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Information is everywhere, but the ability to express information in a clear, compelling way is not. This chapter teaches you how to turn virtually any topic into an engaging, organized, and ethical informative speech that is adapted to the needs of your audience. You’ll also learn how to rehearse your presentation and how to inform your listeners without attempting to persuade them.

THIS CHAPTER WILL HELP YOU:
✓ Understand what it means to inform
✓ Select a type of informative speech
✓ Choose a method of informing
✓ Fit your method of informing into an organizational pattern
✓ Rehearse your delivery
✓ Speak ethically
✓ Prepare to succeed by maintaining a focus on informing
✓ Bring it all together in an informative speech

Let’s start by exploring what it means to inform.
UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO INFORM

When we make personal and professional decisions, we rely on accurate information from websites, newspapers, interpersonal encounters, and many other sources. Having good information can empower us to make wise choices. Often, however, the manner in which information is presented matters as much as the information itself. If the information we receive from others isn’t accurate, complete, or understandable—or if it doesn’t hold our attention—it may lead us to make poor decisions. The same is true when we have occasion to speak informatively to others. Unless we convey our messages clearly, accurately, and engagingly, our listeners’ decision making might be compromised.

As a result, proficiency in informative speaking is highly valued in contemporary life. Developing that proficiency begins by recognizing the three key tasks of an informative speaker: gaining listener interest, increasing audience understanding, and teaching without influencing.

■ Gain listener interest. Few people are motivated to learn about topics that don’t interest them. A key task of an informative speaker is therefore to create information hunger, the desire to learn, by sparking listeners’ curiosity and giving them reason to want the information contained in the speech. Effective informative speakers often create information hunger by explaining either the benefits listeners will experience from learning about the speech topic or the risks they will run from not learning about the topic. The following introduction uses both techniques to create information hunger:

Imagine this: You’re spending the holidays with family and you’ve just gotten up from a delicious dinner when you see your dad stumble and fall to the floor. At first, you think he has just tripped, but his eyes are closed and he isn’t moving. Your mom runs to call 911, but it could be several minutes before anyone arrives. Would you know what to do to keep your father alive until help got there? You would if you’d been trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. Today, I’m going to tell you what CPR is, how it works, and where you can learn to perform it. If you know how to administer CPR properly, you may be able to save the life of someone near and dear to you.

In this introduction, the speaker gains listener interest by making clear the benefits of learning CPR and by implying the risks of failing to learn it.

■ Increase audience understanding. The word inform comes from a Latin term meaning “to shape, train, and instruct.” In the same way that teachers shape their students’ minds by training them to perform new skills and instructing them to make sense of new knowledge, you inform your listeners by increasing their understanding of your speech topic. Thus, good informative speakers not only introduce information to their audiences; they also help their audiences comprehend that information.1 In the speech
about CPR, for instance, introducing what CPR is and when it is called for would be informative. Explaining how the procedure operates and why it works helps the audience understand it more fully.

- **Teach rather than influence.** A challenging characteristic of informing is that it should educate people without attempting to influence their opinions, beliefs, or actions. Informative speeches should “teach, not preach” by providing information but not recommending specific ways of thinking or particular courses of action. For instance, the speaker in the CPR speech says that he or she will explain what CPR is, how it works, and where listeners can learn it. Importantly, although the speaker points out the benefits of learning CPR, he or she stops short of telling listeners they should learn it. That may seem like a fine distinction, but the line between informing and persuading often is. That’s because people use information when making decisions, so an informative speech may be persuasive even if it wasn’t designed to be. That’s OK; the point is that your job as an informative speaker is only to inform.

In Chapter 6, we explored strategies for selecting a good speech topic. Some topics lend themselves to the goals of an informative speech better than others. Fortunately, you have many possibilities to explore.

**SELECT A TYPE OF INFORMATIVE SPEECH**

When crafting an informative speech, some speakers have difficulty selecting a topic that will capture and hold their listeners’ attention. But that decision needn’t be a challenge, because the list of potential topics for an informative speech is long. In fact, communication scholars Ron Allen and Raymie McKerrow have identified eight types of informative speech, each of which offers a wide range of options.²

- **Speeches about issues:** According to Allen and McKerrow, issues are problems or points of controversy concerning which people desire resolution. You could choose to speak on a contemporary issue facing the United States, such as unemployment, immigration, or the war on terror. You might instead select an issue that has been controversial for some time, such as affirmative action or taxes on Internet sales. When you focus your informative speech on an issue, your purpose isn’t to persuade your listeners to adopt any particular point of view but rather to give them the facts they need to form their own opinions.

