

# CHAPTER 3

## What You Say: Ingredients of Intelligent Speaking



### Coming Up!

The first step toward mastering speech and debate is to know how to build an interesting, relevant, and effective speech. This chapter will show you how to zero-in on your primary purpose and how to develop and structure your key points.

## WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

Greek philosopher Aristotle once said, “A speech has two parts. You must state your case, and you must prove it.” At its core, this is what a speech boils down to. Sounds simple? Well, it isn't.

Before you start to develop your speech, you need to know what exactly you're trying to accomplish. It's important to make your speech relevant to the specific issue or situation. Avoid trying to say anything and everything about the subject. Instead, focus on a few main ideas and explain them clearly and completely.

### Did You Know?



A British lawyer once delivered a speech that lasted 119 days.

Speeches are generally intended to *inform*, to *persuade*, or to *entertain*. You may find it necessary to combine the techniques of more than one of these types of speeches. For instance, many persuasive speeches have heavy informative content as a way of laying the foundation for the main arguments. And some of the most captivating speakers inject humor into their speeches. Ultimately, you have to consider your topic, your intent, and your environment.

## In the Know: Informative Speeches

When speaking to inform, your main objective is to explain, detail, instruct, or clarify. In this type of speech, the precision and clarity of your ideas are critically important, because you're trying to help your audience understand the issue. Given the nature of an informative speech, it's tempting to overload your listeners with facts and details. Avoid this tendency as much as possible. The information you present is only useful to the extent that it's *absorbed* and *remembered*. Informative speaking skills will help you greatly in debating, particularly when you have to present evidence and clearly explain concepts to your judges. Here are a few examples of informative speech topics:

- The Internet's impact on education and research.
- Changes to the school disciplinary policy.
- United Nations peacekeeping involvement.
- Developments in natural, alternative medicines.
- New frontiers in science and technology research.

## The Sales Pitch: Persuasive Speeches

Your ability to deliver persuasive speeches is essential to debating. The purpose is to convince your audience about a set of values or proposals and, in some cases, to inspire or compel a group to take action. An example of persuasive speaking you'll be familiar with is a campaign speech for student government. Important attributes for this type of speaking include a set of strong arguments, a convincing tone, and a passionate style of delivery. If you want to convince others to agree with your arguments, it's vital that you speak with conviction. Here are a few examples of persuasive speech topics:

- The military should receive more funding.
- Standardized tests should be phased out.
- Space exploration should be stopped.
- School uniforms should be eliminated.
- Voting should be mandatory.

## Make Them Laugh: Entertaining Speeches

A speech to entertain will most commonly be delivered as a special occasion speech, such as an after dinner speech or a comedy routine during a talent show. In some instances, you may have a persuasive intent, such as using humor to mock a policy. You'll typically use entertaining speaking strategies so that your speech to inform or persuade will become more interesting. To be entertaining, your entire speech need not be funny or on a humorous topic. In fact, using witty words or a lighthearted and humorous style can be equally effective. Even the most serious arguments can be illustrated using humor.

## GET TO THE POINT: YOUR MAIN IDEA

Prior to deciding on your key points, write a sentence that summarizes your speech's general idea. This topic sentence should be your focus when you build the content of your speech. You're much more effective when you focus on the core of your ideas than when you jump around from topic

### Watch Out!

Avoid making broad, unfocused speeches.



to topic without a strong connection between points. Considering that you have limited time, you should include only a few, well-developed points in your speech.

## CHURN OUT THE POINTS

Once you've identified your purpose and your overall theme, the next step is to find three to five main points that you want to talk about. Less than three seems too 'bare', and more than five seems too 'busy'. Begin this brainstorming process using a list or a mind map. Include everything you know about the topic, even if you don't immediately think it's relevant or important.

In a short period of time, you'll likely find many different points that you want to discuss. Your next step is to narrow down your speech to a few key ideas. One rule of thumb is to use the 3S system, or *Sort*, *Select*, and *Summarize*:

1. **Sort similar ideas together.** You may have listed several points that can be added as details and explanations for a larger idea.
2. **Select only the most essential topics.** It's much more effective to focus on your primary purpose than to ramble into unrelated ideas that decrease the overall impact of your speech.
3. **Summarize each topic with a title.** After you're down to three to five points, a brief heading for each one will help you find details and will enable you to focus your explanations.

