CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Speaking to Inform

Natalya Petrovich is the advertising manager for a company that sells computer equipment such as routers, network cards, and wireless extensions. She began that particular workday by meeting with her staff to discuss the company's new line of network cards. She pointed out the special features of each piece of equipment, explained what other equipment was compatible with each, and answered questions about them.

Later that morning, Natalya had a long talk with the head of the company's technical division. "Can you show me," she asked, "how to use the new router we're developing? I need to double-check the ad copy my staff has drafted." Natalya then took notes as the head of the technical division went through the uses of the new router. Natalya also asked questions along the way to make sure she understood exactly how the router worked.

In the afternoon, Natalya met with the company's president and sales director to go over the current year's budget for her department, as well as her projections for the new fiscal year. She reviewed advertising campaigns and sales data, assessed the performance of each member of her staff, and then presented her projections of staffing requirements for the next eighteen months. Afterward, the president complimented Natalya for giving such a clear presentation. "Anyone who can communicate that well," the president said, "is going to go a long way in this company."

Chapter Focus
This chapter introduces students to the task of sharing information accurately, clearly, and engagingly. After exploring four major kinds of speeches to inform, it presents five guidelines for successful informative discourse. It concludes by reprinting a full sample speech with commentary to help students construct their own informative speeches. For a complete outline of the chapter, see the *Instructor's Manual*, pp. 296–299.

Natalya doesn't consider herself a "public speaker," but much of her job involves absorbing and communicating information clearly and effectively. Although Natalya is just a single person, her experience is not unusual. In one survey, graduates from five U.S. colleges were asked to rank the speech skills most important to their jobs. They rated informative speaking number one. In another survey, 62 percent of the respondents said they used informative speaking "almost constantly."[1]

Public speaking to inform occurs in a wide range of everyday situations. What kinds of people make informative speeches? The business manager explaining next year's budget. The architect reviewing plans for a new building. The military officer briefing subordinates. The union leader informing members about details of a new contract. The church worker outlining plans for a fund drive. The teacher in a classroom. There are endless situations in which people need to inform others. Competence in this form of communication will prove valuable to you throughout your life.

informative speech
A speech designed to convey knowledge and understanding.

One of your first classroom assignments probably will be to deliver an informative speech in which you will act as a lecturer or teacher. You may describe an object, show how something works, report on an event, explain a concept. Your aim will be to convey knowledge and understanding—not to advocate a cause. Your speech will be judged in light of three general criteria:

Is the information communicated accurately?

Is the information communicated clearly?

Is the information made meaningful and interesting to the audience?

In this chapter, we will look at four types of informative speeches and the basic principles of informative speaking. Along the way, we will apply various general principles discussed in previous chapters.

Types of Informative Speeches: Analysis and Organization

There are many ways to classify informative speeches. Here we focus on the four kinds of informative speeches you are most likely to give in your speech class: (1) speeches about objects, (2) speeches about processes, (3) speeches about events, and (4) speeches about concepts. These are not hard-and-fast categories, but they provide an effective method of analyzing and organizing informative speeches.

Speeches About Objects

object
Anything that is visible, tangible, and stable in form.

As the word is used here, "objects" include anything that is visible, tangible, and stable in form. Objects may have moving parts or be alive; they may include places, structures, animals, even people. Here are examples of subjects for speeches about objects:

Sitting Bull	Mars Rover
Grand Canyon	stock market
the human eye	Elizabeth Cady Stanton
seaweed	digital music players
comic strips	U.S. Army

You will not have time to tell your classmates everything about any of these subjects. Instead, you will choose a specific purpose that focuses on one aspect of your subject. Working from the topics presented above, the following are examples of good specific purpose statements for informative speeches about objects:

To inform my audience about the social functions of comic strips.

To inform my audience about the geological features of the Grand Canyon.

To inform my audience about the role of Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the U.S. women's rights movement.

To inform my audience what to look for when buying a digital music player.

To inform my audience about the commercial uses of seaweed.

Cross-Reference
See Chapter 4 for full discussion of selecting speech topics and developing specific purpose statements.

Notice how precise these statements are. As we saw in Chapter 4, you should select a specific purpose that is not too broad to achieve in the allotted time. "To inform my audience about Pablo Picasso" is far too general for a classroom speech. "To inform my audience about the major contributions of

Pablo Picasso to modern art" is more exact and is a purpose you could reasonably hope to achieve in a brief talk.

If your specific purpose is to explain the history or evolution of your subject, you will put your speech in *chronological* order. For example:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the major achievements of Frederick Douglass.

Central Idea: Although born in slavery, Frederick Douglass became one of the greatest figures in American history.

Main Points:

I. Douglass spent the first 20 years of his life as a slave in Maryland.
II. After escaping to the North, Douglass became a leader in the abolitionist movement to end slavery.
III. During the Civil War, Douglass helped establish black regiments in the Union Army.
IV. After the war, Douglass was a tireless champion of equal rights for his race.

Teaching Tip
Make sure that students understand the informative speech assignment and that they do not confuse it with speaking to persuade. Although every speech has the potential to persuade depending on how it is interpreted by the audience, there is, in most cases, a sharp difference between a speech designed to convey knowledge and understanding and one designed to change listeners' attitudes, beliefs, or actions. For more on the differences between informative and persuasive speeches, see the Teaching Tip on p. 376.

If your specific purpose is to describe the main features of your subject, you may organize your speech in *spatial* order:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the differences among the five major Hawaiian Islands.

Central Idea: The five major Hawaiian islands run from Kauai in the northwest to Hawaii in the southeast.

Main Points:

I. The northernmost of the major islands, Kauai averages 485 inches of rain a year, making it one of the wettest spots on Earth.
II. Southeast of Kauai is Oahu, home of Honolulu and the most heavily populated of all the islands.
III. Located 26 miles from Oahu, Molokai is known for its friendliness and its large population of native Hawaiians.
IV. Eight miles to the southeast of Oahu lies Maui, famous for its spectacular landscapes, white sandy beaches, and crystal-clear water.
V. The southernmost major island is Hawaii, known as the Big Island, which is twice as large as all the other islands put together.

As often as not, you will find that speeches about objects fall into *topical* order. Here is an example:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the major alternative-fuel cars now being developed.

Central Idea: The major alternative-fuel cars now being developed are powered by electricity, natural gas, methanol, or hydrogen.

Main Points:

I. One kind of alternative-fuel car is powered by electricity.
II. A second kind of alternative-fuel car is powered by natural gas.
III. A third kind of alternative-fuel car is powered by methanol.
IV. A fourth kind of alternative-fuel car is powered by hydrogen.

No matter which of these organizational methods you use—chronological, spatial, or topical—be sure to follow the guidelines discussed in Chapter 8: (1) limit your speech to between two and five main points; (2) keep main points separate; (3) try to use the same pattern of wording for all main points; (4) balance the amount of time devoted to each main point.

Cross-Reference
See Chapter 8 for full discussion of methods and guidelines for organizing the main points of a speech.

Speeches About Processes

A process is a systematic series of actions that leads to a specific result or product. Speeches about processes explain how something is made, how something is done, or how something works. Here are examples of good specific purpose statements for speeches about processes:

process
A systematic series of actions that leads to a specific result or product.

To inform my audience how hurricanes develop.

To inform my audience how to write an effective job resumé.

To inform my audience how to save people from drowning.

To inform my audience how oriental rugs are made.

To inform my audience how to perform Pilates exercises.

