

# informative speaking

## chapter 15

By Lisa Schreiber, Ph.D.  
Millersville University, Millersville, PA



### introduction

Every day you give others information in an informal way, whether you realize it or not. You give your grandparents driving directions to your college campus. You tell your professor about a breaking news story. You teach a friend how to ride a motorcycle. You explain to your significant other your spiritual philosophy. You show a co-worker how to operate the cash register. You help your younger brother build his first Facebook page. Or you share your summer travel experience with your roommate. Without a doubt, information plays a vital role in our everyday lives. In the dictionary, the term “inform” has several meanings, including to impart knowledge; to animate or inspire; to give information or enlightenment; to furnish evidence; to make aware of something; to communicate something of interest or special importance; to give directions; and to provide intelligence, news, facts or data. When you deliver an **informative speech**, your primary purpose is to give your audience information that they did not already know, or to teach them more about a topic with which they are already familiar.

Your ability to give informative speeches is one of the most important skills you will ever master, and it will be used both during the course of your career, and in your personal life. A pharmaceutical sales representative who can’t describe the products’ chemical composition, uses and side effects, will have trouble making a sale. A high school math teacher who can’t explain algebra in simple terms will have students who will not learn. A

### chapter objectives

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

1. Explain why informative speeches are important
2. Recognize the functions of informative speeches
3. Identify the main responsibilities of the informative speaker
4. List and describe the four types of informative speeches
5. Discuss techniques to make informative speeches interesting, coherent, and memorable
6. Apply chapter concepts in review questions and activities

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*Not only is there an art in knowing a thing, but also a certain art in teaching it.*  
~ Cicero

manager who can’t teach workers how to assemble microchips will have a department with low productivity and quality. And a little league coach who is unable to instruct players on batting and catching techniques will have a disadvantaged team. It is easy to imagine how difficult it would be to go about the business of our daily lives without the ability to give and receive information. Speeches to inform are the most common types of speeches (Gladis, 1999), so speech writers should give priority to learning how to construct them.

### chapter outline

- Introduction
- Functions of Informative Speeches
  - Provide Knowledge
  - Shape Perceptions
  - Articulate Alternatives
  - Allow us to Survive and Evolve
- Role of Speaker
  - Informative Speakers are Objective
  - Informative Speakers are Credible
  - Informative Speakers Make the Topic Relevant
  - Informative Speakers are Knowledgeable
- Types of Informative Speeches
  - Definitional Speeches
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- Developing Informative Speeches
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- Conclusion
- Review Questions and Activities
- Glossary
- References

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*A speaker hasn’t taught until the audience has learned.*

## functions of informative speeches

People encounter a number of formal and informal informative presentations throughout their day, and these presentations have several consequences. First, informative presentations *provide people with knowledge*. When others share facts or circumstances associated with some topic, our comprehension, awareness or familiarity is increased. The speaker imparts information, and this information is turned into knowledge. A music teacher describes the difference between a note and chord as an introduction to music. When issuing a warning to a teenager, a police officer explains the nature of the moving violation. A travel agent clarifies for customers the policies for airline ticket refunds. Participants at a cultural fair are enlightened by a shaman explaining her spiritual practices. Knowledge helps us to understand the world around us, enables us to make connections, and helps us to predict the future.

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*All men by nature desire knowledge.*

~ Aristotle

Second, informative presentations *shape our perceptions*. These presentations can affect how people see a subject by bringing it to light, or may influence what is seen as important by virtue of directing attention to the subject (Osborn & Osborn, 1991). Information helps us to interpret our experiences, it shapes our values and beliefs, it may alter our self-concept, and it gives meaning to situations. Imagine you meet your new boss, and she is very curt and pre-occupied during the first staff meeting. You may at first perceive her as being rude, unless later you find out that just before your meeting with her she learned that her father had been hospitalized with a stroke. Learning this new information allowed you to see the situation from a different perspective. In the same way, informative presentations enable us to get a sense of “the big picture” and



improve our ability to think and evaluate.

Some informative presentations may be aimed at helping listeners understand the number, variety, and quality of alternatives available to them (Hogan et al., 2010). Consequently, informative presentations also serve to *articulate alternatives*. A car sales associate might explain to you the features of one car in comparison to another car in order to help you differentiate between the models. A doctor might explain to your grandmother her treatment options for arthritis. A fitness trainer may demonstrate to you several types of exercises to help you strengthen your abdominal muscles and reduce your waistline. If you go to a temporary employment agency, a staff member may provide you will a range of job options that fit your qualifications. Successful informative presentations provide information which improves listeners’ ability to make wise decisions, because they understand all of their options (Jaffe, 1998).

Finally, informative presentations *enhance our ability to survive and evolve*. Our existence and safety depend upon the successful communication of facts and knowledge. An informative speech “helps keep countries developing, communicates valuable and useful information in thousands of areas, and continues to change, improve or upgrade the lives of audiences” (Wilbur, 2000, p. 99). For thousands of years, cultural and technical knowledge was passed from generation to generation orally. Even today with the presence of the internet, you are still likely to get a good amount of

information verbally. We have all seen “how to” YouTube videos, and although these have a significant visual components, the “experts” still have to give a verbal explanation. Through meetings, presentations and face-to-face interactions, we gain information about how to perform and improve in our jobs. To keep our children safe, we don’t give them an instruction manual, we sit down with them and explain things. All of the knowledge we accumulate while we live will be passed down to (hopefully) improve on the lives of those who come after us. Much of this information will be passed down in the form of a presentation.

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*Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.*

~ H. G. Wells

## role of speaker

Now that you understand the importance of informing others, this next section will show you the speakers’ responsibilities for preparing and presenting informative speeches.

