



Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Preparing a Presentation for Educational Programs

"Leadership must first express itself in speech. One must know how to ask for things, how to explain things and how to speak persuasively enough to win the active support of others. Resourcefulness and adaptability in speech may be regarded as essential to success in every occupation." - Hoffman

Prepare Your Presentation

Extension agents and specialists are frequently called upon to give talks and other presentations. This guide includes tips for speakers at educational events.

Know Before You Speak

- **WHEN** is the talk to be given?
Put the correct date and event on your calendar, with the approximate time you'll begin to talk.
- **WHERE** is the event?
A visit to the place where the talk is to be given might be the most valuable step in early preparation. Will it be in a public hall, a home. . . inside or out in the open? Will the room be small or large?
- **WHO** will be in the audience?
What are the major needs and interests of the audience now? This is the **KEY** to your whole speech. But also find out how many people will be there—you must know this if you plan to distribute materials. What will be the age span and educational level of your audience?
- **WHAT** do you need to know?
How long will the total program last? How much time is allotted for your part? What is to be the subject

of your talk? Will other speakers be on the program? What topics will they cover?

Select the Topic

Often you will be assigned a topic. If you must choose your own, it's important to consider three things—the occasion, the audience, your own capabilities/interests.

To see if your chosen topic is suitable, ask yourself these questions:

- Does it fit me? My capabilities, knowledge, experience?
- Does the topic fit my audience and the occasion? Will they be interested in it and feel it concerns them?
- Can the topic be covered properly within the allotted time and circumstances?

Now begin to gather materials. First, draw on your own experience and knowledge of the subject. Put your ideas on paper. Then look in your personal library—assemble all written material you have on the subject. The third step is to visit an appropriate library—tell the resource person what you're looking for and ask for suggestions. Check through indexes of your topic.

Talk with people who are authorities on the subject. Get their opinions.

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For most programs that Extension persons will give, TAEX will have related materials in bulletins or other forms. Sometimes handouts are available to support your talk.

Make notes—don't rely on memory. From the very start, begin writing down your ideas. A small notebook will do, but many people find that using 3x5 notecards works better. The advantage of notecards is that if each contains only one idea, cards can be shifted and placed in the proper order when the speech is being organized.

After your notes are made, put them in some logical order. Read them over several times, until you're familiar with the material.

Write the Speech

A speech has three major parts:
INTRODUCTION, BODY, CONCLUSION.

BODY — Start here. Write out the purpose of your speech in precise, clear terms. If your purpose is to inform, the approach will be different from the speech to entertain.

Decide on 3 or 4 main points to be covered. List these main headings and sort your notes under the proper heading.

Take each point in turn. Prepare a lead sentence and expand it. The basic thought should be concentrated in the first sentence. Each following sentence should relate directly to the basic thought of the whole paragraph.

In building your ideas, begin with something familiar to your audience. Move from the known to the unknown. Use stories and illustrations to make your points personal. Be convincing. Show your audience that what you have to say is important to them.

INTRODUCTION — The next step is to prepare the beginning—your first ten words are more important than your next ten minutes! Capture your audience in your opening sentence. If you don't, the rest of your time may be spent catching up with it.

Put your audience on the edge of their seats—this is where you want them! Some proven methods are these:

- Tell a story, recite a poem (humorous or serious)
- Use a quotation
- Quote a headline
- State a problem clearly
- Ask a question

- Throw out a challenge
- State a dramatic fact related to your subject

ENDING — This is probably the most important part of your speech. It's the "final touch." Plan it well. Some suggestions for planning your ending are these:

- Summarize important points one by one.
- Use a quotation or poem that summarizes the importance of what you have had to say.
- Ask a question. For example, "What can you and I do about this problem?"
- Answer the question by stating clearly what can be gained by taking action and what can be lost if action isn't taken.

NEVER APOLOGIZE — Don't apologize for your appearance, your limited knowledge of the subject, the time you had to prepare the speech, taking up the audience's time, or anything!

IN THE CONCLUSION — Don't close too abruptly, don't tell the audience you're going to close, don't introduce new material, don't use such statements as "in conclusion. . ."

Learn the Speech

After the speech has been planned, written and rewritten, you'll need to learn it. This may not be as hard as you imagine. If you've done everything already mentioned, you have a good idea of the content.

Have your speech typed—double or triple-spaced. Put it in front of you, along with a supply of 3x5 notecards. List on the notecards MAJOR IDEAS on which you want to elaborate—you might need only a word or phrase, just enough to bring the thought into focus. After your speech has been transferred to notecards, you're ready to practice.

Practice

Carry your notecards with you. Every chance you get—practice! At first, you may feel more at ease practicing privately. Later you'll want someone to listen—your family is a good audience. If you have a tape recorder, record your speech and play it back. Listen for spots where improvements can be made.

Your speech need not be learned all at once. Learn it in parts. Don't memorize it. Remember, you want it to sound like conversation, not a recitation. After you've practiced the speech in parts, put it all together and rehearse it just the way you'll give it. This involves

going through all the steps you'll follow in your actual presentation. Play it out in front of a mirror. Pretend you're introduced and walk to the speaker's stand or microphone. You pause, look around, smile at the audience, pause again, look at your audience and begin. PRACTICE! PRACTICE! PRACTICE!

Standing

Stand at ease. Your weight should be evenly distributed on both feet or shift your weight from one foot to the other from time to time for comfort. Don't sway back and forth. Ease, erectness and freedom of movement are essential.

Hands

The best place to hold your hands is beside your body. Holding arms straight to the sides can give a stiff appearance—a bent arm held at the waist (book-carrying position) is often more effective and creates a casual appearance. Don't clench your hands together. You can put your hands on the speaker's stand occasionally, but don't grip it or lean on it. Don't fold your hands across your chest. Don't stroke your ear or throat. Don't hold the microphone. It's not bad to put a hand in your pocket occasionally, but don't keep it there. You can clasp your hands behind your back occasionally.

Gestures

Avoid meaningless gestures. Gestures should be used only when they're spontaneous, when they'll help clarify or emphasize a point. A gesture is appropriate if it is one you would make during an ordinary conversation.

Gaining Confidence

- Pick out 2 or 3 people in the audience and talk to them as you would in normal conversation.
- Acknowledge your introduction. Start talking. Don't rush.
- Speak slowly and distinctly. Don't be a monotone—go up and down the scale.
- Pronounce words correctly.
- Never talk "down" to your audience.
- Pause often.
- Be enthusiastic. Smile. Be sincere.

Reference:

Make Your Meetings Worthwhile, TAEX, 1969.

Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap or national origin.

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