

Developing Your Speech Topic and Purpose

- How Context Influences Your Speaking Goals
- Choosing Your Speech Topic
- Articulating Your Purpose
- Stating Your Thesis



In this chapter, you will learn to:

- Identify how context influences your speaking goals
- Choose a speech topic whether you decide to speak, are asked to speak, or are required to speak
- Develop clear statements of purpose for your speech
- Develop the thesis statement of your speech



Review the chapter's **LEARNING OBJECTIVES** and **START** with a quick warm-up activity

or more than 50 years, student groups in the United States and other countries have publicly asked political leaders to act with integrity and morality. In 1962, Students for a Democratic Society issued the Port Huron Statement, a “living document” that condemned the Cold War, racism, and poverty and identified students as “agents of social change.” Today’s Occupy Wall Street movement reiterates many of those claims, questions the morals of our leaders, calls for “participatory democracy,” and has served as an inspiration for student-led movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and several countries in the Middle East. Inspired by the Freedom Riders of the early 1960s, and selling for 25 cents in 1962, the Port Huron Statement is described as having “a power and excitement rare to any document,” and as having “dignity in its language, persuasiveness in its arguments.”¹



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Whether or not you've followed the voices of today's student protesters, heard the term *participatory democracy*, or are familiar with the Freedom Riders or the Port Huron Statement, you can use the public speaking skills you develop in this class to participate in our public dialogue. This chapter will help you select interesting and relevant topics for your speeches, topics that reflect the concerns of our world, and that help us sort through complex issues. This chapter will also help you determine the best way to frame a topic so you fulfill your speaking purpose or what you want to accomplish with your speech.

Successful public speaking is usually the result of careful planning and forethought rather than any so-called intuitive or natural speaking ability. No doubt, we can and do find ourselves in front of audiences without much advance notice. However, we are more likely to find ourselves speaking on topics we care about after we've had time to prepare our ideas. Although preparation means work, careful planning before you speak helps you choose speech topics and then narrow them and your purpose to accommodate three speaking contexts: when you decide to speak, when you have been asked to speak, and when you are required to speak.

How Context Influences Your Speaking Goals

There are many different contexts for speaking—formal or informal settings, large or small audiences, serious or lighthearted issues, and so on. Identifying the context in which you speak publicly will help you understand the connection between why we speak publicly and what we speak about.

Deciding to Speak

The most common reason to speak is because we find an issue so important or our experience so relevant that we decide to speak about it. This is also perhaps the most powerful reason people become public speakers. Before the Internet, television, and radio, people used a variety of platforms to share their opinions and ideas. They spoke in churches and town halls, at street corners, in town squares or centers, and on wooden soapboxes. So important was the power of public speech in shaping opinions and influencing actions that until the 1850s, legislation in the United States prevented certain people, such as women, from speaking publicly.



READ, highlight, and take notes online.

Personal Stories After Natural Disasters

Becca Skinner: Young Explorer, Photographer



Courtesy of John Lloyd

Rebecca Skinner lives in Bozeman, Montana, and attended the University of Wyoming, where she majored in Social Work. For Skinner, photography became more than a hobby when, in the fall of 2010, she won a grant from her university to travel to New Orleans to photograph the rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. Then, as a National Geographic Young Explorer, she traveled to Banda Aceh, Indonesia, to photograph rebuilding efforts after the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. In Indonesia, she found it "most challenging" to try to document seven years of rebuilding in one short month on location. Since then, she has spoken about her expeditions to varied audiences, from small groups of third-graders to large audiences of potential Young Explorer candidates.

Her talks feature her photographs, which she selects to suit the particular group or occasion. As someone who majored in social work, she is concerned about people's lives, and she realized that, through her photography, she could tell the personal stories of people whose lives were affected by natural disasters. She says,

Studying social work in school has made me really passionate about giving a voice to people who feel they cannot be heard. Through both my tsunami and Hurricane Katrina photo projects, I've realized that post-natural disaster communities are often forgotten about or pushed aside in the wake of more recent news stories. I strongly believe that how a community recovers (or does not recover) is just as important as the disaster itself. Photographically documenting these communities and individuals seems to give personal stories and experiences a voice through an artistic and tangible venue.