## BREAK IT DOWN: STRUCTURING YOUR SPEECH

Once you've come up with your main ideas, the next step is to organize your speech for maximum effectiveness. Speech organization isn't difficult, but it is very important. It makes your speech clearer and your ideas easier to remember. The basic organization for any speech, either on its own or in a debate, is an introduction, three or four content sections, and a conclusion.

### Success Tip!

Match your structure to your subject.



There are many different ways to break down your key ideas. Which method you select depends in large part on the type and topic of your speech. It's important for you to think carefully about how you want to organize your points, because your structure can make or break how easily the audience is able to grasp what you're saying. Here are some of the ways to structure your points:

**Topics and Themes.** This is the most common way to organize a speech. The idea is to divide your points into different subject areas and to focus each point on a single topic. A common pitfall is that the subject areas are overly distinct, making the speech seem disjointed. Be sure that one area leads smoothly into the next by selecting and ordering the themes in a logical manner. Here's an example of organization by topic for a speech explaining how media organizations have a social responsibility:

- *Point #1: The media provides vital alerts.* You could talk about advisories during natural disasters and alerts of missing children. Making this point your first one is logical, because by clearly explaining a critical function, it sets the tone for your overall message.
- *Point #2: The media educates us on important matters.* Here, you could discuss media reporting of health issues, safety tips, faulty consumer products, and other matters important to our daily lives. It's a logical extension from the first point, because it deals with media functions that are critical to us personally. But it's different enough from the first point, as its focus is on less urgent matters.
- *Point #3: The media keeps us informed about current affairs.* This section could focus on our desire to be informed about national political affairs, global politics, sports, and other day to day events. This point extends logically from the second point. It's similar in its focus on matters of daily importance, but it's different in its emphasis on information that's not as essential.

**Time and Progression.** Chronological organization is often the easiest for the audience to follow. People naturally think in terms of time. For example, what do I need to do in the morning, then in the afternoon, and then in the evening? Extending this logic to speech, organizing by time allows you to lead your audience on an easy to understand pro-

gression. Below is an example of time-based organization for a speech outlining how the local government could encourage recycling:

- *Point #1: Make it easy for people to recycle.* You could suggest that regular pickups and free recycling boxes divided into categories of materials is the first step in encouraging more recycling. If it's not convenient, nothing else is likely to work.
- *Point #2: A campaign to motivate people to recycle more.* Once you've made it convenient to recycle, a logical next step is to tell them why they should even bother. A television advertising or direct mail campaign could be part of this section.
- *Point #3: A long-term strategy to inform the public.* Now that you've encouraged people to recycle more, how do you make sure that they continue to do so in the long-term? Of course, continuing to make it convenient and advertising that they should recycle could be part of the strategy. But you could say that the next major step is to tell the public about the positive results of its cooperation.

**Physical Location.** Many people organize their thoughts according to where items are or where situations occur. The same tool can be applied to speech topics, particularly when there are multiple events or circumstances happening in different areas. Say you're talking about solutions to poverty in various parts of the world:

- *Point #1: Improving government systems in Africa.* You could argue that building democratic and transparent government institutions is the first step in alleviating poverty in Africa. The incentives of debt relief and aid could be used to push forward these reforms.
- *Point #2: Reforming economic systems in Latin America.* Economic and currency instability in many parts of Latin America could be cited as problems in need of action.
- *Point #3: Building infrastructure in South Asia.* You could make the case that the large, but mostly poor populations of South Asia would benefit from infrastructure investment. Development of roads, schools, hospitals, and sanitation systems could be touted as solutions.

