BASIC STEPS OF SPEECH PREPARATION

Giving your first speech requires having a general sense of the speechmaking process as well as ideas for managing speech anxiety. In addition, you need specific skills for putting your ideas into the form of a speech. To transform knowledge and attitude into a skillful performance, let us proceed by example and by principle. Read the following sample of a first classroom speech given in a basic public-speaking course. Next, consider the subsequent six preparation steps that provide an overview of how to put together your speech.

STEPS OF SPEECH PREPARATION

Now that you have read Monica Haller's first speech, consider how you should prepare your own. Your first speech may require you to introduce yourself, to relate an experience, or to state an opinion. In any case, what you need is a road map of steps leading to a finished speech. The process of speech preparation may be organized into six steps: (1) develop the purpose, (2) analyze the audience, (3) develop the thesis, (4) investigate the subject, (5) structure the message, and (6) ready the message for oral presentation. To help you get more information where necessary, each step includes appropriate references to later chapters.

SAMPLE SPEECH

How I Survived "The All-New Dating Game"
by Monica L. Haller

"Wanted, irresistible singles to win exciting trips to places like Jamaica, the Bahamas, Switzerland." Interested? Who wouldn't be? There was just one catch, though. You had to be a contestant on "The All-New Dating Game." I know, I was hesitant too at first when I was recruited last June at a Universal Studio tour. But the thought of sipping tropical drinks on an exotic isle with a hunk in tight shorts was too irresistible to pass up. So I signed up.

Actually, I thought, how hard could it be to get on a game show. Huh. But take it from a veteran—the real game begins behind the camera. There are three characteristics a contestant hopeful must possess in order to get on a game show. I call them the Three As: appearance, attitude, and ability. In the category of appearance, the Dating Game interviewers in particular were looking for individuals who are sexy, innocent, and sweet; sort of a Gidget with silicon implants. This category took a little more effort. So, two beauty parlor appointments, a bottle of fake tanning lotion, and fasting for four days later, and I was Hollywood bound. I walked into the studio starring not only a new appearance, but also a new attitude as well. I was energetic, enthusiastic—instantly larger than life. Sort of like a Disneyland tour guide with pom-poms. I walked in to greet the producers and yelled, "Hi, I'm Monica Haller from sunny Mission Viejo, California." I smiled so much it hurt. The final clincher was the category of ability. Now in the Dating Game it's not the ability to spew out trivial facts or spell multisyllabic words, but rather the ability to lie—and lie with conviction. This category I excelled in. I lied about my weight, my height, even my natural hair color.

Now that I've mastered the game show technique, I plan to make it a life long series. What next? The Love Connection, The Newlywed Game, and Divorce Court. Let the games begin!

Reprinted with permission of Monica L. Haller.
Develop the purpose. When you speak, you aim at one of four broad purposes: (1) to inform, or impart understanding about the topic; (2) to persuade, or to modify the beliefs and attitudes of listeners; (3) to inspire, or to deepen the audience's appreciation of a person, event, or object; and (4) to entertain, or to interest and amuse the listeners by treating the light side of a subject. What would you say was Monica's chief purpose? To entertain? To inform?

To be sure, the four aims of speechmaking overlap. But experienced speakers find themselves emphasizing one of the purposes; they realize that a single speech will fall when attempting everything at once. Because her speech focuses on the light side of game shows, Monica's purpose would be classified as chiefly one of entertaining. Her secondary purpose seems informative, presenting the basic steps to becoming a contestant on a game show.

When you have settled upon one of the four general purposes for your speech, you are ready to develop your specific purpose. A statement of specific purpose links your general purpose to the subject of the speech and to the specific audience. In the case of Monica's speech, an appropriate specific purpose statement would be "to entertain [general purpose] the public-speaking class [specific audience] with the story of how I became a contestant on "The All-New Dating Game" [the subject]. Chapter 4 conveys more on how a specific purpose statement helps in your speech preparation.