As these examples suggest, there are two kinds of informative speeches about processes. One kind explains a process so that listeners will *understand* it better. Your goal in this kind of speech is to have your audience know the steps of the process and how they relate to one another. If your specific purpose is "To inform my audience how underwater robots work," you will explain the basic tasks and mechanisms of underwater robots. You will not instruct your listeners on how they can *operate* an underwater robot.

A second kind of speech explains a process so listeners will be better able to *perform* the process themselves. Your goal in this kind of speech is to have the audience learn a particular skill. Suppose your specific purpose is "To inform my audience how to take pictures like a professional photographer." You will present the basic techniques of professional photography and show your listeners how they can utilize those techniques. You want the audience to be able to *use* the techniques as a result of your speech.

Both kinds of speeches about processes may require visual aids. At the very least, you should prepare a chart outlining the steps or techniques of your process. In some cases you will need to demonstrate the steps or techniques by performing them in front of your audience. One student did sleight-of-hand magic tricks to show the techniques behind

Teaching Tip
Some instructors require that students choose a single topic for both the informative and persuasive speeches. In the informative speech, students provide background information about the topic; in the persuasive speech, they advocate a policy with regard to the same topic. Such an approach eliminates the need for students to spend time selecting two speech topics, and it allows them to research a single topic in more depth than would otherwise be the case.

them. Another acted out the basic methods of mime. Yet another executed elementary tai chi maneuvers. In each case, the demonstration not only clarified the speaker's process, but captivated the audience as well. (If you are using visual aids of any kind, be sure to review Chapter 13 before your speech.)

When informing about a process, you will usually arrange your speech in *chronological* order, explaining the process step by step from beginning to end. For example:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the major rituals of a traditional Bengali wedding in India.

Central Idea: A traditional Bengali wedding consists of a series of rituals that take place before the wedding, during the wedding ceremony, and after the wedding.

Main Points:

I. Pre-wedding rituals include offering reverence to the ancestors of the bride and groom, giving gifts to the bride and groom, and dressing the bride in traditional fashion.
II. Rituals during the wedding ceremony include an exchange of garlands between the bride and groom, the chanting of mantras, and the giving away of the bride by her uncle.
III. Post-wedding rituals include a celebration at the home of the bride's family, a reception at the home of the groom's family, and the formal exit of the bride and groom to their nuptial quarters.

Sometimes, rather than leading your audience through a process step by step, you will focus on the major principles or techniques involved in performing the process. Then you will organize your speech in *topical* order. Each main point will deal with a separate principle or technique. For example:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience of the common methods used by stage magicians to perform their tricks.

Central Idea: Stage magicians use two common methods to perform their tricks—mechanical devices and sleight of hand.

Main Points:

I. Many magic tricks rely on mechanical devices that may require little skill by the magician.
II. Other magic tricks depend on the magician's skill in fooling people by sleight-of-hand manipulation.

Concise organization is especially important in speeches about processes. You must make sure each step in the process is clear and easy to follow. If your process has more than four or five steps, group the steps into units so as to limit the number of main points. Otherwise, you will have too many main points for listeners to grasp and recall. For example,

Teaching Tip

Students sometimes propose topics for informative speeches about events or concepts that would be more suitable for a persuasive speech on a question of fact. "To inform my audience of the scientific evidence supporting the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life" is an acceptable specific purpose statement for an informative speech as long as the evidence presented in the speech is truly scientific. In contrast, "To inform my audience about the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life" is not appropriate for an informative speech. Why? Because there is no consensus in the scientific community about the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life. Some experts believe in such life; others do not. Because the facts of the matter are so hotly contested, this subject would be better treated as a persuasive speech on a question of fact, with the specific purpose statement "To persuade my audience that there is intelligent extraterrestrial life in the universe." For full discussion of persuasive speeches on questions of fact, see Chapter 15, pp. 406–409.

Informative speeches can be organized in many ways. A speech on the growth of modern art would likely be in chronological order, while a speech on the techniques of painting would fall into topical order.

in a speech explaining how to set up a home aquarium, a student presented the following main points:

I. First you must choose the size of your tank.
II. Then you must determine the shape of your tank.
III. You must also decide how much you can afford to pay for a tank.
IV. Once you have the tank, you need a filter system.
V. A heater is also absolutely necessary.
VI. You must also get an air pump.
VII. Once this is done, you need to choose gravel for the tank.
VIII. You will also need plants.
IX. Other decorations will round out the effects of your aquarium.
X. Now you are ready to add the fish.
XI. Freshwater fish are the most common.
XII. Saltwater fish are more expensive and require special care.

Class Activity
It is crucial that students understand the importance of limiting the number of main points in an informative speech about a process. For a helpful activity on this subject, see Applying the Power of Public Speaking at the end of this chapter. For discussion of the activity, see the *Instructor's Manual*, pp. 303–304.

Not surprisingly, this was too much for the audience to follow. The speaker should have organized the points something like this:

I. The first step in establishing a home aquarium is choosing a tank.
   A. The size of the tank is important.
   B. The shape of the tank is important.
   C. The cost of the tank is important.
II. The second step in establishing a home aquarium is equipping the tank.
   A. You will need a filter system.
   B. You will need a heater.
   C. You will need an air pump.
   D. You will need gravel.

E. You will need plants.
F. You may also want other decorations.

III. The third step in establishing a home aquarium is adding the fish.
A. Freshwater fish are the most common for home aquariums.
B. Saltwater fish are more expensive and require special care.

As you can see, the subpoints cover the same territory as that originally covered by the twelve main points. But three main points are much easier to understand and remember than twelve.

Speeches About Events

event
Anything that happens or is regarded as happening.

The *Random House Dictionary* defines an event as "anything that happens or is regarded as happening." By this definition, the following are examples of suitable subjects for informative speeches about events:

Holocaust	mountain climbing
civil rights movement	Paralympics
figure skating	job interviews
Cinco de Mayo	tsunamis
attention deficit disorder	Battle of Little Big Horn

Speech Assignment
There are many possible approaches to the informative speech assignment, one of which is to have students explain a significant aspect of a culture other than their own. For an explanation of such an assignment, see the *Instructor's Manual,* p. 34. For a more involved approach that combines attention to cultural diversity with small-group discussion and informative speaking, see Kimberly A. Powell, "Increasing Appreciation for Diversity Through the Group Culture Speech," in *Selections from the Speech Communication Teacher, 1994–1996,* pp. 28–29, which accompanies *The Art of Public Speaking*.

As usual, you will need to narrow your focus and pick a specific purpose you can accomplish in a short speech. Here are examples of good specific purpose statements for informative speeches about events:

To inform my audience about the equipment used in mountain climbing.

To inform my audience of the festivities at Mexico's Cinco de Mayo celebration.

To inform my audience about what happened at the Battle of Little Big Horn.

To inform my audience about the techniques of therapeutic massage.

To inform my audience about the experience of working on an archaeological dig.

As you can see, there are many ways to discuss events. If your specific purpose is to recount the history of an event, you will organize your speech in *chronological* order, relating the incidents one after another in the order they occurred. For example:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the history of the Paralympics.

Central Idea: Olympic-style games for athletes with physical disabilities have made great strides since the first competition almost 60 years ago.

Main Points:

I. What would eventually become the Paralympics began in 1948 with a sports competition in Great Britain involving World War II veterans with spinal cord injuries.

THE INTERNET *Connection*

Do you need quick access to facts about your informative speech topic? Log on to the Internet Public Library's Subject Collection (www.ipl.org/div/subject/), which offers links to a wide range of high-quality resources chosen for their accurate and reliable information.

