

LESSON-41

USING SUPPORTING MATERIALS IN YOUR PRESENTATION

THIS CHAPTER Will HELP YOU

- understand the "forms of supporting materials.
- select the best supporting materials for your speeches
- learn how to use supporting materials to best advantage.

The universe is made of stories, not *of* atoms. - Muriel Rukeyser

Our home on the Tennessee River stands at the top of a ridgeline several hundred offset above the river. It is built upon terrain that slopes down at about a 45-degree angle, so that while the front of the home rests upon solid earth, the back of it rises on posts some thirty feet above the ground. You might think that the structure is flimsy, but actually it is quite strong. Our builders selected the finest wood, concrete, plastics, and steel available. And they know how to fashion and combine these materials into powerful supports.

Up to now, we have characterized your speeches primarily as a journey *over* Interference Mountain in which you and your fastness work...to overcome the barriers that separate you. In these next chapters, we use a different metaphor. We look at your speeches as a structure of ideas raised up on solid pillars of supporting materials. Like our builders, you must know how to select them and how to use them wisely. Just as our home is built to withstand storms and high winds, your speech must be built to withstand doubt and even controversy. When you stand to speak upon it, you must be absolutely confident of its structural integrity.

Facts and statistics, testimony, examples, and narratives are the major forms of supporting materials used in the building of speeches. These materials provide the substance, strength, credibility, and appeal a speech must have before listeners will place their faith in it. Their essential functions are to arouse interest, to elaborate and explain the meaning of your ideas, to emphasize their importance to listeners, and to verify controversial or surprising statements you might make. Your personal experience, library research, and interviews with experts, described in chapter 5, should have provided you with a good stockpile of such materials.

As we examine each type of supporting material, we will discuss its nature and significance, how to evaluate it, and how to put it to work in your speeches.

FACTS AND STATISTICS

Facts and statistics are the most objective forms of supporting material. To call them objective is to say that - in comparison with other forms of supporting material - they can stand alone, independent of anyone person's experience of them. Examples, stories, and testimonials are more subjective, in that they depend more on the experience of a person or a certain group of people. This relatively independent nature of facts and statistics means that you can count on them to add credibility to your ideas. If the facts are in your favor," this creates a presumption that what you are saying is true. Therefore, facts and statistics are especially important when your topic is unfamiliar or your ideas are controversial.

Facts

Facts are verifiable units of information, which means that independent observers see and report them consistently. Richard Weaver, a prominent communication critic writing in the 1950s, suggested that Americans honor facts as the highest form of knowledge. He further noted that Americans respect scientific facts and numbers in the way that other societies often respect divine revelation's. Although we may believe we are more sophisticated consumers of communication than the audiences of the '50s, a recent survey conducted by the Gallup organization revealed that 86 percent of the people polled agreed that "references to scientific research in a story increased its credibility."² We still worship at the altar of science.

The following statements are factual because they can be verified a.) either true or false:

Chevrolet Tahoe is an American-made utility, vehicle.

Most students at our school earn their degrees in five years.

Television ads often rely on emotional appeals.

While factual statements can stand by themselves, speakers rarely use them without interpreting them. Interpretations often are simply a few additional words that transform factual statements into claims:

Chevrolet Tahoe is a *superior* American-made utility vehicle.

Most *hard-working* students at our school earn their degrees in five years.

Television ads often rely on *unethical* emotional appeals.

There is nothing essentially wrong with providing interpretations or making claims. We often must shape factual statements to fit our purpose. The problem comes when speakers and audiences forget that these are no longer just factual statements that can stand alone without further demonstration. The addition of such words as "superior," "hard-working," or "unethical" means that these speakers have added another burden of support to their speeches. They must now introduce other facts or statistics, examples, testimony, or stories to prove that the claims are justified – that they are more than just opinions. Claims that are allowed to go forward as factual statements introduce bias, distortion, and confusion into speeches.

