

Chapter

10



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Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter and completing the online activities for this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Describe the importance of informative speaking and its relevance to your life.
2. Define criteria for a strong informative speech topic.
3. Identify different ways to organize the informative speech.

Informative Speaking

At a Glance

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INTRODUCTION

informative speech

Type of speech that communicates information and ideas in a way that an audience will understand and remember.

Whether you are a nurse conducting CPR training for new parents at the local community center, a museum curator delivering a speech on impressionist art, or an auto repair shop manager updating your workers on the implications of a recent manufacturer's recall notice, your **informative speech** goal is *to communicate information and ideas in a way that your audience will understand and remember*. You want your audience to gain understanding of your topic. In your job, community activities, and in this public speaking class, remember that the audience should hear *new* knowledge, not facts they already know.

In this chapter, we first distinguish informative speaking from persuasive speaking. Next, we identify different types of informative speeches. Finally, goals and strategies for informative speaking are presented.

The online lesson further identifies the chief differences between informative and persuasive speaking by examining informative and persuasive speech outlines on the same topic. See Topic 1.



10.1 Informative versus Persuasive Speaking

When she was younger, one of the authors of this textbook remembers her parents telling her a story about how they took a free tour of a resort while they were traveling. It was their intent to learn more about the resort so, if they were ever in that part of the country again, they could know if they would like to stay there. Instead of gaining valuable information, however, they were bombarded by a pushy salesperson that told them why they should buy a timeshare at the resort. Details, history, and highlights (otherwise known as information) were replaced with arguments, rhetorical tactics, and sales pitches (elements of persuasion). After that unsettling



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FIGURE 10.1 Speaking informatively can take place in a variety of situations, including the workplace.

experience, her parents vowed to be mindful of “free tours.” Informative and persuasive speaking clearly have different aims. As a speaker, it is important to know the profound differences between these types of speaking so that your responsibilities to both the topic and your audience are successfully fulfilled. To clarify this goal, the next few pages will differentiate between these speech types.

When you deliver an informative speech, your intent is to enlighten your audience—to increase understanding or awareness and, perhaps, to create an appreciation of the topic. In contrast, when you deliver a persuasive speech, your intent is to influence your audience to agree with your point of view, to change attitudes or beliefs, or to bring about a specific, desired action.

10.1.1 The Purpose of Informative Speaking

Maintaining the integrity of these different purposes can be a challenge. For example, if you developed an informative speech on the consequences of calling off a marriage at the last minute, your main points might include relationship damage (friends and family), emotional trauma, and financial difficulties. These are acceptable informative topic areas. If, however, in your speech you instead suggest that engaged couples in your audience implement safeguards to prevent emotional or financial damage, you are being persuasive implicitly. When you tell the men in your audience that they should obtain a written statement from their fiancées pledging the return of the engagement ring if the relationship ends, you are asking for explicit action, and you have blurred the line between information and persuasion.

The key to informative speaking is *intent*. If your goal is to expand understanding, your speech is informative. If, in the process, you also want your audience to change their minds or agree with your point of view, you may be crossing the line into persuasive territory.

To ensure that your speech is informative rather than persuasive, begin by crafting a clear, specific purpose that reflects your intent. Compare the following two specific purpose statements:

Specific purpose statement #1 (SPS#1) To inform my listeners about cosmetic surgery, specifically the various cosmetic surgery procedures one can get, how much these procedures cost, and how such procedures have influenced society’s perception of beauty.

Specific purpose statement #2 (SPS#2) To inform my listeners about the rampant outbreak of cosmetic surgery procedures plaguing society, their exorbitant costs, and how they have tainted our culture’s perception of beauty.

While the intent of the first statement is informational, the intent of the second is definitely persuasive. The speaker in SPS#1 is likely to discuss various cosmetic surgeries, such as rhinoplasties and tummy tucks, the fees that individuals pay for these surgeries, and how the surgeries are related to a new conceptualization of beauty. The speaker in SPS#2 uses subjective words such as “outbreak,” “plaguing,” and “tainted” to preview the information. Most likely, this speech would focus more on the negative impact that cosmetic surgery has had on society at large. In turn, writing your specific purpose statement first can be a great aid to guarantee that you are indeed engaging in informative speaking.

10.1.2 Types of Informative Speaking

Although all informative speeches seek to help audiences understand, there are three distinct types of informative speeches. A **speech of description** helps an audience understand *what* something is. When you want to help the audience understand *why* something is so, you are delivering a **speech of explanation**. Finally, when you want to focus is on *how* something is done, choose a **speech of demonstration**. Each of these types, as well as their most logical organizational patterns, will be discussed in more detail.



The online lesson provides additional examples of speeches of description, explanation, and demonstration. See Topic 1.

speech of description

Type of speech that helps an audience understand *what* something is.

speech of explanation

Type of speech that helps an audience understand *why* something is so.

speech of demonstration

Type of speech that focuses on *how* something is done.

