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Organizing Your Speech

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Organizing your speech is the first step toward making it a success. You can apply a four-part organization to practically any speech: (1) introduction, (2) thesis, (3) discussion, and (4) conclusion.

THE INTRODUCTION

The primary function of the introduction is to secure your audience's attention. Here are some workable attention-getting devices.

1. Narrative material. Open with a "story" but not necessarily a joke. Experiences of your own or of people familiar to you are your best sources because you can present them convincingly. Or you can draw on your reading. Of course, you can use entirely imaginary material but make sure that the audience understands you are using a hypothetical illustration. And it still should be typical enough to have a ring of authenticity.



2. Literary passage. Quote poetry or an appropriate selection from literature. Choose something which is, or can be made to be, pertinent to your subject.

3. Dramatization. Act out your narrative material by assuming the parts of the people in your "story" opening. However, if you don't have the talent to put it across, don't use this approach.

4. Shock treatment. Essentially, lead your audience to expect you to open in one way, then begin in a startlingly different manner. For example, remain silent when you're expected to begin talking; then state a dramatic fact about your subject. To be effective, this method requires self-assurance, a sense of timing, and an accurate knowledge of your audience.

Besides gaining audience attention, the introduction has a second essential function: to focus interest on your central proposition. This moment is a delicate point in the general structure of your speech. A neat transitional sentence or statement is required; you must tie the introduction into the subject to be revealed in your thesis statement.

THE THESIS STATEMENT

After the introduction, you must state the specific purpose of your speech in a brief, to-the-point "thesis statement."

That statement may be propositional--"This is what I shall discuss and here are the reasons why I am doing so." Or it may be procedural only, indicating the number of points you will develop and carrying the audience with you into your discussion.

In all cases, narrow your discussion to no more than five points; three is probably the most effective number. Always clearly indicate how many points you will develop.

Write the thesis statement out in full in your notes. Examples of good and poor thesis statements appear later in this bulletin.

THE DISCUSSION

In the body of the speech, discuss the main points mentioned in your thesis statement. For nearly any subject matter, you can follow one of these patterns:

1. Time pattern--a past, present, and future development. "Greatgrandfather broke the Minnesota plains with a walking plow... today's farmer lives in an age of mechanization... let us try to visualize how atomic science will affect agriculture."

2. Space sequence--a "geographical" arrangement. As you develop your main points, move from the information on lower central Minnesota up to the northern section.

3. Problem-effects-solution--a self-explanatory pattern. If you are concerned with soil erosion, translate its effects into terms of human distress and depletion of a national resource. Then, consider removal of causes, corrective measures, and prevention plans.

4. Narrative sequence--the most suited to an inductive treatment. It is an adaptation of the sales technique of "slipping" facts into the listener's consciousness until he is receptive to a final summing up and the sales "clincher."

With any pattern, there is a sound way of establishing each main point. These techniques require some explanation.

Beginning A Point - For each separate point, start with a phrase that tells your audience just how far you've progressed in your planned speech structure. Examples of such phrases are: "In



the first place"... "But to continue"... "That brings up the question of"... "Moreover"... "The final aspect"... "Last but not least"... "Most startling of all." You can think of many others.

Developing A Point - Avoid all unnecessary explanations; illustrate your point. Of course, it is easier just to explain a point than to tell a story that makes the point for you. But, narrative material is interesting while explanatory material is dry and boring.

Use stories, demonstrations, mimicry, poems, examples, analogies, anecdotes, jokes -- always keeping them relevant to your point. It is almost impossible to make narrative too large a proportion of your speech.

Finishing A Point - To summarize the illustrations for each point, you need a sentence like: "This story is not an isolated example, but only one of a dozen similar cases which could illustrate my point." Merely reciting specific instances is not enough.

THE CONCLUSION

In a well planned speech, your audience will know when you have said what you had to say in your discussion. Don't lose them then by failing to move swiftly into your conclusion.

Keep in mind Mark Twain's story about listening to a speaker appeal for funds. When the speaker had reached what should have been the end of his discussion, Twain was ready to give \$10 and was considering giving \$20. When, half an hour later, the speaker actually concluded, Twain took 50 cents from the collection plate as partial payment for the time he had wasted in listening until the end.

The conclusion consists of a summary and a final appeal (or application).

The Summary - Usually, you can handle the summary in one sentence, using parallelism in its internal structure. Have new phraseology for recapitulating your main discussion points; it's your last opportunity to implant them firmly in your listeners' minds. Always reemphasize your main points to prepare the audience for the final appeal.

The Appeal - Frequently, the final appeal is to the emotions. It is the payoff; here you win or lose. So build it around one or more of the five great motives that impel men to action: self-preservation (or health), cost (or profit), reputation, power, and sentiment. And be specific. Don't let the listener go away saying, "So what?... What's all this to me?"



The pronoun "I" is out of place here. Use "our," "we," "us," "you," and phrases like "it is obvious." You are now openly urging the audience to understand, to believe, or to act according to your thesis which, by now, you have clearly revealed. Your final note may be either

vigorous and challenging or quiet and visionary-- either technique can be equally effective.

Of course, in a strictly informative speech, the "appeal" may be essentially an application of your materials: "Here's how the facts apply; make use of them if you will!" But since persuasive elements are present in all good teaching, you may wish to make as vigorous a final appeal as possible.

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EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS

Because an effective thesis statement is so important to your speech's success, some examples are included here. Avoid such apologetic or semiapologetic words as "try," "attempt," "without much preparation," or "in the limited time allowed me." Also avoid vague phrases like "a few of the reasons," or "a little bit about." The thesis statement must always be specific.

Study these examples carefully. Notice that the better ones clearly state your purpose, are brief, and set forth a specific number of points to be discussed. They can even inform the audience that you imposed a time limit upon yourself. Some examples may strike you as being too formal in tone. Depending on your subject and audience, you may wish to use less formal language. It is the structure of the thesis statement that is important.

Well Stated Theses

1. "There are three schools of thought with respect to price supports for agricultural commodities. My purpose tonight is to reveal those three points of view."
2. "Let us examine carefully, and in turn, the five chief arguments advanced by senators in favor of a retail sales tax."
3. "It is my purpose in the next 30 minutes to expose the three factions in this city which are actively opposing law enforcement."

Complete and Adequate Theses

1. "It is my purpose to explain the four necessary parts of every effective public speech, illustrating each part as I go along."
2. "What is the problem of listening inefficiency? What are its causes? What can be done to solve it? Let us consider these questions in turn."
3. "The time has come to examine in the light of hard cold facts these three plans already advanced for international disarmament."

Incomplete and Inadequate Theses

1. "This morning I should like to talk about how to make bread."
2. "It is my conviction that something must be done about this problem."
3. "Although I don't have my tools with me, I shall try to show you how to make a sled."