“In all matters, before beginning, a diligent preparation should be made.”
—Cicero

Chapter 7
Developing Your Speech

7.1 Select and Narrow Your Topic
   Guidelines for Selecting a Topic
   Strategies for Selecting a Topic
   Narrowing the Topic

7.2 Determine Your Purpose
   General Purpose
   Specific Purpose

7.3 Develop Your Central Idea
   A Complete Declarative Sentence
   Direct, Specific Language
   A Single Idea
   An Audience-Centered Idea

Outline (continued)
Learning Objectives

7.1 Select and narrow a topic for a speech that is appropriate to the audience, the occasion, the time limits, and yourself.
7.2 Write an audience-centered specific-purpose statement for a speech.
7.3 State a single audience-centered central idea with direct, specific language in a complete declarative sentence.
7.4 Apply three ways of generating main ideas from a central idea.

Ed Garcia has arranged the books and papers on his desk into neat, even piles. He has sharpened his pencils and laid them out parallel to one another. He has even dusted his desktop and cleaned the computer monitor’s screen. Ed can think of no other task to delay writing his speech. He opens a new word-processing document, carefully centers the words “Informative Speech” at the top of the first page, and then slouches in his chair, staring glumly at the blank expanse that threatens his well-being. Finally, he types the words “College Football” under the words “Informative Speech.” There is another long pause. Hesitantly, he begins his first sentence: “Today I want to talk to you about college football.” Rereading his first ten words, Ed decides that they sound moronic. He deletes the sentence and tries again. This time, the screen looks even blanker than before. He writes—deletes—writes—deletes. Half an hour later, Ed is exhausted and still mocked by a blank screen. And he is frantic—this speech has to be ready by nine in the morning.

Getting from a blank screen or sheet of paper to a speech outline is often the biggest hurdle you will face as a public speaker. Fortunately, however, it is one that you can learn to clear. If your earlier efforts at speech writing have been like Ed Garcia’s, take heart. Just as you learned to read, do long division, drive a car, and get through college registration, so too can you learn to prepare a speech.

The first steps in preparing a speech are these:

1. Select and narrow your topic.
2. Determine your purpose.
3. Develop your central idea.
4. Generate your main ideas.

At the end of step 4, you will have a plan for the speech, and you will be ready to develop and polish your main ideas further. For most brief classroom speeches (under ten minutes), you should allow at least one week between
selecting a topic and delivering your speech. A week gives you enough time to
develop and research your speech. Many habitual procrastinators, like Ed Gar-
cia, who grudgingly decide to begin an assignment a week in advance, learn to
their surprise that the whole process is far easier than it would be if they put off
working until the night before they are supposed to deliver their speech.

As we observed in Chapter 6, audience-centered speakers consider the
needs, interests, and expectations of their audience during the entire speech-
preparation process—needs, interests, and expectations that will be as diverse
as the audiences themselves. As you move from topic selection to speech plan,
remember that you are preparing a message for your listeners. Always keep the
audience as your central focus.

Select and Narrow Your Topic

7.1 Select and narrow a topic for a speech that is appropriate to the
audience, the occasion, the time limits, and yourself.

Your first task, as illustrated in Figure 7.1, is to choose a topic on which to speak.
You will then need to narrow this topic to fit your time limits. Sometimes you can
eliminate one or both of these steps because the topic has been chosen and properly
defined for you. For example, knowing that you visited England’s Lake District on
your tour of Great Britain last summer, your English literature teacher asks you to
speak about the mountains and lakes of that region before your class studies the
poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Or knowing that you chair the local drug-abuse
task force, the Lions Club asks you to speak at its weekly meeting about the work
of your group. In both cases, your topic and its scope have been decided for you.

At other times, the choice of topic may be left entirely to you. In your public-
speaking class, your instructor may specify a time limit and type of speech (in-
formative, persuasive, or entertaining) but allow you to choose your topic. In
this event, you should realize that the success of your speech may rest on your
decision. But how do you go about choosing an appropriate, interesting topic?