## informative speakers are objective

Most public speaking texts discuss three **general purposes** for speeches: to inform, to persuade, and to entertain. Although these general purposes are theoretically distinct, in practice, they tend to overlap. Even in situations when the occasion calls for an informative speech (one which enhances understanding), often persuasive and entertaining elements are present. First, all informative speeches have a persuasive component by virtue of the fact that the speaker tries to convince the audience that the facts presented are accurate (Harlan, 1993). Second, a well-written speech can make even the most dry, technical information entertaining through engaging illustrations, colorful language, unusual facts, and powerful visuals.

In spite of this caveat, when planning your informative speech your primary *intent* will be to increase listeners' knowledge in an impartial way. For instance, in a speech about urban legends (Craughwell, 2000), your specific purpose statement may be: *“At the end of my speech, my audience will understand what an urban legend is, how urban legends are spread, and common variations of urban legends.”* The topic you choose is not as important as your approach to the material in determining whether your speech is informative or persuasive (Peterson, Stephan, & White, 1992). Can you imagine how speeches on witchcraft, stem cell research, the federal deficit, or hybrid cars could be written either to inform or persuade? Informative speeches need to be as objective, fair, and unbiased as possible. You are not asking your audience to take action or convincing them to change their mind. You are teaching them something and allowing them to decide for themselves what to do with the information. When writing your speech, present all sides of the story and try to remove all unrelated facts, personal opinions, and emotions (Westerfield, 2002).

### informative speakers are credible

An objective approach also enhances a speaker's **credibility**. Credibility, or *ethos*, refers to an audience's perception that the speaker is well prepared and qualified to speak on a topic (Fraleigh & Tuman, 2011).



Table 15.1 Boost Your Credibility	
Establish Expertise By:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citing reputable sources</li> <li>▪ Making sure your facts are accurate</li> <li>▪ Covering your points in enough detail to demonstrate your knowledge</li> <li>▪ Revealing your personal expertise with the topic</li> </ul>
Help the Audience Identify with You By:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wearing appropriate and attractive clothing</li> <li>▪ Mentioning what you have in common</li> <li>▪ Being friendly and enthusiastic</li> <li>▪ Relating to listeners' situations, feelings, and motives</li> </ul>
Show You are Telling the Truth By:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Presenting both sides of an issue</li> <li>▪ Sharing what motivated you to select your topic</li> <li>▪ Having open, natural nonverbals that correspond to what you say</li> <li>▪ Approaching the speech with ethics and positive intentions for your audience</li> </ul>

Peterson, Stephan, and White (1992) explain that there are two kinds of credibility; the reputation that precedes you before you give your speech (antecedent credibility) and the credibility you develop during the course of your speech (consequent credibility). In many cases, the audience has no prior knowledge of the speaker, so they make judgments about the quality of the evidence and arguments in the speech. In addition, they look at and listen to the speaker to determine if s/he is a reliable source of information.

Audience members have no motivation to listen to a speaker they perceive as lacking authority or credibility --- except maybe to mock the speaker. To avoid this pitfall, there are at least three ways to boost your credibility as a speaker; by establishing your expertise, helping your audience identify with you, and showing you are telling the truth (see examples in Table 16.1). It seems to be common sense that we do not listen to speakers who do not know what they are talking about, who cannot relate to us, or who give the impression of being dishonest. However, in planning informative speeches, we can get so wrapped up in the topic that is easy to forget about the elements of credibility. Just remember that in order to teach, we first have to

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*In the end, you make your reputation and you have your success based upon credibility and being able to provide people who are really hungry for information what they want.*  
~ Brit Hume

show that we are worthy of our audience's attention.

### informative speakers are knowledgeable

Good informative speeches contain a number of different source citations throughout the speech. To show that the information you present is accurate and complete, these sources should be up-to-date, reliable, unbiased, and directly relevant to your topic. Even if you plan to give a speech about an activity you have done all of your life, you will still need to seek out additional sources for your speech. By all means, you should cite and use your own experiences with the topic, but if you want to appear objective, you will need to show that your ideas and experiences correspond with others'. Using a variety of sound reference materials helps you appear well-informed and more trustworthy.

In our information age, people are fortunate to have unlimited and free access to information on virtually any topic they can imagine via the internet. Unfortunately, in addition to the credible information, the internet contains an abundance of garbage. Good speech writers know that it is important to avoid weak or questionable sources (e.g. Wikipedia, Britannica.com or Ask.com) when constructing their speeches. Start by asking what you know, find out what the experts know, and then move to find out what information other sources can provide (Gladis, 1999). You can search your library catalogue or *Amazon.com* to locate books (which provide details and depth), and then check out or order these books via interlibrary loan (often free) if they are not available in your library. Explain not only *how* something is done, but also *why* it is done for a great speech (MacInnis, 2006). This variety gives a speech depth and a level of interest that cannot be achieved merely by doing a Google search and using the first five websites that pop up. For additional ideas on locating sources, “*Sources of interesting information*” is provided at the end of this chapter.

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*The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.*

~ Dorothy Parker

### informative speakers make the topic relevant

When you are selecting your topic and thinking about what you want to accomplish in your informative speech, two factors should drive your decision. Foremost, you want to select a topic that holds a high degree of interest for you (i.e. the topic is meaningful to you). Students who feel at a loss for topic ideas should turn their attention to their own lives and activities. If you like to play video games, you might give a speech about how they are made. If you have a passion for ska reggae music, you might bring in MP3 cuts to help define the boundaries of this music

genre. If you have to work three jobs to help pay for school, you could give a speech on effective time management. Genuine curiosity will make the research and preparation process easier. Further, when you have enthusiasm for a topic, it shows when you speak. On the other hand, if you do not really care about your topic, your audience is not likely to care either.

