



Confident Public Speaking

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Confident Public Speaking

There are times when each of us is called upon to address a group of people. There is no reason why we cannot approach this challenge with relative ease and self-confidence.

The Purpose of Speaking

Public speeches are delivered on many different occasions, but no matter what the occasion, the speaker hopes to get the audience to accept his point of view.

Therefore, in a certain sense, all speeches are persuasive speeches:

Persuading the audience to believe your information persuading the audience to change its beliefs persuading the audience not only to change its beliefs, but also to act on the changes

Perhaps you wish to inform the audience about capital punishment. Or, you may wish to get them to change their beliefs about capital punishment. Or, you may not only wish them to change their beliefs about capital punishment, but to write letters to the governor telling him what action to take.

The purpose is determined by the type of audience you are speaking to; by the circumstances of the speech; and sometimes by the course of action that you recommend.

But, whether the purpose of a particular speech is determined by the audience, by the circumstances, or by the speaker himself, preparation of the public speech must begin with the establishment of the purpose of the speech.

This purpose should be put into a sentence which is specific and concrete. A clear knowledge of the purpose in speaking is as helpful to the speaker as a road map is to the driver. The purpose gives direction to the speech and, to a degree, governs all subsequent efforts the speaker makes.

The speaker should therefore begin preparing his speech by asking himself just what action he wishes his audience to take.

We call this desired action the intended audience response (IAR).

The intended audience response should aid the audience, not just the speaker. We expect each speaker to be responsible for the welfare of the audience.

When Hitler spoke to the German people prior to and during World War II, he sought and received support for a military machine that ultimately brought death and destruction to Germany.

We believe, therefore, that he misled the German people.

His intended audience response should not have been taken by the people, in their own self-interest.

The President of the United States has, on the other hand, suggested the exchange of atomic energy secrets and fissionable materials among the nations of the world.

This is an action that people could take in their own self-interest.

A person who would deliberately recommend action by the audience that was to their detriment is dishonest; he who would do so unknowingly is ignorant. Certainly, the public speaker must avoid being either.

A speaker may recommend action that would be beneficial to the audience, but impractical to carry out. A speaker who would select such an IAR will, of course, fail.

To avoid such failure, the speaker should be able to answer these questions in the affirmative:

- Does the audience have the authority to make the IAR? (Politicians do not address children.)
- Does the audience have the capability to make the IAR? (Appeals for charitable contributions are not made to beggars.)
- Would it be appropriate for the audience to make the IAR? (Women should not be asked to volunteer for heavy labor.)

In addition, the speaker should not ask for a response that he has neither the time nor the support to justify.

2. Selection of the Central Idea

People will take action consistent with the ideas they accept. In order to get an audience to accept the IAR, a speaker must present an idea that will lead to the desired response.

In order to clarify the relation between the central idea (CI) and the intended audience response, let us consider the following IAR examples:

Donate money to charity

If you donate money to charity, you fulfill your social obligation.
If you donate money to charity, you may deduct it from your income taxes.

Charitable organizations will help your own community.

Vote in the next national election

It is a privilege to vote.

It is a civic duty to vote.

Vote to have good government.

Read better books

There are great love stories among the classics.

Biographies can be instructive.

Historical novels can be enjoyable reading.

These examples of central ideas may appear at first glance to be mere arguments in favor of taking the recommended action. In some cases, this may be true.

Let us distinguish between a central idea and an argument.

A central idea is that idea, which, if accepted, will bring about the IAR. In the examples above, if the audience is the congregation in a church, the first listed central idea for donating money to charity would be a wise selection.

If the audience were all business men, the deduction of charitable donations from income taxes would be a better choice.

If neither of these would seem appropriate, the appeal* to self-interest would be the best choice.

It is clear that one particular group would accept one idea more readily than another.

The selection of the central idea is simply a question of which idea (when fully developed) will influence the audience to take the action desired by the speaker.

When selecting the central idea, like choosing the IAR, the speaker must consider the nature of his audience. The CI he selects must be within the intellectual grasp of his audience.

The audience must have had the experience necessary to understand the idea. The CI should be a challenge to the audience. It must not be hackneyed.

3. Subdivisions of the Speech

When you have selected the CI, you should then divide it into several sub-ideas which will, in turn, become the main headings of the body of your speech. The selection of the headings of a speech is an important step in the planning.