Skinner says she is a "really visual person," and she selects her photographs to tell particular stories that are tailored to her audience. For example, when she gave a presentation to a group of third-graders, her talk focused not on natural disasters, but about the process of photography; she selected both "good" and "bad" photographs, and engaged the students in a discussion of what they liked or didn't like about the photos. For older

audiences, she talks about the people she met and tries to convey both individual and community stories of disaster and rebuilding; her stories also describes how she was able to make connections across cultures through her photography. In Indonesia, she photographed the top of a mosque that had been carried nine miles from a village and landed in the middle of a rice paddy. She said, "I went that night and all the stars were out, and so I have a picture of the top of this mosque in a rice field with all of the stars overhead, and that picture to me was very special," since it reminds her of the people she met, their stories, and their resilience.²

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Skinner turned her hobby, photography, into a way to raise awareness, advocate for change, and stimulate public discussion and dialogue. What interests of your own, or your classmates, could be used in a similar way to stimulate the public dialogue on important issues?
2. The severity of recent natural disasters has made this phenomenon a common topic in our public deliberations. What are the different aspects of natural disasters that you might consider developing into a speech and what would your purpose be in giving a speech on natural disasters be?

Although mass media and journalists are viewed as the voice of the people, increasingly individuals are inserting their own voices into public discussions. Individuals use blogs, twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and more to participate in public discussions. In educational settings, we give class presentations and participate in student government. In social gatherings, we offer toasts and congratulations to others, or we debate current issues. In business and professional meetings, we discuss ideas and create plans. And in community forums, we speak about the environment, population growth, education, and the like.

When people decide to speak, as students throughout history have, they generally speak about issues central to their lives and well-being. To decide to speak publicly is to decide you can offer an audience important knowledge or a valuable perspective.

Being Asked to Speak

To be asked to speak is probably the most flattering context for a public speaker. When we are asked to speak, we are asked to share important experiences, our expertise, or our perspectives with others. When we are asked to speak, we are recognized as experts or at least as persons who have information others want. As you move through life, you might find you are asked to speak in educational settings, at service clubs, or at formal or professional gatherings. But remember that although you may be considered an expert, you'll be a more successful speaker if you follow the principles of speech preparation discussed in this book. Expertise in a particular subject area does not always guarantee you are an expert at giving speeches.

Being Required to Speak

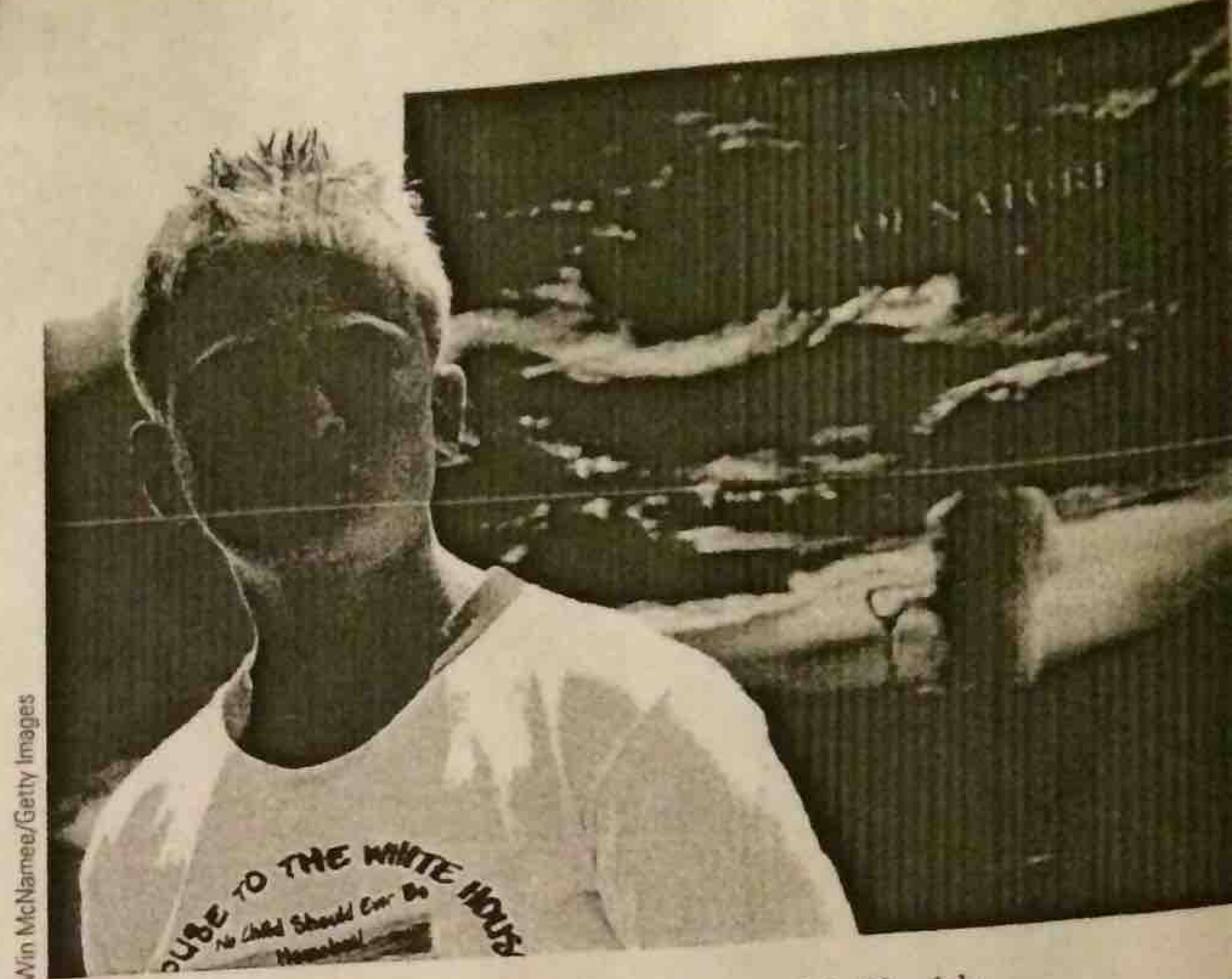
Being required to speak can be a regular part of our lives. For example, you're now taking a public speaking course that requires you to give speeches. But outside the public speaking class, you may have a job that requires public speaking, such as in marketing or as a tour guide. Occasionally, you may have to fulfill a civic or legal obligation, such as speaking before a Senate hearing or as part of a jury.

