

Christian Communicators of the Southeast

TIPS ON STRUCTURING A PERSUASIVE SPEECH

It is much easier to write a simple informative or ceremonial speech than it is to write and deliver an effective persuasive speech that inspires someone to change their attitude, perspective or behavior. Here are some tips we have collected that will help you to write a good persuasive speech.

1. Keep in mind that your goal is to winsomely gain support for your position, and/or to persuade your audience to take a specific step or action. It is **not** to "twist their arms" with strong argumentation tactics, such as in a formal debate round.
2. Find an appropriate and interesting topic. For many students, this is one of the most difficult parts of writing a persuasive speech. The league has provided a document with a list of tips on "Finding a Great Persuasive Topic". There you will find a list of some fun speech topics about popular culture and sports, and another list of some tired, overused topics to avoid.
3. Set realistic goals. Your speech will probably be somewhere between eight and ten minutes long. You're not going to change someone's mind about a major issue in those few minutes. However, you might help them think differently about a smaller part of that issue. For example, you are not going to change someone's mind about the huge problem of illegal immigration, but you might enlighten them on one aspect of the issue, such as how the children of immigrants are educated. In this document you will find some examples of how to take a "big" topic and make it more effective by discussing a smaller part of that topic.
4. Know your audience. In order for you to encourage your listeners to embrace your views, you must have a sense of who is likely to be in the audience and what kinds of appeals might resonate with them. But never make the mistake of assuming that the entire audience already either agrees or disagrees with you.
5. To help identify with the audience, use examples that they can relate to. For example, if you're giving a speech about how certain "big box" retailers cause small ones to go out of business, mention a popular retail store in your area that went out of business because they couldn't compete with the chains.
6. Use excellent support. Do your research and pack your speech with plenty of statistics, facts, and quotes from credible sources, as well as good illustrations, stories and emotional examples. However, do not rely too much on examples to provide strong support, realizing that an isolated example can be found to support just about anything.
7. Represent the opposing viewpoint accurately. When discussing the other side's point of view, make sure you accurately represent their motives and their point of view. For example, if you are giving a speech in support of gun control, do not imply that those who disagree with you do not care about the safety of citizens. If you are giving a pro-life speech, do not imply that pro-choice supporters do not like children. People who disagree with you may feel alienated and stop listening, which would contradict the goal of this speech: to advocate for and garner their support for your position.

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8. Represent the other side sympathetically. This can be difficult to do, but it is important! State clearly that although you disagree with the other side, you understand that people who disagree with you have good reasons for doing so. Never say or imply that people who disagree with you are immoral or unkind. If you insult someone, they certainly will not want to warm up to the position you are advocating.
9. Find common ground with the other side. An audience or judge will identify with you if they understand that although your opinions may be different, you do have similar goals and values. They also might agree with you if you convince them your point of view does not conflict with their values. For example, if you are giving a speech in favor of school dress codes, tell the audience that you share their concern about students and personal freedom. Then explain to them why you feel dress codes will actually increase student freedoms.
10. Anticipate any potential holes or flaws in your own argumentation that the audience may be silently considering, and then communicate that you recognize there are reasonable arguments the other side may have. So, use good disclaimers, statements that present an argument against your position, and explain why this argument is not correct. A good disclaimer goes like this: "I understand that many people support embryonic stem cell research because it can lead to medical breakthroughs. While this is true, let me explain to you how adult stem cells are also very promising." Remember, represent opposing views with accuracy and respect.