**Problem and Solution.** This organizational method is great if a problem isn't widely accepted or understood, and if you're trying to establish the problem as the basis for a solution. It's important that your solution closely matches and directly addresses the problems. Here's an example of this type of speech structure if you're arguing that pharmaceutical companies should have to make more of the data from clinical trials available to the public:

- *Point #1: Problem of medical side-effects.* Explain the extent to which drugs approved by government agencies are later found to pose serious health risks. In particular, you could use well-publicized examples of drugs which were released and later discovered to cause health ailments, including severe illnesses and deaths.
- *Point #2: Problem of insufficient information.* You could argue that without full information from all clinical trials, medical professionals and members of the public don't have enough of an ability to scrutinize drugs and make their own judgments.
- *Point #3: Solution of more public information.* Your solution could be that pharmaceutical companies should have to release more information to the public. The immediate result would be at least a partial solution to the problem of insufficient information. Then, you could argue that if this problem is solved and there is greater public scrutiny of drugs, the result would be fewer medical side-effects.

### **Building the Pieces: Structuring Each Point**

Like each paragraph in an essay, each section in a speech needs to have a sound structure. A general rule to remember is to "Claim, Comment, Cite, and Conclude" for each section:

1. **Claim** your point, usually in a single sentence. This serves as a 'signpost' to your audience members, setting the stage for what you're hoping to explain to them. You want your listeners to be thinking to themselves, "Okay, we're on a new point now, and that's precisely what the point is about. Let's see what the speaker has to say about it." An example of claiming your point is, "My second point is that if genetically-modified foods are sold without appropriate labeling, it reduces the confidence that people have in the food supply."

2. **Comment** on the point, presenting important analysis and logic. Explain in greater depth what the point means, or why it's correct. Using the previous example, you could say, "Everyone wants to feel certainty and security when they pick up food from the grocery store. If they don't have sufficient information ..."

3. **Cite** different pieces of evidence to support your underlying claims. This essentially tells your audience, "Don't just take my word for it. There are facts that support what I'm saying." Continuing with the issue of genetically-modified foods, you could state, "The percent of genetically-modified foods labeled as such is very low, especially when compared to the percent of people who want to know this information. It's been found that ..."

4. **Conclude** the section either by restating the main point in different words or by explaining the importance of the point to the main idea of the speech. For example, "Therefore, it's clear that the absence of standard and enforceable labeling requirements has caused unacceptable harm to public confidence in food products."

## Completing the Puzzle: Overall Organization

The order in which you present your content sections is largely a matter of judgment and personal preference. Many speakers will start and finish with their most important ideas. However, particularly in persuasive speeches, you may want to build your points into a final idea that proves your overall theme.

Most audience members have great difficulty remembering a point the first time they hear it. As the speaker, it makes perfect sense to you, but your audience usually needs reminders. Many communicators fail to guide their listeners. They only briefly summarize their speech, out of fear that they're simply repeating themselves. Well, repetition works. Most of what we learn is repeated to us several times, although often in different forms and styles. Here's a great framework for making your speech organized and your points easier for the audience members to remember:

### Success Tip!

Reinforce your ideas with reminders.





1. **“Tell them what you’re going to tell them.”** Paint a road map for the audience. At minimum, tell them in general terms what they can expect to hear from you. A speech isn’t a mystery novel. If you want to capture interest and create understanding, tell your listeners what path you’ll be taking with your speech.
2. **“Tell them.”** This section includes the three to five main points of your speech. They must be distinct sections with smooth transitions and logical ordering. In this part, you convey the ‘meat’ of your speech—the points and supporting details that deliver your message.
3. **“Tell them what you told them.”** Huh? But didn’t you already tell them? Actually, the most effective speakers remind the audience of their key points. The conclusion should tie the entire speech together, taking a variety of points and summarizing them around your core theme. Your audience will remember much more of your speech if you do a point by point summary.

## SEARCHING FOR SUPPORT

After you have an overall skeleton of your speech, namely three to five main points, you’re ready to find the details necessary to be effective. There are many places you can look to find this information, which are likely the same places you would go if you were writing an essay. Below are some of the places to search for details:

### Success Tip!

Stay on top of what’s happening in the news.



**Libraries** will likely have information on your subject. It’s now easier than ever to find what you’re looking for, because most libraries have electronic search databases. You’ll also want to look in encyclopedias and other reference works for any relevant details.

**The Internet** is the fastest and easiest way to find current information on virtually any subject. Unfortunately, it’s also filled with many unreliable sources, so you’ll have to use your good sense and critical judgment to separate fact from fiction.

**Family and friends** who work in a field related to your speech topic, or who you feel would have significant knowledge about your subject, are always excellent resources to contact.