Guidelines for Selecting a Topic

In May 2012, CNN and Time journalist Fareed Zakaria delivered much the same
speech to the graduating class of Harvard as he had delivered to Duke graduates
less than two weeks earlier. After beginning both speeches with the same anecdote
about missing his own college graduation, Zakaria went on to use similar, some-
times identical, language and content in the two speeches. Any listeners who later
Googled the speech probably felt cheated when they discovered that Zakaria had
also delivered essentially the same speech to an entirely different group.¹

CONSIDER THE AUDIENCE In contrast to Fareed Zakaria, autism activist and
animal behaviorist Temple Grandin notes that when she is invited to deliver a
commencement address, she makes it a point to find out about “each campus,
the place, and the people,” and to adapt her speech accordingly.² You, too, should
keep in mind each audience’s interests and expectations. “What interests and
needs do the members of this audience have in common?” and “Why did they ask me to speak?” are important questions to ask yourself as you search for potential speech topics. For example, a university president who has been invited to speak to a civic organization should talk about some new university program or recent accomplishment; a police officer speaking to an elementary school’s PTA should address the audience’s concern for the safety of young children.

Not only should a speaker’s choice of topic be relevant to the interests and expectations of his or her listeners; it should also take into account the knowledge listeners already have about the subject. For example, the need for a campus-wide office of disability services would not be a good topic to discuss in a speech to a group of students with disabilities, who would already be well aware of such a need. The speech would offer them no new information.

Finally, speakers should choose topics that are important—topics that matter to their listeners as well as to themselves. Student speaker Roger Fringer explains the stakes for students in a public-speaking class:

We work hard for our tuition, so we should spend it wisely. Spending it wisely means . . . we don’t waste our classmates’ time who have to listen to our speeches.³
Select and Narrow Your Topic

Several years ago, communication scholar and then-president of the National Communication Association Bruce Gronbeck reminded an audience of communication instructors that students should be giving “the important kinds of . . . speeches that show . . . people how to confront the issues that divide them.”\(^4\) Table 7.1 offers examples of topics that are appropriate for the interests, expectations, knowledge, and concerns of particular audiences.

**CONSIDER THE OCCASION** On December 17, 1877, Mark Twain was invited to be one of the after-dinner speakers at American poet John Greenleaf Whittier’s seventieth-birthday celebration.\(^5\) The guest list included such dignitaries as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Dean Howells, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. When it was Twain’s turn to speak, he began with a humorous sketch featuring Longfellow, Emerson, and Holmes as drunken card-playing travelers in Nevada. Used to laughter and applause from his audiences, Twain was stunned by the silence.

What had gone wrong? Was Mark Twain’s topic of interest to his listeners? Undoubtedly. Did they expect to hear someone talk about the distinguished guests? Yes. Could Twain add to their knowledge of the subject? Probably. Was his topic appropriate to the occasion? Definitely not!

Although after-dinner speeches are usually humorous, Twain’s irreverence was inappropriate to the dignity of this birthday observance. Even though he had considered his audience, he had not considered carefully enough the demands of the occasion. Twain’s irreverent talk aroused quite a commotion at the time and is said to have embarrassed him for years afterward. To be successful, a topic must be appropriate to both audience and occasion.

**CONSIDER YOURSELF** What do you talk about with your friends? You probably discuss school, mutual friends, political or social issues, hobbies or leisure activities, or whatever other topics are of interest and importance to you. Like most people, your liveliest, most animated conversations revolve around topics of personal concern that arouse your deepest convictions.

The best public-speaking topics are also those that reflect your personal experience or especially interest you. Where have you lived? Where have you traveled? Describe your family or your ancestors. Have you held any part-time jobs?

### Table 7.1 Sample Audience-Centered Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retirees</td>
<td>Prescription drug benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic organization</td>
<td>The Special Olympics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church members</td>
<td>Starting a community food bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First graders</td>
<td>What to do in case of a fire at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Building children’s self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College fraternity</td>
<td>Campus service opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The best public-speaking topics are also those that reflect your personal experience or especially interest you. Where have you lived? Where have you traveled? Describe your family or your ancestors. Have you held any part-time jobs?
Describe your first days at college. What are your favorite classes? What are your hobbies or interests? What is your favorite sport? What social issues especially concern you? Here is one list of topics that was generated by such questions:

- Blues music
- “Yankee, go home”: the American tourist in France
- Why most diets fail
- Behind the counter at McDonald’s
- My first day at college
- Maintaining family ties while living a long distance from home
- Getting involved in political campaigns

An alternative to selecting a topic with which you are already familiar is to select one that you would like to know more about. Your interest will motivate both your research and your eventual delivery of the speech.