10.1.3 Benefits and Purposes of Informative Speeches

Speeches of Description

Describing the circus to a group of youngsters, describing the effects of an earthquake, and describing the social media networking habits of young adults are all examples of informative speeches of description. These speeches paint a clear picture of an event, person, object, place, situation, or concept. The goal is to create images in the minds of listeners about your topic or to describe a concept in concrete detail. Here, for example, is a section of a speech describing a relatively new event—the poetry slam. We begin with the specific purpose and thesis statement:

Specific purpose: To explain to my audience how poetry slams moved the performance of poetry to a competitive event.

Thesis statement: In order to understand the poetry slam, one must understand its history, the performance, and the judging process.

Imagine reading a piece of poetry in a quaint bookstore with bongo drums playing in the background as a mellow audience snaps their fingers in appreciation. This is how some perceive the traditional poetry reading. Imagine instead, a smoke-filled bar, filled with rowdy individuals, many inebriated, anticipating being entertained in three-minute intervals by young poets yearning for the adrenaline rush found in fierce competition. This is how a poetry reading becomes the poetry slam.

Slam poetry is a competitive event founded by Chicago author Mark Smith in the mid-1990s. Individuals perform original poetry designed to elicit an emotional response, and then are judged by experts in the poetry community. Venues across the United States include the Bowery Street Poetry Club in New York, Green Mill in Chicago, and the national slam competition hosted in a different city each year.

(Source: <http://www.nuyorican.org/poetryslam.php>)

In this excerpt, the speaker describes a competitive outlet for poets. Audience members learn that this event takes place in bars and clubs, and audience members respond fully. One gets a feeling for the setting through vivid language usage. Organizational patterns (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7) that work best with

speeches of description include the topical pattern, spatial pattern, chronological pattern, and narrative pattern.

Speeches of Explanation

Speeches of explanation deal with more **abstract topics** (ideas, theories, principles, and beliefs) than speeches of description or demonstration. They also involve attempts to simplify complex topics. The goal of these speeches is audience understanding. How substance abuse affects the mind, why gas prices continue to rise, or how volunteering can improve one's self-esteem are all examples of speeches of explanation.

To be effective, your speech of explanation must be designed specifically to achieve audience understanding of the theory or principle. Avoid complicated language, too much jargon, or technical terms by using verbal pictures that define and explain. Here, for example, a speaker uses vivid imagery to explain how color blindness can affect an individual's life.

I don't remember any mention of color blindness when I got my driver's license. I learned at an early age that the white traffic light was green, the light orange was yellow, and the darker orange was red. After high school I considered joining the army, hoping to go into computers or electronics. I soon learned that color blindness banned me from both of these. That may be the only limitation I ever found from this trait. (Quote appears on martymodell.com/colorblindness/chogg.htm web site)

While the previous description suggests that color blind individuals have ways of coping, the following specifics provide much more concrete information on how this lesser-known condition functions:

Eyes with a deficiency of cones and pigment might be colorblind. That is, people "with normal cones and light sensitive pigment (trichromasy) are able to see all of the different colors and subtle mixtures of them by using cones sensitive to one of three wavelengths of light—red, green, and blue. A mild color deficiency is present when one or more of the three cones' light-sensitive pigments are not quite right and their peak sensitivity is shifted (anomalous trichromasy—includes protanomaly and deuteranomaly). A more severe color deficiency is present when one or more of the cones' light-sensitive pigments is really wrong (dichromasy—includes protanopia and deuteranopia)." (Quote appears on TestingColorVision.com web site)

If the first is presented alone, listeners are limited in their ability to anchor the concept to something concrete. The second explanation, which provides definitions, is much more effective when combined with the first. Some organizational patterns that you might use for a speech of explanation include the topical pattern, cause-and-effect pattern, chronological pattern, and circular pattern.

Speeches of Demonstration

Speeches of demonstration focus on a process by describing the gradual changes that lead to a particular result. These speeches often involve two different approaches, one is *how*, and the other is a *how to* approach. Here are four examples of specific purposes for speeches of demonstration:

abstract topics

Topics that are not grounded in tangible element, but instead are ideas, theories, principles, and beliefs.

To inform my audience *how* college admissions committees choose the most qualified applicants.

To inform my audience *how* excessive tanning threatens health.

To inform my audience *how* to sell an item on eBay.

To inform my audience *how* to create a scrapbook.

Speeches using a “how” approach have audience understanding as their goal. They create understanding by explaining how a process functions without teaching the specific skills needed to complete a task. After listening to a speech on college admissions, for example, you may understand the process but may not be prepared to take a seat on an admissions committee. Consider the following sample speech segment on communication apprehension:

Why does the prospect of public speaking make so many individuals extremely apprehensive? The fear associated with public speaking is it not just psychological; there are also *physiological* elements at play that interact with your mind, creating a vicious cycle of fear. How do these components work together? Consider this—when you mind registers feelings of nervousness, it can trigger a racing heartbeat, sweaty, shaky palms, and even a dry mouth. Once you notice that these physical conditions are present, you become more uncomfortable and uneasy (“*oh no, my hands are trembling ... it feels like everyone is focusing on them!*”), creating even more physical reactions like rapid breath (to deal with the racing heartbeat) and blanking out (which can come with extreme stress). This relationship between physical and mental process is significant in *how* you process communication apprehension.

