

Choosing the Main Points

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to determine the focus of your speech. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Choosing Main Points
 - a. Focus on the Audience
 - b. Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Audiences
2. The Stakes
3. The Innovation
4. The Purpose

1. Choosing Main Points

When you are preparing a speech, it is important to establish a clear focus from the beginning.

How should you narrow your focus and choose your main points? Follow the first commandment of public speaking: Know Thy Audience.

1a. Focus on the Audience

According to a Greek philosopher named Epictetus, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." Epictetus's wisdom applies to public speaking: listening to the audience is twice as important as speaking to the audience.

Find out what your audience members already know about your topic, what they want to learn, and why it is important to them. If you focus on information that is obvious, irrelevant, or incomprehensible to them, you may find yourself speaking to a room full of yawns, cell phones, and backs walking out of your talk.

However, if you research the demographics of your audience, you may avoid some common last-minute dilemmas: "Do I need to define this term?" "Will this anecdote offend anyone?" "Will anyone care about what I'm saying?"

Of course, some groups are easier to figure out than others.

IN CONTEXT

Let's say you are speaking at a professional development conference for paralegals. In that case, the attendees share a common purpose, which makes it easier to address their specific needs. You could look at sources such as professional journals and conference bulletins from previous years to see what issues are important to ambitious paralegals.

If, on the other hand, you are speaking at a high school graduation ceremony, the audience may include a wide range of people with very little in common except the ceremony itself. In that case, your main points could focus on graduation, the one thing that binds everyone together.

Before you choose your main points, answer these questions about the audience:

- What does the audience know about my topic?
- Is the audience homogeneous or heterogeneous?
- How does this topic relate to the audience?
- Why is this topic important to the audience?
- What is at stake for the audience?
- What does the audience want to learn about my topic?
- How can I show the audience that my main points are relevant and useful?

1b. Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Audiences

A **homogeneous** audience is a group of people who share a consistent level of interest and expertise in your topic. A **heterogeneous** audience includes people with different levels of expertise and interest in your topic.

It is important to determine what type of audience you have, and plan your speech accordingly.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you are writing a toast for your best friend's wedding, you already know what your listeners want: they are gathered to celebrate the happy couple, and your toast should help them do that. On the other hand, if you are presenting scientific research to a mixed audience of academics and wealthy donors, you need to navigate a varied set of interests, agendas, and levels of knowledge as you select your main points.

If there are non-experts in the audience, it is important to provide background information and define key terms. For a heterogeneous audience, you should make points that appeal to different segments of the audience, but also try to identify points that will unite your listeners under a common cause.

If you are addressing a homogeneous group, don't take their interest for granted. It's not a free pass— a homogeneous audience is not a captive audience.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you are presenting research on business ethics to a group of specialists in your field, make sure to include points that might be applicable to their research.



TERMS TO KNOW

Homogeneous

Having the same composition throughout; of uniform make-up.

Heterogeneous

Diverse in kind or nature; composed of diverse parts.

2. The Stakes

How does your topic relate to your listeners, why should they care about it, and what is at stake for them? The answers to these questions will be your best guide in choosing main points.

If you want to hold your audience's attention, your speech needs to answer these questions as early as possible.

3. The Innovation

What are you adding to the existing conversation about your topic? What can your speech offer that the audience won't find elsewhere?

If you want to hold your audience's attention, make a case for the comparative advantage of your perspective.

4. The Purpose

Most speeches aim to do one of three things: to inform, to persuade, or to commemorate.

Choose main points that will fulfill your speech's overall purpose:

For an informative speech, provide a foundation of relevant information and then present knowledge and wisdom that will be useful to your audience.

A persuasive speech assumes that your audience already has preconceptions about your topic. Address these preconceptions, and then introduce points that prove the value of your position.

A commemorative speech usually compiles stories and wisdom that will help the audience honor, remember, or celebrate something.

Remember the broad purpose of your speech (to inform, to persuade, or to commemorate) as you choose your main points.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that when **choosing your main points**, you should remember to **focus on your audience**. If you are speaking to a **homogeneous audience**, research the particular interests of that group and tailor your speech to meet their needs. If you are speaking to a **heterogeneous audience**, try to find points that will interest each segment of your audience, and also a common purpose to unify diverse elements. As you choose your main points, ask yourself what is at **stake** for the audience. Why should that particular group of people care about your topic? What is **innovative**

about your perspective and what is its **purpose**? How will it affect them?

Source: Boundless. "Choosing the Main Points." Boundless Communications Boundless, 3 Mar. 2017. Retrieved 21 May. 2017 from <https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/organizing-and-outlining-the-speech-10/main-points-52/choosing-the-main-points-207-6813/>



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