

Building a Speech: Starting with an Outline

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to begin putting your speech together. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Building a Speech: Starting with an Outline
2. Brainstorming
3. Topic Outline
4. Sentence Outline

1. Building a Speech: Starting with an Outline

It is always a good idea to make an **outline** before you begin writing a speech. An outline is a structural plan that lists main points, summarizes claims, and serves as a guide for the writing process. Working from an outline can help you organize your speech and put supporting elements, such as definitions and supporting evidence, in order.

Some outlines are minimal, providing a quick sketch of a speech's main points. Other outlines are very detailed, filling in a skeleton of topic headings with topic sentences, pieces of evidence, and transitions.

Many students are familiar with outlining techniques from academic writing classes. Outlining a speech is similar, but there is one key difference: speechwriters can use the outlining process to create prompts to aid with delivering the speech. Some speakers like to use handwritten notes, others use cue-cards, still others read from a printed script, and some experienced speakers don't use any prompts at all.

Ideally, with practice, you will avoid reading a script word-for-word—burying your face in papers for the entirety of the speech will limit your ability to engage the audience. However, minimal prompts such as cue cards and outline-style notes may help you stay on topic and remember main points. Whether or not you plan to use prompts, creating an outline is a great way to refine your argument—and you can always ignore it once you begin writing.



TERM TO KNOW

Outline

A list used to present the main points or topics of a given subject, often used as a rough draft or

2. Brainstorming

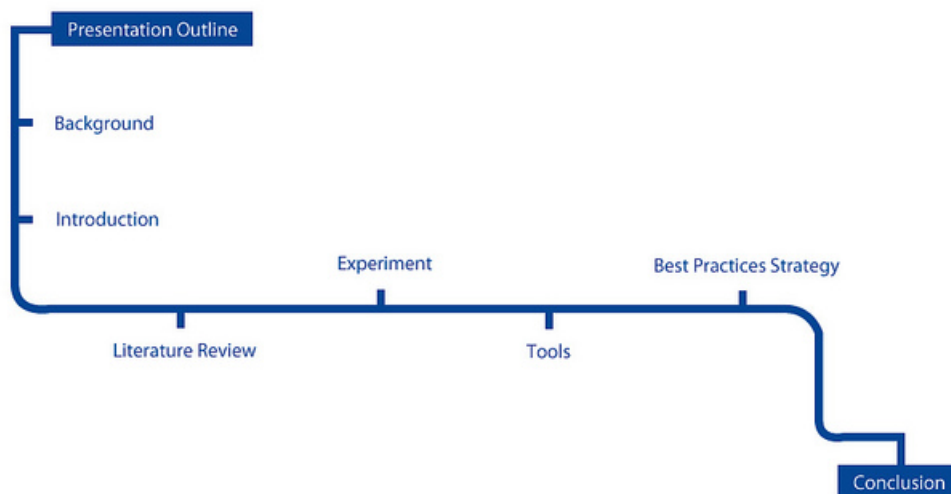
Many speakers like to brainstorm before making an outline. Brainstorming, which involves techniques such as creating "idea maps" or flowcharts that connect ideas and evidence, is less formal and structured than outlining.

It is a great place to begin if you're having a hard time settling on a definite plan for your speech.

3. Topic Outline

A **topic outline** is a hierarchical list of a speech's main points. Topic outlines tend to use keywords and short phrases rather than complete sentences.

A topic outline is fragmentary—it serves as a prompt, rather than a draft of material to use in the actual speech.



TERM TO KNOW

Topic Outline

A topic outline is a hierarchical list of a speech's main points. Topic outlines use keywords and short phrases rather than complete sentences.

4. Sentence Outline

A **sentence outline** expresses the central ideas of a speech in complete sentences.

Sentence outlines are more detailed than topic outlines, but less detailed than first drafts.



TERM TO KNOW

Sentence Outline

A sentence outline expresses the central ideas of a speech in complete sentences.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that when you are building a speech, you should always **start with an outline**. If you are having trouble writing your outline, try **brainstorming** first. A **topic outline**, or a general list of topics, evidence, quotes, and other details, is a good way to organize your main points and create a general overview of the speech. If you want to make an outline that includes text from the actual speech, write a **sentence outline**.

Source: Boundless. "Building a Speech: Starting with an Outline." Boundless Communications Boundless, 3 Mar. 2017. Retrieved 20 May. 2017 from <https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/organizing-and-outlining-the-speech-10/principles-of-organization-51/building-a-speech-starting-with-an-outline-206-6814/>



TERMS TO KNOW

Outline

A list used to present the main points or topics of a given subject, often used as a rough draft or summary of the content of a document.

Sentence Outline

A sentence outline expresses the central ideas of a speech in complete sentences.

Topic Outline

A topic outline is a hierarchical list of a speech's main points. Topic outlines use keywords and short phrases rather than complete sentences.