

Speech Assignment for 2A

This semester, you will be asked to give a five to eight minute persuasive (also called “deliberative”) speech. The speech will concern an issue taken from the readings for this semester. You will be required to submit a full-content outline of this speech, and the speech will be graded. The details of the assignment will be up to your individual instructor.

The Persuasive Speech

A persuasive speech differs from those you have previously made in the course, both in intent and in organization. This section of the reader is intended to help you with both aspects of constructing the speech.

Persuasive speech arises out of the process of deliberation, when audiences need all sides of an issue presented to them before they make a decision. In this sense, its roots are in the Greek democratic state. This made it a speech of particular interest for all Greek writers and teachers of rhetoric: in fact, rhetorical study is said by Aristotle to be “concerned with the modes of persuasion” (*The Rhetoric*, I, I).

You obviously use persuasion in your daily life—say, convincing your family of something or assuring your professor you really *did* study for that test. The historical period we are covering this semester suggests an even wider application for deliberative rhetoric. We will read about an ever-increasing number of citizens, as they appear in more and more “democratic” states, trying to influence public policy. A full knowledge of the techniques of persuasion was vital to everyday life during this time. Humanities 2A contains subject matter that is loaded with debates, arguments, disputes, parliamentary discussions, and public sermons with political overtones.

Persuasive speaking has aims that are different from those of both exegetical and epideictic speech. Persuasive speech is aimed at helping convince the audience to choose one of a number of possible perspectives. It requires the audience to assent to a point of view, and therefore asks for a great deal of commitment from the hearers. It can thus require more emotion than an exegetical speech and, perhaps, more documentation and organization than an epideictic one. In many ways, it is the type of speech that requires all the available means at a speaker’s disposal.

Persuasive speech involves several components. First of all, you need to arouse the audience’s attention (as in any speech). Second, you need to show the audience that a current problem exists. After all, if there is no problem in the world, there is no need to give a speech. The problem may be that something needs changing; it may be that something needs to stay the same despite the please of others who wish to change it. Whichever approach you take, the persuasive speech requires what rhetorician Karl Wallace called an *exigency*, an “imperfection marked by an urgency.” In such a case, there is a compelling need to persuade the audience of something that needs attention.

Third, you need to offer a solution to the problem as you see it. The persuasive speech requires that you take a clear stand for or against a specific proposal. This clear stand is expressed as your thesis. You are then to convince the audience that your solution adequately addresses the problem as you see it.

Helpful Hints

Before I discuss the organization of the speech, let me offer two other observations. You may be reluctant to give your opinion in front of the class. Many students are. But such fear is usually based on a concern that the audience will disagree with you (and therefore not like you as much as they did before the speech). Or, you may be concerned that you are not competent to argue something before a group of people. You need to remember that neither of these fears reflects the reality of your classroom. First, all students need to understand that all *claims* (such as the ones you will make) are not *facts* but simply *assertions* offered with varying degrees of certainty. You cannot *prove* a claim; you can only marshal evidence that supports the validity of the argument you are making, and then hope the audience accepts that evidence and your reasoning. Second, you *are* competent to argue in front of the class, insofar as you are prepared and organized. Democracy (such as the ones that developed during the historical period we are studying this semester) does not require that everyone who stands up to speak take a test beforehand.

With this in mind, let me offer you some general guidelines to planning your persuasive speech. Most of all, give the audience a reason to listen. You may want to use techniques like the following:

- Start with areas with which you think the audience will agree (general values you all share) before moving to areas of potential disagreement.
- For your evidence, cite authorities that the audience will be likely to accept.
- Assure the audience that you are aware of various sides of the issue, and that your speech will answer objections that the audience may have if they hold the contrary position.
- Show the audience that your proposal is consistent with their needs and values.
- While emotion is fine, make sure you do not rely too much on emotional appeals. Your audience is an academic one; they will require solid evidence as well.
- Stress the need for the audience to act now; show how inaction will lead to trouble.

