

Guidance for speakers: Public speaking's basic aims

These guidelines are designed to be of use in preparing for any public speech, but especially those in competitions of any format. We advise speakers in the ESU International Public Speaking Competition to read the judging guidelines and mark scheme at the end of this book in addition to this section.

The term public speaking covers many activities. It is an essential part of the jobs of teachers, politicians, broadcasters, lecturers, salesmen, lawyers and religious figures; it is done by community leaders and campaigners. At some point all of us will have to give a speech in public, whether at a public ceremony, special family or community occasion, or in a class, business presentation or job interview.

Each of these activities has a different purpose, but we can still identify three aims of public speaking:

- to inform
- to persuade
- to inspire

That means that some forms of speaking in public aren't public speaking – acting, for example, or cabaret entertainment – but these activities may also share aspects with public speaking, such as the need to be delivered clearly and maintain audience interest.

People who inform, persuade and inspire

How do these purposes fit into our real-world instances of public speaking? Teachers, lecturers and most broadcasters certainly set out to inform us, giving us valuable information on a range of topics. Lawyers are tasked to persuade – that is, to gain the assent of a court, judge or jury of the truth or falsity of a claim. Campaigners intend to inspire their audiences – that is, rouse them into action – whether to protect the environment, demand a change of government, or go on strike.

But to some extent all roles seek to inform, persuade and inspire. A politician wants to inform you of her policies, which you may not be familiar with; to persuade you that they are good policies; and inspire you to vote for them. A salesman wants to inform you about his product, persuade you that it is a good product, and inspire you to buy it. It may not immediately be obvious but all the types of public speech we have mentioned encompass all three different purposes. A teacher, for example, when setting out to inform you, also has to persuade you that you should believe what she is saying, and pay

attention to it. You believe what a teacher says, in the absence of other ways to check its accuracy, because the teacher herself has credibility, a result of her authority. Politicians, religious and community leaders, and lawyers all rely in part on their credibility to ensure that they achieve their other aims.

Credibility

Credibility is what is fundamental to all types of public speaking – it is the willingness of the audience to listen to you, to believe what you are saying, and to approve of you saying it. Having credibility doesn't necessarily imply that the audience is also informed, persuaded or inspired, but it is an essential foundation for any of those things.

Most speakers gain credibility from who they are and what they do. So we listen to a politician's policies more carefully and are more open to being persuaded by him because we know that he will be standing for election and may soon govern us. At a very practical level, we listen to his views and those of broadcasters because they are transmitted on the radio and television, just as we listen to lawyers in court because they are the ones suitably qualified to be allowed to address the court. We listen to teachers and lecturers and religious figures, even if we are meeting them for the first time, because of their title or perhaps what they wear – the outward signs of authority.

The ESU International Public Speaking Competition aims to test the general skills that are used by public speakers. It aims to test your ability to inform, persuade or inspire, but in order to demonstrate that you must first establish credibility. This is the hardest part of competitive public speaking, as opposed to the 'real world' speeches made by the figures we have examined; as a competitor you have no automatic credibility from who you are, the role you perform or the job you do. All the audience's willingness to listen to you, believe you and approve of you must come solely from your speech, apart from, and sometimes despite, its context in a competition.

About this part of the handbook

In the next few sections we will look at how we prepare a speech – choosing our topic, researching our subject, organising our content and practising our delivery – with the emphasis all the time on how to use each of these elements to build our credibility. Finally we will look at how to deal with questions, tips to build your confidence, and the judging guidelines and mark scheme.

Guidance for speakers: The topic for your speech

Choosing a topic

A public speech could be about anything, but in order for it to be a good speech you are going to need to consider the following things:

- **Will the audience be interested in my topic?**
Your audience does not necessarily need to be interested in your subject before the speech – indeed, most speeches that set out to inform will be on things that people know very little about – but the subject should at least be able to capture people’s imaginations. Does it have obvious parallels with something that they do know about? Does it affect their lives, even if they don’t realise that? Consider these and other issues to see if you can make a link between the topic and the audience.
- **Am I interested in the topic?**
You are going to spend a lot of time working on your speech; it will be more enjoyable for you if you pick something because it interests you, rather than because you think it worthy or appealing to the judges. However, it’s also essential for your credibility that you appear to care about your topic when you are speaking, or can explain to the audience the reasons you have chosen to discuss the issue or how you came to know about it.
- **Am I able to research my topic effectively?**
You will need to use information in your speech to inform and persuade your audience. Where will you get it from? The internet, a library, interviews with other people, a personal experience? Make sure that you have access to the important facts that you’ll use to support your reasoning.
- **Can I properly discuss my chosen topic in the limited time I have available?**
Some topics are unfamiliar to audiences and may require considerable amounts of background description simply for you to get to a position to persuade people of something. For example, it is probably impossible to reasonably convince people that “The Meiji Restoration in Japan was unfair on the daimyos” if you have to begin your talk with a description of the state of Japan before the Restoration, then tell us what the Restoration changed, tell us what a daimyo is, and then present analysis of your previous descriptions to show how the daimyos suffered wrongly as a result of the Restoration, all in five minutes.

