Informative Speaking

Inquire: Informative Speaking in Action

Overview

Informative speaking is everywhere. Between classes at school and orientations at work, you will always be around informative speaking. Knowing what kinds of informative speaking exist and how to organize them can be a great boon to your public speaking skills. This lesson will teach you what informative speaking is, and what information speaking topics exist. Then, this lesson will cover information overload and how to avoid presenting too much information. Finally, you will learn about information bias and how to identify it in presentations.

Big Question: In what ways do you inform audiences when you speak?

Watch: Seeing Informative Speaking at Work

Informative speaking is everywhere. Any speech that tries to teach new information or expand on current information is considered informative. Informative speaking doesn’t try to convince an audience to do something. It tries to teach the audience new things. This lesson will teach you about informative speaking, different informative topics, and how to organize informative speeches. You’ll learn about event, object, and process speeches. Event speeches teach about historical or cultural events, such as holidays. For instance, if you listen to your friend from Israel explain the importance and traditions of Yom Kippur, that is an event speech. An object speech teaches about a specific thing, such as a new kind of prosthetic limb or a new car. A process speech teaches the steps in a process, such as making a sandwich or changing a tire.

After you learn the topics of informative speaking, you will learn to avoid information overload. There are important guidelines for how much information to include. The final topic this lesson will cover is identifying information bias. Information almost always has a skew, and this lesson will help you identify if this skew goes too far or if it is usable based on outside verification.

Think of a time that you were in a class. What strategies did the teacher use to maximize your learning? Perhaps in a history class you were taught the events of war or conflict. Did the organization of the presentation follow the order of events? That is chronological organization. Different organizational patterns can be used to maximize the learning of your audience. This lesson will teach you to use topics and organizational patterns to their fullest to ensure the audience learns everything you want them to from a presentation. As you go through this lesson, keep in mind the class you thought of a moment ago. Relate that example to the information you read, and evaluate whether it was an effective informative speech.
Informing Your Audience

Overview

Informative speaking is one of the primary uses of public speaking you will encounter. This lesson will teach you what informative speaking is, different kinds of informative topics, how to avoid information overload, and how to identify bias in information.

What is Informative Speaking?

Informative speaking is speaking that attempts to teach new material or deepen an understanding of existing material. Informative speaking does not attempt to persuade the audience. It merely attempts to present information. When presenting a speech, it is important to understand what the purpose of the speech is. If a speech is persuasive, you will need to teach some amount of information to the crowd. On the other hand, if the speech is informative, you shouldn’t try to convince them of something.

The thesis statement of an informative speech guides the knowledge that the speaker wants to impart to the audience. You should tell the audience upfront what your goal is and how you intend to achieve it. Use that thesis statement to guide the creation of the speech itself.

What are Informative Topics?

Informative speaking relies on several topics to present information. Event speeches seek to teach an audience about a historical or cultural event, such as a holiday or a day of memorial. Object speeches seek to teach an audience about an object, such as a specific kind of engine. Process speeches seek to teach an audience how something is done, such as how to tie a shoe or how to change your oil.

There are several ways to present these topics. You can use spatial organization, that relates things to how they are physically arranged. You might teach someone how to build a building by starting with the foundation, moving on to the support structure, and finishing with teaching about decoration. Chronological organization teaches a topic in the order that events took place. Topical organization explains things in whatever order they occur. To teach someone to bake a cake, you start with how to mix ingredients before teaching how to decorate the cake.

Information Overload: How Much is Too Much?

In a presentation, it is important to know how much information to present. The human brain has a limit on the amount of new information it can learn at one time. An easy rule of thumb is to introduce five, plus or minus two, new concepts in a presentation. The human brain is capable of remembering three to seven new concepts in a short time. Keeping your presentation within that limit will make it easier for all involved to remember what was covered. Visual aids are also important tools to help people remember, but you don’t want to overload those either. When making a visual aid, keep in mind a rule of four. Try to have only four bullet points on a slide that aren’t much longer than four key words each. Additionally, you want to explain your visual aid. You don’t want the visual aid to have to explain itself.

