Use Definitions and Examples to Reinforce Support Materials

Brief: Definitions and examples are often used to help clarify the meaning of ideas and reinforce other support materials.

Learning Objective: Understand how to use definitions and examples to reinforce support materials.

Key Terms:
- Definition: A statement of the meaning of a word using other words.
- Example: A specific situation, problem, or story designed to help illustrate a principle, method, or phenomenon.

Select Support Materials for Your Main Points

Incorporate engaging support material for each main point of your speech. Most speeches generally rely on some form of researched data such as facts, figures, and statistics to establish credibility. Personal anecdotes and references are often included because they can be entertaining and memorable. Quotations and historical or current events are frequently added as forms of support. Depending on your subject, audience, and venue, humor may also be appropriate to weave throughout your speech.

In addition, definitions and examples are often used as ways to help clarify the meaning of ideas and to reinforce other support materials.

Provide Definitions to Clarify Meaning

Your speech will likely contain specific terms that only those who know a lot about your topic will understand. To be sure that your audience knows what you are talking about, define your key terms. A definition states the meaning of a word using other words. When you define your terms, you do two things: First, you further establish your credibility by demonstrating you know what you are speaking about. Second, when there is more than one possible definition of a term, you clearly state your selected definition to avoid a misunderstanding.

For example, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word "rhetoric" as:
1 : the art of speaking or writing effectively: such as
a : the study of principles and rules of composition formulated by critics of ancient times
b : the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion
2a : skill in the effective use of speech

b : a type or mode of language or speech
    also : insincere or grandiloquent language
3 : verbal communication : DISCOURSE

If your speech is specifically about the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle and his contributions to contemporary public speaking, you would share Merriam-Webster's definition of rhetoric 1a: "the study of principles and rules of composition formulated by critics of ancient times." And to add further clarity, you might also indicate that you're not referring to definition 2a or 3, rhetoric as a skill or as a general reference to verbal discourse.

Clarify Through Examples

An example is a specific situation, problem, or story designed to help illustrate a principle, method, or phenomenon. Examples are useful because they can help make an abstract idea more concrete for an audience by providing a specific case. Examples are most effective when they are used as a complement to a key point in the presentation and focus on the important topics of the presentation.

Use Examples to Reinforce Support Materials

One method of effectively communicating examples is to use an example to clarify and complement a main point of a presentation. If a public speaker is holding a seminar about how to encourage productivity in the workplace, an example may focus on how a specific employee received an incentive to work harder, such as a bonus, and how this improved the employee's productivity. An example like this would act to reinforce the main point and help the audience better understand how to use incentives to improve performance in the workplace.

Use Concise and Relevant Examples

Examples are essential to help your audience better understand your topic. However, examples that are long and detailed can be distracting and are apt to create a break in your audience's focus on your main points. To be effective, examples should be complete but also concise and to the point.

From Concept to Action

Imagine that you're an audience member who knows nothing about your speech topic. Now, read through the research material you've collected so far. Note any terms that your audience might find new or confusing. Select one term and look it up in the dictionary. Does your term have multiple meanings? Do these dictionary meanings match your idea of what the term means? Should you use the dictionary meaning, citing the source? Do you need to find the meaning in another dictionary or perhaps an encyclopedia? Or do you need to write your own version of the definition? Repeat this process until you've identified and clarified all of the potentially confusing terms.

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Decide How You Will Tell Your Story." Lumen Learning. https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54135. Accessed 11 December 2018. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"Definitions." Lumen Learning. https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54218. Accessed 11 December 2018. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

REFERENCES:

"Rhetoric." Merriam-Webster. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetoric. Accessed 11 December 2018.