- **Speeches about events:** Events are occurrences that are noteworthy for the meanings they represent. You may choose to speak about an event that was
publicly experienced, such as the 2012 attack on the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, or the deaths of nineteen members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots team in an Arizona wildfire. You might speak about a significant event in your personal life, such as spending time in a foreign country or going through a religious conversion. In each instance, you can educate your audience about the event and communicate the significant meaning it has, either for your listeners or for you.

- **Speeches about people:** Many informative speakers focus their presentations on other people. You might choose to discuss an individual who made history, such as Pope Francis, the first Catholic pontiff elected from the Western Hemisphere. You could talk about a celebrity who is noteworthy for acts of charity, such as singer Taylor Swift. You might speak about the life of someone who has overcome personal tragedy, such as Rachelle Friedman, who became permanently paralyzed after being pushed into a swimming pool as a joke on the night of her bachelorette party and went on to marry her fiancé the following year. You can also focus on a group, such as the Amish or the Apollo 11 astronauts.

- **Speeches about places:** Cable television’s Travel Channel is popular because it informs viewers about interesting and exotic places. You can do the same by speaking on a place you find significant or intriguing. It might be a place you have visited, or perhaps it is a locale where daily life is substantially different than it is for your listeners, such as Cuba, Iceland, or Yemen. You can even focus on a place in a specific historical period, such as China during the Shang dynasty or Moscow before the breakup of the Soviet Union.

- **Speeches about objects:** Allen and McKerrow have categorized as objects any entities that are nonhuman. Those can include living or animate objects, such as the California giant redwoods and the Epstein-Barr virus. They can also include inanimate objects, such as the guillotine and the Empire State Building. Effective speeches about an object often educate listeners about the object’s evolution and development or its significance in history, culture, politics, or ecology.
Speeches about concepts: Whereas objects are concrete items, concepts are abstract ideas. Oppression, compassion, integrity, bias, and forgiveness are all examples of concepts, because each is a notion or an idea rather than a tangible object. Some powerful speeches have focused on concepts that were significant to their audiences. In June 2013, for instance, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which had the effect of extending marriage equality at the federal level to same-sex couples in the United States. Equality isn’t an object that can be seen or felt; it’s a complex idea, one that affects millions of lives as a social concept.

Speeches about processes: Many informative speeches describe or demonstrate a process, a series of actions that culminates in a specific result. For instance, you might focus on a natural process, such as how coal becomes diamond or how a canyon forms from water erosion. Or you can focus on a human-created process, such as the design of currency or the functions of a CT scanner. You might use an informative speech to teach your listeners a process, such as how to tie a bowline knot or crop a digital photo.

Speeches about policies: Informative speeches can focus on policies, which are programs that aim to guide future decision making or to achieve some goal. You might inform your listeners about policies that existed in the past but have been overturned, such as school segregation in the United States and apartheid in South Africa. You might also speak on current policies, such as those regulating interrogation tactics by the military. Some humorous informative speeches focus on bizarre policies and laws, such as the New Jersey prohibition against frowning at police officers and the Nevada law against riding a camel on public highways.

As you can see, a wide range of topics is available for an informative speech, so be creative. The “Adapt to Technology” box points out that online resources can aid your search for an apt topic. Consider the types of informative speeches—issues, events, people, places, objects, concepts, processes, policies—that you feel are well suited to your audience and you. As you do so, remember that your listeners’ cultural backgrounds can influence the appropriateness of topics. Although to U.S. audiences few topics are considered taboo—impolite to discuss publicly—listeners from other cultures may be surprised or even offended by certain topics. Table 14.1 presents some examples of culturally taboo topics.
Choose a Method of Informing

Once you have a topic in mind from the sea of possibilities, how exactly do you inform someone about it? As you’ll discover in this section, there are at least four methods by which to inform an audience:

- **Define**: “FICO score refers to...”
- **Describe**: “The Great Wall of China extends for 13,170 miles.”
- **Explain**: “Britons drive on the left side of the road because...”
- **Demonstrate**: “I am slicing the tomatoes and cheese...”

### TO TECHNOLOGY

**MINING ONLINE RESOURCES FOR INFORMATIVE SPEECH TOPICS**

Allen and McKerrow describe eight types of informative speeches, each of which includes many possible topics. If you’ve selected a type of informative speech but are struggling to find a topic, consult the following online resources for help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informative Speech Type</th>
<th>Some Websites to Consult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>globalissues.org; sirc.org; nytimes.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>cnn.com; foxnews.com; allvoices.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>infoplease.com/people; people.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>nationonline.org; officialcitysites.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>coolthings.com; neo.jpl.nasa.gov/neo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>psychologyconcepts.com; top-topics.thefullwiki.org/basic_financial_concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>howstuffworks.com; manufacturing.stanford.edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org; turtlezen.com/weirdlaws.html</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What you can do

Choose one type of informative speech in this table and add other websites that would be useful in generating topic ideas. Post your new suggestions on a course listserv or bulletin board, where other students can benefit from them.