**Strategies for Selecting a Topic**

All successful topics reflect audience, occasion, and speaker. But just contemplating those guidelines does not automatically produce a good topic. Sooner or later, we all find ourselves unable to think of a good speech topic, whether it is for the first speech of the semester, that all-important final speech, or a speaking engagement long after our school years are over. Nothing is as frustrating to a public speaker as floundering for something to talk about! In such an instance, you may want to turn to one of the following strategies to help generate a speech topic.

**BRAINSTORMING** A problem-solving technique that is widely used in such diverse fields as business, advertising, writing, and science, brainstorming or visual brainstorming can easily be used to generate ideas for speech topics as well. For example, the following list of twenty-one possible topics came from a brainstorming session that lasted about three minutes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Bob Marley</th>
<th>Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob Marley</td>
<td>Sound-recording technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retro music</td>
<td>Buddy Holly</td>
<td>Retro music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship of music</td>
<td>Movie themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar-winning movies of the 1950s</td>
<td>Great epic movies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titanic (the movie)</td>
<td>Salvaging the Titanic (the ship)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beatles</td>
<td>John Lennon</td>
<td>The Beatles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative music</td>
<td>Popular rock bands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iTunes</td>
<td>Treasure hunting</td>
<td>iTunes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key West, Florida</td>
<td>Ernest Hemingway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polydactyl cats</td>
<td></td>
<td>Polydactyl cats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The How To box list gives you step-by-step instructions for brainstorming. If your brainstorming yields several good topics, so much the better. Set aside a page or two in your class notebook or an electronic file where you list topic ideas that you don’t end up choosing. You can then reconsider them when you get your next assignment.

LISTENING AND READING FOR TOPIC IDEAS  Very often, something you see, hear, or read triggers an idea for a speech. A current story from your favorite news source may suggest a topic. The following list of topics was brought to mind by recent headline stories in a large daily newspaper:

- Cyber-espionage
- Recovery in the housing market
- Issues for same-sex married couples
- The rising cost of flood insurance
- Mexican drug wars
- Optimal advance warning time for tornadoes

In addition to discovering topics in news stories, you might find them in an interesting segment of 20/20, Dateline, or even a daytime talk show. Chances are that a topic covered in one medium has been covered in another as well, allowing extended research on the topic. For example, Dr. Oz’s report on the germiest places in your home may be paralleled by Time’s article on the dangers of overusing antibacterial cleaning products.

You may also find speech topics in one of your classes. One of the topics that we’ve mentioned so far might cause you to get an idea, or a lecture in an economics or political science class may arouse your interest and provide a good topic for your next speech. The instructor of that class could probably suggest additional references on the subject.

Sometimes even a subject that you discuss casually with friends can be developed into a good speech topic. You have probably talked with classmates about such campus issues as dormitory regulations, inadequate parking, or your frustration with registration and advisors. Campuswide concerns would be
relevant to the student audience in your speech class, as would such matters as how to find a good summer job or the pros and cons of living on or off campus.

Just as you jotted down possible topics generated by brainstorming sessions, remember to write down topic ideas that you get from what’s trending in social media you use, class lectures, and informal conversations. If you rely on memory alone, what seems like a great topic today may be only a frustrating blank tomorrow.

**SCANNING WEB DIRECTORIES** By now, you probably have a list of topics from which to choose. But if all your efforts have failed to produce any ideas that satisfy you, try the following strategy:

Access a Web directory such as Yahoo! Directory (dir.yahoo.com), and select a category at random. Click on it, and look through the subcategories that come up. Click on one of them. Continue to follow the chain of categories until you see a topic that piques your interest—or until you reach a dead end, in which case you can return to the Yahoo! Directory homepage and try again.

A recent random directory search yielded the following category and subcategories, listed from general to specific:

- Society and culture
- Environment and nature
- Ecotourism

This search took only a few minutes (as will yours, as long as you resist the temptation to begin surfing the Web) and yielded at least one possible topic: The pros and cons of ecotourism. An additional advantage of this strategy is that you begin to develop your preliminary bibliography while you are searching for a topic.

**Quick Check**

**Selecting a Topic**

**Guidelines:**
- Consider the audience.
- Consider the occasion.
- Consider yourself.

**Strategies:**
- Brainstorm.
- Listen and read.
- Scan Web directories.

**Narrowing the Topic**

After brainstorming, reading the newspaper, surfing the Web, and talking to friends, you have come up with a topic. For some students, the toughest part
Determine Your Purpose

Write an audience-centered specific-purpose statement for a speech.

