

Persuasive Speech Assignment Description

Objectives

After completing the persuasive speech, students should be able to:

- Identify their target audience and the areas where the target audience might be persuaded
- Develop strategies designed to increase an oppositional audience's support for your position
- Make language choices that appeal to an oppositional audience
- Extemporize a speech in a lively manner

Description

The persuasive speech asks you to persuade members of your audience who disagree with you on a topic of genuine public controversy. These controversies can range from the local, to the regional, to the national and international. What is important is that you speak to an issue that affects the public as a collective and is debated publicly. We will discuss public forum topics more in class.

The purpose of this speech is to persuade, not simply to argue. You might be able to develop a perfectly logical argument that is wholly unpersuasive to an audience. Persuading audience members that disagree with you requires that you think about why they disagree with you, identify areas where these audience members can be moved, and speak to those areas in a way that highlights your shared interests. It is doubtful that you will be able to convert some or all the oppositional members in your audience in a 6-8 minute span, but you can begin to weaken their commitment to their original position and better understand and sympathize with your position. Remember that your credibility plays an important role in persuading audiences; as such, you must deal with oppositional arguments in a fair and convincing way. Good persuaders do not ignore the opposition, nor do they simply attack the opposition, they engage opposition's arguments in an even-handed way.

Basic Requirements

In addition to persuading your audience, the persuasive speech must satisfy the following requirements:

- **Public Forum Topic:** You must speak to a topic that affects us as a public and is debated publicly. See your textbook 442-443 for a description of public forums. In selecting a public forum topic, you must select an issue that has reasonable pro and con arguments. You should not speak to a topic that everyone agrees on; rather, you need to select issues that demand genuine persuasion.
- **Persuasiveness:** You are attempting to *weaken* your audience members' support for the opposing case. You need to develop arguments that are designed to sway audience members who may initially disagree with your position.
- **Time:** The speech should run 6-8 minutes. Your assignment grade will be lowered by 5 points for every 45 seconds you speak under or over the target time range.
- **Notes:** You must deliver the speech extemporaneously. That means, the speech should not be memorized or scripted. You may put a keyword outline of your speech on standard 3x5 notecards. However, you should not read or rely heavily on these notes.
- **Sources:** You must orally cite a minimum of three sources. Two of your sources must be available in print (in other words, you can only cite one web source). Your evidence should clearly support your arguments and you should explain the inference. You should include a variety of evidence (statistics, examples, testimony, etc.).
- **Visual Aid:** You cannot use a visual aid for this speech.

Hints on Doing Well

- **Select a topic that allows you to persuade:** Students may try to speak on a topic that is not genuinely controversial. I am reminded of a speaker who made a wonderful argument against cyanide fishing (which is exactly what it sounds like—using cyanide to fish). The problem was that she didn't really have to persuade her audience to support efforts to halt cyanide fishing...because we already agreed. No one was out there making principled arguments for cyanide fishing; there weren't two reasonable parties that disputed this issue. You need to select a topic that people actually dispute right now. Also, you need to think ahead a bit. Can you still speak on this topic in a few weeks for the advocacy speech? During the presidential election, I had people who wanted to do persuasive speeches on who to vote for. This would normally be a fine topic, but the elections were over by the time they spoke. Barring the invention of a time machine, trying to persuade us to take an action that we already took is irrelevant.
- **Speak to persuade:** Despite my protestations, I regularly see speeches that are simply self-defensive arguments (e.g. "This is why I believe what I believe and you are simply wrong if you think otherwise!"). Television conditions us to make these types of arguments, but it is unhealthy and unproductive in interpersonal settings. No one is going to agree with the person who just spent 6-8 minutes making fun of or attacking his or her beliefs. You must think about introducing new evidence that maybe we hadn't thought about or reframing the issue in terms of a shared value. So, there is a sample speech on the web that does a good job of this. She argues for using nuclear energy. Why? Because there are newer and safer modes of generating nuclear power (new evidence), because she show that the minimal risk is worth the decrease in pollution and increase in cheaper energy (shared values), and because other respected nations regularly use nuclear energy (reliable testimony/shared ethos). Is this argument going to convince a die-hard environmentalist? Probably not. Might it convince someone who had a negative preconception about nuclear energy, but hasn't done much research? Maybe.
- **Use logos, pathos, and ethos:** Students tend to get lost in their research and regurgitate every factoid they found. This is not helpful. We are persuaded by facts and statistics, but we are also persuaded by examples that show the human impact of your argument. Of course, you have to deploy such examples carefully and honestly. If an audience feels that you are milking an example, they will probably discount the example and much else of what you say. Also, use ethos. Make sure we know that you know what you're talking about. Also, explain how what you are arguing for is in our best interests as an audience.
- **Make savvy language choices:** Please avoid the words, "my opposition." This is a convenience in the lecture to explain the assignment and talk about the process, but it just sounds odd in your speech. You are trying to get the audience to understand your position and its benefits; you want to emphasize that you are on the same side. Use language that grants their position legitimacy, encourages agreement and negation. This is why persuading is harder than arguing. Arguing simply requires you to spout off; persuading requires you to constantly think about how you will be heard and understood.
- **Get off the cards:** This holds true for all speeches, but I've had the most problems with card reading in the persuasive speech. It is probably because you have more evidence in your persuasive speech than in others. Regardless, you need to engage us as an audience of listeners and generate the words at the moment of speaking. There may be a few phrases that you have to get just right, but cards should be used minimally. Cards are often a crutch. You can easily remember the main parts of your speech (you are mentally equipped to remember this amount of information). However, you need to

practice this speech many times before you give it for a grade. A good rule of thumb is 10 full run throughs before the speech itself.

