

## ***Speeches***

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### **What this handout is about**

This handout will help you create an effective speech by establishing the purpose of your speech and making it easily understandable. It will also help you to analyze your audience and keep the audience interested.

### **What's different about a speech?**

Writing for public speaking isn't so different from other types of writing. You want to engage your audience's attention, convey your ideas in a logical manner and use reliable evidence to support your point. But the conditions for public speaking favor some writing qualities over others. When you write a speech, your audience is made up of listeners. They have only one chance to comprehend the information as you read it, so your speech must be well-organized and easily understood. In addition, the content of the speech and your delivery must fit the audience.

### **What's your purpose?**

People have gathered to hear you speak on a specific issue, and they expect to get something out of it immediately. And you, the speaker, hope to have an immediate effect on your audience. The purpose of your speech is to get the response you want. Most speeches invite audiences to react in one of three ways: feeling, thinking, or acting. For example, eulogies encourage emotional response from the audience; college lectures stimulate listeners to think about a topic from a different perspective; protest speeches in the Pit recommend actions the audience can take.

As you establish your purpose, ask yourself these questions:

- What do you want the audience to learn or do?
- If you are making an argument, why do you want them to agree with you?
- If they already agree with you, why are you giving the speech?
- How can your audience benefit from what you have to say?

### **Audience analysis**

If your purpose is to get a certain response from your audience, you must consider who they are (or who you're pretending they are). If you can identify ways to connect with your listeners,

you can make your speech interesting and useful.

As you think of ways to appeal to your audience, ask yourself:

- What do they have in common? Age? Interests? Ethnicity? Gender?
- Do they know as much about your topic as you, or will you be introducing them to new ideas?
- Why are these people listening to you? What are they looking for?
- What level of detail will be effective for them?
- What tone will be most effective in conveying your message?
- What might offend or alienate them?

For more help, see our handout on [audience](#).

### **Creating an effective introduction**

#### **Get their attention, otherwise known as “The Hook”**

Think about how you can relate to these listeners and get them to relate to you or your topic. Appealing to your audience on a personal level captures their attention and concern, increasing the chances of a successful speech. Speakers often begin with anecdotes to hook their audience’s attention. Other methods include presenting shocking statistics, asking direct questions of the audience, or enlisting audience participation.

#### **Establish context and/or motive**

Explain why your topic is important. Consider your purpose and how you came to speak to this audience. You may also want to connect the material to related or larger issues as well, especially those that may be important to your audience.

#### **Get to the point**

Tell your listeners your thesis right away and explain how you will support it. Don’t spend as much time developing your introductory paragraph and leading up to the thesis statement as you would in a research paper for a course. Moving from the intro into the body of the speech quickly will help keep your audience interested. You may be tempted to create suspense by keeping the audience guessing about your thesis until the end, then springing the implications of your discussion on them. But if you do so, they will most likely become bored or confused.

For more help, see our handout on [introductions](#).

#### **Making your speech easy to understand**

#### **Repeat crucial points and buzzwords**

Especially in longer speeches, it’s a good idea to keep reminding your audience of the main

points you've made. For example, you could link an earlier main point or key term as you transition into or wrap up a new point. You could also address the relationship between earlier points and new points through discussion within a body paragraph. Using buzzwords or key terms throughout your paper is also a good idea. If your thesis says you're going to expose unethical behavior of medical insurance companies, make sure the use of "ethics" recurs instead of switching to "immoral" or simply "wrong." Repetition of key terms makes it easier for your audience to take in and connect information.

### **Incorporate previews and summaries into the speech**

For example: "I'm here today to talk to you about three issues that threaten our educational system: First, ... Second, ... Third," or "I've talked to you today about such and such." These kinds of verbal cues permit the people in the audience to put together the pieces of your speech without thinking too hard, so they can spend more time paying attention to its content.

### **Use especially strong transitions**

This will help your listeners see how new information relates to what they've heard so far. If you set up a counterargument in one paragraph so you can demolish it in the next, begin the demolition by saying something like, "But this argument makes no sense when you consider that . . . ." If you're providing additional information to support your main point, you could say, "Another fact that supports my main point is . . . ."