Now that you have selected and narrowed your topic, you need to decide on a purpose (as shown in Figure 7.1). If you do not know what you want your speech to achieve, chances are your audience won’t either. Ask yourself, “What is really important for the audience to hear?” and “How do I want the audience to respond?” Clarifying your objectives at this stage will ensure a more interesting speech and a more successful outcome.

Narrow Your Topic

Try these two steps to narrow a broad, unmanageable topic:

1. **Create categories.** Divide the topic, similar to the categories used in Web directories. First, write your general topic at the top of a list. Then add words to the topic, making each added word a more specific or concrete topic. Here’s an example:

   - Music
   - Folk music
   - Irish folk music
   - The popularity of Irish folk music in the United States

2. **Find the right level.** Use the time limit of your speech to choose a topic from the correct spot on your list.
   - **Not too broad:** If your topic is still a bit too broad—say, you simply cannot cover all the forms of Irish folk music that are popular in the United States during a five-minute talk—continue to add more categories to your list. In this example, you might choose one form of music—dance music—and talk about the kind of Irish hard-shoe dance music featured in Riverdance.
   - **Not too narrow:** If you find that you’ve narrowed your topic too much—so that you cannot find enough information for even a three-minute talk—just go back a step. In our example, you could return to the broader topic of the popularity of Irish folk music in the United States.

Of the assignment is over at this point. But others soon experience additional frustration because their topic is so broad that they find themselves overwhelmed with information. How can you cover all aspects of a topic as large as “television” in three to five minutes? Even if you trained yourself to speak as rapidly as an auctioneer, it would take days to get it all in! The solution is to narrow your topic so that it fits within the time limits set by your assignment. The challenge lies in how to do this. The How To box describes one helpful method.
General Purpose

The **general purpose**, or overarching goal, of virtually any speech is to inform, to persuade, or to entertain. The speeches that you give in class will generally be either informative or persuasive. It is important that you fully understand what constitutes each type of speech so that you do not confuse them and fail to fulfill an assignment. You certainly do not want to deliver a first-rate persuasive speech when an informative one was assigned! Chapter 15–18 discuss the three general purposes at length. We also offer you a summary of the basic principles of each here.

**SPEAKING TO INFORM**  An informative speaker is a teacher. Informative speakers give listeners information. They define, describe, or explain a thing, person, place, concept, process, or function. In this excerpt from a student’s informative speech on anorexia nervosa, the student describes the disorder for her audience:

> Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder that affects 1 out of every 200 American women. It is a self-induced starvation that can waste its victims to the point that they resemble victims of Nazi concentration camps.7

Most lectures that you hear in college are informative. The university president’s annual “state of the university” speech is also informative, as is the tour guide’s talk at Colonial Williamsburg. Such speakers are all trying to increase their listeners’ knowledge. Although they may use an occasional bit of humor in their presentations, their main objective is not to entertain. And although they may provoke an audience’s interest in the topic, their main objective is not to persuade.

**SPEAKING TO PERSUADE**  Persuasive speakers may offer information, but they use the information to try to change or reinforce an audience’s convictions and often to urge some sort of action. For example, Brian offered compelling statistics to help persuade his audience to take steps to prevent and alleviate chronic pain:

> A hundred million Americans, nearly a third of the population, [suffer] from chronic pain due to everything from accidents to the simple daily stresses on our bodies.8

The representative from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) who spoke at your high-school assembly urged you not to drink and drive and urged you to help others realize the inherent dangers of the practice. The fraternity president talking to your group of rushees tried to convince you to join his fraternity. Appearing on television during the last election, the candidates for president of the United States asked for your vote. All these speakers gave you information, but they used that information to try to get you to believe or do something.
SPEAKING TO ENTERTAIN  The entertaining speaker tries to get the members of an audience to relax, smile, perhaps laugh, and generally enjoy themselves. Storyteller Garrison Keillor spins tales of the town and residents of Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, to amuse his listeners. Comedian Louis C.K. delivers comic patter to make his audience laugh. Most after-dinner speakers talk to entertain the banquet guests. Like persuasive speakers, entertaining speakers may inform their listeners, but providing knowledge is not their main goal. Rather, their objective is to produce at least a smile and at best a belly laugh.

