

Principles of Organization

The Importance of Organization

Good organization is the key to effective communication because it helps make your ideas accessible to your audience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Explain how information, knowledge, and wisdom work together in a speech

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Public speakers can structure the audience 's experience through skillful organization. As you write your speech, decide what you want your audience to feel in the beginning, middle, and end of your speech.
- An effective speech should balance information, knowledge, and wisdom.
- Information is the foundation of knowledge; knowledge is the basis of wisdom.

Key Terms

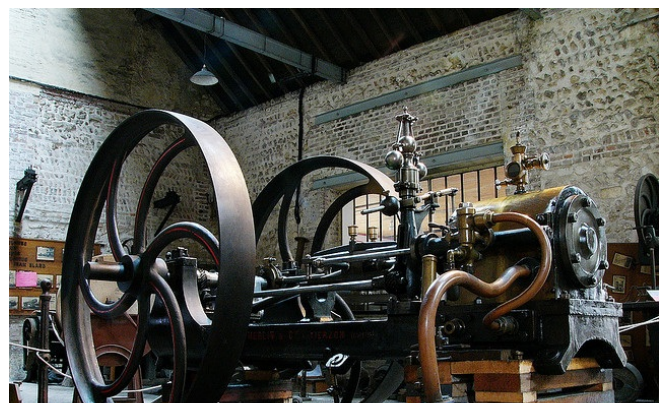
- **information:** The category of information includes facts, figures, and concepts taken from primary and secondary texts.
- **knowledge:** Familiarity or understanding of a particular skill, branch of learning, etc.
- **wisdom:** Wisdom refers to insight that is gained from knowledge. This category includes truth, opinion, and perception.

Why Does Organization Matter?

William Carlos Williams once said that a poem is a “machine made of words.” A sad poem is a machine that manufactures melancholy; a funny poem is a machine that produces laughs. Poetry doesn't have a monopoly on this quality—a well-crafted speech can also be a machine made of words. Skillfully constructed language has a powerful effect on its audience, and speechwriters should strive to harness that power. How should a public speaker go about building a “machine made of words”? It's all in the organization. Machines only work when their component parts are assembled properly.

When you are organizing your main points, ask yourself a few questions. What is your ultimate goal? Are you trying to inform the audience, persuade the audience, amuse the audience, or enrage the audience? Think about the experience you want to create for your listeners—how you want them to feel when you begin speaking, and how you want them to feel when you make your final statement. When you have a clear vision in mind, return to the “Ordering Main Points” segment and choose a model that fits your purpose.

For example, let's say you are preparing a speech to solicit money



for political dissidents in Chechnya, and you want to motivate your listeners by shocking them. If shock is the desired effect, it would be ineffective to spend ten minutes pontificating generally about the

virtues of free speech without mentioning the specific abuse that the fundraiser addresses. It would be more effective to open with the story of an abused dissident who could benefit from the fundraiser's efforts—a story that would show the audience how high the stakes are, and how donations could help.



Organizing a Speech: A well-organized speech is like a well-oiled machine.

Information, Knowledge, and Wisdom

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

-T.S. Eliot

T.S. Eliot makes a good point: it is difficult to maintain a healthy balance of information, knowledge, and wisdom. When we write speeches, we mix material from the three main registers of meaning: information, knowledge, and wisdom. For our purposes, let's define information as facts, figures, and concepts taken from primary and secondary texts. Knowledge is more general than information: it refers to the ideas that come from processing information, rather than the information itself. Knowledge is the synthesis of many facts. This category includes stories, principles, and contexts. Wisdom, the most general category of all, refers to insight that is gained from knowledge. Wisdom includes truth, opinion, and perception.

To put it in concrete terms, let's look at the information/knowledge/wisdom breakdown in a speech about performance-enhancing drugs in sports:

Information: statistics about athletes' steroid use

Knowledge: stories about athletes who take steroids

Wisdom: suggestions about ethics in sports

All three of these elements should work together. If your speech is too heavy on information and light on knowledge and wisdom, your message may get lost in the details. A speech that presents knowledge without information to support it or wisdom to justify it may seem pointless. "Wisdom" offered without information and knowledge to ground it in reality may come across as a vapid collection of clichés.

