



# Gathering Information & Materials

by

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The most difficult and also the most important part of making a presentation is actually getting started.

Your first step is to *collect* and *read* as much *information* as possible about your subject. Take notes.

The next step involves *selecting the information* and *deciding how much of it* you will present. To accomplish this, you need to know how long your talk will be. Naturally, the amount of material you will discuss in an hour differs from the amount you will handle in a full-day presentation; however, the format or structure should be the same in both cases.

*Deciding on the format* is your next step. It is at this point that you need to decide how and in what sequence you will present the material you have chosen.

Other matters to consider are:

1. What visuals will I use?
2. Where will I stand when I speak?
3. How can I present the material clearly and in an interesting fashion?

When asked to speak in public, the first things some people think about are: "What am I going to wear?", "Will there be a lot of people there?" "What if I mess up?"

These are all important questions, but they represent just a small part of what needs to be taken into consideration when preparing a presentation.

### **Quality Speech Material**

We often ask ourselves, "What if my speech is not good enough?" If we construct our speeches with care and properly prepare and practice, our speech material will always be good.

Don't be afraid to take risks and present new material. Remember, practice makes perfect.

### ***Speech Preparation as a Process***

Genuine speech preparation means digging something out of yourself. You need to both gather facts and arrange your thoughts. It is not enough to simply collect ideas. You must also nurture them and reflect on how to present them in a unique, organized manner.

A speech needs time to grow. Prepare for weeks. Sleep on your topic, dream about it and let your ideas sink into your subconscious. Ask yourself questions. Write down your thoughts. Keep adding new ideas.

Once you've determined your purpose for delivering this speech, state the purpose in a sentence and focus your speech around that purpose. Ask yourself, "How does this purpose relate to the audience?"

Let your purpose drive your speech

Try to come up with a good title, too. Aim not only to inform your listeners, but also persuade them.

As you prepare each presentation, you should develop a simple and orderly outline. You will need to decide the sequence you will follow from these organizational patterns:

- Sequential
- Categorical
- Problem and solution
- Contrast and comparison

In developing the sequence of your presentation, mind-mapping or webbing techniques can be very useful. Remember to decide, too, on the transitions between sections and examples you will use. Real-life anecdotes can be particularly effective.

The use of personal stories always works best for my audiences. Most professional speakers always use personal stories and quite often it is a personal story that becomes their "signature" story.

To be successful it is extremely important to start gathering information as soon as possible. Many people ask me, "Lenny, how far in advance should I begin preparing for my speech?" I always tell them, "You should begin preparing your speech the moment they ask you to speak!" The sooner you begin the more time you will have to practice your speech.

I'd like to leave you with one of my favorite Mark Twain stories. As many of you may or may not know, Mark Twain was a great speaker. In fact, Mark Twain is one of the earliest known professional speakers and when asked one day if he could prepare a speech for an upcoming engagement, he responded, "If you want me to speak for an hour, I am ready today." "If you want me to speak for just a few minutes, it will take me a few weeks to prepare."

As with most speakers, it usually takes more time to prepare a short version of a speech than a longer one. When you prepare your next speech, try preparing two - one that will run approximately one hour and one that will only run 10 minutes. You will find that Mark Twain was right. " In either case, you must gather your facts and decide on what is most important.

For more tips on the speech preparation process, read my [Speech Preparation Questions](#).

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