Analyze the audience. As you become more competent in the rhetorical arts, you will recognize that your audience is vital to your speech plans. You will become more sensitive to the characteristics and expectations of listeners, and you will take this information into account in preparing a message. Begin by surveying the objective features of the audience, including such characteristics as sex, age, and ethnic origins. Look for ways that these characteristics might help you predict the audience's reaction to your message. For instance, if most students are over twenty-five years of age, you will have to work harder to impress them with the importance of a legal drinking age of eighteen. Beyond noting observable characteristics of your listeners, remember things that classmates say about themselves. Information about hobbies, academic majors, and the like will not only sensititize you to your listeners but also may give some useful clues about how to make your points.

After you have found characteristics of your listeners, try to generalize on the audience's knowledgeability and opinions on your subject. Put yourself in the audience's place. Just how much information does the typical person in your class possess about the topic you have chosen? Monica rightly assumed that few members of her audience had auditioned for a game show but that most had watched the programs.

Try to get some specific information on how people in general and specific members of your audience view your subject; that is, consider factors of culture and group membership. You might question your family and friends to get ideas. Why not ask three or four classmates to comment on points you will be making? Suppose you are planning to give a talk on car seats for children. Possibly you will learn that people consider a baby to be safer in an automobile when held by an adult than when sitting in a car seat. If so, then you will want to emphasize that the arm-held baby actually is in greater danger. Further, you may be able to construct a mini-poll to find out specifics of what the whole class thinks about your topic. Write out a couple of yes-no questions on slips of paper, and distribute your poll before class. If you planned to talk about smoking, you might ask whether people smoked and also whether they approved of prohibiting smoking in public areas.

The final step in audience analysis is using your knowledge of the audience to structure the speech. Your scrutiny of the audience gives insight into whether listeners are familiar with or favorable to your material. This information should help you select, word, and arrange your ideas in the speech. Even very general predictions could help you decide how much background explanation is necessary and which of your arguments is strongest.

For instance, if you wanted to argue that smoking should be limited to designated public areas, you might capitalize on the tendency of most adults to worry more about their children's safety than their own. You might argue that smoking creates a special danger for the very young. Also, if you used a mini-poll to gather ideas for an antismoking message, you might uncover the troubling information that half of your listeners were smokers. This finding might prompt you to begin the speech with points generally agreeable to smokers. For instance, you could start with the argument that people in society get along better when clear rules exist to control their conflicting interests. More about using audience data is found in chapter 5.

Develop the thesis statement. A thesis statement is a one-sentence summary of the content of your speech. You build a thesis statement by taking your key points about the topic and merging them into a single statement. When you prepare your speech around a clear thesis, both your needs and those of the audience are served. The thesis helps you decide what material should be included or excluded. At the same time, organizing your speech around a clear thesis helps listeners remember what you have to say.

To develop your thesis, first list the two to five points you want to make. Next, write a sentence that states and relates these points. Here is a thesis statement for Monica Haller's speech that meets the criteria described above:

When I decided to audition for "The All-New Dating Game," I began an adventure in making an impression through appearance, attitude, and ability.

This thesis statement indicates the general topic of Monica's speech and identifies her three major points. Look in chapter 6 for more instruction on the thesis statement.

Most people work on speech topics they already know something about or in which they have a real interest. Whenever you have preexisting knowledge or interest, you probably also have an overall conclusion (thesis) in mind as you start preparing the speech. However, you should expect to modify and reword your thesis as a result of your further analysis and inquiry.

Investigate the subject. Chances are good that you chose your speech topic partly because you already knew something about it. Possibly you already are more knowledgeable about the subject than most of your listeners. It is unlikely, however, that you are aware of even a fraction of everything that could be said on the topic. Adlai Stevenson, Democratic candidate for president in 1952 and 1956, was one of America's most experienced politicians. Nevertheless, after he prepared the first draft of a speech, Stevenson always asked his aides to check on facts.
There are two basic ways to investigate the subject: first, identify what you know and need to know; and second, consult outside sources to fill in the cracks that lie between your current knowledge and what the speech requires. The classical teachers of speech recommend that students begin research by using a category-based system for gathering and organizing details. This category format for research is known as the method of commonplaces and is fully explained in chapter 6. The commonplaces method begins when you write headings to designate important divisions or ideas that are related to a subject. These categories include such general headings as the familiar commonplaces of journalists: who, what, when, where, and how. The headings might also mark key points of a given subject. For instance, a public-speaking student used these categories on the subject of abuse of tranquilizers: (1) reasons that people use and abuse tranquilizers, (2) types of tranquilizers, (3) side effects, and (4) history of tranquilizers. Each heading, each category, was useful in speech preparation because it brought up ideas for possible inclusion in the speech.

