



SWC 5: Composing an Effective Speech

Unlike composing an essay, a speech comes with the additional step of creating a performance to accompany written work. Taking the performance aspect of a speech into consideration as it is being written will help lessen nervousness and boost confidence about delivering a message to an audience. Before starting on your speech, consider the following elements:

- **Audience:** Who is your audience? If the speech is for a class assignment, your audience will likely be your professor and classmates. If the speech is for an organization or event, you might be speaking to a room of complete strangers. What prior knowledge does your audience have about your topic? How do you know? What attitude might they have about your topic? Knowing this information will help you make the best choices with how you write and deliver your speech and can affect how your words, gestures, etc. might be interpreted. Write down some ideas about who your audience is and how you should approach the topic based on this audience:
- **Tone:** Once you know your audience, you will be able to choose your tone. Tone is the mood you want your speech to have, and it can be effected by choice of words, your style of speaking, your gestures/body language, and your interactions with your audience while giving the speech. If you want your speech to have a light-hearted tone, you might use more jokes and casual language while writing and take a relaxed pose while speaking. A speech with a serious tone needs to be more direct and less casual. Write down what tone you want to have, and how can you establish it:
- **Time:** How long will your speech need to be? The average person speaks about 110 to 150 words-per-minute. If you must give a five-minute speech, the amount of words you have time to deliver should fit on one single-spaced page. Practicing your speech will help you figure out your timing and whether or not you have too much or too little material to cover your allotted timeframe. Do you have a time limit? How much time will you have for your speech?
- **Setting:** The setting is where your speech will take place. Where will you be in relationship to your audience? Will the room be large or small? A large room with a large audience will require you to project (raising your voice so that you can be heard without shouting) your voice so that all of your listeners can hear you clearly. Will the room have a computer? If it does, you might choose to have a PowerPoint or another visual aid to accompany your speech. Access to the internet will also affect those choices you make. Where will you give your speech? Do you have any technology concerns? (Over)



- **Topic:** The final step to getting started is choosing your topic. This will depend on what type of speech you are giving and if you have set of guidelines or unlimited freedom. In either situation, a speech requires your interest in the subject matter to have the best impact. If you are bored or disinterested in your subject, your audience will likely notice. Choose a topic, within limits, that you care about and are knowledgeable of (this may require research) so that you can better connect with your audience. What is your topic? Do you have multiple topics you are considering?

Composing the Speech

The next stage is to begin writing. Think of lectures you have attended or classes you have taken that were memorable. Oftentimes, the speakers we remember delivered information to their audience in a compelling way, either by telling stories, by using unique or humorous examples, or by simply being passionate about their subject matter. By learning from positive examples, you can write a speech that is just as effective. Remember:

- **A Speech Is Not an Essay:** Because your speech will be delivered to an audience, remember that you should not be simply reading your words from a page or notecards. Speeches require using simplified key terms that will help you remember what you want to say. Keep your writing short and simple like an outline. In fact, creating an outline can be an effective way to plan and organize ideas. When delivering the speech, use signal words so that your audience knows you are moving on to a new point.
- **Anecdotes:** An anecdote—a personal story—is also a great way to begin a speech. By expressing something personal to you that relates to your topic, your audience gains interest by seeing how invested you are in the subject matter.
- **Practice While Writing:** Because you will be performing your speech once it is written, practice while you are composing. Speaking out loud while you write will help you choose what words are appropriate for your audience and are easy to remember and say. You will also learn when you need to pause, when you might call the audience's attention to a visual aid, and when you want to add dramatic flair (such as gesturing or giving a reflective pause). This will also allow you to test your timeframe and ease nerves.
- **Be Prepared for Questions:** Once you have composed your speech, you need to consider that your audience might have questions after you are finished. Reflect on your writing and try to imagine what questions your audience might have. If you think of something that needs to be added to the speech beforehand, edit your speech to address that issue. If you do not, be prepared to potentially answer that question after your speech is over.

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