

## Determine Your General Purpose

**Brief:** By taking a step back to examine the general purpose of a speech, a speaker makes sure that his or her thoughts and ideas align with that purpose.

**Learning Objective:** Define a general purpose of a speech and why it is important.

**Key Terms:**

- Purpose: A result that is desired; an intention.
- General: giving or consisting of only the most important aspects of something, ignoring minor details; indefinite.

## Understand the General Purpose of Your Speech

One of the first questions you should ask yourself when you're getting ready to prepare your speech is "What do I hope to achieve with my speech?" There are four basic speech purposes: to inform, to persuade, to inspire, and to entertain.

A speech may have more than one purpose, but it's important to identify your primary purpose for giving your speech. If you don't know what you're trying to accomplish by giving your speech, your audience won't either. And, if your audience doesn't understand what you're trying to accomplish, they will have a difficult time receiving and understanding your message.

### ***Inverted Pyramid***

Think of a speech as an inverted pyramid. The pyramid's widest point represents the most general purpose for the speech. As you begin to define your topic, refine your thesis, and create supporting arguments, your pyramid will get narrower and narrower, allowing you to focus in on your main points. As you develop your speech, it'll be tempting to focus all of your attention on those narrowest points because they're the most interesting to you. However, it's just as important to take a step back from time to time and reflect on the general purpose of your speech.

### ***Why Determines What***

Your general purpose will inform what to include in your speech. For example, imagine that you've chosen a social media topic, such as Twitter. One of the first things you'll need to think about is your audience. How much do they know about the topic?

Perhaps you're speaking to audience comprised of older adults who not are not currently using Twitter. (Facebook is much more popular among seniors.) If your general purpose is to inform, you might conduct a demonstration on how to get started, beginning with how to set up a Twitter account. As you further define your purpose and thesis, your speech might narrow down even more into instruction about why it's important to specify one's privacy settings.

Now imagine your task is to persuade your audience. Perhaps you're speaking to that same audience, except this time your task is to convince them to adopt Twitter. You may still have to do some instruction, but you will primarily want to talk about the benefits of Twitter, as well as about the cognitive benefits of lifelong learning and technology use. Because you know your primary purpose is to persuade, you understand that your speech will not be successful if your content only includes instruction.

Whatever the purpose of your speech—to inform, to persuade, to inspire, or to entertain—before diving into the specifics of your thesis, you should remember to take a step back to examine the broad, general purpose of why you're speaking. In doing so, you will be sure that every piece of evidence and thought in your speech connects to that general purpose, in order to successfully fulfill your obligation to your audience.

## From Concept to Action

In speech class, you'll likely be given your speech purpose from your instructor. But, in everyday communication when you need to determine the purpose for a communication, you're on your own. Think of a time when you needed to persuade someone to do something for you. What did you say to try to convince them? Did you keep your purpose in mind as you constructed your message? Or did you get lost in details and stray off your purpose? In the end, were you successful in persuading the other person to do what you needed? Why or why not?

### OER TEXT SOURCES:

"General." Wiktionary. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/general>. Accessed 06 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"General Purpose." Lumen Learning.

[https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54178?module\\_item\\_id=5007014](https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54178?module_item_id=5007014). Accessed 06 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]