When you are required to speak, you often must follow strict guidelines. For example, in a professional setting, your boss may limit the amount of time and even your speaking goal when you speak at a meeting. In a typical public speaking assignment, you may be asked to give an informative speech that is three minutes long, cites two sources, and includes a visual aid. Although we may not like required public speaking, learning to give speeches in a public speaking course can be invaluable. If you view a classroom speaking requirement as an opportunity to prepare for other speaking contexts, you can make the most of the time you spend in class. In a public speaking course, you are given structure and guidance that can help you improve your presentational skills and participate in the public dialogue.

These three contexts—deciding, being asked, and being required to speak—are the reasons people enter the public dialogue. Understanding how you become a public speaker is the first step in preparing a successful presentation. Once you recognize why you are speaking, you can turn your attention to selecting and narrowing your speech topic and deciding on your purpose for speaking.

Choosing Your Speech Topic

Your **speech topic** is the subject of your speech. Selecting a topic for a speech can be a very creative and energizing part of putting a speech together. With a little systematic thought and inventive organization, speakers often come up with a wide range of interesting speech topics. By now, you've probably discovered in your public



After Hurricane Charley hit Florida in 2004, six-year-old Zach Bonner was motivated to help out by distributing water to families in need. He's been helping people ever since. Now sixteen, one of his most recent—and impressive—feats has been a solo cross-country walk from Florida to California to raise awareness and funds for homeless kids. As a result of his work and his experiences, he has been asked to speak publicly many times. For what reasons do you think you might be asked to speak? Can you think of experiences or expertise you have that you might be asked to speak about? If you weren't asked, would you decide or choose to speak about them in a required setting, such as your speech class?

GOOD TO KNOW!

speech topic: Subject of your speech.

tip National Geographic Explorer



BECCA SKINNER, Young Explorer, Photographer
How much preparation time goes into your presentations?
And how does your preparation time vary between shorter
or longer presentations?

I think I have spent more time on the shorter presentations, because it's difficult for me to cut it down and to share the really important parts and all of my favorite photographs. I probably spend anywhere from two to seven hours working on presentations, and then I prep multiple, multiple times before I give them.

speaking course that you need to choose a topic of interest to both you and your audience. The steps described in this section will help you find interesting and relevant speech topics for your required speeches. When you decide or are asked to speak, your topic is usually predetermined. Your task in these contexts is to make sure you understand your topic fully. You can do this by asking yourself several questions, which are discussed at the end of this section.

The Classroom Setting

Before you can select an appropriate and interesting topic for your assigned speech, you must consider the requirements of your assignment. Assigned speeches usually have several constraints because they are presented in a classroom setting.

