Making Your Point
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You have an opinion. Not just a minor, “Oh, I think you should wear your hair up instead of down today” one either. You have an argument to make and you want your point to stick in the minds of your audience, whether that’s one individual or a packed auditorium. There are a select few out there blessed with the knack for persuasive speaking. For everyone else, there’s this guide.
1. Articulate Ideas in Plain Language

One of the fastest ways to confuse or lose your audience is to use flowery language or long, complicated language. When it comes to making your idea stick, less is more. People have many tasks on their brain already, and if you start throwing too much at them, there’s a chance that your most important idea will get lost in the shuffle. Keep your sentences short and neat. If you have the time, write them out beforehand. Are all the commas, multi-syllable words, and run-on sentences making your eyes hurt? If so, they’ll probably make your audience’s ears hurt just the same. If it doesn’t flow easily when read, it probably won’t flow easily when spoken.
And as for those long, complicated words, if you don’t know how to use them properly you’re going to come off looking like you don’t know what you’re talking about. Take your time with those words, perhaps learning one or two of them a week and then practice sprinkling them into your everyday language. When perfected, add them to your conversations. Until then, be confident in the words with which you are familiar, and those will be the words that will take you the furthest in the end.

Finally, speak up! Speak clearly and make sure not to mumble. There’s a chance you’ll be nervous, so make an effort to speak a beat slower than what you may be comfortable with. This will ensure everything comes out smoothly, clearly, and calmly. These are three words often used when describing the most confident of speakers—which if you’re not already, you will be very soon. Now go practice making a point to a friend or family member. Take a deep breath, speak in simple terms, and remember: If it’s not making sense to you, it probably isn’t making sense to them, either!
Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:

- “Are you confusing your audience by using language they may not understand?”

- “Are you keeping your ideas simple and easy to grasp?”

- “Do you practice your presentation before trying to convey your point to your audience?”
2. Demonstrate Commitment

It may be necessary to demonstrate commitment to your audience during some presentations. Let them connect with you emotionally by displaying how you give your undivided attention to the issue you are speaking about, while at the same time encouraging them to reexamine the ideas, opinions, and acts they claim to be committed to. One way to do this is to shock them by telling an exaggerated story.

For instance, maybe you’ve run a marathon for a cause you are trying to persuade them to care about just as much as you do. You can start by asking them, “Would you go out on a limb for this cause?” And upon their response: “What about 26 miles out on that limb?” They may give you some confused looks, or even laughter. You may then explain that you ran a marathon, all for the cause that you are trying to get them to care about. This may shock, surprise, or even silence them, but most importantly, it will challenge them to think about whether they share your same level of commitment. If you’re really persuasive, it will also stick with them long after you’ve walked away.
Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:

- “Are you committed to your point?”

- “Are you convincing to your audience?”

- “What causes are you passionate about?”
3. Hanger Words

Amusement parks worldwide would cease to exist if suddenly all their roller coasters were turned into simple trains. You know, regular old cross-country trains, the kind that stay the same speed for the duration of the trip, move in the same constant direction, have no real steep inclines, and definitely no speeding downhill releases. Simply put: They would be boring. The same goes for persuasive speeches. Everyone has been the victim of a bland speaker—the kind that makes you check your watch repetitively and count the tiles in the ceiling just to give your mind some action.

The best way to avoid being the speaker all audiences dread? Use hanger words. Let me ask you this . . . Here's the best part . . . Here's the catch . . . The difference is . . . Are you ready for this? Draw your audience to the top of the crest, pausing before you release them with the rest of your content. The key here is the pause. The human mind instinctively wants closure. The pause will grab your audience's attention as they anticipate what's to come—the completion of the loop you've been drawing for them.
By sprinkling hanger words throughout your dialogue, you keep your audience on their toes, anticipating the next exciting twist or turn you have to offer. Become familiar with hanger words and practice them so they become a common part of your speech process. If it becomes a normal practice in your arguments to use hanger words, you’ll start to be known for them. And just like a roller coaster you’ll be the speaker people will begin to line up to hear, as they’ll know that with you, the ride is never predictable.

Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:
• “Do you know what an analogy is?”

• “What are your favorite hanger words?”

• “Do you think you can keep an audience’s attention by using hanger words?”
4. Reflect Your Reality

It's not a bad idea to prep for a persuasive speech if you have the time. During this prep, a great test for you and your “point” is to put it through the ringer by placing yourself in your audience’s shoes. Jot down your main idea and then hand it over to a friend or family member to read back to you. How does it sound? How does hearing it read by someone else make you feel? Chances are, those same feelings will be felt by your audience. By hearing your words spoken by someone else, you can see yourself the way others do, and sometimes the result can be shocking. This should assist you with any edits to your speech that should be made prior to the big day. You want your point to register in your audience’s minds, so what better way to do so than making sure it registers in yours first?
Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:

- “Are you comfortable practicing your presentation with a friend or family member?”

- “Have you heard your written words spoken back to you?”