In addition to having relevance for you, it is crucial that you tie your topic directly to your listeners. Early in the speech, give listeners at least one reason why they should care about your topic and the ways in which the information will be beneficial or entertaining (Morreale & Bovee, 1998). Establishing a motive for your audience to listen to you is commonly referred to by the acronym **WIIFM** – “What’s in it for me?” This is what the audience consciously or unconsciously asks when you start speaking (Urech, 1998). To establish WIIFM, you clearly link the topic to the listeners’ values, attitudes, beliefs and lifestyle. Consider not only what the audience *wants* to hear, but also what they *need* to hear (Gladis, 1999; Maxey & O’Connor, 2006). Take the topic of retirement planning as an example. Younger listeners may not perceive this as relevant to their lives when they are not yet making a steady salary. But, if you can demonstrate how investing even a small amount every month can grow to a considerable nest egg by retirement age, and that getting into the habit of saving early can lower the number of years they have to work, the topic becomes more interesting for them.



Making the topic relevant for your audience can also mean that you show them how to apply the information

immediately. In a speech on relaxation techniques, a speaker can lead the audience through a simple stress reduction exercise they can use at home. For a speech on handwriting analysis, listeners can be given paper, asked to write a sample sentence and shown how to interpret some points on the sample. If the audience members have laptops, a speaker can show them how to improve one of their digital photos. If listeners can use the information they learn quickly, they tend to remember it longer, and they are more likely to try the action again later (Nelson, et al., 2010).

### types of informative speeches

In the last section we examined how informative speakers need to be objective, credible, knowledgeable, and how they need to make the topic relevant to their audience. This section discusses the four primary types of informative speeches. These include definitional speeches, descriptive speeches, explanatory speeches, and demonstration speeches.

#### definitional speeches

In definitional speeches the speaker attempts to set forth the meaning of concepts, theories, philosophies, or issues that may be unfamiliar to the audience. In these types of speeches, speakers may begin by giving the historical derivation, classification, or synonyms of terms or the background of the subject. In a speech on “How to identify a sociopath,” the speaker may answer these questions: Where did the word ‘sociopath’ come from? What is a sociopath? How many sociopaths are there in the population? What are the symptoms? Carefully define your terminology to give shape to things the audience cannot directly sense. Describing the essential attributes of one concept compared to another (as through use of analogies) can increase understanding as well. For a speech on “Elderly Abuse,” the speaker may compare this type of abuse to child or spousal abuse for contrast.

Regardless of the listeners' level of knowledge about the subject, it is very important in these types of speeches to show the relevance of the topic to their lives. Often the topics discussed in definitional speeches are abstract --- distanced from reality. So provide explicit, real-life examples and applications of the subject matter. If you were going to give a speech about civil rights, you would need to go beyond commonly held meanings and show the topic in a new light. In this type of speech, the speaker points out the unique and distinguishing properties or boundaries of a concept *in a particular context* (Rinehart, 2002). The meaning of "civil rights" has changed significantly over time. What does it mean today compared to the 1960s? How will knowing this distinction help audience members? What are some specific incidents involving civil rights issues in current news? What changes in civil rights legislation might listeners see in their lifetimes?



### descriptive speeches

The purpose of **descriptive speeches** is to provide a detailed, vivid, word picture of a person, animal, place, or object. Audiences should carry away in their minds a clear vision of the subject (Osborn & Osborn, 1991). Consider this description of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India by Steve Cassidy (edited for length).

*To gaze in wonder at that magnificent dome and elegant gardens will be a moment that you remember for the rest of your life. The Taj Mahal just takes your breath away. What is immediately striking is its graceful symmetry - geometric lines run through formal gardens ending in a white marble platform. Atop this platform is great white bulbous dome complemented by four towering minarets in each corner. The whole image shimmers in a reflecting pool flanked by beautiful gardens - the effect is magical. The first stretch by the reflecting pool is where most people pose for their photos. But we were impressed by the fresh, green gardens. As you approach through the gardens two mosques come into view flanking the Taj - both exquisitely carved and built of red sandstone.*

In the descriptive speech, determine the characteristics, features, functions, or fine points of the topic. What makes the person unique? How did the person make you feel? What adjectives apply to the subject? What kind of material is the object made from? What shape is

### Sample Definitional Speech Outline

**Title:** "Life is suffering," and Other Buddhist Teachings (Thompson, 1999)

**Specific Purpose:** At the end of my speech, my audience will understand the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path in Buddhism

**Central Idea:** Regardless of your religious beliefs, Buddhist philosophy teaches a number of useful lessons you can apply to your own life.

- I. Four Noble Truths
  - A. All life involves *dukkha* (suffering)
  - B. Suffering is caused by *tanha* (longing for things to be other than they are)
  - C. If this longing stops (*nirodha*), suffering will cease
  - D. The way to eliminate longing is to follow the Eightfold Path
  
- II. The Noble Eightfold Path (the Middle Way)
  - A. Right view
  - B. Right intention
  - C. Right speech
  - D. Right action
  - E. Right livelihood
  - F. Right effort
  - G. Right mindfulness
  - H. Right contemplation

it? What color is it? What does it smell like? Is it part of a larger system? Can it be seen by the naked eye? What is its geography or location in space? How has it changed or evolved over time? How does it compare to a similar object? When preparing for the speech, try to think of ways to appeal to as many of the senses as possible. As an example, in a speech about different types of curried dishes, you could probably verbally describe the difference between yellow, red, and green curry, but the speech will have more impact if the audience can see, smell, and taste samples.



Ehninger, & Monroe, 2000). For example, to explain the custom of the Thai *wai* greeting (hands pressed together as in prayer), you also need to explain how it originated to show one had no weapons, and the ways it is tied to religion, gender, age, and status.

### Sample Descriptive Speech Outline

**Title:** *Easter Island: The Navel of the World* (Fischer, 2006)

**Specific Purpose:** At the end of my speech, my audience will be able to visualize some of the main attractions on Easter Island.

**Central Idea:** Easter Island hosts a number of ancient, mysterious, and beautiful attractions that make it an ideal vacation destination.

