

Persuasive Speech Assignment

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 5-8 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 the 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. 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 be delivered within 5-8 minutes. Good speeches fit within this time frame. Time your speech, and get a sense of where you should be in your speech with 2 minutes left, 1 minute left, etc.
- **Notes:** You must deliver the speech extemporaneously. That means, the speech should not be memorized or scripted. You should put a keyword outline of your speech on standard notecards. However, you should not read or rely heavily on these notes. Maximum eye contact and fluid delivery are your goals.
- **Sources:** You must orally cite a minimum of three sources. Your evidence should clearly support your arguments and you should explain this support. You should include a variety of evidence (statistics, examples, testimony, etc.).
- **Visual Aid:** You are to use a PowerPoint as your visual aid for this speech. Please use the "How to Create an Effective PowerPoint" resource on swicks.weebly.com as a guide for this visual aid.

Terms to Consider:

The goal of argumentation is to persuade your audience that your ideas are valid, or more valid than someone else's. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, divided the means of persuasion into three categories—**Ethos, Pathos, Logos**.

Ethos (Credibility), or **ethical appeal**, means convincing by the character of the author. We tend to believe people whom we respect. One of the central problems of persuasion is to project an impression to your audience that you are someone worth listening to, in other words making yourself into an authority on the subject, as well as someone who is likable and worthy of respect.

Pathos (Emotional) means persuading by appealing to the audience's emotions. We can look at texts ranging from classic essays to contemporary advertisements to see how pathos, emotional appeals, is used to persuade. Language choice affects the audience's emotional response, and emotional appeal can effectively be used to enhance an argument.

Logos (Logical) means persuading by the use of reasoning. This is the most important technique you can use and Aristotle's favorite. Giving reasons is the heart of argumentation and cannot be emphasized enough. You must use effective evidence to substantiate your claim. In addition, you must use enough evidence to convince your listener.

Persuading Effectively

- **Select a topic that allows you to persuade:** Students may try to speak on a topic that is not genuinely controversial. For example, a speaker once 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 her audience 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.
- **Speak to persuade:** Don't make 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 5-8 minutes making fun of or attacking his or her beliefs. You must think about introducing new evidence that maybe your audience hasn't considered or you must reframe the issue in terms of a shared value. For example, you could argue for using nuclear energy. Why? Because there are newer and safer modes of generating nuclear power (new evidence) and 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 find. 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. You must sound as if you are an expert on this subject. In addition, explain how your claim is in the best interest of your audience.
- **Make savvy language choices:** You are trying to get the audience to understand your position and its benefits; you want to emphasize that this is not about being on opposite sides of an issue. Use language that grants those with opposing positions legitimacy and encourages agreement. 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.

We will be working on **presenting arguments to support claims in an analysis of a substantive topic, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.**

