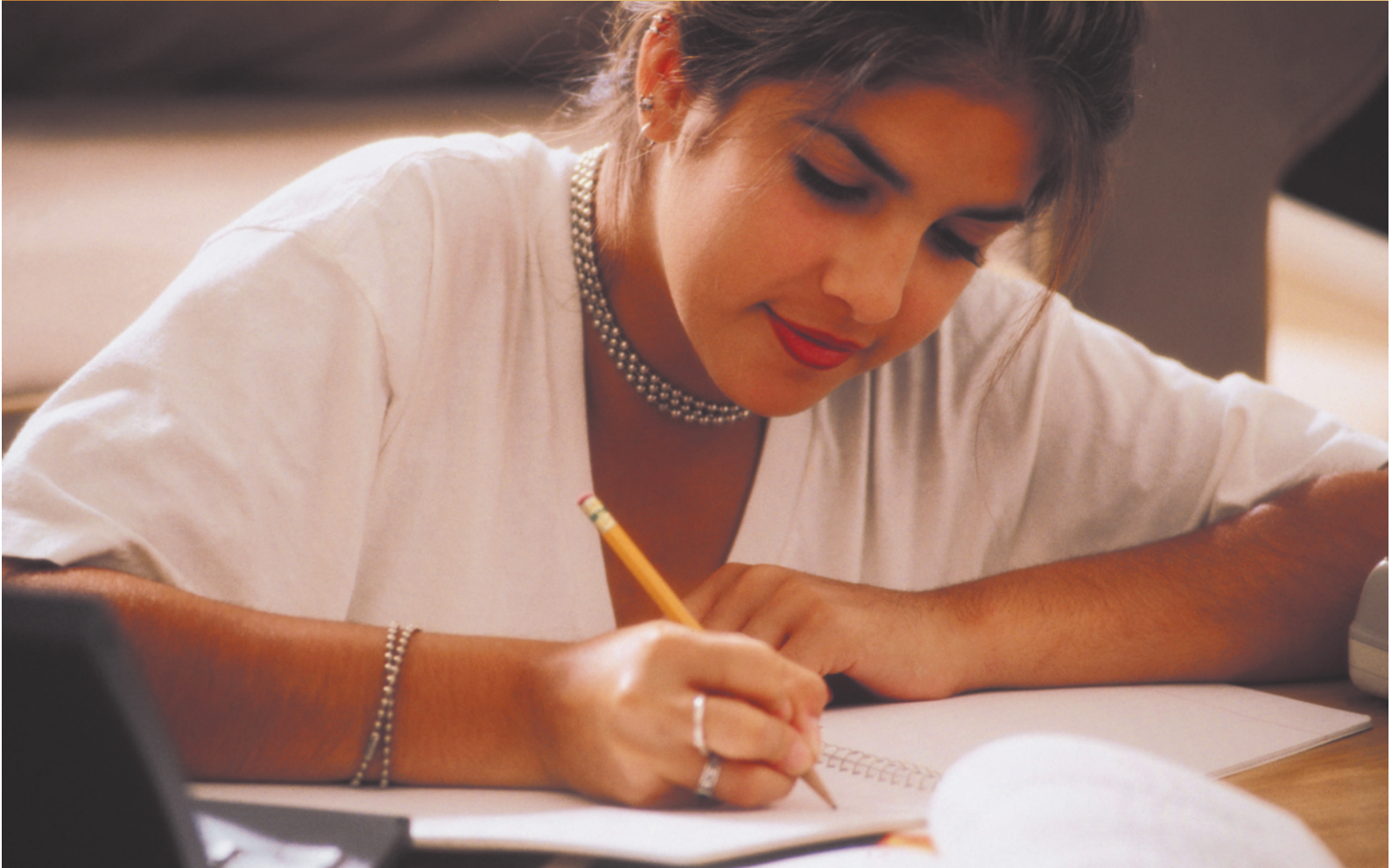


CHAPTER THREE



The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don't define them, or ever seriously consider them as believable or achievable.

**DENIS WAITLEY,
THE WAITLEY INSTITUTE**

Looking up gives light, although at first it makes you dizzy.

**MEVLANA RUMI,
13TH CENTURY SUFI POET**

Selecting a Topic and Purpose

What will you learn?

When you have read and thought about this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Search for and select a public speaking topic.
2. Evaluate a public speaking topic.
3. Identify three general purposes of public speaking.
4. Write a specific purpose for a public presentation.
5. Develop a thesis statement for a public presentation.

One of the first steps in preparing a presentation is choosing a topic. You may choose to talk about a topic that is familiar to you, or you may use this opportunity to research an unfamiliar topic about which you are curious. In either case, the choice is yours. In this chapter, we will consider selecting a topic and purpose.



Cultural Note

FREE SPEECH VS. CULTURAL RESPECT

Which is more important? Respect for cultural sensitivity or free speech? Most of us would agree that both are important. What happens if a speaker uses the word “oriental” when referring to people of Asian descent? When called on it, the speaker insists that freedom of speech allows this usage. How would you respond? Would your response depend on the ethnic makeup of your audience? Why or why not?

Maria Vega was worried about her speech topic. Having grown up in San Jose del Cabo, Maria had met many Americans who visited the Mexican city. Her family owned a jewelry store in downtown San Jose, and she had worked at the store while she was in high school. Maria had learned English as a child and had had many opportunities to practice with English-speaking customers in her family's store. She spoke with only the slightest accent. She began college in Mexico City, but she had transferred in her second year to a state university in the United States. Her sister had gone to the school before her and encouraged Maria to join her.

