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Chapter 10

Developing Business Presentations

It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.

- Mark Twain

Being in the right does not depend on having a loud voice.

- Chinese Proverb

Getting Started

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. Complete the following self-inventory by brainstorming as many items as you can for each category. Think about anything you know, find interesting, or are involved in which relates to the topics below. Have you travelled to a different city, province, or country? Do you have any projects in other classes you find interesting? List them in the questions below.

- What do you read?
- What do you play or do for fun?
- What do you watch (visual media)?
- Where do you live or have you lived?
- What places have you visited (travel)?
- Whom do you know?
- What's important to you?
- If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

Choose your three favourite categories from the list above and circle them. Then ask a friend what they would be most interested in hearing about. Ask more than one friend, and keep score of which item attracts the most attention. Make sure you keep track of who likes which category.

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES (CONT.)

2. What do you know about the world?
- a. What is the most populous country on the planet?
1. United States
 2. India
 3. China
 4. Brazil
- b. The United States is home to more foreign-born residents than any other country. Which country has the next-highest number of foreign-born residents? Bremner, J., Haub, C., Lee, M., Mather, M., & Zuehlke, E. (2009, September). World population highlights: Key findings from PRB's 2009 world population data sheet. *Population Bulletin*, 64(3). Retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/pdf09/64.3highlights.pdf>
1. Russia
 2. England
 3. India
 4. Argentina
- c. As of 2008, what percentage of the world's population lived in an urban setting?
1. 15 percent
 2. 30 percent
 3. 50 percent
 4. 60 percent
- d. The world's population mid-2011 was almost seven billion. In what year is this figure expected to reach 10 billion? Rosenberg, M. (2012, January 26). Current World Population and World Population Growth Since the Year One. *About.com Guide*. Retrieved from <http://geography.about.com/od/obtainpopulationdata/a/worldpopulation.htm>
1. 2090

2. 2027
3. 2083
4. 2109

Answers: a. 3, b. 1, c. 3, d. 3.

Mark Twain makes a valid point that presentations require preparation. If you have the luxury of time to prepare, take full advantage of it. Speeches don't always happen when or how we envision them. Preparation becomes especially paramount when the element of unknown is present, forcing us to improvise. One mistake or misquote can and will be quickly rebroadcast, creating lasting damage. Take full advantage of the time to prepare for what you can anticipate, but also consider the element of surprise. In this chapter we discuss the planning and preparation necessary to prepare an effective presentation. You will be judged on how well you present yourself, so take the time when available to prepare.

Now that you are concerned with getting started and preparing a speech for work or class, let's consider the first step. It may be that you are part of a team developing a sales presentation, preparing to meet with a specific client in a one-on-one meeting, or even setting up a teleconference. Your first response may be that a meeting is not a speech, but your part of the conversation has a lot in common with a formal presentation. You need to prepare, you need to organize your message, and you need to consider audience's expectations, their familiarity with the topic, and even individual word choices that may improve your effectiveness. Regardless whether your presentation is to one individual (interpersonal) or many (group), it has as its foundation the act of communication. Communication itself is a dynamic and complex process, and the degree to which you can prepare and present effectively across a range of settings will enhance your success as a business communicator.

If you have been assigned a topic by the teacher or your supervisor, you may be able to go straight to the section on narrowing your topic. If not, then the first part of this chapter will help you. This chapter will help you step by step in preparing for your speech or oral presentation. By the time you have finished this chapter, you will have chosen a topic for your speech, narrowed the topic, and analyzed the appropriateness of the topic for yourself as well as the audience. From this basis, you will have formulated a general purpose statement and specific thesis statement to further define the topic of your speech. Building on the general and specific purpose statements you formulate, you will create an outline for your oral presentation.

Through this chapter, you will become more knowledgeable about the process of creating a speech and gain confidence in your organizational abilities. Preparation and organization are two main areas that, when well developed prior to an oral presentation, significantly contribute to reducing your level of speech anxiety. If you are well prepared, you will be more relaxed when it is time to give your speech. Effective business communicators have excellent communication skills that can be learned through experience and practice. In this chapter we will work together to develop your skills in preparing clear and concise messages to reach your target audience.

10.1 Before You Choose a Topic

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe the steps in the process of planning a speech.

As you begin to think about choosing your topic, there are a few key factors to consider. These include the purpose of the speech, its projected time length, the appropriateness of the topic for your audience, and your knowledge or the amount of information you can access on the topic. Let's examine each of these factors.

Determine the General and Specific Purpose

It is important for you to have a clear understanding of your purpose, as all the other factors depend on it. Here's a brief review of the five general purposes for speaking in public:

1. *Speech to inform.* Increase the audience's knowledge, teach about a topic or issue, and share your expertise.
2. *Speech to demonstrate.* Show the audience how to use, operate, or do something.
3. *Speech to persuade.* Influence the audience by presenting arguments intended to change attitudes, beliefs, or values.
4. *Speech to entertain.* Amuse the audience by engaging them in a relatively light-hearted speech that may have a serious point or goal.
5. *Ceremonial speech.* Perform a ritual function, such as give a toast at a wedding reception or a eulogy at a funeral.

You should be able to choose one of these options. If you find that your speech may fall into more than one category, you may need to get a better understanding of the assignment or goal. Starting out with a clear understanding of why you are doing what you are supposed to do will go a long way in helping you organize, focus, prepare, and deliver your oral presentation.

Once you have determined your general purpose—or had it determined for you, if this is an assigned speech—you will still need to write your specific purpose. What specifically are you going to inform, persuade, demonstrate, or entertain your audience with? What type of ceremony is your speech intended for? A clear goal

makes it much easier to develop an effective speech. Try to write in just one sentence exactly what you are going to do.

Examples
To inform the audience about my favourite car, the Ford Mustang
To persuade the audience that global warming is a threat to the environment

Notice that each example includes two pieces of information. The first is the general purpose (to inform or to persuade) and the second is the specific subject you intend to talk about.

Can I Cover the Topic in Time?

Your next key consideration is the amount of time in which you intend to accomplish your purpose. Consider the depth, scope, and amount of information available on the topic you have in mind. In business situations, speeches or presentations vary greatly in length, but most often the speaker needs to get the message across as quickly as possible—for example, in less than five minutes. If you are giving a speech in class, it can be five to seven minutes, it could be 10 minutes, or it may be up to 15-20 minutes. In five to seven minutes, it would be impossible to tell your audience about the complete history of the Ford Mustang automobile. You could, however, tell them about four key body style changes since 1965. If your topic is still too broad, narrow it down into something you can reasonably cover in the time allotted. For example, focus on just the classic Mustangs, the individual differences by year, and how to tell them apart.

You may have been assigned a persuasive speech topic, linking global warming to business, but have you been given enough time to present a thorough speech on why human growth and consumption is clearly linked to global warming? Are you supposed to discuss “green” strategies of energy conservation in business, for example? The topic of global warming is quite complex, and by definition involves a great deal of information, debate over interpretations of data, and analysis on the diverse global impacts. Rather than try to explore the chemistry, the corporate debates, or the current government activities that may be involved, you can consider how visual aids may make the speech vivid for the audience. You might decide to focus on three clear examples of global warming to capture your audience’s attention and move them closer to your stated position: “green” and energy-saving strategies are good for business.

Perhaps you'll start with a brownie on a plate with a big scoop of ice cream on top, asking your audience what will happen when the ice cream melts. They will probably predict that the melted ice cream will spread out over the plate in a puddle, becoming a deeper puddle as the ice cream continues to melt. Next, you might display a chart showing that globally, temperatures have risen, followed by a map of the islands that have lost beaches due to rising tides. To explain how this had happened, you may show two pictures of Antarctica—one taken in 1993 and the other in 2003, after it lost over 15 percent of its total mass as the Ross Ice Shelf melted, cracked, and broke off from the continent. You may then make a transition to what happens when water evaporates as it goes into the atmosphere. Show a picture of the hole in the ozone over Chile and much of South America, and hold up a bottle of sunscreen, saying that even SPF 45 isn't strong enough to protect you. Finally, you may show a pie graph that illustrates that customers are aware of the environmental changes and the extent of their purchase decision is based on the perception of a product's "green" features or support of related initiatives. In just a few minutes, you've given seven visual examples to support your central position and meet your stated purpose.

