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IFAS Extension

Preparing a Speech[1]

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Introduction

One of our greatest fears is that of speaking in public. To stand before a group and be required to give remarks terrifies many of us. However, public speaking is a skill that most people have to conquer to be successful, and one that is required in most jobs in one form or another. One way to help calm the nerves and prepare for success in public speaking is to properly prepare for the speech. This means that items such as audience analysis, considering a purpose and topic, preparing the major components of the speech (introduction, main point, organization, and conclusion), and referencing resources must be addressed.

Audience Analysis

Audience analysis should be the first consideration when preparing a speech. In order to ensure that the attention of the audience is captured and that the presentation is considered worthwhile, the speaker must clearly understand the audience. Without this understanding, speakers often struggle when writing a speech. Questions to assist in analyzing the audience include the following:

• Who exactly is my audience?

• What is the size of my audience?

• What are the demographics of my audience? (age, gender, race, ethnicity, educational background, beliefs, etc.)

• What are the interests, backgrounds, and knowledge levels of my audience?

• What is the purpose of my audience? What do they want to get from this presentation?

The speaker should also consider situational factors that may affect the audience. These factors include: time of day, size and layout of room, schedule, and distractions.

Considering Purpose and Topic

After analyzing the audience, the speaker should consider the purpose of the speech. General purposes include the intent to inform, persuade, motivate, or entertain. After having identified the general purpose of the speech, the speaker should select a topic and determine the objective of the speech.

When choosing a topic, the speaker should consider the audience analysis, the general purpose of the speech, his or her own knowledge and interests, and any guidelines that may have been given. Koch (2004) suggests the following questions to consider when selecting a topic:

1. Is the subject suited for my purpose?

2. Is the subject interesting to me?

3. Am I qualified to speak on the subject?

4. Will my audience find this subject interesting?

5. Will my audience find this subject useful?

6. Is the subject sufficiently narrow?

After having identified the general purpose and topic, the speaker should then develop a main objective. This objective should be the goal of the speech. An easy way to start a main objective statement is: "*At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to _____.*" By completing this sentence, the speaker should identify the main objective of the speech. The speaker should strive to narrow the topic to a main objective that is manageable in the given time restrictions. If the topic is too narrow, the speaker will struggle to provide meaningful information and fill the time requirement. On the other hand, if the topic is too broad, the speaker will not be able to provide enough depth, or will go over time.

Sometimes the purpose and topic of the speech are already decided, but it is still important to go through the steps of determining a main objective and topic refinement. An important point to remember is that the purpose and topic of the speech generally belong to the group requesting the speech, but the main objective belongs to the speaker.

Major Components

Introduction

The introduction should accomplish three goals. First, it should capture the attention of the audience. Secondly, the introduction should develop a felt "need to know" in the audience. Finally, the introduction should outline the main ideas of the speech.

Interest Approach

The interest approach is one of the most important parts of the speech itself. The goal of the interest approach is to stimulate interest and enthusiasm for the topic. If the speaker does not capture the attention of the audience from the beginning, nothing else that is said will matter. The interest approach also establishes the atmosphere for the speech. A good interest approach will put both the audience and the speaker at ease. Table 1 outlines several interest approach techniques.

Need to Know

Once the attention of the audience has been captured, the speaker must retain their attention. An effective way to accomplish this goal is to make the audience believe they *need* to know the information that is about to be shared. Audience members will more likely pay attention throughout the speech if they perceive it to be useful to them.

Main Ideas Object

Before leading into the body of the speech, the speaker should provide a clear outline of the objective and main points. The speaker should let the audience know what will be shared with them during the speech. By establishing the main points, the audience will be able to follow the speech easier.

Body

The body of the speech contains two major components: the main points and supporting information to make a case. When developing the body of the presentation, it is important to develop strong support for each of the main points. The organization of the body is vital to the flow of the presentation. Finally, the speaker should focus on creating strong transitions to help the audience move from one point to the next.

Supporting Ideas

The speaker should use three to five main points to support the main objective. Each of these points

should be supported by clear evidence. Evidence should be specific, recent, and credible.

In order to provide strong support the speaker should use an effective mix of evidence. Evidence may include illustrations, descriptions and explanations, definitions, analogies, statistics, and opinions (Table 2). However, the evidence should be incorporated into the speech correctly to be effective. Many of the useful resources listed at the end of the paper provide further information in the use of these techniques.

Organizational Patterns

It is important to organize the body of the speech logically so that it is easy for the audience to follow the train of thought. Unlike when reading a book, individuals in the audience cannot go back and re-read if they get lost or confused. Table 3 describes four organizational patterns that can be useful when developing a speech.

Transitions

Transitions provide the bridges that help the audience move between major aspects of the presentation. They provide coherence and a smooth flow to the speech. Use transitions between the introduction and body, between the main points in the body, and between the body and conclusion. Verbal transitions utilize transitional words or phrases that indicate the direction of the thought process. For example, words like *also* indicate a forward progression, whereas words like *however* indicate a reversal in thought progression. Using phrases or sentences that conclude one point and introduce the new point also provide valuable transitions. For example, if a speech is given on reducing production costs, a transitional phrase like the following would be in order: "*In addition to reducing costs through economies of scales by increasing volume, you may also reduce costs monitoring inputs.*" This transition summarizes the previous point and introduces the next point. When delivering a speech, nonverbal clues to reinforce the transition may be used.

