



Kansas 4-H Public Speaking

Kansas 4-H members have been learning to speak skillfully before an audience for more than 100 years. It is often one of the things people say they most remember about their 4-H experiences — before participating in 4-H, they could not speak comfortably in front of an audience. Thousands of youth have learned, through 4-H, the skills necessary to clearly organize and present ideas and instructions through project talks, demonstrations, illustrated talks, and public speaking. This fact sheet focuses on public speaking.

What is public speaking?

Public speaking is the skill of writing and delivering a persuasive, entertaining, informational, or inspiring speech on a given topic. It can be an effective way to present an important message.

Effective speakers are not necessarily polished or perfect. Instead, they are energetic, direct, and open in their message. They are involved with their topic and their audience.

Pick a topic

You may be assigned a topic. However, if you choose your own topic, it is important that you consider three things: the occasion, the audience, and your own interests and capabilities.

Know the occasion

When is the talk to be given? Be certain you have the correct date. Place the date on your calendar.

Find out the time of the meeting and the approximate time you will begin to talk. Find out how long the total program will last and how much time will be allotted for your use.

You may make some changes in your delivery if you know your speech will be after several others — your audience may be bored or, following a meal, sleepy. Where is the talk to be given — in a public hall, church, school, community center, or home?

Will the room be large or small? Will you have a speaker's stand? If so, where will it be located? Will

Public speaking at a glance

To persuade, inform, entertain, or inspire.

For 4-H members 14 years and older.

Visuals are encouraged when they complement; do not use in competition.

Questions are optional.

Talks last 5 to 15 minutes.

you use a microphone? Visit the location for your talk early in your preparations. If possible, try to set up the surroundings so you will be comfortable. The more familiar you are with the setting, the less nervous you will be.

Know your audience

If you know something about your audience (their ages, knowledge of your topic, how your topic will affect them, etc.), you will be better able to plan a speech that speaks directly to them. Ask these questions:

- Who will be in the audience? Why are they there?
- How many people will be there? You must know if you plan to distribute flyers or other materials.
- Will the audience be predominantly females, males, or evenly mixed?
- What will be the age span of the audience?
- What are the major needs and interests of the audience? This is the key to your speech.

Know your interests and capabilities

The best way to assure a positive speaking experience is to talk about something you know. Suppose a group of civic leaders asks you to talk to them about 4-H. You could look up all the statistics about new members, distribution of funds, how 4-H is organized at the local through national levels, and quote all the facts and figures. But because the

information is unfamiliar to you, you're likely to forget things or become very nervous. It would be better to talk about things you know well — such as how 4-H has helped you. Stick to topics you care about, have thought about, and have researched; then you'll be an expert and interesting, too.

Recheck the topic

To see if your selected topic is suitable, ask yourself these questions:

- Does the topic fit my capabilities, knowledge, experience and intelligence?
- Does the topic fit my audience?
- Will the audience be interested?
- Will the audience feel a personal connection to the topic?
- Does the topic fit the occasion?
- Can the topic be covered properly within the time allotted?

It's better to present a few short statements your audience will remember than to give a lot of details to an audience that has stopped paying attention. Try to limit your speech to 10 minutes or less, especially if you're speaking at a dinner when people may be tired of sitting.



Organize and write your speech

When you have answered the questions above, you must put your thoughts into an organized, interesting speech.

The parts of a speech

Good speeches are made up of three parts: the introduction, the body, and the summary.

Introduction — About 15 percent

Body — About 80 percent

Summary — About 5 percent

Although the introduction comes first, the body of the speech contains the real message and should be prepared first.

1. Introduction

The key to your speech is the introduction. The introduction should capture the audience's attention immediately and should lead gracefully into the body of the speech.

When you have the audience's attention, give them an idea of what you will be speaking about. Be brief and specific. Use only one type of introduction. Here are some ideas to help you put together an effective introduction:

- Open with a challenging statement. This can be a great way to get attention, but make sure the challenge is inspiring, not offensive.
- Tell a story that has something to do with your topic. If you can't think of one, check with your librarian for a book of anecdotes to use in speeches.
- Use a quotation. Check Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, or ask your librarian for other sources, including reputable websites.
- State a startling fact related to your subject.
- Ask the audience a question.

2. Body

Determine the purpose for your speech. Is it to entertain, to inform, or to persuade the audience, or a combination? Write out the purpose of your speech in clear and precise terms. If your purpose is to entertain, the approach will be different than if the purpose is to inform or persuade.

Research your topic and take notes; use your own knowledge and experiences related to the topic. Put your ideas on paper; don't rely on memory. From the very start, write down your ideas. A small notebook will do, but many people find that using 3" × 5" white index cards work best. The advantage of note cards is that if each contains only one idea or fact, the cards can be rearranged in the proper order when the speech is being organized. There is no purpose in researching material you already know. Start your search on the Internet or in the library. Ask for the opinions of a librarian or people who are authorities on the subject you want to speak about.

Write your outline after your notes are made. Decide on three or four main points to be covered. List these main headings and group your notes under the proper heading. Work on writing transitions between points, rather than jumping cold from one point to the next.

If you have some complex material or statistics to present, interpret or highlight the material with examples and visual aids.

As a rule of thumb, if you cannot clearly restate your message in three or four sentences, you are including too much information or your content is fuzzy. It will likely confuse your audience.

3. Summary

The conclusion should emphasize your main points in a brief summary. Plan it well. Here are some suggestions for planning your conclusion:

- Summarize important points one by one.
- Use a quotation that summarizes the importance of what you have said.

- Ask a question. For example, "What can you and I do about this problem or situation?" Answer the question by stating clearly what can be gained by taking action and what can be lost if action is not taken.

Practice delivery

Practice is important if you want to become a skilled presenter. Only through practice can improvement be made and presentations polished. Try making a video of your presentation. It will help you see ways to improve your posture, eye contact, delivery speed, voice, enunciation, mannerisms and gestures, general appearance, demeanor (smile and other facial expressions), and organization.

Visual aids

Visual aids — both on a poster and electronic — can help the audience better understand and remember what you are telling them. Visuals should be used only if they make the speech more effective and should not distract from it. They can help you remember what to do and say next and are preferred to note cards.

Other resources to help you

4-H Communication Fact Sheets:

- 4H1105, Kansas 4-H Project Talk Scoresheet
- 4H1104, Kansas 4-H Demonstration and Illustrated Talk Scoresheet
- 4H1103, Kansas 4-H Public Speaking Scoresheet
- 4H978, Kansas 4-H Presentation Overview
- 4H979, Kansas 4-H Project Talks
- 4H980, Kansas 4-H Demonstrations
- 4H981, Kansas 4-H Demonstration or Illustrated Talk Outline Form
- 4H982, Kansas 4-H Illustrated Talks
- 4H984, Effective Presentation Tips
- 4H985, Preparing and Using Visual Aids
- 4H986, Presentation Brainstorming Activity

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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