First, the headings, when taken together, should completely cover the subject. For example, a speech with the central idea that "The United States Government is efficient," should have the following subordinate ideas:

- A. The Legislative Branch is Efficient
- B. The Executive Branch is Efficient
- C. The Judicial Branch is Efficient

The government has three branches. There are no other parts.

The full development of these headings treats the central idea and shows that the entire government is efficient.

Having one central idea, broken up into sub-ideas properly selected and supported, is a means of insuring unity in a speech. As a result of this unity, the audience will believe that you have given it a complete picture.

Your own experience will show you that using only a few sub-divisions will help you understand and remember a complex idea, while too many will tend to confuse you.

Therefore, the sub-ideas should not exceed five.

Past experience indicates that five separate headings approach the maximum number of items that people can easily remember. Too many sub-heads can actually damage the unity of your speech. More than five sub-ideas spell "danger" to the speaker.

The order in which speech materials are presented can either strengthen or weaken the effect of the speech. The speaker may find that his speech fits properly into one of the thought patterns.

If not, then, he should arrange his data in relation to the strength of each point. A speech may be organized around either three or five points.

The more nearly your ideas approximate one of the following arrangements, the more effective your speech will be.

The Form of the Outline

The speaker should begin the outline of the speech by stating the intended audience response in as concrete terms as is possible. This assures the speaker that his thinking about his purpose for speaking is clear.

He should then record the central idea. This is the next step because the selection of the central idea will determine the framework of the speech.

After selecting the central idea, the speaker should check to see if it actually will (when developed) bring about the desired response.

Division of the central idea into sub-ideas should be the next step.

Before completing the outline, it is necessary, of course, to explore each sub-idea, read about it, talk about it, and record whatever support can be found for it.

At this point it may be necessary to review the central idea and sub-ideas to see if your reading and other research will enable you to improve upon your previous choice of headings.

The next problem is to select from the recorded materials, the best supports available for each particular idea; decide how much is needed and arrange them in the most effective way.

If some headings require more specific data for support than has been found, additional research should be done.

Now that we have the ideas set down, we need to ask one more question: "Which of these ideas will the audience accept on my own authority, and which of these ideas will require additional support?"

In general, the more radical the statement, the more likely it is that you will need to refer to a source of reference to persuade the audience to your way of thinking.

Preparation of the Introduction and the Conclusion

After the body of the speech is complete, and only then, is it possible to determine an appropriate introduction and conclusion.

Planning the Introduction

The purpose of the introduction is to prepare the audience to hear your speech.

In order to do this, it must get the attention of the audience, make the audience

like or respect you (or both), and create an interest in the ideas you are going to present.

Speak Audibly. This needs little comment since a speech unheard is practically the same as a speech unmade. The members of the audience need to listen from the beginning in order to understand the speech fully.

What can be said to gain attention will, of course, depend upon the speaker, the audience, and the situation. Some approaches that have been successful in the past are:

- A startling statement: "More people have been killed on our highways than have died on all the battlefields in the history of the world!"
- A seemingly unbelievable but true statement: "There are many Americans who actually enjoy paying their income taxes."
- A question or a series of questions: "Have you ever stopped to think what it would be like to live in Red China? Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a Chinese Communist?"
- A familiar quotation: "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been!"
- The business-like approach: "Today we are going to discuss three factors. First, we shall consider . . . etc."

An example: You may use a serious story, an anecdote, a joke, or a parable. Remember that one illustration is worth a thousand words of explanation.

All the world likes a good story.

Notice how speakers you hear get the attention of their audience. Remember, the first sentence you say will be listened to by all. You may never again have so high a percentage of listeners.

Don't miss your best opportunity by wasting it on formalities or trivialities.

The routine recognition of important guests can be left to a less important part of the speech. "Ladies and gentlemen" is the safest type of salutation and is usually used in most speech situations.

Now that you have the attention of the audience, you need to concentrate on making the audience like or respect you enough to listen.

With a hostile audience, it may be necessary to prolong the introduction, but for most audiences, it is sufficient that you be well-prepared to speak to them, that you be interested in them, and that you get the job done as quickly and as well as possible.

Avoid long-winded introductions. Get to the point. Avoid apologies at all costs. The speaker who says, "I'm not very qualified to talk to you on this subject, but . . ."

ought not to be speaking to begin with.

