

Speech Topics are Everywhere

By Tammy A. Miller, DTM, PID

Have you ever struggled with finding topics for your presentations? Maybe you are a new member, unsure of what you should talk about, or you are a seasoned Toastmaster who believes you have exhausted every topic out there. Take heart: Speech topics are everywhere; you just have to know how to look for them!

The best place to start looking for a speech topic is in the mirror. What information do you already know? What can you share about your life that others will find interesting?

Before we go further with generating topics, let's look at basic structures for presentations. You can use a variety of speech structures – for example, cause and effect, problem and solution, a timeline, compare and contrast, or step-by-step. All of these structures are the “body” of your presentation. In the simplest form, an effective presentation can consist of an introduction, three main points and a conclusion. In this article, I will address how to generate those three points.

Research shows that a person's brain can most comfortably retain three to five ideas at a time, so a great exercise for generating topics is to simply look around the room you are in right now and “think in threes.” If you are sitting in your office, what do you see?

Choose three of these items and think about at least three things you could talk about:

1. **Books** – Discuss why a particular book is on your shelf, the most valuable piece of information you gleaned from it and why you recommend it (or don't) to someone else.
2. **Computer** – Mention the history of computers (always a great place to start), how our lives are affected by them and how social networking can help or hinder communication skills.
3. **Telephone** – Explain the prevalence of cell phones in our society, the dangers of texting while driving and whether cell phones pose any danger to our health.

For the topics above, you could create an entire presentation from each point, or use the three points for one presentation.

More Speech Topics

Children can also provide a constant flow of speech material. Any parent understands how kids can provide the basis for a funny, poignant or serious presentation. Three possible topics:

- The joys of potty training (!)
- Life lessons my children have taught me
- Teaching your children how to respond in an emergency

Anyone who is around animals – including household pets – knows that they, too, can provide endless inspiration for presentations. Potential speech topics:

- Why do dogs have owners but cats have servants?
- How owning pets can lower your blood pressure
- Learning how to laugh and love from watching my pet

For each of the examples in this article, you can take that point and think of at least three other related points to build a presentation on. Are you seeing the value of thinking in threes?

Just Look Around You

Life is certainly speech material; we just have to look around and see the “points.” Some random life adventures have led to interesting presentations for me. For example, have you ever had “one of those days” when ...

- A pipe breaks in the garage and water is pouring in but only in a small area that just happens to be over your boxes of rare books and irreplaceable high school yearbooks? Or ...
- Your best friend goes a little crazy while furniture shopping and says, “Of course we can get this waterbed in the van”? When there is already a full couch, dresser and recliner in the van? Or ...
- You are only 42 years old and the doctor says, “Tammy, I am afraid it is cancer.”

I am sure you get the idea. From these examples have come speeches ranging from home safety to the value of friendship to using humor to deal with adversity.

You just never know where the inspiration for your next presentation will come from, or how your next life-changing moment can help others. Yes, my life is filled with speech material. But most importantly, so is yours.

This is a condensed version of Tammy Miller’s article that appeared in the February 2011 issue of the Toastmaster magazine.

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