If you are giving an informative speech on a topic with multicultural dimensions, you may find the following Web sites useful:

Yahoo! Regional (http://dir.yahoo.com/Regional/)

WWW Virtual Library: American Indians (www.hanksville.org/NAresources)

Asian American Studies Resources (www.sunysb.edu/library/eresources/www/asian.html)

Latino/Hispanic Resources (www-rcf.usc.edu/~cmmr/Latino.html)

African American Web Connection (www.aawc.com)

ONLINE LEARNING CENTER

You can link to these Web sites at www.mhhe.com/lucas9.

II. In 1952 the event took on an international flavor when athletes from the Netherlands took part.
III. The first official Paralympic Games for international athletes with disabilities took place in Rome in 1960.
IV. In 2001 an agreement was signed allowing for the Paralympic Games to be held alongside both the summer and winter Olympic Games.

Speech Assignment
For a different kind of informative speech assignment, have students inform their classmates about a prominent public speaker, either contemporary or historical. Although I have used this assignment most frequently for the final speech of the term, the speech can be reduced in length and complexity so as to be appropriate earlier. For fuller explanation, see the *Instructor's Manual,* p. 37.

Instead of recounting the history of an event, you might take a more analytical approach and explain its causes and/or effects. In such a case, you will organize your speech in *causal* order. Let's say your specific purpose is "To inform my audience why so many lives were lost when a major tsunami hit Southeast Asia in 2004." Working from cause to effect, your outline might look like this:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience why so many lives were lost when a major tsunami hit Southeast Asia in 2004.

Central Idea: On December 26, 2004, a catastrophic tsunami hit unexpectedly and took the lives of more than 200,000 people caught near the seashore.

Main Points:

I. There were two major causes for the great loss of life when the tsunami struck.
   A. Many resorts and fishing villages were built directly on the beach.
   B. There was no warning system for tsunamis in that part of the world.

II. The effects of these two situations were disastrous.
  A. There was no time for people to escape to higher ground.
  B. Thousands of people who were vacationing, living, or working on the beach were swept away.

Teaching Tip
Many instructors require that students use a visual aid in the informative speech—regardless of whether the speech is about a process, an object, a concept, or an event. Not only does this ensure that all students gain experience using a visual aid in at least one of their speeches, it also increases audience interest, reduces the speaker's nervousness, and encourages extemporaneous delivery. For full discussion of visual aids, see Chapter 13.

There are other ways to deal with an event besides telling what happened or why it happened. Indeed, you can approach an event from almost any angle or combination of angles—features, origins, implications, benefits, future developments, and so forth. In such cases, you will put your speech together in *topical* order. And you should make sure your main points subdivide the subject logically and consistently. For instance:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the four traditional events in women's gymnastics.

Central Idea: The four traditional events in women's gymnastics are floor exercise, vault, balance beam, and uneven parallel bars.

Main Points:
I. The floor exercise combines dancing, acrobatics, and tumbling.
II. The vault features explosive strength and dramatic midair maneuvers.
III. The balance beam requires precise routines and perfect coordination.
IV. The uneven parallel bars demand great strength, flexibility, and agility.

Speeches About Concepts

concept
A belief, theory, idea, notion, principle, or the like.

Concepts include beliefs, theories, ideas, principles, and the like. They are more abstract than objects, processes, or events. The following are some examples of subjects for speeches about concepts:

Confucianism	film theory
philosophies of education	principles of feminism
original-intent doctrine	existentialism
concepts of science	theories of psychology
religious beliefs	international law

Taking a few of these general subjects, here are some specific purpose statements for speeches about concepts:

To inform my audience about the basic principles of Confucianism.

To inform my audience about the doctrine of original intent in constitutional interpretation.

The principles of informative speaking are applicable to a wide range of situations. Knowing those principles will help you whenever you need to convey knowledge and understanding.

To inform my audience about the different philosophies of education in Europe and the United States.

To inform my audience about the concept of patriarchy in feminist thought.

To inform my audience about the major principles of film theory.

Speeches about concepts are usually organized in *topical* order. One common approach is to enumerate the main features or aspects of your concept. For example:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the basic principles of nonviolent resistance.

Central Idea: The basic principles of nonviolent resistance stress using moral means to achieve social change, refusing to inflict violence on one's enemies, and using suffering as a social force.

Main Points:

I. The first major principle of nonviolent resistance is that social change must be achieved by moral means.
II. The second major principle of nonviolent resistance is that one should not inflict violence on one's enemies.
III. The third major principle of nonviolent resistance is that suffering can be a powerful social force.

Speech Assignment
Providing clear explanations of complex ideas is one of the most difficult challenges facing a public speaker. For a valuable exploration of this aspect of informative speaking, see Katherine Rowan, "The Speech to Explain Difficult Ideas," in *Selections from the Speech Communication Teacher 1986–1991*, pp. 69–71, which accompanies *The Art of Public Speaking*.

A more complex approach is to define the concept you are dealing with, identify its major elements, and illustrate it with specific examples. An

excellent instance of this came in a student speech about Islam:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience of the basic principles of Islam.

Central Idea: The beliefs of Islam can be traced to the prophet Muhammad, are written in the Koran, and have produced a number of sects.

Main Points:

I. Islam was founded by the prophet Muhammad in the early 600s.
II. The teachings of Islam are written in the Koran, the holy book of Islam.
III. Today Islam is divided into a number of sects, the largest of which are the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Overhead Transparency
For ease of classroom discussion, examples of specific purpose statements, central ideas, and main points for all four kinds of informative speeches discussed in this chapter are included in the binder of full-color overhead transparencies that accompanies *The Art of Public Speaking*.

Yet another approach is to explain competing schools of thought about the same subject. For example:

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience of the major arguments for and against homeschooling.

Central Idea: Supporters and opponents of homeschooling both have legitimate arguments.

Main Points:

I. Supporters of homeschooling argue that parents are the best judge of the values and academic subjects their children should be taught.
II. Opponents of homeschooling argue that society requires all children to learn a common set of academic subjects and civic values.

As you can see from these examples, speeches about concepts are often more complex than other kinds of informative speeches. Concepts are abstract and can be very hard to explain to someone who is learning about them for the first time. When explaining concepts, pay special attention to avoiding technical language, to defining terms clearly, and to using examples and comparisons to illustrate the concepts and make them understandable to your listeners.

View an excerpt from "Feng Shui."

Look, for example, at CD 1, Video 14.1, which presents an excerpt from a student speech about the ancient Chinese art of feng shui. Notice how clearly the student defines feng shui and then explains the concept of chi, which is the most important factor in feng shui. If you give an informative speech about a concept, give special thought to how you can make that concept clear and comprehensible to your listeners.

The lines dividing speeches about objects, processes, events, and concepts are not absolute. Some subjects could fit into more than one category, depending on how you develop the speech. You could treat the Declaration of Independence as an object—by explaining its history and its role in the American Revolution. Or you could deal with the meaning of the Declaration, in which case you would be speaking about a concept—an idea bound up with freedom and democracy.

To take another example, a speech about the destruction of ancient Pompeii by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius would probably deal with its subject as an event, but a speech on what causes volcanoes to erupt would most likely treat its subject as a process. The important step is to decide how you will handle your subject—as an object, a process, an event, or a concept. Once you do that, you can develop the speech accordingly.