We usually cannot verify directly the accuracy of facts. We have no idea how we might proceed on our own to verify whether Chevrolet those actually are “superior.” We would have to look to independent authorities who are competent to verify such claims and who have no economic axe to grind. So we might say in a speech, “according to the latest issue of consumer reports, which did extensive tests with many utility vehicles, the Chevrolet Tahoe is superior.” We would have to look to independent authorities who are competent to utility vehicles, the Chevrolet Tahoe is superior.” If our reading of consumer reports is correct, we have introduced a factual statement in support of a claim. Because this factual statement comes from an expert source, we have combined fact and expert testimony, which we discuss later in this chapter. Incidentally, note also how we reassure careful listeners: our source is the “latest,” and CR was responsible in its work (“did extensive tests”).

Source of information have ethos just as speakers do. For example, consumer reports enjoys a reputation for responsible, objective testing of products. On social or political issues, the ideological position of the source may be important. For example, if you cited William F. Buckley's *National Review* in support of a claim, skeptical listeners might respond, "Well, that's a conservative magazine. Of course Buckley will support this rightwing claim. On the other hand, if you also cite *The New Republic*, a more liberal publication, then skeptical listeners might think, "Well, if both left and right agree, then maybe what she's saying is true. Even seemingly neutral sources present "factual" information that is colored by its cultural environment. Compare the following excerpts from the same encyclopedia in its 1960 and 1990 editions:

1960: Kiowa Indians hunted buffalo on the southwestern plains of the United States. The Kiowa and their allies, the Comanche, raided many Texas ranches. They probably killed more whites than any other Indian tribe. . . . By [a] treaty signed in 1868, the Kiowa agreed to go with the Comanche to a reservation in Indian territory (now Oklahoma). But only the Kiowa chiefs had signed the treaty, and no chiefs could force their young men to make such a sacrifice. Many struggles and arrests occurred before the Kiowa finally went to live on the reservation. When trouble broke out in 1874, Satanta, one of the most daring Kiowa leaders, was arrested and sentenced to prison. There he committed suicide. The Kiowa then "put their hands to the plow." They now live peacefully as farmers. Several have become well-known artists.

1990: Kiowa Indians are a tribe that lives largely in Oklahoma and elsewhere in the Southwestern United States. The tribe has about 8,000 members, most of whom live in rural communities near Anadarko, Carnegie, and Mountain View, Oklahoma. Other tribal members live in urban areas and work in law, medicine, teaching, and other professions. . . . [In] 1970 the Kiowa adopted their own tribal constitution. The tribe is governed by the Kiowa Indian Council, which consists of all members who are at least 18 years old. The Kiowa Business Committee, an elected group, manages tribal programs in such fields as business, education, and health.⁴

Both of these accounts are "factual," but the first dwells upon past conflict, defining the --- as adversaries of the dominant culture, while the second emphasizes assimilation. The contrast reminds us that even relatively objective descriptions are selective and incomplete. We should always ask ourselves what any given description is leaving out, and whether that omission is critical to our understanding.

Statistics

Statistics are numerical facts that can describe the size of something, make predictions, illustrate trends, or *show* relationships. Americans are almost as much in awe of numbers as they are of experience. In the same Gallup study cited earlier in this chapter, 82 percent of those surveyed said that statistics increased a story's credibility's. These figures suggest that statistics can be one of the most powerful forms of supporting material that can be used in speeches.

The following example from a student speech demonstrates how statistical information can appear in speeches:

The Environmental Protection Agency is saying that secondhand smoke causes 3,000 lung cancer deaths a year; 35,000 heart disease deaths a year; and contributes to 150,000 to 300,000 respiratory infections in babies, mainly bronchitis and pneumonia, resulting in 7,500 to 15,000 hospitalizations. It triggers 8,000 to 26,000 new cases of asthma in previously unaffected children and exacerbates symptoms in 400,000 to 1 million asthmatic children.

When presented orally, statistics can be rather baffling. Using a brief explanation, example, or presentation aid -(see Chapter 9) can make numerical information more understandable in your speeches. Compare the above example with the way a physician used "similar figures to help his listeners understand the extent of medical problems caused by smoking:

I ask you to check your watches. Because in this hour, by the time I'm done speaking-, 50 Americans will die from smoke-related diseases. By the time you sit down to breakfast in the morning, 600 more will have joined them: 8,400 by the end of the week - every week, every month, every year until it kills , nearly half a-million Americans, year in, year out. That's more than all the other preventable causes of death combined. Alcohol, illegal drugs, AIDS, suicide, *tar* accidents, fires, guns all are killers out tobacco kills more than all of them put together.

