

Impromptu Speech

Assignment Description

Objectives

After completing both impromptu speeches, students should be able to:

- Quickly develop and advance clear and well-reasoned arguments by:
 - supporting a thesis with solid and succinct supporting main points and then explaining this connection to an audience clearly
 - supporting each main point with solid and succinct supporting evidence and then explain this connection to an audience clearly
- Deliver introductions, transitions, and conclusions in a manner that clarifies the speech's arrangement
- Use natural movement, gestures, and pace in a manner that engages the audience

Speech Description

In business, in school, and in public life, you are often called upon to “make a few comments.” Though these are not as formal as some of your other speeches, they are speeches none the less. Often, people so tasked with a short speech become flummoxed. The impromptu speech assignment is designed to help you develop resources so you can shine where others falter. Impromptu speaking reinforces all aspects of good public speaking: quick thinking, sound argumentation, strategic word choice, and engaged delivery.

It is important for you to understand the key distinction between a good, well-supported impromptu speech and b.s. This speech does not reward those who simply fill air with words for three to four minutes. My main goal for this speech is that you are able to quickly arrange and deliver a clear and well-supported argument. Each one of these words is important to this assignment. You must act quickly, which requires a sense of speech arrangement. Your speech must be clear, which requires you to include previews, reviews, and transitions. Your speech needs to have, at its heart, a well-organized and well-supported argument. This means that you must practice impromptu speeches many times before you deliver your speech in-class.

For the impromptu, you will have 6 minutes of prep time and be expected to deliver a 3-4 minute speech. The impromptu speech is worth 60 points.

Procedure

Each student will receive a thesis statement on a slip of paper. Each student will then have time to prepare a short speech and then deliver the speech. You should use your time judiciously. You will select a strip of paper that lists two thesis statements; you can speak on either one of the thesis statements. You do not have to agree with the thesis statement; you can argue against it. Next you should support the thesis statement with 2-3 main points. For each main point, you need at least one piece of evidence that illustrates your main point.

Speech Arrangement

At minimum, your speech should include the following elements:

Introduction

- State your thesis
- Preview of your main points

[Transition to Main point #1]

I. Main point #1

- Statement of your first main point
- At least one piece of evidence (two are preferable) illustrating the first main point
- Summarize your first main point

[Transition to Main point #2]

II. Main point #2

- Statement of your second main point
- At least one piece of evidence (two are preferable) illustrating the first main point
- Summarize your second main point

[Transition to the conclusion]

Conclusion

- Restate the your thesis statement
- Review your two main points and explain how they support your thesis
- Conclude your speech

Sample Arrangement

Below are an outline for one impromptu speech that agrees and one impromptu speech that disagrees with the thesis statement:

“A College Education is essential to a good job”

Sample 1—agreeing with the thesis

Thesis-- A College Education is essential to a good job.

- I. Most top companies demand a college degree
 - A. Tell a story about workers at Microsoft
 - B. Discuss an example about the education necessary for produce buyers at supermarkets
- II. A college education prepares you for a number of potentially different jobs
 - A. List and discuss some of the various skills students with Liberal Arts degrees possess
 - B. Talk a bit about number of jobs my brother has had

Sample 2—disagreeing and offering a counter-thesis

Counter-thesis—A college education, though it might be a ticket into the corporate world, is not essential to getting a good job.

- I. Entrepreneurial spirit cannot be taught
 - A. Talk about the success of the self-taught Thomas Edison
 - B. Discuss the intellectual benefits that Bill Gates gained by dropping out
- II. Many fulfilling jobs lie outside the corporate world
 - A. Vinyl Artists don't need a formal education
 - B. Landscaping is quite rewarding and can be learned through apprenticing

Basic Requirements

- **Time:** Your preparation time cannot exceed time allotted. If you finish your preparation before preparation time limit is up, you can use that time to think more about the speech. Once you begin the speech, you have 3-4 minutes to deliver your speech. Your assignment grade will be lowered by 5 points for every 45 seconds you speak under or over the target time range.
- **Notes:** You may use a notecard to prepare and deliver your speech.
- **Arrangement:** Your speech must include a thesis statement, at least two supporting main points, and at least two supporting pieces of evidence (at minimum, one piece of evidence per main point).
- **Evidence:** You should use popular knowledge and examples to explain and support your main points. These examples can be from movies, television shows, other classes you have taken, history, pop culture, etc. Almost anything can be a good piece of evidence so long as it clearly supports your main points.

