

Giving a Persuasive Speech

How to communicate effectively and compellingly

*Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense.
(Ralph Waldo Emerson in Letters and Social Aims)*

Summary:

This guide covers the three steps to preparing and delivering a persuasive speech. They are:

- A. **Preparing:** Determining the goals of your speech; organizing your thoughts into 1-3 major themes
- B. **Presenting:** Start strong; stick to major points; close strong
- C. **Practicing:** Delivery

A. Preparing Your Speech:

1. Determine your goal. Speaking persuasively in a speech is a valuable professional skill. This ability helps you convince listeners to view an issue as you do, and achieve goals that require the support of others.

The first thing to do if you need to give a persuasive speech, is to consider your audience and your goals. Your thoughts will be the foundation of the outline of what you are going to say, as well as how you will say it. So, take a few minutes to jot down some answers to the following questions:

1. Who is your audience, and what you are trying to convince them of?
2. Why is what you are trying to convince them of important? What will they gain?
3. Why would they be reluctant to be convinced? What can you say to alleviate their concerns?
4. What 'take away' pieces of information do you want them to leave with, after hearing you speak?

FOR EXAMPLE:

Let's look at Ernesto Rojas, who is giving a 10-minute speech to request funding for his group's initiative to have a networking event. He might jot down the following ideas:

My audience is the dean of my school and the dean's funding committee. I want to convince them to consider funding my group's alumni networking dinner. Though there are a lot of good proposals which might attract them, mine meets the funding guidelines, will have a big impact, and focuses on developing a key professional skill. By the end of my speech, I want them to see:

1. How valuable this opportunity would be for students' career and professional development,
2. That it would be well attended and a good investment,
3. That my group has the organizational ability to organize an event like this successfully,
4. That a networking event is in line with the dean's goals of promoting professional development,
5. That it's a better use of funds than other options being presented here today,
6. That there hasn't been a networking event like this in a long time,
7. That it would be fun.

With these goals in mind, Ernesto can begin to organize how to will present this information. So take a few minutes to jot down your thoughts for the goals of your speech.

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2. Organize your thoughts into 1-3 major themes. Speeches that last between 3-10 minutes are not a great deal of time to make multiple points and to provide sufficient evidence to prove that point. Even if you have over ten reasons to support your view, you need to prioritize your strongest 2-4 points, or risk losing your audience's attention.

Let's look again at Ernesto's notes about what information he wants to share with the dean's committee. He looks at his seven points, and both combines and narrows them down to what he thinks are his three best arguments to convince the committee to fund the networking dinner. These become the themes of his speech.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Ernesto summarizes and prioritizes his seven points into three main themes. These are his best arguments:

- **Theme 1.** How valuable this opportunity would be for students' career and professional development, which is in line with the dean's goal of promoting professional development,
- **Theme 2.** This event would be well attended, and a good investment, and,
- **Theme 3.** My group has the organizational ability to organize an event like this successfully.

Take a few minutes to review the ideas that prove the point you are trying to make. If there are over 3, decide which are your strongest. With this information, you now know **what** you are going to say. Now let's address **how** you're going to say it.

B. Presenting Your Speech

The three parts of every good speech: Whether you have one minute or one hour, a typical, effective, persuasive speech follows the following format:

1. **Opening:** Summarize what you are going to say.
2. **Body:** Cover your 2-4 major themes.
3. **Conclusion:** Summarize what you just said and make a final, specific appeal.

Let's now look at the purpose of, and how to organize, each of these three parts.

Pacing yourself in a speech:

| | 5 Minutes | 10 Minutes |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Opening | 30 sec - 1 min | 1 min |
| Body (3 themes) | 1 min each | 1-3 min each |
| Close | 30 sec - 1 min | 30 sec - 1 min |

1. The Opening of Your Speech:

Start strong: The first 30 seconds of a speech are your best opportunity to capture the audience's attention and support. There are a number of 'catchy' openings, and we're just listing three successful 3 opening gambits.

Ernesto might say: The SF Chronicle recently stated that 35% of workers found a job through their professional network. That's why I am requesting that this committee fund our group's proposal for an alumni networking dinner.

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I. The goals/issues/summary opening: Here you lead with the purpose of your speech. Examples include:

- There are two reasons I believe that we need to do A: they are B, and C.
- In a clinical situation where depression is a key symptom, exercise is the best, non-invasive intervention.
- I am running for office for only one purpose, to do X.
- Athletic activities currently receive double the funding of the library on campus. This needs to change.

Ernesto might say: There are a number of great proposals being presented today. Why should you choose this one? It's because our request for funding to support an alumni networking dinner will help large number of students develop a key professional skill: how to network, and serve as a community-building activity between students and alumni. Our proposal is about learning, and supporting each other, and about having a good time. Let me tell you more.

II. The question-answer opening: In this option, you lay out your argument by rhetorically asking and answering your audience's question about why they should support you. For example:

- Why select Dr. Canaro as your group leader? There are three reasons. First...
- Why should you support this hand-washing initiative? Because it is the most effective and least expensive approach to help reduce the spread of infection in our hospital.
- What are the options that stand before you today?