Your introduction should arouse the interest of your audience in the theme of your speech.

Therefore, your startling statement, challenging statement, series of questions, familiar quotation, business-like approach, or illustration should point up the theme of your speech.

Do not warm up the audience with a few unrelated jokes and then say, in effect, "Well, we had better get back to the speech." You can tell jokes but choose ones which illustrate your point.

If you think you will be nervous during the first few minutes of your speech, begin with an introduction that will require movement.

Put a chart on one side of the platform so that you can walk over and point to it, set up a demonstration and practice opening with it, or plan to have a few pieces of note paper in your hands at the beginning.

A physical movement will assist in calming you. Plan enough movement in your introduction to put yourself at ease.

It can be seen from the above discussion that an introduction for a particular speech must be worked out in terms of the nature of the speech, the speaker, the audience, and the speech situation.

We have offered some general suggestions that you might try out in your speeches, but we must repeat these cautions:

- First, introductions should be as brief as possible.
- Second, materials in introductions should be included only if they contribute to one of the three purposes of the introduction.
- Third, the more original and the more timely it is, the more effective the introduction will be.
- Fourth, all introductions should be planned, yet flexible enough to incorporate events that happen as late as your own introduction.

Planning the Conclusion

The purpose of the conclusion is to draw the whole speech together in a few words. In order to do this, it must give the audience a sense of finality or completeness, summarize the content of the body of the speech, and/or arouse the audience to action.

Although a conclusion may achieve all three of these purposes, any one of them may be sufficient to meet the needs of an individual speech.

In order to give the audience a sense of finality or completeness, the conclusion

should be adequately designed to balance Preparation of the Introduction and the Conclusion.

After the body of the speech is complete, and only then, is it possible to determine an appropriate introduction and conclusion.

It should be neither too long, nor too short. Avoid the anti-climax. There is nothing worse for an audience than to think that a speaker is concluding, only to find that he has gained steam and is moving on to something new.

A preview of your speech in your introduction will help to avoid these anti-climaxes. Here are some suggestions for giving your conclusion a sense of completeness:

- A significant quotation: Save a particularly effective sentence from one of your best sources and use it as the basis of your conclusion.

You might say...

"My remarks encouraging this class to adopt a child overseas, under the Save the Children Federation, may be most effectively concluded by quoting Constance Capron from her Reader's Digest article, when she said:

'I was ashamed that my own troubles, now petty by comparison, had blinded me to the realities of life.' Are we in this same fix?"

- A startling statistic: "Only 5,500 children are now being sponsored through the Save the Children Federation. Only 5,500.

Think of the thousands more who need help. Are there not more than 5,500 families in the United States who can afford to share a small amount of their income with a destitute child overseas?"

- A fitting example: "Let me tell you one story before I end my speech. This is the story of Stella Saradari of Serres, Greece.

Her father died fighting the Communists in the mountains of Greece; her mother is a scrub woman. Stella, her brother Constantine, and her mother live in one room. Their house fell down after a particularly hard winter, and had to be rebuilt by neighbors ..."

The conclusion to every speech ought to summarize its content.

If you tell an audience in your introduction what to expect in the speech, by saying, "I am going to discuss three things with you;" if you point out to the audience in the body of the speech when you are discussing each of these by saying, "Now first, we will discuss".

And if, in your conclusion, you say, "Now, I have told you three things about," your audience cannot help but get a clear picture of your message.

If this sounds too elementary to you, remember that you are already highly familiar with the content of your speech and have gone over the material

several times.

Your audience, on the contrary, has not had this opportunity. If you give an audience three reviews of your main structure (once in the introduction, once in the body, and once in the conclusion), you need have no fears of being misunderstood.

The suggested conclusions will, to a very great extent, summarize your content. But, your central idea will be even clearer if you also review for your audience the main parts of your speech. If you are not organized, you cannot make such a summary.

Recommended Resources...

Online Speaker Training Course

An 11 Session Step-by-step Audio/video E-course Teaching You How To Speak And Present With Confidence From Expert Public Speaker, Dale Mercer. Includes Workbook And Videos On How To Use Persuasion And How To Select Winning Topics.

[Click here for more information](#)

Become an Expert Persuader in 20 Days (or less!)

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