

## Guide to Speech Giving

### **Introduction:**

Attention getter:

Thesis:

Self-qualification:

Reason for the audience to listen:

Preview of the main ideas:

A:

B:

C:

### **Body:**

A:

Support for A:

Transition to B:

B:

Support for B:

Transition to C:

C:

Support for C:

### **Conclusion:**

Review of main ideas:

A:

B:

C:

Call to action (optional):

Closure:

## **The Introduction:**

*Attention Getter:* People take a moment or two to get used to your voice, your rhythm, the fact that something is happening. This is an attempt to say something--but it can not be important to what you want to say. It can be a joke, a story, a meditation on the weather---as long as it is not important. It is literally a throw away. If it gains interest—that is great. If it does nothing--that is better than trying to do something that is important to understanding the rest of the speech.

*Thesis:* This should be a clear statement of what you wish the audience to understand by the end of the speech. This can go at any point in the introduction. It helps the audience to set the framework for the discussion. If you say what the thesis is, then the audience will start to employ the scaffolding that is appropriate for that topic so that they know what to do with what will follow. If you hide the thesis until the conclusion---as you might in a long essay—people will not be able to make a judgment about what they should keep or what they should get rid of until it is too late. Remember, the ephemerality problem means that they have to make these decisions on the fly and that they do not have the luxury of going back and remaking them later.

*Self-qualification/reason to listen:* We know that the speaker is the number one reason that people will accept what the speaker has to say. In writing, it is usually the quality of your evidence. In speaking, the speaker stands in for a clear and deliberate evaluation of much of this. So, it is important that the audience understands that the speaker has some expertise and that they come with good will. Good will is the sense that the speaker is speaking for the good of the audience rather than some self-benefit. Imagine your reaction when the salesman comes up to you in a car lot. You become defensive because you know that they are not working in your interest. Here, we try to increase the credibility of speaker by giving the audience a stake in what they say.

*Preview:* The old chestnut in public speaking is that you should “tell them what you want to tell them, tell them and tell then what you told them.” It is good advice: it helps to identify the important things as important things. It works through repetition. It helps with the process of triangulation and reinforcement.

A good preview will do the following:

1. *Identify two to five main ideas.* One is not only the loneliest number, but it is also the one most likely to be forgotten. Remember when your mom would tell you---“I want you to remember this one thing.” Well, you forgot it because it had no reinforcement. When it was gone from your memory, there was nothing to help you to recover it. If it were two things she wanted you to remember, there is some risk that you might remember one of them, and then remember that there were two and work your way backward.

Likewise, there is an upper limit. If you have read Malcolm Gladwell's The Tipping Point, then you are familiar with the idea of channel capacity. One of the studies that he identifies notes that people can remember six musical notes---regardless of their distribution on a scale. That is, most can identify six notes whether they are close to each other or far away. However, when it comes to identifying seven notes, most people melt down and cannot identify any of them. This is channel capacity. We know that most people start to give out on their memory power when you move above five levels of differentiation (it may have something to do with the number of fingers on one hand). So, it is not a good idea to have more than five main points. Three is the cultural ideal.

2. *Be short and clear.* It should be phrased in a parallel fashion—each main point getting similar phrasing and time. A great preview will utilize some pre-existing organizational scheme. So, for example, a preview might be: “I will look at the past, present and future of \_\_\_\_\_.” It is also good to work with metaphors: “Ready, set, \_\_\_\_\_” or “red, yellow, \_\_\_\_\_.” It should make the rest of the speech predictable and give it the sense that you are moving forward---since it will be clear where you are in the speech at every moment.

If you come from a literature background, this will seem very trite. Yes, you are right. However, when it comes to speaking this is prudent and has to do with the unique problems of the speaking situation.

### **The Body:**

*The body should employ the same features as the preview.* The thesis of each main point should be clear. It should repeat the phrasing of the preview—otherwise you lose the benefits of repetition.

