

CHAPTER 2

How to Structure a Speech

The ability to speak well is one of the central skills in the debater's toolkit. In fact, students often assume that being an effective speaker is a prerequisite for debating. It isn't: Eloquent and persuasive speech is a skill that can be learned and developed over time. This chapter will look at the first stage in becoming an effective speaker—the framework around which you build your speeches.

The chapter begins by explaining the importance of structure. Next, it outlines the basic organization of a speech—introduction, body, and conclusion—and explains how you can use introductions and conclusions to help your audience follow your case. Then, it lays out what should be included in the main body of your speech. Later chapters will look at the content and style of your speeches, but, by the end of this chapter, you should have a clear sense of the building blocks of speechcraft in a debate.

The First Task Is to Communicate

The purpose of any speech is to persuade—and to be persuasive the speaker must communicate clearly. As with any other form of communication, the brilliance of your ideas doesn't really matter if your audience can't follow what you're saying. Having a clear structure allows you to be confident that the audience at least understands the point you're making. They may not accept your argument, but they'll know what they're disagreeing with.

Setting out a structure is similar to guiding a group of travelers on a journey. Chances are that they have a general idea of where they're going and are eager to get there and also enjoy the sights along the way. However, they are dependent on the guide to get them to the destination with as little hassle as possible. As with a journey, so with a speech. Your arguments are uncharted territory for the listeners, and you need to help them through that territory by explaining what your case will be, deciding for them what arguments