

Structure and Style of a Speech Outline

Brief: Create an outline before you deliver your speech to act as your guide to effectively sequencing your information and ensuring you touch on all of your main points.

Learning Objective: Identify the components of a speech outline and the style choices involved in preparing one.

Key Terms:

- **Outline:** A list that presents the main points or topics of a given subject, often used as a rough draft or summary of the content of a document.

Outline Components

Organizing your speech in outline form will force you to choose exactly which points you would like to convey in each section of your speech. In this way, you can ensure you will not skip anything crucial and that your speech will follow a logical sequence.

It is important to keep in mind that your outline is only a guide. The purpose of it is to aid you in delivering a clear speech that flows smoothly and effectively, communicating all your ideas. An outline is not a script of your speech with the exact text you want to say, nor is it a rigid structure that you must follow exactly when giving your speech.

Think of your outline as a skeleton—a tool for delivery of extemporaneous speaking. It will serve as the backbone of your speech, providing you with a solid structure on which to build. However, it is your job to then to it flesh out and enrich it. Use your creative flare to make the bare bones more appealing and accessible to your audience.

Organization

Your outline should consist of the three main parts of your speech: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. Within each of these sections, you need to plan more specifically what you would like to say.

You can list your hook in the introduction, identify three or so main points to touch on in the body of your speech, and clearly lay out how you will end your speech and what thoughts you will leave your audience with in your conclusion.

Outline Styles

Outline styles vary, but will always include a list of items organized according to a consistent principle. Each item may be divided into additional sub-items or sub-points.

Common outline styles include sentence outlines and topic outlines. While sentence outlines follow a hierarchical structure composed of full sentences, topic outlines are comprised of words and phrases. Both sentence and topic outlines can be arranged alphanumerically. Alpha-numeric outlines include a prefix in the form of a Roman numeral at the top level (I, II, III, IV, etc.), upper-case letters for the next level (A, B, C, etc.), Arabic numerals for the third level (1, 2, 3, etc.) and lowercase letters for the final level (a, b, c, etc.).

Full Sentence Outlines

If your speech is complex or if you are new to public speaking, using a sentence outline may be more appropriate, as it will require you to articulate the points of your speech more fully ahead of time.

You will start with the introduction, creating a list of points you would like to cover before launching into the body of your speech. This may include a preview of the main topic, as well as an attention-grabbing quotation or statistic to support the main argument of your presentation.

The body of your speech will contain the details and descriptors to support the main point, topic, or argument of the speech. Here you will state each of the main points or topics you covered in your introduction, followed by supporting facts and details. Sub-topics should be added underneath each main topic covered in the outline body.

Finally, you will wrap up your outline with the conclusion, noting how you will summarize the main points of your speech.

From Concept to Action

To practice outlining, start with a speech transcript and reverse engineer an alphanumeric topic outline. Find a speech transcript through an online search. TED Talks are a good source, as they generally include a written transcript. After you read through the transcript, imagine that you're the speaker who created it. What would your outline look like? What information would you include in the introduction, body, and conclusion? After you complete the outline, consider what you've learned through this exercise.

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Outlining." Lumen Learning. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-communications/chapter/outlining/> Accessed 30 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 4.0]