Hints on Doing Well

- **PRACTICE!!!:** I cannot stress this enough. While practicing is always the surest way to get better at something, this is particularly true in the case of the impromptu speech. I assume that you have not performed something like this previously. This is a skill building assignment to get you ready for more formal speeches in the quarter. You should practice developing thesis statements, main points, and evidence whenever you have the opportunity. Pick a few sentences to work with and practice them in your head as you walk from class to class. If you don't practice, you will not do well on this assignment.
- **Get off the card:** I am often struck by how wedded students are to their notecard. You only spent 6 minutes with it out in the hallway; it only has a few words on it; why do you spend 75% of your time looking at that blank sheet? I know it feels safer to look at this card, but it generally leads to a poorer speech. You have had 6 minutes to gather your thoughts, now simply explain your argument to us. Remember, the goal here is to communicate your thoughts to an active audience, not to simply stand and speak in front of us. The card often serves as a barrier separating you from us; get off it.
- **Move through the parts with purpose:** What I mean here is think about what your goals are in each section. In the introduction, you need to us to understand what you are going to talk about, so make sure we understand. In the main points, you need to explain for us how this main point supports the thesis, or how the evidence supports the main points. Your goal is not to have everything laid out perfectly; rather, you need to spontaneously generate words that will help us, your audience, to understand what you are arguing.
- **Finally, PRACTICE:** Come to the Speaking Center and work with a TA or a tutor. These people can help you (even if you don't think you need help) and these people know what excellent, good, and adequate speeches look like and how you can improve. Also, you need to practice as you will perform the speech for a grade. So, simply running through a speech in the shower, or writing out lots of potential main points doesn't really count as practice. You need to also get in lots of practice session that have you recreate the class conditions (a 6 minute prep time, 4 minutes speaking time). You should run through at least 10 full impromptu speeches exactly as you will do them for a grade.

Grading Criteria for the Impromptu Speech

In an *adequate speech* (42-47), the speaker will:

1. conform to the time limit
2. demonstrate a clear sense of overall speech arrangement with an appropriate number of main points, but deliver unclear previews, reviews, and transitions
3. need to explain more clearly their the thesis/argument
4. need to define more clearly distinct main points
5. need to explain more clearly how the main points support the thesis
6. need to explain more clearly how the evidence supports the main points
7. need more concrete evidence
8. need to engage the audience more
9. need to slow down and/or speak up more

In a *good speech* (48-53), the speaker will:

1. conform to the time limit
2. begin by engaging the audience with some sort of attention gaining device
3. demonstrate a clear speech arrangement and reinforce that clarity through effective preview, reviews and transitions
4. state the thesis in a clear way
5. deliver distinct main points that support the thesis
6. need to explain a bit more clearly or succinctly how these main points support the thesis
7. use interesting and concrete evidence to support the main points
8. need to discuss the evidence in a more focused or succinct manner
9. deliver a strong introduction and conclusion
10. engage the audience periodically, but still rely a bit too heavily on notecards. In essence, the speaker moves between talking at the audience and communicating with the audience
11. deliver the speech with good projection and confidence, but probably needs to slow down a bit

In an *excellent speech* (54-60), the speaker will:

1. conform to the time limit
2. begin the speech in an interesting way that engages the audience
3. demonstrate excellent speech arrangement that makes sense and is easy to remember
4. deliver smooth previews, reviews and transitions that clearly divide the speech into smaller parts
5. deliver an introduction that orients the audience to the topic and argument in an interesting and succinct manner
6. conclude the speech in a natural way that builds to the final line
7. will explain their clear and distinct main points, which are phrased in, that clearly support and strengthen the thesis
8. phrase their thesis and main points in a succinct and memorable way
9. use interesting and concrete examples that clearly support and illustrate the main points
10. explain the links between the evidence and main points, and the links between the main points and the thesis in a concise and effective manner
11. consistently engage the audience by engaging them in a dynamic act of communication
12. deliver the speech in manner that accents their clarity and ethos

The *poor speech* is deficient in the criteria required for the *adequate speech*.

In a *poor speech* (36-41), the speaker will:

1. fail to meet the time requirements
2. fail to explain how the main support the thesis statement
3. fail to use sufficient supporting evidence
4. use evidence that does not support the main points
5. deliver a poorly organized speech that is difficult to follow
6. fail to deliver a clear introduction and conclusion

In a *failing speech*, the speaker will:

1. fail follow the guidelines of the assignment
2. demonstrate little to no concern for the speech

IMPROMPTU SPEECH EVALUATION

Name: _____

+ = excellent, √+ = good, √ = adequate, √- = flawed, - = poor/missing

Arrangement & Invention (45 points)

- _____ The speaker clearly and effectively stated the thesis affirming or countering the chosen sentence in the introduction
- _____ The speaker clearly and effectively previewed the main points in the introduction
- _____ The speaker clearly and effectively transitioned between main points
- _____ The speaker clearly and effectively restated the thesis and reviewed the main points in the conclusion
- _____ The speaker concluded the speech clearly and effectively
- _____ The main points adhered to the principles of coordination, subordination, and discreteness
- _____ The speaker explained clearly and effectively how the main points supported the thesis

- _____ The evidence adhered to the principles of coordination, subordination, and discreteness
- _____ The speaker explained clearly and effectively how the evidence supported the main points
- _____ In general, the speaker advanced a clear and well-reasoned argument

Delivery (15 points)

- _____ The speaker engaged the audience
- _____ The speaker spoke at a pace that contributed to the meaning and rhythm of the speech
- _____ The speaker moved and gestured in a natural way that contributed to speech
- _____ The speaker spoke confidently and with appropriate projection for the space
- _____ In general, the speaker's delivery contributed to the meaning and clarity of the speech

Comments: _____

Time: _____

Time Penalty (if any): _____

Grade for Speech: _____