These are hard, cold realities, defined by hard, cold statistics. But I'd ask you to remember this most important fact. Every statistic is an encoded memorial to remember as once a living, breathing -loving and loved - mother, father, sister, brother. Not numbers, real people, and the toll is as terrible as the most horrific war.⁶

The contrast provided by these two examples is revealing. In the first example, the speaker almost drowns the listener with a deluge of numbers. While the magnitude of the problem is made undeniable, the mere recitation of statistics may overwhelm the audience. In the second example, the speaker uses fewer numbers, but by connecting the numbers so that they form a pattern, he makes them more comprehensible. Moreover, by comparing smoking to other forms of preventable death, he builds its importance in the minds of listeners. Finally, in order to increase the impact of his message, he transforms his numbers by describing the people they represent. We shall discuss these techniques of comparison and description in more detail later in this chapter.

Evaluating Facts and Statistics

Your research notes should contain a wide assortment of facts and statistics on most of the topics you select. Before you decide which of these materials will actually appear in your speeches, use the critical thinking skills we discussed in Chapter 3 to evaluate them. Ask the following questions:

- Is this information relevant?
- Is this information the most recent available?
- Are the sources of this information credible?
- Is this information reliable?

As you review your research notes, you may discover much interesting information about your topic that does not directly relate to your specific purpose. No matter how fascinating it seems, if the information is not relevant, don't use it. A speech that is cluttered with interesting digressions is difficult for listeners to follow. You should also be certain that any statistics you cite are relevant to your locale. If you talk about the "crisis of unemployment" in your area, basing your claim on a national average of 7 percent, you could have a problem if someone points out that the local rate is only 4 percent.

You must also consider how current the information is, especially when your topic is one on which information changes rapidly. On certain subjects, such as *who* is doing *what* to *whom* in the Bosnian crisis, yesterday's news is already obsolete. When you speak on such topics, be sure you are up to date. Save yourself the embarrassment of having a listener point out that your claims are invalid because of what happened this morning!

It is also important to evaluate the sources of your information. Test even "factual" material for potential bias, distortions, or omissions. Don't be taken in by "scientific sounding" names, especially if the information contradicts common sense. Cynthia Crossen, a reporter and editor with the *Wall Street Journal* exposes many instances of such deception in her book, *Tainted Truth*. For example, she presents the case of a study attributed to "the Cooper Institute for Aerobic Research" which concluded that "white bread will not make you gain weight." It turns out that the study that produced this amazing conclusion was funded by the makers of Wonder Bread.⁷

To guard against deceptive information, do not rely too heavily on any one source. Computerized access to information makes it easy to double check your facts and statistics. Information confirmed by more than one authority should be more reliable. The more controversial your topic, the more critical the reliability of your information. Compare what different expert sources have to say, and look for areas of agreement.

As you weigh the use of facts and statistics, be careful not to read into information what you want to find or exaggerate the results. Be on guard against the tendency to distort facts and statistics by the way you word them. Don't ignore information that contradicts your claims by rejecting it

Using facts and statistic

Use the most recent, reliable facts and statistics.

Use information from unbiased sources who have no vested interest in the results they report.

Interpret information accurately. Do not stretch or twist its meaning.

When using statistics in speeches, round off numbers whenever you can without distorting results.

Make statistics understandable by amplifying them with examples or visual aids.

Don't overwhelm your audience with a barrage of facts and statistics.

as atypical or irrelevant. And, obviously, don't put blind faith in what appear at first glance to be factual statements.

