

Build Confidence: Impromptu Speeches

Brief: Delivering an impromptu speech, such as a speech of self-introduction, is a wonderful way to practice being self-confident.

Learning Objective: Understand the purpose and benefits of impromptu speeches.

Key Terms:

- **Impromptu speech:** A type of speech that occurs when the speaker is given very little (or no) time to prepare; he or she is given a topic and is expected to immediately begin speaking on it.
- **Self-introduction speech:** A speech in which you introduce yourself to an audience, often delivered in an impromptu manner.

What is an Impromptu Speaking?

Impromptu speaking occurs when the speaker is given very little (or no) time to prepare to give a speech; he or she is given a topic and is expected to immediately begin speaking on it. This speaking style involves thinking on your feet and being able to determine the flow of the speech as you give it.

While the thought of giving a speech “off the cuff” may seem scary, consider that most of the speech you engage in your daily life is impromptu. We generally don’t conduct background research on conversation topics with friends or prepare for hours before speaking to them.

Usually, when we’re asked to give an impromptu speech, it’s because we’re already knowledgeable about the subject. A common example is when you’re called on to speak in class to give a short impromptu speech about a topic that was covered in the assigned readings.

In the professional world, impromptu meetings are commonplace. Businesses often use “check in” meetings to make sure everyone is informed about current projects. In a small informal meeting, participants will interrupt and ask questions, which help guide the speech and the information that is presented. When campaigning, politicians are expected to be able to respond to reporters or voters, almost anywhere and at any time.

Advantages of Impromptu Speaking

When you are asked to give an impromptu speech, you generally know a lot about the topic, so you can choose what you want to focus on. Everyone knows you haven’t had time to do research, so you’re not expected to cite sources. Instead, you can rely heavily on examples from personal experience to support what you are saying.

Because you haven't had time to prepare, your delivery will naturally be more conversational and spontaneous. And, because you are not prepared with pages of notes, you are more likely to speak directly to the audience as if you were speaking to another person in a conversation. Delivering an impromptu speech is a wonderful way to practice being self-confident. As the saying goes, "Fake it until you make it." Since you're the authority on the topic, you have permission to speak with conviction—like you really mean it.

Self-Introduction Speech

At the beginning of a new class, many instructors will ask you to introduce yourself to the rest of the class. This type of speech, known as a speech of self-introduction, is an excellent opportunity to develop confidence as a speaker. Often a speech of self-introduction is impromptu, given at the spur of the moment.



To prepare for a self-introduction speech, you will want to isolate a few aspects of your life, personality, or beliefs that reflect favorably on you. The process of deciding what to leave in, and what to leave out, is called impression management. By deciding what you choose to share, you manage your audience's impression of you. Do you want to convey the qualities of competence, integrity, good humor, power, or some combination?

The speech of self-introduction requires a general theme or purpose. Consider the following question areas for developing the speech:

- Geographic locations: Have you been shaped by where you grew up or by your culture?
- Important people: Who has made a great impact on you?
- Experience: Has some unique experience shaped your life?
- Activities: Do you enjoy a meaningful activity or hobby?
- Career or work: Are you largely defined by what you do for work?
- Values: Do you have some values that are important in your life?
- Goals: Do you have an overwhelming purpose in your life that defines what you do?

You'll want to be certain that you've included an effective introduction and conclusion. Your speech of self-introduction should begin with an introduction, rather than just listing your biographical information. Similarly, your conclusion should summarize the theme or purpose of your speech.

From Concept to Action

You have five minutes to prepare a self-introduction speech. Consider the questions listed in the section on self-introduction speeches. What theme or purpose do you want to emphasize? Jot a few ideas on a piece of paper. Think of two or three personal examples that you can include to support your theme or purpose. Remember, you'll need to create an introduction, body, and conclusion—just like in a longer, planned speech. When your five minutes of planning are up, be sure to actually deliver your self-introduction speech out loud!

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Nice to Meet You Introduction Meet Greeting Meeting." Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/nice-to-meet-you-introduction-meet-1185863>. Accessed 21 March 2019. [CC0]

OER TEXT SOURCES:

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"Sample Assessment: Speech of Self-Introduction." Lumen Learning. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/el Paso-publicspeaking/chapter/sample-assessment-speech-of-self-introduction>. Accessed 21 March 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]