

Persuade with Power

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The ability to persuade people - getting them to understand, accept and act upon your ideas - is a valuable skill. Your listeners will more likely be persuaded if they perceive you as credible, if you use logic and emotion in your appeal, if you carefully structure your speech and if you appeal to their interests. Avoid using notes because they may cause listeners to doubt your sincerity, knowledge and conviction.

OBJECTIVES:

- Persuade listeners to adopt your viewpoint or ideas or to take some action.
- Appeal to the audience's interests.
- Use logic and emotion to support your position.
- Avoid using notes.

Time: Five to seven minutes

Today we are bombarded by persuasive messages. Advertisements try to persuade us to buy a particular brand of soft drink, coffee or antacid. Salespeople try to persuade us to buy an automobile, a personal computer or a cellular telephone. We do it too, by trying to persuade our spouses to vacation in the Bahamas, persuade a salesclerk to refund our money, or convince our boss that a certain proposal is better.

People who can speak persuasively have a great deal of influence. The ability to get others to understand, accept and act upon your ideas is a skill you can use every day at home, at work and in the community. It is also a characteristic of a good leader. Throughout history people have rallied around those who can speak persuasively.

Types of Persuasion

In a persuasive speech, your primary purpose is to influence the thinking or behavior of listeners. You can influence them in several ways:

- **Inspire.** Your goal is to excite your listeners about your topic or reinforce their existing ideas or beliefs, not necessarily to alter their opinions or beliefs. Sermons and commencement addresses fall into this category of persuasive speech. You'll learn more about this type of speech in Project 10.
- **Convince.** You want your listeners to change their opinions or to develop the same opinion you have. You may not want them to do anything at the moment but change their minds. A presentation convincing listeners that extraterrestrial life exists is an example of this type of speech.
- **Call them to action.** You want listeners to do something after hearing your presentation, such as sign a petition, read a book or buy a product.

Your Role

Impressions count, and this is especially true in persuasive speaking. While the content of your message is important, of equal weight is the audience's opinion of you. Your listeners must like, trust and respect you before they will adopt your ideas. They should view you as someone they can identify with - someone whose needs and interests are similar to theirs. They base their opinion of you on your:

- **Knowledge.** You must be qualified to discuss the subject and offer evidence to support your position. You must know the subject well and be able to present plenty of evidence to support your ideas.
- **Reputation.** Your reputation is based on your past performances, accomplishments and honors. Make sure the audience is familiar with your qualifications through your introduction, advance publicity or your speech

itself.

- **Sincerity.** You communicate your ideas with conviction and believe that what you are proposing will truly benefit the audience. Audiences are naturally suspicious of anyone who is trying to change them in any way, so you must make it clear that you have their interests in mind and are not seeking their support for selfish reasons.
- **Delivery.** If you appear timid, the audience will be less likely to accept your ideas. Speak firmly and confidently, and establish direct eye contact with listeners.

The Audience

The way you present your persuasive message will depend on who your listeners are and what attitudes they hold toward your subject. Your audience may be:

- **Agreeable.** This audience already agrees with your opinion or viewpoint, so you simply have to strengthen and reinforce this agreement.
- **Apathetic.** Your listeners don't care about your subject or your views, so you must convince them that the issue directly affects them. This is the most common type of attitude.
- **Hostile.** The audience is opposed to you, your subject and/or your viewpoint. You must help listeners to recognize the merits of your position and make them reconsider their own views.
- **Uninformed.** Your listeners aren't apathetic; they just don't know anything about your subject. You will have to educate them and convince them of its importance.
- **Mixed.** The audience contains more than one of the above types. You must inform audience members and convince them of your subject's importance, the merits of your viewpoint and why they should reconsider their own views.

Burden of Proof

Changing people's minds is difficult. Your listeners think they already have a rational view of your subject, whatever that view may be. Your task is to provide the proof they need to change their minds. You must arouse listeners' interest, help them to assimilate new information into their existing knowledge and guide them into forming new beliefs. The more help you can provide in the process, the more successful you will be in persuading your listeners.

You already know about the importance of credibility in any speech. It's even more crucial in a persuasive speech. If listeners don't perceive you as credible, you will have difficulty persuading them to adopt your viewpoint or to take action. Two other factors also have a major influence on the audience:

Logic. To convince your audience you must provide evidence - outside sources that provide proof or lend support to your position. Research is invaluable in this respect. Your evidence and reasoning must be consistent and support your position.

Emotion. Few people are persuaded by logic alone. Emotions contribute a large part in people's willingness to change their minds. Arousing emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, anger, guilt and love in listeners and relating them to your subject is an effective tool.