- *Preselected purpose.* An instructor usually tells you to give a particular type of speech such as a speech to inform or persuade. You do not have the freedom to select your speech purpose, and you must select a topic compatible with the purpose.
- *Time limits.* Class size determines speech length; your instructor wants to make sure everyone in the class has time to give their speeches. Classroom speeches often last only a few minutes, and you may be penalized for going over time. You must select and narrow your topic to satisfy the assignment's time limits.
- *Highly structured assignment.* You're usually asked to incorporate several specific speech components. You may be required to cite a specific number of outside sources, use visual aids, incorporate a specific style of language, or use a particular organizational pattern. The structure of an assigned speech often influences topic selection.
- *Instructor as an audience.* You give your classroom speeches to an instructor who is already a skilled public speaker. You must select a stimulating topic that your instructor, who has listened to many other speeches, will appreciate.
- *Class members as an audience.* Your classmates may become the best audience for you as a beginning public speaker. They're also learning the ropes of public speaking, and they'll appreciate your diligent efforts. But they can also be a challenge because they are also searching for interesting topics, so try to avoid commonly used topics.

So how do you select a manageable, interesting, and dynamic topic for your required speeches? The process takes a bit of planning and effort, but you will discover that you have a wealth of usable ideas once you organize your thoughts about who you are, what you know, and what issues and events capture your own attention.

Choosing Your Topic and Staying Audience Centered

One of the most basic ways to select a topic for a required speech is to make a list of your interests and give a speech about one of them. In this section, you'll discover that with some care and time, you can build on this basic process to come up with unique and exciting slants on topics that at first may seem uninteresting.

In a public speaking classroom, the first step in selecting a topic is to outline the requirements of the speech assignment. Write down your speech requirements at the top of your computer screen page or a piece of paper. Your assignment might look like this:

Informative purpose; four minutes long; three to four sources; one statistic; one of the following: metaphor, analogy, narrative, or alliteration; inclusive language.

The second step is to match your interests or expertise to these requirements.

Matching your interests to a speaking assignment. Before you can match your interests to a particular assignment, you must determine what they are. Divide your interests into the following categories: what you like to do, what you like to talk about, and what you would like to know more about.

Most people can identify many activities they like to participate in. Make a list of them, including those that seem serious as well as playful or silly. Try to be as detailed as possible. Krista, a twenty-three-year-old college senior, likes to do the following:

- swim, run, cycle
- play soccer, volleyball, tennis, and Frisbee golf
- snowboard, skateboard, and hike
- watch television and movies
- Facebook
- spend time with her friends
- coach children in sports during the summer
- get good grades
- stay up late
- eat pizza, hamburgers, anything barbecued, and some vegetables

With a little adjustment and creativity, any of these interests could be turned into an interesting informative topic. Krista could inform her audience about any of the following:

- the top ten medal-earning swimmers in the world
- the history of marathon running
- how to play Frisbee golf
- who invented skateboards
- the longest-running television sitcom
- the first chat room on the Web
- gender differences in friendship styles
- the relationship between grades and annual income
- medical research on optimal sleeping patterns
- the origins of pizza



Public speaking instructors and students might hear eighty or more speeches in a single course. Try to think about who is in your audience and select your speech topics carefully so that your speech stands out.

These are just a few of the many informative topics Krista could speak about, all relevant to her instructor, her classmates, and the public dialogue.

Another good way to find speech topics is to take inventory of what you like to talk about. To do this, ask yourself the following questions:

- When do you find yourself participating in discussions?
- When do you feel like you have a lot to say about an issue but don't speak up?
- What topics do you raise in conversations?
- What topics do you repeatedly return to or seek more information about?

For example, Keenan loves to talk about basketball. He could turn this very broad topic into a dynamic speech by going beyond the obvious. What does he love about the sport? Is it the players' skill, the strategy of the game, the politics of athletics, or the behaviors of sports fans? He could fashion a speech out of any of these topics:

- evolution of basketball as a sport
- advantages and disadvantages of starting children in the sport at a young age
- money behind the game
- balance between athletic talent and game strategy
- role of sports fans in supporting individual teams

With some creativity and effort, Keenan could turn his love of basketball into an informative, invitational, or persuasive speech.