*The parts of the body should be parallel.* In writing, we tend to give each point its due. This means that important points get a lot of attention while unimportant ones get less attention. In speaking, it is important that we dispense with this in favor of the benefits of repetition and memory. If you have three points, they need to be structurally similar. They should have parallel thesis statements, they should develop in similar sorts of ways and they should take up relatively the same amount of time in the speech--regardless of importance. Otherwise, you will end up with one main point--which is the same as having no main points.

*It should include overt citations.* Because there are no footnotes in speeches, it is essential that students give all evidence an overt citation. There are several reasons for this. Primarily, it is because it is ethical to give citations for borrowed materials. However, it is also important to helping to establish the credibility and good will of the speaker because it indicates that they are not just making stuff up because it is convenient to them.

*Transitions should point overtly toward the structure of the speech.* In writing, this type of attention to structure would seem trite. However, it is important to help the audience keep track of what is going on and where you are in the speech. Other than keeping the organization straight, overt signpost transitions (“my second point is. . .”) reinforce the main points and give the audience the impression that the speech is moving forward and not just spinning its wheels.

### **The Conclusion:**

The conclusion of the speech is a lot like the introduction. It is important to have a review that is the same as the preview--only in the past tense. It should not change the titles. It should have the same parallel form and it should reflect the actual structure of the speech.

Additionally, it is traditional to put a call to action as part of the conclusions. This acts as a final appeal to the relevance of the material.

A good speech will end with some closure. This means that the last paragraph of the speech ends the speech without the speaker having to say “thank you.” Tradition dictates several ways to accomplish this: reference to the attention getter to come full circle, an inspirational quotations or a call to action are all good ways to end a speech.

### **Performative elements:**

In general, we push for a conversational style of speaking—as opposed to the highly structured and formalized style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This style reflects the contexts that frame most people’s speaking experiences. As such, students should appear engaging, as if in a conversation with the audience. At a minimum, they should appear genuine, make lots of eye contact with the audience, reference their actual circumstance (not give a generic speech that makes no reference to the attending audience), have natural gestures and movements that do not distract from their main points, use natural language that is slightly more formal than the common language of their audience--but not much more.

They should not memorize or read since it will result in several problems. First, the language will tend to be much more formal than expected, seeming inorganic to the actual circumstance. Also, they will speak too fast--running through pauses. Also, because they are not appealing to an actual audience, they will tend to avoid using a lot of vocal variety to emphasize main points. Most importantly, because they will want to give a faithful rendering of their text, they will either look down to keep up with the text, or, if memorizing, they will tend to stumble and have long and awkward pauses as they try to regain their composure.

Perversely, memorizing/reading will cause them to be more nervous than otherwise. They will lack confidence in their own knowledge and the fear that something will go wrong will overwhelm their ability to react to what is actually happening. They will work actively to appear disengaged and unfriendly and the audience will respond likewise---

making the whole situation seem much worse.

Most agree that the best practice is to speak extemporaneously. This means speaking from some bare-bones notes that identifies little more than the next topic and evidence---so that you would feel foolish if you read it or stared at it for too long.

The goal of the physical presentation is to keep from showing nervousness. If you hold onto the podium, rock back and forth, dance with your feet, hold a shaking piece of paper, people will know that you are nervous. Ideally, gestures and movements help to reinforce the structure of the speech without distracting from it. As such, it is better to stand back from the podium so that your hands are free and you are free of the temptation of a text. Movements should be discrete and should coincide with changes in main points.

### **Anxiety:**

The most distinctive elements of public speaking is that it produces a lot of anxiety. Whether you call it communication anxiety, glossophobia or stage fright, it is the one thing that stands in the way of most people's mastery of public speaking. There is little that you can do to get rid of it. However, there are several things that you can do to help manage it.

Practice helps people to manage it and anything you can do to get people to practice their speeches will reduce anxiety. Practice so that you can hit a firm time limit. Practice out loud so that you know how long the speech is. Give the speech a couple of times so that you feel confident. Research demonstrates that this is the only real way to reduce anxiety.

However, there are some other things that can make it easier. Deep breathing exercises sometimes help. Many find it helpful to talk though the symptoms of anxiety to point out how normal they are---they are the same as excitement---only they get a different label.