Good organization can prevent these problems. Balance information, knowledge, and wisdom as though you are building a house: lay a strong foundation of information, build knowledge on top of it, and finish the house with a roof of wisdom.

Critical Thinking

Learning how to think critically is a vital part of the organizational process of crafting an effective speech.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Critical thinking consists of intentional, reflective thinking about a given set of information and determining not only what to believe about that information but also how to act on it.
- Critical thinking consists of the following six key processes and actions: clarifying goals, examining assumptions, discerning hidden values, evaluating evidence, accomplishing actions, and assessing conclusions.
- You must utilize the many elements of critical thinking to pinpoint your goals and articulate compelling, relevant, accurate evidence in your speech. Additionally, critical thinking allows you to examine your thesis from opposing viewpoints, giving you further strategies to bolster your argument.

Key Terms

- **critical thinking:** the application of logical principles, rigorous standards of evidence, and careful reasoning to the analysis and discussion of claims, beliefs, and issues

Critical thinking consists of intentional, reflective thinking about a given set of information and determining not only what to believe about that information but also how to act on it. When you think of delivering a speech or a public address, you might not think that critical thinking plays a key role in the delivery of that speech. The key to a successful delivery lies in the speech's logical structure and organization of thought. Critical thinking is an important part of that organizational process.

Speeches typically serve one of four basic purposes: to inform, to persuade, to demonstrate, or to entertain. Constructing your speech with an effective thesis or main point and evidence to support that thesis requires you as the speechwriter to use critical thinking to determine how you'll make those points. Fully understanding the context of your speech is one of the most important elements of critical thinking in your speechwriting process.

Critical thinking consists of the following six key processes and actions:

1. Clarify goals
2. Examine assumptions
3. Discern hidden values
4. Evaluate evidence
5. Accomplish actions
6. Assess conclusions

In regards to public speaking, each of these is a process to undertake as you craft your speech.

Clarifying Goals

Before you begin outlining your speech, consider exactly what you're trying to accomplish. Are you trying to inform or instruct your audience on a particular subject? Do you seek to persuade them to feel a certain way about your topic? By considering your purpose for speaking, you can more clearly articulate your goals for the speech.

Examining Assumptions

As you pinpoint your thesis and main points, you'll begin to outline exactly how you plan to support your argument. In order to present a clear and well-reasoned argument, you'll need to make



Critical Thinking: Critical thinking is an important step in the process of writing an effective speech.

sure you have accurate and specific evidence to support your claims. By examining assumptions that may be made about your particular thesis, you can more clearly hone and refine the evidence you choose to present to bolster your case.

Discerning Hidden Values

Have you considered all the possible ways to present your main thesis and all the possible evidence you could include? Consider your thesis from opposing points of view. Using this critical thinking skill of discerning hidden values gives you a comprehensive way to approach your speech from all possible points of view.

Evaluating Evidence

Now that you know all the possible angles from which others can approach your line of reasoning, now it's time to select the best evidence to support your thesis. By evaluating evidence with a critical eye, you'll strengthen your argument by selecting the most compelling evidence to make your point.

Accomplishing Actions

Now that you've outlined your purpose, goals, and evidence, how exactly will you set out to accomplish those goals? Considering what actions you hope your speech will provoke will further guide you in the process of carefully selecting every word and sentence that brings you closer to realizing those goals.

Assessing Conclusions

Once you've written your speech, will your audience come to the same logical conclusion as you? Assessing the ways in which your audience will come to their own conclusions about your material will influence all the other pathways of critical thinking about your speech. You can then go back and tailor your evidence and content more appropriately so that your audience reaches the same conclusions you set out to present.

In sum, critical thinking is a vital part of the speechwriting and public-speaking process, a skill that you should work to develop in order to craft effective speeches.

Components of a Speech: Main Points, Introduction, Conclusion, and Transitions

A speech should have four components: the main points, introduction, conclusion, and transitions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Name the different components of a speech

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Composing a speech is different from writing an essay. Write with listeners in mind, not readers.
- The bulk of a speech is different from the body of an essay. An essay is a careful, detailed scaffold that builds points over multiple pages, whereas a speech should stick to a few overarching points or themes.
- Public speakers can emphasize transition points with visual aids, body language, vocal delivery, and transitional words and phrases.