Be especially careful when using statistics. Remember that listeners place great faith in numbers. Keep in mind that statistical predictions are based on probability, not certainty, and that they are subject to misuse and abuse. Peter Francese, founder and president of *American Demographics*, has pointed out that while statistics are supposed to represent reality, they may also be used to create reality:

Politicians and lobbyists carefully select the numbers they use to talk about crime (it's always rampant or immigration (it's always out of control). The numbers are typically used to prove there is a "big" problem. It's like rounding up vicious dogs to prove that all dogs bite. . . . No number can represent truth perfectly. Every survey has some error or bias. Data from public records; such as crime reports, can be underreported or misclassified. And even perfectly collected data are open to different interpretations.⁸

Chapter 14's discussion of other possible misuses of facts and statistics as evidence in persuasive speaking "will provide additional help in evaluating information and using it ethically.

Using Fact And Statistics

Information is useful when it is framed into strong supports that prevent a speech from collapsing under the weight of its claims. Three techniques for framing facts and statistics into powerful supporting materials are definitions, explanations, and descriptions.

Definitions. A definition helps your audience understand what you are 'talking about by translating your topic into words your listeners will understand. It helps assure that speaker and listeners are talking about the same thing. Your audience analysis should help you determine whether you need to provide definitions in your speech. As a general rule, you should provide definitions for any technical terms that are unfamiliar to your audience the first time you use them. For example, you might define *osteoporosis* as "a disease of older women that causes their bones to break easily and results in a humped back."

Definitions can be persuasive as well as informative. A persuasive definition reflects your way of looking at a controversial subject. It presents your perspective in such a way that your listeners will want to share it. A persuasive definition usually puts the subject in an emotional context. In a speech on domestic violence against women Donna Shalala, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, provided the following persuasive definition of domestic violence: "Domestic violence is terrorism. Terrorism in the home. And that is what we should call it."⁹

Explanations. Longer and more detailed than definitions, explanations combine facts and statistics to clarify a topic or demonstrate how it works. The following explanation of "old growth," combined perhaps with an enlarged photograph as a presentation aid, might work well in a speech on forest preservation:

From a traditional forester's view, *old growth* forests are those in which wood production has reached its peak. . . . Old-growth forests contain many large, live, ancient trees. They are forests that have never been harvested. The Wilderness Society defines "classic" old growth as "containing at least eight big trees per acre exceeding 300 years in age or measuring more than 40 inches in diameter at breast height."¹⁰

Again, it is important to offer explanations early in your speech to help your listeners easily grasp your meaning.

Descriptions. Descriptions are "word pictures" that help listeners visualize information. The best descriptions evoke vivid images in the minds of the audience. The great Roman rhetorician, Longinus, once said of images that they occur when, "carried away by enthusiasm and passion, you think you see what you describe, and you place it before the eyes of your hearers." 11 Images color information with the speaker's feelings: they establish a mood in addition to increasing understanding. Note how the following description of the monument at Wounded Knee, which commemorates the massacre of hundreds of Sioux men, women, and children (complete text of this speech is in Appendix B), both paints a picture and establishes a mood:

Two red brick columns topped with a wrought iron arch and a small metal cross form the entrance to the grave site. The column to the right is in bad shape: cinder blocks from the base are missing; the brickwork near the top has deteriorated and tumbled to the ground; graffiti on the columns proclaim an attitude we found repeatedly expressed about the Bureau of Indian Affairs: "The BIA sucks!" Crumbling concrete steps lead you to the mass grave. The top of the grave is covered with gravel, punctuated by unruly patches of chickweed and crabgrass. . . .

Such descriptions help bring information to life before an audience. But a word of caution is in order. The description above works well because it is *understated*. All too often beginning speakers indulge in emotional overkill. They add too many adjectives, too-much emotional coloration. If "grave site" here were "lonely grave site," if "attitude" were "angry attitude," if "mass grave" were "abandoned mass grave," we would begin to think more about the speaker's feelings than about the subject being portrayed. *Let listeners supply the adjectives in their own minds*. That way, they will *participate* in creating the image. They will then be less likely to feel they are being manipulated.

TESTIMONY

You use testimony when you cite the words and ideas of others in support of your message. When you repeat the exact words of others, you are using a direct quotation. Direct quotations are useful when the material is brief, the exact wording is important, or the language is especially eloquent. When points are controversial, direct quotation can also seem authoritative and conclusive. You also may paraphrase material or restate in your own words what others have said. Keep in mind that when you paraphrase testimony you must still cite the source.

