



3.1 Impromptu Speaking

This activity introduces basic public speaking skills. Using a prompt, students deliver short speeches with limited preparation time.

Time Allotment

Approximately 3-5 minutes per speech. If you don't want to devote an entire class (or two) to impromptu speaking, you can make this an ongoing activity. In the second situation, have a few students deliver an impromptu speech per class period until the entire class has had a chance to speak.

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- practice developing well-organized, analytical arguments with limited preparation time.
- practice good presentation technique.

Materials and Preparation

Slips of paper with speech topics, one for each student in the class. Choose topics that students can speak about for 1-3 minutes without research or preparation and that require the speaker to make and defend an argument.

Method

The key to impromptu speaking is organization, delivery, and the clear formation of an argument rather than the content of the speech or the strength of an argument. Begin by explaining the expectations for a speech prepared with very limited time and no research. An impromptu speaker should:

- Begin with an introduction that states the argument to be presented and end with a conclusion that sums up the argument for the audience;
- Clearly state 2-3 points that support their argument using simple analysis;
- Practice good presentation technique, including poise, eye contact, quality and use of voice, enunciation, fluency, effective and expressive gestures, and confidence.

Version 1: The first student should draw one speech topic. Allow the students a set amount of preparation time (2-3 minutes, or less for more advanced students) to write the outline of a speech. When time is up, the student should deliver a short speech (suggested time limit: 2 minutes). To keep the activity moving, the next speaker should draw a topic and begin preparing before the first speaker begins speaking.

Version 2: The first student draws two topics, one for themselves and one for the next speaker. The first student should prepare and deliver a speech as described above. In the middle of the speech, the speaker should call out the second topic, and the second student should immediately begin preparing a speech on this topic. Once the first speaker has finished speaking, the second speaker has 1 minute to finish preparing a speech. Before the second speaker begins to speak, he should draw another topic to call out for the next speaker during his speech. The activity continues like this with each speaker drawing and calling out the topic for the next speaker.