

LESSON-40

The Outline

To plan your presentation, you will *read, research, and think* along the same lines you would follow in a writing process. (Chapter 9 in Unit Five describes the RRTWRP process: Read, Research, Think, Write, Revise, Proofread.) Your **outline**, in which you have identified the ideas you want to communicate and the order in which you will present them, is the “backbone” of your presentation. It may be all you need to write or it may be the starting point for a full draft of your talk.

Depending on the topic and your comfort level with public speaking, you may decide to speak from your outline. If this is the case, you need only include enough information on your outline to help you remember each point; the exact phrasing you keep in your head. If you are a beginning speaker, or if the topic is sufficiently complex, it is better to draft your presentation word for word. Once you have written and practiced the entire presentation, you may find that you can revert to speaking from your outline. In either case, the less you can rely on your notes during your talk, the more natural and relaxed your presentation will be to your audience.

Words Aloud versus Words on Paper

Before you write your presentation, think about how spoken language differs from written language. We tend to be less formal in our speech than in our writing. Sentence constructions are less complex. In fact, over the past ‘several decades, the printed word-in everything from newspapers to textbooks-has become more and more like speech; that is, more plain and natural. Let this trend guide your presentation writing. Keep your sentences short and use words and phrases that will increase comprehension rather than interfere with it.

If you write out your presentation, you may catch some wordiness as you revise your copy. Proofreading your talk is unnecessary unless you plan to publish your presentation or make it available to the audience. The best way to evaluate what you have written is to say it aloud. When you practice your presentation, and you’ll learn about how to do that later in this chapter, you’ll notice the words and phrases that sound awkward. Then you can change them to improve the flow of your talk.

CASE SCENARIO

Expert Words

Rex Haley was a scientist in the environmental lab of a chemical processing plant, ChemRite. He was asked by the town council to explain the company’s pollution reduction activities and how these efforts conform to local, state, and national regulations. The council called on Ray because he was known as an authority on the subject of pollution control and reduction.

Rex was very comfortable with this topic, so he readily outlined the information he would cover in his talk. Because he was rarely called on to speak in public, he decided to write his presentation in full. Here’s an excerpt:

With regard to national regulations, I will, if you please, expound upon the exemplary record of ChemRite. No other company of similar size or stature has maintained the stringent effluent regulatory standards that are the hallmark of ChemRite's environmental policy. The polemic of certain strident environmental groups aside, we at ChemRite do care deeply about preserving our earth and our future on this planet.

How do you think Rex's speech was received by the town council? Why do you think Rex chose to speak in this style? What constructive criticism would you give him? How would you rewrite the excerpt to better get the point across?

1 USE YOUR JUDGMENT

Write an outline for a short talk on why you are for or against one of these topics: welfare reform, handgun control, women in combat. Tape-record yourself speaking from your outline. If you have difficulty doing this, write down what you want to say. Analyze which method worked for you. Hand in your outline, taped or written presentation, and analysis to your instructor.

2 USE YOUR JUDGMENT

Take a newspaper or magazine article, or a paper you have written for another class, and explain how you would "translate" it for an oral presentation, using words and phrases that are more natural for speech. Be sure to decide first who your audience will be. Be specific as you describe how your wording or approach might change from the printed original.

PREPARING CONTENT

Two common temptations can be present when making speeches or oral reports. If you have a flair for drama, you might err in one of these areas. You might exaggerate, which can taint your credibility. Or, you might rely too much on humor, or use the wrong kind of humor, either of which can drown out your message. Use data and humor in presentations with respect to the following guidelines.

Facts

Facts and figures can impress an audience. But for the very reason that they can influence opinion, they must be used responsibly. Consider this example:

"Used-home sales rose almost 6 percent in March—that's up 18 percent over last year's sales during the same period."

What if the percentage of used-home sales in March included for-sale-by-owner homes, when previous calculations did not? Would the statistics cited reflect an actual difference in overall sales, or just more accurate reporting? It is helpful to know how data was gathered and analyzed before using it to make a point. Cite only data that comes from reliable sources, and never inflate or alter figures to support your position.

If you are using statistics in your talk, there are ways you can increase your listeners' attention to and comprehension of them. Try to relate your "facts" to a common experience or understanding. Consider how each of the following analogies help you understand the speaker's point:

- “You can eat a bacon-and-egg breakfast, a burger and fries for lunch, and a steak with all the trimmings for dinner and still not consume as much fat as there is in a medium-sized buttered popcorn from your local movie theater!”
- “A pack-a-day smoker spends at least \$14 per week on cigarettes. Over a year, that’s enough pocket change to purchase a year’s membership at the local health club;”