- I. Stone Giants – “Moai”
  - A. Average 13 feet high; 14 tons
  - B. Play sacred role for Rapa Nui (native inhabitants)
  - C. Central Ahu ceremonial sites
- II. Coastline activities
  - A. Beaches
  - B. Snorkeling & Scuba
  - C. Surfing
- III. Rano Kau Chilean National Park
  - A. Giant crater
  - B. Sheer cliffs to ocean
  - C. Sea birds

*Be able to describe anything visual, such as a street scene, in words that convey your meaning.*  
~ Marilyn vos Savant

### explanatory speeches

An **explanatory speech** (also known as a briefing) is similar to the descriptive speech in that they both share the function of clarifying the topic. But explanatory speeches focus on reports of current and historical events, customs, transformations, inventions, policies, outcomes, and options. Whereas descriptive speeches attempt to paint a picture with words so that audiences can vicariously experience it, explanatory speeches focus on the *how* or *why* of a subject and its consequences. Thus, a speaker might give a *descriptive* speech on the daily life of Marie Antoinette, or an *explanatory* speech on how she came to her death. Recall that definitional speeches focus on delineating concepts or issues. In this case, a speaker might give a *definitional* speech about the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, or an *explanatory* speech on why the financial bailout was necessary for U.S. financial stability.

If a manager wanted to inform employees about a new workplace internet use policy, s/he might cover questions like: Why was a policy implemented? How will it help? What happens if people do not follow established policies? Explanatory speeches are less concerned with appealing to the senses than connecting the topic to a series of related other subjects to enhance a deep understanding (McKerrow, Gronbeck,

### Sample Explanatory Speech Outline

**Title:** *Giant Waves, Death, and Devastation: The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami* (National Geographic, 2006)

**Specific Purpose:** At the end of my speech, my audience will be aware of the nature of the 2004 Tsunami and the destruction it caused.

**Central Idea:** The 2004 Asian Tsunami was one of the worst natural disasters in human history in terms of magnitude, loss of human life, and enduring impact.

- I. Geological event
  - A. Earthquake epicenter and magnitude
  - B. Tsunami forms (waves reach up to 100 feet)
  - C. Tsunami strikes land of various countries with no warning
- II. Human casualties reach almost 230,000 – top 10 of all natural disasters
  - A. The countries and people involved
  - B. Loss of food, water, hospitals, housing, electricity, and plumbing
  - C. Threat of disease
- III. Ongoing effects
  - A. Environmental destruction
  - B. Economic devastation
  - C. Psychological trauma

*I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.*  
~ Confucious

### demonstration speeches

The most practical of all informative speeches, a demonstration speech shows listeners how some process is accomplished or how to perform it themselves. The focus is on a chronological explanation of some process (how potato chips are made), procedure (how to fight fires on a submarine), application (how to use the calendar function in Outlook), or course of action (how court cases proceed to Supreme Court status). Speakers might focus on processes that have a series of steps with a specific beginning and end (how to sell a home by yourself) or the process may be continuous (how to maintain the hard drive on your computer to prevent crashes). Demonstration speeches can be challenging to write due to the fact that the process may involve several objects, a set of tools, materials, or a number of related relationships or events (Rinehart, 2002). Nevertheless, these types of speeches provide the greatest opportunity for audience members to get involved or apply the information later.

When preparing this speech, remember first to keep the safety of the audience in mind. One speaker severely burned his professor when he accidentally spilled hot oil from a wok on her. Another student nearly took the heads off listeners when he was demonstrating how to swing a baseball bat. Keep in mind also that you may need to bring in examples or pictures of completed steps in order to make efficient use of your time. Just think of the way that cooking demonstrations are done on TV --- the ingredients are pre-measured, the food is pre-mixed, and the mixture magically goes from uncooked to cooked in a matter of seconds. Finally, if you are having your audience participate during your presentation (making an origami sculpture), know what their knowledge level is so that you don't make them

feel unintelligent if they are not successful. Practice your speech with friends who know nothing about the topic to gauge if listeners can do what you are asking them to do in the time allotted.

### Sample Demonstration Speech Outline

**Title:** *How to Survive if You Get Stranded in the Wilderness* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2006).

**Specific Purpose:** At the end of my speech my audience will understand what to do if they unexpectedly become stranded in the wilderness.

**Central Idea:** You can greatly improve your ability to stay alive and safe in the wilderness by learning a few simple survival techniques.

- I. Size up the situation
  - A. Size up the surroundings
  - B. Size up your physical and mental states
  - C. Size up your equipment (handout "What to Include in a Survival Kit")
  
- II. Survival Basics
  - A. Obtaining water
  - B. Acquiring food
  - C. Building a fire
  - D. Locating shelter
  
- III. Finding help
  - A. Call or signal rescue personnel
  - B. Wilderness navigation
  - C. Leaving "bread crumb" trail

*Any subject can be made interesting, and therefore any subject can be made boring.*

~ Hilaire Belloc

### developing informative speeches

The first sections of this chapter explained the importance of informative speaking, the functions of informative speeches, the role of the informative speaker, and the four major types of informative speeches. This final section of the chapter discusses three goals in developing informative speeches and advice for increasing the effectiveness of your speech. These three goals include 1) arousing the interest of your audience, 2) presenting information in a way that can be understood, and 3) helping the audience remember what you have said (Fujishin, 2000).

### generate and maintain interest

#### Use Attention-Getting Elements

Before you capture the interest of an audience, you have to get their attention. As you know, attention getters are used in the introduction of a speech, but **attention getters** can also be used throughout your speech to maintain an audience's attention. There are a number of techniques you can use that will naturally draw listeners' attention (German, et al., 2010).