Early on, you need to decide which of the three general purposes your speech is to have. This decision keeps you on track throughout the development of your speech. The way in which you organize, support, and deliver your speech depends, in part, on your general purpose.

Quick Check

General Purposes for Speeches

To inform: To share information with listeners by defining, describing, or explaining a thing, person, place, concept, process, or function

To persuade: To change or reinforce a listener’s attitude, belief, value, or behavior

To entertain: To help listeners have a good time by getting them to relax, smile, and laugh

Specific Purpose

Now that you have a topic and you know generally whether your speech should inform, persuade, or entertain, it is time you decided on its specific purpose, the concise statement of what you want your listeners to know, feel, or be able to do when you finish speaking. Unlike the general purpose, which can be assigned by your instructor, you alone must decide the specific purpose of your speech, because it depends directly on the topic you choose.

IDENTIFY A BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVE  To arrive at a specific purpose for your speech, you must think in precise terms of what you want your audience to be able to do at the end of your speech. This kind of goal or purpose is called a behavioral objective, because you specify the behavior you seek from the audience.

The How To box offers a formula you can use to develop a specific-purpose statement for a speech with any general purpose. For a speech on how television comedy represents the modern family, you might write, “At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to explain how television comedies portray American family life today.” The specific-purpose statement for a how-to speech using visual aids might read, “At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to use...
Formulate Your Specific-Purpose Statement

1. **Start with standard wording.** Almost all specific-purpose statements begin with the same words: “At the end of my speech, the audience will [be able to]. . . .”

2. **Add a verb.** The next word in your statement should be a verb that names an observable, measurable action that the audience should be able to take by the end of the speech.
   - **DO** use verbs such as *list*, *explain*, *describe*, or *write*.
   - **DON’T** use words such as *know*, *understand*, or *believe*. You can discover what your listeners know, understand, or believe only by having them *show* their increased capability in some measurable way.

3. **Finish with details.** The last part of your statement should give details that explain the action you want your listeners to do. The details reflect the topic of your speech. They often provide the answer to “w” questions you may have learned as a child: *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and so on. For example, the statement “At the end of my speech the audience will be able to wash any size car by themselves at home” gives details about where and with whom listeners will be able to wash which car.

Characteristics of a specific purpose

Note that a statement of purpose does not say what you, the *speaker*, will do. The techniques of public speaking help you to achieve your goals, but they are not themselves goals. To say, “In my speech, I will talk about the benefits of studying classical dance” emphasizes your performance as a speaker. The goal of the speech is centered on you rather than on the audience. Other than restating your topic, this statement of purpose provides little direction for the speech. But to say, “At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to list three ways in which studying classical dance can benefit them” places the audience and their behavior at the center of your concern. This latter statement provides a tangible goal that can guide your preparation and by which you can measure the success of your speech.

The following guidelines will also help you to prepare your statement of purpose:

- **Use words that refer to observable or measurable behavior.**
  
  *Not observable*: At the end of my speech, the audience will know some things about Hannibal, Missouri.
Observable: At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to list five points of interest in the town of Hannibal, Missouri.

- **Limit the specific purpose to a single idea.** If your statement of purpose has more than one idea, you will have trouble covering the extra ideas in your speech. You will also run the risk of having your speech “come apart at the seams.” Your speech is likely to lack unity of ideas and coherence of expression.

Two ideas: At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to write a simple computer program in BASIC and play the video game Bioshock Infinite.

One idea: At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to write a simple computer program in BASIC.

- **Make sure your specific purpose reflects the interests, expectations, and knowledge level of your audience.** Also be sure that your specific purpose is important. Earlier in this chapter, we discussed these criteria as guidelines for selecting a speech topic. Consider them again as you word your specific-purpose statement.

Behavioral statements of purpose help to remind you that the aim of public speaking is to win a response from the audience. In addition, using a specific purpose to guide the development of your speech helps you to focus on the audience during the entire preparation process.

**USING THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE** Everything you do while preparing and delivering the speech should contribute to your specific purpose. The specific purpose can help you to assess the information you are gathering for your speech. For example, you may find that an interesting statistic, although related to your topic, does not help to achieve your specific purpose. In that case, you can substitute material that directly advances your purpose.

As soon as you have decided on it, write the specific purpose on a three- by five-inch note card. Then refer to it as often as necessary while developing your speech.