**CHOOSE A METHOD OF INFORMING**

Once you have a topic in mind from the sea of possibilities, how exactly do you inform someone about it? As you’ll discover in this section, there are at least four methods by which to inform an audience:
Chapter 14

Speak to Inform

Part 5

One method of informing an audience is defining: providing the meaning of a word or concept. Let’s say you want to educate your listeners about the credit industry. You might focus part of your speech on defining the term FICO score, a widely used personal credit score calculated by the Fair Isaac Corporation. An individual’s FICO score strongly influences that person’s ability to obtain credit, so knowing what a FICO score is can help your audience understand how the credit industry works.

Defining a term may sound straightforward, because it requires only that you connect the term to its meaning, yet meanings can be contested. How a society defines the word marriage, for instance, differentiates those who can enjoy the benefits of such a relationship from those who cannot. Likewise, how a government

Table 14.1 Cultural Dos and Don’ts: Managing Taboo Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Topics to Avoid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Tibet and the Dalai Lama; the Falun-Gong movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Jobs, financial success, and wealth; immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Poverty; religious beliefs; India’s relationship with Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim countries</td>
<td>Sex and sexual practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Politics; personal family matters; the relationship between North and South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Pollution; illegal immigration; sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Politics; Taiwan’s relationship with mainland China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>National security; criticisms of the monarchy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speak to Inform

One method of informing an audience is defining: providing the meaning of a word or concept. Let’s say you want to educate your listeners about the credit industry. You might focus part of your speech on defining the term FICO score, a widely used personal credit score calculated by the Fair Isaac Corporation. An individual’s FICO score strongly influences that person’s ability to obtain credit, so knowing what a FICO score is can help your audience understand how the credit industry works.

Defining a term may sound straightforward, because it requires only that you connect the term to its meaning, yet meanings can be contested. How a society defines the word marriage, for instance, differentiates those who can enjoy the benefits of such a relationship from those who cannot. Likewise, how a government
defines the word torture dictates what methods its military personnel can use in combat and interrogations. Individuals often have dramatically different perspectives on how words such as marriage and torture ought to be defined, largely because their definitions of such terms have consequences for so many people.

If defining a word or concept will help you inform your listeners, you can choose from several methods:

- **Identify the denotative meaning.** Recall from Chapter 13 that a term’s denotative meaning is its dictionary definition. In a speech about climate change, for instance, you could define greenhouse gases as “atmospheric gases that absorb and emit radiation.”

- **Explain the connotative meaning.** As Chapter 13 explained, a term’s connotative meaning is its socially or culturally implied meaning. One connotative meaning of the word bread, for example, is “a baked food used to make sandwiches.”

- **Provide the etymology.** The etymology of a term is its origin or history. In a speech about affectionate communication, you could explain that the word affection derives from the Latin word affectio, meaning “an emotion of the mind.”

- **Give synonyms or antonyms.** You can define a word by identifying synonyms, words that have the same meaning, or antonyms, words that have opposite meanings. Synonyms for the term normal include usual, ordinary, and typical, whereas its antonyms include abnormal, irregular, and odd.

- **Define by example.** You may help your audience understand a concept by providing examples that illustrate its meaning. In a speech about the immune system, you might define the term pathogen by giving examples of types of pathogens, such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites.

- **Compare and contrast definitions.** You can discuss similarities and differences between two or more definitions of a term. To some people, the definition of family is limited to legal and biological relatives, whereas to others, it includes anyone to whom they feel emotionally close. If you were speaking about the concept of family, you could compare and contrast those two definitions.

### Speak to describe

Another way to inform your audience about something is to describe it. Describing means using words to depict or portray a person, a place, an object, or an experience. For example, you might use language that creates a mental image to describe the room arrangement in the campus student center or the experience of having your eyes dilated by an optometrist.

Two forms of description are common in informative speeches. The first form, representation, consists of describing something in
The second form of description common in informative speeches is narration, which is describing a series of events in sequence. You can think of narration as storytelling. In an informative speech about the field of veterinary medicine, for instance, you could describe what someone you know went through to become a veterinarian or tell a story about your first visit to an animal hospital.

Many informative speakers combine representation with narration. Let’s say you want to inform your audience about the life of singer-actor Jennifer Hudson. You could use representation to describe some memorable characters she has played in her movies, such as her Academy Award–winning performance as Effie White in Dreamgirls. You could use narration to describe how Hudson competed in American Idol in 2004 or how she tragically lost her mother, brother, and nephew in 2008. Incorporating both forms of description can produce a richer mental image for your listeners than either form can evoke on its own.