Key Terms

- **transition:** The process of change from one form, state, style, or place to another.

Components of a Speech: Main Points, Introduction, Conclusion, and Transitions

A speech is more than simply an essay that is read aloud. Listening to a speaker is inherently different from reading a page, and public speakers should keep that difference in mind as they prepare their work.

A traditional academic essay consists of an introduction, a body with alternating concrete details and commentary, and a conclusion. The role of the introduction and conclusion are similar in speeches and essays, but the “body” is a different matter. Break free of the essay mindset, and try to think of a speech as the sum of four components: the main points, introduction, conclusion, and transitions. What’s the difference? Read on to see what is special about the components of a speech.

Main Points

Thinking of “main points” rather than a “body” can help speakers remember to keep it simple. A restless audience may not have patience for the predictable, orderly progression of concrete details and commentary that is typical in the body of an academic essay. Above all, communicate a few important points!

Introduction

The introduction should get the audience’s attention, describe the topic, state the thesis or purpose, and give an overview of the speech and its main points. Open with a detailed map of your speech—giving good directions in the beginning will save your audience from getting lost along the way.

Conclusion

The conclusion should summarize main points and state a strong thesis. Remember that many people struggle with auditory learning, and consequently have trouble focusing on spoken words. Your listeners may not put everything together on their own, so you should make it easier for them by summarizing your argument and reviewing central ideas in the conclusion.

Transitions

A transition is a change or shift from one topic to another. It may be surprising to see that transitions are one of the four key components of a speech. Academic writers tend to think of transitions as important stylistic elements rather than essential building blocks. However, transitions are crucial for public speakers, since speakers need to compensate for the loss of visual formatting. On a written page, formatting provides a helpful road map: the reader sees topic headings, paragraph breaks, and other visual cues that signal transitions naturally. Speakers can replicate these cues and signal transitions using visual aids and body language, but it will take more conscious effort than simply hitting “enter” to create a paragraph break. Speakers can emphasize transition points with visual aids, body language, vocal delivery, and transitional words and phrases.

Visual Aids for Transitions

Visual aids such as slides and handouts are a great way to guide the audience through your transitions. A slide or handout with topic headings printed on it is a good road map for a speech, preparing the audience for any twists and turns that may come up.



Transitioning Together: Effective transitions will help the audience follow your speech as it moves from topic to topic.

Transition Words and Phrases

These words and phrases signal a change, giving the audience a “heads up” about an upcoming transition:

Connecting:

- additionally
- also
- again
- moreover
- furthermore
- coupled with
- for example
- for instance
- likewise
- similarly
- specifically
- indeed
- in fact

Contrasting:

- however
- although
- but
- nevertheless
- on one hand
- on the other hand

- on the other hand
- besides
- yet
- on the contrary
- conversely
- comparatively

Concluding:

- overall
- above all
- therefore
- thus
- accordingly
- consequently
- in conclusion
- finally
- in essence
- in other words
- in short

Patterns of Organization: Informative, Persuasive, and Commemorative

The three main categories of speech are: informative, persuasive, and commemorative.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Discuss the goals of informative, persuasive, and commemorative speeches

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- When you begin organizing your speech, determine what your broader purpose is—to inform, persuade, or commemorate.
- Keep the purpose of your speech in mind as you try different structural models.
- Different structures are suited to different purposes, and you may have to experiment with a few models before you find the right one for your speech.

Key Terms

- **informative speech:** An informative speech educates the audience about its topic.

- **commemorative speech:** A commemorative speech honors, celebrates, or remembers its subject.
- **persuasive speech:** A persuasive speech makes a convincing case for its position or viewpoint.

Patterns of Organization:

As you organize your main points, keep your “big picture” goal in mind. Are you trying to inform your listeners about an issue? Or trying to persuade them to share your opinion? Perhaps you are commemorating an event?

Different goals call for different narrative structures and you may need to try a few models before you find one that suits. To aid your trial-and-error process, refer to the list of structural models in the previous chapter for ideas. If you haven’t looked at these recently, it may be helpful to review “Ordering Main Points” before reading on. The following provides examples of some of these in action.

