

Writing a Formal Speech

When writing a formal speech, the student should consider four points:

- 1) Topic
- 2) Audience
- 3) Personality
- 4) Occasion.

(1) Topic

Choosing the topic is often the hardest and can be the most important step in preparing a speech. The two most important criteria are as follows:

- (a) Choose a topic that you are interested in
- (b) Choose a topic that you feel will be interesting to your audience.

The student's direct and indirect experiences are the two general sources of speech subjects. *Direct experience* is knowledge obtained by actual participation in events. *Indirect experience* is knowledge obtained from radio, television, reading, and listening to other people. Students can usually make a more effective presentation with topics from their direct experiences. Topics should stimulate speakers to their best efforts. At the same time, they must appeal to the audience and be keyed to the knowledge and experience of the listeners.

Topics are divided into three basic types: those that *inform*, those that *persuade*, and those that *entertain*. All are important.

Some examples of *informative* topics are:

- Basic principles of computers
- The feeding habits of snakes
- How steel is made

Some examples of *persuasive* topics are:

- The 12-month school year should be adopted.
- Canada's military should only play the role of peace-keepers in other countries and only become involve in combat when war occurs on their own soil
- Capital punishment should be abolished.

Some examples of *entertaining* topics are:

- How not to give a speech!
- Inventions that never worked
- Pets as members of the family

(2) Audience

Students must consider the knowledge and the wants of their audiences. They should find out what the members of their audience already know about the subject.

The student who attempts to persuade an audience should know their attitudes or opinions. If speakers know beforehand that their audience is opposed to their proposal, then they know that they face a different problem from that of persuading a favorable audience.

Students should also know whether the members of their audience want to hear about a subject. People usually listen only when they think the speaker's ideas will be of some benefit to them.

(3) Personality

The student's personality is probably the most important factor in influencing audiences. Students should consider how the audience would view them. Is their personality capable of delivering a humorous speech? Can they remain serious enough to be effective in a persuasive speech? Can they make an informational speech interesting enough to hold an audience's attention? There is no doubt that some speakers are more effective with some types of speeches. A good or developed speaker, however, can be effective with any of the three types.

(4) Occasion

Students should think carefully about the time and place of their speeches. Is the occasion appropriate for the subject they have chosen? The meeting of a sailing club would hardly be an appropriate occasion for a speech designed to sell household appliances. However, such a meeting would be appropriate for a speech designed to raise money for new sailboats.