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**Develop Your Central Idea**

**7.3 State a single audience-centered central idea with direct, specific language in a complete declarative sentence.**

Having stated the specific purpose of your speech, you are ready to develop your central idea, the first step highlighted in Figure 7.2. The **central idea** (sometimes called the *thesis*) states in one sentence what the speech is about. You can use your specific-purpose statement to help you write your central idea. However, as Table 7.2 summarizes, a central idea differs from a purpose statement in both focus and application. A purpose statement focuses on audience behavior, whereas the central idea focuses on the content of the speech. A purpose statement guides your decisions as you prepare the speech; the central idea becomes part of your final speech.
Developing Your Speech

Professional speech coach Judith Humphrey explains the importance of a central idea:

Ask yourself before writing a speech . . . “What’s my point?” Be able to state that message in a single clear sentence. Everything else you say will support that single argument.\(^9\)

**Figure 7.2** State your central idea as a one-sentence summary of your speech, and then generate main ideas by looking for natural divisions, reasons, or steps to support your central idea.

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**Table 7.2** Purpose Statement versus Central Idea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Purpose Statement</th>
<th>The Central Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicates what the audience should be able to do by the end of the speech</td>
<td>Summarizes the speech in one sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides the speaker’s choices throughout the preparation of the speech</td>
<td>Is stated in the speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Central Idea Should . . .**
- Be a complete declarative sentence
- Use direct, specific language
- Be a single idea
- Be an audience-centered idea

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The guidelines in the following sections can help you to put your central idea into words.

A Complete Declarative Sentence
The central idea should be a complete declarative sentence—not a phrase or clause and not a question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Car maintenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Is regular car maintenance important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete declarative sentence</td>
<td>Maintaining your car regularly can ensure that it provides reliable transportation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The phrase *car maintenance* is really a topic, not a central idea. It does not say anything about car maintenance. The question “Is regular car maintenance important?” is more complete but does not reveal whether the speaker is going to support the affirmative or the negative answer. By the time you word your central idea, you should be ready to summarize your stand on your topic in a complete declarative sentence.

Direct, Specific Language
The central idea should use direct, specific language rather than qualifiers and vague generalities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualified language</th>
<th>In my opinion, censorship of school textbooks threatens the rights of schoolchildren.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct language</td>
<td>Censorship of school textbooks threatens the rights of schoolchildren.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague language</td>
<td>A 2012 hurricane affected the northeastern United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific language</td>
<td>When Superstorm Sandy struck the coast of the northeastern United States in October 2012, it killed hundreds of people, caused billions of dollars in property damage, and closed the New York Stock Exchange for two days.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Single Idea
The central idea should be a single idea.

Two ideas: Deforestation by lumber interests and toxic-waste dumping are major environmental problems in the United States today.

One idea: Toxic-waste dumping is a major environmental problem in the United States today.

More than one central idea, like more than one idea in a purpose statement, only leads to confusion and lack of coherence in a speech.
An Audience-Centered Idea

The central idea should reflect consideration of the audience. You considered your audience when selecting and narrowing your topic and when composing your purpose statement. In the same way, you should consider your audience’s needs, interests, expectations, and knowledge when stating your central idea. If you do not consider your listeners, you run the risk of losing their attention before you even begin developing the speech. If your audience consists mainly of college juniors and seniors, the second of the following central ideas would be better suited to your listeners than the first.

Inappropriate: Scholarships from a variety of sources are readily available to first-year college students.

Appropriate: Although you might think of scholarships as a source of money for freshmen, a number of scholarships are available only to students who have completed their first year of college.

Generate and Preview Your Main Ideas

Apply three ways of generating main ideas from a central idea.

Next to selecting a topic, probably the most common stumbling block in developing speeches is coming up with a speech plan.

Generating Your Main Ideas

Trying to decide how to subdivide your central idea into two, three, or four key points, or main ideas—detailed points of focus that help you develop your central idea—can make you chew your pencil, scratch your head, and end up as you began, with a blank sheet of paper. The task will be much easier if you use the three-question strategy described in the How To box. Let’s see this technique at work with several central idea statements.

FINDING LOGICAL DIVISIONS Suppose your central idea is “A liberal arts education benefits the student in two ways.” You now turn to the three questions. But for this example, you needn’t go beyond the first one. Does the central idea have logical divisions? The phrase “two ways” indicates that it does. You can logically divide your speech into ways in which the student benefits:

1. Appreciation of culture
2. Concern for humankind

A brief brainstorming session then could help you to come up with more specific examples of ways in which a liberal arts education might benefit students.
At this stage, you needn’t worry about Roman numerals, parallel form, or even the order in which the main ideas are listed. We will discuss these and other features of outlining in Chapter 9. Your goal now is simply to generate ideas.