Figure 10.1



Visual aids may make this speech vivid for the audience.

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Will My Topic Be Interesting to My Audience?

Remember that communication is a two-way process; even if you are the only one speaking, the audience is an essential part of your speech. Put yourself in their place and imagine how to make your topic relevant for them. What information will they actually use once your speech is over?

For example, if you are speaking to a group of auto mechanics who specialize in repairing and maintaining classic cars, it might make sense to inform them about the body features of the Mustang, but they may already be quite knowledgeable about these features. If you represent a new rust treatment product used in the restoration process, they may be more interested in how it works than any specific model of car. However, if your audience belong to a general group of students or would-be car buyers, it would be more useful to inform them about how to buy a classic car and what to look for. General issues of rust may be more relevant, and can still be clearly linked to your new rust treatment product.

For a persuasive speech, in addition to considering the audience's interests, you will also want to gauge their attitudes and beliefs. If you are speaking about global

warming to a group of scientists, you can probably assume that they are familiar with the basic facts of melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and ozone depletion. In that case, you might want to focus on something more specific, such as strategies for reducing greenhouse gases that can be implemented by business and industry. Your goal might be to persuade this audience to advocate for such strategies, and support or even endorse the gradual implementation of the cost- and energy-saving methods that may not solve all the problems at once, but serve as an important first step.

In contrast, for a general audience, you may anticipate skepticism that global warming is even occurring, or that it poses any threat to the environment. Some audience members may question the cost savings, while others may assert that the steps are not nearly enough to make a difference. The clear, visual examples described above will help get your point across, but if you are also prepared to answer questions—for example, “If the earth is heating up, why has it been so cold here lately?” or “Isn’t this just part of a warming and cooling cycle that’s been happening for millions of years?”—you may make your speech ultimately more effective. By asking your listeners to consider what other signs they can observe that global warming is occurring, you might highlight a way for them to apply your speech beyond the classroom setting. By taking small steps as you introduce your assertions, rather than advocating a complete overhaul of the system or even revolution, you will more effectively engage a larger percentage of your audience.

How Much Information about My Topic Is Readily Available?

For a short speech, especially if it is a speech to entertain, you may be able to rely completely on your knowledge and ideas. But in most cases you will need to gather information so that you can make your speech interesting by telling the audience things they don’t already know. Try to choose a topic that can be researched in your college or university libraries. You may need to do some initial checking of sources to be sure the material is available.

Putting It All Together

When you have determined your general purpose, the amount of material appropriate to the time allowed for your speech, and the appropriateness for your audience, then you should be well on your way to identifying the topic for your speech. As a double-check, you should be able to state your specific purpose in one sentence. For example, the specific purpose of our “Classic Cars” speech could be stated as, “By the end of my speech, I want my audience to be more informed about the three ways in which they can determine whether a classic car is a rust bucket or diamond in the rough, and be aware of one product solution.”

KEY TAKEAWAY

Speech planning begins with knowing your general and specific purpose, your time allotment, your audience, and the amount of information available.

EXERCISES

1. Complete the following sentence for your speech: By the end of my speech, I want the audience to be more informed (persuaded, have a better understanding of, entertained by) about _____.

If you can't finish the sentence, you need to go back and review the steps in this section. Make sure you have given them sufficient time and attention. An effective speech requires planning and preparation, and that takes time. Know your general and specific purpose, and make sure you can write it in one sentence. If you don't know your purpose, the audience won't either.

2. Make a list of topics that interest you and meet the objectives of the assignment. Trade the list with a classmate and encircle three topics that you would like to learn more about on their list. Repeat this exercise. What topic received the most interest and why? Discuss the results with your classmates.

10.2 Choosing a Topic

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Identify the strategies that help you choose a topic and craft an effective thesis statement.

Now that you have a clear idea of your general and specific purpose, the allotted time, your audience's expectations, and the amount of information available, you are ready to commit to a topic. We have several strategies you can use to help select and narrow the topic appropriately.

Know Yourself and Your Audience

The first strategy is to identify an area of knowledge or an issue that deeply interests you. If you have not already completed the first of the [Note 10.1 "Introductory Exercises"](#) for this chapter, please work with it, identifying as many activities, areas of interest, places you've travelled to, and things you find interesting as possible. Once you have completed the exercise, identify three broad subject areas where you have some knowledge or experience and consider at least one link to business and industry for each area. Talking about what you know will make you a more credibility speaker but it must clearly connect with your employer's goals for your presentation. If, for example, you like doing a scrapbook, what kind of glue do you prefer and why? That may make for a natural speech topic that calls on your previous experience while requiring you to learn more about the glue and its properties. You may need to compare and contrast several types of glues as part of your preparation. Your in-depth awareness of scrapbooking and glue as a necessary ingredient will make you a more credible speaker.

In the first of the [Note 10.1 "Introductory Exercises"](#) for this chapter, you were asked to choose three questions from the list and then survey people you know to find out which of the three they prefer to hear about. Make sure you keep score by writing down factors like age, gender, and any other elements you think your audience may have in common. This exercise serves to reinforce the idea of being audience-centred, or tailoring your message to your specific audience. Our third of the [Note 10.1 "Introductory Exercises"](#) for this chapter should highlight that our perception of the world is not always accurate, and there is no substitute for thorough, objective research when preparing a speech. The more you know, about

yourself and your audience, the better you can prepare to meet their needs and accomplish your goals as a speaker.

You have now utilized the Note 10.1 "Introductory Exercises" to help identify some broad topic areas that might work for you. If you find the topic interesting, your enthusiasm will show and your audience will become interested, too. Next, you will want to decide which of these areas would work best for your speech, and how to narrow it down.

Saving Time

Here are some strategies you can use to save yourself time in selecting a speech topic.

First, consider the information you already have close at hand. Do you already have a project you are working on, perhaps in another course? What are you currently studying in your other classes? What topics do you want to know more about? Which issues or aspects initially drew you to this topic or area? Chances are that whatever piqued your interest the first time will also get your audience interested.

Next, conduct a search (online, in the library, or interview people you know) in your subject area to get an overview of the subject. Explore topics, issues, places, or people that fascinate you.

Appeal, Appropriateness, and Ability

These are three main factors to consider when choosing a topic. All three factors are related to one another, but by systematically focusing on each one you will help address the strengths and weaknesses of your chosen topic.

Appeal¹ involves the attractive power of arousing a sympathetic, stimulated response from the audience. Your audience will have expectations of you as a speaker and of your purpose for speaking. We all tend to seek novelty and find interesting, attractive, or appealing, or something that is not part of everyday life. A good example is the melting ice cream used in the speech on global warming. The elements are nothing new. We've all seen plates, brownies, and ice cream before, but how many of us have seen a speaker use them together to symbolize the melting ice caps associated with global warming? There is an inherent novelty present when we adapt something from its original purpose in order to make it appealing. You will need to consider an appealing way to start your speech, and will look for ways throughout your speech to reaffirm that appeal to the audience.

1. Involves the attractive power of arousing a sympathetic, stimulated response from the audience.

When considering a topic, also think about the visual or auditory images that come to mind, or how you might represent it to an audience in ways other than your words. This can guide you as you proceed to select your topic, thinking about what you can make appealing to your audience.

It also follows that appeal applies to the speaker as well as the audience. You may find the prospect of discussing global warming not very interesting, and if you feel this way, it will come through in your speech. You need to be attracted, interested or find your topic appealing in order to convey this appeal to your audience. Find something that catches your interest, and that same spark is what you will cultivate to develop ways to stimulate the spark of curiosity in your audience.

