GIVING A PRESENTATION

When you need to give a speech or presentation of any sort, you need to consider three primary issues at the outset:

1) What is the goal?
2) Who is the audience?
3) Why am I speaking?

What is the goal?

The goal is critical because it affects all other speechmaking components. For example, if your goal is to persuade someone that the clothing he or she is wearing is not appropriate, it is neither desired nor acceptable to give a public lecture about it! Instead, the goal insists that you discuss it with the person one-on-one in an informal way. However, if your goal is to inform a group of people of the research conducted on violence in the media, it might be more effective to present it to a larger number of people in a more formal fashion. Figuring out the goal of the speech, including why it should be presented at this time and in this way, is the first step.

Who is the audience?

You likely will modify your goal after you consider your audience. The audience is the "end all and be all" of your speech. After all, you are not giving your presentation to impress yourself with your knowledge! Your audience affects your speech strategies, the examples you use, the degree of formality, and how you will be seen by the group. Consider this: If you are persuading someone to change clothes, will you convince the person in the same way if he or she is a friend? Your worst enemy? Your teacher?! As you can see, how you approach the situation is quite different. On the other hand, if you have a large and diverse audience, you will want to choose content that reaches every person in the room.

Why am I speaking?

The goal and audience will also be affected by you! Your credibility as a speaker is determined by many factors; thus, you need to ask yourself a few questions: Why am I capable of speaking on this topic? If you don't have a lot of experience, you will need to rely upon research and presentation of evidence more than someone who has years of expertise. You must be able to support your claims. Will the audience believe me? You need to keep your information in perspective and well supported or the audience will not think seriously about what you are saying. It helps to convey confidence, dress well, and keep the best interests of the audience in mind at all times. Should I invite others to speak? It might assist your credibility if you speak along with others, each of whom may have different experiences and degrees of knowledge to support you (click here for additional information).

You are now ready to dive into research!

The revised goal
Now that you have your research (or at least an excellent start), you are ready to narrow your goal and construct a thesis statement. Before we start with the goal, it's a good idea at this point to remind yourself not to feel overwhelmed. It is very common, especially with so much information available in libraries and especially on-line, to feel that your brain is stuffed with too much knowledge! Real research is hard work-- give yourself breaks, and don't be afraid to move to the next step if you've got at least a few solid resources. You can always do more research!

Let's use the media example from above to focus our goal. You want to give an informative speech about research on violence and television. You have decided the audience consists of your peers. Following research you have modified your goal: To inform my peers of recent studies on the effects of television violence on children.

Do you see the enormous difference in our first goal compared to this one? We have narrowed it in three ways: effects of violence (instead of violence in general), on children (not only do you narrow the topic, but you remind everyone they were kids not long ago), and only recent studies (which defines the scope of the speech). There are MANY ways to narrow your goal-- the important thing is that you do! If the goal is too broad, your speech cannot be presented within the time limit.

The thesis statement

The thesis of the speech is much like the thesis of a paper you might write for a class:

1) It is one sentence
2) It is your central argument (each part of the speech will support the thesis)
3) It is concise and direct
4) It contains the goal of the speech

Could we adopt the following thesis for our presentation? "Violence on television is destructive to our lives at home." Well, it is one sentence. It is concise and direct. However, could you support this language-- that it is "destructive to the audience's lives at home"? After all, I may have watched twelve hours of television a day and had a great life (or at least that's how I see it). Another student might think, perhaps my life wasn't the greatest, but certainly not destructive, and certainly not due to television.

Do you see how difficult it is to state, firmly, that it is destructive for everyone? Or that it is destructive at all? The language is very loaded in this thesis statement. In addition, it suggests that the goal is to persuade-- are you trying to convince people that media violence is destructive? Or are you informing them of current studies so that they can make their own judgments? Again, there is a significant difference in this case.

You might change the thesis to, "While the number of violent acts on television has increased over the past 10 years, current research studies do not agree on the impact of television violence on children." This thesis is far from perfect, but it more accurately reflects your goal; in addition, it focuses your central argument. You may modify your thesis as much
as you want. When you feel comfortable with it, you are ready to structure your speech. In addition to structuring your speech, you need to be able to make strong arguments in support of your thesis.

Feeling overwhelmed?

Are you feeling overwhelmed? Don't worry, you have finished a lot of hard work, and you are getting close to the end! Remember, the audience has never seen this presentation before, and they are looking forward to your energy and enthusiasm! You are now ready to consider delivery and language. If you are at all anxious about speaking in front of people, you may wish to consult this guide. Do you need visual or audio aids for your presentation?

At last, you are now ready to practice where you will be speaking. Hopefully you will be able to have access to the room before the day of your presentation; however, if you can't, be sure to rehearse in the empty room at least sometime before your actual presentation. It is best to bring others with you– by placing them in different parts of the room, they can help to determine the effectiveness of your delivery. Practice with a timer to ensure you are within limitations. Move about the room. If there is a sound system, be sure to turn it on, check for feedback and volume, and determine how much it limits your movement. Double check visual aids.

As you speak, engage the audience directly. Enjoy your speaking experience. Have confidence in your information. It is a good idea to leave time for audience questions after the presentation.

*Special thanks to Jody Roy, Ph.D. for providing these materials to SAVE.*