

Organizing a Speech

Organizing your thoughts in a clear, coherent, and logical manner is the first step in becoming a critical thinker – one who can reflect upon his own ideas and analyze those of others. Organizing your speech will help you think more clearly, pursue your ideas more systematically, and increase the likelihood that your audience will receive your message as you intended it – all of which will make your speech more effective.

I. Introduction: The introduction of the speech establishes the first, crucial contact between you and your audience. Use your introduction to orient your listeners to your topic and make connections between what your audience already knows about this topic and the issues you will address in your speech.

A. Focus your audience’s attention and create exigency: Establish for your listeners why this topic is important to them right now. Involve listeners by appealing to their human interests through a hook, based specifically on audience analysis. **Hooks** may include an interesting anecdote, brief narrative, example, striking fact or statistic, unusual statement or quotation, rhetorical question, or refutation of a commonly held opinion. Choose the type of hook that best fits your topic and leads well to your thesis and argument.

B. Establish goodwill and credibility: Aristotle believed the most important part of persuasion was **ethos**, the character the speaker exhibits to the audience. Your audience needs to see you as someone to listen to attentively and sympathetically. You need to appear reliable to make that happen. Ethos is generated by ideas, style, and delivery. Express ideas in an honest, original, intelligent manner. Briefly define unfamiliar terms in an unbiased way and preview main points you will cover in the body so that the audience can be prepared to listen for them. Making eye contact with your audience and displaying confidence in your voice and body are two other important ways to establish ethos.

C. Clearly state your thesis: The introduction is the place where you should state your main claim or idea very clearly and give the audience a sense of what you aim to do or accomplish in the speech. People have learned to expect the thesis early in a speech. It provides a signpost telling your listeners where you are going to take them. A thesis also helps the audience follow your ideas. They are less likely to mentally wander from your main topic when you have already stated where you want them to go with your speech. The thesis should be reduced down to one sentence and be positioned as the last sentence in the introduction. Your thesis statement should accomplish three goals:

- narrow your speech topic
- precisely state your purpose for speaking/position on that topic
- preview the three main points of your argument in the same order in which they’ll appear in the body of your speech

Your thesis is generally a fairly complicated sentence containing multiple ideas and explaining relationships among those ideas. Always allow a 5-10 second **pause** after you state your thesis to allow your listeners to take in and digest these ideas before you begin your argument.

II. Body: The body is the part of the speech where you present any necessary, relevant background information on the topic; analyze it; present your argument through claims supported by sufficient,

relevant evidence in the form of statistics, analogies, facts, examples, anecdotes, expert opinions, values, beliefs, traditions, customs, and rules; possibly state and refute opposing viewpoints; and finally, lead up to your conclusion. The most difficult part of organizing the body is determining what kind and how much evidence is needed based upon your purpose for speaking and your particular audience. You don't want to tell them something they already know, but you don't want to leave out something that is vital to your reasoning. The structure of the body should be logical and easy for the audience to follow. Relatively short speeches (ten minutes or fewer) should not have more than three main points, each of which should be supported by a variety of types of evidence. Main points can be offered in ascending or descending order of importance, but each point should be balanced in terms of the amount of substantiating evidence offered. Be careful not to include too many statistics or long quotations that can be difficult for audience members to follow. Be especially vigilant to avoid logical fallacies that will compromise your credibility and thereby destroy your ethos as a trustworthy speaker.

Repetition is an important aspect of public speaking. Listening is an imperfect art, and audience members generally tune out periodically – sometimes to think about your speech and sometimes to think about their own thoughts. Help listeners stay attentive and on task by offering **verbal cues** that keep your **speech's structure transparent and easy to follow**.

A. **Signposts**: Verbal cues and transition words alert listeners to your speech's structure as you progress through lists and move from one point to the next. They include words such as, "first," "next," "primary," "conversely," "similarly," "another example," "finally," or "to summarize"

B. **Internal previews**: By briefly outlining a series of sub-points, listeners can more easily follow a complex example or explanation. "The issue of factory pollution is multifaceted. First, we'll look at the amount of pollution different types of factories release into the environment. Second, we'll examine efforts currently being considered to remediate pollution emissions. Next, we'll"

C. **Internal summaries**: Before transitioning to a new major point, recap the information you just presented in a brief form to highlight what was most important in that point and to show the logical sequence to the next main point. "The demonstrate the petition's social and political advantages, but the economic benefits offer the most compelling"

D. **Pauses**: Momentary silences offer listeners an opportunity to think about what they've just heard and make connections to earlier points and to their own lives. Pauses are also effective as markers to point out the importance of what was just said. Always pause for 5-10 seconds after stating your thesis before beginning your argument.

The body of a persuasive speech should include an additional section where you present the opposing viewpoint's main argument (the counterargument), then refute that argument.

III. **Conclusion**: Your concluding remarks should denote finality and adequately summarize your thesis and main points. One effective technique is to return to the opening hook. Your first and last sentences should be carefully planned and confidently delivered. Your audience will remember your last words more clearly than any in the beginning or middle. In a persuasive speech, always close with a call for action – call for a change in belief or action in your audience.

