# STRUCTURING YOUR SPEECH

You know what you want to talk about but how do you ensure that your audience actually want to listen? Making a speech could be likened to a two way dialogue where only one side actually speaks and the other listens. However, your listeners are likely to be busy people, how can you stop their minds wandering and maintain their interest?

It is very tempting, particularly if you are passionate about your subject, for all your ideas to come bubbling out in an ad-hoc fashion so your audience simply 'lose the plot' and start thinking about something else. Unlike reading a book or listening to a DVD, they can't re-read a paragraph or re-wind.

The key to maintaining the interest of your listeners is to ensure they can immediately follow your train of thought by structuring your speech or presentation in a logical pattern. Before you can do this, of course, you need to be clear on exactly what your thoughts are! All successful performances require thorough preparation and the following simple steps will help ensure that your audience is kept interested and will listen.

## PREPARATION

1. **Streamline your thoughts**
   - Consider the purpose of your speech e.g. do you want to convince them of something, present findings, educate, sell or entertain? Write this down, refer to it often and keep it in mind at all times.
   - Do your research. Spend as much time as possible gathering everything that is, even remotely, relevant to your subject. Write everything down and don't discard anything at this stage.
   - Know your audience. It is not always possible but it certainly helps if you are aware of their likely level of understanding, whether they have any knowledge at all about your subject, and/or whether they are likely to accept your views.

Keep all your notes and add to them as thoughts occur to you or further facts come to light. Gradually assemble them into some sort of order to clarify your thinking.

## 2. Prepare an Outline
This is your first draft. Keep in mind the purpose of your speech and include everything you want to say (you can prune later).

## 3. Structure your Speech
There are various methods of structuring a Speech but usually they follow the basic formula of a Beginning (the introduction), a middle (the main theme or subject of your

speech) and an end (the conclusion). Although it sounds illogical, it is often better to prepare the middle (main part) of the speech before the introduction and conclusion. This is because an impactful beginning and end often becomes clearer once you have planned the main body.

### 3.1 Beginning/Introduction
Although this should be quite short in relation to the main body of your speech, the importance of an impactful introduction cannot be over-estimated. This is your opportunity to grab the attention of your audience and ensure they want to listen to you. You may choose to start with a question, a quotation or a joke (be careful not to offend as you are also establishing your credibility) and prepare the audience for what is to come.

### 3.2 Body/Middle
This is the largest part of the speech so, initially, include everything from your outline and try to sort into some sort of sequence to make sure your audience will follow your thoughts and/or arguments. The sequence will depend upon your subject or the reason for your speech but, for example, could be organised:

- Chronologically – if you want your audience to know the history behind something , you could work from the past to the present
- Numerically – if you have several different options to put forward, work through them by introducing as firstly... secondly... etc.
- Theory to practice – Talk about the theory behind the issue first and then how that could be translated into practice.
- Problem/Solution – Outline of the problem, then offer a proposed solution(s)

### 3.3. Conclusion
This is your opportunity to reiterate your major points. Your conclusion, like the beginning, should be short and impactful – for example, dependent upon your topic, you could close with a plea for action, a quotation, an inspiring statement. These are the final words – make them memorable!

### REVIEW

You are most often allowed a finite amount of time for a speech/presentation. Review the body of your speech and prune ruthlessly. Retain only what the audience need to know and ask yourself whether you have bombarded them  with information you find personally interesting but which is of absolutely no use to them whatsoever, do they really need to hear all those personal anecdotes, do all those facts and figures actually help your argument/point? Most importantly, is your structure logical and does it flow seamlessly through your presentation so your audience can follow, understand and maintain interest?