## PROVING THE POINTS

Many different types of evidence can be useful in both informative and persuasive speeches. These include statistics, events, quotations, reports, and analogies, to name a few. You should use one or two pieces of evidence to support each of your points, along with clear explanations of how the evidence proves what you're saying.

### Flaunting the Facts

Statistics are typically anything to do with numbers. Your statistics should come from reliable sources. For instance, the audience members are more likely to believe facts from a study by a well-respected university than from a special interest group that they've never heard of before (not to mention that the group may appear biased). Be careful not to overuse statistics, because unless you're speaking to a group of academics, the audience will likely get quite bored. If used correctly, however, statistics and reports can add significant credibility, depth, and clarity to your main ideas.

For example: How many people died from cancer over the last year? How much money does it cost to provide prescription drug benefits to every one of the country's senior citizens? What percent of the city's teenagers use illegal drugs?

### Making it Real

True events, stories, and comparisons are some of the examples you may want to include in order to enhance your speech. They show that an action or circumstance actually did happen or is taking place currently, lending credibility to your main ideas. And they're effective at simplifying or clarifying your position. If you want to use a hypothetical event or story, make sure it's realistic, or else it won't add any real value. A comparison can be useful in drawing clear distinctions, helping to illustrate your points. Here are some of the speech topics for which an event, story, or comparison may be effective:

- **Drunk driving:** If trying to prove the detrimental impact that drunk drivers have on society, it could be useful to talk about a recent and local tragedy, and how it changed life for the victim's family.
- **Land mines:** If your objective is to debate in favor of banning the production and sale of land mines, try describing the story of a child who was a victim of a land mine explosion.
- **Post-secondary education:** A career, lifestyle, and salary comparison of a student with post-secondary education to a student with only a high school diploma could be an effective way to prove the value of continuing education past high school.

## Evoking the Experts

Used properly, quotations from famous people or experts in the field can be valuable additions to your speech. For example, if your speech is about freedom and civil rights, you could quote from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. When considering the use of a quotation, make sure it adds substance, not just an endorsement. And don't overuse quotations, because they reflect someone's opinion rather than conclusive evidence.

## INTRIGUING INTRODUCTIONS

The first 30 to 40 seconds of your speech are in many respects the most important, because they give you an opportunity to capture the audience's attention. It's your way of saying, "Listen to what I have to say," as well as establishing your main idea and outlining your structure. Start with something that grabs attention, such as a startling statistic, a rhetorical question, an appeal to emotion, or a humorous story. Here are some examples of attention-grabbing introductions:

### **Success Tip!**

To make an emotional connection, use vivid language.



- **Startling Statistics:** "Last year alone, 49 people in this city were murdered. Out of this alarming number, 38 were innocent civilians, and 11 of them were children."

- **Rhetorical Questions:** “Do you feel unsafe these days? Are you afraid to walk outside at night? Do you now fear for the safety of your young children when they play in the front yard or go to school?”

- **Appeal to Emotion:** “The criminals are winning the battle against us, the law-abiding citizens of this city. Too many of us are innocent victims of criminals, many of whom are getting away with violence because of lax policing. Ladies and gentlemen, I say it’s time for change. It’s time for our government to pour in the resources necessary to make our streets safer for all of us.”

- **Humorous Story:** “Lady Astor once said to Winston Churchill, ‘Winston, if I were your wife I’d put poison in your coffee’. You would expect the recipient of such a personal attack to be rather phased and quite angry. But in classic Churchillian fashion, he instead quipped back, ‘Nancy, if I were your husband I’d drink it.’”

There are many different ways to organize your speech’s introduction. However, there’s no perfect structure. It’s important that you try a variety of styles and formats. To get you started, here’s one example of a format for your opening:

**Step #1: Grab the audience’s attention.** As mentioned previously, the most effective introductions start with a ‘hook’ that encourages the audience members to listen to what you have to say. This attention-grabber usually hints at the topic or theme of your speech.

**Step #2: Address the audience.** Always acknowledge your audience. For example, you could say, “Ladies and gentlemen ...” or “Mr. Chairperson, judges, and worthy opponents ...” Unfortunately, many people spend too long on this part, presenting a laundry list of people in the audience. There’s no need to take up time saying, for instance, “Teachers, parents, fellow students, school administrators, elected officials, alumni, and most welcome guests.”