Maria had mixed feelings about the tourists she met in San Jose and the Americans she met at college. She certainly appreciated the economic boost that tourists provided in Mexico, but she worried about the future of her town. The old church on town square was no longer held in deep reverence as it once had been. Instead, the winter months found people eating ice cream cones and sipping tall drinks while sitting on the church steps.

The Americans she met in class were friendly, but she wondered about their values. Those who had visited the Cabo area seemed only to appreciate the bars and restaurants and not the history or the culture of the Baja Mexican area.

Maria registered for a public speaking course in her first term. She was excited about the class, but now she was facing her first speech assignment. Her instructor had scheduled Maria's presentation for the first day of the assignment. Maria had thought a great deal about the assignment, but she did not yet have a topic. What could she share with the class? What did she know that they did not know? What would her classmates like to know? How could she determine what her goal should be? Maria thought about the presentation while she was walking to class, while she was exercising, and while she was trying to fall asleep at night. Still, she did not have a topic.

Searching for a Topic

The range of topics on which you can speak is almost limitless, but sometimes, like Maria, you might have a difficult time identifying a topic for your speech. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the right of free expression, saying, in part, “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.”

Does the First Amendment mean that nothing is off limits? No. Speakers cannot defame others with falsehoods, they cannot incite audiences to take illegal action, and they cannot threaten the president's life.

The First Amendment is often the subject of debate in contemporary society. The development of the Internet, concern for children's rights, differing views on women's rights, and incidents of hate speech by a variety of groups all fuel the sometimes fiery debate about the parameters of the First Amendment. Nonetheless, you are free to speak on almost any topic that you can identify. Check with your instructors for any particular expectations they may have. Here are some of the topics of speeches included in this book:

| | |
|---|--|
| Apex predators | Public security |
| The digital divide | "No Child Left Behind" |
| What is "ethnic cleansing"? | The phenylketonurics among us |
| Public assistance in the 21st century | The guidelines for ethical decision making |
| Hate crime in your state | The price of prescription drugs |
| The use of nanotechnology on oil spills | Hunger Awareness Day |
| Health issues in underdeveloped countries | The Architects of Peace project |

When your instructor assigns a speech, what do you do? If you are like Maria and many other beginning speakers, you may put off the assignment as long as possible. You may consider possible topics as you go about other daily activities. How can you jump-start the process so you have more constructive time to plan your presentation?

In this section, we will discuss five methods of searching for a topic: individual brainstorming, categorical brainstorming, conducting a personal inventory, current topic identification, and Internet searching. Some of these methods will be more interesting and useful to you than others.

Individual Brainstorming

Brainstorming occurs *when you try to think of as many topics as you can in a limited time*. Without judging them, you simply list all topics that come to mind. Groups frequently use brainstorming when members get together to propose a number of ideas. After the brainstorming process, which should be limited to a specific amount of time, say five minutes, the group discusses the ideas and selects one or more by assessing their quality. Individual brainstorming occurs when you, individually, spend a certain amount of time writing down all the possible topics you can think of. After you have completed that phase of the process, you evaluate the topics and choose two or three for further research.

Categorical Brainstorming

Categorical brainstorming is similar to individual brainstorming. The difference

Civic Engagement

Discuss with your class the obligations associated with the right to free speech. Besides legal obligations (not libeling others, not inciting illegal or dangerous activities), what other obligations do speakers face when granted the right of free speech? Are people obligated to enact their right of speech?

Teaching Tip

To avoid trivial topics, encourage students to become audience-centered by selecting a topic of significance to their listeners.



Conduct a personal inventory to identify topics related to your life such as experiences, attitudes, values, beliefs, interests, and skills.

TABLE 3.1 TOPICS IDENTIFIED BY CATEGORICAL BRAINSTORMING

| PEOPLE | PLACES | THINGS | EVENTS |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Wonkette | Kosovo | salsa | Cinco de Mayo |
| Bill Gates | Australia | higher education | Halloween |
| Dixie Chicks | Arctic National Wildlife Refuge | social justice | spring break |
| Lance Armstrong | Hollywood | tsunamis | Earth Day |
| Madonna | Lake Mille Lacs | business improvement district | birthday |
| Vince Chase | Napa Valley | neuroscience | Chinese New Year |
| Maya Lin | Bangkok, Thailand | geography | wedding |
| Barack Obama | South Central L.A. | blogs | funeral |
| Coldplay | Tibet | fishing gear | graduation |
| Jennifer Lopez | Miami | coffee | Race for the Cure® |
| Nelson Mandela | Mount Rushmore | diversity | election day |
| Beyoncé | Central Park | red beans and rice | Boxing Day |
| Chris Rock | Nepal | conventional wisdom | concerts |

Writing and Discussion Activity

Have students brainstorm individually as many topics as they can in five minutes. Have them circle and share their top three choices. Have the class critique the topics.

is that *you begin with categories that prompt you to think of topics*. For example, you might think about people, places, things, and events. Begin by writing these four categories on a sheet of paper and making four columns. Then brainstorm topics that fit in any of the four columns. Table 3.1 provides an example.

Conducting a Personal Inventory

Another strategy that might be helpful is conducting a **personal inventory**. Consider *features of your life such as experiences, attitudes, values, beliefs, interests, and skills*. Write down anything that describes you. Don't worry if your words don't sound like a topic for a presentation. No idea should be discarded at this stage. Later you will cull through this list and identify two or three topics that might work for your presentation. Here are some topics that students identified using personal inventories.

Civic Engagement

Using the same topical categories as those in Table 3.1, generate a new table using only campus, community, or regional topics.

