

PLANNING AND PRESENTING AN INFORMATIVE SPEECH

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Abstraction. Informative speaking offers you an opportunity to practice your researching, writing, organizing, and speaking skills. You will learn how to discover and present information clearly. If you take the time to thoroughly research and understand your topic, to create a clearly organized speech, and to practice an enthusiastic, dynamic style of delivery, you can be an effective "teacher" during your informative speech. Finally, you will get a chance to practice a type of speaking you will undoubtedly use later in your professional career. The purpose of the informative speech is to provide interesting, useful, and unique information to your audience. By dedicating yourself to the goals of providing information and appealing to your audience, you can take a positive step toward succeeding in your efforts as an informative speaker.

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An informative speech conveys knowledge, a task that you've engaged in throughout your life. When you give driving directions, you convey knowledge. When you caution someone about crossing the street at a certain intersection, you are describing a dangerous situation. When you steer someone away from using the car pool lane, you are explaining what it's for. information to the audience in a way that is clear and that keeps the listener interested in the topic. Achieving all three of these goals—accuracy, clarity, and interest—is the key to your effectiveness as a speaker. If information is inaccurate, incomplete, or unclear, it will be of limited usefulness to the audience. There is no topic about which you can give complete information, and therefore, we strongly recommend careful narrowing. With a carefully narrowed topic and purpose, it is possible to give an accurate picture that isn't misleading. Part of being accurate is making sure that your information is current. Even if you know a great deal about your topic or wrote a good paper on the topic in a high school course, you need to verify the accuracy and completeness of what you know. Most people understand that technology changes rapidly, so you need to update your information almost constantly, but the same is true for topics that, on the surface, may seem to require less updating. For example, the American Civil War occurred 150 years ago, but contemporary research still offers new and emerging theories about the causes of the war and its long-term effects. So even with a topic that seems to be unchanging, you

need to carefully check your information to be sure it's accurate and up to date. In order for your listeners to benefit from your speech, you must convey your ideas in a fashion that your audience can understand. The clarity of your speech relies on logical organization and understandable word choices. You should not assume that something that's obvious to you will also be obvious to the members of your audience. Formulate your work with the objective of being understood in all details. [p22,50]

Structuring an Informative Speech

Informative speeches have three parts:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

In this section, we discuss the three parts of an informative speech, calling attention to specific elements that can enhance the effectiveness of your speech. As a speaker, you will want to create a clear structure for your speech. In this section, you will find discussions of the major parts of the informative speech.

Introduction

The introduction sets the tone of the entire speech. The introduction should be brief and to-the-point as it accomplishes these several important tasks. Typically, there are six main components of an effective introduction:

- Attention Getters
- Thesis Statement
- Audience Adaptation
- Credibility Statement
- Preview

The Body

As in any social situation, your audience makes strong assumptions about you during the first eight or ten seconds of your speech. For this reason, you need to start solidly and launch the topic clearly. Focus your efforts on completing these tasks and moving on to the real information (the body) of the speech. Typically, there are six main components of an effective introduction. These tasks do not have to be handled in this order, but this layout often yields the best results.

Conclusion

While the conclusion should be brief and tight, it has a few specific tasks to accomplish:

- Re-assert/Reinforce the Thesis
- Review the Main Points
- Close Effectively

Strategies for Selecting a Topic

In many cases, circumstances will dictate the topic of your speech. However, if the topic has not been assigned or if you are having difficulty figuring out how to frame your topic as an informative speech, the following may be useful. Begin by thinking of your interests. If you have always loved art, contemplate possible topics dealing with famous artists, art works, or different types of art. If you are employed, think of aspects of your job or aspects of your employer's business that would be interesting to talk about. While you cannot substitute personal experience for detailed research, your own experience can supplement your research and add vitality to your presentation. Choose one of the items below to learn more about selecting a topic. [7,19]

Researching Your Topic

As you begin to work on your informative speech, you will find that you need to gather additional information. Your instructor will most likely require that you locate relevant materials in the library and cite those materials in your speech. In this section, we discuss the process of researching your topic and thesis.

Conducting research for a major informative speech can be a daunting task. In this section, we discuss a number of strategies and techniques that you can use together and organize source materials for your speech.

Making Information Clear and Interesting for the Audience

A clear and interesting speech can make use of description, causal analysis, or categories. With description, you use words to create a picture in the minds of your audience. You can describe physical realities, social realities, emotional experiences, sequences, consequences, or contexts. For instance, you can describe the mindset of the Massachusetts town of Salem during the witch trials. You can also use causal analysis, which focuses on the connections between causes and consequences. For example, in speaking about health care costs, you could explain how a serious illness can put even a well-insured family into bankruptcy. You can also use categories to group things together. For instance, you could say that there are three categories of investment for the future: liquid savings, avoiding debt, and acquiring properties that will increase in value. There are a number of principles to keep in mind as a speaker to make the information you present clear and interesting for your audience. [p11-26]

Delivering an Informative Speech

For many speakers, delivery is the most intimidating aspect of public speaking. Although there is no known cure for nervousness, you can make yourself much more comfortable by following a few basic delivery guidelines. In this section, we discuss those guidelines.

The Five-Step Method for Improving Delivery

Read aloud your full-sentence outline. Listen to what you are saying and adjust your language to achieve a good, clear, simple sentence structure. Practice the speech repeatedly from the speaking outline. Become comfortable with your keywords to the

point that what you say takes the form of an easy, natural conversation. Practice the speech aloud...rehearse it until you are confident you have mastered the ideas you want to present. Do not be concerned about "getting it just right." Once you know the content, you will find the way that is most comfortable for you. Practice in front of a mirror, tape record your practice, and/or present your speech to a friend. You are looking for feedback on rate of delivery, volume, pitch, non-verbal cues (gestures, card-usage, etc.), and eye-contact. Do a dress rehearsal of the speech under conditions as close as possible to those of the actual speech. Practice the speech a day or two before in a classroom. Be sure to incorporate as many elements as possible in the dress rehearsal...especially visual aids.

CONCLUSION

Informative speaking generally centers on talking about people, events, processes, places, or things. Informing an audience about one of these subjects without being persuasive is often a difficult task to complete. For example, a speech informing an audience about growing peace lilies as houseplants might ultimately persuade the audience to buy and grow peace lilies. All speech has an effect that might enable individuals to self-persuade themselves. The line walked during an informative speech, as opposed to a persuasive speech, is to not make persuasion an explicit and obvious goal. An informative speech on peace lilies might cover both the advantages and disadvantages of these houseplants; a persuasive speech would take a firm position on the virtues of peace lilies.

Analyze the audience. What can the audience be reasonably expected to know? If talking to a field of medical professional about cloning, they likely know the basics of DNA. An audience of lay people might not be so fluent in the language of biomedical engineering, and so basic concepts like this will have to be explained. Never presume that an audience has a thorough background in the subject.

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