Conclusion

The conclusion is a vital part of a speech. Using a strong and clear transition to signify that the conclusion is beginning is very important. The audience should be aware that the most important messages to be remembered from the speech are being emphasized. No new information should be introduced during the conclusion. Instead, the conclusion should summarize the main points, leave a strong final impression, and mirror the introduction.

Summarize Main Points

The speaker should briefly summarize the main idea and each of the main points of the speech. Restate the main point and any vital information from that point; however, do not regurgitate the whole speech. The speaker should not use more than one to two sentences to restate a point. The more complete and concise the information, the more effective the conclusion will be. The main idea is to provide the audience with information in a package that makes it easy for them to remember.

Final Impression

The conclusion will be the final impression left with the audience. To make a good final impression, the speaker must develop a strong conclusion. The speaker should use this opportunity to leave the audience with a memorable thought or question to ponder as a result of the speech. This approach will keep the audience focused on the speech and the information presented. Also, the goal of the speech should be clearly reiterated. For example, if the speaker wants the audience to change a habit, provide them with the steps and resources they need to follow to make that change. Finally, create a complete package for the audience by tying final thoughts back to the introduction.

Mirror Introduction

By tying the final thoughts in the conclusion back to the introduction and interest approach, the speaker helps the audience come full circle. For example, if an analogy of a symphony is used to represent all the parts in an organization working together properly in the introduction, the same

analogy should be used in the conclusion. In doing so, the audience will better understand how everything in the speech fits together and will create a package for them to remember. Many speakers write the introduction and conclusion together to make a clear connection.

Referencing

It is important to ensure that plagiarism is avoided. Within the manuscript, ideas that are not those of the author of the speech must be cited. Several styles may be found for citing references, each of which provides a unique citation and referencing formula. Whichever style is chosen, it is important to follow the formula exactly.

Conclusion

By contributing time and effort to developing a strong speech, the task of public speaking can be made much easier. Proper preparation requires the speaker to analyze the audience and choose an appropriate purpose and topic. While keeping the audience in mind, the speaker should design a strong introduction that will capture the audience's attention and introduce the purpose and main points. Logical organization and transitions will help the audience follow the speech. The speaker should provide a variety of strong evidence to support each of the main points. The conclusion should mirror the introduction, summarize the important information, and leave a strong final impression. Finally, the speaker should ensure that plagiarism is avoided by properly citing sources. If these guidelines are followed, preparing a successful speech is almost a certainty.

Useful Resources

Beebe, S. A., & Beebe, S. J. (2006). *Public speaking: An audience-centered approach* (6th ed.). New York: Pearson.

Fraleigh, D. M., & Tuman, J. S. (2009). *Speak up! An illustrated guide to public speaking*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins.

Hacker, D. (2004). *A pocket style manual* (4th ed.). New York: Bedford/St. Martin.

Koch, A. (2004). *Speaking with a purpose* (6th ed.). New York: Pearson.

Lunsford, A. A. (2005). *The everyday writer* (3rd ed.). New York: Bedford/St. Martin.

Table 1. Interest Approach Techniques.

Technique	Description
Anecdote	Tell a story or relate an incident relative to the topic
Questioning	Pose a question which focuses the audience to consider the topic at hand.
Humor	Use tactful and tasteful humor to engage and relax audience.
Statement	A startling statement or a statement out of context can capture attention and provide a memorable take-home line.
Challenge	Challenge the audience to meet a goal.
Quotation	Using a relevant quotation may help put the main idea into words for the audience to consider.
Analogy	Analogies provide an indirect approach to the topic and can be very memorable.
Piggy-back	Refer to a previous speaker or event related to the topic.

Table 2. Forms of Evidence. (Adapted from Beebe & Beebe, 2006; Konch, 2004).

Evidence	Description	Types
Analogies	A comparison between two things.	literal, figurative
Analysis	The process of explaining something by breaking it down into its parts and examining them.	critique, review, how it works
Definitions	A statement about what a term means or how it is applied in a specific instance.	classification, definitions
Descriptions	A word picture of something.	describing
Example	A typical sample selected to show the nature or character of the rest.	factual, hypothetical, brief, detailed
Explanations	A statement that makes clear how something is done or why something exists in its present form or existed in it past form.	how, why
Illustrations	A story or anecdote that provides an example of an idea, issue, or problem a speaker is discussing.	brief, extended, hypothetical
Opinions	A statement expressing an individual's attitudes, beliefs, or values.	expert testimony, lay testimony, literary quotations
Statistics	Numerical data that summarizes facts or samples.	primary, secondary
Visual Aid	A visual or audiovisual representation used to reinforce or clarify the ideas being presented.	Prop, charts, graphs, diagrams, slides, handouts, photograph, movie clip, PowerPoint

Table 3. Organizational Patterns for Presentations.

Pattern	Description	Example
Chronological	Events are ordered based on time	The rise of ethanol • Need (dependence on oil) • Research and development • Implementing use

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Pattern	Description	Example
Spatial Sequence	Topics are ordered by location	Florida Agricultural Commodities by Geographical Area • Northwest Panhandle – Cow calf, peanuts • Central Florida – citrus, strawberries • South Florida – tropical fruits, ornamental horticulture
Topical Sequence	Ideas are ordered by topic	Breed Characteristics of Sheep • Suffolk • Southdown • Corriedale • Cotswold
Pros vs. Cons or Problem - Solution	Pros are given, then cons (or opposite)	Genetically altering crops • Pros • Cons