Informative

An informative speech should educate the audience about its topic. These speeches are not argumentative—they describe, announce, or explain their subject without making a case or taking sides.

Catering to the audience’s needs is important in any speech, but it is crucial in an informative speech. This type of speech relies on the value of the information itself, without the added appeal of a conversion experience or an emotional catharsis. Make sure your information will be useful and interesting to your audience!

Here are some sample topic statements that illustrate different approaches to framing an informative speech:

Cause and Effect

- Consumers listed rising gas prices and falling prices for electric vehicles as the main reasons behind their new interest in electric cars.

Compare and Contrast

- Studies have found major demographic differences between consumers who would consider buying electric cars and those who would not, but both groups still share the same concerns.

Categorical

- Market research shows that consumers weigh three main issues when they consider buying an electric car: purchase price, convenience, and long-term cost savings.

Chronological

- The market for electric cars has evolved significantly in the years between its invention in the late nineteenth century and the mass-production of electric cars today.

Biographical

- Belgian inventor, Camille Jenatzy, combined solid engineering skills with a flair for publicity stunts to build a successful electric vehicle company in the 1890s.

Persuasive

A persuasive speech should make a convincing case for its position. While some are intended to win passive agreement from the audience, others encourage immediate action. For example, a speech arguing that drug-resistant bacteria strains are a serious problem seeks only passive agreement. However, if the speech went one step further and urged listeners to reduce their own consumption of antibiotics, it would belong to the second category.

If you want your audience to *do* something, end your speech with a call to action and explain how your listeners could help the cause.

These thesis statements about antibiotic-resistant bacteria illustrate different structural models for persuasive speaking:

Cause and Effect

- The U.S. industry standard of giving daily antibiotics to healthy livestock promotes the creation of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Problem-Cause-Solution

- Dangerous bacteria are adapting to resist antibiotics on under-regulated U.S. farms. The FDA should scrap its useless “voluntary guidelines” for agribusiness and impose legally-binding restrictions on the practice of feeding antibiotics to healthy animals.

Compare and Contrast

- The European Union banned the routine feeding of antibiotics to livestock as part of its quest to fight antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Compared to the strict regulations in other industrialized nations, the U.S. policy of trusting agri-businesses to regulate themselves seems outdated and irresponsible.

Categorical

- The case for legally-binding restrictions on agricultural consumption of antibiotics should be evaluated in terms of its costs, benefits, and practical feasibility.

Chronological

- The European Union banned the practice of routinely feeding antibiotics to healthy livestock in 2004. Since then, calls for similar legislation in the U.S. have become increasingly urgent as new studies warn of public health risks from antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Biographical

- Dr. Marc Sprenger of the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention draws on his experience as a doctor and epidemiologist to combat antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Commemorative

A commemorative speech should honor, celebrate, or remember its subject. These sample statements of purpose memorialize different aspects of the *Titanic*:



Autographed Postcard: Three survivors of the Titanic, including Eva Hart, signed a postcard commemorating the tragedy.

Cause and Effect

- The sinking of the *Titanic* inspired a new wave of maritime safety laws. My panel will discuss the life-saving provisions we owe to that tragedy.

Compare and Contrast

- The passenger carrier *Lusitania* sank only three years after the *Titanic* and claimed nearly as many lives. However, the legend of the *Titanic* overshadows the *Lusitania's* story. When I compare these two tragedies, I find myself asking—how different are they, really?

Categorical

- Are we justified in our nostalgia for a bygone era of chivalry? Behavioral economists have taken one step toward answering this question, using data from the *Titanic* and the *Lusitania* to study social norms in disaster responses. How many men actually gave up lifeboat seats to women and children? I will address these questions by analyzing the effects of age, gender, ticket class, and family structure on an individual's chance of surviving one of these disasters.

Chronological

- After the *Titanic* sank in 1912, the White Star Line spent four years in arbitration before reaching a deal to cover 16 million in legal claims with a settlement of 664,000. Let's give that controversial legal battle a retrial from beginning to end to see if the settlement is actually a fair outcome.

Biographical

- Tonight, we are gathered to celebrate Eva Hart, who was only seven years old when she sat on a lifeboat watching the *Titanic* sink into the sea with her father on board. The experience left her with terrible nightmares, but she overcame her fears and lived a full life as a singer, politician, and magistrate.

