

Critical Thinking and the Organizational Process

Brief: Learning how to think critically is a vital part of the organizational process of crafting an effective speech because it helps make main ideas accessible to the audience.

Learning Objective: Engage in critical thinking to organize an effective speech.

Key Terms:

- **Critical thinking:** The application of logical principles, rigorous standards of evidence, and careful reasoning to the analysis and discussion of claims, beliefs, and issues.

What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking consists of intentional, reflective thinking about a given set of information and determining not only what to believe about that information, but also how to act on it.

While you're probably aware that you have a lot to do to prepare your speech, you probably haven't thought much about the important role critical thinking will play in your success. The key to a successful delivery lies in your speech's logical structure and organization of thought; critical thinking is an important part of that organizational process.

Speeches typically serve one of four basic purposes: to inform, to persuade, to inspire, or to entertain. For you to be able to construct your speech, you need to think critically about how to support your purpose and points.

The Five Key Processes and Actions of Critical Thinking

Clarifying Goals

Before you begin outlining your speech, consider exactly what you're trying to accomplish. Are you trying to inform or instruct your audience on a particular subject? Do you seek to persuade them to feel a certain way about your topic? By considering your purpose for speaking, you can more clearly articulate your goals for the speech.

Examining Assumptions

As you pinpoint your thesis and main points, you'll begin to outline exactly how you plan to support your argument. In order to present a clear and well-reasoned argument, you'll need to make sure you have accurate and specific evidence to support your claims. By examining assumptions that may be made about your particular thesis, you can more clearly hone and refine the evidence you choose to present to bolster your case.

Shifting Perspectives

Have you considered all the possible ways to present your main thesis and all the possible evidence you could include? It can be extremely helpful to consider your thesis from opposing points of view. Using this critical thinking skill of perspective-taking, you can bolster the strength of your speech.

Evaluating Evidence

Now that you know all the possible angles from which others can approach your line of reasoning, now it's time to select the best evidence to support your thesis. What criteria will you use to decide what to include and what to leave out? By evaluating evidence with a critical mind, you'll strengthen your argument by selecting the most compelling evidence to make your point.

Ordering Evidence

Now that you've evaluated your evidence, you'll need to decide what's the best way to present your evidence. Decisions about how to organize your speech require you to think critically about your audience.

Again, perspective taking can help. Imagine that you're sitting in your audience's seats, listening to your speech. Once you've completed your speech, will your audience understand your main points? You can then go back and tailor your evidence and content more appropriately so that your audience can follow your logical progression of thought and remember your main points.

From Concept to Action

Try a perspective-taking exercise. At this point in your planning, what are your main points about your topic and how are you going to present them? Imagine that you're sitting in your audience's seats, listening to your speech. Once you've completed your speech, will your audience understand your main points? Now, imagine that you've decided to present your main points in a different way. Once again pretend to be an audience member, listening to your delivery. What's the result of this version of your speech? In what ways is it more effective? In what ways is it less effective? How might you apply what you've learned from this exercise in the development of your speech?

OER TEXT SOURCES:

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