In contrast, “*how-to*” speeches try to communicate specific skills sets, such as selling an item on eBay or making a pineapple upside-down cake. Compare the previous “*how*” example discussing caffeine with the following “*how-to*” presentation on “*how to*” identify whether a Louis Vuitton handbag is authentic or counterfeit.

If the cost of a designer purse seems to good to be true, it might be a fake. With the increase of e-commerce and the deregulation of manufacturing in foreign countries, counterfeit handbags are a becoming a significant problem. One designing house that has found itself victim to counterfeit many times over is Louis Vuitton. Fortunately, there are steps that you can take to determine whether the bag you are interested in is indeed authentic. First, the only way that you can be entirely sure is to purchase your bag from an authorized Louis Vuitton dealer. If, however, you are dazzled by the deals found on a web site or online auction, then carefully check for the following earmarks of authenticity:

- 1.** *Correct stampings (on an authentic LV bag, they should be dark gray instead of black).*
- 2.** *Perfect symmetry in the monogram pattern.*
- 3.** *Even spiral stitching.*
- 4.** *Clean and fused hardware.*
- 5.** *Finally, an accompanying dust bag with sharp, rather than round, edges and an LV logo on the front.*

If your bag passes this inspection, you just might have the genuine article on your hands!

Notice that the “how-to” speech has several steps. These are generally in chronological order, and once learned, should result in “mastery” of a particular ability or skill.



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FIGURE 10.2 Speeches of demonstration typically benefit from the use of presentational aids like charts, graphs, and props.

One clear difference between the speech of demonstration and speeches of explanation is that the speech of demonstration benefits from presentational aids. When your goal is to demonstrate a process, you may choose to complete the entire process—or a part of it—in front of your audience. The nature of your demonstration and the constraints of time affect your choice. If you are giving CPR training, a human form, otherwise known as “CPR Annie,” will be necessary for audience members to truly grasp the concept. If you are demonstrating how to prepare California rolls, however, your audience does not need to watch you boil rice and dice avocados; prepare in advance to maintain audience interest and save time. When organizing your speech of demonstration, consider the chronological pattern, cause-and-effect pattern, and spatial pattern.

TABLE 10.1 is a tool to help you to determine the appropriate organizational pattern for each type of informative topic you might select:

Topic Type	Pattern Type	Examples
Issues	Topical, cause-effect, chronological, circular	Hunger, miracles
Processes	Chronological, narrative	Blood donation, asking someone out
Concepts	Topical, cause-effect, circular	Racism, gravity
Events	Chronological, narrative, cause-effect	The Olympics, a lunar eclipse
Objects	Topical, spatial	A cell phone, a Swiss army knife
People	Topical, narrative, chronological	James Dean, Harriet Tubman

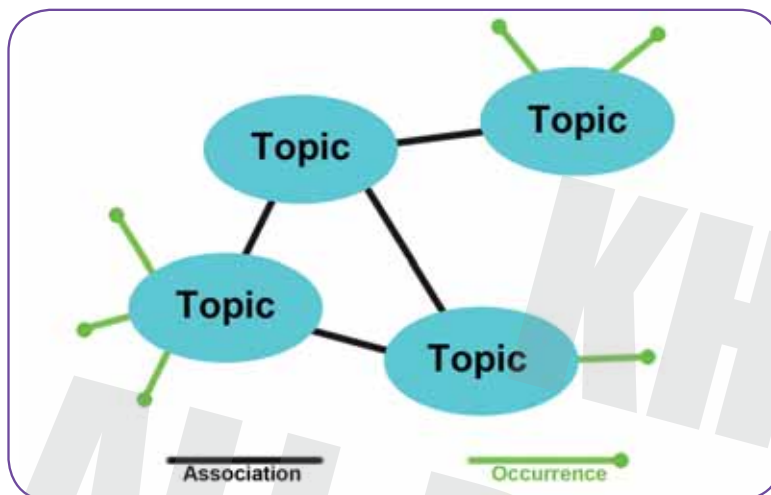
10.2 Selecting an Informative Topic

To determine the type of informative speech you will deliver, you should choose a topic early in the planning process. Because an informative speech involves conveying relevant and interesting content to your audience, settling on just one topic can be challenging. At the end of the day, your topic should be interesting to you; if you don't care about it, neither will your audience. Here are some tips for choosing an engaging informative topic that is right for you and the audience.