Interpreting the theme

In the ESU competition you are given a theme for your speech and asked to interpret it. It is important to note first that you are not allowed to use the theme as your title. Second, the theme is quite broad and deliberately does not suggest a specific subject area. This is because audience interest in your subject is also relative to the other speeches in the competition – if everyone gave a speech about modern architecture the audience would soon find the speakers dull however good they were! Stick to the guidelines above about manageable topics that you are interested in. Don’t try to second guess what the ‘intention’ was behind the choice of theme, and do not pick something that you feel you ought to talk about in preference to something you really want to talk about.

Inform, persuade or inspire?

Above we discussed the three purposes of a public speech, and saw how each to some extent involves the others and establishes credibility. In this competition where you have a very limited period of time to deliver your speech, aiming simply to inform the audience will probably not enable you to demonstrate fully your public speaking skills. Though any good speech in this competition will contain plenty of information, the best speeches will aim to use that content, and other factors, to persuade their audience of the truth or falsity of something, or to inspire them to take a certain action.

Statement of intent

At this point we can draw up what will be the core of the speech – the few sentences that explain what the purpose of the speech is, and what the main points in it will be.

Complete the following sentence: “*At the end of my speech I want to have persuaded the audience that ...*”. Do not complete it with “... my topic is great.” Give yourself a specific target. So for example, rather than saying “*At the end of my speech I want to have persuaded the audience that climate change is bad*”, say “*At the end of my speech I want to have persuaded my audience that climate change will have a serious effect on the global economy in the next twenty years, but that they are able to take action to alleviate it*”. This is your statement of intent.

You do not necessarily need to deliver the statement of intent in your actual speech, but having one will help you to focus on the message you are giving.

Guidance for speakers: Evidence and research

Supporting your statement of intent

Each clause in your statement of intent is a claim that needs to be identified and then supported. Looking at the example on the previous page, we can see there are two claims:

“climate change will have a serious effect on the global economy in the next twenty years”

and

“they [the audience] are able to take action to alleviate it”

You’re going to need evidence to support each of these claims – probably quite a few pieces of evidence – and you’re going to need to explain how your evidence supports what you are saying.

Opposing opinions and contrary evidence

The most interesting speeches often make claims that are controversial. This means that although you will be hoping, in the course of your speech, to reason your way to a firm conclusion there will be much evidence surrounding your topic that does not support your conclusion, and many opinions different from your own. Don’t ignore these. It is apparent to an audience when an issue can be seen from more than one viewpoint, and it will harm your credibility if you seem not to recognise that.

Take time in your speech to acknowledge, explore and recognise other points of view, before comparing them carefully with your own evidence and reasons to come to a balanced conclusion. That is much more effective as a method of persuasion because it creates much more credibility for you.

Evidence as illustration

There are all sorts of pieces of evidence that could support your claim, not just what you might think of as ‘facts’. You may want to use some statistics, examples from history or current affairs, or widely accepted facts from science or geography, but ideas can also be supported with other ideas, such as common sense beliefs, religious tenets, the views of others, analogies and narrative stories.

Think of evidence not just in the sense in which it is meant in a courtroom, but as illustration in the most literal sense – shedding light on the issue, illuminating your ideas and making them more easily understood by the audience. Always remember, though, to show how your evidence is relevant, and how it supports what you’re saying – facts are no substitute for reasons!

Researching your topic

Even if you’ve chosen a topic that you’re very knowledgeable about (as we’ve recommended) you will probably want to look more widely at the issue, especially at viewpoints different from your own.

You may want to see what other people have said about the issue before you (and perhaps you’ll want to quote them) or you may want to see if there have been any recent developments that you would want to share with your audience. Direct your research towards recent and frequently updated publications with editorials and analysis (like newspapers), rather than at definitive but less opinionated or up-to-date sources (like encyclopaedias).

Guidance for speakers: Organisation

A five minute public speech only gives your audience one chance to take in and understand everything you're saying, which may be of considerable complexity. This means you're going to have to think carefully about how you structure your speech.