- Studying abroad
- Interning in the White House
- Service learning with listening-impaired children
- Laser surgery for better sight
- The symbols in a powwow
- Being a Muslim in the United States
- Rugby as exercise
- Free speech in Mexico
- Health care for veterans
- Private versus public education

Growing up below the poverty line
 Preparing for a job interview
 Managing a life-threatening disease
 Pilates

Maria, who was searching for a speech topic at the beginning of this chapter, used a personal inventory to create her speech topic: San Jose del Cabo—A Vacationer’s Paradise. Maria knew that she could talk about the history and culture of the city as well as the current venues for a relaxing and enjoyable vacation.

Current Topic Identification

Another way to approach searching for a topic is to consider topics of interest today. **Current topics** are *items that you find in the news, on the media, and on the minds of people in your audience*. Among the best sources of ideas on current topics are newspapers, magazines, TV news/discussions/documentaries, radio talk shows, and the Internet. Specialized magazines of political opinion and editorials from major newspapers are especially good at inspiring ideas for speeches. Student speech topics that originated in current topics include:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| The case for war in Iraq | Organic farming |
| Are professional athletes overpaid? | Identity theft |
| Rising health-care costs | Weight control |
| Binge drinking | Anabolic steroids |
| Genetically modified produce | Hate crime |
| Investments for students | Hybrid cars |
| AIDS in the 21st century | Executive compensation |
| Nursing shortages | Same-sex marriage |
| Ethical issues in business | Suicide bombing |
| Stem cells and research | Internet privacy |

Internet Searching

Today you have another tool that was not available to students of previous generations. Your access to the World Wide Web through the Internet is an invaluable resource as you search for a topic. You can use a subject-based search engine such as the Librarians’ Index to the Internet, Dogpile, Google, or AltaVista. You can also use a metasearch engine such as Mamma.com for an even larger database. Many search engines provide a list of major categories of subjects that they index. For example, if you go to Google and click on “More” and then “Directory” from the Google Services menu, you will find the list of broad categories shown in Figure 3.1. These categories are then further subdivided into subdirectories. For example, clicking on the “Arts” subdirectory will take you to the specific categories of Arts shown in Figure 3.2.

You can get increasingly more detailed information as you follow individual links in these directories. For example, if you are interested in Theater and Street Performance, you will find coverage such as that shown in Figure 3.3.

While we provide an in-depth example of Google here, other sources on the Internet may be far more valuable to you. Two sources that many students use are Lexis/Nexis or EBSCOhost. These sources provide dozens of journals, magazines,

Civic Engagement

Contact your local newspaper and request enough copies of the current edition to bring to class (many newspapers will provide free copies for educational use). Ask students to form groups and go through the newspaper and identify as many potential topics as possible.

Group and Discussion Activity

In groups, brainstorm ways to reduce general topics into smaller, more manageable topics. The group should select three small topics to share for class consideration and comment.

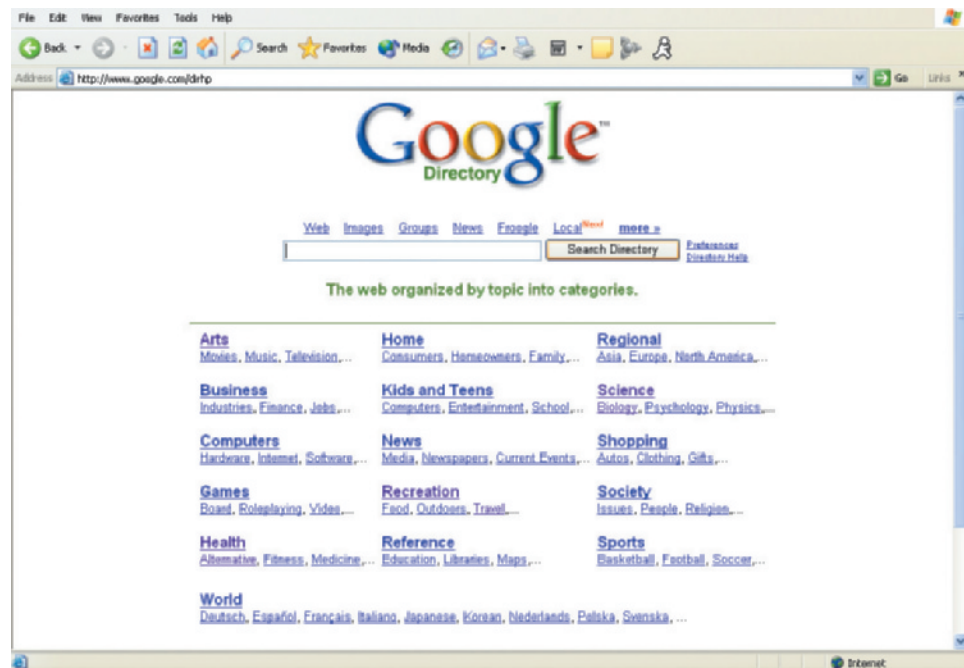


Figure 3.1 The Google directory.

