

## Extemporaneous Speeches: Definition and Delivery

**Brief:** Because extemporaneous speeches are not read or memorized, the extemporaneous speaker needs to stay in the moment and be able to “think on their feet”—a process that can be stressful, but can also allow for a high level of spontaneity, leading to a natural, conversational style.

**Learning Objective:** Demonstrate how to deliver an extemporaneous speech.

**Key Terms:**

- Extemporaneous: Without preparation or advanced thought; offhand.
- Extemporaneous speech: A well-prepared speech that relies on research, clear organization, and practiced delivery, but is neither read nor memorized.

### What is an Extemporaneous Speech?

The word extemporaneous means “without planning” and is considered a synonym for the word impromptu. However, an extemporaneous speech is actually a well-prepared speech that relies on research, clear organization, and practiced delivery. It is neither read nor memorized, so it is never delivered exactly the same way. Most extemporaneous speakers rely on notes of some sort, using index cards or technology, such as PowerPoint.



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Because they are composed almost entirely in the moment, extemporaneous speeches have a higher level of spontaneity. However, because they require extensive research and preparation, they tend to have significantly more depth, and therefore are generally the preferred method for speech delivery.

### What Are the Elements of an Effective Extemporaneous Speech?

#### ***Speak About Something Worth Saying***

The first element of an effective extemporaneous speech is having something to say that has meaning—for yourself and for your audience. Having an interesting topic alone isn’t enough.

Without innovative ideas, up-to-date information, and thoughtful personal opinion, even the most eloquent words coming out of your mouth won't matter.

When you're preparing to deliver your speech extemporaneously, it's especially important that you think clearly and thoroughly about the content of the message. Because you'll be choosing your words in the moment, you will need to be an expert about your message.

### ***Speak with Sincerity***

As an extemporaneous speaker, you'll be expected to thoroughly believe in the message you're conveying to your audience. If you don't believe in your message—if you're not sincerely convinced that your topic matters—your audience will quickly pick up on your lack of sincerity. Projecting insincerity is a sure-fire way to lose your audience's attention. Nothing is more unsettling to the extemporaneous speaker than looking out at the audience and seeing a roomful of blank expressions. To help you maintain your composure and continue to think on your feet throughout your speech, keep it real. Believe in your topic.

### ***Speak with Your Own Style***

Speaking in a natural, conversational style means that you shouldn't try to imitate the speaking style of other speakers. Learn from other speakers. Observe what they do that works from them. Follow the rules for preparing and delivering an effective extemporary speech. But, when it comes to style, figure out how to express a style that's authentic to you.

## **Practice and Rehearsal Tips**

The following guidelines are tips for how to practice and rehearse your extemporaneous speech:

- Write an easy-to-follow speech outline that includes all of the essential elements of your speech.
- Create index cards to act as cues to keep you on track throughout your speech. (Alternatively, use the note feature of your graphic technology.)
- Never read from your index cards unless you're reading a direct quotation or a statistic.
- Rehearse with your graphic technology and/or other visual aids and coordinate them with your talk.
- Display images from your graphic technology and/or other visual aids only when you are talking about them.
- Develop your conversational speaking style.
- Rehearse in front of others and solicit feedback.
- Record and listen to a timed version of your practice speech.
- Prepare for your entire speech.

## From Concept to Action

One of the biggest challenges you'll face when preparing to deliver an extemporaneous speech will be overcoming the temptation to write your entire speech, in very small letters, on your index cards. The problem with writing out your entire speech on index cards is twofold: 1. You'll have to make your writing so small that you likely won't be able to read it. 2. Reading your speech (even from index cards) is manuscript delivery, not extemporaneous delivery. Like all other aspects of speech development, creating effective index cards to accompany extemporaneous delivery requires practice.

Start by selecting a sample at least three paragraphs long from a piece of expository writing, such as an article from a magazine or a passage from one of your textbooks. Next, create a short outline that reflects the ideas in that sample, including the main points, sub-points, and direct quotations, statistics, and other significant support materials. Then, create index cards from your outline, using key words and additional details about support material when needed. Finally, use your index cards to recreate the original sample, recognizing that your aim isn't to perfectly replicate the original text. Remember, you're practicing extemporaneous delivery and the exact words you use will vary. What matters is whether you're able to get the main and sub-points across in a conversational manner. How did you do?

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Jeffery, Ben. "Scattered index cards." Flickr. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jeffbr13/5767838135/in/photolist-9MFFk6-Jga3Mf-dX1dtW-7iSnfi-dciTKR-AybhL-gh8K7-Fe9k6-63D6ma-ccswt9-48Huf-acNNsS-acNLd5-acNMYU-8cKyas-acNMPL-6TVmX-H64Uut-acNL5w-CuLxa-acKWnc-acKWjZ-5pgEcp-9ARodu-68mD39-acGvJF-7XBd2R-avtpUY-63D6dZ-ahpC7J-stZ15-63HiEQ-dUa8SJ-Evizt-a1GRJY-63D1Qi-4YKES1-dLaBqC-CgQPv-3VwGa-4tGtgk-63HiCf-acGuGk-acKmdG-63HiL3-acGvnn-6xh4S6-acKmt7-5Ptfp-bAEwGD> Accessed 14 May 2019. [CC BY-SA 2.0]

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