Have a speech outline

It helps the audience to follow your speech if you tell them at the start of the speech what your main reasons and pieces of evidence are going to be, and then again at the end, after you have delivered the bulk of material in the speech, remind them of what the key points are that they should take away with them.

- **Open with an introduction**, which lets the audience know who you are, what you are going to be speaking about and why and what you hope to achieve by the end of the speech.
- **Provide a preview** of your points, telling the audience what you will be saying that will help you to achieve your aim, and in what order. Think of this as a 'map' for the speech to help the audience follow you.
- **Move on to your main points**, covering them in a logical order that builds your argument up (starting with the most basic or fundamental of your claims, or any necessary description you have to give in order to help your audience understand, and then moving towards your conclusion). Remember all the time to support your claims with evidence, and then show how that evidence supports the claim.

Let the audience know when you're moving from one part of your speech to the next with transition words or phrases, like "So we've looked at the effect of global warming on poorer countries – now I'd like to examine the effect on richer countries...", for example.

- **Summarise the points** you have made – so that the audience can feel confident that they have understood everything in your speech, and they are sure what they have to consider.
- **Conclude**. The conclusion ties together everything you have said and reminds them what you wanted to convince them of, and why they should be persuaded.

Using notes

Having a clear outline and structure to your speech enables you to make very simple notes. Each person will find a particular notation style that suits them, but remember never to write out any of your speech in full. Having a few large key words written on a card in front of you will enable you to pick up your speech more easily if you stumble or get lost. It also has advantages for your speaking style, which we will look at in the next section.

Giving your structure a theme

Your speech acquires more of a sense of unity if you can find a single theme that links the names you are using for your different points. This theme may be an analogy to a familiar 'set' of words or concepts, a popular story, song or well known person, place or event. For example, you may wish to theme a speech about climate change in following way:

"What I want to talk about today – the effect humans are having on the environment – is of elemental importance. I want to speak about environmental impact today on the four elements known to ancient man – earth, air, water and fire.

First, earth – the erosion of the earth's soils resulting from deforestation, intensive farming and urbanisation.

Second, air – the emission of heavy metals, acids and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that are slowly but surely poisoning humans, the ecosystem and suffocating the whole planet.

Third, water – the contamination of our water courses and oceans, traditionally thought of as 'flushing away' our waste, until they no longer contain life and we can't even drink them.

And finally, fire – man's most elemental source of energy, though we now use many different forms of energy to power our world. I want to examine how we generate power, and show you how new solutions to our energy crisis could help us to solve our other problems."

Guidance for speakers: Introductions and conclusions

The start and end are the most difficult, and in some ways the most important, parts of your speech. You should plan them carefully and know them off by heart.

Your introduction is the very first impression you will make on the audience, so make it a good one. Rather than explaining, in a dry way, what your topic is about, try to grab the audience's attention first, by making the topic sound relevant to them.

For example, rather than saying this:

"Today I want to talk about global warming caused by carbon emissions. I will show how the rise in global temperatures will lead to inundations of low-lying ground, droughts and food shortages in some areas, disruption to the ecosystem and civil unrest. I will then tell you what we can do to stop these effects from occurring."

try this:

"Floods; famines; plagues of locusts; war, death and destruction on a worldwide scale – no, not prophecies from the bible, not the scenes of some Hollywood disaster movie, but predictions for the real world in the next twenty years from top scientists, if we continue pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and altering the global climate. In my speech I want to show you how easy it could be to avoid this doomsday scenario, if we only wake up to the reality that this time it's fact, not fiction."

Conclusions are the last thing an audience hears, so should leave them sure of what you have said and thoughtful about their own approach to it. This could be achieved, for example, by a rhetorical question to set the audience as a departing challenge – but remember to be sure that you have already provided the answer to the question beyond doubt – rhetorical questions are meant to be answered by you, not by the audience!

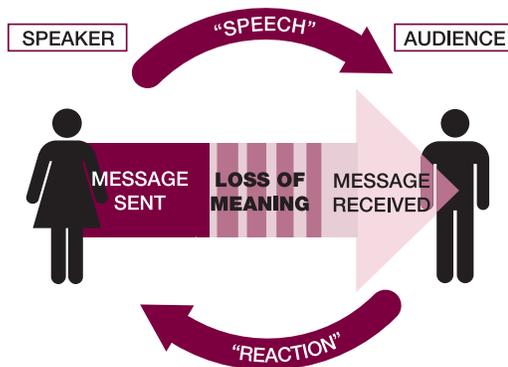
For example this conclusion provides the answer to the question it poses in no uncertain terms:

