



THE SPEAKING CENTER

What is a topic?

A **topic** is the **subject of your speech** or the **main idea** you are focusing on.

How do I pick a topic for my speech?

First, **think of what you already know**. Is there anything you are **passionate** about, have an interest in, or a skill you possess? Here are some questions to get you started:

- *What TV shows, books, podcasts, music or other media do you enjoy?*
- *What types of pages do you follow on social media?*
- *What is the most interesting class that you have taken?*
- *What is the most interesting concept that you have learned?*
- *What issues concern you? What bothers you in this city, your home, your country?*
- *What issue do you wish people were aware of and maybe did something about?*
- *What is your passion in life?*

Is any topic "off-limits"?

It depends on the instructor. **Reconsider if you are choosing a topic everyone in the audience is already familiar**. Can you present any unique information to keep their attention or teach them something new?

Also, keep ethics in mind. Just because anything technically can be a speech topic, it doesn't mean it should be, especially in the context of persuasive speeches. **Keep in mind that some topics are too big to cover in a small amount of time as well**. Issues like abortion, civil rights (symbols that are controversial) are too broad to cover in a five-minute speech. Consider speaking about a smaller component of the issue.

Are topics different for Informative and Persuasive speeches?

Not necessarily. You could use the same topic, but differently.

Remember for an **Informative speech** your goal is to **increase the audience awareness and understanding** of a topic by **defining, describing, explaining, or demonstrating your knowledge of the topic**. You are essentially teaching the audience about your topic.

In the **Persuasive speech**, your goal is to **advocate for your topic**. You are **trying to cause some degree of change** in the audience's **attitudes, beliefs, or even specific behaviors**. In summary, you are either trying to get them to act or become an agent of change.

What are some categories of topics for Informative Speeches?

Just about anything! This could be a person, a place, an event, a concept, an issue, a process, an object, or a phenomenon. It all goes back to choosing a topic both you and the audience are interested in, one that has sufficient supporting materials, and one you feel comfortable discussing. Keep in mind that a speech about your favorite athlete or singer is a matter of why it is relevant for the audience to know.

What are some categories of topics for Persuasive Speeches?

A persuasive speech is a little different, the topic should be an argument surrounding a **claim of fact (is something true or untrue), value (is something right or wrong), or policy (promoting a specific solution or calling the audience to action)**. Oftentimes the "hot-button" or more controversial topics fall into these categories. For example, things like abortion, gun control, or euthanasia would be more persuasive than informative, albeit tired topics. Again, try to pick a topic that you have a connection to or are personally invested in. If you don't care about your topic, it can be incredibly hard to motivate your audience to care about it as well.

What can I do if I am totally stuck on picking a topic?

You can complete a word/free association, or draw a cluster/mind map, or complete a personal inventory. Just remember, you need to have a personal investment in the topic. Don't pick one just because it seems easy!

- For both a word and free association, grab a blank sheet of paper or open up a clear screen on your device. For each, choose a set time you want to brainstorm. For a **word association**, **write a single word, idea, or topic at the top of the sheet/screen**. Then for your designated amount of time, **write down absolutely anything that comes to mind!** The only difference with a free association is that there is no key idea to guide your thoughts; it is just more of a free for all. Again, write down anything and everything that comes to mind during the designated time. After the time has lapsed, go back through what you wrote down. Try to narrow down the list and see if you have come up with a potential topic.
- For a **cluster/mind map**, **write your general subject down** in the middle of a piece of paper. Then, using the whole sheet of paper, rapidly jot down ideas related to that subject. If an idea spawns other ideas, **link them together using lines and circles/shapes** to form a cluster of ideas. The whole purpose here is to use lines and circles to show visually how your ideas relate to one another and to the main subject. You can also use digital tools like Padlet and Wordle.

- If you are more **visual**, you can use places like **Pinterest** to gather ideas and images or even doodle images on the paper to spur your creativity. Choosing pictures that appeal to you or speak to you combines the visual and the verbal in an alternative presentation to generate, structure, and classify ideas to help with studying, organizing information, and solving problems.

Is there anything else I need to consider when choosing a topic?

Keep the audience in mind! You want to present interesting information that they will be engaged with. **Think about time limits;** your major speeches are usually 5 to 8 minutes. There are some topics that might be either too simple or too complex to fit into that time range.

Consider your research; you are going to have to find source material for your major speeches. If you pick something too broad or too obscure, it could be difficult to find sources. Perhaps you can narrow your topic down and find a subtopic to cover with a limited amount of time.

What are your biggest “take-aways” for picking a topic?

- First, always try to pick a topic you have a personal interest in or want to learn more about.
- Second, try to narrow down the topic as much as possible so it will be easy to do research.
- Lastly, think about your audience! Consider if they will be interested in the topic or able to relate to it.