

GCSE



# GCSE English Language: Speaking & Listening

Speaking and Listening advice for Students



## Tips and advice for students when preparing to give a speech

### Good organisation

When you are preparing your speech, firstly gather together all the information you want to include and do any research you think is necessary. For example, if you were asked to prepare a talk to promote a particular charity, e.g. NSPCC, you could collect leaflets, check their website, talk to someone involved with the charity, etc.



When you have collected all the information you need, then you need to decide what clear line of argument you want to present. Organise all your information into the best possible order to present your argument. Nothing annoys an audience more than a speech that seems to wander all over the place. Listeners will quickly lose interest if your speech is confused and difficult to follow.

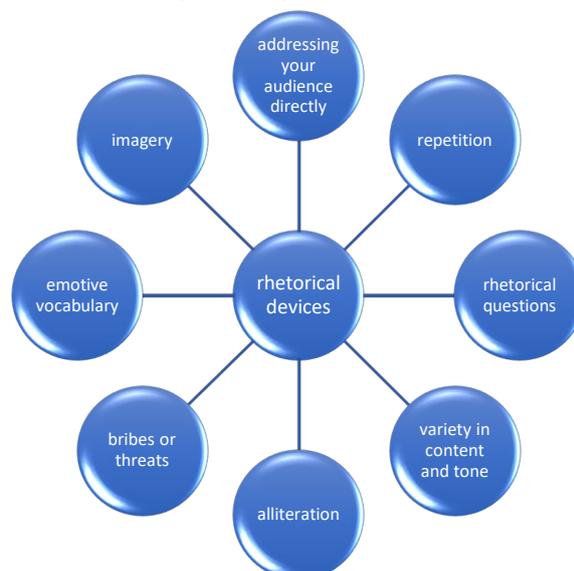
### An interesting opening

The first 30 seconds of a speech is important. If the audience is bored by your opening, it will be very difficult to win them back later. Rather than begin with a flat statement, such as: "I am here today to talk to you about the NSPCC", try to think of a more interesting or arresting introduction. For example:

- a) You could begin with a funny or interesting or shocking anecdote/story, e.g. a story about the sufferings of a particular child.
- b) You could start with a personal comment, perhaps explaining to the audience why you have a personal interest in this charity.
- c) You could devise an unusual lead-in which would bring the audience to the topic from a surprising angle, e.g. ask them to think about the amount of money they spent at the weekend - perhaps get them to add it all up - and then tell them how much it would take to provide shelter for needy children, pointing out how a small sacrifice on their behalf could mean a great deal to these children.
- d) You could ask for 'active' responses, e.g. for them to raise their hand if they owned a mobile phone before they started post primary school.

### Be rhetorical

The selection of some rhetorical devices below is probably familiar to you and you may already use them in your written work. They can be just as effective when delivering a speech:



It is not necessary to use all of these devices, but a sensible selection will give your speech a lot of impact.

- **Addressing your audience directly:** at the start of your speech and during it, try addressing your listeners -  
“Fellow students...”, “Residents of Enniskillen...”, “Friends...”, “Ladies and Gentlemen...”,  
“Brothers and Sisters...” or whatever is appropriate to your speech.

Your **aim** is to make your audience feel involved and prepared to take a personal interest.

- **Repetition:** experiment with repeating a key word or phrase during your speech. Think of the impact Martin Luther King achieved by repeating “*I have a dream today*” in his great Civil Rights speech.

Your **aim** is to ensure that your listeners remember your key message and by remembering the repeated word or phrase or slogan, they will recall it.

- **Rhetorical questions:** employing questions which don’t require an answer or maybe have the answer built into them can intrigue and engage your audience –  
“Isn’t it a shame that we can spend all that money on ourselves and think nothing of children starving in our towns?”, “What are you prepared to do help these children?”, “How much did you spend on junk food and fizzy drinks at the weekend?”



Your **aim** is to provoke your listeners into thinking more carefully about your topic.

- **Variety in content and tone:** a listener’s attention span is usually quite short, so it is important to use different ways of presenting your information and arguments. You could include statistics (but do not over-do this as most people can only remember a few significant figures and will forget the others quickly). Break up sections which are heavy with information with personal anecdotes – these could be funny or sad stories depending on your topic.

Your **aim** is to keep your audience listening by surprising them with unusual twists and turns in your talk.