Let's assume that you have chosen several categories and have written out several ideas suggested by each heading. Now it is time to follow up with outside ways of getting information. Outside research includes library work, interviews, questionnaires, and actual participation in events. Finally, summarize on paper the key points made by your sources of information. Chapter 6 shows how your research data are most effectively summarized for later use.

Structure the message The three essential elements of speech structure are ideas, the wording of ideas, and the arrangement of ideas. For beginning speakers, preparing a sentence outline can be the best way to massage your material into its most useful shape. The helpful thing about an outline is that it allows you to experiment. If you do not like the way points are shaping up, all you have to do is shift a few sentences to create an entirely new format for your speech.

Don't think that an outline is useless just because your speech will be short or because you are planning to emphasize narration. Unless you are using a chisel to carve out ideas in granite, you have no reason to regard your first words as unchangeable. Maybe some of your ideas and phrases are truly inspired, but problems can result when you regard your first notations as finished masterpieces rather than rough blueprints. Your presentations will improve to the extent that you prepare and revise your words—an outline will help.

A relatively simple outline will probably suffice for your first speech. Consider the following outline of Monica Haller's speech. This outline shows two useful features. First, it makes separate entries for introduction, body, and conclusion. Second, it is built upon more points are shaping up, all you have to do is shift a few sentences to create an entirely new format for your speech.

Something like this, perhaps?

I. Introduction: At Universal Studios
II. Thesis: How hard can it be?
III. Body: The Three A's
   A. Appearance: They want sexy, innocent, sweet
   B. Attitude:
      1. They want energetic, enthusiastic
      2. I walked in: "Hi, I'm . . ."
   C. Ability:
      1. Lie with conviction
      2. Lied about weight, height, hair color
IV. Conclusion: Now that you've mastered the game show technique.

Prepare for oral presentation Remember that a course in public speaking aims to make you an effective extemporaneous speaker. To extemporize is to speak spontaneously, using brief notes. Two qualifications exist, however; first, "spontaneous" here means the presentation of the results of practice. Whereas an impromptu speaker creates the speech spontaneously, the extemporaneous speaker re-creates a practiced talk. Second, notes for the speech are not exactly the same as the outline you prepared. An outline is most effective when it consists of whole sentences, because the sentence is the basic unit of reasoned thought. In contrast, notes for the speech are most effective if they condense the original outline.

As you deliver the speech from your outline, you find yourself able to boil down the sentences of the outline into key phrases or words. Ideally, each run-through of the speech will lead to a modification of the notes, usually in the direction of fewer words. More information on extemporaneous speaking is given in chapter 12.

Notes for the speech should be written clearly so as not to interfere with direct communication between you and your listeners. Write the notes onto something that you can use easily during the speech—a five-by-eight-inch index card or a sheet placed in a plastic folder. Be careful about notes that flop, sag, rustle, or shuffle. Also, avoid using thin pieces of loose paper or a stack of twenty-five note cards.

Can you take the outline of Monica Haller's speech and transform it into useful notes? Something like this, perhaps?

I. Introduction: Scene at Universal
II. Thesis: How hard?
III. Three A's
   A. Appearance
   B. Attitude
   C. Ability
IV. Master the Games Technique

It is difficult to practice a speech too much and to practice too little. You should run through the speech several times before you deliver it—improvement will come with each session. When you begin to find that the speech is coming along naturally, you are ready to pay attention to your voice and movement. Are you speaking loudly and clearly enough? Try to make your voice just a bit louder and your words a bit more distinct than in ordinary conversation; this way you easily can be heard by a class of twenty or thirty people. Try for some gestures. Do not force the gestures; let them come naturally at points where you feel that emphasis is required.