Appropriateness² involves a topic that is especially suitable or compatible with your audience's interest, expectations, norms, or customs. Everyone will have expectations about roles and outcomes associated with your speech. Some may be looking for information, while others may already know something about your topic and want to learn more. You will need to reach both groups within the audience. As we saw earlier in the Ford Mustang example, a highly technical speech may lose the more novice members of your audience.

Appropriateness is important because some topics do not work as well in a classroom setting as others. Will everyone find a new rust treatment product interesting? Will everyone find a car speech interesting? Whether you are in the classroom or business office setting, consider your audience and the appropriateness of your topic.

Regardless where you give a speech, you should always choose topics that will not promote harmful or illegal actions. It is also important to consider whether your topic might offend members of the audience. If this is a possibility, can you find a way to present the topic that will minimize offence? Similarly, if your topic is controversial and you know that your audience has strong feelings about it, consider how you can convey your message without alienating or antagonizing your listeners. Finally, it is usually wise to avoid topics which the audience already knows a lot about.

2. Involves a topic that is especially suitable or compatible with your audience's interest, expectations, norms, or customs.

3. Involves the natural aptitude or acquired proficiency to be able to perform.

Ability³ involves the natural aptitude or acquired proficiency to be able to perform. If you have a lot of prior information on flying, gained over years of experience being at the controls of an aircraft, you may have a natural aptitude and knowledge base to use to your advantage. If, however, you've never flown before, you may need to gather information and go visit an airport to be able to approach a proficient level of understanding to discuss the topic.

In addition to your ability to draw on your natural strengths, you'll also want to consider your ability to research a topic where you are located. If you want to develop a speech on a particular topic but you find information hard to come by, this will make your job even harder and could possibly have a detrimental impact on your speech. You may find that two similar topics interest you but your ability to gather information from more diverse sources, from places that are more readily available, or from your background and experience make one topic more attractive than the other.

Consider topics that are,

- new,
- possibly controversial,
- clear,
- supported by information you can find in outside sources,
- interesting to you.

Figure 10.2



Consider your audience and the appropriateness of your topic, product, or service for success.

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Individual course guidelines vary, so make sure that your instructor approves your topic, and that your topic is appropriate for your audience. At some colleges and universities, broad topics are designated as part of the curriculum including, for example, environment, diversity, and technology. In your class, you may be challenged to link any of those topics to business, and to prepare an informative or persuasive speech. Some colleges and university instructors may also encourage you not to choose topics that are too controversial, like abortion or euthanasia, unless you can connect the issue to a current event or new perspective. Don't avoid all controversial topics, though, as they often intrigue your audience and help maintain interest. Just make sure to consider the pre-existing attitudes of your audience when attempting to create an effective, engaging speech.

In a business setting, you will rarely be given complete freedom to choose your topic. You may even have a script and visual aids prepared in advance. In the real world the luxury of time for preparation and topic selection are rare, but in a classroom setting you are often given more of an opportunity to choose. That choice should not be taken lightly, and should be viewed as an opportunity. The classroom is a training ground, and your freedom to explore and experiment is designed to build skills and strengths. When you join an employer, you will be asked to prepare a presentation as part of the job; more often than not, there are clear guidelines on what is acceptable and your professionalism is expected.

Use Your Self-Inventory

Choosing a topic can be difficult, but your self-inventory of things you already know should get you started. By doing a little exploring, you can often help yourself come up with several possible topics. The topic itself will not exclusively make a “good” or “bad” speech. How you develop that topic and discuss its points and issues, however, will make a significant impact. Before moving on to the next step in this chapter, make sure you have a topic in which you are relatively confident. If you have trouble selecting a topic, take your self-inventory to your instructor or librarian. They may be able to help guide you to a topic that works for you.

Here are some examples to get you started. Let’s say your self-inventory response from the first of the [Note 10.1 "Introductory Exercises"](#) for this chapter to the question, “**What do you play or do for fun?**” is to play sports, and it also happens to be one way you are earning your way through school on a scholarship. You could consider a topic like the history of your sport for an informative speech, or how to tell the difference between three classic types of pitches in baseball, involving an audience member in a demonstrative speech. You could also consider stereotypes of athletes in college and some of the common misperceptions and persuade the audience that athletes often handle the issues of time management well, can get good grades (provide statistics as evidence and ask a coach for examples), and are actively developing both their minds and their bodies through participation in sports. You might even take on a topic of why basketball is more interesting than football, or vice versa. You might decide instead to entertain the audience, and tell stories associated with game travel, buses breaking down, or road trips gone bad. Finally, you might put together a ceremonial speech, recognizing and honouring a fellow student's excellence both in academics and in athletics.

If you are not a student athlete, but a college student, you may have answered that same question by indicating you are taking classes for a degree as well as for fun. You could put together an informative speech on the steps involved in applying for financial aid, or produce a demonstrative speech on how to gather the information required and complete the application process. You might persuade the audience to apply for financial aid, even if they think they might not be eligible, and cover the options within the program. You might entertain the audience with funny stories about the challenges of registering for classes, completing financial aid, and completing the classes you need to graduate (and there is always just one more class, right?) You might also draft a ceremonial speech as if you were presenting the commencement speech at your graduation.

These two scenarios should stimulate some ideas, or you might already have a clear purpose and topic in mind. It’s important to be clear on both your purpose and your

topic as you begin to put pencil to paper, or keystroke to computer, and begin the process of writing your general purpose and thesis statements.

Writing Your Thesis Statement

Earlier in the chapter you wrote a statement expressing the general and specific purpose of your speech. Now that you have explored further and identified a definite topic, it's time to write a thesis statement. This **thesis statement**⁴ should be a short, specific sentence capturing the central idea of your speech. Steven Beebe and Susan BeebeBeebe, S. [Steven], & Beebe, S. [Susan]. (1997). *Public speaking: An audience-centered approach* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. recommend five guiding principles when considering your thesis statement. The thesis statement should

1. be a declarative statement;
2. be a complete sentence;
3. use specific language, not vague generalities;
4. be a single idea;
5. reflect consideration of the audience.

For example, if you plan to inform a general audience about the Ford Mustang, a good thesis statement might be, "Ford produced five 'generations' of the Mustang, each with a distinctive body style that audience members can learn to recognize." If you plan to persuade a group of investors that a beachfront property could be threatened by rising sea levels, a good thesis statement might be, "Sea levels are predicted to rise because of global warming, and if these predictions are correct, the beachfront property my audience is considering investing in may be threatened."

The thesis statement is key to the success of your speech. If your audience has to work to find out what exactly you are talking about, or what your stated purpose or goal is, they will be less likely to listen, be impacted, or recall your speech. By stating your point clearly in your introduction, and then referring back to it during your speech, you promote the cognitive strategies of emphasis, clarity, and conciseness, and help your audience to listen while meeting the expectations of the rhetorical context.

4. A short, specific sentence capturing the central idea of your speech.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Choosing a speech topic involves knowing yourself and your audience; using efficient strategies; and understanding appeal, appropriateness, and ability. When you have accomplished these steps, you will be able to write a good thesis statement.

EXERCISES

1. Which of the following qualify as good thesis statements? Take any that are faulty and rewrite them to remedy their weaknesses.
 - a. Living in the desert as we do, my listeners and I can grow many beautiful and interesting plants in our gardens without using large amounts of water.
 - b. To inform patients about how the medical insurance claims process works.
 - c. Because recent research suggests children develop positive self-esteem through recognition for their achievements, not from indiscriminate praise, I will persuade the parents and teachers in my audience to modify their behaviour toward children.
 - d. Tourists can learn a lot from visiting the European battlefields of World War II, and unexploded land mines from past wars are a serious problem throughout the world.
 - e. As a student attending this college on an athletic scholarship, I lead a very busy life because I am responsible for working hard at my sport as well as being held to the same academic standards as the nonathlete students in my audience.

