

Topic Research: Gathering Materials and Evidence

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

Now that you've figured out your topic and given some thought as to who will be your audience, it's time to roll up your sleeves and begin the real work of preparing your speech. In this lesson, you'll learn how to best research and gather your materials and supporting evidence. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Finding Credible Sources
2. Just What Makes a Source "Credible"?
3. Keeping Your Research Organized

1. Finding Credible Sources

The first instinct for many people preparing a speech is to go out and find every piece of information they can, often via search engines online.

While this is a great way to "presearch," you'll want to really pay attention to the sources from which you're gathering your information.

If you want to successfully substantiate any claim in your speech, you'll need to make sure you back it up with information from credible sources.

2. Just What Makes a Source "Credible"?

Typically, hard, irrefutable facts make for a credible source.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** Fact: The Earth is anywhere from 36 to 63 million miles away from Mars, depending on orbital locations of either planet. But if you have a claim that could stray anywhere into the realm of opinion (such as, the existence of extraterrestrial life in the universe besides that on Earth), you'll want to make sure you have credible sources to back up that claim.

Many times, you'll want to turn to scholarly sources. Academic journals and publications (particularly if they have been peer-reviewed) make for excellent scholarly sources.

Additionally, there's no reason that you can't approach an expert in the field that you are researching. In the latter instance, this is considered a primary source of information and can sometimes help point you in the right direction to find other credible sources of information.

When in doubt, ask your friendly librarian. They can often point you to online journal collections or academic search engines where you can find reliable, credible sources.

3. Keeping Your Research Organized

As you begin to assemble your research, it's imperative to keep your notes centrally located and easily accessible. You might want to create a binder to keep all of your papers and notes together, or dedicate a multi-sectioned notebook to your research.

You might take notes on notecards, organizing them by color or heading. If you take your notes online, you can use cloud computing to store your research remotely to access them anywhere on the go. Other software exists to keep your notes files and organized electronically on your computer.

Always keep records of where you got your information. You'll need this in case someone ever decides to question you about your facts after your speech.

Also, this shows people that, yes, you've done your homework. Additionally, you should never copy any information word for word and claim it as your own. **Plagiarism** will only damage your reputation and the credibility and ethics of your speech in addition to potentially causing you to fail a class, lose your job, or worse.

However you organize your notes, just make sure you have them organized and handy. You never know when you might run into a primary source!



TERM TO KNOW

Plagiarism

The act of plagiarizing: the copying of another person's ideas, text or other creative work, and presenting it as one's own, especially without permission.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about conducting research for your speech. Make sure you **find credible sources** of information, whether they be from scholarly sources that have been peer-reviewed, or irrefutable facts. While the Internet might seem like the easiest place to find information, you should always double-check to **make sure those sources are accurate and credible**. Don't use research that might be outdated, particularly with regard to scientific or technological advances.

Make sure you acknowledge your sources. You may not directly reference them in your speech, but if questioned afterward, you'll want to know from where you found your information. Never copy information word for word and claim it as your own; this is plagiarism and erodes your ethical integrity. **Keeping your research organized** will make it easier for you to check that you have cited each source properly.

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