One final word about organizing your informative speech: Regardless of which method of organization you use, be sure to give your listeners plenty of help in sorting out facts and ideas during the speech. One way is by using enough transitions, internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts (see Chapter 8). Another way is to follow the old maxim: "Tell 'em what you're going to say; say it; then tell 'em what you've said." In other words, preview the main points of your speech in the introduction, and summarize them in the conclusion. This will make your speech not only easier to understand but also easier to remember.

Guidelines for Informative Speaking

All the previous chapters of this book relate to the principles of informative speaking. Choosing a topic and specific purpose, analyzing the audience, gathering materials, choosing supporting details, organizing the speech, using words to communicate meaning, delivering the speech—all of these must be done effectively if your informative speech is to be a success. Here we emphasize five points that will help you avoid the mistakes that plague many informative speakers.

Don't Overestimate What the Audience Knows

In a speech about meteorology, a student said, "If modern methods of weather forecasting had existed in 1900, the Galveston hurricane disaster would never have taken place." Then he was off to other matters, leaving his listeners to puzzle over what the Galveston hurricane was, when it happened, and what kind of destruction it wreaked.

The speaker assumed that the audience already knew these things. But his classmates were not experts on meteorology or on American history. Even those who had heard of the hurricane had only a fuzzy notion of it. Some were not even sure about the location of Galveston. Only the speaker knew that the hurricane, which killed more than 6,000 people when it unexpectedly struck Galveston, Texas, on September 8, 1900, is still the deadliest natural disaster in American history.

As many speakers have discovered, it is easy to overestimate the audience's stock of information. In most informative speeches, your listeners will be only vaguely knowledgeable (at best) about the details of your topic. (Otherwise, there would not be much need for an informative speech!) Therefore, you must lead your listeners step by step, without any shortcuts. You cannot *assume* they will know what you mean. Rather, you must be *sure* to explain everything so thoroughly that they cannot help but understand. As you work on your speech, always consider

Class Activity
Divide the class into small groups and have them work on the first Exercise for Critical Thinking at the end of this chapter. This exercise gives students practice in developing specific purpose statements for informative speeches and helps them distinguish among informative speeches about objects, concepts, processes, and events. For additional discussion of the exercise, see the *Instructor's Manual,* p. 300.

whether it will be clear to someone who is hearing about the topic for the first time.

Suppose you are talking about Roth IRAs, a type of individual retirement account approved by Congress in 1998. Although some of your classmates might have heard of Roth IRAs, you cannot assume they have a firm grasp of the subject. So you should start by telling them what a Roth IRA is. How will you tell them? Here's one way:

> Introduced in 1998, a Roth IRA is a type of individual retirement account in which annual contributions are made with after-tax dollars but in which earnings and distributions are tax-free once the holder of the account is 59.5 years of age or older.

Class Activity
Divide the class into small groups. Have each group select a topic from among the following:

How to tie a shoelace

How to change a car tire

The basic rules of baseball

How to operate a digital camera

How to program a TiVo

The basic rules of Monopoly

Give each group 15 minutes to work out a 2-minute explanation designed for an audience that knows absolutely nothing about the topic. Each group should select one of its members to present the explanation orally to the class. For further discussion of this activity, see the third Additional Exercise for Critical Thinking on p. 311 of the *Instructor's Manual*.

To someone who knows a lot about economics this is perfectly clear. But someone who does not will probably get lost along the way. The tone of the statement is that of a speaker reviewing information already familiar to the audience—not of a speaker introducing new information.

Here, in contrast, is another explanation of Roth IRAs:

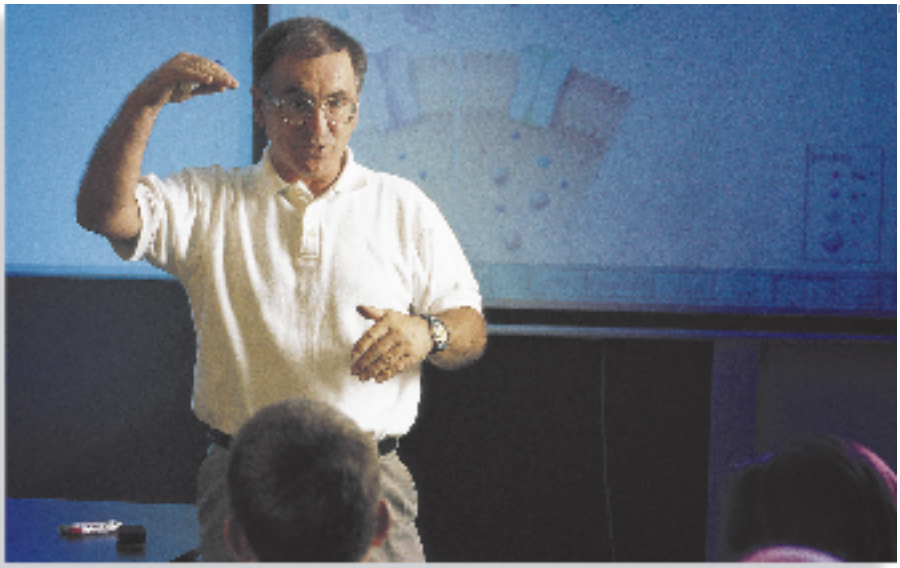
> What is a Roth Individual Retirement Account, or IRA? Let me explain with an example.
>
> Imagine yourself a few years down the road as a recent college graduate. Your job pays a good salary, but you're still concerned with your finances and your future. After all, everyone keeps telling you to start planning for retirement early.
>
> In addition to Social Security, you have a number of retirement-planning options. One is the Roth IRA. Suppose you place $4,000 into a Roth IRA every year. Suppose also that your money grows at an average rate of 8 percent a year.
>
> If you start putting money in at age 25 and withdraw it at age 65, you will have an account worth more than $1.2 million. Moreover, unlike other retirement accounts, you won't have to pay taxes on your $1.2 million, even if you take it out all at once.
>
> So you can see why Roth IRAs are so popular. You win both ways—your money grows tax-free and it is free of taxes when you withdraw it.

This statement is clear and simple. Its tone is that of a teacher unraveling a new subject.

Is it too simple? Will your classmates feel as if you are talking down to them? Almost certainly not. Many students hesitate to speak simply because they are afraid they will sound simpleminded. They think they need big words and complicated sentences to sound intelligent. But nothing could be farther from the truth. The test of a good speaker is to communicate even the most complex ideas clearly and simply. Anyone can go to a book and find a learned-sounding definition of a Roth IRA like the one above. But to say in plain English what a Roth IRA is—that takes hard work and creative thinking.

Also, remember that readers can study a printed passage again and again until they extract its meaning, but listeners don't have that luxury. They must understand what you say in the time it takes you to say it. The more you assume they know about the topic, the greater your chances of being misunderstood.

If you have circulated a questionnaire among your listeners before the speech (see Chapter 5, pages 128–131), you should have a good idea of their



Whether in the classroom or out, effective informative speakers work on communicating their ideas in clear, nontechnical language that relates the topic to their listeners' knowledge and interests.

knowledge about the topic. If not, you will usually do better to aim for the low end of the knowledge spectrum. Some experts recommend preparing a speech as if the audience had never heard of the subject. That may be a bit extreme, but it is one way to make sure you define every special term, clarify every idea, illustrate every concept, and support every conclusion. You cannot go wrong by following the news reporters' code: "Never *over*estimate the information of your audience; never *under*estimate the intelligence of your audience."

Relate the Subject Directly to the Audience

The British dramatist Oscar Wilde arrived at his club after the disastrous opening-night performance of his new play.

"Oscar, how did your play go?" asked a friend.