- 1. Choose a topic that reflects your personal interests.** Your hobbies and fascinations are natural options and will allow you to share something effortless and genuine with your audience.
- 2. Explore current events.** Often audience members get snippets of news on popular topics but rarely do they receive all the details—your speech can illuminate an issue so the audience really understands its breadth and depth.
- 3. Select a topic you'd like to know more about.** Informative speaking can be a wonderful opportunity for you to research on a topic about which you've always been curious—both the audience *and* you will benefit from your preparation and newly gained knowledge.
- 4. Aim for relevance, appropriateness, and focus.** Strong informative speech topics must be relevant to the audience (“What is in it for me?”), appropriate for the speaking situation (consider time constraints and audience demographics), and focused enough to cover effectively (e.g., “famous battles of World War II, rather than World War II as a whole).
- 5. Experiment with brainstorming.** Whether you try listing all topics that you find interesting and narrow it down from there, or create a graphic organizer like a **topic map** (or *interest map*), the important part of brainstorming is to avoid judging your ideas until you've exhausted all possibilities—you might be surprised with what you come up with!

topic map

A graphic organizer or diagram (also known as an *interest map*) that allows you to represent the connections between topics as ideas, images, or words. Such maps provide a visual framework for organizing information in terms of a line of argument or a train of thought.



Courtesy of Marie Hulett.

FIGURE 10.3 When deciding on a topic, creating a topic or interest map allows you to hone in on subjects that you may find interesting.

10.3 Goals and Strategies of Informative Speaking

Although your overarching goal in an informative speech is to communicate information and ideas so that your audience will understand, there are also more specific goals of informative speaking. Whether you are giving a speech to explain, describe, or demonstrate, you should consider the following five goals: be accurate, objective, clear, meaningful, and memorable. After each goal, we present two specific strategies for achieving that goal.

Be Accurate

You should strive to present the truth and nothing but the truth. This is achieved by understanding the importance of careful research for verifying information that you present. When gathering information, follow the “**Three Cs**”: facts must be **correct**, **current**, and **credible**. Research is crucial to attaining this goal. Do not rely solely on your own opinion; find support from other sources. For example, in a speech talking about financing college costs, you may want to discuss how much debt college students have. After talking with your friends, you may believe that students are in “a lot” of debt. After doing research, you find a source from the Huffington Post web site in February, 2010, that states recent college graduates are carrying an average of \$23,200 of debt. This provides solid support.

However, if you looked at a publication from the National Center for Education Statistics in 2000, you would find that in 1997, 46 percent of undergraduates had no debt from college, and the average loan debt was \$10,100. Information that is not current may be inaccurate or misleading. Offering an incorrect or outdated fact may hurt speaker credibility and cause people to stop listening. The following two strategies will help you present accurate information.

correctness

The accuracy of the material (Is it error free?); one of the three “Cs” of informative speaking.

currency

The timeliness of the material (Is the information up to date?); one of the three “Cs” of informative speaking.

credibility

The reliability of the material (Does the information come from a trustworthy source?); one of the three “Cs” of informative speaking.

- 1. Question the source of information.** Is the source a nationally recognized magazine or reputable newspaper, or is it from someone's rant on a random blog? As you know, virtually anyone can post to the Internet so check to see if your source has appropriate credentials, which may include education, work experience, or verifiable personal experience.
- 2. Consider the timeliness of the information.** As demonstrated above, information can become dated. There is no hard and fast rule about when something violates timeliness, but you can apply some common sense to avoid problems. Your instructor may take this decision making out of your hands by requiring sources from the last several years or so. If not, the issue of timeliness relates directly to the topic. If you wanted to inform the class about the health care system in America, relying on sources more than a few months old would be misleading because political developments occur continuously.

Be Objective

Present information fairly and in an unbiased manner. Purposely leaving out critical information or “stacking the facts” to create a misleading picture violates the rule of objectivity and compromises your ethics as a speaker. The following two strategies should help you maintain objectivity.

- 1. Take into account all perspectives.** Combining perspectives creates a more complete picture. Avoiding other perspectives creates bias, and may turn an informative speech into a persuasive one. In a speech on “how to get a fair record deal,” the record label executive may have an entirely different perspective on what the process looks like in contrast to the experience of the artist herself. They may be using the same facts and statistics, but interpreting them differently. An impartial third party (e.g., you, the speaker) trying to determine how the process is in actuality needs to examine both sides and attempt to remove obvious bias.
- 2. Show trends.** Trends put individual facts in perspective as they clarify ideas within a larger context. The whole—the connection among ideas—gives each detail greater meaning. If a speaker tries to explain how to purchase a home, it makes sense to talk about the home buying in relation to what it was like a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago, or even longer, rather than focus on today or last week. Trends also suggest what the future will look like.



The online lesson explains ways to maintain objectivity during the planning and delivery of your informative speech. See Topic 3.