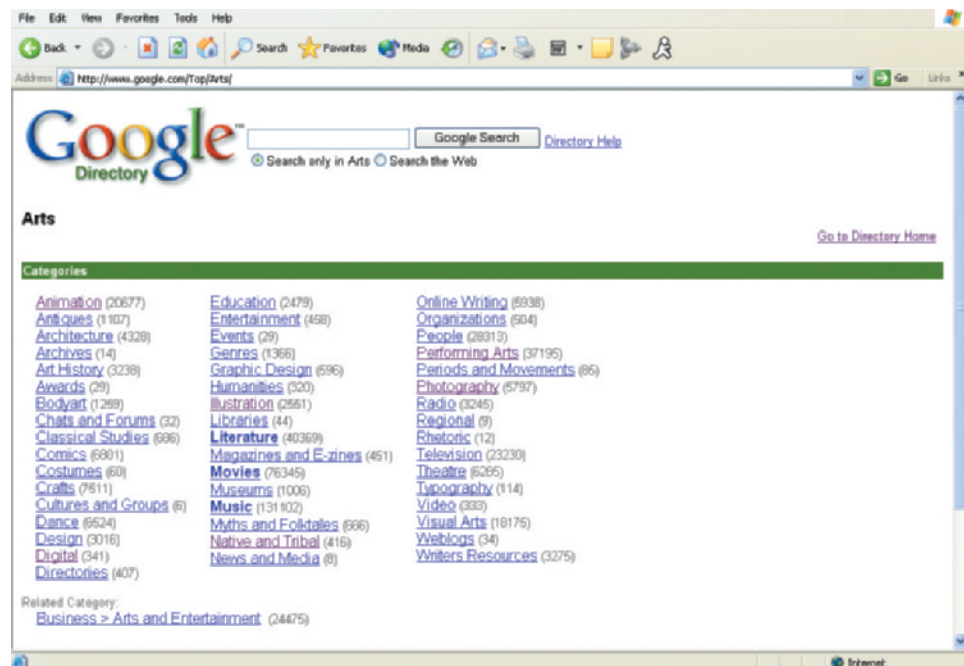


Figure 3.2 Google subdirectory to Arts.

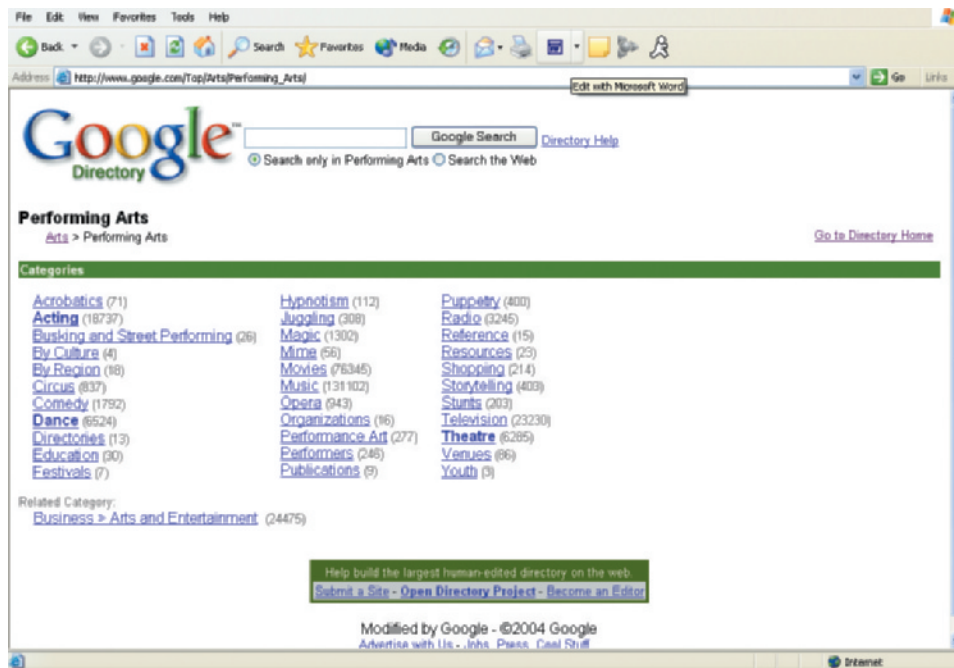


Figure 3.3 Google subdirectory to Performing Arts.

and other references. You will be able to search within them using single words or multiple words as you expand your search. However, you will need to determine if these sources are available to you on your school's library Web site or elsewhere.

Keep in mind that regardless of the search engines or indices that you use, plagiarism becomes very easy. You can cut and paste sections of text and forget to give credit to the source. You can minimally paraphrase information, which is also an infraction of the rules. The Internet is a bountiful source of information. Be careful not to take the words of others without giving credit.

Most important in searching for a topic is getting started. Journals that public speaking students completed in beginning courses revealed that students spent some time thinking about topics but did not engage in searching for a topic immediately after the assignment was given. The best strategy is to begin one or more of these searching techniques as soon as you know the speech assignment. Students who earn high grades in public speaking courses engage in this process early. You, too, can prepare an impressive presentation if you begin the process quickly.

Teaching Tip

As a research project, have students find your school's policy on plagiarism, explain what is and is not allowed, and the consequences for the offense. Can students "borrow" Internet information without citation?

Classroom Discussion Activity

Talk about the advantages and disadvantages of each method of searching for a topic.

Now that you have identified several topics for a presentation, you will need to comb through them and select one. How can you best succeed in choosing? Here are some general guidelines for topic selection used successfully by public speaking students:

Selecting a Topic

- *Speak about topics you already know.* What subjects do you know about—Web design, culinary arts, or national parks? You will save much time by choosing a familiar topic.

Teaching Tip

If your school has technology that supports online class discussion, assign each student to post a topic on the site and to respond to at least five of their classmates' topics.

