

# Persuasive Presentations

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the various ways in which persuasive presentations work to achieve their purpose. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Functions of Persuasive Presentations

What does a presentation to persuade do? There are many functions to consider; they may overlap, or you may incorporate more than one as you present.

In general, persuasive presentations can aim to:

- Stimulate
- Convince
- Call to action
- Increase consideration
- Develop tolerance of alternate perspectives

We will now examine how each of these functions influences the process of persuasion.

### 1a. Stimulate

When you focus on stimulation as the goal or operational function of your speech, you want to reinforce existing beliefs, intensify them, and bring them to the forefront.

#### IN CONTEXT

Perhaps you've been concerned with global warming for quite some time. Many people in the audience may not know about the melting polar ice caps and the loss of significant ice shelves in Antarctica, including part of the Ross Ice Shelf, an iceberg almost 20 miles wide and 124 miles long, more than twice the size of Rhode Island.

Your audience members may also be unaware of how many ice shelves have broken off, the six percent drop in global phytoplankton (the basis of many food chains), and the effects of the introduction of fresh water to the oceans. By presenting these facts, you will reinforce existing beliefs, intensify them, and bring the issue to the surface.

You might also consider the foundation of common ground and commonly held beliefs, and then introduce information that a mainstream audience may not be aware of that supports that common ground as a strategy to stimulate.

## 1b. Convince

In a persuasive speech, the goal is to change the attitudes, beliefs, values, or judgments of your audience.

### IN CONTEXT

In a trial, the prosecuting attorney tries to convince the jury members that the defendant is guilty beyond reasonable doubt. She may discuss motive and present facts, all with the goal of convincing the jury to believe or find that her position is true.

In the film *The Day After Tomorrow*, Dennis Quaid stars as a paleoclimatologist who unsuccessfully tries to convince the U.S. Vice President that a sudden climate change is about to occur. In the film, the Vice President listens to Quaid's position with his own bias in mind, listening only for points that reinforce his point of view while rejecting points that do not.

Audience members will also hold beliefs and are likely to involve their own personal bias. Your goal is to get them to agree with your position, so you will need to plan a range of points and examples to get audience members to consider your topic.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Perhaps you present Dennis Quaid's argument that loss of the North Atlantic Current will drastically change our climate, clearly establishing the problem for the audience. You might cite a review by a scholar in a reputable science magazine, providing research that backs up your position.

You then need to describe a range of possible solutions to the problem you present. If the audience comes to a mental agreement that a problem exists, they will look to you asking, "What are the options?" Then you may indicate a solution that is a better alternative, recommending future action.



### Self and Social Awareness: Skill Tip

Your self and social awareness skill can help you be empathetic to other points of view. As you seek to understand those, you can seek to find common ground.

## 1c. Call to Action

A call to action features a clear response for the audience. This function of a persuasive speech is not about stimulating interest to reinforce and accentuate beliefs, or convincing an audience of a viewpoint that you hold. Rather, it is about persuading your listeners change their behavior.

### IN CONTEXT

If you were in sales at Toyota, you might incorporate our previous example on global warming to

reinforce your point, and then make a call to action (suggesting the audience make a purchase decision), when presenting the Prius hybrid (gas-electric) automobile. The economics, even at current gas prices, might not completely justify the difference in price between a hybrid and a non-hybrid car.

However, if you as the salesperson can make a convincing argument that choosing a hybrid car is the right and responsible decision, you may be more likely to get the customer to act.

The persuasive speech that focuses on action often generates curiosity, clarifies a problem, and as we have seen, proposes a range of solutions. The key difference here is that there is a clear link to action associated with the solutions. Solutions lead us to considering the goals of action. These goals address the question, "What do I want the audience to do as a result of being engaged by my speech?"

The goals of action include:

- Adoption
- Discontinuance
- Deterrence
- Continuance

**Adoption** means the speaker wants to persuade the audience to take on a new way of thinking, or adopt a new idea.

➞ **EXAMPLE** This type of call to action might involve persuading an audience to buy a new product, vote for a new candidate, or decide to donate blood. The key is that the audience member adopts, or takes on, a new view, action, or habit.

