

Defining Your Purpose, Audience, and Scope

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the key factors to consider as you begin to think about choosing your topic. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. General and Specific Purpose

It is important for you to have a clear understanding of your purpose, as all the other factors depend on it.

Here's a brief review of the five general purposes for speaking in public:

1. *Speech to inform:* Increase the audience's knowledge, teach about a topic or issue, and share your expertise.
2. *Speech to demonstrate:* Show the audience how to use, operate, or do something.
3. *Speech to persuade:* Influence the audience by presenting arguments intended to change attitudes, beliefs, or values.
4. *Speech to entertain:* Amuse the audience by engaging them in a relatively light-hearted speech that may have a serious point or goal.
5. *Ceremonial speech:* Perform a ritual function, such as giving a toast at a wedding reception or a eulogy at a funeral.

You should be able to choose one of these options. If you find that your speech may fall into more than one category, you may need to get a better understanding of the assignment or goal. Starting out with a clear understanding of why you are doing what you are supposed to do will go a long way in helping you organize, focus, prepare, and deliver your oral presentation.

Once you have determined your general purpose - or had it determined for you, if this is an assigned speech - you will still need to write your specific purpose:

- What are you going to inform, persuade, demonstrate, or entertain about?
- What type of occasion is your speech intended for?

A clear goal makes it much easier to develop an effective speech. Try to write in just one sentence exactly what you are going to do.

➞ EXAMPLE *To inform the audience about my favorite car, the Ford Mustang*

➞ EXAMPLE *To persuade the audience that global warming is a threat to the environment*

Notice that each example includes two pieces of information. The first is the general purpose (to inform or to persuade), and the second is the specific subject you intend to talk about.

2. Scope and Timing

Your next key consideration is the amount of time in which you intend to accomplish your purpose. Consider the depth, scope, and amount of information available on the topic you have in mind.



Productivity: Skill in Action

Lisa's supervisor asked her to present an update to her leadership team. The members only knew some basics about the topic, and Lisa was given an hour to present. She could not exceed that time limit due to other meetings the team had that day. She used time management techniques to effectively plan for her time limit and audience. She made sure to include a high level of detail, and she practiced her speech with a timer to make sure it did not exceed an hour.

In business situations, speeches or presentations vary greatly in length, but most often the speaker needs to get the message across as quickly as possible. If you are giving a speech in class, it will typically be five to seven minutes; at most, it may be up to ten minutes.

➞ EXAMPLE In ten minutes, it would be impossible to tell your audience about the complete history of the Ford Mustang automobile. You could, however, tell them about four key body style changes since 1965.

If your topic is still too broad, narrow it down to something you can reasonably cover in the time allotted.

➞ EXAMPLE Focus on just the classic Mustangs, the individual differences by year, and how to tell them apart.

IN CONTEXT

You may have been tasked with a persuasive speech topic, linking global warming to business, but have you been given enough time to present a thorough speech on why human growth and consumption is clearly linked to global warming? Are you supposed to discuss "green" strategies of energy conservation in business, for example?

The topic of global warming is quite complex, and by definition involves a great deal of information, debate over interpretations of data, and analysis on the diverse global impacts. Rather than try to explore the chemistry, the corporate debates, or the current government activities that may be involved, you can consider how visual aids may make the speech vivid for the audience. You might decide to focus on three clear examples of global warming to capture your audience's attention and move them closer to your stated position: "green" and energy-saving strategies are good for

3. Interest of the Audience

Remember that communication is a two-way process; even if you are the only one speaking, the audience is an essential part of your speech. Put yourself in their place and imagine how to make your topic relevant for them. What information will they actually use once your speech is over?

IN CONTEXT

If you are speaking to a group of auto mechanics who specialize in repairing and maintaining classic cars, it might make sense to inform them about the body features of the Mustang, but they may already be quite knowledgeable about these features. If you represent a new rust treatment product used in the restoration process, they may be more interested in how it works than any specific model of car.

However, if your audience belongs to a general group of students or would-be car buyers, it would be more useful to inform them about how to buy a classic car and what to look for. General issues of rust may be more relevant, and can still be clearly linked to your new rust treatment product.

Visual aids may make your speech vivid for the audience and help maintain interest.

➔ **EXAMPLE** For a speech on global warming, you might display a chart showing that temperatures have risen globally, followed by a map of the islands that have lost beaches due to rising tides.

For a persuasive speech, in addition to considering the audience's interests, you will also want to gauge their attitudes and beliefs.

IN CONTEXT

If you are speaking about global warming to a group of scientists, you can probably assume that they are familiar with the basic facts of melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and ozone depletion. In that case, you might want to focus on something more specific, such as strategies for reducing greenhouse gases that can be implemented by business and industry. Your goal might be to persuade this audience to advocate for such strategies, and support or even endorse the gradual implementation of the cost- and energy-saving methods that may not solve all the problems at once, but serve as an important first step.

In contrast, for a general audience, you may anticipate skepticism that global warming is even occurring, or that it poses any threat to the environment. Some audience members may question the cost savings, while others may assert that the steps are not nearly enough to make a difference. A clear visual may help get your point across, but if you are also prepared to answer questions, you may ultimately make your speech more effective. Additionally, by taking small steps as you introduce your assertions, rather than advocating for a complete overhaul or revolution, you will more effectively engage a larger percentage of your audience.

4. Available Information

When you have determined your general purpose, the amount of material appropriate for the time allowed for your speech, and the appropriateness for your audience, then you should be well on your way to identifying the topic for your speech.

Still, depending on the type of speech you are giving, you may have to consider the research you will need to perform. For a short speech, especially if it is a speech to entertain, you may be able to rely completely on your knowledge and ideas.

But in most cases, you will need to gather information so that you can make your speech interesting by telling the audience things they don't already know. This is another great opportunity to use your **productivity skill** to make sure you practice good time management and have your speech ready to go by the deadline.

Additionally, you can use your **self and social awareness skill** to put yourself in your listeners' place and imagine how to make your topic relevant for them. What information will they actually use once your speech is over?



HINT

You may need to do some initial checking of sources to be sure the material is available before firmly settling on a topic.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about several steps you should take when choosing a topic for a speech or presentation. Defining your **general and specific purpose** will ensure that your speech is focused and aligned with expectations. **Scope and timing** should be considered concurrently, as the amount of time you have to speak will determine how broad or narrow your scope should be. The **interest of your audience** is also a key consideration, so that you can plan a speech that is relevant and interesting.

Finally, you should also think about **available information** when selecting a topic, so that you don't spend time developing an unworkable idea. By taking these steps in the planning phase, you will manage your time more effectively, maximize your productivity, and demonstrate your social awareness to others.

Best of luck in your learning!

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