- *Speak about a topic that interests you.* What subjects arouse your interest—politics, social justice, or fitness? What do you like to read about? What elective courses do you choose? Selecting a topic that interests you will make the research process enjoyable.
- *Speak about topics that are uniquely your own.* If you have done a personal inventory or an individual brainstorm, examine the list for topics that might not be shared by others in the class. Consider unusual jobs or travel experiences. Consider your unique background for ideas to share with the audience.
- *Speak about a topic that is important to your local community.* Have you heard the expression “Think globally; act locally”? How can you relate international and national issues and trends to your hometown or present community?
- *Speak about topics that your audience finds interesting*—reality television, Internet dating, or interviewing do’s and don’ts. What do people in your class enjoy talking and hearing about? Which of their favorite topics could you discuss with some authority? If people tend to talk about certain topics before or after class, consider those ideas for a speech topic.
- *Speak about a topic that the audience embraces, but you do not.* Do some members of your class hold ideas that they accept without question, but which you think could be challenged? For example, people in your class might have differing views on political candidates, cohabiting, or how much alcohol they should and do drink. Try to convince members of the audience to consider your thinking on the topic.

Evaluating Topics

After you have identified a general topic, the next step is evaluating it. You must determine if the topic meets standards of appropriateness for the speaker, audience, ethics, and occasion.

Appropriate for You

While you should always keep your attention on the audience, you also need to determine whether a topic is of interest to you. A speech is appropriate for you as a speaker if you can generate interest in the topic. If you are interested, you can be enthusiastic, and the audience is likely to share your feelings. If you are not, the audience will probably sense it.

Research is every speaker’s obligation. You should know something about your topic, but you should also have a sincere interest in learning more about the subject. A topic is appropriate for you if you know—or can learn—more about it than most of the people in the audience. Most of us possess only



When you select a topic that is appropriate for you, you communicate your enthusiasm.

superficial knowledge of most topics. A speaker can generally learn more about a specific subject than is generally known to an audience. When you have such knowledge, you are said to have subject matter competence.

Appropriate for the Audience

A speech is appropriate for audience members if the content is both interesting and worthwhile to them. The speaker is responsible for generating audience interest. Suppose you are very interested in genetic engineering, but you realize that practically nobody else in the class holds this interest. One way to arouse audience interest might be to show how controversial genetic engineering can be. For example, consider the issue of genetically modified foods.

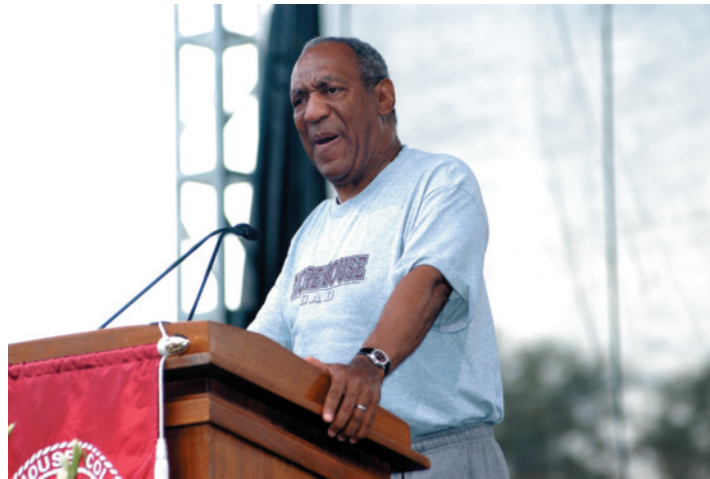
Also consider whether your topic is worthwhile for the audience. If the audience is already familiar with the topic, be careful about the information you are presenting. Try to present new information about familiar topics; do not repeat what the audience is already likely to know. A presentation about a topic too familiar to the audience, for example, reality television, would probably be uninformative. A presentation about a topic that is too trivial, for instance your summer vacation at the lake, will not be worth the audience's time. A proper analysis of your audience should reveal both how interesting and how worthwhile your topic would be. In the next chapter, we thoroughly discuss audience analysis.

Maria, the beginning speech student in our opening story, decided that her audience would be more interested in considering San Jose del Cabo as a current vacation spot rather than understanding the complete history, social issues, and economic realities of the city. Maria thus limited her topic as she considered her audience and their interest in it. She was somewhat disheartened, but she accurately assessed the audience's interest.

Appropriate for the Occasion

Finally, consider the topic's appropriateness for the occasion: Is the subject significant, timely, and tailored? A speech topic is *significant* if the content meets the audience's expectation of what should occur on that occasion. In a classroom presentation, for example, a common expectation is that the speech should be on a topic of importance to the class, the campus, the community, or the world. Your breakfast preferences, your date Saturday night, or your most recent argument with your roommate probably do not warrant publicity; that is, a presentation about them would seem insignificant.

A speech is *timely* if it can be linked to the audience's current concerns. A student who gave a presentation about a revolution in Liberia did a fine job on the speech, but the revolution had occurred several years before and the student



On several occasions when he has spoken in front of audiences composed largely of African Americans, Bill Cosby has been critical of the behavior of young African Americans. Do you believe his topic was appropriate for the audience?

Civic Engagement

Identify and discuss examples of local, state, or national figures who have advocated positions contrary to the expectations of most audience members. Discuss the potential advantages, disadvantages, and perhaps obligations that speakers would need to consider.

1. Do you, as the speaker, have *involvement* with the topic?
2. Do you, as the speaker, have *competence* in the topic area?
3. Based on audience analysis, does this topic hold *interest* for your audience?
4. Based on audience analysis, is the topic *worthwhile* to your audience?
5. Is the topic *significant* in terms of the speech occasion?
6. Is the topic *timely* or *appropriate* for the speech occasion?
7. Have you appropriately *narrowed* and *limited* the topic for the occasion?

