

Finding Resources

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about how to use your **productivity skill** to gather information in order to establish credibility, create a more comprehensive speech, and make sure no important aspect of your topic is left out. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Narrowing Your Topic and Focusing on Key Points

By now you have developed an idea of your topic, but even with your purpose and thesis statement, you may still have a broad subject that will be a challenge to cover within the allotted time.

You might want to revisit your purpose and thesis statement and ask yourself: *How specific is my topic?*

➞ **EXAMPLE** If flying an airplane is your topic area and you are going to inform your audience about the experience, discuss the history of flying and the necessary equipment, cover the basic requirements for going on your first flight, and provide information on where your audience could go to take flying lessons locally, you might find that five to seven minutes is simply not enough time.

Rather than stating that you need more time, or that you'll just rush through it, consider your audience and what they might want to learn. How can you narrow your topic to better consider their needs? As you edit your topic, considering what is essential information and what can be cut, you'll come to focus on the key points naturally and reduce the pressure on yourself to cover too much information in a short amount of time.

If you haven't presented many speeches, five to seven minutes may seem like an eternity, but when you are in front of the audience, the time will pass quickly. Consider how you feel about the areas of your speech and you'll soon see how it could easily turn into an hour-long presentation. You need to work within the time limits, and show your audience respect as you stay within them, recognizing that they too may be presenting speeches in the same time frame.

For yourself and your audience, narrow your topic to just the key points.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Perhaps you will begin with a description and a visual image of your first flight, followed by a list of the basic equipment and training needed. Finally, a reference to local flying schools may help you define your speech. While the history of flying may be fascinating, and may serve as a topic in itself for another speech, it would add too much information to this particular brief speech.

2. Planning Your Search for Information

When preparing a speech, it is important to gather information from books, magazines, newspapers, electronic sources, and interviews from people who know a lot about your topic.

With information from a variety of sources, you will have many possibilities when it comes to developing your speech. If you keep in mind the key information you need to support your thesis, you will save yourself time, as you can choose and edit information as you go along.

As you begin to investigate your topic, make sure you also consider several sides of an issue.

IN CONTEXT

Let's say you are going to make an informative speech at a town council meeting about the recent history of commuter rail service in your town. At first, you may have looked at two sides, rail versus private cars. Automobile dealers, oil companies, and individual drivers wanted the flexibility of travel by car, while rail advocates argued that commuter trains would lower costs and energy consumption.

If you take another look, you see that several other perspectives also have bearing on this issue. Many workers commuted by bus prior to the railroad, so the bus companies would not want the competition. Property owners objected to the noise of trains and the issue of eminent domain (i.e., the taking of private property by the government). To serve several towns that are separated by open space, the rail lines cut through wildlife habitats and migration corridors. We now have five perspectives to the central issue, which makes the topic all the more interesting.



HINT

Make sure, as you start your investigation for information, that you always question the credibility of the information. Sources may not have been reviewed by peers or editors, and the information may be misleading, biased, or even false. Be a wise information consumer.

3. Ethics, Content Selection, and Avoiding Plagiarism

An aspect of sifting and sorting information involves how you will ethically present your material. You might be tempted to omit information that may be perceived as negative or may not be well-received.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For the speech on commuter rail service, you may be tempted to omit mentions of several train accidents that have occurred, or of the fact that train fares have risen as service has been cut back.

If your purpose is to inform, you owe it to your audience to give an honest presentation of the available facts. By omitting information, you are not presenting an accurate picture, and may mislead your audience.

Even if your purpose is to persuade, omitting the opposing points will present a one-sided presentation. The

audience will naturally consider what you are not telling them as well as what you are presenting, and will raise questions.

Instead, consider your responsibility as a speaker to present all the information you understand to be complete, and do it honestly and ethically.

IN CONTEXT

Suppose you work for a swimming pool construction company and are speaking to inform a neighborhood group about pool safety. You have photos of pools you have worked on, but they aren't very exciting. There are many more glamorous swimming pool photos on free Internet sites. Who can really tell if the pool in the picture is yours or not?

Furthermore, the "Terms of Use" on the site state that photos may be downloaded for personal use. Wouldn't this speech to inform be considered personal use? In fact, it probably would not, even if your informative speech is not a direct sales pitch. And even if you don't actually tell your audience, "My company built this pool," it would be reasonable for them to assume you did unless you specifically tell them otherwise.

As a student, you are no doubt already aware that failing to cite sources or including a sentence or paragraph you copied from a blog on the Internet for an English essay is called plagiarism and is grounds for a failing grade on your paper. At many schools, plagiarism can even be grounds for expulsion.