There are three types of testimony which you can use as supporting material. Expert testimony comes from sources who are authorities on the topic. Lay testimony involves citing ordinary citizens who may have firsthand experience. Prestige testimony comes from someone who is highly regarded but not necessarily an expert on the topic at hand.

Expert Testimony

Expert testimony comes from people who are qualified by training or experience to serve as authorities on a subject. As you review your research notes, you will probably discover statements by experts offering opinions, information, or simply interesting quotations. When you cite experts in your speeches, you are calling on them as qualified witnesses to support your case. In a sense, using expert testimony follows you to borrow echoic from them to make your speech more credible. Expert testimony is especially important when your topic is innovative, unfamiliar, highly technical, or controversial.

When using expert testimony, remember that competence is area specific. That means that statements can be used as *expert testimony* only when they fall within the area in which your expert is qualified. For example, emergency room physicians who could provide expert testimony on the physical effects of gunshot wounds might not qualify as experts on gun control legislation.

As you introduce expert testimony in your speeches, be sure to present the credentials of your experts. You can further strengthen the value of testimony by emphasizing its regency or, when appropriate, by the fact that it was published by a prestigious journal or newspaper.

Dr. lee Gonzales, chair of our Criminal Justice Department and former member of the Presidential Task Force on Inner-City Violence, said last week in the *Washington Post* that a law requiring the licensing of hand guns would. . . .

You may wish to say more about your experts' background or the nature of their research projects, depending on the circumstances of your speech.

Lay Testimony

Lay testimony representing the voice of the people is highly regarded in democratic societies. In the United States, people have become honest obsessed with public opinion polls, especially during political campaigns. Newspapers keep us informed of what lithe people" think about issues. In fact *USA Today* features lay testimony along with that of experts on its editorial page.¹² Speakers often use lay testimony to provide an understanding of the real-life consequences of issues. If you were preparing a speech on assembly line boredom, you might quote factory workers to acid an authentic note to your message.

Lay testimony cannot be used to establish the objective validity of ideas. But if your listeners can identify with the people you quote because they the just like us," they may be more willing to accept the point you are _making. While expert testimony deals primarily with the dispassionate determination of facts and carefully considered interpretations based upon them, lay testimony more often deals with direct personal experience and appeals to feelings. Such testimony can be extremely powerful when it is emotionally charged. For example, in a speech at the Center For National Policy, Congressman Richard Gerhard used lay testimony to illustrate the devastating impact of unemployment:

A few weeks ago, I met a man in Jefferson County, Missouri, who had lost his job and couldn't find a way to earn a living. His economic crisis shattered his marriage, as well as his self-confidence. He has loaded all of his worldly possessions into his car, and was headed down the road to nowhere. He looked at me with tears in his eyes, and said, "They took away more than my paycheck. They took away my *pride*.". Your job is more than what you *do* - it's who you *are*. It's your identity."¹³

Prestige-Testimony

Prestige testimony associates your message with the words of a respected public figure. This person is usually an eloquent writer or cultural hero or heroine who, while not necessarily an expert on your particular topic, has voiced some timeless truth that supports, illuminates, and elevates your ideas. Citing such testimony can add distinction to your speech. It allows you to associate your cause with the ethos of the revered person.

Prestige testimony is also one source of *mythos*, a form of proof discussed in Chapter 14 that summons the power of tradition in support of your message. In a speech on the "giveaway of our public lands," Brock Evans, a vice president of the Audubon Society, used prestige testimony to emphasize the depth of the problem:

If there ever was a crisis for all our public lands and wildlife heritage, it is now. The words that keep running through my head, over and over again these terrible times, come from president Abraham Lincoln who in another time of crisis, 130 years ago, said:

"Fellow countrymen, we cannot escape history... the dogmas of the quiet past will no longer suffice for the stormy present... as the occasion now before us is piled high with difficulties, so we must rise to that occasion... history will judge us if we fail."