Issues, events, people, and ideas you are curious about also often make excellent speech topics. You could give a speech that informs others of a particular event, or you could persuade them to participate in that event. If you are intrigued by a famous person, you could give a commemorative or informative speech about that person's life and accomplishments. If you are curious about a place, an idea, an object, or an animal, you could explore it with others in an informative or invitational speech. If you participate in an activity or have always wanted to do so, you could give a persuasive, informative, or invitational speech about it. Speeches that grow out of a speaker's curiosity often capture the attention, interest, and curiosity of an audience as well.

Matching your expertise to a speech assignment. *Expertise* can be an intimidating label, but whether we realize it or not, almost everyone is an expert in some area of life. Some people are experts in obvious ways, such as playing a musical instrument, painting, or computer programming. Other people are experts in less obvious ways. They may have an unfailing sense of direction, know the right gift to buy for any occasion, or tell hilarious jokes. Dynamic speech topics can come from your own skills and talents. Consider the following examples:

- Tomás is an excellent cook. He decides to give an informative speech on the differences between traditional Bolivian and Spanish foods.
- April is fluent in American Sign Language. She decides to give a speech persuading her audience to learn a second language.
- Rachael comes from a family of artists. She decides to give a speech inviting her audience to support the arts.
- Gardner is a mechanic. He decides to give a commemorative speech on nineteenth-century French inventor Gustave Trouvé, the creator of the first automobile powered by electricity.

These are interesting speech topics about activities or skills that may seem mundane to the person who has them. You can identify areas in which you may be considered an expert by asking yourself the following questions:

- What comes naturally to me?
- What runs in my family?
- Do I often get compliments when I do a particular thing?

- Do others repeatedly ask me to take the lead, take care of some situation, or solve a problem for them?
- Have I ever had special training or lessons?
- Have I spent years studying, practicing, or doing something?
- Do I have degrees, certifications, licenses, or other markers of my accomplishments?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be an expert in some area that would make an interesting topic for a required speech. Although not all of our experiences make us experts, you might find you have expertise because of an event you've witnessed or an environment you've been in. Consider these possibilities:

- Did you live or grow up in another country?
- Did you play sports in high school or college?
- Is there something about your family that is unique or unusual?
- Have you had unexpected or momentous experiences in your life?
- Have you been exposed to different cultures, religions, and philosophies?

Situations like these can generate short speeches that satisfy the requirements of an assignment, capture the attention of your instructor and classmates, and relate directly to the public dialogue. A few final tips: As you translate your experiences into speech topics, be certain you can talk about them easily without getting upset or revealing more than you are comfortable with. And note that although you might know a lot about a topic, you should still research it to discover interesting aspects about which you might be unaware.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is the process of generating ideas randomly and uncritically, without attention to logic, connections, or relevance. This process requires you to free-associate rather than plan, and it is often used as a problem-solving strategy in business settings. Brainstorming can be an effective tool for coming up with speech topics in required speaking situations, and you can use this technique by yourself, in pairs, or in groups. Here are some tips for successful brainstorming:

- Let your thoughts go where they will. Don't censor yourself or others. Allow all ideas, even those that seem trivial or odd.
- Write down your ideas quickly. Don't worry about spelling or punctuation, and abbreviate whenever you can.
- Keep your list handy over the course of several days, and add to it as new thoughts come to you.

There are several ways to approach brainstorming: by free association, by clustering, by categories, and by technology.

Brainstorming by free association. Brainstorming can be as unstructured as sitting at your desk with a pencil and paper, or at your computer with a blank screen, and recording all ideas that come to your mind. Although it might take a moment for the first idea to come to mind, more will follow in rapid succession.

Brainstorming on a computer is especially effective because many people can type faster than they can write in longhand. When you record your ideas quickly, your thoughts also flow quickly. If you use a computer, consider starting by free-associating with the computer screen turned off. Sometimes, the blank screen allows you to free-associate without the pressure of filling up a blank page. At other times, seeing your ideas on the screen stimulates your thinking and spurs

GOOD TO KNOW!

brainstorming: Process of generating ideas randomly and uncritically, without attention to logic, connections, or relevance.

Using a busy image like this as a basis for brainstorming can yield a lot of good ideas for speech topics. What possible topics come to mind when you consider the details of this photo? Can you narrow your ideas down to one interesting topic that would interest your audience and contribute to the public dialogue?