Figure 3.4 Guidelines for topic appropriateness.

failed to demonstrate how the topic related to the present. Ancient history can be timely if the speaker can show how that history speaks to the present.

A speech is *tailored* if the topic is narrowed to fit the time allotted for the presentation. To cover the rise and fall of the Roman Empire in a five-minute speech is impossible, but to talk about three ways to avoid obesity through diet and exercise is possible. Most speakers err in selecting too large rather than too small a topic. A narrow topic allows you to use research time more effectively; researching too large a topic will require cutting much of the material to meet the time limits of the speech.

Refer to the criteria in Figure 3.4 as guidelines for evaluating your topic for appropriateness.

TRY THIS

After you have identified a number of topics using one or more of the methods in the section on searching for a topic, pair up with a classmate. Share your lists. Have your classmate identify topics in which she or he would be interested, that are appropriate for the occasion, and that meet ethical standards. Reverse roles and identify appropriate topics from your classmate's list. What does this exercise illustrate? Are either of you surprised by the other's reaction to the topics?

Purposes of Speeches

Without a map, you do not know how to get to your destination. In public speaking, without a purpose, you do not know what you should say. In this section of the chapter, we consider *purposes* of speeches and the *thesis statement*, which is a kind of short summary of your speech. Speeches have both general purposes and specific purposes. We consider both purposes here.

General Purposes

In the broadest sense, the *general purpose* of many speeches is either *to inform*, *to persuade* or *to highlight a special occasion*. In class, your teacher may determine the general purpose of your speech. When you are invited to give a presentation to a

particular group, the person who invites you may suggest a purpose. If you are not given a general purpose, you should consider the speech, the occasion, the audience, and your own motivations as you determine the general purpose of your speech.

The general purposes of speaking can sometimes overlap. You often must inform your audience before you can persuade them. Most speeches, however, can be distinguished as mainly informative, mainly persuasive, or mainly special occasion.

The Speech to Inform

The **speech to inform** *seeks to increase the audience's level of understanding or knowledge about a topic*. Generally, the speaker provides new information or shows how existing information can be applied in new ways. The speaker does not attempt to persuade or convince the audience to change attitudes or behaviors. The informative speech should be devoid of persuasive tactics. The speaker is essentially a teacher. How would the following topics lend themselves to a speech to inform?

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| What does it mean to be Muslim? | The Federal Marriage Amendment |
| After Enron: The Sarbanes Oxley Act | Early childhood literacy |
| Wind energy | Recognizing bias in language |
| Interviewing: Best practices | Purchasing a PDA |
| Tips for improving your grades | Wetlands ecology |

Keep in mind that the main idea behind the informative speech is to increase the audience's knowledge about a topic.

William B. Harrison, Jr., chief executive officer of J. P. Morgan Chase and Company, delivered a talk to the Peterson Business Award Dinner at the Greenwich Library in Greenwich, Connecticut, on March 7, 2002. Harrison began his informative talk by stating,

Tonight I will look at how two institutions—banks and libraries—have evolved through three great revolutions in information technology. This will be a quick, even lighthearted look.

Similarly, Dr. Two Bears, a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, began her talk,

While statistics vary on the frequency of procedures performed, an increasing number of teenagers are seeking plastic surgery.

These two speakers give dozens of speeches each year. They demonstrate their ability to state their purpose clearly and cleverly. Professional speakers can serve as good role models for beginning speakers.

The Speech to Persuade

The **speech to persuade** *seeks to influence, reinforce, or modify the audience members' feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors*. Persuasive speeches may seek change or they may argue that the status quo should be upheld. Persuasive speakers attempt to add to what the audience members already know, but they also strive to alter how the audience feels about what they know and ultimately how they behave. The speaker, in this instance, is an advocate. How would the following topics lend themselves to a speech to persuade?

Civic Engagement

Select one or more vital topics and analyze how topics can be approached as either informative or persuasive messages. By using several examples, you will better be able to distinguish between “mainly informative” and “mainly persuasive.” This distinction is more difficult to recognize when engaging complex, multifaceted, or controversial topics.

| | |
|--|--|
| Binge drinking should be reduced on college campuses | Why families are in crisis |
| Young adults need to worry about heart disease | Serve the community |
| Medicine, ethics, and compassion | Why schools should lower tuition |
| CEOs must take responsibility | How to improve your family relationships |
| People must become involved with politics | Trust must be restored in America |
| Improving American education | Ten commandments of community |
| Minorities in business | A just AND peaceful world? |
| Globalization and business development | Ethics: One day at a time |

Daniel Ramirez, a student, began his persuasive presentation,

Maybe you have never thought about the safety of your automobile, but after hearing my presentation today, I hope you will. Two months ago, my wife asked me to run some errands in her new car. This automobile purchase was the result of careful research and numerous consultations with *Consumer Reports* magazine. As I sped to pick up a few groceries and two items from the drugstore, nothing was further from my mind than all the investigative work she had done prior to buying the car. But when an oncoming car hit me head on, both air bags deployed exactly as they were designed to do. The engine absorbed the impact of the collision and was driven downward rather than toward the front seat. Amazingly, I walked away without a scratch.

No one in the audience could have doubted that the purpose of his speech was to be persuasive.

CD-ROM Activity

View the video clip on the CD-ROM entitled "Conveying the Central Idea." Why should the central idea be clear? What happens if it is ambiguous?

