Outlining

Any good speech is carefully prepared and organized in advance of its delivery. This organizational process begins with sifting through the information you gather when researching, but the structure of your speech really takes shape when you draft your outline. The development of an outline is not a one-time task, but rather a process in which you create a full-sentence outline that illustrates the points you want to make and from which you practice your speech. As you practice, you become more familiar with the material and thus can pare it down to shorter phrases, which in turn constitutes your speaking outline.

In order to successfully use this process, it is important to understand the principles that guide the construction of a good outline. In this chapter, we will first cover the principles of outlining, and then discuss the characteristics of a preparation outline, and how to turn that outline into a proper speaking outline. Despite the emphasis on outlining in this chapter, we recognize an outline is not the only type of speaking material you might use, and so the chapter concludes with a brief exploration of other types of speaking materials.

Outlining Principles

Outlining is a systematic method of organizing your ideas. This organized approach ensures that your argument is clear and your information is in an appropriate place within the speech. There are three key tenets to outlining: subordination, coordination, and division. Each of these three helps you create an organized presentation your audience can follow.

Subordination

All outlines work to create what is essentially a hierarchy of ideas through the use of symbols and indentations. This process of creating a hierarchy of ideas in which the most general ideas appear first followed by more specific ideas is called **subordination**, and it is a key principle of outlining. In an outline, each level has a different symbol set, and those symbols correspond to items such as main points, subpoints, and sub-subpoints. The first or broadest level is a main point, and it is represented by a Roman numeral. The second, slightly more specific level is a subpoint, and it is represented by a capital letter. The third level, if needed, is even more specific than the second level, and is denoted by an Arabic numeral. The following shows what the system looks like:

    I. Main point
            A. Subpoint
            B. Subpoint
            C. Subpoint
                    1. Sub-subpoint
                    2. Sub-subpoint
    II. Main point

Notice how indenting different levels creates the perception of a hierarchy of points. The main point is the most general and does not include specific evidence or data, but rather sets up an entire section of a speech that provides data and evidence in support of the main point. The subpoint is a more specific aspect or aspects of the main point and can include specific evidence or information in support of the main point. Sometimes this information can take several sentences of explanation, and in those cases another level of the outline, the sub-subpoint, is created.

Each time you move to a new level, the information should support the level above it. So, if you have a subpoint indicated by a capital letter and need to explain it further, you do not use another capital letter, but rather move down a level to numbers so you can visually see that that explanation relates to the particular subpoint it is under. In essence, the deeper into the levels one goes, the more specific the information gets, but it always relates to the level under which it appears.

Coordination

The hierarchy created by an outline that adheres to subordinated points naturally creates coordination of information. By **coordination** we mean that all information on the same level has the same significance. In other words, you would not place a main point next to a capital letter or number because such a move would create a confusing speech. The same types of statements appear on the same level, and when you find yourself making a claim in a place where you should be providing data in the outline, it should indicate that you are at the wrong level of the outline and need to make a change. This coordination helps you and your audience stay on track and provides expected and relevant information when it is needed.

Division

The final principle of outlining we will discuss is the notion of **division**, and it is just as important as the ideas of subordination and coordination. If you are going to divide a point, such as a main point into subpoints, you need to have two or more subpoints in order to do so. The same is said for dividing subpoints as well—you must have two sub-subpoints if you plan to create a new level for the outline. More succinctly: if you have a main point I, you must have a main point II, and if you have a subpoint A, you must have a subpoint B, and, of course, if you have a sub-subpoint 1, you must have a sub-subpoint 2.

The principle of division ensures you give adequate attention to each line and claim you make in a speech. If you have too many claims and not enough evidence then the speech needs more attention to the supporting materials. Division ensures balance, explanation, and organization within the hierarchy of ideas and should not be discarded as unimportant.

Outlining helps you logically organize your ideas by adhering to the three principles of subordination, coordination, and division. Because of the structured nature of an outline and the use of these ideas, it is easy to see how an outline serves a speaker better than bullet points or random notes. It affords you the ability to lay the main points out and logically put the subpoints and sub-subpoints neatly into the hierarchy. Additionally, the earlier you start the outlining process, the better your speech will be, and the more you get into the practice of outlining, the more you will realize that it is a valuable tool, whether you are preparing a speech or writing a research paper.

Preparation Outline

We have repeatedly noted that developing a speech is a creative and fluid process, and the development of an outline is no different. We mentioned a few moments ago that organizing your speech begins when you start gathering information, but that it accelerates when you sit down to prepare an outline. The earlier you do this, the more time you have to make changes and work through different ways to deliver your material. The preparation outline is a tool that facilitates such changes in a smooth fashion by visually illustrating the information you collected and the arguments you wish to make.

Preparation outlines follow several rules. The first is that each symbol of the outline is followed by a full sentence. For example, we show a main point and subpoint:

> I. Main point stated as a full sentence
> > A. Subpoint stated as a full sentence
> > B. Subpoint stated as a full sentence
> II. Main point stated as a full sentence
> > A. Subpoint stated as a full sentence
> > B. Subpoint stated as a full sentence

Full sentences help demonstrate what you want to say and also allow you to make specific connections between points and evidence. Additionally, they allow you to practice your speech in its entirety, which as you will see when we discuss how to create a speaking outline, is very helpful.