Answers: Examples 1, 3 and 5 are good thesis statements.

Example 2 is not a complete sentence. Example 4 contains more than one main idea.

2. From your list of possible topics, write several sample purpose or thesis statements. Share and compare your results with classmates.
3. Write a general purpose statement and thesis statement for a speech to inform. Now adapt these statements for a speech to persuade.

10.3 Finding Resources

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the importance of research in developing your topic.
2. Use resources to gather information effectively.
3. Document your sources correctly and avoid plagiarism.

Now that you know your general purpose, have committed to a topic, and have written your thesis statement, it's time to gather information. If you have chosen the topic from your list, you probably already know a lot about it. But in most cases you will still need information from sources other than yourself, to establish credibility, create a more comprehensive speech, and to make sure no important aspect of your topic is left out.

Your time is valuable and you'll need to plan ahead to avoid a rushed frenzy right before your due date. You'll feel more confident if you budget your time wisely and give yourself an opportunity to reflect on what you have prepared, and this will help you feel more relaxed as you deliver your speech, reducing your speech anxiety.

Narrow Your Topic and Focus on Key Points

By now you have developed an idea of your topic, but even with your purpose and thesis statement, you may still have a broad subject that will be a challenge to cover within the allotted time. You might want to revisit your purpose and thesis statement and ask yourself: how specific is my topic? If flying an airplane is your topic area and you are going to inform your audience on the experience, discuss the history and basic equipment, cover the basic requirements necessary to go on your first flight, and look at reference information on where your audience could go locally to take flying lessons, you might find that five to seven minutes simply is not enough time. Rather than stating that you need more time, or that you'll just rush through it, consider your audience and what they might want to learn. How can you narrow your topic to better consider their needs? As you edit your topic, considering what is essential information and what can be cut, you'll come to focus on the key points naturally and reduce the pressure on yourself to cover too much information in a short amount of time.

If you haven't presented many speeches, five to seven minutes may seem like an eternity, but when you are in front of the audience, the time will pass quickly. Consider how you feel about the areas of your speech and you'll soon see how it could easily turn into an hour-long presentation. You need to work within the time limits, and show your audience respect as you stay within them, recognizing that they too will be presenting speeches in the same time frame. For yourself and your audience, narrow your topic to just the key points. Perhaps you will begin with a description and a visual image of your first flight, followed by a list of the basic equipment and training needed. Finally, a reference to local flying schools may help you define your speech. While the history of flying may be fascinating, and may serve as a topic in itself for another speech, it would add too much information to this particular brief speech.

As you begin this process, keep an open mind for the reference materials available. The access to information on the Internet is amazing, but not all the information has equal value. Try not to just go with the first three examples, Web sites or sources you run across but instead skim, rather than read in-depth, the information at that relates to your topic and what you find of interest. Look for abstracts, or brief summaries of information, before you commit time to reading an article all the way through. Look for indexes to identify key terms you might want to cover before eliminating them as you narrow your topic. Take notes as you search or bookmark pages with you Web browser in order to go back to a site or source that at first you passed over, but now think may make a relevant contribution to your speech. Consider the source and their credibility. While a high school Web page assignment may prove interesting, the link to the research in the field, the author of a study, or a university source may provide much credible information. Once you have identified sources you consider to be valuable, you will assemble the information and key points needed to make your speech much better.

Plan Your Search for Information

When preparing a speech, it is important to gather information from books, magazines, newspapers, electronic sources, and interviews from people who know a lot about your topic. With information from a variety of sources, you will have many possibilities when it comes to developing your speech. If you keep in mind the key information you need to support your thesis, you will save yourself time, as you can choose and edit information as you go along. Also, consider your other responsibilities in other classes or with work and family. You'll have to schedule time for your investigation and make it a priority, but it will necessarily compete with other priorities. Perhaps scheduling for yourself time in the library, a visit to the local flight school to interview a flight instructor, and some Internet search time in the evenings may help you create a to-do list that you can use to structure

your research. Remember that this investigation will be more fun if your topic is one in which you are actually interested.

Before you go to the library, look over your information sources. Do you read a magazine that relates to the topic? Did you read a recent news article that might be relevant? Is there a book, CD-ROM, or music that has information you can use? Think of what you want your audience to know, and how you could show it to them. Perhaps cover art from a CD, or a line from a poem may make an important contribution to your speech. You might even know someone who has experience in the area you want to research.

As you begin to investigate your topic, make sure you consider several sides of an issue. Let's say you are going to make an informative speech at a town council meeting about the recent history of commuter rail service in your town. At first, you may have looked at two sides, rail versus private cars. Automobile dealers, oil companies, and individual drivers wanted the flexibility of travel by car, while rail advocates argued that commuter trains would lower costs and energy consumption. If you take another look, you see that several other perspectives also have bearing on this issue. Many workers commuted by bus prior to the railroad, so the bus companies would not want the competition. Property owners objected to the noise of trains and the issue of eminent domain (i.e., taking of private property by the government). To serve several towns that are separated by open space, the rail lines cut through wildlife habitat and migration corridors. We now have five perspectives to the central issue, which makes the topic all the more interesting.

Make sure, as you start your investigation for information, that you always question the credibility of the information. Sources may have no review by peers or editor, and the information may be misleading, biased, or even false. Be a wise information consumer.

Ethics, Content Selection, and Avoiding Plagiarism

An aspect of sifting and sorting information involves how you will ethically present your material. You may be tempted to omit information that may be perceived as negative or may not be well received. For example, you may be tempted to omit mention of several train accidents that have occurred, or of the fact that train fares have risen as service has been cut back. If your purpose is to inform, you owe it to your audience to give an honest presentation of the available facts. By omitting information, you are not presenting an accurate picture, and may mislead your audience. Even if your purpose is to persuade, omitting the opposing points will present a one-sided presentation. The audience will naturally consider what you are not telling them as well as what you are presenting, and will raise questions.

Instead, consider your responsibility as a speaker to present all the information you understand to be complete, and do it honestly and ethically.

As another example, suppose you work for a swimming pool construction company and are speaking to inform a neighbourhood group about pool safety. You have photos of pools you have worked on, but they aren't very exciting. There are many more glamorous swimming pool photos on free Internet sites. Who can really tell if the pool in the picture is yours or not? Furthermore, the "Terms of Use" on the site state that photos may be downloaded for personal use. Wouldn't this speech to inform be considered personal use? In fact, it probably would not, even if your informative speech is not a direct sales pitch. And even if you don't actually tell your audience, "My company built this pool," it would be reasonable for them to assume you did unless you specifically tell them otherwise.

As a student, you are no doubt already aware that failing to cite sources or including a sentence or paragraph you copied from a blog on the Internet for an English essay is called plagiarism and is grounds for an F on your paper. At many schools, plagiarism can even be grounds for expulsion. Similarly, in your professional life it behooves you to be truthful with your audience and give credit where credit is due for several reasons. First, misrepresenting your employer's work could be illegal under statutes related to fraud; it could put not only your job but also your employer's contractor licence in jeopardy. Second, someone in your audience could recognize one of the photos (after all, they can browse the Internet as easily as you can) and embarrass you by pointing it out during your presentation. Third, by using photos that display your company's actual work you will feel more confident, reducing your speech anxiety. You have a responsibility to your audience and engaging in plagiarism fails in that responsibility.

Staying Organized

Before you start browsing on your computer, go to the library, or make the trip for an interview, make sure you have designated a space where you can keep all your materials in one place. Decide on a name for the project and use it to set up a subdirectory in your computer as well as a physical receptacle, such as a cardboard box or a manila folder.

As you gather information online, open a new document in whatever writing program you use and save it as "Sources." Every time you find information that may prove useful, copy the Web address or reference/citation information and paste it into your document. If you are gathering information from books or periodicals, use one sheet of paper as your "Sources" document. This will save you a lot of time later when you are polishing your speech.