Speak to explain

In many informative presentations, the speaker explains something to the audience. Explaining means revealing why something occurred or how something works. For example, you might explain how Larry Page and Sergey Brin, two Ph.D. students at Stanford University, developed the search engine Google. Or you might explain how cancer cells spread through the body or why people in Great Britain drive on the left side of the road.

When offering an explanation, speakers must use clear, concrete language and avoid jargon that might be unfamiliar to listeners. Suppose that, in an informative speech about statistics, you hear a speaker explain, “Mean scores are considered significantly different only if the p-value is smaller than the critical alpha.” Although that explanation would make perfect sense to a statistician, it wouldn’t make sense to a listener who didn’t already understand what mean scores, p-values, and critical alphas are and why they matter. It is always useful to assess how much your listeners already know about your speech topic and then adapt to their current knowledge. That consideration is especially crucial.
when you are explaining something, because you want your audience to understand all of the elements of your explanation.

Think back to the beginning of this chapter, where we considered how important it is in informative speaking to provide information without attempting to influence listeners’ opinions, beliefs, or actions. Of all the techniques speakers can use to inform an audience, explaining often comes closest to crossing the line from informing to persuading. The reason is that people’s opinions and perspectives frequently influence their explanations of events or processes. In February 2012, for instance, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, coordinator of the neighborhood watch program in the community where Martin was visiting his father. Zimmerman told police that the African American teenager had attacked him and that he had responded in self-defense. After the discovery that Martin had been unarmed, many in the community condemned Zimmerman’s actions as an example of overt racism. Either explanation—justified self-defense or unjustified racism—may have merit, but the explanation you believe may be influenced by your own attitudes about race or your own experiences with law enforcement. Therefore, by explaining Martin’s shooting as the product of either self-defense or racism, an informative speaker is implicitly persuading the audience to believe the speaker’s explanation.

You can avoid crossing the line from informative to persuasive speaking by keeping your remarks objective—based on facts rather than opinions. When you speak objectively, you avoid trying to convince listeners to take a particular point of view. In comparison, remarks in a persuasive speech are subjective—biased toward a specific conclusion. Consult Table 14.2 for some key differences between informative and persuasive speaking.

### Speak to demonstrate

Many people learn better by seeing how to do something than by simply hearing how to do it. Thus, one way to maximize the effectiveness of an explanation is to incorporate a demonstration. **Demonstrating** means showing how to do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14.2</th>
<th>To Inform or to Persuade?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoid turning an informative speech into a persuasive speech by keeping in mind these fundamental differences.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasive Speech</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informative Speech</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>What should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Facts and opinions that support a predetermined conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To convince listeners to adopt a particular belief or action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
something by doing it while explaining it. For instance, you could teach listeners how to use Instagram, swing a cricket bat, or stretch properly before exercise by demonstrating those activities during your speech.

When you’re demonstrating a process, it’s important to describe each step as you do it. Let’s say your informative speech is about how to prepare a Caprese salad. You might start by identifying each of the ingredients you’ll be using: tomatoes, mozzarella cheese, basil, black pepper, and balsamic vinegar. Then, as you slice the tomatoes and mozzarella, tell your audience what you’re doing (“I am slicing the tomatoes and cheese into equal-size pieces so they’ll be easier to eat”). When you chop the basil, describe how you’re doing it (“First, I’m going to cut the stem off each basil leaf; then, I’ll roll the leaves together and give them a rough chop”). Explain how you are arranging the tomatoes, cheese, and basil on a plate (“I’m interspersing slices of tomato and cheese on the plate in a vertical pattern and then sprinkling the chopped basil over the top”). Describe seasoning the salad with black pepper and balsamic vinegar as you do so. In this way, your audience will both see and hear every step of the process.

Defining, describing, explaining, and demonstrating give you various ways to inform your audience. In “Live Work Speak,” you’ll see how Malia decides on a method to use for her informative speech about Hawaii.

**FIT YOUR METHOD OF INFORMING INTO AN ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERN**

As Chapter 11 explained, you can choose from among several organizational patterns when crafting a speech. A topic (topical) pattern, a time (chronological) pattern, a space (spatial) pattern, a cause-effect pattern, and a problem-solution pattern can each provide a practical design for structuring your main points. You may find some patterns more valuable than others, depending on whether your informative speech will define, describe, explain, or demonstrate. Consequently, it’s helpful to consider which organizational pattern most effectively fits your method of informing.

