

Select Your Main Points

Brief: The main points of a speech are the key pieces of information or arguments contained within the talk or presentation.

Learning Objective: Identify criteria to use when selecting main points.

Key Terms:

- **Main point:** A key piece of information or argument contained within the talk or presentation.
- **Sub-point:** An example, statistic, fact, anecdote, or other piece of information that contributes to an audience's understanding of a main point.

How Should I Select My Points?

What is a Main Point?

The main points of any speech are the key pieces of information or arguments contained within the talk or presentation. In other words, the main points are what you want your audience to remember.

When you've conducted enough research to feel confident that you have identified your main ideas, you're ready to move to the next stage in the speech preparation process. If you're unsure of your main points, you should continue with your research.

What is a Sub-Point?

Main points are not intended to stand alone. Instead, speakers must back up their main points by offering up examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, or other information that contribute to the audience's understanding of the main points. These are sub-points, which are used to help support the main points.

How Many Do You Need?

Try to limit yourself to three or four main points. An audience will only be able to grasp so much information at one time; the presenter does not want to bombard the audience with too much information at once. Additionally, make sure that each of your main points is supported by roughly the same number of sub-points or evidence. This adds balance and proportion to your speech.

How Do You Choose?

As you're deciding on which main points to choose, ask yourself, "How does my topic relate to my listeners? Why should they care about it? What's at stake for them?"

The answers to these questions will be your best guide in choosing main points. If you select your main points based on your knowledge about your audience—knowledge about what they relate to, care about, and are invested in—your speech will be more likely to grab and hold their interest.

What's New About Your Topic?

If you want to hold your audience's attention, choose main points that reflect up-to-date information that they likely haven't heard before. If your information is outdated or commonplace, your audience will be more likely to tune you out.

Ask yourself, "What new perspective am I adding to the conversation about my topic? What main points can I include in my speech that the audience won't find elsewhere?"

What's Your Purpose?

Most speeches aim to do one of four things: to inform, to persuade, to inspire, or to entertain. Choose main points that will fulfill your speech's general purpose:

- For an informative speech, provide a foundation of relevant information and share how that information can be useful to your audience.
- For a persuasive speech, provide your audience with points that address their preconceptions about your topic and then introduce points that prove the value of your position.
- For an inspirational speech, provide you audience with stories and wisdom that will inspire the audience to seek higher aspirations and overcome challenges to meeting their goals.
- For an entertainment speech, provide your audience with humor and unexpected narratives that capture their imagination and offer a novel experience.

From Concept to Action

Reflect on the research you've already conducted on a topic for an upcoming speech. Is your information up-to-date? Review the dates in your bibliography. What's your oldest source of information? How can you determine if this older information is still relevant? What's your most recent source? How can you determine if your newest source is credible? Finally, consider your sources in relationship to your topic. Is your topic part of a rapidly changing field of study that requires the latest information, such as technology or the environment? Or can your topic be

considered “timeless,” such as needlepoint or cake decorating? While there may be innovation in the types of thread used or the types of frosting dispensers used, the basics of these crafts remain essentially the same over time therefore older sources continue to provide relevant information.

OER TEXT SOURCES:

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