Plan to use your time effectively. What information do you hope to find in the library? Make a list. Try to combine tasks and get your investigation completed efficiently. Go to the library once with a list, rather than three times without one. Ask the research librarian for assistance in grouping information and where to find it.

As you search through articles, books, Web sites, and images for your presentation, consider how each element relates specifically to the key points in your speech. Don't just look for the first citation or reference that fits your list. Rushing through the research process can result in leaving out key areas of support or illustration in your speech, an outcome you may not be happy with. Instead, enjoy the fun of searching for material for your speech—but be aware that it is easy for your list under each key point to grow and grow with “must include” information. As we discussed earlier, narrowing your topic is a key strategy in crafting a good speech. Try not to “commit” to information until you have gathered more than you need, then go back and choose the most relevant and most interesting facts, quotations, and visual aids.

You might think of this as the “accordion phase” of preparing your speech, as the amount of material first gets bigger and then smaller. You'll feel a sense of loss as you edit and come to realize that your time frame simply does not allow for all the great information you found—but remember that nobody else will know what *didn't* go into your speech, they will just appreciate the good material you did choose. As you sift through information, look for the promising, effective elements to include and omit the rest. In your English class, you often need to edit and revise a paper to produce a rough draft before your final draft. This process parallels the production of a rough draft. By taking notes with your key point in mind, you'll begin to see your speech come together.

Searching for Information on the Internet

Finding information on the Internet or in electronic databases can decrease your search time, but you will still need to budget time to accomplish the tasks associated with reviewing, selecting, interpreting, and incorporating information to your particular use.

The World Wide Web is an amazing source of information, but for that very reason, it is difficult to get information you actually need. Let's look at two issues that can make searching online easier: where and how to search for information.

Knowing where to go for information is as important as knowing key words and concepts related to your topic. Do you need general information? Do you need to

survey what's available quickly? Do you prefer searching only reviewed sites? Is your topic education-related? Depending on your answer, you may want to consider where to start your search.

Table 10.1 "Some Examples of Internet Search Sites" presents a summary of main search engines and how they might work for you.

Table 10.1 Some Examples of Internet Search Sites

Description	URL
General Web searches that can also be customized according to categories like news, maps, images, video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.google.ca • http://go.com • http://www.itools.com/research-it • http://www.metacrawler.com • http://www.search.com • http://www.ca.yahoo.com
Dictionaries and encyclopedias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.britannica.com • http://dictionary.reference.com • http://encarta.msn.com • http://www.encyclopedia.com • http://www.merriam-webster.com • http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page • http://dictionary.canadaspace.com/ • www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/
Very basic information on a wide range of topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.about.com • http://www.answers.com • http://canadaonline.about.com/ • http://ca.answers.yahoo.com/
To find people or businesses in white pages or yellow pages listings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.switchboard.com • http://www.anywho.com

Description	URL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.whitepages.ca • http://www.yellowpages.ca • http://www.canada411.ca/
<p>Specialized databases—may be free, require registration, or require a paid subscription</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.apa.org/psycinfo • http://www.peoplelookup.com • http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/ccc-rec.nsf/eng/home • http://sis.agr.gc.ca/cansis/nsdb/intro.html • http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/canada-gazette/index-e.html • http://www.casrdb.mcgill.ca/

At the end of this chapter under “Additional Resources,” you will find a list of many Web sites that may be useful for public speaking research.

Evaluating Your Sources

It is important to be aware of how much online information is incomplete, outdated, misleading, or downright false. Anyone can put up a Web site, and once it is up the owner may or may not enter updates or corrections on a regular basis. Anyone can write a blog on any subject, whether or not that person actually knows much about that subject. Anyone who wishes to contribute to a Wikipedia article can do so—although the postings are moderated by editors who have to register and submit their qualifications. While The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedom of expression, the Canadian Supreme Court does point out that there are limits. This freedom is also restricted by laws against libel (false accusations against a person) and indecency, but those laws can be difficult to enforce. It is always important to look beyond the surface of a site to who sponsors it, where the information displayed came from, and whether the site owner has a certain agenda.

In gathering information for your speech, you will want to draw on reputable, reliable sources—printed ones as well as electronic ones—because they reflect on the credibility of the message, and the messenger. Analyzing and assessing

information is an important skill in speech preparation, and here are six main points to consider when evaluating a document, presentation, or similar source of information. Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2007). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and tools*. Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking Press. In general, documents that represent quality reasoning have

- a clearly articulated purpose and goal;
- a question, problem, or issue to address;
- information, data, and evidence that is clearly relevant to the stated purpose and goals;
- inferences or interpretations that lead to conclusions based on the presented information, data, and evidence;
- a frame of reference or point of view that is clearly articulated;
- assumptions, concepts, and ideas that are clearly articulated

An additional question to ask is *how credible the source* is. This question can be hard to answer even with years of training and expertise. Academic researchers have been trained in the objective, impartial use of the scientific method to determine validity and reliability. But as research is increasingly dependent on funding, and funding often brings specific points of view and agendas with it, pure research can be—and has been—compromised. You can no longer simply assume that “studies show” something without finding out who conducted the study, how it was conducted, and who funded the effort. This may sound like a lot of investigation and present quite a challenge, but again it is worth the effort.

Information literacy is an essential skill set in the process of speech preparation. As you learn to spot key signs of information that will not serve to enhance your credibility and contribute to your presentation, you can increase your effectiveness as you research and analyze your resources. For example, suppose you are preparing an informative speech on safety in the workplace. You might come upon a site owned by a consulting company that specializes in safety analysis. The site might give many statistics, illustrating the frequency of on-the-job accidents, repetitive motion injuries, workplace violence, and so on. But the sources of these percentage figures may not be credited. As an intelligent researcher, you need to ask yourself whether the consulting company that owns the site performed its own research to get these numbers. Most likely it did not—so why are the sources not cited? Moreover, such a site would unlikely mention any free workplace safety resources available from sources such as Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS). Less biased sources of information would be the American Management Association, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and other not-for-profit organizations that study workplace safety.

The Internet also encompasses thousands of interactive sites where readers can ask and answer questions. Some sites, like Askville by Amazon.com, WikiAnswers, and Yahoo! Answers, are open to almost any topic. Others, like ParentingQuestions and WebMD, deal with specific topics. Chat rooms on bridal Web sites allow couples who are planning a wedding to share advice and compare prices for gowns, florists, caterers, and so on. Reader comment sites like Newsvine facilitate discussions about current events. Customer reviews are available for just about everything imaginable, from hotels and restaurants to personal care products, home improvement products, and sports equipment. These contributors are not experts, nor do they pretend to be. Some may have extreme opinions that are not based in reality. Then, too, it is always possible for a vendor to “plant” favourable customer reviews on the Internet to make its product look good. Although the “terms of use,” which contributors must agree to, usually forbid the posting of advertisements, profanity, or personal attacks, some sites do a better job than others in monitoring and deleting such material. Nevertheless, if your speech research involves finding out how the “average person” feels about an issue in the news, or whether a new type of home exercise device really works as advertised, these comment and customer review sites can be very useful indeed.

It may seem like it’s a hard work to assess your sources, to make sure your information is accurate and truthful, but the effort is worth it. Business and industry rely on reputation and trust, just as we individuals do, in order to maintain healthy relationships. Your speech is an important part of that reputation and interaction.