The Special Occasion Speech

The **special occasion speech** is a presentation that highlights a special event. Special occasion speeches are quite common, but they differ in many ways from the speech to inform or the speech to persuade. Special occasion speeches include presentations that have as their purpose to welcome, to pay tribute, to introduce, to nominate, to dedicate, to commemorate, and to entertain. The following topics would lend themselves to a special occasion speech.

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Honoring the leader of the Boy Scouts of America | An anniversary tribute |
| A eulogy for an old friend | A nomination speech |
| Celebrating Campus Compact | Dedication of the new library |
| The governor of New Mexico: A friendly roast | An after-dinner "dessert" |
| A toast to the bride and groom | Words that make us laugh |
| On my retirement | Some presidential remarks |

An excerpt from a special occasion speech follows:

Happy Birthday Mom!

This day means a lot to us, and I thought I'd take a few minutes today to tell you why. The most obvious explanation, of course, is that we all like an excuse for a party!

But there's a more important reason.

We all want you to know how much we appreciate everything you've done for us.

And we all want you to know that we think you have a lot to celebrate.

For starters, you've been a great provider.

You've been the kind of mother who puts her family first, and does whatever it takes to make . . .

Specific Purposes

The general purpose involves nothing more than stating that your goal is to inform or to persuade. The *specific purpose* goes a step further. Here *you identify your purpose more precisely as an outcome or behavioral objective. You also include the audience* in your specific purpose. For example, a specific purpose statement might be, "My audience will be able to list the five signs of skin cancer." A specific purpose statement thus includes your general purpose, your intended audience, and your precise goal. Some additional examples of specific purpose statements might be the following.

My audience will be able to explain why violence and bullying in elementary schools are on the rise.

My audience will be able to define and identify hate crime.

My audience will state the benefits of walking.

My audience will identify three reasons to help register persons without homes to vote.

My audience will be able to identify helpful herbs.

My audience will be able to describe ways to close the digital divide.

My audience will stop drinking alcoholic beverages in excess.

My audience will identify three reasons to become a nurse.

Statements of specific purpose guide the entire presentation like a map or blueprint. When developing your specific purpose, consider the following four characteristics of good purpose statements.

1. They are declarative statements rather than imperative statements (expressing a command, request, or plea) or interrogative statements (asking a question). They make a statement; they do not command behavior nor do they ask a question.
GOOD: My audience will be able to state some reasons for failing to graduate within four years.
POOR: Why do students flunk out of college?
2. Strong specific purpose statements are complete statements; they are not titles, phrases, clauses, or fragments of ideas.
GOOD: My audience will be able to defend our institution's policy on liquor on campus.
POOR: The importance of liquor policies
3. They are descriptive and specific, rather than figurative and vague or general.
GOOD: My audience will learn how to create a playlist on iTunes.
POOR: My goal will be to demonstrate all the many things you can do with an iPod.

E-Note

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC PURPOSE

Find a passionate speech, such as the short message that President Ronald Reagan provided on January 22, 1981, as he spoke to the American hostages freed from Iran (at <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1981/12281d.htm>). Or examine President Bill Clinton's farewell speech to the nation (available at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/clintonfarewell.htm>). Or consider a famous historical speech such as Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death," which you can access at <http://theamericanrevolution.org/ipeople/phentry.asp>. Another well-known historical speech is Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions," available at <http://gos.sbc.edu/byyears/old.html>. Can you determine the general purpose and the specific purpose of the speech you have selected?

4. They focus on one idea rather than on a combination of ideas.

GOOD: My audience will be able to distinguish between legal and illegal drugs.

POOR: I want my classmates to avoid illegal drugs and possibly getting arrested; I also want them to know about legal drugs that may be useful to them as they become increasingly fit.

If your statement of purpose meets these standards, then you are ready to begin creating a thesis statement for your presentation. Maria determined her statement of purpose: My audience will be able to identify at least three attractions in the San Jose del Cabo, Mexico, area.

Thesis Statement

You may decide the general kind of presentation you will give and the specific goal you have before you conduct your research. However, unless you have a personal involvement with your topic, you will probably not be able to develop the thesis statement until you become more informed.

The **thesis statement** is a *summary of the speech* that typically is established early in the presentation. It is similar to the topic sentence or central idea of a written composition: a complete sentence that reveals the content of your presentation. Some examples of thesis statements follow:

- U.S. businesses need to restore trust with the public.
- Puerto Rico's Caribbean National Forest is a national treasure.
- Drug use by NCAA athletes decreased from 1985 to 2005.
- Diversity is America's good fortune.



San Jose del Cabo offers many attractions for discerning travelers.

- Community service is essential for any successful democracy.
- Hispanics have become the largest minority group in the United States.
- Intercultural communication knowledge is essential for successful globalization.
- Over 1.2 million young people in Los Angeles are “at risk” and are in jeopardy of not reaching adulthood.
- Eco-terrorism has become routine.
- Moral truth is not the same in every culture.

What are some qualities of a good thesis statement? (1) The thesis statement should be a complete statement rather than a fragment or grouping of a few words. (2) The thesis statement should be a declarative sentence rather than a question, explanation, or command. (3) The thesis statement should avoid figurative language and strive for literal meanings. (4) Finally, the thesis statement should not be vague or ambiguous.

Let us examine some examples of poorly written thesis statements:

Implementing a job shadowing program

The immune system is fantastic!

Are you getting enough sleep?

Television destroys lives.

The right to vote

What is wrong with these thesis statements? The first and fifth are not complete sentences. The second is an exclamation while the third is a question. The second uses language (“fantastic”) that can be defined in multiple ways, while the fourth uses exaggeration to make a point. Some of these topics may also be viewed as trivial. How could we rewrite these ideas into appropriate thesis statements?