Table 14.3 lists the options for organizational patterns and suggests the methods of informing that are well served by each pattern. The table also gives specific examples of informative speech topics that reflect each method of informing.
Choose a Method of Informing

Born and raised on the Hawaiian island of Maui, Malia is now a sophomore at a small college in the midwestern United States. For her informative speech assignment in her public speaking class, she considers a topic she knows well: her home state of Hawaii. She learns through casual conversation and classroom discussions that none of her fellow students has visited the Aloha State before, so she decides this will be a worthwhile topic. She reviews the methods of informing she can use to teach her audience about Hawaii.

FIRST From her informal audience analysis, Malia knows that her listeners are unlikely to be familiar with Hawaiian language, customs, and traditions. Thus, she realizes that she can inform them about Hawaii by defining various examples of Hawaiian culture:

- She can report that in the Hawaiian language, *mahalo* means “thank you” and *aloha* is used as a general greeting.
- She can define the *luau*, a traditional Hawaiian feast accompanied by music.

SECOND Malia understands how powerful her personal experience can be when helping people understand Hawaii. Consequently, she realizes that she can inform her audience by describing what Hawaii has meant to her:

- She can narrate her experiences from her first visit to Hana, an isolated community on the eastern end of Maui.
- She might describe the reactions she often sees on the faces of visitors arriving in Hawaii for the first time.

THIRD Malia knows that people are often curious about how certain things work in Hawaii. She therefore recognizes that she can inform her audience by explaining some Hawaiian customs or recurring events:

- She might explain how blowing in a conch shell produces sound.
- She can help listeners understand what happens during the Hawaiian monsoon.

FOURTH Finally, Malia realizes that listeners frequently enjoy seeing how to do something rather than just hearing about it. So, she decides to inform her audience by demonstrating one or more Hawaiian traditions:

- She might demonstrate how to dance the hula.
- She might show listeners how to create a traditional Hawaiian lei.

APPLYING THE LESSONS

1. What are some other specific options for defining, describing, explaining, and demonstrating that Malia might consider for this speech?
2. If you were Malia, which method of informing would you choose? What considerations would go into your decision?
### Table 14.3  Finding the Right Fit: Organizational Patterns and Methods of Informing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Pattern</th>
<th>Good for These Methods of Informing</th>
<th>Sample Informative Speech Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Topic pattern**      | Defining, Describing, Explaining    | ▪ Define various forms of government  
▪ Describe the *American Idol* judges  
▪ Explain the three functions of money |
| **Time pattern**       | Describing, Demonstrating           | ▪ Describe the stages of grief  
▪ Demonstrate the Doppler effect |
| **Space pattern**      | Describing                          | ▪ Describe the layout of the earth’s physical layers  
▪ Describe how to drive from Miami to Boston while making only right turns |
| **Cause-effect pattern** | Describing, Explaining             | ▪ Describe the causes of the Spanish civil war  
▪ Explain why evaporation causes cooling |
| **Problem-solution pattern** | Defining, Explaining, Demonstrating | ▪ Define cyber-addiction and identify possible treatments  
▪ Explain how bankruptcy helps corporations reorganize debt  
▪ Demonstrate how to replace a broken car windshield |

### REHEARSE YOUR DELIVERY

Your preparation of a winning informative speech doesn’t end once you have researched and outlined your presentation. After all, speeches are created to be performed, and performance requires rehearsal. Upcoming chapters will detail many of the strategies necessary for ensuring a successful performance. It is not
too early to include the process of rehearsal in your speech-preparation activities, however. As you rehearse your informative speech, give particular thought to these issues:

- **Attend to your language.** It might seem self-evident to say that your listeners must understand what you’re saying before they can learn from it, but many speakers forget that crucial consideration. A common mistake is to use technical language or jargon, which they erroneously assume their audience understands. A better approach, especially if you’re unsure whether certain words will be familiar to your listeners, is to use simple language that everyone will understand. As you rehearse your speech, practice in front of others and ask them to point out words and phrases they find unfamiliar. Refer to Chapter 13 for additional suggestions on making your language clear and compelling.

- **Choose appropriate presentation aids and rehearse with them.** Presentation aids—such as PowerPoint slides, Prezi presentation media, handouts, models, and sound recordings—can do much to make your speech involving and memorable. You don’t need to use presentation aids with every speech, but when you do, choose tools that are relevant to your topic, simple yet professional, and easy to manage. Chapter 22 offers much more information on creating effective presentation aids. Whenever you include them, it is important to rehearse with them, so that you become comfortable speaking and using your presentation aids simultaneously.

