



Public Speaking: Planning Your Talk

Effective presentations rely on planning, drafting, and revision. This handout will help you to plan some of your presentation. And remember—you're welcome to come to meet with a writing partner who can help you with brainstorming, drafting, revising, and practicing the talk.

Planning the Presentation

1. **Know your purpose.** It's not enough just to know the material. You also need to know why you're sharing that information with your listeners. Are you trying to persuade them? Inform them? Inspire them? Clarify your purpose by *defining it with a verb* and then structure your presentation with that purpose in mind.
2. **Be thorough when planning.** It's tempting to jot down only a few bullet points or to skip this step entirely, but by writing a specific plan or outline—and by using complete sentences when you write—you'll commit a lot of information to memory. Knowing the material well will make you more confident when you're presenting.
3. **Consider your audience:** Think about whether your audience is voluntary or captive. If they're captive (i.e., required to be there), you'll probably need to work harder to get them invested in the topic, so be explicit about *why your content matters*. Why should your audience care? And maybe get them engaged with an activity early on.

Consider also your audience's level of expertise. What background information will they need in order to understand your main idea? You might be an expert on your topic, but your listeners probably aren't. By giving them background information, you'll help them to understand the more complex ideas within your talk.

To test whether you're providing enough context and background information, practice your talk in front of others. Ask them whether you've provided enough detail and information so the main idea is clear and meaningful. And work on speaking to your more novice listeners. This will ensure that everyone is following along with your ideas.

4. **Think about time.** How much time do you have? This dictates how much information you can have and how detailed your information should be. You'll likely have more information than you can discuss, so decide carefully what to include.



When Planning and Presenting, Be Explicit

Listening to a talk is challenging. To help your audience follow along, plan out specific signal phrases that let your audience know what they're going to hear. This works well even when you're not going to read a speech verbatim or memorize it. For example, you can introduce yourself and topic by also stating outright the verb you've used to define your purpose.

Similarly, you can plan out specific, clear transitions so your audience is certain about the connections you're making and when you're moving on to additional key points. Some examples of transitions:

- Now that we've covered X, we can focus on Y ...
- The second main reason you should vote is ...
- I will conclude by ...

And—again—keep the content focused! Since you probably have a lot more knowledge about the topic than you can share during this one talk, make sure to trim the content so that the main ideas come across clearly to your listeners.

Developing an Introduction

There are a lot of different ways you might begin, but a few essential elements are useful to consider. You'll want to make clear to listeners

- What your purpose is
- Why the topic is important
- What the general layout of your presentation is

By structuring your introduction in this way, you'll help listeners understand what to expect and why they should care. This helps to clarify content while also making listeners have a stake in what you say.

Note: It can be helpful to develop your introduction after you've planned the body of your presentation. That way you'll have concrete ideas about what your presentation contains and what your purpose is so you can highlight those in the introduction.

Developing a Conclusion

Conclusions share some similar qualities with introductions since you'll want to develop your conclusion after you've developed the body. You'll also want to keep in mind certain criteria:

- Help listeners understand that the presentation is coming to a close—give them a clear signal phrase to prepare them.
- Sum up and reiterate your main points.
- Include any final suggestions, recommendations, or appeals if those are appropriate to your purpose.