"So I have shown you the precipice on which we stand, and which, at our current rate of carbon dioxide production, we seem doomed to topple into. I have shown you how easy it would be to turn our heads away, to ignore the signs, to hope that the problem will go away, solve itself, or will only affect our descendants, not us. I have agreed that sometimes it can feel hopeless to think that our small actions can possibly affect a problem so widespread on a planet so huge. But I have also explained today that our actions do make a difference, that we do have reason to hope, and that although our actions will cost us time, effort and money, they must be taken if we are to avoid the greater cost of the end of our way of life. So which will you do, ladies and gentlemen – turn your heads, and hope against hope, even as the wind whistles past your ears, that we won't fall off that precipice; or wake up, face the problem and do your part to solve it, and feel proud when you are able to show your grandchildren the world you have bequeathed to them, which they so nearly didn't inherit. Only you can make that decision – what will you choose?"

Guidance for speakers: Expression and delivery

A public speech is much more than the text of its words, and a public speaker does much more than just read out a transcript. The way a speaker uses his voice and body and chooses his words conveys meaning to the audience over and above the simple meaning of the words.

The communication model



The diagram above represents the way you communicate your ideas to an audience – you transmit the idea through the medium of speech, and you receive feedback from the audience to let you know how well your speech is getting across. In the process of communication some of the meaning that you have in your minds – both simple meaning and the more ambiguous or emotive meaning in your speech – is lost.

Let's look at four ways that you can minimise this loss, making sure that all your meaning gets across to the audience.

1. Physical

- **Volume:** make sure you are speaking loudly enough to be heard, but not so loud that people can't take in your words.
- **Pace and clarity:** make sure that you speak at a rate that can be easily followed, and clearly enunciate your words so that people can understand them.

2. Psychological

- **Tone and pause:** vary the way you use your voice to break up your sound – people will 'tune out' from a monotonous speaker, so change your pitch and speed as you move from section to section.
- **Body language:** much of our communication is non-verbal, so make sure that your body is making 'open'

gestures, like facing forward and using your arms freely to gesture (but not over gesture) in support of your words; avoid 'closed' gestures like folding your arms, turning away or hanging your head.

- **Facial expressions and eye contact:** even more important than your body is your face. The audience needs to feel that you're speaking to them, so make eye contact with as many members of the audience as you can. You need to convince them that you are confident in what you are saying, so smile and you'll set both yourself and the audience at ease.

3. Linguistic

- **Vocabulary:** make sure that you are using words that everyone in the audience can understand. Although all your audiences will speak English, we each use that language in a different way, and we have to be careful not to slip into colloquialisms and slang that may exclude part or all of the audience.
- **Jargon:** It can be tempting, if you have spent a long time researching a topic, to use a lot of technical words in your speech, or to refer to things by abbreviations or unfamiliar titles. Remember that your audience will probably not be as knowledgeable as you on your own subject, so always explain these things in ordinary language.
- **Word choice:** English is full of synonyms – two or more different words that refer to the same idea, object or concept. Different words conjure up different ideas of that same object in people's heads, depending on the wider associations of the word. For example, if we say:

"Human beings have an innate tendency to exploit the resources of their environment in a non-sustainable fashion, which will lead to a point of such depletion that the use-value of those resources becomes nil."

we are being much less effective in raising the audience's concerns than if we try to connect the quite academic sounding ideas that we are expressing to images the audience may already have in their minds, like this:

"Everything mankind touches it seems to destroy – felling forests, draining lakes, burning ancient jungles long since fossilised into oil and coal; sooner or later we're going to realise that there's nothing left to destroy – those forests, those lakes, and most of all, those fossilised jungles, aren't coming back."

Not only have we illustrated the point with imagery of what is actually going on, but we've also substituted "destroy" for "exploit in a non-sustainable fashion" – so 'destroy' is a word with negative connotations, the audience will feel more indignant towards the phenomenon we are describing. This aspect of word choice can work in reverse too – to play down things that we wish the audience to think about less or take less seriously. For example, rather than saying:

"We will have sacrifice a lot of luxuries like foreign holidays and exotic foods if we are going to have any impact on our carbon dioxide emissions."

we might say:

"Simply using less of some of our unnecessary extravagances in life could make a huge difference to how much global warming we cause."

A note on notes

Earlier we advised you to use a few clear key words as your speaking notes, rather than writing out your whole speech or trying to memorise it in its entirety. One advantage of speaking from notes and constructing each of your individual sentences afresh each time you speak is that the speech retains a sense of novelty and reality – it is all too easy for the audience to get the impression, if you are reciting for the tenth time, perhaps, a speech you know off by heart, that your engagement is with your memory and your words,

rather than with them. So be sure what each of your points is going to be, and know your introduction and conclusion very well, but don't over-rehearse the main body of your speech to such an extent that you lose that vital connection with it or begin to become bored by it. Remember, it's all about getting and keeping credibility!

