

Research Your Topic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Your speech will be more effective if you can support your main points with statistics, testimony, stories, anecdotes, examples, visual aids and facts. You can find this material on the Internet, at a library and in other places.

Use information collected from numerous sources and carefully support points with specific facts, examples and illustrations, rather than with just your own opinions.

OBJECTIVES:

- Collect information about your topic from numerous sources.
- Carefully support your points and opinions with specific facts, examples and illustrations gathered through research.

Time: Five to seven minutes

The most challenging part of preparing a speech is gathering the material. If you want to convince an audience, you need the facts to support your message. But how do you find the information you need?

In Project 2 you learned about the different types of support material:

- **Statistics.** These are numerical ways of conveying information about incidents, data and events.
- **Testimony.** These are quotes or opinions from people with expertise on a particular subject.
- **Examples, stories or anecdotes.** These relate an event that happened to you or someone you know, or someone you've read about.
- **Visual aids.** These could be diagrams, charts, pictures, models or other objects. (More information about using visual aids appears in Project 8.)
- **Facts.** Facts are verifiable information.

Lots of resources offer these types of information. Your challenge is to find the ones that will help you with your presentation.

How to Begin

Start your research by compiling what you already know or have on your speech subject. You may have had personal experience with the subject matter, perhaps even have files, magazines and other literature about it. Organize what you already know or have and see where any gaps exist. Your research goal will be to fill in these gaps.

Search the Web

Today the most convenient research source is the Internet. You can comfortably sit at your desk with your personal computer and find a variety of information on numerous subjects on the Internet through common search engines such as Yahoo and Google. Some encyclopedia companies put versions of their books online. Many magazines and newspapers are available online too.

Government agencies post information and statistics, and so do publishers of books and journals.

You'll also find sites containing quotations, biographies and other helpful resources. Much of the information you'll find from these sources is free; some sources may charge per use, monthly, or annual fees for access to their data.

Because the Web contains so much data, finding the specific information you're looking for will take time. In some cases, you may not find the substantive information you need.

Search engines are software tools that allow you to ask for a list of Web pages containing certain words or phrases from a search index. The search engine then indexes the findings for your review.

If you are looking for information on breeding Siamese cats, for example, you could type "Siamese cats" in the search box. The search engine then looks for Web pages containing the words, combinations or phrases containing the words "Siamese cats." You can program the engine to look for an exact match or for a close match. Usually the engine will rank its findings based on their closeness to the words you typed. Be aware, though, that the process is automated. No person screens the Web pages to see whether they are applicable to your needs. For example, someone's personal Web page may contain the words "Siamese cats" only as it relates to his or her family's pets.

For best results, define your search as narrowly as possible. "Siamese cats" yields an index of more than 77,000 Web pages - a lot for you to review. "Applehead Siamese cats" yields about 600 Web pages - more manageable. "Breeding Applehead Siamese cats" results in about 200 Web pages, even better yet.

Be thorough in your search and remember to use a variety of search engines. One engine may produce a larger index than another and provide that "gem" piece of information you are seeking, while others may offer next to nothing on your topic. You'll find more information about the various search engines available and how to use them on the Internet by typing "search engines" in the "search" box on your Web browser.

Web directories can be useful too. Similar to a subject index in a library, a Web directory is categorized by different topics, such as business, health or sports, which are broken into subtopics. Most directories have a search engine that allows you to search within the directory.

Many libraries offer their catalogs and periodical indexes online. However, they usually offer only brief descriptions of available items, not the full text. Searching a library's online catalog and periodical index may tell you if the library has information on your topic, but you still have to go in person to the library to access that information.

The Library

A good library offers more information than you'll find on the Internet. University libraries are the best, but public libraries also are good resources. You'll find books, magazines, newspapers, videos, CD-ROMs, audio tapes and other items. You can search the library's catalog and periodical indexes for the latest books and articles on your topic.

The best part of library research is that people are available to help you. The reference librarian can recommend periodicals that you seek, direct you to books on the subject and even help you search for information on the Internet. In some libraries the reference librarian will do the research for you for a small fee.

Whether you are searching the Internet or visiting your local library, you'll be sure to find helpful links or references to other documents on your topic.

Other Information Sources

The Internet and the library are the most common sources of information, but they may not be necessary for some types of research. If you're looking for information about the number of new businesses in your community, call the local chamber of commerce. Looking for tips on growing roses? The staff at a nearby garden store may be able to help. Do you have some questions about etiquette? A bookstore will have lots of material on the subject. What do people in your neighborhood think about the town's redevelopment plans? Ask them, or read the letters and editorial pages in your newspaper.

As you do the research, remember to:

- 1. Keep an open mind.** The information you discover may cause you to change your mind about a topic or prove it to be inappropriate or incorrect.
- 2. Use different sources.** Read as many different books or articles about the subject as possible to give you a broader view.
- 3. Record the information.** Take notes on important points and the publication in which you found it, in case you want to cite it, are asked about it later or want to check it again.

Vary the Support

Most likely you will collect far more information than you need. Your challenge is to pick out the material that best supports your ideas. It should add color to your presentation, explaining or reinforcing points and illustrating your message.

Keep your speech interesting by using different types of support materials. Citing statistics may be appropriate for one point, but a story or anecdote may be the best support for another. Avoid using the same type of support material throughout the speech. Excessive use of statistics can be dull; too many anecdotes will make them lose their effectiveness.

Keep It at Their Level

Research can be impressive, but only if your audience understands it. If your support material is complex or involves statistics, find the human interest side and include that information in your speech. For example, if your research shows that 20 percent of adults read at a fifth-grade level or lower, make this statistic more meaningful to your audience by saying, "One of five adults in this room reads at or below the fifth-grade level." When you relate numbers or facts to their everyday lives, your listeners will be appreciative.

Your Assignment

This project emphasizes using research to support your message. You are to:

- Choose a subject that will interest your listeners, one that requires a large amount of research.
- Collect information from numerous sources. This will be the most thoroughly researched presentation you have given to date.
- Carefully support your points and opinions with specific facts, examples and illustrations.

Be sure to incorporate what you learned in previous projects about purpose, organization, word usage, body language and vocal variety and use appropriate suggestions from the evaluations you received. As you prepare, review the Speaker's Checklist in Project 1.

Evaluation Guide for

Research Your Topic

Title:

Date

Evaluator _____

NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR: *The speaker is to select a subject of importance to the audience that requires a large amount of research. The speaker is to collect information from numerous sources and carefully support points with specific facts, examples, and illustrations, rather than with just the speaker's own opinions. The speaker is to incorporate what he or she has learned in previous projects about purpose, organization, word usage, body language and vocal variety, as well as use appropriate suggestions from the evaluations received. In addition to your verbal evaluation, please write answers to the questions below.*

- How well did the speaker's topic apply to the audience?
- Was the topic well researched?
- How well did the speaker support his or her main points?
- Was the support material appropriate for the point made?
- Did the speaker vary the types of support material?
- How clear was the speaker's purpose?
- Was the speech effectively organized?
- Did the speaker take advantage of body language and vocal variety?
- What could the speaker have done differently to improve the speech?
- What did you like about the speech?