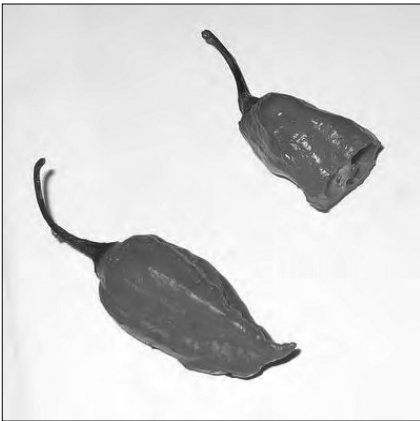
**Intensity** refers to something that has a high or extreme degree of emotion, color, volume, strength or other defining characteristic. In a speech about sharks' senses, showing how sharks smell 10,000 times better



than humans would be an example of the intensity principle.

**Novelty** involves those things that are new or unusual. Discussing the recent invention of the flesh-eating mushroom death suit developed by Jae Rhim Lee would be novel. This suit is designed to help bodies decompose naturally above ground to avoid the use of dangerous embalming chemicals.

**Contrast** can also be used to draw attention through comparison to something that is different or opposite. This works best when the differences are significant. If you were showing the audience how to make hot sauce, and you showed a bar graph comparing the scoville units (level of hotness) of different chili peppers, this would be contrast. Jalapenos rate at 2500 – 8000 scoville units, habaneros rate at 100,000 – 350,000, and the naga jolokia rates at 855,000 – 1,041,241.



Audiences will also attend to movement or **Activity**. To employ this technique, the speaker can either use action words, well-chosen movements, an increased rate of speech, or s/he can show action with video. A speech describing or showing extreme sports with high levels of risk, a fast pace, or amazing stunts could be used to illustrate activity.

Finally, **Humor** can be used to draw attention to a subject or point, but be sure that it is relevant and in good taste. In a speech about the devotion of Trekkies (Star Trek fans), you could share the example of Tony Alleyne who designed and outfitted his flat in England as a replica of the deck of the

Voyager. You could also direct the audience's attention to couples who have wedding ceremonies spoken in Klingon.



### Tell a Story

Story telling is not only the basis for most of our entertainment; it is also one of the best ways to teach an audience (Carlson, 2005). Also known as narratives, stories typically have a beginning in which the characters and setting are introduced, a rise in action, some complication or problem, and a resolution. Stories with compelling characters can be used in a creative way to weave facts otherwise dry and technical facts together (Walters, 1995), as in a speech about preparing a space shuttle for take-off from a mouse's perspective. Jaffe (1998) differentiates between three types of narratives that can be used in informative speeches. The first type of story is a natural reality in which natural or scientific facts are brought together in chronological accounts, as in the formation of the Grand Canyon. The second narrative involves social realities which detail historic events, and the development of cultures and institutions. The last kind of story, the ultimate reality, is focused on profound philosophical and spiritual questions like "Where do we come from?" and "What happens to us when we die?"

Nursery rhymes and song lyrics familiar to the audience can also be used in an interactive way to get listeners interested in the topic (Maxey & O'Connor, 2006). In a speech about the global population explosion, you could ask audience to finish the phrase "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe..." Common commercials,

*The wisest mind has something yet to learn.*

~ George Santayna

lyrics to Beatles songs, holiday songs, and children's games are universal.

Commercial jingles and song lyrics also work to get the audience involved. You could start a speech on boating safety with these lyrics: Just sit right back / And you'll hear a tale / A tale of a fateful trip / That started from this tropic port / Aboard this tiny ship (from *Gilligan's Island*). Depending on the make-up of your audience, you might use lyrics from Johnny Cash, Billy Holiday, The Doors, The Beatles, Jay-Z, The Judds or the Arctic Monkeys. Just remember you probably can't read all of the lyrics, you need to make sure the lyrics are directly linked to your topic, and you should be sure to cite the artist and song title.



Just for fun, can you name the artist who sang the lyrics below? Can you think of a speech topic that would correspond to the lyrics? (Answer at the end of the chapter)

### Mystery Artist

*Money, get away.*

*Get a good job with good pay and you're okay.*

*Money, it's a gas.*

*Grab that cash with both hands and make a stash.*

*New car, caviar, four star daydream,*

*Think I'll buy me a football team.*



## Be Creative

Speakers who are different are memorable (Maxey & O'Connor, 2006). To give your speech impact, be imaginative and dare to push the envelope of conformity. When you have spent time researching a topic, you may be able to envision ways to incorporate surprising facts, props or visuals that make your presentation different from others, and therefore more memorable. You could dress like a Shakespearian actor for a speech about the famous playwright. You could have the audience move their chairs and take part in a yoga demonstration. Or you might use your own audience plants to help with a speech entitled "Behind the Scenes of TV Talk Shows." When one student got up to speak, he drew a row of houses on the blackboard and then began to drink a glass of water and speak about the life giving properties of water. After making a few comments, he threw the glass of water on the blackboard --- erasing most of the houses. Then he began his speech on the devastating effects of a flood (be sure to get your professor's permission before you do something like this!). Another student giving a speech about "Clowning" had two actual clowns wait in the hall until she was ready to bring

them in and show off their make-up and costumes. The speaker was wise to have her cohorts in the room just long enough to make the point (but not the entire time which would distract from the speaker), and the audience was attentive and grateful for the variety. Hanks and Parry (1991) explain that anyone can be creative, if s/he wants to be and is willing to make the effort. For some tips on how to foster your creativity, see Table 16.2. However, you need to remember that creativity is just a tool to help you teach your audience. Do not overlook the requirements of the occasion, the content of your research, or the needs of your audience in your zeal to be creative.

