

Note: Students may be assigned to prepare and present sample conclusions.

The Conclusion

A day is never ended without a sunset of some kind. If the sunset is captivating the entire day is often long remembered because of its impressive ending. A speech is much the same. It must have an ending and to be most successful the ending should be impressive.

The conclusion brings together all the thoughts, emotions, discussions, arguments, and feelings which the speaker has tried to communicate to his audience. The closing words should make a powerful emotional impression on the listeners, since in most cases logic alone is insufficient to move an audience to act or believe as the speaker suggests. Not only this, but the conclusion is the last opportunity to emphasize the point of the speech. It should be a natural culmination of all that has been spoken. It should not be weak, insipid remarks which are begun or ended just as the speaker starts a hesitating but very obvious journey towards his chair.

The conclusion should be, without exception, one of the most carefully prepared parts of a speech. Just when it should be prepared is largely a matter of opinion. Some authorities advise preparing it first because such a practice enables a speaker to point his talk toward a predetermined end. Other speakers suggest preparing the conclusion last because this procedure allows a person to draw his final words from the full draft of his speech. Regardless of when a conclusion is prepared, there is one point on which all authorities agree and it is that the conclusion must be carefully worded, carefully organized, carefully rehearsed and in most cases committed to memory or nearly so. The conclusion should be brief, generally not more than one-eighth to one-tenth of the entire speech, perhaps less, depending on the speech, the speaker, the audience, the occasion and the environment in which the speech is delivered. A conclusion should never bring in new material, since such an action requires a discussion of the new material which in turn unnecessarily prolongs the speech. Also the introduction of new material brings about an undesirable anticlimax and frequently irritates an audience because a speaker runs past a perfect place to stop.

When a speaker moves into his conclusion, it should be obvious that he is closing his remarks. His intentions should be so clear that he should not have to tell the audience what he is doing by saying, "In conclusion..."

The importance of the delivery of a conclusion cannot be overemphasized. The total organism, mind, body and soul, must be harmoniously at work. The eye contact should be direct, the gestures and actions appropriate, the posture alert, and the voice sincere, distinct and well articulated. The speaker's effort in delivering the conclusion may be likened to a foot racer who culminates an entire race in one great, last surge of power as he lunges toward the tape- and victory.

Now that you have been told what should be contained within a conclusion there remains one major question which is, "How do you actually go about attaining these ends, i.e., what methods should be used?"

There are numerous ways to develop a conclusion. Some of the better known are listed as follows:

1. Summary is a method often utilized in closing a speech. It is sometimes expressed by restatement of the speech title, of the purpose, of some specific phrase that has been used several times in the speech, by an apt quotation, either prose or poetry, which adroitly says what the speaker wishes to be said, or by any other means which tends to bring the main point of the speech into final focus for the audience. An example of a very brief summary is contained in the following words which were once used by a speaker to summarize a speech against Hitler's aggression in Czechoslovakia:

Example:

"Czechoslovakia will live again! The hordes of Hitler, the Huns of Europe, the intrigue of Berlin shall not swallow up this mighty and prideful people. They shall rise up and fight their horrible aggressor. Yes, Czechoslovakia will live again!"

2. Recapitulation may be used in longer formal speeches when it is necessary to restate points in a one, two, three order. The danger of this method is that it may become monotonous and uninteresting. Short speeches do not require this type on conclusion, since the points are easily remembered. A short speech may close with the last main point if it is a strong point. Usually, however, more is needed to close a speech, even a short one.

3. A striking anecdote, an analogy, or a simile may be employed as closing remarks, or any one of them or a suitable combination of them may be interwoven with the summary or recapitulation type of conclusion. One conclusion which utilizes the analogy for a speech concerning old cars is:

Example:

“These old cars of ours are like the wonderful one horse shay. Let us hope that they, too, do not suddenly fall apart, scattering nuts and bolts across our neighbor’s lawn.”