Bryan Busovicki/Shutterstock.com



additional ideas.³ After only a minute, a typical free association list might look like this:

hands, keyboard, letters, movement, running, wind, kites, children, play, laughter, skinned knees, Band-Aids, nurses, hospitals, sterile, feral cats, tiger, cougars, wilderness, encroachment, farming, ranching, cows, cowboys, rodeos, circus, clowns, entertainment, containment, buckets, garage, car, war, peace, hostility, conflict, harm, warm, cold, snow skiing, skis, lifts, chairs, dining rooms, meals, holidays, families, celebration, gifts

A free association list can go on and on until you run out of ideas. When you're trying to come up with a speech topic, try to spend at least several minutes brainstorming by free association to generate as many ideas as possible. Once you've compiled your list, explore it to determine if one of your ideas might be an appropriate speech topic. The free association list here could generate the following interesting speech topics:

- the inventor of Band-Aids
- what to do when you encounter a feral cat
- different kinds of clowns
- how different countries celebrate holidays or the starts of new seasons

If brainstorming by free association doesn't generate the kinds of topics you think might make an interesting speech, other techniques might help.

Brainstorming by clustering. Clustering is a visual way to brainstorm. Write down an idea in the center of a piece of paper and then draw four or five lines extending from it. At the ends of these lines, write down other ideas that relate to your first idea. Then extend lines from these new ideas to even more ideas. Let's take a look at Jeret's clustering diagram. He began scuba diving at a very young age, so he used this as his general idea and developed the cluster of ideas in Figure 3.1.

Brainstorming by categories. Most speeches given in public speaking classrooms are about concepts, events, natural phenomena, objects, people, places, plans and policies, problems, and processes. As you've probably noticed, these topics represent different categories. Brainstorming by categories is an excellent way to generate a speech topic, and it provides more structure than free association or clustering. To brainstorm by categories, list the following nine categories on your computer screen or a piece of paper. Then list five or six different words