A job shadowing program should be implemented on our campus.

The human immune system is important for homeostasis.

The human need for sleep varies with age and activity.

Excessive television viewing may lead to violent behavior.

Voting is an important element of a democratic society.

Purposes of speeches are thus general and specific. Although the general purpose is often to inform or to persuade, the specific purpose goes further. The specific purpose includes the goal of your speech as a precise outcome or behavioral objective. The specific purpose reflects considerations of your audience. The thesis statement is a one-sentence summary of the speech and should be a complete and unambiguous statement.

CD-ROM Activity

View the speech on the CD-ROM entitled “Sharks: The Misunderstood Monster,” and ask students to identify the general purpose, specific purpose, and the thesis statement of the presentation.

Let us finish this chapter by visualizing the three elements that will form the foundation of your presentation. Regardless of the purpose of your speech, all presentations usually require a topic that is appropriate for the speaker and the audience, a purpose

From Topic Selection to Thesis Statement: A Three-Step Process

TABLE 3.2 FROM TOPIC TO PURPOSE TO THESIS STATEMENT

| | INFORMATIVE PRESENTATION | PERSUASIVE PRESENTATION | SPECIAL OCCASION PRESENTATION |
|--|---|--|--|
| STEP ONE TOPIC | Wetlands ecology | The ethics of publicly held companies | An anniversary tribute |
| ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| STEP TWO PURPOSE | To increase the audience's knowledge of wetland ecology | To convince the audience that publicly held businesses have community responsibility | To honor the couple on their tenth anniversary |
| ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| STEP THREE THESIS STATEMENT | Puerto Rico's Caribbean National Forest is a national treasure. | U.S. businesses need to restore trust with the public. | Congratulations to Ann and Mark on a decade of love and happiness. |

that is consistent with the assignment of expectations of the occasion, and a thesis statement that clearly reveals the content of your presentation. Table 3.2 illustrates the three-step process for the three general purposes of speaking: informative, persuasive, and special occasion.

Resources for Review and Discussion

SUMMARY

In this chapter you have learned the following:

- ▶ To search for a public speaking topic, you can use at least five different approaches:
 - Individual brainstorming.
 - Categorical brainstorming.
 - Conducting a personal inventory.
 - Current topic identification.
 - Internet searching.
- ▶ To select a public speaking topic,
 - Speak about topics you already know.
 - Speak about a topic that interests you.
 - Speak about a topic that is important to your local community.
 - Speak about topics that are uniquely your own.
 - Speak about topics that your audience finds interesting.
 - Speak about a topic that the audience embraces but you do not.
- ▶ To evaluate a public speaking topic, determine whether the topic meets the standards of
 - Appropriateness for the speaker.
 - Appropriateness for the audience.
 - Appropriateness for the occasion.
- ▶ The three general purposes of public speaking are
 - To inform.
 - To persuade.
 - To highlight a special occasion.
- ▶ The specific purpose for a public speech includes considerations of
 - Your general purpose.
 - Your intended audience.
 - Your precise goal.
- ▶ To develop a thesis statement for a public speech,
 - You will prepare a one-sentence summary of the speech.
 - You will need to be informed on your topic.

KEY TERMS



Use the *Public Speaking* CD-ROM and the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/nelson to further your understanding of the following terminology.

Brainstorming

Categorical brainstorming

Current topics

Personal inventory

Special occasion speech

Speech to inform

Speech to persuade

Thesis statement

APPLICATION EXERCISES



Go to the self-quizzes on the *Public Speaking* CD-ROM and the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/nelson to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts.

1. Examine the following specific purpose statements. Identify those that are good examples and explain why the others are bad examples.
 - a. The beauty of the Grand Teton National Park.
 - b. My audience will be able to explain the current Homeland Security strategies.
 - c. What do men want in their personal relationships?
 - d. My audience will be able to identify five kinds of love.
 - e. To persuade the audience to live and let live.
 - f. To inform my audience about STDs.
 - g. To identify the primary causes of cancer.
 - h. My audience will be able to distinguish between moderate and binge drinking.
 - i. To explain early baldness in men.
 - j. My audience will go to graduate school or professional school.
 - k. To inform my audience about weekend trips in the region.
 - l. To inform my audience about the pleasures of flying one's own plane.

- m. To inform my audience about the steps to earning the Eagle Scout Award.
 - n. A passion for cooking.
2. Divide a piece of paper into four columns. Write one of the following general topics at the top of each of the four columns.
- a. Job experiences I have had.
 - b. Places I have traveled.
 - c. City, state, or area I am from.
 - d. People who make me angry.
 - e. Happy experiences I have had.
 - f. Unusual experiences I have had.
 - g. Personal experiences I have had with crime.
 - h. My involvement in marriage, divorce, or other family matters.
 - i. My experiences with members of other groups—the old, the young, ethnic groups.
 - j. The effect of the drug culture on my life.
 - k. My relationship to local, state, or federal government.
 - l. My background in painting, music, sculpture, theater, dance, or other fine arts.
 - m. My feelings about grades, a college education, sororities and fraternities, college requirements, student government, or alternatives to a college education.
 - n. My reactions to current radio, television, or film practices, policies, or programming.
 - o. Recent Supreme Court decisions that affect me.
 - p. My personal and career goals.
- Now, write down specific topics under each of the four general topic areas you chose. Spend no more than five minutes on this exercise brainstorming. Next, underline one topic in each of the four columns that is particularly interesting to you. From these four topics, select the one about which you have the most information or the best access to information. Can you adapt the topic to your specific audience?

