

Informative vs. Persuasive Speeches

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the difference between two categories of speeches. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

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When choosing between writing an **informative** or **persuasive** speech, the speaker should consider the purpose of the speech. Is it to share information about a particular event, topic, or subject? Or is it to persuade the audience to hold a certain belief or attitude about said event, topic, or subject?

The focus of the thesis, or the main argument of the speech, often dictates whether the speech will be mainly informative or persuasive in nature. However, keep in mind that some speeches will contain a combination of both types of speech.

Informative speeches describe knowledge about a particular event, process, object, or concept. The goal of an informative speech is for the audience to fully comprehend this knowledge. Persuasive speeches are those that seek to have the audience share a belief or feeling about a particular event, process, object or concept. The difference is subtle, and yet mighty.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** Imagine a topic that could fall into either category, such as reproductive choice. An informative speech may track the history of reproductive choice in America. A persuasive speech may discuss the pros and cons of Roe v. Wade, or how some groups feel that reproductive choice is threatened. In the latter instance, using examples from history may bolster that argument. As noted above, all persuasive speeches will be informational in nature, but not all informational speeches may be persuasive.

Fully understanding the informational or persuasive purpose of the speech will help the speaker determine what rhetorical strategies to use in the pursuit of achieving his or her goal. If the purpose is simply to provide information, then the speech will likely rely less on **pathos** and more on evidence, statistical data, or charts and graphs. If the purpose is have the audience believe or feel a certain way about the subject, then the speaker will tailor the evidence and specific data with appeals to emotion to lead the audience to the desired point of view.

When writing a speech, take into account the intended audience that will be addressed; never underestimate

the importance of knowing the audience. For example, when giving an informative speech, the speaker must take into account not only the audience's familiarity with any technical terms, but also what sort of pathos he or she may want to use.

Some audiences will respond to certain appeals to emotion, while others might be turned off to the speaker if he or she makes what is seen as an inappropriate appeal to emotion. Therefore, always consider the specifics of your audience, such as age, occupation, beliefs, motivations, and then use these specifics to inform the form and content of the speech.

IN CONTEXT

The State of the Union is a good example of a speech that contains elements of informative and persuasive speeches. In the State of the Union, the President of the United States is supposed to inform the members of Congress on the state of the union. Therefore, it commonly contains specific information (for example, the number of jobs created in a certain time period).

However, the State of the Union also contains heavy pathos that is intended to make citizens feel confident about the President's handling of the nation and hopeful about the future. The President will spin data and use emotional appeals to make his or her case to the American people. This specific speech makes it clear that a speech can combine the features of informative and persuasive speeches.



TERMS TO KNOW

Informative

Providing knowledge, especially useful or interesting information.

Persuasive

Able to induce to believe by appealing to reason or understanding; convincing.

Pathos

That quality or property of anything which touches the feelings or excites emotions and passions, esp., that which awakens tender emotions, such as pity, sorrow, and the like; contagious warmth of feeling, action, or expression; pathetic quality.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that an **informative speech** aims to inform the audience about a specific topic, while a **persuasive speech** aims to persuade the audience to perform a certain action or convince the audience to adopt the belief or opinion of the speaker. Many speeches will combine features of informative and persuasive speeches. Know the audience: the types of knowledge they possess, the core beliefs they hold, and what motivates them to undertake actions. Considering the purpose of the speech will help determine if the speech should use more of the features of informative or persuasive speeches. Know the audience: the types of knowledge they possess, the core beliefs they hold, and what motivates them to undertake actions.

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