A CLASSICAL RHETORIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING PERSUASION

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher and rhetorician who lived and wrote in the fourth century B.C.E., was the source of many ideas about communication in general and persuasion in particular. Appendix B provides a closer look at Aristotle and his ideas. As we noted in Chapter 4, he defined *rhetoric* as the process of discovering in any particular case the available means of persuasion. When the goal is to persuade, the communicator selects symbols (words and nonverbal messages, including images and music) to change attitudes, beliefs, values, or behavior. Aristotle identified three general methods (or, using his language, “available means”) to persuade. They are *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*.

ETHOS To use *ethos* to persuade, an effective communicator presents information that is credible. Aristotle believed that in order to be credible, a public speaker should be ethical, possess good character, have common sense, and be concerned for the well-being of the audience. The more credible and ethical a speaker is perceived to be, the greater the chances are that a listener will believe in, trust, and positively respond to the persuasive message of the speaker. So one of the means or methods of persuasion is for the communicator to present information that can be trusted and to be believable and trustworthy himself or herself. When a friend is trying to convince you to let him borrow your car, he may say, “Trust me. I promise not to do anything whacky with your car. I’m a responsible guy.” He’s appealing to his credibility as an ethical, trusted friend. We’ll discuss specific strategies to enhance your credibility and thus your persuasiveness, in the next chapter.

LOGOS Another means of persuading others is to use *logos*. The word *logos* literally means “the word.” Aristotle used this term to refer to the rational, logical arguments that a speaker uses to persuade someone. A skilled persuader not only reaches a logical conclusion but also supports the message with evidence and reasoning. Your friend who is trying to borrow your car may try using a logical, rational argument supported with evidence to get your car keys. He may say, “I borrowed your car last week and I returned it without a scratch. I also borrowed it the week before that and there were no problems—and I filled the tank with gas. So if you loan me your car today, I’ll return it just like I did in the past.” Your friend is appealing to your rational side by using evidence to support his conclusion that your car will be returned in good shape. In Chapter 17 we’ll provide detailed strategies for developing logical, rational arguments and supporting those arguments with solid evidence.

PATHOS Aristotle used the term *pathos* to refer to the use of appeals to emotion. We sometimes hold attitudes, beliefs, and values that are not logical but that simply make us feel positive. Likewise, we sometimes do things or buy things to make ourselves feel happy, powerful, or energized. Your friend who wants to borrow your wheels may also use *pathos*—an emotional appeal—to get you to turn over your car keys. He may say, “Look, without transportation I can’t get to my doctor’s appointment. I’m feeling sick. I need your help. Friends help friends, and I could use a good friend right now.” Your buddy is trying to tug on your emotional heartstrings to motivate you to loan him your car. He’s hoping to convince you to behave in a way that makes you feel positive about yourself.

What are effective ways to appeal to listeners’ emotions? Use emotion-arousing stories and concrete examples, as well as pictures and music. In the next chapter we’ll identify ethical strategies to appeal to emotions when persuading others.

All three of these available means of persuasion—*ethos* (ethical credibility), *logos* (logic), and *pathos* (emotion)—are ways of motivating a listener to think or behave in certain ways. **Motivation** is the underlying internal force that drives people to achieve their goals. Our motives explain why we do things.¹ Several factors motivate people to respond to persuasive messages: the need to restore balance to their lives to avoid stress, the need to avoid pain, and the desire to increase pleasure have been documented as influencing attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior.

Cicero's Rhetorical Theory

Cicero, a famous Roman statesman and orator, viewed persuasive public speaking as a series of problems to be solved in order for speakers to promote and defend their ideas. He divided the basic tasks of speech development into five steps:

1. **Inventio** (rhetorical invention or discovery) describes the process for discovering and selecting material to be the subject matter and evidence in your speech. The key concept here is that your discourse is a personal creation or invention. Just as inventors create innovative solutions to problems – a better mousetrap—so skilled orators craft their speeches to generate a particular response from a specific audience.
2. **Dispositio** (disposition or arrangement) describes the various ways to arrange or sequence the material that you plan to cover in your speech. The way you organize your ideas will shape your listeners' reaction to and reception of your message.
3. **Elocutio** (elocution or style) describes the process of finding the best words and grammatical patterns for presenting your message. Vivid descriptions and word rhythms add drama and energy to your ideas.
4. **Pronuntiatio** (pronouncement or delivery) describes the decision-making process by which speakers determine how they can use their voices and bodies to maximize the impact of their words. This stage includes planning what words and phrases should be emphasized through inflection, increases or decreases in volume or pitch, and well-placed pauses. Similarly, speakers should be intentional in planning what movement, gestures, and facial expressions will enhance the audiences' response to their messages.
5. **Memoria** (mental command of message) describes the process by which speakers maintain command of the entire speech. While Cicero devised elaborate methods to aid speakers in memorizing speeches, modern orators promote extemporaneous delivery whereby speakers actively engage their audience in talking relationships. Rather than offering a canned, memorized performance, extemporaneous speakers are present in the moment as they think aloud with their audiences. With adequate practice, speakers gain mastery over the key concepts, examples, and stylistic details that make up the substance of their message as well as the arrangement and emphasis they hope to place even though they remain open to changes within the exact wording of the delivery.