

8. SUPPORTS IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

8.1 VISUAL SUPPORT: SUPPORT MATERIAL

Use a Variety of Support Material

There are a variety of types of support material which can be used to illustrate or prove points you make. The following kinds of materials are commonly used to support assertions in speeches:

- example -- a concrete instance of the point you are making
- testimony -- direct quotation or paraphrase of a credible source used to prove or illustrate a point
- statistics/surveys -- quantitative information which proves or illustrates a point.
- definition -- providing a dictionary or personal meaning for an unfamiliar or technical word. e.g., "A tariff is a tax placed on imported goods."
- narration -- A narration is a small story used in a speech or essay (usually appealing to the "mind's eye," told in chronological order).
- analogy - a comparison of the unfamiliar to the familiar.
- description/explanation -- describing why your point is valid in your own words, usually in vivid concrete language
- Audio/Visual aids -- anything the audience can see or hear (other than your words) which helps you make a point.

Good micro-structure REQUIRES that you have support for every point (assertion) you make. However, it is also valuable to use as many different types of support material as you can. A speech that is mostly statistics or only explanation is almost certainly going to be less interesting to the audience than a speech which includes stories, quotations, analogies, and examples as well as statistics or explanation. In fact, overuse of explanation is a very common weakness in speeches.

A variety of support types not only helps keep listener interest, it also builds your credibility. Research shows that speakers who use many kinds of support are

judged to be more knowledgeable than those who don't and are regarded as better speakers. Beginning with your second speech label the type of each item of support you use in your outline as a way of encouraging you to avoid having only a limited variety of support in your speech. The most important factor in getting a wide variety of support is obtaining several different kinds of information sources on your topic. By all means avoid speeches based solely on "personal knowledge."

Use Support Material Effectively

Merely having a variety of good support material doesn't guarantee that the audience will understand or be convinced of your point. You must use support well. In SCAT 101 we refer to the "Three Step Process" for effective use of support. The Wingard speech (on a separate page called SAMPLE PERSUASIVE SPEECH) has good examples of this process.

STEP 1. State the point (assertion) you wish to make/prove/illustrate. While this seems obvious sometimes speakers state a statistic or begin a story without indicating what THEIR point is, assuming the audience will draw the right conclusion. The problem is your audience may not see the point you think is obvious. Be clear. Make your point stand out as you deliver it so the audience will recognize it as important.

STEP 2. Present support material (one or more items) which clarifies, illustrates, or proves (convinces) your assertion. Use the support to develop your idea taking enough time to let the point "soak in."

STEP 3. Show how the support material clarifies or proves your assertion by a) summarizing the point, or b) explaining the link between support and assertion. At the very least you should remind listeners of your point after you present the support material to reinforce what you want them to remember. This may seem repetitious to you but it won't to your audience. They may not have gotten the assertion in step 1 and need a summary. Sometimes you may need to do more than summarize. The audience may not be able to see how your support proves your point (This is especially true when the support is statistical.). When that is possible you should be sure to explain the link as well as summarize.

8.2 VISUAL SUPPORT: Research shows that presentations which use visual support are more persuasive than ones which do not. Visual aids help listeners understand abstract concepts and allow complex data to be organized and reduced to make a point clearly and concisely. Furthermore, effective visual support

maintains listener interest and increases audience retention of the material being presented.

Props for Your Next Presentation

The men's basketball team of Michigan State University has gone to the Final Four in spite of being seeded fifth in the NCAA Tournament. One of the keys to turning the team around for the success they had in the Tournament was what Coach Tom Izzo did on Selection Sunday. At a team meeting, he took videotapes of the last two games [a victory over last place Penn State and a Big Ten Tournament loss to Iowa] and smashed them with a hammer. Then he said, "This is going to be a new season" [referring to the NCAA Tournament]. This unusual technique seemed to inspire the team to a new level of skill and determination.