III. The start with a story opening: This strategy involves telling a story that illuminates your argument. Stories are a great way to stir the audience's imagination. But limit story to less than a minute, then articulate what the purpose of your speech is. Longer than that, and your listeners may wonder 'where is this going?'

Ernesto might say: Last year, I attended a networking session at the ABC Meeting. Honestly, I found myself unsure about how to best use it as an opportunity to make contacts. Talking with my fellow students, I realized I wasn't alone in my lack of confidence in how to network at a large event. As the dean has noted, networking is a key professional skill. Without it, students can miss out on one of the best benefits of attending UCSF – our alumni. That's why my group would like to organize a networking workshop and alumni dinner for students. And I am here today to ask for your support - because we can't achieve this without your help.

2. The Body of Your Speech:

Stick to major themes: Expect the 'body' of your speech to take about 80% of whatever time you are allotted. It is a chance to flesh out the most relevant details that will support your 2-4 themes.

Let's go back to Ernesto's pitch to the dean's committee to fund his group's networking dinner. Imagine that Ernesto has ten minutes to present. That gives him eight minutes for the body of his speech, or about 2-3 minutes to make his best argument for each of his themes. He might tease out the major points of each theme in the following way:

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FOR EXAMPLE:

Theme 1. *This is a valuable opportunity would be for students career and professional development, which is in line with the dean's goal of promoting professional development.*

- We know that networking is important, and it would foster community to promote networking with our local alumni.

Theme 2. *The networking dinner would be well attended, and a good investment.*

- In our informal poll, 80% of students said the event was a good idea, and they would attend if they could, particularly if there was a wide range of career options featured in the alumni guests.
- The dinner in the Millberry Union Gym could seat up to 200 people, serving many students and numerous alumni.

Theme 3. *Our group has the organizational ability to organize an event like this successfully.*

- We organized a large-scale event (the Halloween dance and fundraiser) similarly last year, and it was well received.
- We are working with the OCPD to pair this event with a 'How to network effectively' workshop to prepare students, and plan to work with alumni affairs to recruit alumni.

Now it's your turn. Review your themes, and take a moment to flesh out 1-2 bullet points of evidence that best supports your themes, and would convince your audience to support you.

3. The Conclusion of Your Speech:

End Strong: This conclusion is your final chance to leave your audience with a positive impression, a summary review, and/or specific request. Once again, there are several types of successful ending tactics. Here, we focus on just three successful conclusion options. They include:

1. Summarize the main points. Restate the main idea in a single 'take away' sentence.
2. Answer the question of why audiences should care.
3. Summarize what larger vision will happen if the audience is persuaded by your speech, or, summarize what larger vision will not happen, if the audience is not persuaded.

One way to assess if you have a strong conclusion is whether or not it could stand on its own as a compelling statement that would sway your listener.

Returning to Ernesto, he chooses a combination of the three conclusion options. In his one minute conclusion, he summarizes his points about why the networking dinner is a good idea. He has a take-away sentence, 'Support this dinner, because networking is key'. He also addresses what will happen if the committee does not support this initiative - students might be charged to attend. In this way, he suggests that the committee can make a big difference in students' lives, just by supporting this initiative

FOR EXAMPLE:

Ernesto might say: In conclusion, I ask you to partner with our group, and help teach UCSF students an important skill: how to develop their professional network. We are so close: We have the OCPD offering a networking workshop to prepare students to make the most of this event. We have funding both from our group and the alumni association. We have the support from the alumni association to invite alumni. All we lack is \$1,500 of support. Without your help, we would have to charge students, which might exclude the very students who would appreciate an opportunity like this the most. For these reasons, my group is here today to ask this committee to help fund for our alumni dinner. **Support this dinner, because networking is key.** Thank you for your consideration of our proposal.

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C. Practicing Your Speech:

Finally, it's time to practice giving your speech. You might believe, incorrectly, that feeling nervous about public speaking is a sign that you cannot be a strong public speaker. This is untrue! Even excellent, experienced speakers can feel all the symptoms of nervousness when presenting: dry mouth, elevated heart rate, shaky voice, etc. Practicing beforehand is one of the best ways to make sure that you get your message across, even if you are feeling some nervousness. Here are some strategies to help you while practicing:

1. Accept that you are nervous about public speaking. For some people, speaking publicly is something they do because it helps them achieve a goal, not necessarily because they enjoy it. Others are always nervous beforehand, but enjoy it after they begin speaking.
2. Practice in front of a mirror, or video yourself. Some find it painful to listen or watch themselves present, **but it helps immensely**. Note what you are doing well, as well as areas of improvement.
3. Only try to work on 1-2 presentation improvements at a time. For example, if you need to slow down, not say 'um' so much, stop fidgeting, and stop pronouncing certain words incorrectly, don't work on them all simultaneously. First, just work on slowing down, and pacing yourself. Then work on pausing, rather than saying 'um', etc.
4. Practice in front of friends, but ask them for feedback on **specific aspects** of your speech's content or your delivery. For example, you can ask a friend to comment on how strong your argument is, and another to focus on what verbal and non-verbal tics you seem to be exhibiting. A third person can focus just on whether or not you are speaking too quickly. In the absence of a request for specific feedback, friends might just say that your presentation 'sounds fine', or is 'okay'.
5. Memorize your opening and closing sentences, so you can begin with eye contact to the audience.

