

Exercise 1 ~ Your First Speech: About Me

Your Goal: To speak for 3 minutes about yourself, your background, your interests – whatever you choose, so your audience can find out a little about you.

You cannot find a person more knowledgeable on this subject, so ignorance is not a problem. Your task is to select from your well-stocked memory enough coherent material to interest your audience for three minutes. Let's look at the key words in that last sentence.

Select ~ It's impossible to present all your personal history in the three minutes allowed, so you must limit your scope to the more significant illustrations of one aspect of your life. Examples: childhood, marriage, family, occupation, education, hobbies, lifestyle. Write down for your own guidance your chosen purpose. For example to show how and why I became converted to a low-fat, high-fibre diet.

Sufficient ~ but not too much, three minutes is a short time. After you've allowed for an introduction and an ending, you've only about two minutes left for the core of your speech. You cannot make more than two or three significant points in that time. Select from your material just enough points to support your chosen purpose.

Coherent ~ Select material so each of the points you make is logically or emotionally linked. They should all contribute to the purpose of your talk.

Interest ~ It's not interesting to any audience to hear a recital of humdrum activities or experiences that are common to most people. Find something special about you or your life that is likely to excite the curiosity and interest of your listeners. Can any of your children walk on water? If you're a wife, does your husband design and make your dresses? Remember the adage of what is newsworthy: it's when a man bites a dog, not when a dog bites a man.

Your Audience ~ You should take account of their range of occupations, attitudes, sex distribution, educational backgrounds and lifestyles, when deciding what to say, and how to say it. Aim to interest your audience.

Three Minutes ~ You can cram a lot of words into three minutes, if you speak fast, but you will bewilder your audience. Too rapid a delivery of ideas or information will overload their capacity to absorb what you're saying. Take time to speak distinctly. There is no ideal pace for speaking, but if you aim to have about 350 words in your full text (that's about 120 words/minute) you will have a good starting point for timing your speech. Rehearse it aloud, and adjust if the timing is more than half a minute either side of the target. Avoid the trap of adding more words. It is better to have fewer, more easily understood, words than to cram in an extra point that you feel you must make.