4. An emotionalized or idealized statement of the thesis may serve as a useful conclusion. If the theses were “American Honesty”, one conclusion of the above type could be:

Example:

“Honesty is and always has been the moral fiber of our country. Honesty is the heritage of over two hundred million Americans. To this criterion of national manliness the world pays respect and offers admiration. It reveres American honesty as a true indication of Christian living. Let us not blot out this bright star which outshines all the myriads of lesser lights. Let us continue to deserve the right to be known as the world’s most honest nation.”

5. There may be a powerful restatement of the thesis. If the subject were “America’s Might”, the final words could be:

Example:

“America will live forever, strong, defiant to aggression, relentless in attack, mighty in defense, humble before God.”

6. A vivid illustration of the central idea may fittingly conclude a speech. If it were on the Navy’s might, the following words could be used:

Example:

“The famous words of John Paul Jones, who said he had not yet begun to fight, are emblazoned again across the world’s horizon, for tonight the American Navy launched ten new battle ships!”

7. A call for action from the audience may clinch a speech. It must of course pertain to the ideas of the speaker. This is an excellent type of conclusion, particularly when the purpose has been to stimulate or to get action from the audience. If a speech were on “Building Good Government”, a conclusion could be:

Example:

“Let us no longer sit here, doing nothing, while the crooked politicians corrupt our government and steal our money. Let’s go out one by one, by two’s and three’s or by the hundreds and vote for clean government and honest officials. Let’s do it tomorrow-it’s election day and our only hope!”

One final word of warning is this: When the speech is done the speaker should hold the floor for a second or two (this cannot be stressed enough), then return to his chair, seat himself politely and remain seated until the chairman adjourns the audience. Display of frivolity of any kind on the part of the speaker after the speech may sharply alter many good impressions which he has made while on the platform. A person should not let his actions portray how well or how poorly he thinks he has done on his speech. The audience will decide this point.

HOW TO BEGIN A SPEECH

INTRODUCTION

What ways can you start a speech? How can you get an audience to listen to you?

Don’t bore your listeners. Give them a speech they will like. How do you do that? By making your speech conform to the natural way an audience thinks.

It is true that every audience is different—different age, different background, different attitudes—and you must always account for these differences. But it is also true every audience has a tendency to think in a uniform and predictable way. Knowing this process, we can set up a formula for organizing speeches that meets the listeners' needs and allows you to give them a speech they'll like.

The formula is:

Introduction

- Capture
- Motivate
- Assert
- Preview

Body

Conclusion

- Action step if it is a persuasive speech

Capture

Some audiences start out bored, stifling yawns. So the speaker's very first sentence must pack a punch, capturing the listener's attention.

For example, avoid beginning a speech on cancer by saying "I am going to talk to you about cancer, a terrible disease." Instead, you might say "One hundred new metal coffins will be lowered into our city's cemetery this month. Of those, at least twenty will contain cancer victims."

The following list suggests several ways to capture audience attention.

1. Startling statement: an unexpected fact. See example above.
2. Quotation: a famous person's words that relate to your subject

Example: "Genius," said Tom Edison, "is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." (This quote might begin a speech on the secret of success.)

3. Rhetorical question: a question the audience will silently answer in their own minds.

Example: "If you were awarded an expense free trip to any place in the world, where would you go? Would you choose a tropical island? Or a land of ice and snow? Would you seek the noisy life of a city or the pastoral scene of the country?" (You might use these questions to begin a speech on how to choose vacation spots.)

4. Illustration: a short anecdote or story, which may be true or fictional and that applies to your speech.

Example: "The great scientist Louis Pasteur was terrified by one thing—dogs. The sight of a dog immobilized him. Even when he heard a dog bark from blocks away, his agonized boyhood memories of friends driven crazy through the bite of a mad hound would haunt him. So at the height of his career when doctors were pleading that he focus his attention on a dozen diseases, Pasteur limited himself to finding a vaccine for rabies. His persistent research and final triumph were possible because he had great personal feeling that aided his creativity. (So might you begin a speech that discusses how a person's strong emotions can produce inventive ideas.)