"Oh," Wilde quipped, "the play was a great success, but the audience was a failure."

Speakers have been known to give much the same answer in saving face after a dismal informative speech. "Oh," they say, "the speech was fine, but the audience just wasn't interested." And they are at least partly right—the audience *wasn't* interested. Then was the speech fine? Not by any objective standard. A speech is measured by its impact on a particular audience. There is no such thing as a fine speech that puts people to sleep. It is the speaker's job to get listeners interested—and to keep them interested.

Informative speakers have one big hurdle to overcome. They must recognize that what is fascinating to them may not be fascinating to everybody. A mathematician, for example, might be truly enthralled by a perfect equation, but most people wouldn't want to hear about it. Once you have chosen a topic that could possibly be interesting to your listeners, you should

Class Activity
Once students have settled on topics for their informative speeches, lead a class discussion in which students share their topics with their classmates. Ask the class how much they know about each topic. In most cases, the class will know considerably less than the speaker assumes. Lead a brainstorming session on how the speakers can relate their topics to the audience.

take special steps to relate it to them. You should tie it in with their interests and concerns.

Start in the introduction. Instead of saying,

I want to talk with you about chili peppers,

you could say:

Imagine your mouth burning like wildfire, your eyes squirting out uncontrollable tears, and your face red and sweating profusely. Are you sick? No. You just took a bite of a screaming hot chili pepper. Congratulations. You're partaking in a worldwide tradition that has been spicing up lives and diets for thousands of years.

Get your audience involved right at the beginning. Notice how one student did this in her informative speech about depression. The speaker's classmates all knew something about depression as a medical condition, but the speaker wanted to relate the subject to them on a more personal basis. She began by saying:

CD 1:VIDEO 14.2

View these excerpts from "The Hidden World of Chili Peppers" and "Depression: More Than a Blue Mood."

You feel exhausted, yet you can't sleep. You have no energy, no hope, and you get no pleasure from your usual activities. You're angry and irritable, and you find that lately you're spending more and more time alone. You feel like you're caught in a trap, and you see no way out.

Have you or someone close to you suffered from these scary feelings? I'd be surprised if you answered no. These are symptoms of depression, and according to the National Institute of Mental Health, about 19 percent of adults, or almost 10 million people, become depressed each year. What's more, symptoms usually begin between ages 15 and 30, making depression a serious concern for college students.

Don't stop with the introduction. Whenever you can, put your listeners into the body of the speech. After all, nothing interests people more than themselves. Don't just rattle off statistics and concepts as if you were reciting a shopping list. Find ways to talk about your topic in terms of your listeners. Bring your material home to them. Get it as close to them as possible.

Cross-Reference
See Chapter 5 for a full discussion of audience analysis and adaptation.

Here's an example. Let's say you are explaining how people can discover whether they are "secret southpaws"—that is, people who are naturally left-handed but who have grown up preferring the right hand because they were taught to use it as a child. You have plenty of facts and could recite them like this:

According to *Science* magazine, half of all people who are naturally left-handed assume they are right-handed because that is the hand they use to eat, to write, and to play sports. But how can it be determined whether one is a natural southpaw? According to Abram Blau, author of *The Master Hand,* there are a number of simple tests. For one thing, most natural left-handers can write spontaneously backward or upside down with the left hand. For another, when left-handers clasp their hands in front of themselves, they usually place the left thumb on top. In contrast, when left-handers grab a broom, they normally place their left hand below the right. Finally, when using

the right hand, natural left-handers will draw a circle clockwise, while natural right-handers will draw it counterclockwise. People who give a left-handed response on three or more of these tests may well be secret southpaws.

This is fascinating information, but it is not made fascinating to the audience. Let's try again:

Just because *you* use *your* right hand to eat, to write, and to play sports, *you* may assume that *you're* naturally right-handed. But, says *Science* magazine, half of all people who are naturally left-handed grow up using their right hands.

How can *you* tell if you're a natural lefty? Dr. Abram Blau, author of *The Master Hand*, gives some tests *you* can try.

First, on a sheet of paper see if *you* can write backward or upside down with *your* left hand. If *you* are left-handed, *you* can probably do this spontaneously, without practice or training.

Second, clasp *your* hands together in front of *you*. Whichever thumb *you* place on top is usually *your* dominant hand.

Third, grab hold of a broomstick. Odds are *you'll* place *your* dominant hand on the bottom.

Finally, draw a circle on a piece of paper with *your* right hand. If *you* draw it counterclockwise, *you're* probably a natural right-hander. But if *you* draw it clockwise, *you're* probably a natural lefty.

If *you* test left-handed on three of these tests, there is a good chance *you* are a secret southpaw.

CD 1: VIDEO 14.3

View these excerpts from "Secret Southpaws."

Look at the frequent use of "you" and "your." The facts are the same, but now they are pointed directly at the audience. This is the kind of thing that gets listeners to sit up and pay attention. In addition, research shows that using personal terms such as "you" and "your" in an informative speech significantly increases audience understanding of the speaker's ideas.[2]

Don't Be Too Technical

What does it mean to say that an informative speech is too technical? It may mean the subject matter is too specialized for the audience. Any subject can be popularized—but only up to a point. The important thing for a speaker to know is what can be explained to an ordinary audience and what cannot.

Say your subject is electronic amplifiers. It's no trick to demonstrate how to operate an amplifier (how to turn it on and off, adjust the volume, set the tone and balance controls). It's also relatively easy to explain what an amplifier does (it boosts the sound received from a radio, CD player, or live performance). But to give a full scientific account of how an amplifier works—that is another matter. It cannot be done in any reasonable time unless the audience knows the principles of audio technology. You would be better off not even trying. The material is just too technical to be understood by a general audience.

Even when the subject matter is not technical, the language used to explain it may be. Every activity has its jargon. This is true of golf (bogey, wedge, match play); of chemistry (colloid, glycogen, heavy water); of

Overhead Transparency
For ease of classroom discussion, the guidelines for informative speaking discussed on pp. 383–391 are included in the binder of full-color overhead transparencies that accompanies *The Art of Public Speaking*.

financial analysis (covered call, reverse bid, toehold acquisition); of ballet (arabesque, jeté, pas de deux). If you are talking to a group of specialists, you can use technical words and be understood. But you must do all you can to avoid technical words when informing a general audience such as your speech class.

jargon
The specialized or technical language of a trade, profession, or similar group.

You may find this hard to do at first. Many people are so addicted to the lingo of their subject that they have trouble escaping it. As you give more speeches, though, you will become increasingly adept at expressing your ideas in everyday, nontechnical language.

Here, for instance, are two statements explaining the process of cryonics, which involves freezing people after death in the hope that medical science will be able to restore them to life in the future. The first is heavily laden with specialized language that would have little impact on ordinary listeners:

> Options for cryonic suspension include freezing the subject's head or complete body. In either case, the process entails complex scientific procedures that, for maximum functionality, must be implemented immediately upon the cessation of biological functioning. Measures must be taken to minimize tissue decomposition so as to ensure that the subject can be successfully resuscitated at some undetermined future period.