Compiling Your Information

When you have investigated and narrowed your topic, it’s time to compile your information. **Compiling**⁵ involves composing your speech out of materials from the documents and other sources you have collected. This process has seven major steps, adapted from a model by Anderson, Anderson and Williams: sensitivity, exposure, assimilation and accommodation, incubation, incorporation, production and revision. Andrews, P., Andrews, J., & Williams, G. (1999). *Public speaking: Connecting you and your audience*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

5. Involves composing your speech out of materials from the documents and other sources you have collected.

6. Your capacity to respond to stimulation, be excited, be responsive, or be susceptible to new information.

Sensitivity⁶ refers to your capacity to respond to stimulation, be excited, be responsive, or be susceptible to new information. This starts with your self-inventory of what you are interested or involved in as you did in the first of the [Note 10.1 "Introductory Exercises"](#) for this chapter. If you are intrigued by a topic or area of interest, your enthusiasm will carry through to your speech and make it more stimulating for your audience. You may not have considered, or even noticed, elements or ideas associated with your topic, but now that you have begun the process of investigation, you see them everywhere. For example, have you ever

heard someone say a word or phrase that you never heard before, but now that you are familiar with it, you hear it everywhere? This same principle applies to your sensitivity to ideas related to your topic. You'll notice information and it will help you as you develop your awareness of your topic and the many directions you could take the speech. Cognitive psychologists use the term "priming" to refer to this excited state of awareness. Yaniv, I., & Meyer, D. (1987). Activation and metacognition of inaccessible stored information: Potential bases for incubation effects in problem solving. *Journal of Experimental Psychology Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 13, 187–205.

Exposure⁷ occurs when views or ideas are presented to you, or you come to know something through direct experience. If you are thinking of giving an informative speech on flying an airplane but have never flown before, your level of exposure may be low. Your level of awareness may be high, however, in terms of the importance of security on commercial airlines after reading about, watching on television, or hearing on the radio stories after the events of September 11, 2001. You may decide to expose yourself to more information through a range of sources as you investigate the topic of airline security. The more you become exposed to the issues, processes and goals of your topic, the more likely you are to see areas of interest, think of new ideas that might fit in your speech, and form patterns of awareness you did not perceive previously.

Assimilation⁸ and **accommodation**⁹ refers to the process by which you integrate (assimilate) new ideas into your thinking patterns, and adopt (accommodate) or filter out new sources of information as they relate to your goal. You may have had preconceived notions or ideas about airline security before you began your investigation, but new information has changed the way you view your topic. You might also find issues (e.g., right to privacy) that may be points of conflict with your beliefs as you review information. This stage is important to the overall process of developing your topic and takes time. You need time to be able to contemplate, review, and reflect on how the new information fits or fails to connect clearly to your chosen topic.

Incubation¹⁰ is the process by which you cause an idea or ideas to develop in your mind. This might not happen all at once, and you might spend time thinking about the new information, directions, or ways you might develop or focus your topic. Consider the meaning of the word "incubation" as it relates to chickens and eggs. An egg may look ready to hatch as soon as the hen lays it, but it needs time and a warm environment to develop. You might have an idea but need to create an environment for it to develop. This might involve further investigation and exploration, or it may involve removing yourself from active research to "digest" what you have already learned. If you feel "stuck" on an idea or perceive an inability to move on in the development of your ideas or topic, giving it a rest may

7. The process that occurs when views or ideas are presented to you, or you come to know something through direct experience.
8. The process by which you integrate new ideas into your thinking patterns.
9. The process by which you adapt or filter out new sources of information as they relate to your goal.
10. The process by which you cause an idea or ideas to develop in your mind.

be the best course of action. You may also find that just when you least expect it, an idea, fully formed, flashes into your mind and you ask yourself, “Why didn’t I see that before?” Before the idea escapes you, write it down and make sure you can refer to it later.

Incorporation¹¹ refers to the process by which you bring the information into a whole or complete topic. By now you have investigated, chosen some information over others, and have started to see how the pieces will come together. Your perceptions of how the elements come together will form the basis for the organization of your speech. It will contribute to the logic of your message and help you produce a coherent, organized speech that your audience can follow clearly.

Production¹² involves the act of creating your speech from the elements you have gathered. You may start to consider what comes first, what goes last, and how you will link your ideas and examples together. You may find that you need additional information, and can go back to your notes that you took to find the source quickly and easily. You may also start to communicate with friends, sharing some of the elements or even practicing the first drafts of your speech, learning where the connections are clear and where they need work.

Revision¹³ is the process by which you look over your speech again in order to correct or improve it. You will notice elements that need further investigation, development, or additional examples and visual aids as you produce your speech. This is an important step to the overall production of your speech, much like revising an essay for an English course. The first time you said, thought, or wrote something it may have made sense to you, but upon reflection and after trying an idea out, you need it to be revised in order to work effectively as part of your speech. You may revisit the place in which you started, and start all speeches, by reconsidering the rhetorical situation and see if what you have produced is in line with the expectations of the audience. Your awareness of the content, audience, and purpose of the rhetorical situation will guide you through the revision process and contribute to the production of a more effective speech.

11. The process by which you bring the information into a whole or complete topic.
12. Involves the act of creating your speech from the elements you have gathered; you may start to consider what comes first, what goes last, and how you will link your ideas and examples together.
13. The process by which you look over your speech again in order to correct or improve it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

To find resources for your speech, narrow your topic and plan your search for information. Be aware of ethics, selecting reliable content, and avoiding plagiarism. Stay organized, and be a wise consumer of Internet information. Last, compile your information into a coherent series of main points.

EXERCISES

1. Find at least one example of an Internet site that is sponsored by each of the following:
 - Local, provincial, or federal government in Canada or another country
 - For-profit corporation that sells a product or service to the general public
 - Not-for-profit organization
 - Private or public college, university, or other school
2. Describe the type of information available on each of your chosen sites. How do they differ from one another? What do they have in common? Discuss your findings with your classmates.
3. Find a Web site you find particularly useful in terms of information. Write a brief review and then share with classmates.
4. Find a Web site you find particularly poor in terms of your ability to access information. Write a brief review and then share with classmates.
5. When creating a speech, is it appropriate to omit certain information? Explain and discuss your thoughts with a classmate.
6. How can a persuasive speech be ethical? Explain your opinion and give some examples. Compare and share in class.

10.4 Myths and Realities of Public Speaking

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe common myths and realities of public speaking.

Now that you have identified your purpose, chosen your topic and thesis statement, gathered and organized your material, you are almost ready to put your speech into its final form. At this juncture, let's examine some common public speaking myths and outline the guidelines you'll need to consider as you prepare to face your audience. There are a lot of myths associated with public speaking. In many ways these guidelines dispel common perceptions of public speaking and may lead you to be more open with yourself and your audience as you prepare and present your speech.

Speaking in Public Is Not Like Killing Lions

From an evolutionary biology perspective, our bodies have developed to respond to stress in advantageous ways. When we needed to run from a bear, hunt a lion, or avoid a snake, our bodies predictably got us prepared with a surge of adrenaline. Burnham, T., & Phelan, J. (2000). *Mean genes: From sex to money to food: Taming our primal instincts*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus. Hunters who didn't respond well to stress or failed at hunting were less likely to live long enough to reach maturity and reproduce. So we have the successful hunter to thank for our genes, but people in developed countries today do not need hunting skills to feed their families.

While food is still an issue in many parts of the world, our need to respond to threats and stress has shifted from our evolutionary roots to concern over our job, our relationships, and how we negotiate a modern economy. Communication is a great resource and tool, and we can apply the principles and lessons to ourselves. We can create the perception that the speech is like defeating the lion and really get ourselves worked up. Or we can choose to see it as a natural extension of communication with others.

Speaking in public itself is not inherently stressful, but our response to the stimulus can contribute to or reduce our level of stress. We all will have a stress response to a new, unknown, or unfamiliar stimulus. Nevertheless, the butterflies in our stomach

are a response we can choose to control by becoming more familiar with the expectations, preparation, and performance associated with speaking in public.