5. Humorous anecdote: a story that is really funny and that directly applies to your speech.

Example: “Oh, darling, I’ve missed you,” she cried, and fired the gun again. (This might be a funny way to begin a speech on the multiple meanings of words.)

Motivate

The second step in your introduction and in your audience’s thinking process is to ask, “What’s that to me?” So the speaker must motivate the audience or make them interested by showing why the subject is important to them. Tell the audience why you bring up the subject, how it affects them, how it touches on their lives. Why should girls listen to a talk on karate? Why is your class affected because the cocoa crop is doing badly in South America? A wise speaker will answer such questions for his audience, giving them specific reasons for listening to him.

You can motivate or interest your listeners by using one or a combination of three approaches:

1. Penalty. Through the use of fear you describe what will happen if they don’t listen. An example of motivating through penalty is used when the U. S. Air Force requires each man to pack the parachute he will use. Failure to learn the correct way provides an obvious penalty!

Penalty examples: You will lose money.
You will endanger your health.
You will fail the class.
You will be out of date.

2. Reward. This is the preferred process because people respond more eagerly to promises than to threats.

Reward examples: You will win a prize.
You will save your life.
You will make more money.
You will increase your enjoyment.

3. Curiosity. You appeal to your listener’s desire to learn for the sake of learning.

Curiosity examples: “How hot is the sun? How heavy is it? How old is it? What are sunspots? These are questions that people have asked through the years.”

Assert.

After the audience knows why it is important to listen to the speech, the next thing they wonder about is the specific approach the speaker will use. You meet this audience need by stating your assertion or the specific purpose of your speech.

Example: “There is a correct way to hit a golf ball.”
“The toy French poodle makes a good house pet.”
“Many TV commercials on medicine are dishonest.”

Preview

When the audience knows your specific purpose, they then wonder how you will present it. A brief initial summary or sneak preview of your main points will help them to follow easily the rest of your speech.

Example: Assertion: "There is a correct way to hit a golf ball."

Preview: "Let's discuss the proper stance, the grip, and the swing in order to hit that ball correctly."

Example: Assertion: "The toy French poodle makes a good house pet."

Preview: "The poodle is smart. It does not shed. It does not have a 'doggy' odor. Let's focus on each of these reasons in turn."

A speech without an introduction is undressed and shocks many people. It can be said with few exceptions every speech demands an introduction. It has also been said that every speaker has the audience's attention when he rises to speak and that if he loses the attention, it is after he begins to speak, hence the importance of the introduction becomes apparent.

There are a few points to remember when preparing and delivering an introduction. Dullness and triteness, undue length of opening remarks, false leads that are not followed up, stories which are suggestive or risqué used only to fill time, or a mere announcement of the topic should be avoided. Any apologies or remarks which might be construed to be apologies for the speech should definitely be omitted. There is nothing so invigorating, so appreciated, so likely to secure good will as an introduction which provides an original, fresh and sparkling meeting between the audience and the speaker and his subject. Work for it.

Generally speaking, an introduction is prepared last. This is practical because a speaker needs to have the body of his talk outlined and his ideas developed before he can best determine how they should be introduced. The length of an introduction may vary considerably; however, it should not comprise more than one-fourth of the entire speech. It may comprise much less.

One more important aspect of the beginning of a speech is the speaker's behavior before he takes the platform and after he gets there. If he is sitting on stage in full view of his audience he should remain comfortably and calmly alert, yet politely seated. People are carefully appraising him while he waits. When the speaker is introduced, he should rise easily without delay or noise and move to his place on the platform. After arriving there, a few seconds should elapse while he deliberately surveys the scene before him. Then after addressing the chairman, if he has not already done so, he is ready to begin his introductory remarks.

Packet # 4 Questions over "How to End a Speech"

1. Describe how to use "summary" as the method to conclude a speech.
2. When would you want to use "recapitulation" to conclude a speech?
3. How long should the conclusion be?
4. What does the conclusion bring together?
5. Summarize "The final word of warning" from your packet.