The second statement is perfectly understandable. It is from a student speech and shows how technical information can be made clear to the average person:

> Currently, when a person who has signed up to be cryonically suspended dies, a specific procedure, which was outlined in the book *Cryonics: Reaching for Tomorrow,* must be carried out.
>
> First, before death, an individual must decide whether to have his or her entire body frozen or just the head. If the whole body is to be frozen, it must be preserved upon death. Immediately after death—ideally within a matter of minutes—the patient is connected to a heart-lung machine and chemicals such as glucose and heparin are circulated with the oxygenated blood to help minimize the freezing damage. At the same time, the patient's internal temperature is reduced as quickly as possible using cold packs.
>
> If only the head will be frozen, a slightly different procedure must be carried out. The head must be surgically detached from the rest of the body and preserved in a separate container. You may be wondering, "Why would I preserve only my head?" The answer is, with some diseases the body is in a very poor condition. If this is the case and you choose to preserve your head only, you do so with the belief that medical science will be able to create a healthy new body for you in the future.

CD 1:VIDEO 14.4
View this excerpt from "Cryonics."

Much clearer, isn't it? The only specialized words in the whole passage are "glucose," "heparin," and "oxygenated blood," and they do not get in the way. The rest of the language is straightforward, the ideas easy to grasp. This is what you should strive for in your informative speeches.

Avoid Abstractions

"My task," said the novelist Joseph Conrad, "is, before all, to make you see." And make the reader see is just what Conrad did. Witness this passage, in which Conrad describes the aftermath of an explosion aboard a ship:

> The first person I saw was Mahon, with eyes like saucers, his mouth open, and the long white hair standing straight on end round his head like a silver halo. He was just about to go down when the sight of the main deck stirring, heaving up, and changing into splinters before his eyes, petrified him on the top step. I stared at him in unbelief, and he stared at me with a queer kind of shocked curiosity. I did not know that I had no hair, no eyebrows, no eyelashes, that my young mustache was burnt off, that my face was black, one cheek laid open, my nose cut, and my chin bleeding.[3]

A speech is not a novel. Still, too many abstractions are tedious—whether in a novel or in a speech. Many informative speeches would be vastly improved by the novelist's bent for color, specificity, and detail.

One way to avoid abstractions is through *description.* When we think of description, we usually think of external events such as the explosion described by Conrad. But description is also used to communicate internal feelings. Here is how one student tried to convey to his audience the sensations he experienced when he first began sky diving:

description
A statement that depicts a person, event, idea, or the like with clarity and vividness.

> As we wait for the plane to climb to the jump altitude of 12,000 feet, my mind races with a frenzied jumble of thoughts: "Okay, this is the moment you've been waiting for. It's going to be great. Am I really going to jump out of an airplane from 12,000 feet? What if something goes wrong? Can I still back out? Come on now, don't worry. It'll be fine."

Even if we have not been sky diving, we have all had the same kinds of emotions on similar occasions. So what happened next?

> Now it is time to jump. My palms are sweating and my heart is pounding so hard I think it may burst. "Get ready," yells the instructor. As I jump into the blue, I wonder, "What am I doing here?"

Yes—and then what?

> The blast of air resistance blows me backward like a leaf at the mercy of an autumn wind. In about 10 seconds my body levels out and accelerates to a speed of 120 miles an hour. The air supports my body like an invisible flying carpet. There is no sound except for the wind rushing around my face. The earth appears soft and green, rivers look like strips of silver, and in every direction the scenery forms a panoramic landscape. Any fears or doubts I had are gone in the exhilaration of free flight. Every nerve in my body is alive with sensation; yet I am overcome by a peaceful feeling and the sense that I am at one with the sky.

As we listen to the speaker, we are almost up there with him, sharing his thoughts, feeling his heart pound, joining his exhilaration as he floats effortlessly through the sky. The vivid description lends reality to the speech and draws us further in.

Speech Assignment
If you are teaching during an election year—local, state, or national—assign a speech in which students inform their classmates about the issues and/or candidates. For one approach to such an assignment, see Lori A. Walters-Kramer, "Preparing for November," in *Selections from the Communication Teacher, 2002–2005*, pp. 52–53, which accompanies *The Art of Public Speaking*.

Regardless of the situation, informative speakers need to work on relating the topic directly to their audience, on avoiding overly technical language, and on personalizing their ideas.

comparison
A statement of the similarities among two or more people, events, ideas, etc.

Another way to escape abstractions is with *comparisons* that put your subject in concrete, familiar terms. Do you want to convey what would happen if a comet or large asteroid struck the earth? You could say this:

> If a comet or large asteroid struck the earth, the impact would be devastating.

True, but "the impact would be devastating" is vague and abstract. It does not communicate your meaning clearly and concretely. Now suppose you add this:

> To give you an idea how devastating the impact would be, it would be like all the nuclear bombs in the world going off at one spot.

Now you have made the abstract specific and given us a sharp new slant on things.

contrast
A statement of the differences among two or more people, events, ideas, etc.

Like comparison, *contrast* can put an idea into concrete terms. Suppose you want to make the point that a person's chances of winning a state lottery are extremely low. You could say, "The odds, for example, of winning a state lottery are an astronomical 7 million to 1." The word "astronomical" suggests that you consider 7 million to 1 long odds, but long in comparison to what? One speaker offered this contrast:

> The odds of picking the correct six-digit sequence in a typical state lottery are more than 7 million to 1. In contrast, the odds of getting hit by lightning are only 2 million to 1. The chances of being dealt a royal flush in a poker game are 650,000 to 1. The odds of dying in an automobile accident are about 6,000 to 1. In other words, the odds are much stronger that you will get hit by lightning or be killed in a car crash than that you will win the jackpot in a state lottery.

Now an abstract fact has been put into meaningful perspective. See if you can do something similar in your informative speech.

Personalize Your Ideas

personalize
To present one's ideas in human terms that relate in some fashion to the experience of the audience.

Listeners want to be entertained as they are being enlightened.[4] Nothing takes the edge off an informative speech more than an unbroken string of facts and figures. And nothing enlivens a speech more than personal illustrations. Remember, people are interested in people. They react to stories, not statistics. Whenever possible, you should try to *personalize* your ideas and dramatize them in human terms.

Let's say you are talking about autism, the developmental disability marked by impaired communication and interaction skills. You would surely note that the condition affects 1 in every 500 children, occurs four times more frequently in males than in females, and is most prevalent among Caucasian males. You would also note that the symptoms of autism include abnormal introversion, severely limited use of language, repetitive behaviors, avoidance of eye contact, loss of emotional control, and passive responses to affection.

But these are dry facts and figures. If you really want to get your audience involved, you will weave in some examples of children who suffer from autism. One speaker began by telling about Sam, her autistic nephew:

> My nephew Sam was the delight of our family when he was born, the first grandchild of my parents. He cooed and babbled, smiled at his mom and dad, grasped for the playthings around his crib. At family dinners on Sunday, we took turns holding him in our arms, feeding him, and singing him to sleep. He seemed like any normal infant in a secure and loving home.
>
> Then shortly before his second birthday we began to notice unusual behaviors. Sam avoided looking us in the eye, did not seem interested in learning words, played endlessly with the same toy, rocked back and forth in his chair for hours at a time, and was easily frustrated. My sister took him to a specialist, who gave the dreaded diagnosis: Sam was autistic.

During the body of the speech, the speaker mentioned Sam twice more to illustrate different aspects of autism. Then, at the end of the speech, she brought Sam's story to a hopeful conclusion:

> We have seen that autism is a very serious disorder whose causes are not well understood and whose effects on families and the lives of the children themselves can be devastating. But we have also seen that early diagnosis and early intervention can help to modify and even turn around the symptoms of autism.
>
> I am happy to say that Sam has benefited from such intervention. From the time he was two, he has been taught "normal" behavior patterns through aggressive therapy. Now he is able to participate in his class at the local school. He is also more responsive and affectionate at home. Sam continues to be our delight.

