

Informative Presentations

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the different ways in which informative presentations can accomplish their objectives. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Types of Informative Presentations

The main goal of an informative presentation is to inform, not to persuade, and that requires an emphasis on credibility, both for the speaker and the data or information presented. Extra attention to sources is required and you'll need to indicate what reports, texts, or websites you used for your analyses and conclusions.

Informative presentations come in all sizes, shapes, and forms.

➔ **EXAMPLE** You may need to create an "elevator speech" style presentation with an emphasis on brevity, or produce a comprehensive summary of several points that require multiple visual aids to communicate complex processes or trends.

However, most informative presentations fall into one of four main categories:

- Explanation
- Report
- Description
- Demonstration

Within these categories, there are some additional, more specific types of informative presentations:

- Biographical information
- Case study results
- Comparative advantage results
- Cost-benefit analysis results
- Feasibility studies
- Field study results
- Financial trends analysis
- Health, safety, and accident rates
- Instruction guidelines

- Laboratory results
- Product or service orientations
- Progress reports
- Research results
- Technical specifications

Depending on the rhetorical situation, the audience, and the specific information to be presented, any of these presentation types may be given as an explanation, a report, a description, or a demonstration.

1a. Explanation



THINK ABOUT IT

Have you ever listened to a lecture or speech where you just didn't get it? It wasn't that you weren't interested, at least not at first. Perhaps the professor used language and jargon, gave a confusing example, or omitted something that would have linked facts or concepts together. Soon you probably lost interest and just sat there, attending the speech or lecture in body but certainly not in mind.

An effective speech to inform will take a complex topic or issue and explain it to the audience in ways that increase audience understanding.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Perhaps the speech where you felt lost lacked definitions upfront, or a clear foundation in the introduction. You probably didn't learn much, and that's exactly what you want to avoid when you address your audience.

Consider creative ways to explain your topic (e.g., visually, using definitions and examples, providing a case study, etc.) that can lay a foundation on common ground with your audience, and then build on it.

As the speaker, it's your responsibility to ensure that your audience members feel included. Also know that to teach someone something new - perhaps a skill that they did not possess or a perspective that allows them to see new connections - is a real gift, both to you and the audience members.

You will feel rewarded because you made a difference and they will perceive the gain in their own understanding.

1b. Report

As a business communicator, you may be called upon to give an informative report where you communicate status, trends, or relationships that pertain to a specific topic. You might have only a few moments to speak, and you may have to prepare within a tight timeframe. Your listeners may want "just the highlights," only to ask pointed questions that require significant depth and preparation on your part.

The informative report is a speech where you organize your information around key events, discoveries, or technical data and provide context and illustration for your audience.

IN CONTEXT

Your audience members may naturally wonder, "Why are sales up (or down)?" or "What is the product leader in your lineup?" and you need to anticipate their perspective and present the key information that relates to your topic. If everyone in the room knows the product line, you may not need much information about your bestseller, but instead must place emphasis on marketing research that seems to indicate why it is the bestseller.

Or perhaps you are asked to be the scout and examine a new market, developing strategies to penetrate it. You'll need to orient your audience and provide key information about the market and demonstrate leadership as you articulate your strategies.

You have a perspective gained by time and research, and your audience wants to know why you see things the way you do, as well as learn what you learned. A status report may be short or long, and may be an update that requires little background, but always consider the audience and what common ground you are building your speech on.

1c. Description



THINK ABOUT IT

Have you ever listened to a friend tell you about their recent trip somewhere and found the details fascinating, making you want to travel there or visit a similar place? Or perhaps you listened to your chemistry teacher describe a chemical reaction you were going to perform in class, and you understood the process and could reasonably anticipate the outcome.

Describing information requires emphasis on language that is vivid, captures attention, and excites the imagination. Your audience will be drawn to your effective use of color, descriptive language, and visual aids.

An informative speech that focuses on description will thus be visual in many ways. You may choose to illustrate with images, video and audio clips, and maps. Your first-person experience combined with your content will allow the audience to come to know a topic, area, or place through you, or secondhand.

The imagination of your audience is your ally, and you should aim to stimulate it with attention-getting devices and clear visual aids. Use your imagination to place yourself in the audience's perspective: How would you like to have someone describe the topic to you?

1d. Demonstration

A demonstrative speech focuses on clearly showing a process and telling the audience members important details about each step so that they can imitate, repeat, or do the action themselves. If the topic is complicated, think of ways to simplify each step.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Say you want to teach your audience how to throw a curveball, make salsa, or download apps to a smartphone. Each of these topics will call on your kindergarten experience of "show and tell."

Consider the visual aids or supplies you will need in order to give the best presentation of the steps involved in the task.

IN CONTEXT

You may have noticed that cooking shows on television rarely show the chef chopping and measuring ingredients during the demonstration. Instead, the ingredients are chopped and measured ahead of time, and the chef simply adds each item to the dish with a brief comment like, "Now we'll stir in half a cup of chicken stock."

So, if you want to present a demonstration speech on the ways to make a paper airplane, one that

will turn left or right, go up and down, or perform loops, consider how best to present your topic. Perhaps illustrating the process of making one airplane, followed by an example of how to make adjustments to the plane to allow for different flight patterns, would be effective. Would you need additional paper airplanes made in advance of your speech? Would an example of the paper airplane in each of the key stages of production be helpful to have ready before the speech?

Having all your preparation done ahead of time can make a world of difference, and your audience will appreciate your thoughtful approach. By considering each step and focusing on how to simplify it, you can understand how the audience members might grasp the new information and how you can best help them do so.

Also, consider the desired outcome.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Will your listeners be able to actually do the task themselves, or will they gain an appreciation of the complexities of a difficult skill like piloting an airplane to a safe landing?

Regardless of the sequence or pattern you will illustrate or demonstrate, consider how people from your anticipated audience will respond, and budget additional time for repetition and clarification.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about four different **types of informative presentations**. Although each is meant to increase audience understanding, there are key differences. **Explanation** presentations break down complex topics in a way that allows for easy comprehension. **Reports** are often much shorter and communicate pertinent information on a specific topic. **Description** presentations engage the imagination through vivid language or visuals. Finally, **demonstrations** teach audiences a skill or process by example.

Best of luck in your learning!

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