

Outlining Your Speech

Once you have chosen (or been assigned) a topic and conducted your initial research, you should begin outlining your speech. Like all outlines, the public speaking outlining process should provide you with a clear map from the beginning to the end of your speech, but it will also assist you in developing a speaking voice and rhythm. This speech outlining process may be different than the way you have been asked to outline your writing in the past. Mostly because public speaking requires you to create two separate outlines: the preparation outline and the speaking outline. The thought of creating two outlines may sound daunting, but don't let that make you nervous. The second outline is drawn directly from the first.

In order to create a clear outline that can be easily read and understood, it is important to **label** the introduction, body, and conclusion sections of the speech with a header that is flush with the left margin. The header labels for each section are sometimes bolded to make them stand out within the outline, and inserting each header helps you to make sure that you have included each of these sections as you write. The title of the speech (if you choose to include one) should be centered and listed above the header for the introduction.

It is also important to use **consistent symbolization and levels of indentation**. In an outline, main points are identified with Roman numerals and are all equally indented down the page. One tab in from each of the main points, and identified with capital letters are the subpoints. Each sub-point is also equally indented. This process continues with sub-subpoints and sub-sub-subpoints. The symbolization and indentation should look like this:

- I. Main Point
 - A. Subpoint
 - B. Subpoint
 - 1. Sub-subpoint
 - a. Sub-sub-subpoint
 - b. Sub-sub-subpoint
- II. Main Point
 - A. Subpoint
 - 1. Sub-subpoint
 - B. Subpoint
 - 1. Sub-subpoint
 - 2. Sub-subpoint

When you use this pattern of symbolization, you are creating a **visual framework** for your speech, which illustrates the relationship among the ideas in your speech. If you've used the framework correctly, then your most important ideas, or main points, should be farthest to the left on the page, and as the ideas become progressively less important, or are there to support the main idea, they move further to the right.

Preparation Outline

Now that you understand the visual framework, you will create the **preparation outline**, or full-sentence outline. (Yes, **FULL SENTENCES**, written out the way you plan to say them in the speech). The preparation outline's purpose is to do exactly what it says- help you prepare your speech. This is where you will piece together the individual parts of your speech, beginning with a clearly stated specific purpose and thesis statement followed by the introduction, main points and supporting material, and the conclusion.

Let's start from the top. The first thing that any preparation outline should have is a specific purpose statement. A **specific purpose statement** is a separate statement written at the top of the outline that identifies your speech topic, what you will say about that topic, and what you hope the audience will learn from your speech.

Specific Purpose Statement Examples:

Informative: "My specific purpose is to tell the audience about the 2010 Toyota recall, explain business ethics in relation to this issue, and how Toyota's response differed from similar companies."

Persuasive: "After my speech, the audience will know the effects and importance of a staffing system on organizational development and what actions they can take to reduce costs while increasing employee retention, production, and quality of work within their companies."

The specific purpose is important because it reminds you of your goal, your topic, and your plan to address that topic. Rather, it gives you a rubric for the thesis statement. At first glance, the specific purpose statement and the thesis statement may seem like the same thing, however, there is a difference in the language used in each. The thesis statement reformulates the specific purpose statement to be heard by the audience. The **thesis statement**, sometimes called the central idea, is a single sentence that explicitly verbalizes the topic, main points, and goal of your speech to your audience.

Thesis Statement Examples:

Informative: "Today, I will tell you about Toyota's voluntary recall of several thousand vehicles in 2010 and how their response to the situation differed from previous vehicle manufacturers that faced similar problems as a case study for understanding business ethics."

Persuasive: "In this speech, I argue that staffing systems are vital to the success of organizational development because they increase employee retention, production, and quality of work while also reducing overall costs to the company."

