

Types of Public Speeches

Informative Speeches

An informative speech involves a knowledgeable speaker transferring some of their knowledge to their audience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

List the types of informative speeches and describe their use

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- A speaker should be very knowledgeable about the topic of their informative speech.
- The topic of an informative speech can range from a detailed method to an abstract concept.
- Narrower topics make for more robust and comprehensible speeches.
- Practice any speech multiple times.

Key Terms

- **object:** A thing that has physical existence.
- **inform:** To communicate knowledge to others.
- **concept:** An understanding retained in the mind, from experience, reasoning and/or imagination; a generalization (generic, basic form), or abstraction (mental impression), of a particular set of instances or occurrences (specific, though different, recorded manifestations of the concept).

An informative speech is one in which the speaker relays knowledge to an audience on a specific topic.

There are four distinct categories of topic:

- things, people, or places
- methods
- events
- ideas

Speeches About Objects

For the purposes of this type of informative speech, anything that is visible and tangible is considered an object. Object speeches seek to impart knowledge about this object to the audience. Whether your object is the human body or the most recent episode of Family Guy, informative object speeches provide a comprehensive overview of your object as topic.

It's important that object speeches have a purpose: using our previous examples, you may discuss the complex, myriad ways in which the endocrine system functions and how it regulates metabolism; similarly, you may describe how Family Guy serves as a modern form of satire in pop culture. It's one thing to spout off facts about an object, but there must be a purpose to those facts.

Speeches About Processes

A process is the manner in which something is created, made, done, or works. An informative speech about a process then describes how something is made, done, or works. Processes could include anything from how the modern electoral college works to how an ice cream sandwich is made on the factory line. Informative process speeches work to help your audience both understand the process, and possibly be able to replicate the process for themselves (if applicable).

Speeches About Events

Any occurrence that happens is regarded as an "event." A speech about an event then, describes the occurrence in full: the time, date, location, and circumstances of that occurrence. Like all informative speeches, event speeches must also serve a purpose. You may talk about how the Battles of Lexington and Concord came to be known as the "shot heard 'round the world," or describe the experience of your first week at college. In either case, your speech must have a purpose to it.

Speeches About Concepts

Concepts refer to ideas, beliefs, theories, attitudes, and/or principles. When speaking about concepts, you may have to find concrete ideas in order to make abstract ideas more relatable and tangible to your audience. Whether discussing the theory of the origins of the universe to whether there's any truth to the phrase "love at first sight," concept speeches break down complex ideas into manageable chunks of understanding for your audience.

Crafting an Effective Informative Speech

A narrowly focused speech topic can really hone in on an object, process, event, or concept, thus making it easier for the audience to understand that topic. A broadly chosen topic usually entails lots of different kinds of information, which might complicate the informative quality of a speech and confuse the audience members. A narrowed focus also makes researching more manageable for the speech writer and increases his or her ability to understand that topic thoroughly before presenting it to others.

When writing an informative speech, pick out a small number of key points on your specific topic that you want the audience to take away from your speech. Use these points to develop an organizational

structure to your speech, which should include an introduction, body, and conclusion. This structure will provide a trajectory that guides your audience as you elaborate the key points of information. Having a structure gives you, as the speaker, an opportunity to introduce the key points in the introduction and revisit them in the conclusion, increasing the likelihood that the audience will walk away with the key knowledge about your topic.

Informative Speech: A lecture is an example of an informative speech.

Persuasive Speeches

In a persuasive speech, a speaker attempts to persuade the audience to adopt his/her position in relation to a topic.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Explain how to compose a persuasive speech

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- A persuasive speech intends to persuade the audience to adopt the position of the speaker.
- Know your audience: in order to be persuasive, the form and content of your speech must take into account what the audience knows and how it wants to be addressed.
- An appeal to ethos is used to show the character of the speaker and make him/her more credible.

Key Terms

- **audience:** A group of people within hearing; specifically a group of people listening to a performance, speech etc.; the crowd seeing a stage performance.
- **pathos:** That quality or property of anything which touches the feelings or excites emotions and passions, esp., that which awakens tender emotions, such as pity, sorrow, and the like; contagious warmth of feeling, action, or expression; pathetic quality.
- **persuade:** To successfully convince someone to agree to, accept, or do something, usually through reasoning and verbal influence.

The purpose of a persuasive speech is to convince the audience to adopt the speaker's perspective on a given topic. The core of a persuasive speech is pathos: appealing to and resonating with the audience's feelings and emotions.

In order for the pathos contained in a persuasive speech to be effective, the speaker has to understand the audience he/she is addressing. To be convincing, the speaker has to take into account the behavioral motivations and foundational beliefs of the audience.

Showing empathy with the audience is crucial. Drawing parallels between yourself and the audience reduces the distance between you and them, making your speech that much more persuasive.

In addition to pathos, persuasive speeches contain appeals to ethos and logos. An appeal to ethos is used to show the character of the speaker and make him/her more credible. For the audience to be persuaded, they have to feel that the speaker is a credible and worth listening to. An appeal to logos requires referencing evidence. This demonstrates the extent to which the speaker is knowledgeable about the topic he/she is speaking about, making their speech more persuasive than if he/she appeared ill-informed on the topic.

William Jennings Bryan, 1908: A picture of William Jennings Bryan giving a campaign speech in 1908.