- **Alliteration:** using the same sound at the beginning of words can add emphasis to your points –  
“Football is for the feeble”, “Soccer is for superheroes”, “Misery; Money; Merriment”,  
“Carelessness; Caution; Cure.”

Your **aim** is to help them remember these important points and perhaps provide further explanation.

- **Bribes or threats:** these, of course, are not physical, rather they are clever verbal forms of persuasion which encourage your audience to agree with your perspective –  
“If you are prepared to back my proposal for a new shopping centre, I can promise you a whole world of exciting shops, along with great savings and 24-hour services.”  
This technique can also work when presenting the opposite point of view –  
“If you support this proposal for a shopping centre, you’d better be prepared for the hectic traffic, the litter and the non-stop noise pollution.”

Your **aim** is to coax your listeners into accepting your point of view and to support your proposals.

- **Emotive vocabulary:** try to include words which are designed to provoke an emotional response. This kind of language would seem over the top or over-emotional if you used it at length in an essay, but in a speech it can be used more freely and can sound striking and persuasive. You might use words such as – agony, misery, suffering, passion, freedom, triumph, ecstasy, glory, etc.

Your **aim** is to appeal to the emotions of your listeners and make them ready to agree with what you are suggesting.

- **Imagery:** the inclusion of metaphors and similes can make your speech more vivid and memorable –  
 “The mobile phone is the teenager’s security blanket”, “Getting a new home was like a fairy tale come true”, “If you buy your car from us, you will be driving home a bargain.”

Your **aim** is to startle your audience by the novelty of your imagery - it could be a lot more entertaining than those suggested here - and to make your listeners pay close attention to what you are saying.

### A striking conclusion

Plan your speech so that you can end on a high point. A good opening to your speech is crucial, but your conclusion is equally important. It is the last thing your listeners hear so it should be memorable.

Summarising your points at the end is also effective as it ensures your audience is clear about your message. You need to prepare your audience, to let them know that you are coming to the end of your speech. It is embarrassing for a speaker to come to a stop at the end of a speech and be left standing in silence as nobody else realises that it is the end! You can avoid this by guiding your audience in the final section of your speech by using phrases such as:

“In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen...”, “My final point to you today is...”, “If you remember nothing else I have said today, please remember this...”, “Above all else, remember this last message...”.

Finally, finish your speech with an impressive phrase or words of encouragement or appeal.



Very few people can produce an impressive speech without planning, drafting and tweaking. It takes time to craft a speech that will have the impact you want on your listeners. Be patient and allow yourself enough time between completing a draft and then returning to it with ‘fresh eyes’. Practise reading it aloud on your own. How does it sound? Does it flow? Have you made it interesting for *you* to want to listen to it? If not, it’s unlikely to be interesting to others. What can you change?

Once you are happy with the content, you can focus on improving your delivery.

### Delivery

The famous Roman orator and writer, *Cicero* said there were 5 key steps in speech making:

invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.

- 1 **Invention:** determine/decide exactly what you should say
- 2 **Arrangement:** organise your material in an appropriate order (use good judgement)
- 3 **Style:** embellish the content of your speech with well-chosen words and carefully phrased sentences
- 4 **Memory:** rehearse to fix the key points of your speech in your mind (the more familiar you are with the materials, the easier it will be to deliver)
- 5 **Delivery:** presenting your speech with confidence and flair



Once you have completed steps 1 – 3 (use the advice outlined in the first few pages of this document to help you), you’ll be ready to focus on what *Cicero* defines as steps 4 and 5.

**Step 4** - fix the speech in your mind. Despite what Cicero said, it is not necessary to learn your speech off by heart. Nor should you read your speech directly from the page. Remember, you are being assessed for your speaking and listening skills, not your reading skills. Striking a balance is useful, especially as you develop your experience of presenting speeches. To begin with, you will probably want to write it out in full but once you are happy with your speech, consider transferring important points to cue cards (or cut up pieces of file paper) as a memory aid – this will reduce the temptation to ‘read at’ your audience when your aim is to ‘speak to’ your audience.

## FAQs

### **Q. Do I have to write out the whole speech?**

A. No, but it is very difficult to organise all your material in your head and think of how you will present it. Most people, even experienced speakers, need to write out the speech to help get control of what they want to say.

### **Q. Can I have my whole speech with me when I am presenting?**

A. Yes; some people like to have the whole speech with them because it makes them feel more confident and that is quite acceptable. However, don’t make the mistake of simply reading the speech aloud.