Once these elements are in place, you can begin the preparation outline. Like most outlines, the preparation outline begins with an introduction. Every **introduction** serves five purposes:

1. Gain the attention of the audience
2. State your thesis or argument
3. Establish your credibility as a speaker
4. Preview the body of the speech
5. Transition to the body

Each of these elements is equally important, so in the outline, they would all be aligned on the left with Roman numerals. If any one of the individual elements takes more than one sentence, then subpoints will be used beginning with capital letters, as explained above. For illustrative purposes, it would look like this:

Introduction

- I. Attention-getter
 - II. Thesis statement
 - III. Credibility statement
 - IV. Preview statement
 - A. Preview continued
 - B. Preview continued
- (Transition to body of speech)

The fifth element of the introduction is the **transition**, or a word (or short statement) that signals to the audience when a speaker is moving from one thought to another, though transitions will be found between all major thoughts, not just between the introduction and body paragraphs. They can be as simple as a single word: “first,” “however,” “although,” and “similarly,” or they can be stated in phrases, such as “not only...but also,” or “despite the fact that....” Ideally, your writing will be arranged so that the content of one paragraph flows logically into the next. The transition then serves to very briefly summarize the previous paragraph and hint at the paragraph to come so that the connection between the two is explicitly drawn for the audience. In the illustration above, (and in the preparation outline) transitions are aligned to the left and are placed in parentheses.

Transition Examples:

If in an outline one paragraph was about the reports which drew attention to the problems with Toyota’s vehicles, and the next paragraph was about Toyota’s recall, an appropriate transition between the two paragraphs might be:

“Based on the information received in the reports, Toyota voluntarily recalled 9 million vehicles.”

(For more information on transitions, see [Developing Paragraphs](#))

After you’ve made a clear transition, the audience should know what is coming in the first section of your speech **body**, or the main part of your speech. The body contains all of the main and subpoints in the speech, as well as a transition between each of the main point paragraphs. When writing, be sure that each point stated in the body of the speech reflects some aspect of the speech’s thesis statement, which is listed at the top of the outline for easy reference. The preparation outline can assist you as you write in determining what and how many main points to include in the body paragraphs so that you can not only keep the audience’s focus, but also accomplish your speech goals in the time you have been allotted.

When you’ve finished your last main point, the conclusion is your last chance to restate or reinforce your thesis statement in your speech. There are three components to the conclusion:

1. Signpost
2. Restated thesis
3. Clincher statement

The transition from the body of the speech to the conclusion requires a **signpost**, or a signal, to indicate to the audience that the speech is ending. The signpost is important, and must be clear without being cliché, so try to avoid overused phrases such as, “In conclusion” to signal the end of your speech. A conclusion should also restate the thesis of the speech. Typically this part of the conclusion serves as a very brief summary of the main points. Finally, the speech ends with a **clincher**, or your final conclusion drawn from those points to reinforce the central idea of the speech.

Even after the conclusion, though, the preparation outline isn’t finished. The last step in the preparation outline is the **bibliography**, or the list of sources used for the speech. The heading for the bibliography will come after the conclusion paragraph. Under this heading, you will list any journal articles, newspapers, internet sources, field notes, interviews, etc. used while writing the speech. You will likely use either Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or Chicago citation format for all citations and bibliographies, but you should ask your instructors if they prefer a particular style before you format the actual citations. It may look like this, for example:

Bibliography

English, C. M. (2015). *Outlining for Awesome People*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press.

Speaking Outline

Once you have completed the preparation outline, you can create the speaking outline. A speaking outline is used to assist a speaker with recall during a presentation or speech. The speaking outline follows the same visual framework as the preparation outline, except:

1. No full sentences
2. No citations (in-text or bibliography)
3. No specific purpose or thesis at top

The idea is that a speaker will begin practicing the speech with the preparation outline, and once they know the information fairly well, move to a speaking outline that contains only key words. This is called speaking **extemporaneously**: the speech is written and practiced in advance, but the actual wording of the speech may change during the delivery. On your speaking outline, you should:

1. Use only keywords to avoid reading from outline/ notecards
2. Write out direct quotes to ensure accuracy
3. Number or bind notecards of using them (suggested)

Outlining your speech will help you to organize your thoughts and make your arguments clearly and concisely. It will assist you in finding your speaking voice and in developing a speaking rhythm that will increase the effectiveness of the delivery, and finally, outlining your speech will make practice and delivery much easier, thus increasing your likelihood of a positive outcome. Outlining can and will make you a better public speaker.