

# The Importance of Gathering Information

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the process of gathering information for your speech. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Why Gather Information?
2. Gain Credibility
3. Make It Current
4. Keep It Relevant

## 1. Why Gather Information?

If you are already an expert on your topic, why should you take the time to gather more information? Personal expertise is a great source of anecdotes, illustrations, and insights about important issues and questions related to your topic.

However, one person's opinion holds less weight than an opinion that is shared by other experts, supported by **evidence**, or validated by testimonials. The process of gathering information provides opportunities to step beyond the limitations of your own experience and enrich your own understanding of your topic.

Here are a few of the benefits you can reap from gathering information.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Evidence

The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.

## 2. Gain Credibility

If you want the audience to trust your claims, back them up. Don't expect the audience to take your word for it, no questions asked. Find evidence, illustrations, anecdotes, testimonials, or expert opinions that support your claims.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Compare these two statements— the first is a personal opinion, and the second is an argument supported

with evidence. Which statement sounds more credible?

1. I believe that building a parking garage near the town square would bring more traffic to local businesses and boost the local economy. Everyone knows it's impossible to find parking on weekends here, and that keeps a lot of people at home on weekends.

2. Small businesses in our sister city, Springfield, reported losses comparable to ours after the financial crisis. However, everything changed for them last year: businesses reported that sales were up, and a few new businesses opened in the center of town, creating new jobs. Why didn't we get the same result? The mayor of Springfield credits the change to a new parking garage near the city center, which eased the parking shortage and brought more people into town on weekends. What can we learn from this story? There are people out there who want to patronize local businesses but are being driven away by the lack of parking. The plan for a new parking garage in our town square could bring us the same success we saw in Springfield.

The first statement relies on a "common sense" idea about parking convenience, which the audience may or may not agree with. By providing an example of a similar situation, the second statement lends credibility to the claim that a new parking garage would help the local economy.

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## 3. Make It Current

If you want to assure your audience that you are well-informed about your topic, provide current information about it. Instead of relying on generalizations, gather up-to-date information about the particulars of your topic.



### THINK ABOUT IT

See which of these two statements is more insightful:

1. Teenagers spend too much time with their electronic gadgets. This obsession takes them away from the real world and leaves them unprepared for adult life.

2. According to a recent study from the Kaiser Family Foundation, teenagers spend over seven and a half hours a day using electronic devices—mainly smartphones, computers, and TVs. This preoccupation leaves little time to give undivided attention to homework, family time, and extracurricular activities, all of which are essential steps toward adult life.

The first statement relies on unfounded opinions, leaving gaping holes in its argument. Perhaps teenagers do spend too much time with their devices, but how much time do they spend and why is it a problem? It sounds like a curmudgeonly rant about "kids these days." The second statement backs its claim up with evidence from a recent study and lists specific problems. Recent information makes it possible to define the problem clearly.

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## 4. Keep It Relevant

Different audiences have different needs. When you conduct an audience analysis, you will gain valuable demographic information—and you should use that information to guide the search for supporting evidence and illustrations. What would resonate with that particular group of people?



**EXAMPLE** Let's say you are counseling an audience of nursing students in Florida about their job prospects. If you have general knowledge about nursing jobs, you have a good starting point. If you seek

out information about the current market for nursing jobs in Florida, you will have information that is even more valuable to your audience.

Make sure your speech is relevant to your audience: Take the time to build on your area of expertise by gathering specialized information to fit the occasion.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **why it's important to gather information** for your speech. Don't simply rely on your own expertise to carry you through the speech. Seek out information to support your arguments and **gain credibility** with the audience. Instead of relying on generalizations or common sense, find **current** information to update your interpretation of the topic. Gather specialized information that will make your speech more **relevant** to your particular audience.

Source: Boundless. "The Importance of Gathering Information." Boundless Communications Boundless, Invalid Date Invalid Date. Invalid Date. Retrieved 19 May. 2017 from

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Evidence

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