Other concerns, discussed in the readings for this semester, may also help you with your speech.

Format for the Speech

There are several possible ways to organize a persuasive speech. Let me offer two here: the Problem-Solution format, and the Motivated Sequence. They are somewhat similar in structure, yet offer different ways of approaching persuasion in a speech.

Problem-Solution Pattern.

This is the most basic of all structure. It first shows the audience there is a problem and then offers your solution to that problem. While this sounds simple, speakers often forget how difficult it is to illustrate a problem and how careful they must be to show that their solution addresses each of the aspects of the problem.

In a Problem-Solution speech, never overwhelm your listeners with details. Only cover what you see as the two or three most important features of the problem, give compelling evidence that each of these features is indeed a real problem, and then move onto the solution phase. The solution should reflect the problem as you have stated it.

For example, imagine I am a Puritan in 1620 arguing that James I of England is too Catholic in his emphasis. An outline of my oration might look like this:

I. Problem

- A. The King has surrounded himself with Papists.
 - 1. Buckingham is a known friend of Catholics.
 - a) Evidence
 - b) Evidence
 - 2. There are movements afoot to make the Church of England more Catholic in its ritual.
 - a) Evidence
 - b) Evidence
- B. This plan will undermine England.
 - 1. The people will never accept it.
 - a) Evidence
 - b) Evidence

II. Solution

- A. Elect more Puritans to the House of Commons.
 - 1. Puritans in the House will watch over James I.
 - 2. Puritans will force James I by way of Petitions to give Puritans more rights.
- B. Force James I to allow Puritan sermons in public, not matter what the content, by your resistance to all attempts at control.
 - 1. Meet secretly to hear sermons when you can.
 - 2. Help Puritan ministers survive financially.

As you can see, this speech includes a number of controversial claims, particularly in defining the problem. However, the evidence should “make the case” for those claims. After hearing this, the audience may still disagree, but the speech is judged on how strong a case is presented: was the speech organized, easy to follow, clear, compelling, and suited to both the audience and the occasion?

In this type of speech, you still need an attention-getter, an introduction, a clear thesis in one sentence, a preview, a post-summary, and a conclusion. What I have outlined here is merely the body of the speech, so do not forget to return to *Speechmaking: Rhetorical*

Competence in a Post Modern World to see the overall format. Also, somewhere in the speech, you need to show the audience that you are familiar with the main arguments of the other side and why those are not sufficient.

Motivated Sequence

The Motivated Sequence is a variant on the Problem-Solution format. It has a bit more formalized structure and may work best for you, particularly if your speech has action for a goal. The structure consists of five steps:

1. Attention: This is the same as all speeches we have covered. The first thing you must do is get the attention of the audience. You may use a quotation, a startling statistic, a rhetorical question, or other attention-getting device. (See *Speechmaking: Rhetorical Competence in a Post Modern World* for details.)
2. Need: Show the listeners what the “problem” or “need” is that you wish to address. You may link this to the audience’s own needs, and show them what they might gain or lose if the proposal is not accepted.
3. Satisfaction: This is your own “solution,” in which you explain how your proposal satisfies the need from step 2. Give your audience a plan of action. Show how your solution addresses the needs articulated earlier. Make sure you successfully link the solution to the needs.
4. Visualization: How does the solution or its outcome appear? What would the world look like if your place were in place? Why is this the best of all possible worlds?
5. Action: What are you asking the audience to do? Sign a petition? Discuss this idea more? Tell the audience specific things you want from them.

Again, do not forget the aspects I mentioned earlier: the introduction, the thesis, the preview, the post-summary, and the conclusion. The five steps above simply provide you with a structure, but you need to insert the thesis, introduction, and preview between steps 1 and 2, and the post-summary and conclusion in step 5.

You use persuasion every day of your life. It is important to your private and public concerns. What I have given you is a way more carefully to organize your thoughts and some aspects of persuasion you might consider. As you read selections for this semester, you may find additional help.