
Types of Speeches

Different circumstances call for different types of speeches. One way to categorize these speeches is by the amount of preparation time they require. Other speeches are designed to fit the occasion or the purpose.

Limited Preparation Speeches

IMPROMPTU

An impromptu (in promptu=at hand, at readiness, to bring forth) speech requires very little if any preparation. Conversation is impromptu speaking because a response is required immediately. In a public speaking class, students might be asked to select a topic such as a famous saying or a common household word, then give a short, organized presentation on the topic without making notes or doing research.

EXTEMPORANEOUS

This type of speech allows for a very limited amount of preparation and performance without a text. Extemporaneous (ex=out, away from; tempore=time) speech might include extensive preparation ahead of time for a press

conference where a politician will be facing reporters without any notes. In class, students might be given thirty minutes to do research on an assigned topic, then get up and give an organized presentation based on that limited research and whatever information the speaker had beforehand.

Unlimited Preparation Speeches

INFORMATIVE SPEECHES

Speeches to inform are intended to share new ideas and build perceptions. The speaker identifies a topic of importance to the audience, then does research to find out recent and new information that will affect the audience. A second goal of the information speech is to give audience members a new understanding or new appreciation of some topic with which they might be familiar but unaware of recent developments.

Informative speeches do not take sides or urge direct action. The purpose is to provide an even-handed or objective view of a topic without drawing conclusions or taking sides or proposing solutions. Information can include providing definitions, history, comparisons, testimony, and narratives that expand on topics that are important to the immediate audience. Most classroom lectures are

informative; news reports and programming claim to be objective and informative.

Being objective means presenting information from all major positions if the topic is controversial and explaining why these positions exist. In addition, the ethical speaker is careful to avoid distorting information, especially if that information might cause the audience some emotional distress.

Some types of informative speeches are best suited to brief classroom presentations. A speech of description relies on narrative and language choices to create word pictures that evoke clear images in the minds of the audience.

Demonstration speeches feature a process that is described step-by-step to give the audience enough information to perform the process successfully at the end of the presentation. To create connections between the topic and audience, a speaker might choose to give a speech of explanation when the topic is abstract or difficult to understand. Most informative speeches are combinations of these types of presentations.

PERSUASION

Persuasive speaking takes a less objective view on some topic and asks the audience to take action in support of that view. A speaker will urge the audience to consider why one side of an issue is worth supporting emotionally and logically, and then tell us what action we might take to make that support real. For example, most advertising is persuasive although the logic behind the action is often obscure or fallacious. Persuasion requires providing the audience with enough information to understand the topic under discussion, appealing to the emotions, attitudes and values, and good sense of the listeners to encourage support for the speaker's stance, and setting up a course of action that is well-suited to audience capabilities, ethical, and a logical outgrowth of the arguments set up within the speech. In other words, a good persuasive speech requires the speaker to put together the elements of logos, pathos, and ethos that have been mastered throughout the class so that the audience agrees with the speaker and sees the logic behind the action step.

Logos means logic and it refers to the process of drawing conclusions based on evidence and reasoning. Evidence, from research, is used to "prove" the truth of a

contention or opinion. If the speaker contends (or asserts) that a topic is important, the audience will want to know why. Anticipating that question, the speaker will provide facts and testimony from research that support his or her contention. For example, a speaker urging college students to boycott soda machines on campus because of the high sugar and high caffeine content of the drinks would seek information on the negative effects of sugar and caffeine on the human body as one part of the speech. If the speaker finds out that some sugar and some caffeine can actually benefit a college student's classroom performance, then it is important to define the difference between some intake and excessive intake. That may take some additional research, but that's part of the speaker's responsibility.

Reasoning is a process of stacking evidence to create support for conclusions drawn by the speaker. One simple form of reasoning that we use all of the time is cause-and-effect. When your mom told you to eat your vegetables so that you would grow up strong and healthy, the effect – strong and healthy – is being linked to a single cause - eating vegetables. In a speech situation, we would expect to hear the speaker continue the discussion by explaining why they are linked by providing evidence showing what happens when vegetables are absent or limited in a diet and which

chemical factors in the vegetables contribute to that result. Problem-solution speeches work the same way. A speaker sets up or describes a problem – the amount of sugar and caffeine in soda creating health problems for college students – then suggests a solution based on conclusions drawn from evidence.