- “How did the words sound to you? Did you want to change them?”
5. Stories Trump Resumes

Facts are great. They inform and educate people. Unfortunately, they may not be as thoroughly remembered in the minds of your audience as you would like them to be. Take the sinking of the Titanic. This is an event that many of us were taught in school, and sure, we knew the basics. But when did the story really internalize with the general population? With the release of the movie, of course. The part when the water was filling the bottom section of the boat; or maybe the part when Kate let go of Leo’s hand in the frigid water. It may seem trite now, but face it: You remember more from the Titanic story as it was portrayed in the film than you did from the bullet points in your textbook.
So take a lesson from Titanic and realize that if you have points to get across, it's best done in story form. Maybe you're trying to make a point on how everyone should participate in a beach cleanup at least once. You can overwhelm them with the statistics on how filthy the local beaches are, how much wildlife is being affected, and how they would be helping future generations. But it won't be until you tell them the story of how it felt when you completed your first cleanup that it will really register in their minds and make them want to take action. You know, the cleanup where you and your best friend went together, not knowing anyone, and by the end of the day you gained ten new friends, went out for brunch afterwards, then laid out on the beach you had just beautified?

Now, how much better did that sound than a barrage of bullet points anyone could get by looking up "local beach cleanups" on Google? Stories trump facts—and that's a fact.
Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:

• “Do you understand how telling a story can help you make your point?”

• “Are you good at telling stories?”

• “Do you remember my example?”
6. Illustrate the Cost of Inaction

If the point you are making is one that wants people to take action on a particular issue, the most convincing data will be that which demonstrates how detrimental it would be for them, their families, the environment, whatever it may be—to not take action. For example, a recent post in a financial blog was trying to instill in their readers the importance of enrolling in their office’s 401k plan. To do this, they set up two fictitious men, Mike and Bob, and created for them a real-life example illustrating their point: Mike started contributing $2,000 yearly when he was 27 years old. Bob also chose to contribute $2,000 a year, but procrastinated and didn’t start until he was 30. That’s only three years later than his friend Bob. No big deal, right? Wrong. Those three years, with an annual return of 8% for each, meant that at the age of 65 Mike had earned $477,882, while his friend Bob had only acquired $374,204. In this story, the cost of inaction was $103,678. What will it be in yours?
Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:

- "Did my example make you want to take action?"

- "Do you know how procrastinating can harm you?"

- "If you could take action on something you’ve been putting off, what would it be?"
7. Let the Room Vote

Another great way to make your point is to compel your audience to make it for you. Let them convince themselves that your point is one they should take to heart. Don't worry, you're not going to ask them to do research right then and there on their smart-phones. You're simply going to ask them to raise their hands.

Say a financial planner is trying to make a point on the importance of life insurance. He may ask his audience to all raise their hands. He will then ask them to keep their hands raised if they have a family. Most, if not all, hands will likely stay raised. He will continue by asking who in the room has purchased life insurance. In a full room, chances are more hands will go down than will stay up. He can follow this up by asking: “Now, raise your hand if you’re going to die.”
Can you picture in your mind the drastic point he just made? Not only was it drastic, it was entertaining and immediate. All this combines to make a memorable point that you should try to imitate in your own speeches.

Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:
• “Do you understand the importance of the point I’m trying to make?”

• “Did my example confuse you?”

• “Do you remember my point?”
8. Eye Contact

When making your point to a group, especially a smaller one, no one is going to trust you if you avoid eye contact with them. What do you think when you’re speaking with someone and they won’t meet your eye? Even if it’s only because they are excessively shy, not excessively unintelligent or disinterested, it’s an unfortunate fact that they will be perceived as the latter two. A tried and true trick is to imagine a letter “T” on your listener’s face with the horizontal line being an imaginary bar across the eyebrows, and the vertical line coming down the center of the nose. Keep your eyes scanning that “T” zone and you’ll appear engaged, confident, and interested for the duration of the conversation. If you’re nervous, unconfident, or generally shy, no one will be the wiser.
Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:

• “Do you trust me?”

• “Were you distracted during my presentation?”

• “Did I make eye contact with you?”
9. Be Direct

Don’t make your audience fill in the blanks on their own. This isn’t Ad Libs; it’s an important statement you want to make, and you don’t want to risk your audience walking away with the wrong impression. What are you trying to say? For all the tips you’ve been provided in this guide, there is none more important than this: When it comes to what you came there to say, don’t beat around the bush. Be direct. Be direct in your introduction so your audience knows the idea that will be relayed to them, and be direct in your conclusion so as to ensure that when they leave they’ll know exactly what you wanted to say and why you wanted to say it. They’ll appreciate your bluntness in a world that relies heavily on them drawing their own conclusions from an abundance of information.
Questions to ask yourself and keep in mind:

• “Do you understand what I’m saying?”

• “Have I answered all of your questions?”

• “Do you agree with my point?”

There is nothing to be afraid of when expressing yourself and your convictions. You’ve done your research and you know why you have the opinion that you do. It will be impossible to convince everyone you come across, but if you use the tips in this guide you’ll be well on your way to persuasively making your point.
We invite you to take a free consultation with our course advisors. Explain your needs and goals and they will build a custom study plan that fits your needs. No strings attached.

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