Informative vs. Persuasive Speeches

Many speeches will contain elements of both informative and persuasive speeches.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Distinguish between an informative speech and a persuasive speech

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- An informative speech aims to inform the audience about a specific topic.
- A persuasive speech aims to persuade the audience to perform a certain action or convince the audience to adopt the belief or opinion of the speaker.
- Many speeches will combine features of informative and persuasive speeches.
- Know the audience: the types of knowledge they possess, the core beliefs they hold, and what motivates them to undertake actions.
- Considering the purpose of the speech will help determine if the speech should use more of the features of informative or persuasive speeches.

Key Terms

- **informative:** Providing knowledge, especially useful or interesting information.

- **pathos:** That quality or property of anything which touches the feelings or excites emotions and passions, esp., that which awakens tender emotions, such as pity, sorrow, and the like; contagious warmth of feeling, action, or expression; pathetic quality.
- **persuasive:** Able to induce to believe by appealing to reason or understanding; convincing.

When choosing between writing an informative or persuasive speech, the speaker should consider the purpose of the speech. Is it to share information about a particular event, topic, or subject? Or is it to persuade the audience to hold a certain belief or attitude about said event, topic, or subject?

The focus of the thesis, or the main argument of the speech, often dictates whether the speech will be mainly informative or persuasive in nature. However, keep in mind that some speeches will contain a combination of both types of speech.

Informative speeches describe knowledge about a particular event, process, object, or concept. The goal of an informative speech is for the audience to fully comprehend this knowledge. Persuasive speeches are those that seek to have the audience share a belief or feeling about a particular event, process, object or concept. The difference is subtle, and yet mighty.

For example, imagine a topic that could fall into either category, such as reproductive choice. An informative speech may track the history of reproductive choice in America. A persuasive speech may discuss the pros and cons of *Roe v. Wade*, or how some groups feel that reproductive choice is threatened. In the latter instance, using examples from history may bolster that argument. As noted above, all persuasive speeches will be informational in nature, but not all informational speeches may be persuasive. Fully understanding the informational or persuasive purpose of the speech will help the speaker determine what rhetorical strategies to use in the pursuit of achieving his or her goal. If the purpose is simply to provide information, then the speech will likely rely less on pathos and more on evidence, statistical data, or charts and graphs. If the purpose is have the audience believe or feel a certain way about the subject, then the speaker will tailor the evidence and specific data with appeals to emotion to lead the audience to the desired point of view.

When writing a speech, take into account the intended audience that will be addressed; never underestimate the importance of knowing the audience. For example, when giving an informative speech, the speaker must take into account not only the audience's familiarity with any technical terms, but also what sort of pathos he or she may want to use. Some audiences will respond to certain appeals to emotion, while others might be turned off to the speaker if he or she makes what is seen as an inappropriate appeal to emotion. Therefore, always consider the specifics of your audience—age, occupation, beliefs, motivations—and then use these specifics to inform the form and content of the speech.

The State of the Union is a good example of a speech that contains elements of informative and persuasive speeches. In the State of the Union, the President of the United States is supposed to inform the members of Congress on the state of the union. Therefore, it commonly contains specific information (for example, the number of jobs created in a certain time period).

President Truman, 1950: President Truman delivers his State of the Union to Congress in 1950.

However, the State of the Union also contains heavy pathos that is intended to make citizens feel confident about the President's handling of the nation and hopeful about the future. The President will spin data and use emotional appeals to make his or her case to the American people. This specific speech makes it clear that a speech can combine the features of informative and persuasive speeches.

Speeches for Special Occasions

Some special occasions require speeches that are different than speeches aimed at informing or persuading audiences.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Differentiate a special occasion speech from an informative or persuasive speech

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Special occasion speeches tend to be shorter speeches, commonly less than ten minutes.
- Special occasion speeches are commonly addressed to a particular audience.
- Depending on the context, special occasion speeches can be funny or sad.

Key Terms

- **context:** the situation in which something happens.
- **toast:** to engage in a salutation and/or accompanying raising of glasses while drinking alcohol (or other appropriate beverage) in honor of someone or something.
- **pathos:** an appeal to an audience's emotions or sensibilities.

As the name implies, special occasion speeches are speeches that are given on special occasions. There are many examples of special occasions where it might be appropriate to deliver a speech. For example, an individual might give a speech at a wake or memorial for an audience of friends and families who knew the person being memorialized. Clearly this speech will be very different than a toast given at a wedding, which is also an example of a special occasion speech and which will have a much more celebratory tone. A commencement ceremony or award ceremony are some other special occasions during which someone may give a speech.

Special occasion speeches are usually shorter than informative or persuasive speeches. Special occasion speeches are usually less than ten minutes long, which demonstrates that their purpose is different than

other types of speeches delivered at a conference or political rally. Depending on the context, the purpose of a special occasion speech may be to remember, to praise or to humorously tease. They may contain a use of pathos that aims to convince the audience to be happy, possibly by being comedic. However, they may use a pathos intended to make the audience reflective, as in a speech given at a memorial service. Special occasion speeches might inform the audience. For example, someone may give a speech at a wedding and share a specific memory, thus informing the audience of that particular incident and possibly articulating its importance in relation to the newlyweds. While special occasion speeches may be informative, their purpose is always specific to the context and audience that will be hearing them.