Grading Criteria for the Persuasive Speech

In an *adequate speech* (52-59), the speaker will:

1. address a controversial public issue
2. need to explain the thesis more clearly
3. explain the current and relevant facts and opinions concerning the issue
4. respond to the appropriate oppositional arguments more clearly or directly
5. tend to develop an argument for their beliefs, but need to focus more on what is persuasive for an oppositional audience
6. rely heavily on one type of proof
7. satisfy the source requirement, but need a greater variety of sources (or better sources)
8. need to explain more clearly the inferences linking the evidence to the claim or the main points to the thesis
9. demonstrate a clear sense of overall speech arrangement with an appropriate number of main points, but deliver unclear previews, reviews, and transitions
10. have a proficient introduction and conclusion
11. address the importance of the topic, but need to do so with greater urgency
12. demonstrate a lack of awareness about the most effective language choices for an oppositional audience
13. be delivered somewhat extemporaneously, but with an over reliance on notes
14. be delivered in a manner that engages the audience with eye contact and vocal variety
15. fail to increase their ethos through the delivery of the speech
16. conform to time limits

In a *good speech* (60-67), the speaker will:

1. address a controversial public issue in a way that can appropriately be dealt with in 6-8 minutes
2. develop a clear thesis that speaks to the heart of the controversy in an intelligent way
3. explain the current and relevant facts and opinions concerning the issue
4. respond to the appropriate oppositional arguments in a fair and persuasive manner
5. deliver a speech that focuses on the audience's concerns about the issue
6. rely on a number of different types of proofs
7. use a variety of evidence in effective ways
8. clearly explain the nature and focus of the argument
9. need to explain a bit more clearly or succinctly how these main points support the thesis
10. deliver a persuasive and appropriate introduction and conclusion
11. explain why this topic is a matter of concern for all parties
12. make persuasive language choices highlight the shared values of the speaker and the oppositional audience
13. deliver the speech extemporaneously with minimal note card use
14. deliver the speech in a polished and engaged manner, demonstrating much practice and forethought
15. increase their ethos by demonstrating fairness and goodwill

In an *excellent speech* (68-75), the speaker will:

1. address a controversial public issue in an insightful way
2. develop a clear thesis that speaks to the heart of the controversy in an intelligent way
3. summarize the current and relevant facts and opinions concerning the issue concisely in a way that clarifies the issues in the debate
4. respond to the appropriate oppositional arguments in a fair and persuasive manner
5. deliver a speech that demonstrates a concern with the oppositional audience at all levels
6. interweave a number of proofs
7. deploy a variety of evidence in effective ways
8. clearly explain the nature and focus of the argument
9. clearly and succinctly how these main points support the thesis
10. deliver a persuasive and appropriate introduction and conclusion that establishes interest and secures goodwill
11. identify and explain how the speaker's position is a fair position that best addresses the concerns of all invested parties
12. make language choices that minimize the differences between the speaker and the oppositional audience and highlight a set of shared values that support the speaker's position
13. deliver in a dynamic way that shows a mastery of the material and of the speech itself, with little to no notecard use
14. deliver a polished and engaged speech
15. increase their ethos by demonstrating fairness and goodwill

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

In a *poor speech* (45-51), the speaker will:

1. address a private issue or address a public issue in a way that cannot be dealt with in 6-8 minutes
2. need to explain the thesis more clearly
3. fail to demonstrate a clear understanding of the current situation
4. unfairly accuse the oppositional case of unreasonable arguments
5. ignore the appropriate oppositional arguments
6. provide an argument for their stance that ignores the needs of the oppositional audience
7. lack sufficient sources
8. rely on weak support that does not support the speech's main points directly
9. lack a clear introduction and conclusion
10. lack a sense of internal structure
11. rely too heavily on notes
12. fail to engage the audience
13. be delivered in a way that increases oppositional members' opposition to the speaker's argument
14. not fall within the time requirements

In a *failing speech*, the speaker will:

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

PERSUASIVE SPEECH EVALUATION

Name: _____

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

Note: The percentages here are guidelines. All these categories are mutually dependant.

Arrangement (20%)

- _____ The speaker clearly and effectively introduced the topic and explained its importance and relevance
- _____ The speaker clearly and effectively previewed the argument and main points in the introduction and reviewed them in the conclusion
- _____ The speaker highlighted the structure of the speech and made it easy to follow with artful transitions
- _____ The main points and the subpoints adhered to the principles of coordination, subordination, and discreteness
- _____ The speaker arranged the main points appropriately to persuade an oppositional audience

Delivery (20%)

- _____ The speaker used notes minimally and 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 delivery contributed to the speaker's ethos and persuasiveness

Invention and style (50%)

- _____ The speaker identified and responded to the most relevant and pressing concerns of the opposition
- _____ The speaker appealed effectively to those areas where the audience could be moved
- _____ The speaker effectively used a variety of proofs designed to persuade an oppositional audience
- _____ The speaker effectively used a variety of supporting materials that would be judged as credible by an oppositional audience
- _____ The speaker cited supporting material effectively and appropriately
- _____ The speaker used language that increased the persuasiveness of the argument
- _____ The speaker used language that highlighted shared values and did not alienate or offend the oppositional audience

Overall (10%)

- _____ The speaker addressed a controversial public issue
- _____ The speaker's argument was appropriate for the time constraints and the constraints of the assignment

Additional Comments:

Time: _____ 6-8 min

Time Penalty (if any): _____

Grade for Speech: _____