- **Record your delivery and watch it.** One benefit of practicing your speech before your presentation is that you can record it to evaluate how you look and sound. Using a camcorder or the camera on your smartphone, record yourself as you rehearse. Be sure the camera angle is wide enough to include your movements and gestures and that the camera’s microphone is picking up your voice. Afterward, watch and listen to your recording, and pay attention to opportunities to improve your delivery. Although you may find being recorded an uncomfortable experience, it allows you to evaluate your presentation in a way you otherwise cannot.

- **Pay attention to your nonverbal behavior.** One of the biggest benefits of recording your delivery is that you can observe your nonverbal behavior. Especially watch your facial expressions, gestures and hand movements, eye contact, body posture, and movement around your speaking area. Chapter 21 provides details on how to use these and other nonverbal behaviors to your advantage during speech presentations.

- **Ask for feedback and use it.** Practicing your informative speech in front of others gives you opportunities to receive feedback. Ask people whose opinions you value to watch you rehearse, and invite their suggestions and questions. Do they understand what you are defining, describing, explaining, or demonstrating? Is your organizational pattern clear to them? Have they felt...
informed rather than persuaded? Take their feedback into account as you continue to prepare your speech.

■ Be careful about timing. When giving an informative speech, you will usually have a time limit to observe, so you should rehearse with that time limit in mind. If your time limit is six minutes, for example, but it takes you nearly eight minutes to get through your speech during practice, you are probably trying to say too much and need to look for places to trim. On the contrary, if you’re getting through your speech in four minutes, you may not have written enough material to fill a six-minute presentation. Getting through a practice speech in less than your allotted time might indicate that you don’t have enough material, but it may also suggest that you would benefit from relaxing your presentation style. See “Adapt to Anxiety” for more information.

SLOWING YOUR SPEAKING RATE

Simply rehearsing a speech is enough to make many people nervous and jittery—the signs of speech anxiety. You may recall from Chapter 2 that speech anxiety is a form of stress and that a common response to stressful situations is the desire to flee from them. In a public speaking context, this response can lead you to speak faster than you normally do, because subconsciously you are trying to get through the experience as quickly as possible.

Racing through your speech poses problems, though. For one thing, your listeners may not be able to understand what you’re saying. For another, you may not make adequate eye contact with them or use appropriate gestures, and so you may miss opportunities to connect with them and hold their interest. Finally, if there is a minimum amount of time required for your speech, you could finish before you reach that point, causing an unnecessary reduction in your grade.

If you tend to speak faster than normal when you’re nervous, awareness of that behavior is the first step toward addressing it.³ Realize that it is a natural outcome of your nervous arousal and that you can change that behavior with focused attention and practice. As you rehearse your speech, pay attention to your speaking rate. When it’s fast, make a directed effort to slow down to a natural rate. Practice keeping your speech at a natural rate, and continue rehearsing in this manner until you can present your speech all the way through without increasing your speech rate.

On the day of your performance, your nerves are likely to return. As you begin your speech, remind yourself to keep a steady, natural speaking pace. When you feel yourself speeding up unintentionally, recall your rehearsal. The more you’ve rehearsed, the easier it will be to bring your rate back to normal during your performance.

What you can do

As you rehearse your speech, time yourself and take note of how the duration of your delivery changes in relation to how you feel. Is your delivery shorter when you feel nervous? If so, by how much? Paying attention to these details will help you determine whether your speech rate is an issue to work on.
Rehearsal should play a central, ongoing role in your speech-development process. As you craft new informative speeches, you should rehearse them to determine how your performance looks and sounds to others. Moreover, you should take what you learn from your rehearsals and apply it back to your speeches, so that you are continually improving.

**SPEAK ETHICALLY**

In any public presentation, it is paramount that you treat your listeners ethically. In the context of an informative speech, one of the most important requirements of ethical behavior is truthfulness. Because your purpose is to impart information to your audience, you have a responsibility as an ethical speaker to ensure that your information is true and accurate. Specifically, you should

- **Use information only from reputable sources.** As we considered in Chapter 8, scientific journals and major newspapers are more reputable sources than tabloids and Wikipedia pages, for instance, because information in journals and large mainstream newspapers is checked for accuracy before publication.

- **Understand the information you’re reporting.** If you’re unsure how to interpret the meaning of a report or statistic, ask your instructor for help. If you don’t, you risk drawing unwarranted conclusions from your information.

- **Incorporate verbal footnotes.** When you use information in your speech from another source, identify that source while you’re speaking, as Chapter 9 described. For example, you might say, “According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, occupational therapy is one of the fastest-growing professions.”

- **Be clear about when you’re speculating.** Many sources of information allow consumers to infer ideas or speculate about possibilities, and it is fine to include those inferences or speculations in an informative speech as long as you make it clear that they aren’t facts.