Be Clear

To be successful, your informative speech should not confuse your audience. When a message is not organized clearly, the audience can become frustrated and confused and, ultimately, they will miss your ideas. Conducting careful audience analysis helps you understand what your audience already knows about your topic and allows you to offer a clear, targeted message at their level of understanding. The following two strategies are designed to increase the clarity of your speech.

- 1. Define unfamiliar words and concepts.** Unfamiliar words, especially technical jargon, may prevent your audience from learning. If your audience members

don't understand, your speech will fail to inform. When introducing a new word, define it in a way your listeners can understand. Because you are so close to your material, knowing what to define can be your hardest task. The best advice is to put yourself in the position of a listener who knows less about your topic than you do and prepare accordingly. In addition to explaining the dictionary definition of a concept or term, a speaker may rely on two common forms of definitions: operational and through example.

Operational definitions specify procedures for observing and measuring concepts. For example, in the United States an IQ test (Intelligence Quotient) is used to define how “smart” we are. According to Gregory (2004), someone who scores between 95 and 100 is of average intelligence, a score of 120 or higher is above average, and a score of 155 or higher is considered “genius.” The government tells us who is “poor” based on a specified income level, and communication researchers can determine whether a person has high communication apprehension based on his or her score on McCroskey’s Personal Report of Communication Apprehension.

Exemplar definitions help the audience understand a complex concept by giving the audience a “for instance.” In an effort to explain what is meant by the term “white-collar criminal,” a speaker could provide several examples, such as Jeff Skilling, (former Enron executive convicted on federal felony charges relating to the company’s financial collapse), Rod Blagojevich (former Illinois governor found guilty of making false statements to the FBI), and Wesley Snipes (actor convicted of tax evasion who started his three-year prison term in December, 2010).

- 2. Carefully organize your message.** Find an organizational pattern that makes the most sense for your specific purpose. Descriptive speeches, speeches of demonstration, and speeches of explanation have different goals. Therefore, you must consider the most effective way to organize your message. As previously mentioned, *speeches of description* are often arranged in spatial, topical, and chronological patterns. *Speeches of explanation* are frequently arranged chronologically, or topically, or according to cause-and-effect or problem-solution. *Speeches of demonstration* often use spatial, chronological, and cause-and-effect or problem-solution patterns.

The online lesson provides you with outline templates to help you effectively organize your informative speech. See Topic 3.



operational definitions
Definitions that specify procedures for observing and measuring concepts.

exemplar definitions
Definitions that help explain a complex concept by providing familiar examples.

Be Meaningful

A meaningful, informative message focuses on what matters to the audience as well as to the speaker. Relate your material to the interests, needs, and concerns of your audience. A speech to a parents group explaining the differences between public and private schools may not be meaningful in a small town with one school. Here are two strategies to help you develop a meaningful speech:

- 1. Consider the setting.** The setting may tell you about audience goals. Informative speeches are given in many places, including classrooms, community seminars, and business forums. Audiences may attend these speeches because of an interest in the topic or because attendance is

required. Settings tell you the specific reasons your audience has gathered. A group of adults at public library listening to an expert discuss the tragedy of human trafficking may want to get involved with the cause, while a group of college students listening to the same lecture in a sociology class may be fulfilling a graduation requirement.

- 2. Avoid information overload.** When you are excited about your subject and you want your audience to know about it, you can find yourself trying to say too much in too short a time. You throw fact after fact at your listeners until they can't listen to any more information. Saying too much is like touring London in a day—it cannot be done if you expect to remember anything. Information overload can be frustrating and annoying because the listener experiences difficulty in processing so much information. Your job as an informative speaker is to know how much to say and, just as importantly, what to say. Long lists of facts and statistics are impersonal and mind-numbing. Be conscious of the relationship among time, purpose, and your audience's ability to absorb information. Tie key points to anecdotes and humor. Your goal is not to “get it all in” but to communicate a tangible message as effectively as possible.

Be Memorable

Speakers who are enthusiastic, genuine, and creative and who can communicate their excitement to their listeners deliver memorable speeches. Engaging examples, dramatic stories, and tasteful humor applied to your key ideas in a genuine manner will make a long-lasting impact.

- 1. Use examples and humor.** Nothing elicits interest more than a good example, and humorous stories are effective in helping the audience remember the material. For example, when giving a speech on how to break up with a significant other, talking about how you are a “bona fide expert” on the subject will garner some chuckles, but more important, pique the audience's interest.
- 2. Physically involve your audience.** Ask for audience response to your speech: “Raise your hand if you have a question about. . . .” Seek help with your demonstration. Ask some audience members to take part in an experiment that you conduct to prove a point. For example, to illustrate a point on human memory, ask the audience to close their eyes and then try to visualize what clothing they are wearing.

10.3.1 Guidelines for Effective Informative Speeches

Regardless of the type of informative speech you plan to give, there are characteristics of effective informative speeches that extend across all categories. As you research, develop, and present your speech, keep the following nine characteristics in mind.