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*The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.*

~ Sylvia Plath

## Stimulate Audience Intellect

Most people have a genuine desire to understand the world around them, to seek out the truth, and learn how to solve problems. The role of the informative speaker is to satisfy this desire to learn and know. To illustrate our quest for knowledge, consider the success of the Discovery Channel, the Learning Channel, the History Channel, the Food Network and other educational broadcasts. So how do we appeal to the minds of listeners? Think about all of the information we encounter every day but do not have time to pursue. Think about subjects that *you* would like to know more about. Ask what information would be universally interesting and useful for listeners. Many people fly on airplanes, but do they know how to survive a plane crash? People also share many ordinary illnesses, so what are some common home remedies? All of the people on earth originated someplace, so who were our ancient ancestors?

In addition to finding topics that relate to listeners, the information we supply should be up to date. For instance, Egypt recently had a revolution, and if you are giving a

speech on travelling to the Pyramids, you should be aware of this. When you are talking about a topic that your audience is familiar with, you should share little known facts or paint the subject in a new light. In a speech about a famous person, you might depict what they are like behind the scenes, or what they were like growing up. In a speech about a new technology, you might also talk about the inventors. In a speech about a famous city, you could discuss the more infamous landmarks and attractions.



### Table 16.2 Tips for Jump Starting Your Creativity From *Everyday Creativity* by Carlin Flora (2009)

- Take a different way to work
- Collaborate with others with complementary skills
- Seek inspiration in beautiful surroundings
- Start working on the problem right away
- Work in a blue room (it boosts creativity)
- Get a hobby or play music
- Think about your problem right before falling asleep

## create coherence Organize Logically

Several types of organizational patterns are discussed in the *Selecting and Arranging Main Points* chapter. Using these as a starting point, you should make sure the overall logic of the speech is well thought out. If you were giving speech best suited to chronological order, but presented the steps out of order, it would be very difficult to follow. Those of you who have seen the movie *Memento* (which presented the sequence of events backwards), may have noticed how difficult it was to explain the plot to others. In a logical speech, the points you are trying to draw are obvious, the supporting materials are coherent and correspond exactly to the thesis, and the main points are mutually exclusive and flow naturally from start to finish.

Clarity of thought is critical in presenting information. As Peggy Noonan (1998, p. 64) argues:

*The most moving thing in a speech is always the logic. It's never the flowery words and flourishes, it's not sentimental exhortations, it's never the faux poetry we're all subjected to these days. It's the logic; it's the thinking behind your case. A good case well argued and well said is inherently moving. It shows respect for the brains of the listeners. There is an implicit compliment in it. It shows that you are a serious person and that you are talking to other serious persons.*

When planning your speech, ask questions like: What information needs to come first? What organizational pattern best suits the topic? What information must be shared or omitted to aid in audience understanding? What points or sub-points should be grouped together to aid listeners' understanding?



### Use Simple Language

One common mistake that speech writers make when they are writing their speech is to use the same language that they would use in a written document. Experienced speech writers know that simple language and ideas are easier to understand than complex ones. "Clear speaking is not an alternative to intelligent discourse, but rather an enabler of intelligent discourse" (Carlson, 2005, p. 79). Did you know that Lincoln's Gettysburg address contains only 271 words, and

Low Impact	High Impact
Under the present circumstances	Currently
At the present time	Now
Are in agreement with	Agree
Due to the fact that	Because
Is fully operational	Works
In close proximity to	Near
Of sufficient magnitude	Big enough
In close proximity to	Near
Of sufficient magnitude	Big enough
In the event of	If
Each and every one	Each
In the course of	During
Never before or since	Never
Deciduous trees (jargon)	Trees that lose their leaves
Somnolent (jargon)	Drowsy
Awesome (slang)	Impressive
Put the bit on (slang)	Borrow
No brainer ( cliché)	Easy decision
An arm and a leg	Expensive
Vertically challenged (euphemism)	Short
Gone to the great beyond (euphemism)	Dead

251 of these words only have one or two syllables (Hughes & Phillips, 2000)? Another benefit of using simple language is that you are less likely to trip over or mispronounce simple words. Instead of "protracted," say "drawn out." Instead of "conundrum," say "puzzle." And instead of "loquacious," say "talkative. As you are writing your speech you also want to avoid technical jargon, slang, clichés, and euphemisms. This type of language is difficult to understand and tends to be low impact. Compare the *Low Impact* language column with the *High Impact* column in Table 16.3 above to see examples of ways to make your language more powerful.

### Avoid Information Overload

No one is given an unlimited amount of time to speak. You can't cover everything that there is to know about your topic. And even if you could speak forever about everything there was to know about a subject, your listeners would never be able to take it all in. **Information overload** occurs when a person feels that they are faced with an overwhelming amount of information, with the effect that they

are unable to process it all or unable to make decision. So whether you have five minutes to give a presentation or three eight hour days, you will need to narrow and focus your speech topic and objectives. If you know that you have ten minutes to speak, you will not be able to cover "Car Maintenance for Dummies," but you probably could give a good speech entitled "How to Change the Oil in Your Car." When planning your speech, be sure to determine the amount of information that can reasonably be covered in the time allowed. In fact, rather than taking the entire allotted speaking time, you should get into the practice of speaking only for 90 – 95% of the time that you are given (Reynolds, 2008). More is not always better --- and your audience will appreciate it if you can skillfully make your point with time to spare.

*Today knowledge has power. It controls access to opportunity and advancement.*

~Peter Drucker



**make your speech memorable**

**Build in Repetition**

Audience retention is determined by a number of factors including listeners’ interest, knowledge, physical and emotional state, level of stress, background, and other competing demands (Fujishin, 2000). One way to help your audience remember the content of your speech is by repetition (Hughes & Phillips, 2000). There are three ways to incorporate repetition into your speech. The first form repetition involves restating your main points in your introduction, body and conclusion. When you do this, you will restate your points using different language --- not repeat the points word for word. The second form of repetition is where a word or a phrase is repeated in a poetic way, either throughout the speech or at a critical point in the speech. One example of this would be Abraham Lincoln’s “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Another example can be found in Sojourner Truth’s speech, delivered in 1851 at a women’s rights convention.