Being truthful with your audience is essential to your credibility as a speaker, because audiences have a hard time trusting speakers who have been less than forthright in the past. Aside from credibility, speaking truthfully is important for the sake of treating people ethically—a key goal for every public speaker.
PREPARE TO SUCCEED

Maintain a focus on informing

As you’ve seen, one of the biggest, most common challenges for informative speakers is teaching the audience about a topic without urging any particular course of action. To maintain your focus on informing, keep these strategies in mind:

✓ You can discuss the advantages or disadvantages of a behavior, but you must stop short of encouraging or discouraging that behavior. For example, describing the health benefits of eating a vegan diet does not by itself make your speech persuasive. Be sure, however, that you don’t make a statement like, “And for those reasons, I recommend a vegan diet.” Some listeners may come to that conclusion on their own, but in an informative speech, you must focus only on the information itself, not on what the audience should do with it.

✓ The line between informing and persuading can be a fine one. To make your intention clear, you can say explicitly to your audience, “I’m not trying to tell you what to do or what to believe.” That statement communicates that you recognize the close relationship between informing and persuading. It also states concretely that your purpose is only to inform.

✓ As an informative speaker, you should accept that some listeners may feel persuaded—even manipulated—by your words, despite everything you do to avoid that result. Especially in speeches about provocative or emotionally charged issues, even stating that your intention is only informative won’t always prevent people from believing that you were out to persuade them all along. Because information can be persuasive even when it isn’t presented as such, some listeners who are persuaded by information will attribute that persuasion to you, the speaker, rather than to the information itself. There’s little you can do about those listeners, so focus on making your informative intentions clear to everyone else.

BRING IT ALL TOGETHER: AN INFORMATIVE SPEECH

Sometimes it’s easiest to understand the lessons of public speaking when you can see them applied to a finished product. The chapters in this handbook that teach you to create a specific form of speech will therefore feature a completed example of that form. You’ll also find critiques applying various lessons from preceding chapters to that speech. The purpose is to show how many principles come together in the form of a completed speech draft. Here we’ll look at an informative speech by college senior Juliet Meyer on the topic of absentee voting.
What Is Absentee Voting?

**Topic:** Absentee voting  
**General purpose:** To inform  
**Specific purpose:** To teach students what absentee voting is, why it is beneficial, and how they can do it  
**Type of informative speech:** Speech about process  
**Method of informing:** Describing

**INTRODUCTION**  
For those of us who are American citizens, an important way to exercise our rights is to vote. But what do you do if you are out of state—or away from the county in which you are registered—when election day comes around? This is a common experience for students. Unfortunately, many of us who attend college away from home are not sure if we can still participate in elections. So, instead of helping decide the fate of our nation, we miss the boat completely. Luckily, there is a free and legal way to stay in the game and it’s called absentee voting. Absentee voting is easy to do—all it requires is that you are registered to vote, that you order and send in your absentee ballot before the deadline, and that you are just a little more organized than regular voters. After doing a lot of research on this topic to make sure I didn’t miss the most recent election, I now know what absentee voting is, who can benefit from it, and how to do it. This speech will describe all of these things so that none of us needs to forfeit our right to participate in our democracy.

**BODY**  
First, let’s look at what absentee voting is. Absentee voting allows people who will be away from their official polling station on election day to still cast their vote and have it counted. It’s also called “by-mail voting” or “mail-in voting,” since these ballots are usually cast by mail. Today, people living overseas may also be able to send their votes in electronically, by e-mail or fax, according to the U.S. Department of State website. Absentee voting is not quite the same thing as early voting. Although they have similar
purposes, early voting allows citizens to cast their votes four to fifty days prior to election day (depending on the rules of their jurisdiction). It happens in person and is meant to help decrease congestion at the polls. By comparison, absentee voting allows citizens who will be away from their registered polling stations to send in their votes to arrive just prior to election day.

This brings me to my second point, which is who is allowed to cast a vote by absentee ballot. As I have already mentioned, students attending college out of state are eligible to become absentee voters. U.S. citizens living overseas at the time of an election qualify for this option as well. According to www.longdistancevoter.org, a non-partisan website that helps Americans to vote, other eligible people include those with disabilities or illnesses that don’t allow them to reach their polling stations easily, patients in veterans’ hospitals, deployed military personnel, and people in jail or awaiting a trial. Finally, if you happened to have planned your vacation or business trip at the time of the elections, you will want to become an absentee voter, so that you can make your vote count even while you are away.

Now, let’s get down to what you really need to know: how do you vote as an absentee voter? It’s important to know that the rules vary from state to state—so get organized and find out ahead of time what applies to you. You can look up this important information on www.longdistancevoter.org, the site that I mentioned earlier.