Consider Your Audience's Needs and Goals

The best informative speakers know what their listeners want to learn from their speech. A group of Weight Watchers members may be motivated to attend a lecture on dieting to learn how to lose weight, while nutritionists drawn to the same speech may need the information to help clients. Audience goals are also linked to knowledge. Those who lack knowledge about a topic may be more motivated to listen

Fielding Audience Questions and Unexpected Distractions

In an informative speech, you should be prepared to field questions from your audience. Additionally, you may be faced with an interruption from the audience or a disruption in the surrounding environment. Here are some tips to help you handle these high-pressure, unexpected moments with grace and finesse:

- Decide whether you want questions during your presentation or at the end. If you prefer they wait, tell your audience early in your speech or at the first hand raised something like, “I look forward to answering any questions you may have at the end of the presentation, where I have built in some time for them. Thanks!”
- When fielding questions, develop the habit of doing four things in this order:
 1. Thank the questioner.
 2. Paraphrase the question in your own words (for the people who may not have heard the question and to clarify your understanding of the question).
 3. Answer the question briefly.
 4. Then ask the questioner if you answered their question.
- Note that the second step in answering questions is to paraphrase the question in your own words. This provides you with the opportunity to point questions in desirable directions or away from areas you are not willing to go. Paraphrasing allows the speaker to clarify the question and stay in control of the situation.
- For any question, you have five options:
 1. Answer it. (It’s OK if the answer is, “I do not know.”)
 2. Bounce it back to the questioner, “Well, that is very interesting. How might you answer that question?”
 3. Bounce it to the audience, “I see, does anyone have any helpful thoughts about this?”
 4. Defer the question until later, “Now you and I would find this interesting, but it is outside the scope of my message today. I’d love to chat with you individually about this in a moment.”
 5. Promise more answer later, “I would really like to look further into that. May I get back to you later?”
- When random interruptions occur, do not ignore them. As an option, you can call attention to the distraction; this allows your audience to get it out and then return their attention to you. For example, if the noisy air conditioner kicks on full blast in the midst of your speech, try saying, “Well, I am glad it is working” and continue on with your content.

Effective speakers know and use all five as strategies to keep their question-and-answer period positive, productive, and on track. All in all, the more prepared you can be for potential interaction with your audience and your environment, the more competent you will be in your approach!



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Knowing how to successfully answer the questions generated by your audience is a valuable speaking skill.

and learn than those who feel they already know the topic. However, it is possible that technology has changed, new information has surfaced, or new ways to think about or do something have emerged. When speaking, you need to find a way to engage those who are less motivated.

Make connections between your subject and your audience's daily needs, desires, and interests. The more relevant you can make your topic, the more the audience will want to tune in. For example, some audience members might have no interest in a speech on the effectiveness of halfway houses until you tell them how much money is being spent on prisons locally, or better yet, how much each listener is spending per year. Now the topic is more relevant. People care about money, safety, prestige, family and friends, community, and their own growth and progress, among other things. Show how your topic influences one or more of these and you will have an audience motivated to listen.

Consider Your Audience's Knowledge Level

If you wanted to describe how to use eSnipe when participating in eBay auctions, you may be speaking to students who have never heard of it. To be safe, however, you might develop a brief pre-speech questionnaire to pass out to your class. Or you can select several individuals at random and ask what they know. You do not want to confuse them with information that is too advanced for their knowledge level but you do not want to bore the class with mundane minutiae, either. Consider this example:

As the golf champion of your district, you decide to give your informative speech on the game. You begin by holding up a golf club and saying, "This is a golf club. They come in many sizes and styles." Then you hold up a golf ball. "This is a golf ball. Golf balls are all the same size, but they come in many colors. Most golf balls are white. When you first start playing golf, you need a lot of golf balls. So, you need a golf club and a golf ball to play golf."

Expect your listeners to yawn in this situation. They do not want to hear what they already know. Although your presentation may be effective for an audience of children who have never seen a golf club or ball, your oversimplified presentation will be insulting for most adult audiences. Instead, make sure that your topic possesses content that your audience will *want* to process; give them information that they may not have had before listening to you.

Capture Attention and Interest Immediately

As an informative speaker, your goal is to communicate information about a specific topic in a way that your listeners understand. In your introduction, you must first convince your audience that your topic is interesting and relevant. For example, if you are delivering a speech on hand washing, you might begin like this:

Imagine that every time you touch a doorknob or rail, your hands become infested with millions of tiny entities that are happy to make their home on your flesh. While some of these beings are harmless, others have the ability to make you very sick. These entities are microorganisms—in most cases, germs—that transfer to and dwell on your hands when you touch public fixtures. The good news is, you can combat these critters and their potential harm with a regular and thorough hand-washing regimen.

This approach is more likely to capture audience attention than a basic statement on the otherwise obvious importance of washing one's hands.

