

Informative Speeches vs. Persuasive Speeches

Brief: While not all informative speeches are required to contain persuasive elements, when they do they need to remain secondary to the main purpose of imparting information.

Learning Objective: Distinguish between informative and persuasive speeches.

Key Terms:

- Informative Speech: A type of speech that shares information about a topic in a way that's easy to understand and memorable.
- Logos: A persuasive appeal based in logic.
- Pathos: A persuasive appeal based in emotion.
- Persuasive Speech: A type of speech that seeks to have the audience share a belief or feeling or take an action related to a particular event, process, object, or concept.

Know Your Goal

For many public speaking students, creating a speech goal can seem like an extra and unnecessary step in speech preparation. Depending on whether your instructor has assigned an informative or a persuasive speech, your purpose will be either to inform or to persuade. Right? If the choice is so clear and simple, why bother writing a speech goal?

In fact, writing a speech goal is a necessary step because the choice between whether your speech is informative or persuasive is often unclear.

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 or take an action related to a particular event, process, object, or concept. The difference is subtle, yet significant.

The Connection Between Your Topic and Your Purpose

Many speech topics can fall into either category. For example, the topic of reproductive choice could lead to an informative speech outlining the history of reproductive choice in America. Or, the same topic could lead to a persuasive speech discussing the pros and cons of *Roe v. Wade*.

It's easy to see how the topic of reproductive choice could lead to a speech that includes a blend of both types of speeches. For example, if you chose to make a claim about a particular way in which some groups feel that reproductive choice is threatened, you might decide to include extensive examples from history that bolster that argument.

Your Primary Purpose and Secondary Supports

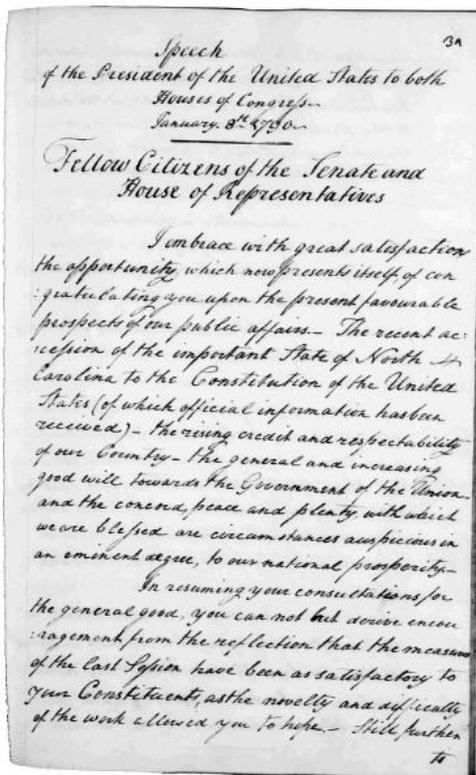
This is why identifying your speech goal is so important. All persuasive speeches include information, but their main purpose should always be to convince the audience. And while not all informative speeches are required to have persuasive elements, when they do these elements need to remain secondary to the main purpose of imparting knowledge.

Speech Purpose and Speech Success

Understanding the nature of the informational purpose of your speech can guide you to determine which rhetorical strategies will best help you achieve your goal. If your purpose is solely to provide information, then your speech will likely rely less on emotional appeal, known as “pathos,” and more on logical appeal, known as “logos,” such as statistical data displayed in charts or graphs.

When a Speech has an Informative and a Persuasive Purpose

If, on the other hand, your speech includes elements of both informative and persuasive speeches, you will need to consider the right balance and flavor of logos and pathos.



George Washington's first State of the Union address

The State of the Union is a good example of a speech that contains elements of informative and persuasive speeches. During the State of the Union, the President of the United States is supposed to inform the members of Congress about how the country's doing. To accomplish this, it's expected that the speech will contain statistical data, such as the number of jobs created in a certain time period, as well as other verifiable information.

However, the State of the Union is also designed to make citizens feel confident about the current administration's handling of the nation and hopeful about the future. To be successful, the speech must also include strong elements of pathos. If either the informative or the persuasive elements of the State of the Union are weak, the speech will not fulfill its purpose.

From Concept to Action

Advertising has become so much a part of our everyday life that we often don't notice the persuasive and informative elements of the content that surround us. Consider an ad you've recently seen for a high ticket item, such as a smart phone or computer. What elements of the argument were appeals to logos? What elements were appeals to pathos? What did you find convincing? For this type of purchase, are you apt to make your decision based on logos or pathos?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"George Washington's first state of the union address, manuscript notes." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Washington_-_State_of_the_Union.djvu. Accessed November 29, 2018. [Public Domain]

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Informative versus Persuasive Speeches." Lumen Learning. <https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54127>. Accessed 28 November 2018. [CC BY-SA 3.0]