Just because you write them down, don’t think that the ideas you come up with now are engraved in stone. They can—and probably will—change. After all, this is a preliminary plan. It may undergo many revisions before you actually deliver your speech. For example, your speech might have four points, but four points might well prove to be too many to develop in the brief time allowed for most classroom speeches. Because it is much easier to eliminate ideas than to invent them, list them all for now.

ESTABLISHING REASONS Suppose your central idea is “Upholstered furniture fires are a life-threatening hazard.” Asking yourself whether this idea has logical divisions is no help at all. There are no key phrases indicating logical divisions—no “ways,” “means,” “types,” or “methods” appear in the wording. The second question, however, is more productive: Having done some initial reading on the topic, you can think of reasons this central idea is true. Asking yourself “Why?” after stating your central idea yields three answers:

1. Standards to reduce fires caused by smoldering cigarettes have lulled furniture makers into a false sense of security.
2. Government officials refuse to force the furniture industry to reexamine its standards.
3. Consumers are largely ignorant of the risks.

Notice that these main ideas are expressed in complete sentences, whereas the ones in the preceding example were in phrases. At this stage, it doesn’t matter. What does matter is getting your ideas written down. You can rewrite and reorganize them later.
TRACING SPECIFIC STEPS  “NASA’s space shuttle program resulted in both great achievement and tragic failure.” You stare glumly at the central idea that you so carefully formulated yesterday. Now what? You know a lot about the subject; your aerospace science professor has covered it thoroughly this semester. But how can you organize all the information you have? Again, you turn to the three-question method.

Does the main idea have logical divisions? You scan the sentence hopefully, but you can find no key phrases suggesting logical divisions.

Can you think of several reasons the central idea is true? You read the central idea again and ask “Why?” at the end of it. Answering that question may indeed produce a plan for a speech, one in which you would talk about the reasons for the achievements and failures. But your purpose statement reads, “At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to trace the history of the space shuttle.” Giving reasons for the space shuttle program’s achievements and failures would not directly contribute to your purpose. So you turn to the third question.

Can you support your central idea with a series of steps? You can generate main ideas for a speech about almost any historical topic, or any topic requiring a chronological progression (for example, topics of how-to speeches), by answering the third question. You therefore decide that your main ideas will be a chronology of important space shuttle flights:

1. April 1981: Test flight of the space shuttle.
7. July 2011: Shuttle Endeavour makes the program’s final flight.

You know that you can add to, eliminate, or reorganize these ideas later. But you have a start.

Notice that for this last example, you consulted your purpose statement as you generated your main ideas. If these main ideas do not help you to achieve your purpose, you need to rethink your speech. You may finally change either your purpose or your main ideas; but whichever you do, you need to synchronize them. Remember, it is much easier to make changes at this point than after you have done your research and produced a detailed outline.

Previewing Your Main Ideas
Once you have generated your main ideas, you can add a preview of those main ideas to your central idea to produce a blueprint for your speech, a statement of
your central idea plus a preview of your main ideas. Some speakers, like Nicole, integrate their central idea and preview into one blueprint sentence:

Obsolete computers are straining landfills because they contain hazardous materials and take a distinctively long time to decay.\textsuperscript{12}

In this example, Nicole started with a central idea: “Obsolete computers are straining landfills.” Asking herself “Why?” yielded two reasons, which became her two main points: “They contain hazardous materials” and “They take a distinctively long time to decay.” Combining these reasons with her central idea produced a blueprint. Like Nicole, you should preview the ideas in the same order in which you plan to discuss them in the speech.

Other speakers, like Patrick, in his speech on the problems associated with mining oil by hydraulic fracturing, state their blueprints in several sentences:

In order to understand the fundamental threat fracturing poses, we must first understand the dangers at each step of the process. Second, expose the corrupt legal maneuvering that protects it. And, finally, champion the simple solution that will save American lives.\textsuperscript{13}

Patrick also started with a central idea: Fracturing poses a fundamental threat. Like Nicole, he generated reasons for his central idea, which in this case were “dangers at each step of the process” and “corrupt legal maneuvering that protects it.” He decided at this early point in the speech to mention that there is a “simple solution that will save American lives.” Thinking that a single sentence might become unwieldy, Patrick decided to use three shorter sentences for his blueprint.