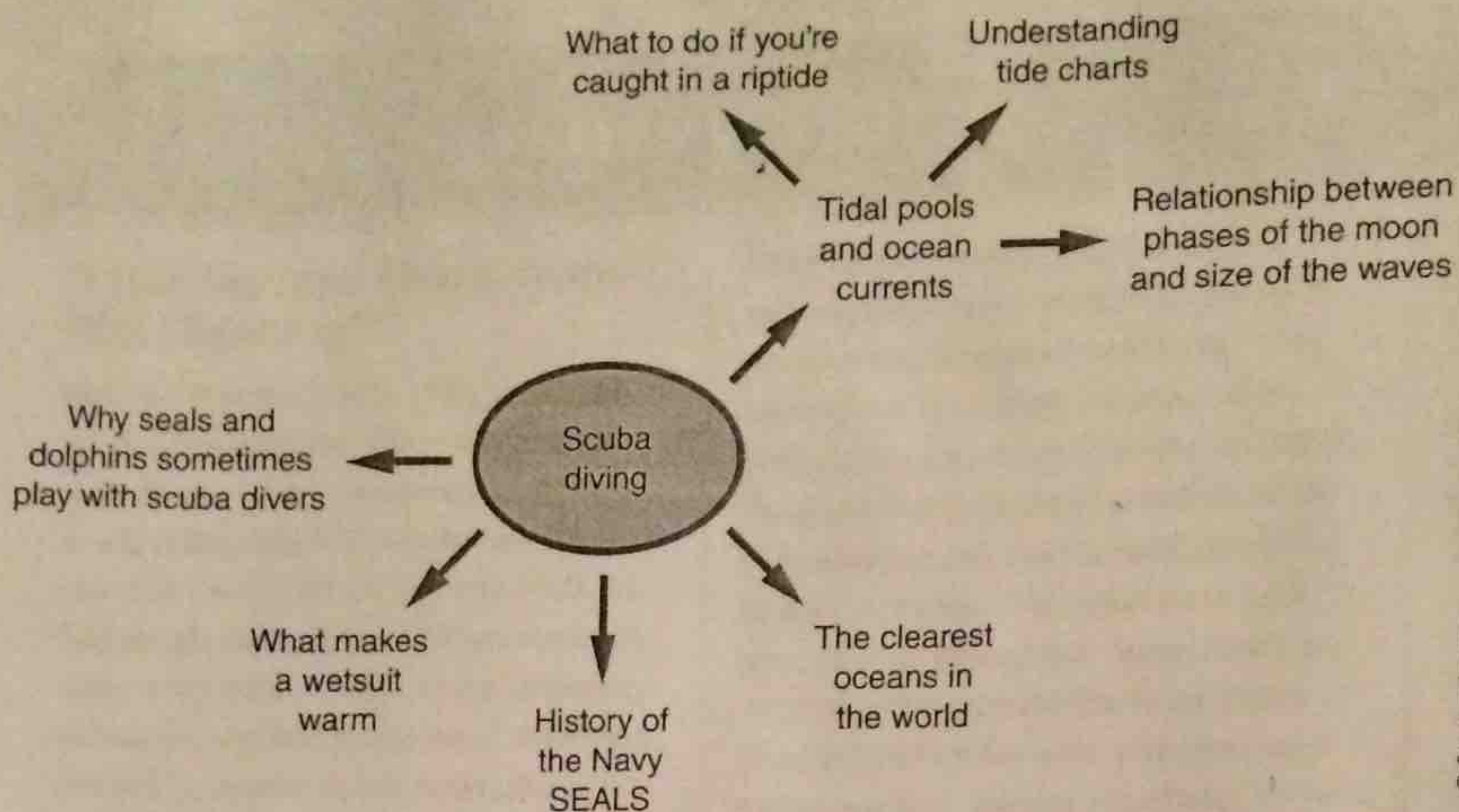


Figure 3.1 Cluster diagram

The figure shows that from scuba diving, his general idea, Jeret was able to branch out to many additional ideas. Brainstorming by clustering is a good way to generate speech topics because it gives some structure to the brainstorming process without limiting your possibilities too much.

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under each heading that fit into the indicated categories. Two students working together came up with this list:

Concepts	Events	Natural phenomena
socialism	Hurricane Sandy	tornadoes
tourism	Stop Online Piracy Act	eclipses
sustainability	Internet Blackout	monsoons
astrophysics	Walk for the Cure	geysers
dieting	Mardi Gras	mudslides
long-distance relationships	Inti Raymi (Incan Festival of the Sun)	glaciers
Objects	People	Places
cell phones	Atlanta Hawks' Jason Collins's coming out	my hometown
guitars	Barack Obama	Machu Picchu
cars	Aamir Kahn	Germany
films of M. Night Shyamalan	Tiger Woods	China
Japanese teapots	Marissa Mayer	Tanzania
mountains	Roya Mahboob	Stonehenge
Plans and policies	Problems	Processes
universal health care	terrorism	brewing beer
government stimulus plans	sexism	building a house
gun control	racism	preparing a meal
sex education	cancer	debating versus dialoguing
censorship laws	obesity	making electricity

If none of the words you write down immediately strikes you as a good speech topic, select one or two and use free association or clustering to narrow your scope, generate new ideas, or frame the topic in a way that is interesting and fits the requirements of your assignment.

Similarly, if none of your brainstormed topics catches your interest, link several of them together. Can you find a connection among Mexico, India, and your hometown? What about these locations and tsunamis or earthquakes? How about laptops,

“I Had No Idea That Anyone Was Listening”

Wangari Maathai (1940–2011), the daughter of a sharecropper father and a farmer mother, was often considered something of a first lady. She is the first woman from East and Central Africa to earn a Ph.D. (in biological sciences); the first woman to become a department chair of the University of Nairobi; the first president of the African Union’s Economic, Social, and Cultural Council; and the first African woman to earn a Nobel Peace Prize.

Maathai began her impressive career as an environmental and political activist in the 1970s. As part of her work with the National Council of Women of Kenya, Maathai established the Green Belt Movement in response to her conversations with rural women about their concerns over water, energy, and nutrition. Seeing the connections between the clear-cutting of forests and the diminished quality of life for many in Kenya, she began to lead high-profile campaigns to save Kenya’s forests and protect its green spaces. Working with thousands of other women, she planted trees to replenish the soil, protect the watersheds, provide fuel, and enhance nutrition. “If you understand and you are disturbed,” she said, “then you are moved to action. That’s exactly what happened to me.”

The government responded to the movement by harassing Maathai and many

other women, holding them in jail and sending them death threats. At one point, Maathai was labeled a “mad woman” and beaten almost to death. However, these setbacks did not stop her. By the late 1990s, the government had abandoned its illegal deforestation and development plans and, to date, more than 30 million trees have been planted throughout Kenya. However, when Maathai received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her work with the Green Belt Movement, she was surprised. She said, “I had no idea that anyone was listening.”