9 Issues & Common Mistakes:

1. **Speaking too quickly:** Many people tend to speed up when speaking publically, particularly when they are excited, nervous, or think they are running out of time. One way to pace yourself if you have notes is to write yourself one. Write "Slow", to remind yourself to slow down, or "Breathe" to take a moment to take a breath and make eye contact with your audience. Also you can write expected times in your presentation, so if you are significantly ahead, say by 30 seconds, you can recalibrate your speed. Also, sometimes people have friends in the back to signal if they are speaking too quickly.
 2. **Getting lost in your speech:** If you are speaking from notes, have markers to help you gauge where you are in your presentation. For example, bold/capitalize the word "OPENING" or "FIRST THEME", "SECOND THEME". If you forget what you were going to say and get lost, scan your notes quickly. If you cannot find your place after 5 second, then you can summarize and wrap up whatever theme you were discussing, and move onto to your next theme.
 3. **Overwhelming your audience with too much information.** There is data that suggests that audiences really can only remember 3 things in the course of a presentation. However, sometimes speakers drone on with seven or ten themes, hoping that if they share every argument, 'something will stick'. This is a mistake. You don't need to include **every** reason, just the strongest ones.
 4. **Using filler words or verbal tics, such as 'um', or 'uh', or 'like'.** It will be difficult to recognize how often you do this without recording yourself. So, consider recording yourself, or having a friend
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listen to your speech, and raise their hand every time you use a filler word. Words like “Um”, “uh”, etc., are called ‘filler words’ because they fit in the space between an idea you have just shared, and the time that you need to figure out what you want to say next. Instead of using a filler phrase, just be silent in that moment. People expect silences between ideas anyway, to give themselves a moment to digest what was just shared. Additionally, if you find yourself using a verbal tic repeatedly, (such as ‘like’ or ‘really’), just try to be mindful that you’re doing it, and consciously try to reduce the number of times you use the word.

5. **Twitching, fidgeting, hair twirling, or other non-verbal nervous tics.** If you see yourself on video, or a friend points out to you that you are engaged in a distracting series of nervous tics, know that is difficult to ‘just stop doing that’. Instead consider focusing that nervous energy towards your hands. You might have noticed that some speakers use their hands to make or further animate a point. You can as well. If you have three points to share, consider holding up three fingers and tic off each one as you make a point. If you are making a point about needing the audience’s support, you can say, “We can do it!” while waving your hand as if to invite the audience to your perspective. The idea is to use your nervous energy effectively.
6. **Not ending confidently/ trailing off or mumbling endings:** Sometimes speakers don’t know how to end a thought, and they trail off or mumble the final words of a sentence or idea. If you can’t think of anything additional to say, don’t mumble – emphasize! Forcefully say the final word in your sentence. The stop speaking and purposefully look at your audience. For example, “.....and that’s why this is.....**Important**”. Additionally, if you’re done with your speech, signal that fact with a final phrase, like, “Thank you for your attention” and/or, “I would welcome any questions”. Then put down your notes, look at your audience and smile.
7. **Pronunciation issues.** In your notes, phonetically write out the words you have trouble pronouncing in large bold letters, and highlight them so you can see when they are coming up. When the time comes, look down and read the text at a slightly slower pace, and then look up again and make eye contact, as you continue to speak.
8. **Not making eye contact:** Here’s a simple tip: Think of your favorite color – say, blue. Make a point throughout your presentation to look out into the audience and let your eyes scan for blue items. It is easy to get distracted when looking out at faces, or making direct eye contact with your audience. Instead scan your eyes and look **near** their faces (say, at the top button of the blue shirt a person is wearing). From a distance, the audience will not be able to tell the difference.
9. **Getting psyched out by another speaker:** It is very common to imagine the ‘invisible, perfect other speaker’ when preparing your speech. This imaginary speaker is more popular, a better speaker, has a more convincing argument, and on, and on. Accept that all of these things may be true (or not), but your goal is just to present the most compelling speech **you** can, and to allow the audience to decide if they will be swayed. Challenge yourself to improve your persuasive argument and presentation skills, rather than trying to ‘beat’ the other person.

Additional Resources

- There are a number of good presentation resources in the OCPD Career Library. Visit us online at career.ucsf.edu, or in the Medical Sciences Building, 513 Parnassus Avenue, Room S140. We are open from 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday. Call us at 415-476-4986.
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- All students can also join UC Oracles: UCSF's Toastmasters International Club. Their mission is to "provide a mutually supportive and positive learning environment in which every member has the opportunity to develop outstanding communication and leadership skills, fostering self-confidence and personal growth". For more information, visit their website at <http://ucoracles.ucsf.edu/>
 - Pharmacy students can also attend *Speak Up!* workshops. Visit the student calendar website, or the OCPD calendar at career.ucsf.edu, to see when the next event will be offered.
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