While informative speeches explain, educate and describe; persuasive speeches raise the stakes by using information to

influence the audience; commemorative speeches assume a shared emotional connection to the subject.

Building a Speech: Starting with an Outline

The process of creating an outline can help speechwriters organize their main points and evidence.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Describe the process and methods for creating a speech outline

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- If you are having trouble writing your outline, try brainstorming first.
- A topic outline, or a general list of topics, evidence, quotes, and other details, is a good way to organize your main points and create a general overview of the speech.
- If you want to make an outline that includes text from the actual speech, write a sentence outline.

Key Terms

- **outline:** A list used to present the main points or topics of a given subject, often used as a rough draft or summary of the content of a document.
- **topic outline:** A topic outline is a hierarchical list of a speech's main points. Topic outlines use keywords and short phrases rather than complete sentences.
- **sentence outline:** A sentence outline expresses the central ideas of a speech in complete sentences.

Building a Speech: Starting with an Outline

It is always a good idea to make an outline before you begin writing a speech. An outline is a structural plan that lists main points, summarizes claims, and serves as a guide for the writing process. Working from an outline can help you organize your speech and put supporting elements, such as definitions and supporting evidence, in order. Some outlines are minimal, providing a quick sketch of a speech's main points. Other outlines are very detailed, filling in a skeleton of topic headings with topic sentences, pieces of evidence, and transitions.

Many students are familiar with outlining techniques from academic writing classes. Outlining a speech is similar, but there is one key difference: speechwriters can use the outlining process to create prompts to aid with delivering the speech. Some speakers like to use handwritten notes, others use cue-cards, still others read from a printed script, and some experienced speakers don't use any prompts at all. Ideally, with practice, you will avoid reading a script word-for-word—burying your face in papers for the entirety of the speech will limit your ability to engage the audience. However, minimal prompts such as cue cards and outline-style notes may help you stay on topic and remember main points. Whether or not you plan to use prompts, creating an outline is a great way to refine your argument—and you can always ignore it once you begin writing.

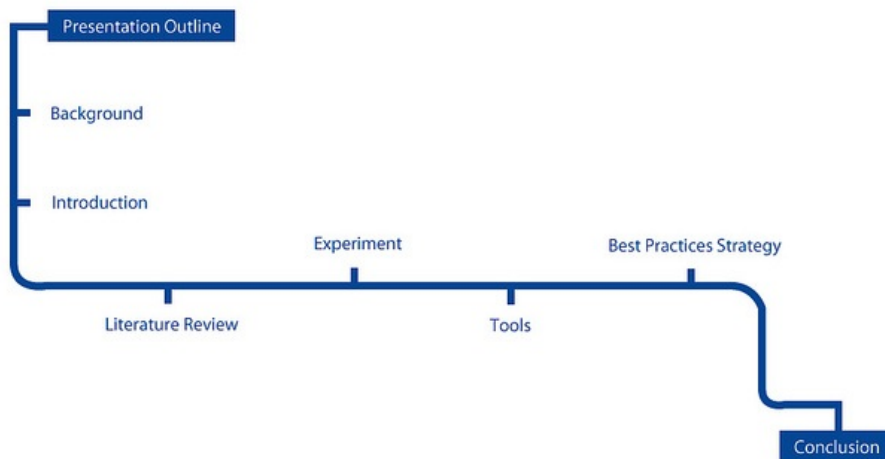
Brainstorming

Many speakers like to brainstorm before making an outline. Brainstorming, which involves techniques such as creating “idea maps” or flowcharts that connect ideas and evidence, is less formal and structured than outlining. It is a great place to begin if you're having a hard time settling on a definite plan for your speech.

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Topic Outline

A topic outline is a hierarchical list of a speech's main points. Topic outlines tend to use keywords and short phrases rather than complete sentences. A topic outline is fragmentary—it serves as a prompt, rather than a draft of material to use in the actual speech.



Creating an Outline: This outline provides a general overview of the structure of a science presentation.

Sentence Outline

A sentence outline expresses the central ideas of a speech in complete sentences. Sentence outlines are more detailed than topic outlines, but less detailed than first drafts.

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