### **Helping your audience listen**

#### **Rely on shorter, simpler sentence structures**

Don't get too complicated when you're asking an audience to remember everything you say. Avoid using too many subordinate clauses, and place subjects and verbs close together.

#### **Too complicated:**

*The product, which was invented in 1908 by Orville Z. McGillicuddy in Des Moines, Iowa, and which was on store shelves approximately one year later, still sells well*

#### **Easier to understand:**

*Orville Z. McGillicuddy invented the product in 1908 and introduced it into stores shortly afterward. Almost a century later, the product still sells well.*

#### **Limit pronoun use**

Listeners may have a hard time remembering or figuring out what "it," "they," or "this" refers to. Be specific by using a key noun instead of unclear pronouns.

#### **Pronoun problem:**

*The U.S. government has failed to protect us from the scourge of so-called reality television, which exploits sex, violence, and petty conflict, and calls it human nature. This cannot continue.*

### **Why the last sentence is unclear:**

“This” what? The government’s failure? Reality TV? Human nature?

### **More specific:**

*The U.S. government has failed to protect us from the scourge of so-called reality television, which exploits sex, violence, and petty conflict, and calls it human nature. This failure cannot continue.*

### **Keeping audience interest**

#### **Incorporate the rhetorical strategies of ethos, pathos, and logos**

When arguing a point, using ethos, pathos, and logos can help convince your audience to believe you and make your argument stronger. Ethos refers to an appeal to your audience by establishing your authenticity and trustworthiness as a speaker. If you employ pathos, you appeal to your audience’s emotions. Using logos includes the support of hard facts, statistics, and logical argumentation. The most effective speeches usually present a combination these rhetorical strategies.

#### **Use statistics and quotations sparingly**

Include only the most striking factual material to support your perspective, things that would likely stick in the listeners’ minds long after you’ve finished speaking. Otherwise, you run the risk of overwhelming your listeners with too much information.

#### **Watch your tone**

Be careful not to talk over the heads of your audience. On the other hand, don’t be condescending either. And as for grabbing their attention, yelling, cursing, using inappropriate humor, or brandishing a potentially offensive prop (say, autopsy photos) will only make the audience tune you out.

#### **Creating an effective conclusion**

##### **Restate your main points, but don’t repeat them**

For example:

- “I asked earlier why we should care about the rain forest. Now I hope it’s clear that . . .”
- “Remember how Mrs. Smith couldn’t afford her prescriptions? Under our plan, . . .”

##### **Call to action**

Speeches often close with an appeal to the audience to take action based on their new knowledge or understanding. If you do this, be sure the action you recommend is specific and realistic. For example, although your audience may not be able to affect foreign policy directly,

they can vote or work for candidates whose foreign policy views they support. Relating the purpose of your speech to their lives not only creates a connection with your audience, but also reiterates the importance of your topic to them in particular or “the bigger picture.”

### **Practicing for effective presentation**

Once you’ve completed a draft, read your speech to a friend or in front of a mirror. When you’ve finished reading, ask the following questions:

- Which pieces of information are clearest?
- Where did I connect with the audience?
- Where might listeners lose the thread of my argument or description?
- Where might listeners become bored?
- Where did I have trouble speaking clearly and/or emphatically?
- Did I stay within my time limit?

### **Other resources**

- [Toastmasters International](#) is a nonprofit group that provides communication and leadership training.
- Allyn & Bacon Publishing’s *Essence of Public Speaking Series* is an extensive treatment of speech writing and delivery, including books on using humor, motivating your audience, word choice and presentation.

### **Works consulted**

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout’s topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the [UNC Libraries citation tutorial](#).

Boone, Louis E., David L. Kurtz, and Judy R. Block. *Contemporary Business Communication*. Prentice-Hall, 1997.

Ehrlich, Henry. *Writing Effective Speeches*. Marlowe, 1994.

Lamb, Sandra. *How to Write It: A Complete Guide to Everything You’ll Ever Write*. 10-Speed Press, 1998.



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