

Use Descriptive Language

Brief: Descriptive language in a speech builds interest and allows the audience to be immersed in a memorable sensory experience.

Learning Objective: Understand why choosing descriptive language is important.

Key Terms:

- Monotony: Tedium as a result of repetition or a lack of variety.
- Narration: The art of storytelling.

Overcome Monotony

Monotony is defined as tedium as a result of repetition or a lack of variety. You never want your audience to say, “That speech was boring. I was so monotonous!” To avoid putting your audience to sleep, choose vivid language and imagery to build interest in your speech.

Choose Descriptive Language

Think of your favorite food or meal. What does it smell like? Look like? Taste like? When you use vivid, descriptive language in your speech, you immerse your audience in a sensory experience that transports them from their seats and into the experience you craft with your words.

Using descriptive language is more than just choosing “pretty” words to dress up your speech. In fact, you want to be careful that you don’t distract your audience by using too many descriptive details. Instead, using descriptive language should actually help your audience understand your meaning more fully than they would if you just simply presented hard facts and data. Descriptive language engages your audience’s imagination, which holds their attention and adds both interest and complexity to your speech.

Narration

Narration means the art of storytelling. Any time you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident in your day, you engage in a form of narration. Your narrative can be factual or fictional. When you tell a factual narrative, you relate actual events as they unfolded in real life. When you tell a fictional narrative, on the other hand, you relate a story that is made-up.

When you use narration, you want your audience to be engaged and moved by your story, which can result in laughter, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly you tell your story, the more emotionally engaged your audience is likely to be.

Most narratives unfold chronologically using strong sensory details. Here's an example from a narrative called "America's Pastime":

As the sun hits my face and I breathe in the fresh air, I temporarily forget that I am at a sporting event. But when I open my eyes and look around, I am reminded of all things American. From the national anthem to the international players on the field, all the sights and sounds of a baseball game come together like a slice of Americana pie.

From Concept to Action

Choose one of the main points of a speech you're currently developing and think of a narrative that best illustrates that point. First, write down the story chronologically, including the who, what, where, when, and why of your story. Next, rewrite the story to include additional descriptive language involving as many of the senses as you can— sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Then, review what you've written to make sure that your narrative actually supports your main point. Have you included a direct connection to your main point that your audience will be able to easily understand? Finally, read your narrative out loud. How does it sound? Does it feel authentic? Have you included too much detail? Is it too long? If so, carefully edit your story, making sure to include only those descriptive elements that are essential to effectively conveying your main point.

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Reading: Purpose and Structure of Narrative Writing." Lumen Learning.
https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/178792/pages/reading-purpose-and-structure-of-narrative-writing?module_item_id=4378984.
Accessed 17 May 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

REFERENCES:

"America's Pastime." Writing for Success. Saylor.org Academy. https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_writing-for-success/s19-04-descriptive-essay.html. Accessed 23 May 2019.