Meanwhile, Back at the Computer . . .

It’s been a while since we left Ed Garcia, the student in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, struggling to write a speech on college football. Even though he has procrastinated, if he follows the steps we have discussed, he should still be able to plan a successful informative speech.

Ed has already chosen his topic. His audience is likely to be interested in his subject. Because Ed is a varsity defensive tackle, the audience will probably expect him to talk about college football. And he himself is passionately interested in and knowledgeable about the subject. It meets all the requirements of a successful topic.

But the topic “college football” is too broad for a three- to five-minute talk. Ed needs to narrow his topic to a manageable size. He goes online to Yahoo! Directory and clicks on the category Recreation Sports, then on Sports. He is just about to select College and University when another category catches his eye: Medicine. Sports medicine? Hmmm. . . . Ed has suffered several injuries and feels qualified to talk about this aspect of football. Ed doesn’t need to go further. He has his topic: “Injuries in college football.”
Now that he has narrowed the topic, Ed needs a purpose statement. He decides that his audience might know something about how players are injured, but they probably do not know how these injuries are treated. He types, “The audience will be able to explain how the three most common injuries suffered by college football players are treated.”

A few minutes later, Ed derives his central idea from his purpose: “Sports medicine specialists have developed specific courses of treatment for the three most common kinds of injuries suffered by college football players.”

Generating main ideas is also fairly easy now. Because his central idea mentions three kinds of injuries, he can plan his speech around those three ideas (logical divisions). Under the central idea Ed lists three injuries:

1. Bruises
2. Broken bones
3. Ligament and cartilage damage

Now Ed has a plan and is well on his way to developing a successful three- to five-minute informative speech.
Study Guide: Review and Apply

Meet Your Objectives

7.1 Select and narrow a topic for a speech that is appropriate to the audience, the occasion, the time limits, and yourself.

When you must select your own topic, keep in mind the interests, expectations, and knowledge levels of the audience. Choose an important topic. Consider the special demands of the occasion. Be sure to take into account your own interests, abilities, and experiences. If you are still undecided, brainstorming strategies, such as consulting the media or scanning Web directories for potential topics, may give you topic ideas. After choosing a broad topic area, narrow the topic so that it fits within your time limits.

Key Term
Brainstorming

7.2 Write an audience-centered specific-purpose statement for a speech.

Your general purpose for speaking will be to inform, to persuade, or to entertain your listeners. Your specific purpose should state, in observable terms, what your audience will do at the end of the speech.

Key Terms
General purpose Specific purpose Behavioral objective

7.3 State a single audience-centered central idea with direct, specific language in a complete declarative sentence.

In contrast to your specific-purpose statement, which indicates what you want the audience to be able to do, your central idea summarizes what you, the speaker will say. The central idea should be a single idea, stated in a complete declarative sentence. Be direct and specific without using qualifiers.

Key Term
Central idea

7.4 Apply three ways of generating main ideas from a central idea.

To generate main ideas, determine whether the central idea (1) has logical divisions, (2) can be supported by several reasons, or (3) can be traced through a series of steps. Preview your central idea and your main ideas in the blueprint of your speech and summarize the blueprint in your conclusion.

Key Terms
Main ideas Blueprint
Think about These Questions

• A candidate for governor visits your public-speaking class and talks for thirty minutes on the topic “Why the state should increase funding of public transportation.” Analyze the candidate’s choice of topic according to the guidelines presented in this chapter.

• Consider the following specific-purpose statements. Analyze each according to the criteria presented in this chapter. Rewrite the statements to correct any problems.
  “At the end of my speech, the audience will know more about the Mexican Free-Tailed Bat.”
  “I will explain some differences between Asian and Western cultures in nonverbal communication.”
  “At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to list some reasons for xeriscaping one’s yard.”
  “The advantages and disadvantages of living in a college dormitory.”
  “At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to prepare a realistic monthly budget.”

• Below are the topic, general purpose, and specific purpose that Marylin has chosen for her speech. Use the advice in this chapter to write an appropriate central idea and main ideas for the speech.
  Topic: America’s crumbling roads and bridges
  General purpose: To persuade
  Specific purpose: At the end of my speech, the audience will be able to list and explain three reasons America should invest in its roads and bridges.