Both of these suggestions are just that: suggestions. They are handy things to keep in mind but are not hard and fast rules. When gauging if you have included too much information, it is important to consider audience input. If people look lost, take a moment to explain a concept deeper so they have time to
mentally digest the information being presented. Audience feedback is a great tool to avoid presenting too much information.

Presenting Factual Information and Identifying Bias in Research

When identifying bias in a source, it is important to ask a series of questions to identify how trustworthy it is. First, ask who funded it. Knowing who paid for information can give you insight into why it was produced in the first place. Additionally, knowing who paid for it allows you to make some basic assumptions about its trustworthiness. For instance, if a report concludes that cigarettes don’t cause cancer and it was paid for by Camel Cigarettes, it calls into question the authenticity of the information.

You also need to pay attention to the agenda of those gathering the information. Knowing what a company is trying to achieve when they fund research lets you know if the information can be trusted. It is important to understand that bias isn’t avoidable or bad. Just because something has a skew doesn’t automatically make it untrustworthy. Gauge what the agenda is, and figure out how it might alter information instead of saying that because there is an agenda, the information is therefore useless. Once you identify what agenda is present, you can ask the final question: How does that information suit the agenda? If the information doesn’t do anything to further the agenda, it’s more likely to be trustworthy. Alternatively, if the information might motivate action according to the group’s agenda, it’s a good idea to find a second source to act as verification for the information.

Reflect Poll: Your Informative Style

What kind of informative speaking do you usually do?
- Event speeches
- Object speeches
- Process speeches

Expand: Informative Speaking Tips and Tricks

Overview

Informative speaking is an important skill to learn. No matter what you end up doing in life, you will inevitably have to present something that requires informative speaking. This section offers some tips and tricks on how to most effectively use informative speeches.

Tips and Tricks

The first thing you need to understand about informative speaking is that it intends to teach. Whether it is new knowledge or more advanced knowledge, informative speaking hopes the audience will learn from the speech. With that in mind, you should focus your efforts on making sure the information is best absorbed by the audience.

The first tip is to focus on repetition. Let your audience know what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then remind them of what you said. This style of presenting exposes the information to the audience enough times that someone is able to remember it. This is why we use a speech organization that has a preview statement, a body, and a review section. We want to make sure the information is repeated enough times to be remembered. However, repetition does no good if the speech is too broad. Your thesis should be a guide to keep your speech focused on the most important information for your
audience to know. Your speech needs to stay focused, so avoid tangents and chasing information that gets you distracted and off topic.

The next tip deals with questions. You want to allow questions from your audience so they can learn most effectively. If they are confused, questions are the best way to clear that up. When answering questions, you want to be brief and always relate the information back to your thesis. Sometimes, the best way to answer questions or clarify confusion is with the use of an example. When preparing your speech, you should come up with examples to explain different concepts. You want to be able to give real world examples that the audience can relate to so they can make the most sense of the new information you want them to learn.

If you keep these tips in mind, you'll be well on your way to delivering speeches that teach your audience exactly what you want them to know!

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

An article offering advice on how to write an introduction for an informative speech
● Link to resource: https://penandthepad.com/write-introduction-informative-speech-5794049.html

An article explaining four main types of informative speaking
● Link to resource: https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/page.cfm?pageid=1048&guideid=52

An article offering suggestions on how to avoid presenting too much information
● Link to resource: https://spokenimpact.com/how-can-i-avoid-information-overload/

Lesson Glossary

informative speaking: speaking that attempts to teach new material or deepen an understanding of existing material

event speeches: seek to teach an audience about a historical or cultural event

object speeches: seek to teach an audience about an object

process speeches: seek to teach an audience about how something is done

spatial organization: relates things to how they are physically arranged

chronological organization: teaches a topic in the order that events took place

topical organization: explains things in whatever order they occur

Check Your Knowledge

1. Informative speaking attempts to change your audience's mind.
   a. True
   b. False

2. A good rule of thumb to avoid information overload is five topics, plus or minus two.
   a. True
   b. False

3. All information has a bias.
   a. True
   b. False
Answer Key:

Citations

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