*... That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when*

*I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?*

The final way to use repetition in your speech is through nonverbal communication. When you say the word “four” and you hold up four fingers, or when you verbally agree with a point and nod your head at the same time, you are reinforcing the idea verbally and nonverbally.

**Appeal to Different Ways of Learning**

Individuals have different learning styles, so some people are visual [V] learners, some are aural [A] learners, some learn by reading [R] and writing, and some learn kinesthetically [K] (Fleming, 2001). You can test your own learning style at [www.vark-learn.com](http://www.vark-learn.com). Understanding your own and others’ learning styles is useful for two reasons. First, you will find that you tend to teach others using your

own learning style. Second, regardless of your own learning styles, you need to appeal to as many different learning styles as possible in your informative speech. To see how each learning style prefers to be taught, see the table below.

Unfortunately, since the ear alone is a very poor information gathering device, steps must be taken to improve retention. Typically listeners only retain only a small fraction of what is explained to them verbally. The first way to enhance retention is to appeal to as many of the senses as possible. Studies show that audiences retain 20 percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they see, and 50 percent of what they hear *and* see (Westerfield, 2002). When the audience has an opportunity to *do* something (adding the kinesthetic sense), their retention increases to 80 percent (Walters, 1995). Or, if participation is not possible, a handout will raise retention to an impressive 85 percent – if the audience can review the handout at least once (Slutsky & Aun, 1997).

Another way to help your listeners remember is by the use of techniques like *association*, linking the new topic to things that the audience knows about

**Table 16.4 The VARK Model of Learning**

Learning Style	Approach the Learner With...
<b>Visual Learners</b>	Maps, charts, graphs, diagrams, brochures, flow charts, highlighters, different colors, pictures, word pictures, and different spatial arrangements
<b>Aural Learners</b>	Explanations of new ideas, large and small group discussions, lectures, audio recordings, stories, and jokes
<b>Read/Write Learners</b>	Lists, essays, reports, textbooks, definitions, printed handouts, readings, manuals, and web pages
<b>Kinesthetic Learners</b>	Field trips, hands-on projects, sensory stimulations, laboratories, recipes and solutions to problems, and collections of samples

*From Hawk and Shaw (2007, p. 7) and Fleming (2001).*

or already understands. If you were giving a speech about rugby, you might compare it to soccer and football to help the audience understand the rules. The use of *acronyms* also aids retention. On the “*Krusty Krab Training Video*” episode of *Spongebob Squarepants* (a spoof on corporate training videos), they use the acronym “POOP.” When I asked my then eight-year-old son if he remembered (several weeks after watching the episode) what “POOP” stood for, he immediately and correctly answered “People Order Our Patties.” The final technique to help audiences remember information is the *simplicity criterion*. Information is best retained when it is explained from top to bottom (rather than bottom to top), when events are presented from first to last (rather than last to first), and when information is presented in the positive voice (rather than in the negative voice) (Devito, 1981).

### Use Visuals

Visual aids can be a very powerful and efficient way to present facts that might otherwise be difficult to convey verbally. The benefits of visuals used for informative speeches include increasing interest, understanding, retention, and the speed at which your audience can understand complex facts. We live in a mediated culture, where people are visually oriented. This means that they expect to be visually stimulated with pictures, graphs, maps, video images and objects. Speakers who do not make use of visuals may be at a disadvantage when compared to speakers who use them. This is assuming of course that the visuals enhance what you are saying and that you use them well. As you know,



plenty of people use Power Point, and it does not necessarily make their speech better or more memorable.

Perhaps the best reason to use visual aids during an informative speech is to help your audience understand a concept that may be difficult to understand just by explaining it. In a speech about heart bypass surgery, would it be better to verbally describe the parts of the human heart, or to show a picture of it? How about a model of the heart? How about an actual human heart? Be sure to consider your audience! What if your speech is about an abstract concept that does not lend itself well to slick graphic representations? One way trainers get their audiences involved and make their presentations memorable is to provide handouts which the listeners complete (in part) themselves. You could use fill-in-the-blank statements (where you provide the answer), open-ended questions where listeners can write their thoughts, and activities like matching or crossword puzzles. Regardless of the type of visual media you select for your speech, just make sure that it does not overpower you or the subject. Work to keep the audience’s attention on you and what you are saying, and use the visual to complement what *you* have to say.

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*Only one person in a million becomes enlightened without a teacher’s help.*

~ Bodhidharma

### conclusion

The primary goal of informative speaking is to increase listeners’ knowledge so they can better understand the world around them and can make more informed decisions. Discussing the impact a speaker can have on an audience, Perry Wilbur (2000, p. 99) explains:

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*Always keep in mind that if your talk helps just one listener in your audience, it has been successful. It is far more likely*

*to have an impact on a number of listeners in your audiences. That is one of the real powers of spoken communication. Develop skill for getting the material across to audiences, and you can and will change lives for the better and make a worthy contribution as a speaker.*

Informative speaking is a crucial skill that, if developed, will help you be more successful in both your personal life and your professional career.

When constructing an informative speech, you should strive to be objective, spend time developing your credibility, demonstrate that you have done your research, and link your subject to the lives of the listeners.

There are four main types of informative speeches. Definitional speeches present the meanings of concepts, theories, philosophies, or issues. Descriptive speeches provide detailed word pictures of people, animals, places, or objects. Explanatory speeches report events, customs, transformations, inventions,, policies, outcomes or options. Demonstration speeches show listeners how some process is done or how to do it themselves.

Several techniques can be used by speakers to increase the effectiveness of their informative speech. Speakers can arouse interest by using attention getting elements, telling a story, adding creative features, and stimulating the intellect of the audience. Speakers can create coherence through logical organization, the use of simple language, and by avoiding information overload. Finally, a speaker can make a speech more memorable via repetition, appealing to different ways of learning, and by using visuals appropriately.

