestant, we prefer those who read and think much. In the speech contest, what impresses the judges is usually the content, instead of the language. It's the brilliant ideas in the speech, especially in the off-hand, that make a difference. Moreover, language skills can be trained and improved. Analytical ability and scope of knowledge can hardly be changed in a short period of time. If you look at Simon's off-hand in the "21st Century" finals, I am sure you'll be awed by his resourcefulness and analysis, which are so impressive that you will ignore quite a few serious grammatical and lexical mistakes he made in the speech.

Students are usually very enthusiastic about the speech contest. Each time before a contest, a large number of students sign up for it. It is good, in that they have the courage to show themselves. However, we can't help asking whether they are really ready for the painstaking preparation. The teacher needs to give them a more realistic picture. In addition to showing them the glory of winning speech championships, tell them the process prior to the glory. Tell them the hardship that a national or international speech champion has to endure. I often joke that as a speech tutor, my job is to tutor and torture speech contestants. The rule is simple: no pains, no gains.



Good luck in choosing the right students for YOUR speech class!