You Don't Have to Be Perfect

Letting go of perfection can be the hardest guideline to apply to ourselves. It's also in our nature to compare ourselves to others and ourselves. You might forgive a classmate for the occasional "umm" during a speech, but then turn right around and spend a lot of mental effort chastising yourself for making the same error in your presentation. We all have distinct strengths and weaknesses. Knowing yourself and where you need to improve is an important first step. Recognizing that Rome wasn't built in a day, and that you won't become a world-class speaker overnight, may be easier said than done.

It may help to recognize that your listeners don't want to see you fail; on the contrary, they want you to do well, because when you do, they will be able to relax and enjoy your presentation. You might be surprised to know that not everyone counts each time you say "umm." However, if "umm," "ahhh," or "you know what I mean" are phrases that you tend to repeat, they will distract your audience from your message. Eliminating such distracting habits can become a goal for improvement. Improvement is a process, not an end in itself; in fact, many people believe that learning to speak in public is more about the journey than the destination. Each new setting, context, and audience will present new challenges, and your ability to adapt, learned through your journey of experience, will help you successfully meet each new challenge.

Organization Is Key to Success

Have you ever thought of a great comeback to something someone said a while after they said it? Wouldn't it have been nice to be quick and articulate and able to deliver your comeback right then and there? Speaking in public gives you a distinct advantage over "off the cuff" improvisation and stumbling for the right comeback. You get to prepare and be organized. You know you'll be speaking to an audience in order to persuade them to do, think, or consider an idea or action.

What issues might they think of while you are speaking? What comebacks or arguments might they say if it were a debate? You get to anticipate what the audience will want to know, say, or hear. You get to prepare your statements and visual aids to support your speech and create the timing, organization, and presentation of each point. Many times in life we are asked to take a position and feel unprepared to respond. Speaking in public gives you the distinct opportunity to

prepare and organize your ideas or points in order to make an impact and respond effectively.

Speaking in Public Is Like Participating in a Conversation

This may sound odd at first, but consider the idea of an “enlarged conversation” described by Julia T. Wood. Woods, J. (2001). *Communication mosaics: An introduction to the field of communication* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. She expresses a clear connection between everyday speech and public dialogue. Sometimes we take a speech turn, while at other times we remain silent while others take their turn. We do this all day long and think nothing of it. We are often the focus of attention from friends and colleagues and it hardly ever makes us nervous. When we get on a stage, however, some people perceive that the whole game has changed. It hasn't. We still take turns, and the speaker will take a longer turn as part of an enlarged conversation. People in the audience will still communicate feedback and the speaker will still negotiate his or her turn just the way they would in an everyday conversation. The difference is all about how we, as the speaker, perceive the context.

Some people feel that the level of expectations, the need for perfection, or the idealistic qualities we perceive in eloquent speakers are required, and then focus on deficiencies, fears, and the possibility of failing to measure up. By letting go of this ideal, we can approach the challenge with a more pragmatic frame of mind. The rules we play comfortably by in conversation every day are the same as we shift to a larger conversation within the context of public speaking. This viewpoint can offer an alternative as you address your apprehensions, and help you let go of unrealistic expectations.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Public speaking does not have to be a “fright or flight” experience; it can be like holding a half of a friendly conversation. This will especially be true if you do a good job of preparing and organizing your presentation ahead of time.

EXERCISES

1. Have you ever done a creative visualization exercise? Try this one and see how it helps you prepare your speech. Choose a quiet place, sit in a comfortable position, and close your eyes. Picture yourself getting up to give your oral presentation. Picture what you want to happen—you will speak confidently, clearly, and engagingly. Your audience will listen attentively and consider the merit of your points. When you are finished, they will applaud and express appreciation for the good job you have done.
2. Write out a series of goal statements, one for each part or point of your presentation. What do you want to accomplish with each section, visual aid, or statement? Share your results with classmates.
3. Consider the elements of a speech to inform and adapt them for a speech to persuade. In what ways would you adjust key points or issues?

10.5 Overcoming Obstacles in Your Presentation

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Overcome common obstacles in public speaking.

We have examined steps to help you investigate and build an effective speech, and discussed some myths, and realities, associated with public speaking. In order to prepare you for success, let's revisit some obstacles you'll want to avoid in order to make your content as accessible to your audience as possible. To build on what we covered, let's examine three key barriers to an effective speech: language, perception, and ethnocentrism. As a speaker, you will need to make an effort to consider each one and how you will create a bridge, rather than contribute to a barrier, with your audience.

Language

Language serves both to bring us together and to help us reinforce our group status. Language can include established languages, like Spanish or French; dialects; or even subtle in-group language styles within a larger language context. Have you ever been part of a group that has its own words or phrases, expressions that have meanings understood only by the members of your group? It is not unusual for families, groups of close friends, classmates, and romantic couples to develop these kinds of "private language." When a group communicates in its own way, it can create a sense of belonging, reinforcing your membership and place in that group.

People often tell each other stories, which often communicate a value or meaning in the culture. Perhaps you have heard the saying, "The early bird gets the worm," with its underlying meaning that the one who is prepared and ready gets the reward. In North America, this saying is common, and reflects a cultural value about promptness and competition. Diverse cultures have diverse sayings that reflect differences in values, customs, and traditions.

Judy Pearson, Paul Nelson, Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An introduction to human communication: Understanding and sharing*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. and Joseph DeVito DeVito, J. (1986). *The communication handbook: A dictionary*. New York, NY: Harper & Row. describe two key areas of language that serve to bring us together, but because they involve a specialized knowledge unique to the group or community, they can create barriers to outsiders. These are often called **co-**

languages¹⁴, because they exist and interact with a dominant language but are nonetheless distinct from it. **Jargon**¹⁵ is an occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Think of the way medical caregivers speak to one another, frequently using abbreviations for procedures and medications. **Slang**¹⁶ is the use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect. Think of how the words “sick,” “fly,” or “chill” are used in casual conversation (and as you read this, these words are probably already out of fashion. What are some current slang terms that you use in everyday conversation?) In addition to language-based barriers, there are also several factors, many of which we have visited in previous chapters, which can act as barriers to effective intercultural communication.

Nature of Perception

Perception is an important part of the communication process, and it is important to recognize that other people’s perceptions may be different from our own in several ways.

Your **cultural value system**¹⁷, what you value and pay attention to, will significantly affect your speech and how your listeners perceive it. North American culture places an emphasis on space, with an “appropriate” distance while shaking hands, for example. If a North American travels to France, Spain, or Chile, he or she will find that a much smaller sense of personal space is the norm, and may receive a kiss on the cheek as a greeting from a new acquaintance. If the North American is uncomfortable, the person from France may not attribute his or her discomfort to personal space, and they may have a miscommunication. Learning about other cultures can help you adapt your speech in diverse settings, and make you more comfortable as you enter new situations where others’ perceptions are different from your own.

Role identities¹⁸, which involve expected social behaviour, are another aspect of intercultural communication that can act as a barrier to effective communication. How does your culture expect men and women to act and behave? How about children, or elders, and older citizens? The word “role” implies an expectation of how one is supposed to act in certain settings and scenes; just like in a play or a movie, each person has a culturally bound set of role expectations. Who works as a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, or a welder? As times and cultures change, so do role identities. Business management was once perceived as a profession dominated by men, but in recent decades women have become actively involved in starting, developing, and facilitating the growth of businesses. As a speaker, your role will necessarily involve preparation and practice, and to a degree an element of leadership as you present your content and guide your audience through it. Your

14. Language systems that exist and interact with dominant language but are nonetheless distinct from it.
15. An occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession.
16. The use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect.
17. What you value and pay attention to.
18. Expected social behaviours. Another aspect of intercultural communication that can act as a barrier to effective communication.

audience also has a role, which involves active listening and displays of interest. Your overlapping roles of interest in the topic are keys to an effective speech.