Top ten tips for confidence

- Know well what you're going to say, and have clear and easy-to-follow notes in front of you.
- Know your first sentence off by heart.
- Avoid wearing uncomfortable clothes or distracting jewellery – tie your hair back if necessary.
- Have a sip of water before you go up to speak. Keep the glass near at hand
- Breathe deeply, using your diaphragm, not your chest (your stomach should move out if you're doing it right).
- Start clearly and loudly from the very first word.
- Make eye contact with the audience from the start – if you're still too nervous to do that, look at the middle of their foreheads – they won't be able to tell the difference!
- If you stumble over a sentence, or momentarily forget what you were going to say, don't try to talk your way out of it. Just stop, have a drink of water or simply pause, breathe deeply and start again.
- Smile at the audience – they're not hostile.
- Relax and enjoy yourself – having a whole room of people listen to you is a rare experience and can be exhilarating!

Answering questions

Most real world public speakers will be faced at some point with questions about what they've said. In the ESU competition this element of the activity is represented by a period at the end of each speech when members of the audience are invited to put brief questions to the speaker. These may ask for clarification or expansion on a point or seek to know the speaker's views on a related issue not covered in their speech. Although questions are not meant to be combative, they may sometimes ask the speaker to justify her views.

Tips for answering questions well

- Before your speech think what questions are likely to be asked, and consider how you might answer them.
- However, don't be tempted to answer the question you hoped you'd get – always answer the question

that was actually asked.

- Use the time in which the question is being asked to start formulating your answer, and don't be afraid to pause before answering – you don't have to rush into an immediate response.
- Do not feel that you have to say a lot to answer a question. Some of the best answers are very short, and you should not go on too long in answer to any question.

Although some questions may ask you to further explain, defend or justify your views, don't become too defensive or start a debate with the questioner. Simply answer the question as well as you can and thank the person asking the questions for giving you the chance to make yourself clearer.

Judging criteria and the mark scheme

Judges are advised to read the guidance for speakers and trainers above in addition to this section.

Language

This is a public speaking competition held in English; it is not an English language proficiency test. While it is necessary to deliver your speech in English, and ability in speaking the language obviously helps a speaker to get a message across and establish credibility, speakers will not be penalised for small mistakes of grammar, for different pronunciations, or for the occasional fumble over a difficult word.

In a contest between, on the one hand, a speaker having a reasonably good level of English, making a few minor mistakes, but delivering a fascinating, funny and thought-provoking speech; and on the other a speaker absolutely fluent in English who delivers a flawless speech but with less interesting content and less engagement with the audience, the former will always win.

However, the ESU recognizes that the competition presents a special challenge to speakers whose native language is not English. The judges therefore award a prize to the best non-native English speaker, to one of the eligible speakers in the final.

The sections of the mark scheme

- **Subject, reasoning and evidence: 40 marks**
The speaker should present an interesting topic of general relevance and some significance. The speech should present the speaker's main ideas in a clear, structured way, supported by evidence or

scheme illustration. The speaker should consider alternative viewpoints to his own, but should present the audience with a definite conclusion.

- **Expression and delivery: 30 marks**
The speaker should use her voice, body and words to attract and sustain audience interest. Her vocabulary should be clear and understandable, but should also add to the straightforward meaning of their points – imaginative and appropriate word choice should be rewarded. The speaker should be confident and appear in command of their subject.
- **Establishing credibility: 20 marks**
Good performance in the previous two sections will aid the speaker's credibility. In addition the speaker should be able to guide the audience clearly through his topic, from an introduction that makes his aims obvious and the importance of their topic apparent, to a conclusion that leaves the audience with no doubt as to the purpose of the speech. In the main body of the speech the speaker should develop a good relationship with the audience, responding to their reaction, perhaps engaging them with humour, and appearing genuine when conveying emotion about the topic.
- **Responding to questions: 10 marks**
The speaker should answer questions in the way most helpful to the questioner and the audience, rather than trying to avoid them. The speaker should answer as succinctly as possible, and will be rewarded for introducing new and relevant content quickly in her answers, where appropriate. The speaker must not arrange for 'planted' questions to be asked by friends in the audience.

Total: 100 marks

For more information about the International Public Speaking Competition, please contact international@esu.org.

For more information about public speaking, debating, or using spoken English effectively, contact the ESU Centre for Speech and Debate at centre@esu.org or www.esu.org/education/for_schools.