

# Preparing an Effective Persuasive Presentation

I find it helpful to visualize the persuasive speech as a cake. The elements of the cake itself are the most essential, while the frosting elements should only be added after the cake is done. This is a guide to the "cake." Frosting elements include your dress, delivery, eye contact, gestures, vocal variety, and so on. An excellent delivery alone will **not be enough** to accomplish persuasion with an intelligent audience. This guide should acquaint you with elements of the persuasive speech with which you may be unfamiliar.

**Topic selection.** Questions to ask yourself:

1. Is it controversial?
2. Am I really interested in it?
3. Is there *new information* available?
4. What side is my audience on?

**Thesis statement.** The thesis of a persuasive speech should be a condensed, concise statement of your position on the topic at hand.

1. A thesis performs three major functions:
  - a. Points out what your topic is
  - b. Clearly illustrates your point of view
  - c. Limits the range of your topic
2. An example would be, "I am opposed to handgun laws in Ohio."

**Your argument.** Illustrative of your point of view and rationale. Must accomplish:

1. Provide reasons to support your point of view (at least three)
2. Address the concerns of your opponents
3. Seek to refute your opponents' arguments
4. Eventually move the audience toward your point of view

Be sure to provide *ample* support for your point of view. There are numerous forms of support. In general, your sources should

1. be as unbiased as possible (*National Review* is not an unbiased source!).
2. be as current as possible.
3. be from a substantial source (avoid popular magazines such as *Mademoiselle*, *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, *The National Enquirer*); use these sources to lead you to stronger sources (actual surveys and professional studies).

Your opening and closing arguments should be your strongest. Place your weakest argument in the middle of your speech in order to have the most effective open and close possible!

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**Opponent's argument.** Must be addressed for persuasion to succeed.

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1. Persuasion is based on the idea that human beings are rational and logical. Failing to address opposite points of view insults your audience's ability to come to their own decision. **It is next to impossible to convince your audience that your view is better if they don't know what the "inferior" view is!**
  2. You can address your opponent's argument in several ways:
    - a. Before your own points, using your points to refute it
    - b. After your points, discrediting the other view
    - c. Before concluding, a generally weak way to address it

**Source citation.** If you forget to cite, you'll regret it!

**Call to action.** Gives your audience a specific persuasive goal.

1. Asks your audience to take a particular action, such as voting, writing a congressperson, or thinking further about an issue.
2. Demonstrates that you have a specific, attainable goal.
3. It is much easier to persuade your audience to take a small but important action than to undergo a 360-degree change.

**Answering questions.** Is a part of your grade and must be done effectively. Here's how:

1. Remain standing at the front of the room after your speech.
2. Select people from different parts of the audience.
3. Repeat the question before you answer it, so everyone hears it.
4. Answer the question succinctly and move on.

**Hints to Think About**

1. Call on a specific person for your first question.
2. Signal when you'll accept one last question.

**Crucial Steps in Preparing Your Speech**

1. You absolutely must have a crystal clear thesis statement.
2. You should be clear about where your audience stands on your issue.
3. Cite your sources or perish!
4. You must have a clear goal for yourself, for example, "I want to move my audience from X position to Y position with respect to my topic." Keep this goal in mind and direct all of your preparation to achieving it.
5. Have your speech clearly organized and make strong use of signposts.
6. Limit your topic to a manageable level: You can't possibly persuade an atheist to believe in God in an 8-minute speech!
7. Visual aids are strongly recommended; your audience has to understand to be persuaded.
8. Practice this speech more than any other!!