Goals¹⁹ reflect what we value and are willing to work for and vary widely across cultures. In some cultures, an afternoon lunch is the main meal of the day, a time with the family, which is followed by a siesta or resting period. In Canada and Northern Europe, people often have a quick lunch or even a “working lunch,” with the emphasis on continuing productivity and the goal of personal and organizational achievement. The differences in values, such as family time versus work time, establish themselves in how we lead our lives. To a European who is accustomed to a full month of vacation each year, the thought of someone from Canada spending a few intense, three-day power weekends hiking, skiing, or snowboarding might seem stressful. To a goal-oriented North American, the power weekend may be just the rejuvenation required to get “back in the game.” Time, and limits on it, will be an important goal in your speech.

Geert Hofstede has spent decades researching the concepts of individualism versus collectivism across diverse cultures. He characterized both Canadian and U.S. culture as strongly individualistic: people perceive things primarily from their own viewpoint, see themselves as individuals capable of making his or her own decisions, and feel responsible for their actions and solving their own problems. Hofstede, G. (1982). *Culture’s consequences* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage. He also found many countries in Asia and South America to be much more collectivistic, focusing on the needs of the family, community, or larger group. In this context, cultural background can become a barrier to an effective speech if you fail to consider your audience and their needs.

Figure 10.3



In our diverse world, awareness of difference in values is key to success.

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In addition, there are other cultural dimensions that influence how we relate to the world that impact our intercultural communication. Carley Dodd discusses the degree to which cultures communicate rules explicitly or implicitly. Dodd, C. (1998). *Dynamics of intercultural communication* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. In an explicit context, the rules are discussed before we hold a meeting, negotiate a contract, or even play a game. In Canada and the United States, we want to make sure everyone knows the rules beforehand and get frustrated if people do not follow the rules. In the Middle East and Latin America, the rules are generally understood by everyone, and people

19. What we value and are willing to work for, and varies widely across cultures.

from these cultures tend to be more accommodating to small differences and are less concerned about whether or not everyone plays by the same rules. Our ability to adapt to contexts that are explicit or implicit is related to our ability to tolerate uncertainty. Hofstede, G. (1982). *Culture's consequences* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

In Canada, we often look to guiding principles rather than rules for every circumstance, and believe that with hard work, we can achieve our goals even though we do not know the outcome. In Peru, Chile, and Argentina, however, people prefer to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty, and like to know exactly what is expected and what the probable outcome will be. Samovar, L., Porter, R., & Stefani, L. (1998). *Communication between cultures* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Table 10.2 Cultural Dimensions

Individualistic Cultures. People value individual freedom and personal independence.	Collectivistic Cultures. People value the family or community over the needs of the individual.
Explicit-Rule Cultures. People discuss rules and expectations clearly to make sure the rules are known.	Implicit-Rule Cultures. People's customs are implied and known by everyone, but not always clearly stated.
Uncertainty-Accepting Cultures. People often focus on principles, rather than having rules for every circumstance, and accept that the outcome is not always known.	Uncertainty-Rejecting Cultures. People often focus on rules for every circumstance and do not like ambiguity or not knowing what the outcome will be.

When we consider whether a culture as a whole places more emphasis on the individual or the community, we must be careful to recognize that individual members of the culture may hold beliefs or customs that do not follow a cultural norm. **Stereotypes**²⁰, defined as generalizations about a group of people that oversimplify their culture, Rogers, E., & Steinfatt, T. (1999). *Intercultural communication*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. can be one significant barrier to effective intercultural communication. Gordon Allport, a pioneer in the field of communication research, examined how and when we formulate or use stereotypes to characterize distinct groups or communities. He found that we tend to stereotype people and cultures with which we have little contact. Allport, G. (1958). *The nature of prejudice*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

20. Generalizations about a group of people that oversimplify their culture

21. A negative preconceived judgement or opinion that guides conduct or social behaviour.

In addition, your first-hand experience will provide you with an increased understanding of prejudice. **Prejudice**²¹ involves a negative preconceived judgement or opinion that guides conduct or social behaviour. Within Canada, can

you make a list of people or groups that may be treated with prejudice by the majority group? Your list may include specific ethnic, racial, or cultural groups that are stereotyped in the media, but it could also include socioeconomic groups or even different regions of the country. For example, Aboriginal peoples were long treated with prejudice in early Western films. Can you imagine, in other countries they may also treat groups with prejudice? In many parts of South America, indigenous people are treated poorly and their rights as citizens are sometimes not respected. Has treatment of Aboriginals changed in North America? Yes, it has, and it still continues to change in both North and South America.

People who treat other with prejudice often make judgements about the group or communities. As Allport illustrated for us, we often assume characteristics about groups with which we have little contact. By extension, we can sometimes assume that people are all basically similar, in effect denying cultural, racial, or ethnic differences. We sometimes describe Canada as a “melting pot,” where individual and cultural differences blend to become a homogeneous culture. This “melting pot” often denies cultural differences. The metaphor of a “salad bowl,” where communities and cultures retain their distinctive characteristics or “flavour,” serves as more equitable model. In this “salad bowl,” we value the differences and what they contribute to the whole.

We can also run the risk of assuming familiarity with cultures when we attribute characteristics of one group to everyone who has connections to the larger culture. For example, people may assume that we are familiar with all Aboriginal groups if we know one tribe in our community, forgetting the distinct differences that exist between tribes and even between individual Aboriginals who live either in urban areas or on reservations.

Ethnocentrism

Finally, your experience may help you to not view the world and its diversity of cultures in an ethnocentric way. **Ethnocentrism**²² means you go beyond pride in your culture, heritage or background and hold the “conviction that (you) know more and are better than those of different cultures.” Seiler, W., & Beall, M. (2000). *Communication: Making connections* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. This belief in the superiority of one’s own group can guide individual and group behaviour. If you visit a new country where people do things differently, you would be considered ethnocentric if you viewed their way as wrong because it is not the same way you were taught. Groups are considered ethnocentric if they prejudge individuals or other groups of people based on negative preconceptions.

22. The tendency to view other cultures as inferior to one’s own.

KEY TAKEAWAY

For a successful oral presentation, do your best to avoid obstacles to understanding, such as language expressions (i.e., unknown to other listeners), cultural perceptions, and ethnocentrism.

EXERCISES

1. Consider the vocabulary that you and your classmates generally use in casual conversations. Are there slang expressions that you often use? Is there a jargon related to your career or major field of study? Make a list of slang and jargon words that you might want to use in a speech. Now, consider whether you can substitute standard English words that will be better understood by all your listeners, remembering that in a business context it is often best to avoid slang and jargon.
2. Pretend you were going to invite someone from a completely different culture to come home with you for a break or holiday. Make a list of ideas, words, or places you would want to share with them to gain insight of you, your family, or your community.
3. How can a speaker prepare a speech for a diverse audience? Explain and give some specific examples. Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.
4. Observe someone presenting a speech. Given the discussion in this chapter, what elements of their speech could you use in your speech? What elements would you not want to use? Why? Compare with a classmate.

10.6 Additional Resources

The Canadian Intellectual Property Office's Guide to Copyrights explores what copyright is, and the benefits of registration and the registration process.
<http://www.cipo.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/cipointernet-internetopic.nsf/eng/wr02393.html#purpose>

Oral communication skill is key to success in politics. Library and Archives Canada offers a collection of prime ministerial speeches broken down by subject.
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/primeministers/h4-4000-e.html>

Schooltube.com offers a video archive of student government speeches.
<http://www.schooltube.com/video/27713/2009-Student-Government-Campaign-Speeches>

The CBC's Digital Archives includes archived speeches on topics ranging from poetry readings to environmental protection to World War II.
<http://archives.cbc.ca/>

Thunderbird School of Global Management operates Thunderbird Knowledge Network, an interactive forum on contemporary business issues delivered in stories, columns, videos, podcasts, and blogs.
<http://knowledgenetwork.thunderbird.edu/research>

Watch an informative speech on “Avoiding Stereotypes in Public Speaking” on eHow.com. http://www.ehow.com/video_4401072_avoiding-stereotypes-public-speaking.html