Sustain Audience Attention and Interest by Being Creative, Vivid, and Enthusiastic

Try something different. Change your pace to bring attention or emphasis to a point. Say the following phrase at a regular rate: "We must work together!" Then say it again, more slowly and with different emphasis: "We must." "Work." "Together!" or "We must work." "Together!" or "We." "Must work." "Together!" Slowing down to emphasize each word gives the sentence much greater impact. Varying rate of speech can be an effective way to sustain audience attention.

Also, show some excitement! Talking about tai chi, the Marine Corps, or monetary inflation with spirit and energy will keep people listening. Delivery can make a difference. Enthusiasm is infectious, even to those who have no particular interest in your subject. It is no accident that advertising campaigns are built around catchy slogans, jingles, and other memorable language that people are likely to remember long after a commercial is over. We are more likely to remember vivid and committed language rather than dull language.



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FIGURE 10.4 Committed delivery involving vocal and physical energy, strong eye contact, and creative language encourages your audience to focus on your message.

Cite Your Sources While Speaking

Anytime you offer facts, statistics, opinions, and ideas that you found in research, you should provide your audience with the source. In doing this, you enhance your own credibility. Your audience appreciates your depth of research on the topic, and you avoid accusations of plagiarism. However, your audience needs enough information in order to judge the credibility of your sources. If you are describing how the CBS television series *Blue Bloods* became the network's most popular show in recent years, it is not sufficient to say, "Rex Miro states..." because Rex Miro's qualification to comment on this show may be based on the fact that he watches television regularly. However, by adding, "Rex Miro, entertainment reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, states..." we know that he has more credibility.



The online lesson encourages you to explore the Internet to find different ways to verbally cite your sources when speaking informatively. See Topic 3.

Signpost Main Ideas

Your audience may need help keeping track of the information in your speech. Separating one idea from another may be difficult for listeners when trying to learn all the information at once. You can help your audience understand the structure of your speech by creating oral lists. Simple “First, second, third, fourth...” or “one, two, three, four...” help the audience focus on your sequence of points. Here is an example of **signposting**:

signposting

Using oral lists, such as “first, second, third,” to help your audience understand the structure of your speech.

Having a Vespa scooter in college instead of a car is preferred for two reasons. The first reason is a financial one. A Vespa gets at least 80 miles per gallon. Over a period of four years, significant savings could occur. The second reason a scooter is preferred in college is convenience. Parking problems are virtually eliminated. No longer do you have to worry about being late to class, because you can park in the motorcycle parking area. They're all around us.

Signposting at the beginning of a speech tells the audience how many points you have or how many ideas you intend to support. Signposting during the speech keeps the audience informed as to where you are in the speech.

Relate the New with the Familiar

Informative speeches should introduce new information in terms of what the audience already knows. Analogies can be useful. Here is an example:

When your romantic relationship is filled with strife, taking a step back is a lot like imposing a “time-out” during an intense point in an athletic event. This cooling-off period can help you to gather your thoughts, reflect on your behaviors, and decide your next plan of action, just like it does when you are playing a sport. Getting to stop mid-play allows us the time to decide if what we are doing is helping or hurting our overall outcome. Similarly, in relationships, taking a “break,” rather than a full-fledged breakup, gives us a chance to see what needs to be done to either salvage or terminate the relationship. The majority of couples who have long-standing relationships admit that taking a healthy time out can clarify feelings and improve relational satisfaction.

Most of us can relate to the “time out” concept referred to in this example, so providing the analogy helps us understand the “step back” period for a struggling relationship. References to the familiar help listeners assimilate new information.

Use Repetition

Repetition is important when presenting new facts and ideas. You help your listeners by reinforcing your main points through summaries and paraphrasing. For example, if you were trying to persuade your classmates to purchase a scooter instead of a car, you might have three points: (1) A scooter is cheaper than a car; (2) A scooter gets better gas mileage than a car; and (3) You can always find a nearby parking spot for your scooter. For your first point, you mention purchase price, insurance, and maintenance cost. As you finish your first point, you could say, “So a scooter is cheaper than a car in at least three ways: purchase price, insurance,

and maintenance.” You have already mentioned these three sub-points, but noting them as an internal summary before your second main point will help reinforce the idea that scooters are cheaper than cars.



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FIGURE 10.5 The use of presentational aids can clarify and enliven your speech, especially for visual learners.

Offer Interesting Visuals

As Cyphert (2007) states, “There is no doubt that good visual design can make information clearer and more interesting” (p. 170). He elaborates:

“Audience expectations have changed, not merely in terms of technical bells and whistles available in the creation of visual aids, but with respect to the culture’s understanding of what it means to deliver an eloquent public address.”

Your audience expects you to put effort into your presentation. This means more than practicing. Using pictures, charts, models, PowerPoint slides, and other presentational aids helps maintain audience interest. Use humorous visuals to display statistics, if appropriate. Demonstrate the physics of air travel by throwing paper airplanes across the room. With ever-increasing computer accessibility and Wi-Fi in the classroom, using computer-generated graphics to enhance and underscore your main points and illustrations is a convenient and valuable way to help you inform your audience effectively.