Logic can be tested by breaking down the sequence of assumptions and evidence put forth by the speaker, then checking to see if the conclusion actually fits the evidence. In formal logic, we could distribute the premises of the conclusion into a syllogism as a test of validity.

The most famous syllogism is:

Major premise: All men are mortal.

Minor premise: Socrates was a man.

Conclusion: Socrates was mortal.

Does it work? Is the conclusion valid? To agree that Socrates was mortal, we have to agree that both the major and minor premises are true. Do we have any evidence that the major premise – the universal statement – is untrue or unbelievable? The speaker will establish the existence of Socrates through evidence, then conclude that because Socrates existed and was human, Socrates was mortal.

When we test the vegetable theory, we find out that mom wasn't quite correct. The "eat your vegetables" syllogism goes like this:

- Major premise: Being strong and healthy is desirable.
- Minor premise: Vegetables provide vitamins and minerals that contribute to health and strength.
- Conclusion: Vegetables contribute to strength and health.

The original conclusion that vegetables "make" you strong and healthy would assume that vegetables, alone, will create that result which would prove both illogical and improvable. Actually, vegetables contribute to health but certainly don't cause it.

Logos is a concept we explored in the section dealing with speaker credibility, but it can be used as a form of proof. If the speaker is someone of immense credibility or celebrity, the message acquires more force. When advertisers employ an entertainment celebrity to sell or endorse a product, the idea is not an appeal to logic but to some audience identification with the celebrity. Sports figures for whom shoes and clothing are named don't necessarily have much say in the manufacturing process, but they are endorsing the product in light of their expertise in a related field. Former President Jimmy Carter endorses the non-profit organization

Habitat for Humanity both through his celebrity as a former national leader but also as a volunteer who had participated in building projects and can testify in terms of his experience in the specific field.

An extremely well-prepared speech that is practiced to perfection and delivered with enthusiasm and skill might be more persuasive than the same speech delivered with less skill. The energy level, adequacy of preparation, and perceived trustworthiness of the speaker are all persuasive measures.

Pathos, or the emotional appeal, is a third form of proof. Speakers want the audience to identify with the emotions and feelings evoked deliberately in the speech as a means of agreeing with the speaker. Emotional appeals usually target attitudes and values as a means of making human connections between the topic and the audience. The speaker still needs to do research and support contentions with evidence, but the human dimension of any appeal should be evident to engage the emotions of the audience.

Conclusions can be reached in one of two ways: deductively or inductively.

Deductive reasoning builds layer upon layer of proof, then comes to a conclusion that can be tested. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, raised this

form of drawing conclusions to a literary art form. Holmes would draw conclusions based on cumulative strands of evidence that fit together like pieces of a puzzle even when the pattern might not be obvious to the reader. The speaker does the same thing, essentially creating a puzzle, then revealing how the pieces fit together as the speech proceeds to its conclusion. Deductive reasoning can be represented by a pyramid, where the tip of the pyramid represents the conclusion resting solidly on a large body of evidence.

Inductive reasoning is somewhat trickier and can lead to fallacious (false) reasoning. Where deductive reasoning can be represented as a pyramid, inductive reasoning flips the pyramid over and is used to draw a broad range of conclusions based on a single point of evidence.

LOGICAL FALLACIES

Beware of using false (fallacious) premises on which to build your arguments. These premises often arise from over-generalization or “received” wisdom – what a culture believes to be true without benefit of evidence or from very limited evidence. Some common fallacies include the slippery slope where a speaker argues that if something happens once, a whole series of related events will occur as though the single event were poised at the top of an icy

mountain; a red herring where the speaker distracts the audience from the real issue by creating a case around something unrelated or more sensational; attacking a person with an ad hominem (toward the person) argument such as blaming the victim rather than exploring the issues; and begging the question where an unsubstantiated conclusion is tacked onto a slogan or generalization such as insisting that “real men eat beef” – it’s an essentially meaningless conclusion that sounds good.

CRITICAL THINKING

Both the speaker and the audience are responsible for testing conclusions and challenging generalizations throughout the speech. Audience members are not expected to interrupt the speaker to question logical premises and the sources of references presented in support of those premises. However, it is important for the audience to listen attentively to the entire development of a logical sequence so that any conclusion reached can be defended. Audience members are expected to put aside attitudes and biases in listening to a persuasive appeal; to test the reasoning and logic on the merits supplied by the speaker; and to decide whether they agree with the speaker on the merits of the presentation.