Extemporaneous Speaking

According to the text, *A Speaker’s Guide Book*, by O’Hair, Stuart, and Rubenstein, there are many different ways to deliver a presentation. The most common ways include: speaking from a manuscript, speaking from memory, and speaking extemporaneously.

**Different Types of Delivery Styles**

**Manuscript speaking** is a style of delivery in which the speaker reads the speech verbatim from a prepared written text containing the entire speech. An example of this type of speech would be a presidential address or a commencement address.

Another style of speaking is **from memory**. Speaking from memory is a delivery style in which the speaker puts the entire speech, word for word, into writing and then commits it to memory. For example, a wedding toast or a campus election speech might be memorized.

Finally, the delivery style that we at the Speaking Center suggest you use in most of your presentations is **extemporaneous speaking**. Extemporaneous speaking falls somewhere between manuscript and memorized deliveries. Speakers delivering an extemporaneous speech prepare well (with an outline) and practice in advance, giving full attention to all the facets of the speech—content, arrangement, and delivery.

**What are the benefits of speaking extemporaneously?**

According to *Public Speaking* by Osborn, Osborn and Osborn, extemporaneous speaking provides many advantages:

- Sounds spontaneous and natural
- Encourages audience participation
- Focuses on overall message and essence of the speech
- Emphasizes the importance of preparation and practice
- Does not allow for the speaker to read or memorize the speech

**How do you extemporize?**

Use a keyword outline. Instead of memorizing or writing the speech word for word, extemporaneous speakers speak from a keyword outline or a phrase outline. The keyword outline is an abbreviated form of a formal, full sentence outline and should contain words to spark the speaker’s memory. It should also include presentation cues such as: “pause,” “transition,” or “talk slowly.” Because a keyword outline uses only limited words, it helps you speak extemporaneously because you aren’t tied to specific wording.
Below is an example of a keyword outline.

Main Point One: Violence and impressions of the world
   Sub-Point One: “Mean World Syndrome”
      • Gerbner: see violence—feel threatened
   Sub-Point Two: “Happy Violence”
      • Gerbner: problems solved by violence

When should you use extemporaneous speaking?

It is important to consider that although there are many benefits to extemporaneous speaking, its style is more suitable to some situations than others. For example, in a very formal situation in which every word you say is examined, such as a political address, extemporaneous would not be the best choice. However, when speaking in club meetings or giving class presentations (which can be applied later in the job field), these types of presentations are more informal and extemporaneous is appropriate. Make sure to analyze the speaking situation and then make your decision on a speaking style.

Keep in mind…

• Although speaking from memory (or a keyword outline) can seem scary, once you practice and become comfortable doing it, it can be easier than manuscript or memorization.
• Know that the more information you have on the topic, the more confident you will be. As long as you know your information well and have practiced, you can be successful with extemporaneous speaking.
• Extemporaneous delivery takes practice, so finalize your outline and practice the presentation several times.
• When practicing, try to keep going with the speech even if you stumble over some parts. This will allow you to practice the whole speech and to get comfortable picking up where you left off.
• Stay on track by following your outline during the presentation. Either use a printed version of the outline, or transfer the outline to note cards.
• Pay attention to time. With extemporaneous delivery, you can be flexible with time (skipping ahead in the speech or backing up and explaining something in a different way). There are advantages to this, but you have to make sure that you stay within the expected time limit.