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*If you have knowledge, let others light their candles at it.*

~Margaret Fuller

## chapter review questions and activities

### review questions

1. For each of the characters described below, what types of informative speeches might each person be called upon to give in her or his personal and professional life? List as many as you can think of for each.
  - A. Stacy is an emergency room physician and medical school professor. She also serves on the board of directors for a local college. For recreation she enjoys rock climbing.
  - B. Rick is an animal control officer who volunteers his time at both the animal shelter and the local Habitat for Humanity group. He is in a bowling league with other city employees.
  - C. Akiko is in insurance sales and volunteers in the math classroom at her children's middle school. As a hobby, she collects and sells antiques.
2. Early in the module, the importance of credibility was discussed. Can you think of any presentations you heard where you DID NOT feel that the speaker had credibility? What did the speakers do and/or say to make you think they lacked credibility? If you were to give these speakers advice on how to improve their credibility, what would you say?
3. The chapter states that speakers need to be objective, credible, knowledgeable and that they need to make the topic relevant to the audience. Rank these responsibilities in order from most to least important, and then explain your ranking.
4. Imagine you are giving an informative speech on \_\_\_\_\_ [you fill in the blank]. How would you apply each of the five attention getting techniques --- intensity, novelty, contrast, activity and humor --- in your speech? Make note of at least one idea for each technique.
5. After you have selected a topic for your informative speech, answer the questions below to help determine ways to orient your topic to your audience. Questions adapted from Ulloth and Alderfer, (1998b, pp. 61 - 62).
  - A. How much information does your audience already have about your topic?
  - B. What social or cultural influences of audience members might affect their reaction to your topic?
  - C. How can your topic be made interesting if the audience has no knowledge or apparent interest in it?
  - D. Are there any mental, physical, or emotional factors in the audience that may affect their response to your speech?
  - E. What do you want your audience to understand after you have delivered your speech?

### Answers to song lyrics question on page 8:

**Mystery Artist:** Pink Floyd "Money" from Dark Side of the Moon

**activities**

1. The list directly below includes a number of potential sources for your informative speech (Walters, 1995; Ulloth & Alderfer, 1998; Slutsky & Aun, 1997). Using this list for ideas, which of these potential sources could be used in the research process for each of the following speech topics?

**speech topics**

Tattoos	Action figure collecting	Free local activities
Making great BBQ	Music piracy	Auctions
Bruce Lee	Decorating on a budget	Creating a web site

**sources of interesting materials**

- Libraries
- Bookstores
- Used book stores
- Video stores
- Music stores
- Reference books
- Phone books (use for experts and specialized businesses)
- Schools and colleges (where your topic is taught or researched)
- Magazines and newsletters
- Trade associations and publications
- Special interest clubs and groups
- People selling products and services
- Research departments of television stations and newspapers
- Objects related to the subject
- Museums
- Computer search engines and data bases (on and off campus)
- Other sources (e.g. specialized stores, friends, colleagues, educational videos)

2. Use the list of potential informative speech topics below to complete the steps of this activity.

A. Which of the topics listed below might also be used for a persuasive speech?

B. For each of the four different types of informative speeches (Definitional, Descriptive, Explanatory, Demonstration), identify three topics that would be appropriate to use for each type of speech.

C. At this point, you should have twelve topics listed --- three each under each type of speech. Now, take one topic from each of the four groups and generate a specific purpose statement and three potential main points. You will have four different speeches, each with their own specific purpose and main points.

**potential speech topics**

- Adventure vacations
- The Alamo
- Alternatives to chemo therapy
- Boating safety
- Building a pond
- Changing the oil in your car
- Characteristics of successful managers
- Cultural changes resulting from 9/11
- Diamond selection
- Ghandi's achievements
- Hospice care
- Hot air balloons
- How a meteor killed the dinosaurs
- How to set up a wireless network
- Illicit drug policy
- Matching dog breeds with owners
- Orchids
- Ramadan
- Robots for the home
- Space vacations
- Using Power Point effectively
- Unemployment and the economy
- What to do when your identity is stolen

## glossary

### Activity

The use of action words, physical or visual movement, or faster rate of speech to draw the audience's attention.

### Attention Getter

A device or technique used to gain the audience's attention in the introduction or keep the audience's attention during the course of a speech.

### Contrast

An attention getting technique whereby supporting ideas are compared to emphasize difference.

### Credibility

Refers to the audience's perception of the speaker's expertise, authenticity, and trustworthiness.

### Definitional Speech

A type of speech in which the speaker attempts to explain or identify the essential qualities or components of concepts, theories, philosophies, or issues.

### Demonstration Speech

A speech that shows listeners how some process is accomplished or how to perform it themselves.

### Descriptive Speech

A speech that provides a detailed, vivid, word picture of a person, animal, place, or object.

### Explanatory Speech

Also known as a briefing, the focus of this speech is on reports of current and historical events, customs, transformations, inventions, policies, outcomes, and options.

### General Purpose

The speaker's overall goal, objective, or intent: to inform, to persuade, or to entertain.

### Humor

The use of amusing or comical facts, stories, or forms of expression to maintain an audience's attention.

### Information Overload

An overwhelming feeling of being faced with so much information one cannot completely process it.

### Informative Speech

A speech in which the primary purpose is to provide the audience with information that they did not already know, or to teach them more about a topic with which they are already familiar.

### Intensity

Supporting material that is characterized by a high degree of emotion, color, volume, strength, or other defining characteristic.

### Novelty

Very recent or unusual supporting ideas.

### WIIFM

An acronym that stands for "What's in it for me?" This is the question that listeners ask themselves when they begin to listen to a speech. Listeners want to know; What does this speech have to do with my life? Is this information useful to me? Is the speaker talking about something I already know? Is the subject interesting? Why should I pay attention?

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