It was a powerful ending. By putting a human face on a familiar topic, the speaker took autism out of the realm of statistics and medical jargon and brought it home in personal terms. As one listener said afterward, "Because of your speech, I will never see autism in the same way again."

Class Activity
Popular nonfiction writing often provides helpful models of informative discourse on technical topics. Have each student select an article of interest from the medicine, science, or business section of *Time* or *Newsweek*—ideally on the subject of the student's upcoming speech. The student should prepare a brief report (written and/or oral) on the article, explaining how the writer uses the techniques discussed in this chapter to make the subject clear and understandable to ordinary readers.

CD 1:VIDEO 14.5
View these excerpts from "Autism: Heartbreak and Hope."

Sample Speech with Commentary

View "Acupuncture: New Uses for an Ancient Remedy."

The following classroom speech provides an excellent example of how to apply the guidelines for informative speaking discussed in this chapter. As you study the speech, notice how the speaker takes what could be a dry, technical topic and makes it interesting. Pay special attention to how crisply the speech is organized, to how the speaker uses well-chosen supporting materials to develop her ideas, and to how she clarifies her ideas with concrete language and personal examples.

Acupuncture: New Uses for an Ancient Remedy

Commentary	*Speech*
The speaker starts with an extended example that captures attention and interest. In this case, the example works particularly well because it is personally related to the speaker and is richly detailed and vividly drawn.	Six months ago, my 78-year-old grandmother was quickly losing her independence. Severe arthritis in both knees hampered her ability to take care of herself. Shopping, getting around the neighborhood, even walking down her front steps was becoming almost impossible. Pain medications helped somewhat, but the side effects created their own problems.
As the speaker continues her opening example, she introduces the subject of her speech by talking about her grandmother's positive experience with acupuncture.	Then her doctor suggested acupuncture. My grandmother was skeptical at first, but she was willing to try just about anything. She did, and the results were miraculous. After six weeks, her pain and stiffness were significantly reduced, she was able to take care of her apartment again, she could get out on her own to go shopping, to visit friends and family, and to do the other things her arthritis had prevented in the past. Acupuncture restored her quality of life and her independence.
Mentioning her own experience with acupuncture helps establish the speaker's credibility.	My grandmother's story is not unique. Performed for well over 2,000 years in China and other parts of Asia, acupuncture is becoming more and more popular in the U.S. and other Western countries for one simple reason—it works. Impressed by my grandmother's experience, I began acupuncture treatments for my migraine headaches, and now my headaches are completely gone.
Here the speaker reinforces her credibility and previews the main points to be discussed in the body of the speech. An explicit preview statement at the end of the introduction is especially important when speaking to inform.	Not surprisingly, I wanted to learn more about this treatment that produced such miraculous results for both my grandmother and myself. Today I will share part of what I have learned by explaining what happens when you receive an acupuncture treatment, how acupuncture works, the kinds of medical conditions that can be treated by acupuncture, and the growing use of acupuncture in combination with Western medical techniques. Let's start by looking at a typical acupuncture treatment.

Now the speaker moves into her first main point. The information in this and the following paragraph answers the audience's questions about what happens during an acupuncture treatment.

Acupuncture is the insertion of needles into the skin to achieve a balanced flow of energy, which in turn restores and preserves health. To prevent any chance of contamination from one person to another, acupuncturists in the U.S. use sterilized needles that are individually packaged and are disposed of after a single use.

Knowing that many people are squeamish about being poked with needles, the speaker makes sure to explain that the needles used in acupuncture are small and essentially painless. Notice that the speaker did not pass the needles around during her speech. As mentioned in Chapter 13, putting visual aids in the hands of the audience during a speech is an almost certain recipe for disaster because listeners will end up paying more attention to the visual aids than to the speaker's words.

I realize that the notion of having needles stuck into you may seem frightening, but the needles are so thin that the process is painless. Acupuncture needles are much smaller than the needles used for drawing blood or getting shots. Here are some needles that I received from my acupuncturist. After my speech I'll pass them around so you can see how incredibly light and small they are. They are so thin—about the thickness of a human hair—that you can hardly tell when they're inserted. And there's usually no sensation other than pain relief once they have been inserted. After being left in for 20 or 30 minutes while you lie in a darkened room, the needles are removed and the treatment is over.

This paragraph begins with a transition into the speaker's second main point. As in the previous paragraph, she relates the topic directly to her audience by speaking in terms of "you."

Now that you know what happens when you're treated by an acupuncturist, you're probably wondering how acupuncture works. The process is explained by Dr. Felix Mann, President of the Medical Acupuncture Society, in his book *Acupuncture: The Ancient Chinese Art of Healing and How It Works Scientifically*. According to traditional Chinese medicine, every life process is based on the flow of vital energy through the body. This energy is known in Chinese as *qi* and flows along channels or pathways called meridians.

As you can see from the video of this speech on CD 2, the speaker uses a visual aid to clarify her explanation of the acupuncture meridians.

The meridians are shown in this visual aid. As you can see, they cover the entire body, running from the top of the head to the bottom of the feet and down both arms. When the free flow of energy through these meridians is blocked, the result is pain, illness, disease, or other physical problems.

The speaker's explanation throughout this main point provides a good example of how to communicate technical information in everyday language. The quotation at the end of the paragraph nicely sums up this section of the speech.

The aim of acupuncture is to restore the open flow of energy through these meridians. This is done by placing needles at specific points on the meridians. Altogether there are more than 1,000 acupuncture points on the meridians. These points have been mapped out over the centuries with scientific precision. In China there is a saying: "There is no pain if there is free flow; if there is pain, there is no free flow."

A signpost of the beginning of this paragraph helps signal that the speaker is moving to her third main point, in which she explains some of the medical conditions that can be treated with acupuncture. As in the rest of the speech, she relies on highly

Although acupuncture is based on a different view of the body from that held by Western doctors, the evidence is clear that it works in treating a wide range of medical conditions. The World Health Organization lists more than 40 conditions that can be effectively treated with acupuncture, including ear, nose, and throat ailments; asthma and other respiratory problems;

credible sources and identifies them clearly. This is crucial if the audience is to accept the accuracy of the speaker's information—especially since she is not an expert on acupuncture.

and nervous system and muscular disorders. A study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* confirms that acupuncture can relieve low-back pain, while the American Cancer Society reports that acupuncture may even help smokers kick the habit.

People also use acupuncture to build their immune system, to control allergies, and to combat depression and anxiety. Of course, you can't use acupuncture to heal a broken arm. But people in Asia often use acupuncture during surgery instead of Western anesthesia, and it can speed recovery time after surgery.

The speaker's final main point deals with the growing integration of acupuncture with Western medical techniques. In this and the following paragraph, she uses a mix of examples, testimony, and statistics to illustrate her point. All in all, this speech provides an excellent case study in how to use supporting materials to buttress an informative presentation.

In light of all this, it is not surprising that a number of clinics and hospitals are combining acupuncture with Western medicine in an effort to provide patients the benefits of both. For example, Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, the third oldest hospital in the U.S., has added acupuncture to its wellness center. Positive results have also been seen at the Mattel Children's Hospital at UCLA. Dr. Lonnie Zeltzer, director of the hospital's pediatric pain program, confirms that acupuncture "really does help. Most children accept acupuncture, and in fact, really feel good about it."

As in the rest of her speech, the speaker's quotations are brief and well-chosen. Notice how she identifies the people she is quoting and establishes their credentials before presenting their testimony.

