Defining a Speech’s Purpose and Audience

Learning the Skill

When you give a speech, you should have a specific purpose in mind. Are you seeking to inform your audience? Persuade? Entertain? Informative speeches describe, demonstrate, or explain a specific topic. Persuasive speeches attempt to move the audience to a belief or action. Entertaining speeches seek to amuse the audience, often through humorous or colorful language. Speakers must organize information according to their purpose. Telling jokes would probably be appropriate in an entertaining speech, but might be out of place in an informative speech.

Speakers also must match their presentations to their listeners. For example, you would probably talk about the World Series much differently to your five-year-old neighbor than you would to Yankees’ superstar Derek Jeter.

When you prepare to give a speech, follow these guidelines:

• Clearly define your purpose, and plan your speech accordingly. Are you trying to teach? Convince? Be funny? If you are giving a persuasive speech, for instance, you will need to provide plenty of evidence for your views and anticipate listeners’ arguments against your views.

• Next, clearly define your audience. Do your audience members know much about the topic? If so, you might use specialized language that only experts are familiar with. Are members of your audience interested beginners? Then give more general information. Also, be aware of your listeners’ age range and education level. Young children will not be able to understand a long, complicated speech.

• Think about why your audience has come to hear you. For example, if they have come to be entertained, it probably would be a bad time to deliver a speech about a serious political issue.

Practicing the Skill

Directions: The passage on the next page is from a speech about the Volga River in Russia. Read the passage, and then answer the questions that follow.
The Volga River is the longest river in Europe. It starts out just northwest of Moscow, winds its way across European Russia, and finally empties into the Caspian Sea, around 2,200 miles (3,500 km) away.

This massive river first emerged as a trade route in the A.D. 700s. During the centuries that followed, cities and towns grew up along the banks of the Volga as trade ports. Canals were built to connect the Volga with the Baltic River and other waterways across Russia. Dams were built to tame its wild waters, allowing barges and steamships loaded with gravel, coal, and other necessities to deliver their goods all over Russia. Thus, the river became a major factor in helping Russia develop its economy—and the reason it became a primary target for Germans in World War II. Today more than 900 ports and 550 industrial docks line the banks of the Volga. Fishing boats, ferries, tour boats, sailboats, and hydrofoils connect cities, towns, and villages.

If you journeyed along the river, you would understand why Russians call this river "Mother Volga." The Volga River is much more than a means of transportation. It is also Russia's spiritual heart and soul—much like the Mississippi River is for Americans—and a rich source of history, folklore, music, and art.

Some say the river mirrors life all across Russia. A visitor to the region today will see elegant vacation homes scattered among the shabby cottages of poor farmers and the rundown apartments of factory and office workers. Construction of high-rise buildings in Russian cities along the Volga reveals that progress is taking place, but development in smaller towns and villages is much slower or nonexistent.

A reporter for the Los Angeles Times wrote that the generation gap in Russia is as broad and deep as the Volga itself. Many older people say they feel abandoned by the former Communist government, and some even long for the security it provided. Younger people, in contrast, are more hopeful about the future. They like to spend time in the cities along the Volga, where new shops and restaurants are opening.

In spite of all the problems facing Russia today, Mother Volga still offers some pleasure. You can boat in her waters and hike along her forested banks. A number of Russian people say they cannot imagine living anywhere else.

1. **Classifying** Do you think this is an informative, persuasive, or entertaining speech? Why?

2. **Specifying** Which group do you think is the primary audience for this speech: a gathering of members of the European Union, middle-school students with an interest in world geography, or a group of scholars on Russian history? How can you tell?
✓ Applying the Skill

Directions: You are going to adapt the information from the previous page into an entertaining speech that you will deliver to a class of fifth graders. In your speech, write about what it is like riding a tour boat along the Volga River. Follow steps 1–4 below.

1. Explaining What information will you keep in the speech? Will you delete any information? Explain your reasoning.

2. Specifying Will you change the language of the speech in any way? Explain what you plan to do (or not do).

3. Expressing Do you need to add any information that is not given in the original speech? Explain.

4. Applying On a separate sheet of paper, adapt the speech based on your plans above.

Assessment Checklist
Assess your speech using the checklist below:

- Defined purpose of my speech and planned accordingly
- Defined my audience—fifth graders—and considered their interests
- Adapted information to fit my audience and purpose
- Researched topic to add information that would be of interest to my audience
- Reduced length of my speech
- Adapted language to a fifth-grade level