As the Green Belt Movement’s official website states, the movement has evolved into “one of the most prominent women’s civil society organizations, . . . advocating for human rights and supporting good governance and peaceful democratic change through the protection of the environment.” Maathai explains this evolution by saying, “When you start working with the environment seriously, the whole arena comes: human rights, women’s rights, environmental rights, children’s rights—you know, everybody’s rights. Once you start making these linkages, you can no longer do just tree-planting.”⁴



YOU CAN GET INVOLVED



MindTap™ If you’d like to learn more about the Green Belt Movement and



Patrick Robert/Corbis

Wangari Maathai

how you might contribute to its work in Kenya and around the world, access **Web Connect 3.1: Green Belt Movement**. For information about other organizations that work to conserve the environment, access **Web Connect 3.2: Environmental Action Groups**. This resource is sponsored by the National Resources Defense Council, a nonprofit environmental action organization. You can access these resources through your MindTap for *Invitation to Public Speaking*.

espresso machines, and theme dining? Linking any of these topics, randomly or with purpose, gives you additional opportunities to develop interesting speech topics.

Brainstorming by technology. You can use technology in a number of ways to find a suitable speech topic. Popular search engines can help you explore an array of topics: enter a term, click a general subject, and link to more and more specific websites until you find a topic that interests you and fits the requirements of your speech assignment.

Libraries also provide many online indexes for journals, newspapers, magazines, and the like. Browse through the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*, *The New York Times Index*, or subject-specific indexes about medicine, physics, science, or women’s studies. (In Chapter 5, you’ll explore how to use these types of resources more fully.)

Narrowing Your Topic

When we speak, we are responding to an issue we are interested in or concerned about. When we speak, we are sharing our views and concerns with an audience. Sometimes, we decide to speak about issues that are complex or controversial or

issues that are multifaceted and with long histories. When select your topic, take a moment to ask yourself the following questions:

- What *exactly* is the topic of my speech? If I have decided to speak, or if I'm required to speak, what specific topic do I want to talk about? If I have been asked to speak, what specific topic does my audience want to hear about?
- Can I discuss this topic in the time allowed, or do I need to narrow or broaden my scope? Is there some aspect of this topic that I might be better able to cover in the time allowed?
- Who is my audience? What is my relationship to my audience? If I've decided to speak, am I qualified to speak about this topic? Will my audience see me as qualified? If not, could I change my topic or strengthen my qualifications in some way? If I've been asked to speak, why am I qualified to speak about this topic?

These questions will help you focus and narrow your topic so it is appropriate for your speaking situation. They'll also help you better understand why you want to speak or why you've been asked to speak and what you're most qualified and prepared to speak about.

Whether you take inventory of your interests and skills, use brainstorming techniques, decide what you are motivated to speak about, or are given a topic to speak about, recognize that you are capable of generating any number of speech topics. With a little bit of creativity and organization, you can come up with speech topics that are interesting and relevant to the public dialogue.

Articulating Your Purpose

There are many different types of speaking: speaking to inform, invite, or persuade and speaking on special occasions and in small groups. For each of these speaking types, the speaker has a different goal: to inform, invite, and persuade or to introduce, commemorate, and accept. These are the goals we focus on in this chapter. Note that as a speaker in or as part of a small group, your speaking goal generally falls into one of these six categories. As such, we'll save the discussion of small group speaking's unique components until the appendix at the end of this book.

Speaking goals can be explained in terms of general purposes and specific purposes. The **general purpose** of a speech is its broad goal: to inform, invite, persuade, introduce, commemorate, or accept. The **specific purpose** is a focused statement that identifies exactly what a speaker wants to accomplish with a speech. Let's take a look at how you use each of these purposes to organize your thoughts about your speeches.

General Speaking Purposes

Suppose your instructor asks you to speak about organic farming. You could speak about many aspects of this topic. Without knowing your purpose for your speech, it can be difficult to know where to begin. Do you describe organic farming, what it is, and who practices it (informative)? Do you ask your audience to explore the impact of organic farming on the environment and the average family's grocery bills (invitational)? Do you attempt to convince your classmates that organic farming is the most efficient type of farming (persuasive)? Do you commemorate organic farming or something about it (commemorative)? Your first step toward answering these questions is to determine the overall goal for your speech, or your general purpose:

To *inform*: describe, clarify, explain, define

To *invite*: explore, discuss, dialogue, understand

To *persuade*: change, shape, influence, motivate

To *introduce*: acquaint, present, familiarize

To *commemorate*: praise, honor, pay tribute

To *accept*: receive an award, express gratitude

GOOD TO KNOW!

general purpose: Speech's broad goal: to inform, invite, persuade, introduce, commemorate, or accept.

specific purpose: Focused statement that identifies exactly what a speaker wants to accomplish with a speech.