**Discontinuance** involves the speaker persuading the audience to stop doing something that it has been doing. Rather than take on a new habit or action, the speaker is asking the audience members to stop an existing behavior or idea. As such, discontinuance is in some ways the opposite of adoption.

➞ **EXAMPLE** This type of call to action could involve urging listeners to stop smoking.

**Deterrence** is a call to action that focuses on persuading the audience not to start something if they haven't already started.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Perhaps many people in the audience have never tried illicit drugs, or have not gotten behind the wheel of a car while intoxicated. The goal in this case would be to deter, or encourage the audience members to refrain from starting or initiating that behavior.

Finally, with **continuance**, the speaker aims to persuade the audience to continue doing what they have been doing.

➞ **EXAMPLE** This type of call to action could involve convincing listeners to reelect a candidate, keep buying a product, or stay in school to get an education.

A speaker may choose to address more than one of these goals of action, depending on the audience analysis. If the audience is largely agreeable and supportive, you may find continuance to be one goal, while adoption is secondary.

These goals serve to guide you in the development of solution steps. Solution steps involve suggestions or ways the audience can take action after your speech. They often proceed from a national to personal level, or the inverse.

Audience members appreciate a clear discussion of the problem in a persuasive speech, but they also appreciate solutions. You might offer a national solution that may be viewed as unworkable, but your solution on a personal level may be more realistic, such as considering an alternate point of view or making a small donation to a worthy cause.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Adoption**

In a persuasive speech, a call to action that attempts to convince the audience to take on a new way of thinking, or adopt a new idea.

##### **Discontinuance**

In a persuasive speech, a call to action that attempts to convince the audience to stop doing something that it has been doing.

##### **Deterrence**

In a persuasive speech, a call action that focuses on persuading the audience not to start doing something if they haven't already started.

##### **Continuance**

In a persuasive speech, a call to action that attempts to convince the audience to keep doing something that it has been doing.

## **1d. Increase Consideration**

For this function of persuasion, you want to increase consideration on the part of the audience whose members either hold hostile views or perhaps are neutral and simply curious.

#### **IN CONTEXT**

Perhaps you know that your audience is not open to emotional appeals that involve the fear of global warming, so you choose to base your persuasive speech on something they are more open to: the economic argument and the relative cost of car ownership.

You might be able to compare and contrast competing cars and show that the costs over ten years are quite similar, but that the Prius has additional features that are the equivalent of a bonus, including high gas mileage. You might describe tax incentives for ownership, maintenance schedules and costs, and resale value.

Your arguments and their support aim at increasing the audience's consideration of your position. You won't be asking for action in this presentation, but a corresponding increase of consideration may lead the customer to that point at a later date.

## **1e. Develop Tolerance of Alternate Perspectives**

Finally, you may want to help your audience develop tolerance of alternate perspectives and viewpoints.

#### **IN CONTEXT**

Perhaps your audience, as in the previous example, is interested in purchasing a car, and you are

the lead salesperson on that model. As you listen and do your informal audience analysis, you may learn that horsepower and speed are important values to this customer base. You might raise the issue of torque versus horsepower and indicate that the "uumph" you feel as you start a car off the line is actually torque. Many hybrid and even electric vehicles have great torque, as their systems involve fewer parts and less friction than a corresponding internal combustion-transaxle system.

You are essentially indicating that there are two relevant factors to consider when discussing speed (horsepower and torque), and asking the customer to consider the alternate perspective. Lots of horsepower might be fine for high speeds, but by raising the issue of their normal driving, they might learn that what counts day in and day out for driving is torque, not horsepower.

Your goal is to help your audience develop tolerance, but not necessarily acceptance, of alternate perspectives. By starting from common ground, and introducing a related idea, you are persuading your audience to consider an alternate perspective.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about five **functions of persuasive speeches**. These functions are to **stimulate, convince, call to action, increase consideration, and develop tolerance of alternate perspectives**. A speaker will employ some or all of these functions depending on their audience and the purpose of their speech.

Best of luck in your learning!

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### Continuance

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### Deterrence

In a persuasive speech, a call to action that focuses on persuading the audience not to start doing something if they haven't already started.

### Discontinuance

In a persuasive speech, a call to action that attempts to convince the audience to stop doing something that it has been doing.