**Step #3: State the topic of your speech.** Make it very clear for your audience exactly what you’re speaking about. Even if the audience knows the general topic, it’s a good idea to narrow it down to a more concrete subject in order to provide a sense of focus to your speech.

**Step #4: State your main idea or perspective.** A speech isn't a drama. You shouldn't be leaving your listeners in suspense, hoping that they 'get it' by the end. State clearly and concisely what you hope to accomplish. This way, when people are listening, they'll know that your points are contributing toward your main idea.

**Step #5: Outline the three to five main points of your speech.** Many listeners find it helpful to know what, in general, the points will be. This makes it easier for them to follow your speech as you go along.

## CATCHY CONCLUSIONS

Your conclusion depends largely on the purpose of your speech. The intent of the closing could be a call to action, a wrap up of your arguments, a summary of your informative points, a link back to your introduction, or a combination of these methods.

While your introduction catches the audience's attention, the conclusion is the final 'sales pitch' for your content and a reminder of your speech's main points. For example, if you're speaking in favor of more funding to fight global poverty, you may have opened your speech by describing the image of a starving child in Somalia. You could conclude by summarizing the reasons for more international development aid, reiterating how everyone can take local action to meet this objective, and finally, presenting the image of the young child in Somalia being given hope for a better life. Whatever you decide, make sure that you leave your audience with a memorable statement through which they can identify and think positively about your speech.

When you're moving into your conclusion, make sure that your audience knows you're doing so. While the simplest way is to say, "In conclusion," there are other methods as well. Saying, for example, "So what have I discussed today?" or "This speech essentially comes down to one overarching theme ..." will give your audience a cue that you're moving into the final part of your speech.

### Watch Out!

Don't 'repeat' your introduction in your conclusion.



## SMOOTH AND SIMPLE TRANSITIONS

When moving from section to section, you need a ‘glue’ to hold the speech together. Rather than shifting abruptly between points, tie your ideas together to create a sense of flow.

In persuasive speeches, effective transitions can tie directly into the building of arguments. For informative speeches, it may be more difficult to find this connection. Instead, you may want to start a section simply by saying that you’re moving on to the next point, while referring to the previous point. Here are a few examples:

- *Speech to Persuade*: “Now that I’ve proven the brutal nature of capital punishment, I will show you how it’s a violation of a citizen’s most basic constitutional rights.”
- *Speech to Inform*: “Not only has space exploration become less expensive, it’s now much safer for our astronauts because of recent advances in shuttle technology.”

As this chapter has discussed, having strong themes, points, and details combined with a carefully planned structure lays the foundation for an effective speech. It’s important to be selective and methodical in deciding what ideas you want to get across to your audience.

## Chapter 3: Keys to Success



✓ **A great speech is based on a unifying theme.** Even if they don't remember all of the details, your audience members should remember this main idea. Make sure that all of your points relate to this theme so that your speech stays on topic.

✓ **Develop possible points by brainstorming, and then place these ideas into categories.** You'll find that your initial list of ideas contains points that are closely related and can be grouped together. Also, you may find that some points overlap or don't relate directly to the theme. Use this process to narrow your speech down to a core set of points.

✓ **Research details to support your key points.** Including evidence, such as examples and statistics, adds credibility to your speech. In addition, evidence helps illustrate and enhance your points, making them clearer and stronger.

✓ **"Claim, Comment, Cite, and Conclude" for each point.** Begin with a clear statement of your point. Then, explain your point in greater depth. Move on by using evidence to support the explanations. Finally, conclude and tie the point into the 'big picture' or theme of your speech. This method will improve the structure and completeness of your key ideas.

✓ **"Tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you told them."** Start your speech by laying out a 'road map' of what you intend to accomplish. Continue with the 'meat' of your speech, namely the main points and details. To conclude, reiterate your main points and show how they've proven the theme. Most people need reminders in order to understand fully what you've said.

✓ **Transition smoothly between points.** Your speech shouldn't be seen as isolated chunks of information. Rather, it should be seen as a connected set of ideas. Good transitions make it clear what you've accomplished and where you're going next.