### **Q. Why can I not just read the speech?**

A. The Assessment Criteria used for Unit 2 requires you to:

“adapt talk and non-verbal features to meet the needs of different audiences” Level 2

“use non-verbal features to add impact” Level 3

If you are keeping your eyes on the page, you cannot be said to be engaging your listeners or using non-verbal features to meet the needs of the audience; you will simply be giving an exhibition of reading and that is not what is required.

### **Q. If I have my whole speech and look at the audience when I am talking, I’ll not be able to find my place on the page when I want to see what my next point is.**

A. You should go through your speech and highlight or underline your main points, so you can spot them quickly when you glance down.

### **Q. If I don’t want to have my whole speech with me, what is the alternative?**

A. When you have gone through your speech and know it pretty well, write out a key sentence or bullet point for each paragraph or major point. Have these key points with you and they should spark off your memory to recall the rest of your argument.

### **Q. Wouldn’t I be better just to learn my speech off by heart?**

A. This is not necessary. Apart from the fact that it will take a lot of your time, learning off by heart creates its own problems - for example, if you forget your words or forget the next point in your argument, you will feel stranded. You also run the risk of sounding too rehearsed and stiff.

### **Q. Should I have my speech or notes on A4 pages or use cards?**

A. The best technique is to have your speech or notes on postcard size pieces of stiff paper or card. A4 pages are too large and can act as a barrier between you and your audience. In addition, it can be very easy to lose your place in a large page of writing.

Put each major point on a separate card and number the cards to make sure you have the points in the right order. Then you simply have to glance at the next card to see where you are going.

**Step 5** – presenting your speech with confidence and flair. Now that you have prepared what you are going to say, you have to deliver your speech. This can be daunting at first, but if you have prepared carefully, you will be much more confident.

**Remember:**

**Your eyes**



Look at your listeners when you are talking to them. You will want to glance at your cards, but do this as discreetly as possible. Hold your cards at a comfortable distance - for most people this will be about chest height- so that you can see them without bobbing your head up and down. Eye contact is essential for your audience to feel that you are communicating with them and that you are interested in their response. Do not just look at the walls or the ceiling or focus on one or two individuals; try to look around at everyone so that each person feels you are talking to him or her.

**Your voice**

Some people worry about their **accent** but this is not a problem and will not affect your assessment. Students from different areas will sound different, but local accents can be very appealing to an audience. Any unusual local colloquialisms should be avoided, however, as they may not be understood.

Remember that giving a talk is classed as a formal task, so you are expected to use appropriate language and correct grammar:

“show awareness of some main features of Standard English” Level 1

“competent and appropriate use of Standard English” Level 3

“make appropriate, controlled, effective use of standard English vocabulary and grammar” Level 4

Make sure you understand fully how to use commonly confused words such as:

did/done, saw/seen, went/gone

Your voice is your main tool for giving meaning and emphasis to your speech, so try to vary your style of speaking. You should try to avoid any verbal mannerisms - such as repeated fillers: ‘ahm....em....um’ etc. or repeating words like ‘you know’, ‘like’, ‘sort of’, ‘stuff’, ‘I mean’ etc.



The volume of your voice is also important. It must be loud enough for your audience to hear the speech you have spent so much time carefully preparing.

The **pace or speed** of your delivery is also crucial. Nervousness often makes us talk rapidly so it may take some effort to slow down. Your listeners only hear your speech once and if it is delivered too quickly, they will not be able to understand or remember it.

The **tone** of your voice is very important. Try to ensure that you use a variety of tones throughout as listeners can very easily switch off if your tone becomes monotonous.

And finally, your **body language**

Think of the impressive and the not-so-impressive speakers you have watched. Again, it’s about striking a balance:

- if your body is too rigid, you will appear awkward and nervous; too relaxed and it will appear that you are not engaged or interested in your own speech;

- if you prefer to move around a little, then do so - but don't be continually moving around or you will make your audience dizzy and distracted;
- if you want to use hand gestures, then do so - but don't swing your arms or hands around windmill-like or you will look ridiculous.

Physical mannerisms can also be distracting - habits like pushing your hair back repeatedly, swaying when you talk, rubbing your face, etc. are very common, so check if you do any of these and make an effort to avoid them for the time when you are delivering your speech. It is often useful to rehearse your speech in front of a mirror or practise by recording yourself on your mobile phone.