And that is how I feel about these times now... these are frightening times for anyone who loves the American land and its biological treasures, for anyone who believes in that great tradition of public lands ownership, for anyone who shares the opinion of our forefathers that some lands should belong to all the people.¹⁴

In this example Evans uses Lincoln's exact words so that he would not lose the elegance and force of the language. When the testimony is taken from a long passage or excerpted from a series of passages, "you might find it advantageous to paraphrase the testimony. Just be sure that you cite the source, and that you reflect fairly the spirit of her or his words.

Evaluating and Using Testimony

Like facts and statistics, testimony must meet the test of *relevance*. And like facts and statistics, testimony must seem *free from bias*. For example, a doctor who promotes vitamin therapy may be the part-owner of a company that sells vitamins. Her expert advice to "start taking Nature Blessed vitamins today" may be somewhat suspect because of self-interest. The test of *regency* takes a strange twist when applied to testimony. If you are using expert or lay-testimony, the conventional rule applies: *latest is best*. But if you are using prestige testimony, often *the older the better*. Wisdom ages well, and heroes and heroines glow brighter with the passage of time.

In addition to these basic tests, you must also consider whether the type of testimony is appropriate for your purpose. Lay testimony can humanize

Using testimony

Select sources your audience will respect.

Be careful to quote or paraphrase material accurately.

Point out the qualifications of sources you are citing as experts.

Use only expert testimony to validate information.

Use lay testimony to build identification and add authenticity.

Use prestige testimony to enhance the general credibility of your message.

a speech and promote identification among listeners, your message, and yourself. Prestige testimony can enhance the attractiveness of both speech and speaker, but only expert testimony can demonstrate that a statement is factually true. If you are using expert testimony, be sure your source is an authority in the specific topic area of the speech.

As you use testimony in your speeches, be sure that your paraphrase or quotation you select reflects the overall meaning and intent of its author. Never twist the meaning of testimony to make it fit your purposes. As we noted in Chapter I, this unethical practice is called "quoting out of context." Political advertising is rife with examples of quoting out of context as candidates try to put a positive spin on their image. For example, during a recent political campaign in Illinois, one state representative sent out a fund-raising letter that claimed he'd been singled out for "special recognition" by *Chicago Magazine*: and indeed, he had. He had been cited as "one of the state's ten worst legislators."¹⁵

To assure accuracy, have -quotations written out on note cards so that you can read them, rather than relying on memory. Use testimony from more than one source, especially when your topic is controversial or there is a possibility of bias. A transition, such as *II* According to . . ." or "In the latest issue of . . .," leads gracefully into such material. And once again, be sure to introduce the credentials of your sources of testimony. That way, you help them have maximum impact in your speech. You can find much useful information about your sources in the biographical resources mentioned in Chapter 5.

EXAMPLES

Examples bring a speech to life. Just as pictures serve "as graphic illustrations for a printed text, examples serve as verbal illustrations for an oral message. In fact, some scholars prefer the term *illustration* to *example*. The word *illustration* derives from the Latin *illustrate*, which means "to shed light" or "to make bright." Good examples illuminate the message of your speech, making it clearer and more vivid for your audience.

In addition to clarifying ideas, examples can also arouse attention and sustain interest. A speech without examples is usually boring. Examples make ideas seem real by providing concrete applications. They demonstrate that what you have said either has happened or could happen. Speakers acknowledge these functions when they say, "Let me give you an example." Similarly, examples may be used to personalize your topic and of humanize both you and your

message. Fred Krupp, executive director of the Environmental Defense Fund, used this personal example to open a speech presented at an Environmental Marketing Communications Forum:

Thank you for the kind introduction. I'm a little surprised that you left out my most important qualifying credential. I have three small sons ages 7, 4, and 14 months. So I do know a great deal about cleaning up after environmental disasters.¹⁶

Examples about people give the audience someone with whom they can identify, thus involving them in the speech. Personalized examples help the audience to *experience* the meaning of your ideas, not simply to *understand* them. Examples that point out common experiences, beliefs, or values also help to bridge gaps in cultural understanding. When Hillary