A prop is an object that you use in your presentation to help illustrate or reinforce a point or to help the audience remember an idea. Audience members weeks or months later often are able to connect the prop with the point of the speech. When preparing for your next presentation, consider using a prop. Here are some suggestions on how to make the best use of the prop.

Make sure the prop relates to the content of your speech. Don't be tempted to use a prop simply because it is unusual or unique; the prop should connect the listener to what you are saying.

The prop should be handled easily. Concealing the prop before and after its use should be simple. The object should not be seen as dangerous. Years ago I used a cap pistol to illustrate how Teddy Roosevelt was almost assassinated in the 1912 Presidential Campaign. That would never work today with the changing view of guns in any public place.

Avoid objects which are valuable and might be stolen as you are talking to people after the speech. Do not increase the complexity of your presentation by having a prop too heavy, too sharp, or too bulky.

Prepare the audience for your use of the prop. If it is introduced suddenly and without warning, the audience may be so distracted by the surprise that they may lose track of the point you are making with the prop. Even a simple sentence like, "Let me show you an object that will help make my point" will introduce the prop.

Power Point and posters and flip charts certainly are effective in many presentations. But, as Coach Izzo demonstrated with the hammer and videotape, nothing in a presentation can inspire and reinforce like a prop.

8.3 ILLUSTRATIONS: People retain what they are hearing more easily if it is presented in the form of a story. Using this knowledge, the illustrations and examples you use in your speech should be told as stories or anecdotes. In the body of your speech there will be instances where examples of real events will be relevant. Starting your speech off with a quote from a real person will also enhance your presentation. Here are some points for you to keep in mind when using illustrations and examples in your speech:

1. In the body of your speech you will have three to five main points. Can you think of an example or anecdote for each of these stories? Note them down and use them when appropriate.
2. Your facts should be backed up with examples every five minutes or so.
3. Preface your example with a statement that indicates a story is coming. This will help focus the audience and perhaps make them more attentive to your speech.
4. Examples can come from anywhere - they could be personal stories about you and your experiences or they could be current affairs events. Keep alert for stories to use in your speeches.
5. Personal stories about real people will help the audience relate to the message more effectively. Talking about you is one excellent effect. People expect your speech to be reflections of you so include personal stories in your presentation.
6. You can illustrate a point by drawing an analogy. Comparing a new principle or idea to something your audience can relate to will help get your idea across. For example if you are talking about different types of hearing aids that are on the market, draw an analogy with buying a new car. Some cars will have more features than you want (the same as hearing aids) and some will be prestige models (same as hearing aids). This will help your audience understand just how big the choice can be.
7. If possible, do some research on your audience and relate the examples and illustrations to their situations. If you are presenting a talk to gardening enthusiasts

who have a particular interest in roses, then pass on a story that involved your rose growing experience.

8. Especially if your talk is an informative one, make sure your examples are current. Don't present old statistics or retell a story that is well past its use-by-date. Keep your examples relevant to today's world.

9. Stories as examples should be light-hearted if possible. Be relaxed when you relay your story

Keep it real and relevant and you will use illustrations and examples to their best advantage.

In a talk, illustrations are word pictures that clarify, support, exemplify, or demonstrate points in the message. Basically, there are two kinds of illustrations: "pointed" and "pointless." A pointed illustration supports the subject while a pointless one does not. Pointed illustrations further clarify the subject and lend a hand in moving listeners ever closer to a predetermined desired outcome. Pointless illustrations may be interesting to hear, but they fail in their intended mission. Ultimately, they do not support the subject or put emphasis on the predetermined desired outcome.

Pointed illustrations support and clarify some key aspect of the message and nudge the audience a step closer to the presenter's intended goal. Years ago, I spoke to a group of career-aged singles about "Building Blocks of Good Character." My first movement in the talk was "A Commitment to Honesty."

Everyone has heard the expression, "Honesty is the best policy." Nevertheless, it is easier said than done. The temptation to lie is ever before us, and, quite often, it looks like the "best" option. **BUT DON'T IT WILL COME BACK TO HAUNT YOU.**