Similarly, in your professional life, it behooves you to be truthful with your audience and give credit where credit is due for several reasons:

1. Misrepresenting your employer's work could be illegal under statutes related to fraud; it could put not only your job but also your employer's contractor license in jeopardy.
2. Someone in your audience could recognize the information from elsewhere (after all, they can browse the Internet as easily as you can) and embarrass you by pointing it out during your presentation.
3. In maintaining honesty and integrity, you will feel more confident, reducing your speech anxiety. You have a responsibility to your audience and engaging in plagiarism fails in that responsibility.

4. Staying Organized

Before you start browsing on your computer, go to the library, or make the trip for an interview, make sure you have designated a space where you can keep all your materials in one place. Decide on a name for the project and use it to set up a subdirectory on your computer as well as a physical receptacle, such as a cardboard box or a manila folder.



Technology: Skill Reflect

Strengthening your technology skill can allow you to consider several options for organizing your materials. For example, are you comfortable with Google Docs? Do you prefer Dropbox? You can select the best tool for the job depending on your comfort level and needs of the project.

As you gather information online, open a new document in whatever writing program you use and save it as "Sources." Every time you find information that may prove useful, copy the web address or reference/citation information and paste it into your document. If you are gathering information from books or periodicals, use one sheet of paper as your "Sources" document. This will save you a lot of time later when you are polishing your speech.



Productivity: Why Employers Care

Strong time management skills make you a more productive person. Employers seek individuals like this who can not only complete tasks, but do so in the most efficient manner.

Plan to use your time effectively by combining tasks to get your investigation completed efficiently. As you search through articles, books, websites, and images for your presentation, consider how each element relates specifically to the key points in your speech. Don't just look for the first citation or reference that fits your list. Rushing through the research process can result in leaving out key areas of support or illustration in your speech, an outcome you may not be happy with.

Instead, enjoy the fun of searching for material for your speech, but also be aware that it is easy for your list under each key point to grow and grow with "must include" information. As we discussed earlier, narrowing your topic is a key strategy in crafting a good speech. Try not to "commit" to information until you have gathered more than you need, then go back and choose the most relevant and most interesting facts, quotations, and visual aids.

You might think of this as the "accordion phase" of preparing your speech, as the amount of material first gets bigger and then smaller. You'll feel a sense of loss as you edit and come to realize that your time frame simply does not allow for all the great information you found, but remember that your audience will appreciate the good material you did choose.

As you sift through information, look for the most promising, effective elements to include and omit the rest. In an English class, you often need to edit and revise a paper to produce a rough draft before your final draft. This process parallels the production of a rough speech draft. By taking notes with your key points in mind, you'll begin to see your speech come together.

5. Searching for Information on the Internet

Finding information on the Internet or in electronic databases can decrease your search time, but you will still need to budget time to accomplish the tasks associated with reviewing, selecting, interpreting, and incorporating information to your particular use.

The Internet is an amazing source of information, but for that very reason, it can be difficult to get the information you actually need.

Knowing where to go for information is as important as knowing key words and concepts related to your topic:

- Do you need general information?
- Do you need to survey what's available quickly?
- Do you prefer searching only reviewed sites?
- Is your topic education-related?

The table below highlights some commonly used online indexes and databases.

Resource	Description
ProQuest	Database that archives content from newspapers, magazines, and dissertations
Psychlit, PsychINFO	Databases that archive content from journals in psychology and psychiatry
Business Source Complete	Database that archives business-related content from magazines and journals
MEDLINE, PubMed	Databases that archive articles in medicine and health
EBSCOhost	General database that provides access to articles on a wide variety of topics



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the role of research in developing a speech or presentation. Once you have determined your purpose and thesis statement, you can begin **narrowing your topic and focusing on key points**. Most presentations will benefit from research during this process.

Planning your search for information will help you to be productive and manage your time well, in addition to improving the quality of your speech. **Ethics, content selection, and avoiding plagiarism** are all important considerations for maintaining credibility as a presenter, and are best assured by planning ahead. Planning your research carefully will also assist you in **staying organized** during the research and writing process. Finally, you learned that research is commonly done by **searching for information on the Internet**, but knowing how and where to find high-quality sources is just as important as efficiency.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This tutorial has been adapted from "Business Communication for Success" Version 1.0 by Scott McLean. Copyright 2010. ISBN 978-1-4533-2742-5 (Licensee Product: Workplace Communication), reprinted with permission from FlatWorld.