Another example of the integration of acupuncture with Western medicine is the Wasser Pain Management Center at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, Canada. Neurologist Allan Gordon, Director of the Center, says that introducing acupuncture into the hospital "expands the treatment available to chronic pain sufferers" and provides "multiple options for care to our patients." The National Institutes for Health report that more than 8 million Americans have tried acupuncture, and its use throughout the rest of the Western world is growing fast.

The phrase "Today we have learned" signals that the speaker is moving into her conclusion. She then provides a concise summary of the main points developed in the body.

Today we have learned what happens during an acupuncture treatment, how acupuncture works, some of the illnesses that can be treated with acupuncture, and the growing integration of acupuncture with Western approaches to medicine. I hope you now know more about this ancient medical practice and the benefits it can provide.

After reinforcing her central idea about the benefits of acupuncture, the speaker refers back to her grandmother, whom she had discussed in the introduction. This unifies the entire speech and ends it on a personal note.

After years of skepticism about acupuncture, the West is finally beginning to recognize that acupuncture is a highly effective way to improve health and reduce pain and suffering. Just ask my grandmother.

Summary

Speaking to inform occurs in a wide range of everyday situations. Yet it is a difficult task that requires more skill than you might think. Improving your ability to convey knowledge effectively will be most valuable to you throughout your life.

Informative speeches may be grouped into four categories—speeches about objects, speeches about processes, speeches about events, and speeches about concepts. These categories are not absolute, but they are helpful in analyzing and organizing informative speeches.

Objects, as defined here, include places, structures, animals, even people. Speeches about objects usually are organized in chronological, spatial, or topical order. A process is a series of actions that work together to produce a final result. Speeches about processes explain how something is made, how something is done, or how something works. Clear organization is especially important in speeches about processes because listeners must be able to follow each step in the process. The most common types of organization for speeches about processes are chronological and topical.

An event is anything that happens or is regarded as happening. You can approach an event from almost any angle. You might explain its origins, causes, effects, implications, major features, and so on. Usually speeches about events are arranged in chronological, causal, or topical order. Concepts include beliefs, theories, ideas, and principles. Speeches about concepts are often more complex than other kinds of informative speeches, and they typically follow a topical pattern of organization.

No matter what the subject of your informative speech, be careful not to overestimate what your audience knows about it. In most classroom speeches your listeners will be no more than slightly familiar with your topic. Therefore, you cannot assume they will know what you mean. Explain everything so thoroughly they cannot help but understand. Avoid being too technical. Make sure your ideas and your language are fully comprehensible to someone who has no specialized knowledge about the topic.

Equally important, recognize that what is fascinating to you may not be fascinating to everybody. It is your job to make your informative speech interesting and meaningful to your audience. Find ways to talk about the topic in terms of your listeners. Avoid too many abstractions. Use description, comparison, and contrast to make your audience *see* what you are talking about. Finally, try to personalize your ideas. No matter what your subject, you can almost always find a way to dramatize it in human terms.

Key Terms

informative speech (372)
object (373)
process (375)
event (378)
concept (380)
jargon (388)
description (389)
comparison (390)
contrast (390)
personalize (391)

Review these terms by doing the Chapter 14 crossword puzzle at www.mhhe.com/lucas9.

Review Questions

CD 1: STUDY QUESTIONS

For further review, go to the Study Questions for this chapter.

After reading this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What are the four types of informative speeches discussed in the chapter? Give an example of a good specific purpose statement for each type.
2. Why must informative speakers be careful not to overestimate what the audience knows about the topic? What can you do to make sure your ideas don't pass over the heads of your listeners?
3. What should you do as an informative speaker to relate your topic directly to the audience?
4. What two things should you watch out for in making sure your speech is not overly technical?
5. What are three methods you can use to avoid abstractions in your informative speech?
6. What does it mean to say that informative speakers should personalize their ideas?

Exercises for Critical Thinking

Cross-Reference

For discussion of the Exercises for Critical Thinking, see the *Instructor's Manual,* pp. 300–302. For additional exercises, check the *Instructor's Manual,* pp. 305–311, as well as the six volumes of *Selections from the Communication Teacher* that accompany *The Art of Public Speaking.*

1. Below is a list of subjects for informative speeches. Your task is twofold: (a) Select four of the topics and prepare a specific purpose statement for an informative speech about each of the four. Make sure your four specific purpose statements include at least one that deals with its topic as an object, one that deals with its topic as a process, one that deals with its topic as an event, and one that deals with its topic as a concept. (b) Explain what method of organization you would most likely use in structuring a speech about each of your specific purpose statements.

hobbies	sports
animals	music
science	cultural customs
education	technology
media	health

2. Analyze "The Hidden World of Chili Peppers" in the appendix of sample speeches that follows Chapter 18. Identify the specific purpose, central idea, main points, and method of organization. Evaluate the speech in light of the guidelines for informative speaking discussed in this chapter.

Applying the POWER of PUBLIC SPEAKING

As the manager for a local chain of coffeehouses, you have been asked to speak to a gourmet group about how to make genuine Italian cappuccino. As you write down ideas for your speech, you find that you have the following main points:

I. First you must make the espresso.
II. Grind the coffee beans so they are fine but not too fine.
III. Place the ground coffee in the filter holder of the espresso machine.
IV. Tamp the coffee once lightly to level the grind in the filter holder.
V. Lock the filter holder onto the brew head of the espresso machine.
VI. Activate the on switch to extract the espresso.
VII. In addition to making the espresso, you must prepare frothed milk for cappuccino.
VIII. Fill a steaming pitcher 1/3 full of very cold milk.
IX. Place the steam vent of the espresso machine just below the surface of the milk in the pitcher.
X. Fully open the steam vent.
XI. Keeping the tip of the steam vent just below the surface of the milk, move the pitcher in a circular motion.
XII. Be careful not to overheat or scald the milk, which will ruin the froth.
XIII. Once you have the desired amount and consistency of froth, turn the steam vent off and remove it from the pitcher.
XIV. Now you are ready to combine the espresso and frothed milk.
XV. The normal proportions for cappuccino are 1/3 espresso to 2/3 frothed milk.
XVI. Some people prefer to pour the espresso into the frothed milk in a cappuccino cup.
XVII. Other people prefer to pour or spoon the frothed milk over the espresso.

Having taken a speech class in college, you know this is too many main points for an audience to keep track of. As you look over your list again, however, you realize that it can easily be reorganized into three main points, each with several subpoints. What are those main points and subpoints?

Cross-Reference
For discussion of this Applying the Power of Public Speaking scenario, see the *Instructor's Manual,* pp. 303–304.

Notes

[1]John R. Johnson and Nancy Szczupakiewicz, "The Public Speaking Course: Is It Preparing Students with Work-Related Public Speaking Skills?" *Communication Education,* 36 (1987), pp. 131–137; Andrew D. Wolvin and Diana Corley, "The Technical Speech Communication Course; A View from the Field," *Association for Communication Administration Bulletin,* 49 (1984), pp. 83–91.
[2]Richard E. Mayer, Sherry Fennell, Lindsay Farmer, and Julie Campbell, "A Personalization Effect in Multimedia Learning: Students Learn Better When Words Are in Conversational Style Rather Than Formal Style," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96 (2004), pp. 389–395.
[3]Joseph Conrad, "Youth: A Narrative," in Samuel Hynes (ed.), *Collected Stories of Joseph Conrad* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1991), p. 166.
[4]James Humes, *Roles Speakers Play* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 25.