Remember, listeners always want to know, "What's in it for me?" The most successful persuasive speeches answer this question. Build your speech on points of major concern to the audience, not on your own concerns. For example, if you want to persuade the town council to build a walking path along the riverfront, point out how the townspeople and local businesses will benefit from the path instead of how the path will benefit you, an avid hiker.

Organizing Your Message

Once you've determined your purpose and audience and gathered information supporting your purpose, you're ready to organize your presentation. You can take one of several approaches.

- **Problem/solution.** State the problem, then present your solution, explaining why it is the best one. Then discuss how to put the solution into effect and what the audience can do to contribute. For example, you

could begin a speech on local water pollution by stating that water pollution has increased dramatically in your community, and that last year more than 2000 fish died in the local lake because of it. Then follow with the effects this pollution and loss of fish have on the community, the sources of pollution, your solution to the problem, and what listeners can do to help.

- **Proposition to proof.** Begin with a statement of your proposition, then follow with proofs that support it. For example, if your purpose is to persuade listeners to vote for a proposal, you would begin by stating, "Vote for Proposition A, which provides more money for our schools," then continue with reasons and a strong closing statement. In this pattern, you are telling listeners immediately what you want from them. This approach works best with audiences who are agreeable, apathetic or uninformed, but it could further alienate hostile listeners.
- **Comparative advantage.** Begin with a statement of the problem, then identify possible solutions and compare their respective advantages and disadvantages. Explain your solution and show why it has more advantages and fewer disadvantages than the others.
- **Motivated sequence.** This five-step speech structure, developed by Dr. Alan H. Monroe, a noted professor of communications, can be adapted to almost any topic.
 1. **Attention.** Seize the audience's attention with your opening and direct that attention toward your topic. "Our rapidly escalating property taxes are supporting a spending spree by our government."
 2. **Need.** State the existing need or problem, explaining why it's important to listeners. "Property taxes must be lowered and government spending brought under control."
 3. **Satisfaction.** Present your solution to the need or problem, showing how it meets the need or solves the problem. Support your position with evidence. "Proposition X will reduce property taxes and limit government spending."
 4. **Visualization.** Draw a picture of future conditions, intensifying audience commitment to your position. Show how things will be if your solution is adopted or what might happen if it is rejected. "If this proposition fails, our taxes will continue to escalate, and many people will lose their homes."
 5. **Action.** Turn the agreement and commitment you've gained into positive action or attitude by your listeners. "Vote 'Yes' on Proposition X."

Whichever approach you choose for your speech, don't neglect the opposition's position. Refute their arguments, beginning with their strongest and concluding with their weakest. Listeners remember best what they hear last, so they will think the opposition's position is weak. Consequently, the last point you make should be the strongest one because your audience is more likely to remember it.

Your Assignment

This project focuses on persuasion. You are to:

- Persuade listeners to adopt your viewpoint or ideas or to take some action. (Do not give an inspirational speech; this type of speech will be addressed in Project 10.)
- Analyze your audience and appeal to their interests.
- Use logic and emotion to support your position.
- Organize your thoughts carefully and choose words that will add power to your message. Use body language and vocal variety to add even more impact. Use visual aids if they contribute to your message.
- Avoid using notes; they may cause the audience to doubt your sincerity, knowledge and conviction.

Incorporate appropriate suggestions from the evaluations you received in previous speeches. As you prepare your speech, thoroughly research your subject and review the Speaker's Checklist in Project 1.

Evaluation Guide for *Persuade with Power*

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR: *The speaker is to present a persuasive speech that combines logical support for his/her viewpoint with a strong emotional appeal. The speech should focus on the self-interest of the audience. The speaker also has been asked to avoid using notes, if possible. In addition to your oral evaluation, please complete this evaluation form by checking the appropriate column for each item. Add your comments only for those items where special praise is warranted, or where you can offer specific suggestions for improvement.*

	EXCELLENT	SATISFACTORY	COULD IMPROVE	COMMENTS/ SUGGESTIONS
• Did the speaker project sincerity and conviction?	_____	_____	_____	
• Was the speaker a credible source of information about this topic?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker phrase his/her appeal in terms of the audience's self-interest?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speech opening capture the audience's interest?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use facts and logical reasoning to support his or her views?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker properly use emotion to persuade the audience to support his or her views?	_____	_____	_____	
• Was the speech organization effective?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker's body language and vocal variety contribute to the message?	_____	_____	_____	
• Were you persuaded to accept the speaker's views?	_____	_____	_____	
• What could the speaker have done differently to make the speech more effective?				
• What did you like about the speech?				