The second rule for preparation outlines is that there is only one sentence allowed per symbol. This rule has only one exception: when you directly quote a source that contains multiple sentences, you include the entire quotation and source citation next to the same symbol. In doing this, you can break down a speech to its component parts and ensure that your information appears where it should. This makes it easier to spot information that is out of place and to cut or move that information to another more appropriate location in the outline. If you find you cannot create a properly divided point, then this may indicate the statement should be moved or discarded.

A third rule of preparation outlines pertains to in-text citations. Preparation outlines should contain proper citations for material drawn from sources. This enables you to cross-check the source and make sure you verbally attribute information when you share it with your audience. In your outline, you should cite your source the same way you plan to cite the source verbally. Generally speaking, you will briefly cite a source and then provide the corresponding information.

Rule number four pertains to the difference between a preparation outline and an essay. Remember that a speech is not written like an essay even though it is typed into an outline. Instead, you should write the outline how you actually plan to say the speech when you deliver it. When we write a formal essay, we use different language, grammar, sentence structure, and even lengths of sentences. When you prepare and deliver a speech, you should use language that is not too complex and with which you feel comfortable. Essays and speeches have different flows and different expectations. Remember, a speech is closer to a conversation in terms of language use than it is to an essay, so prepare your outlines with this in mind. If you choose to write a draft, this same rule applies because the ultimate product is to be spoken, not written.

A strong preparation outline is essential for preparing a successful presentation, but it is not the last outline you'll create. After practicing with the preparation outline and making any adjustments you deem necessary to organization and wording, you should begin to reduce it to a usable outline from which you will deliver your speech. This is the process of creating a speaking outline, which is the actual outline you will speak from when delivering your remarks.

Speaking Outline

After you practice and become familiar with the material in your preparation outline, you prepare the speaking outline. The speaking outline is a truncated form of the preparation outline and does not have full sentences, unless you are citing a direct quotation from a source. There are several reasons to reduce the information and words on a preparation outline when developing the speaking outline:

1. If you speak from a preparation outline, it becomes a manuscript speech, and you are less likely to adapt to audience feedback.

2. Speaking from a preparation outline encourages reading to, and not conversing with, the audience, thus resulting in the perception you are reading an essay instead of delivering a speech.

3. You are more likely to stare at the outline, thus dramatically reducing eye contact with the audience.

Speaking outlines maintain several features of the preparation outline, so it is not as if you are developing a brand new outline from scratch. You still use the Roman numerals, capital letters, and numbers, and you still follow the principles of subordination, coordination, and division. This helps you clearly understand the hierarchal nature of your speech while delivering it and provides you with visual representations of the importance of information so if you run short on time, you can quickly see what you can skip. In essence, the speaking outline is a shorthand version of the preparation outline. You should find the speaking outline much easier to prepare than the preparation outline. One important thing to remember is not to add anything new to the speaking outline—keep it close to the preparation outline in this respect because that is what you have been practicing with and know best.

The speaking outline also provides the opportunity to do a few things relevant to your presentation that you need not do in a preparation outline. For instance, you can add delivery cues for yourself based upon your practice with prior outlines. For instance, let's suppose you want to emphasize certain points during your speeches. On a speaking outline you can add a few reminders in the margin of your outline to give yourself a visual cue, such as a hand-drawn megaphone, or simply write in bold, "LOUDER!" Or, suppose you want to make sure you slow down to explain a specific point. Again, you can use a visual cue, such as drawing a sign that says SLOW, and color it yellow. The speaking outline is more flexible in this regard than a preparation outline, and you can modify it to meet your particular needs.

Other Forms of Speaking Materials

While we strongly recommend outlining a speech, we also recognize there are several other strategies and approaches speakers can take when preparing their remarks. Two such approaches we will briefly discuss here are notecards and a teleprompter.

Some students like to use note cards as they allow you to put a finite portion of your speech in one easy-to-find place. If you use note cards ensure that you do not run main points together on a card, but keep ideas separate. You should use Roman numerals, capital letters, and numbers to help you understand the hierarchy of your points. You also can put delivery cues on the cards. If you use note cards be sure to number them sequentially. It is very uncomfortable if you drop your cards and have to reorder them in front of your audience. Also, make sure you know if your professor limits the number of cards you may use. Note cards can be seen as less professional than having a speaking outline on regular sized paper as you are constantly shifting between cards in front of the audience. If you use note cards, be sure to practice with them so they feel natural to you as you are speaking.

Another option for delivering prepared remarks is the electronic TelePrompter™. The teleprompter loads the draft of the speech word for word into its memory, and scrolls slowly through the speech as you speak. The device is placed on a stand that can adjust to eye level. Teleprompters are very expensive and are used most often by politicians who do not have time to practice long speeches. As such, when speakers use teleprompters they deliver manuscript speeches and have little to no room for adapting to audience feedback or going off script. If you use a teleprompter, remember that technology can fail, and having a speaking outline or note cards prepared just in case is a smart thing to do.

To illustrate why it is important to have back-ups with you in case of technology failure, consider the case of Mary Fisher in 1992. Fisher was asked to speak about AIDS at the Republican National Convention that year, and was afraid that the organizers of the convention, who did not want her to speak, would turn off her teleprompter. So, rather than back down, she prepared for the worst and went on stage with a copy of her speech in her pocket in case the teleprompter failed. Thankfully, it did not, but if it had she still would have been able to deliver her remarks.