10.3.2 Ethics of Informative Speaking

Think about the advertising you see on television and the warning labels on certain products you purchase. Listening to a commercial about a new weight-loss tablet, you believe you have just found a solution to get rid of those extra twenty pounds you carry with you. Several happy people testify about how wonderful the drug

is, and how it worked miracles for them. At the end of the commercial, you hear a speaker say, “This drug is not for children under 16. It may cause diarrhea, restlessness, sleeplessness, nausea, and stomach cramps. It can lead to heat strokes and heart attacks. Those with high blood pressure, epilepsy, diabetes, or heart disease should not take this medicine.” After listening to the warnings, the drug may not sound so miraculous. We have government regulations to make sure consumers make informed choices.

As an individual speaker, *you need to regulate yourself*. A speaker has ethical responsibilities, no matter what type of speech he or she prepares and delivers. The informative speeches you deliver in class and those you listen to on campus are not nearly as likely to affect the course of history as those delivered by high-ranking public officials in a time of war or national political campaigns. Even so, *the principles of ethical responsibility are similar for every speaker*.

The President of the United States, the president of your school, and the president of any organization to which you belong all have an obligation to inform their constituencies (audiences) in nonmanipulative ways and to provide them with information they need and have a right to know. Professors, doctors, police officers, and others engaged in informative speaking ought to tell the truth as they know it, and not withhold information to serve personal gain. You, like others, should always rely on credible sources and avoid what political scientists label as **calculated ambiguity**—a speaker’s planned effort to be vague, sketchy, and considerably abstract. In everyday life, calculated ambiguity occurs when someone you do not want to spend time with asks you what you are doing on the weekend, and you reply, “This and that.” If you offer this individual your exact plans, he or she may ask to join you; if you truthfully have no plans as of yet, you now have no excuse to turn the individual down. In turn, you opt for ambiguity to avoid awkwardness.

calculated ambiguity

A speaker’s planned effort to be vague, sketchy, and considerably abstract.

You have many choices to make as you prepare for an informative speech. Applying reasonable ethical standards will help with your decision making. An informative speech requires you to assemble accurate, sound, and pertinent information that will enable you to tell your audience what you believe to be the truth. Relying on outdated information, not giving the audience enough information about your sources, omitting relevant information, being intentionally vague, and taking information out of context are all violations of ethical principles.

Chapter Summary

Informative speeches fall into three categories. Speeches of description paint a picture of an event, person, object, place, situation, or concept; speeches of explanation deal with such abstractions as ideas, theories, principles, and beliefs; and speeches of demonstration focus on a process, describing the gradual changes that lead to a particular result.

A somewhat blurry line exists between informative and persuasive speaking. Remember that in an informative speech, your goal is to communicate information and ideas in a way that your audience will understand and remember. The key determinant in whether a speech is informative is speaker intent.

As an informative speaker, you should strive to be accurate, objective, clear, meaningful, and memorable. Preparing and delivering an effective informative speech involves applying the strategies identified in this chapter. In order to increase accuracy, make sure you question the source of information, consider the timeliness, and accurately cite your sources orally. Being objective includes taking into account all perspectives and showing trends. Crucial to any speech is clarity. To aid your audience, carefully organize your message, define unfamiliar words and concepts, signpost main ideas, relate the new with the familiar, and use repetition.

Audience members have gathered for different reasons. No matter what the reason, you want your speech to be meaningful to all listeners. In doing so, consider the setting, your audience's needs and goals and knowledge level, and try to avoid information overload. An informative speaker also wants people to remember his or her speech. In order to meet that goal, try to capture attention and interest immediately, sustain audience attention and interest by being creative, vivid, and enthusiastic, use examples and humor, offer interesting visuals, and physically involve your audience.

As you prepare your informative speech, make sure the choices you make are based on a reasonable ethical standard. You have an obligation to be truthful, and we presented many ways for you to accomplish this as you prepare your speech as well as when you deliver it.

Key Terms

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Questions for Reflection

1. How does speaker intent differentiate informative from persuasive speaking?
2. How do the three types of informative speeches differ?
3. What are the characteristics of an effective informative speech?
4. What is the purpose of providing five goals for informative speeches?
5. How can effective visuals enhance an informative speech?
6. What role do ethics play in informative speaking?
7. List some examples of calculated ambiguity.

Activities

1. Attend an informative lecture on campus (not a class lecture). Assess whether the lecture was strictly informative or whether it was also persuasive. Describe and explain your findings in a written reflection.
2. Try to explain a difficult concept (e.g., gravity, how to play chess, how credit cards work) to a small child. How did your delivery of the content differ from how you would tell a peer? Record your results.
3. Attend another informative lecture in your community. Take notes on the effectiveness of the speaker's message. Describe the techniques the speaker used to improve communication. Evaluate the speech on the message and the presentation using the evaluation form available in the online lesson.

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