In general, however, the first step for most states and counties is to confirm that you are already registered to vote. You can do this through longdistancevoter.org. People who are voting for the first time—and this will be relevant for a lot of students—will need to send in proof of identification with their registration. Usually, a copy of your driver’s license will do the trick, but again, check your state’s rules.

We’re almost done. Once you are sure that you are registered to vote, you should request an absentee ballot from your state. Again, longdistancevoter.org has the information you will need. Even if you have requested your absentee ballot well in advance, your state may not begin printing and mailing ballots until thirty days before election day.
day. Don’t panic, but watch your mailbox carefully. (And, if you don’t get your ballot two weeks before election day, you should call someone pronto!) Once you receive your ballot, fill it out and return it, sealed so that your important information stays private, to the appropriate address. As long as it arrives before the deadline—which for most states is the evening before election day—your vote will be counted.

CONCLUSION
And voila! By following these fairly simple steps you have now become a successful absentee voter. As a student who is very concerned about the fate of our country, I was relieved when I found out that I could vote even though I am going to school in California, several thousand miles away from where I am registered to vote. I have found that absentee voting is an easy and efficient way to take part in one of the most important aspects of our democracy—the election process. Nearly all citizens are eligible to become absentee voters, and it’s a simple process to sign up as long as you plan ahead. However you choose to participate, I do hope that you will act on your right to vote—wherever you happen to be when the big day arrives.

REFERENCES

Although it serves as an example, Juliet’s speech is not perfect—no speech is. Like most, Juliet’s speech has both strengths and opportunities for improvement. Let’s identify some instructive instances of each.
Strengths

Juliet immediately points out how her topic is relevant to her listeners. In her introduction, she describes a situation—being away from one’s county or state on election day—and points out that it is a common experience for students, many of whom are consequently unsure how to vote. By connecting her topic to her listeners’ lives so quickly, she captures audience attention and signals the value of the information she is about to present.

This speech is remarkably easy to follow. In her introduction, Juliet identifies very clearly the three main points she plans to discuss—what absentee voting is, who can benefit from it, and how to do it. She uses transitions throughout the body of her speech to signal when she is moving from one topic to the next, such as “First, let’s look at what absentee voting is” and “This brings me to my second point, which is who is allowed to cast a vote by absentee ballot.” Finally, she summarizes all three points in her conclusion.

Opportunities for improvement

Juliet makes a persuasive statement in her conclusion when she says, “However you choose to participate, I do hope that you will act on your right to vote.” Although she does not go so far as to encourage listeners to vote by absentee ballot, which would clearly make this a persuasive speech, she uses language that is more persuasive than is appropriate for an informative presentation.

The conclusion’s memorable moment is not that memorable. Juliet tries to create a memorable moment at the end of her speech by coming back to a brief comment she made in her introduction, which is that she learned about absentee voting so that she wouldn’t miss the most recent election. In her conclusion, she informs her audience that she didn’t miss the election. Her listeners may be glad for her, but this isn’t an especially intriguing, suspenseful, humorous, or emotional story. Thus, it won’t be as memorable as a different story, a quote, or a provocative anecdote may be.

Skill in informative speaking is useful in a wide range of contexts, from the classroom to the boardroom, from the medical world to the business world, from the political arena to the sports arena. Developing your ability to speak informatively can serve you in virtually any career you choose, and this considerable benefit makes it well worth your effort and attention.

EXERCISES: APPLY IT NOW

1. For your first informative speech, you have decided to talk about marriage laws and practices around the world. You will be informing your audience about the wide cultural variation regarding the expectations for marriage (who can marry whom, how spouses are chosen, how many spouses a person can have) and the traditions surrounding marriage
ceremonies. What will you do in your introduction to create information hunger for this topic?

2. Your supervisor at work is preparing an informative presentation for employees regarding the details of a new medical benefits package. He knows you are enrolled in a public speaking course, so he asks your advice on the best method to use for informing employees. Given the topic, you determine that either defining or describing would be most effective.

a. Which of these methods—defining or describing—would you ultimately recommend to your supervisor in this situation? Why?
b. What advice would you have for constructing an effective informative speech using the method you recommend?

3. You are helping your friend Rachel practice an informative presentation for her law school course. The first time you watch her rehearse, she rarely looks away from her manuscript, her gestures are stiff and unnatural, and she exceeds her strict six-minute limit by forty-five seconds. When you mention these issues to her, she does not believe her presentation was as poor as you say. What can you do to help her rehearse more effectively?

KEY TERMS

- information hunger
- defining
- etymology
- synonyms
- antonyms
- describing
- representation
- narration
- explaining
- demonstrating