



## INFORMATIVE SPEAKING: Creating a Solid Foundation

*This guide offers tips for making effective choices in Informative Speaking. This guide will focus on the foundational aspects of effective Informative Speaking, to demonstrate what elements make an Informative successful. As of this writing, Informative is still in its first year as a competitive event at the National Speech & Debate Tournament, meaning there is no precedent to draw upon when thinking about a great Informative Speech at NSDA Nationals. This also means that, as a competitor, you have the opportunity to shape how people think about Informative in the coming years, a rare opportunity in an activity comprised of events with long and storied histories. To help you take advantage of this opportunity, this guide will detail structure, visual aids, time, and using ballot to improve your speech.*

### Structure in Informative Speaking

The commonality among most Informative Speaking structures is the presence of an **introduction**, **three main points**, and a **conclusion**. Where speeches differ is what the three main points contain. As opposed to Oratory, where you generally have some combination of problems, causes, and solutions, Informative has a less concrete direction that each speech can follow. Typically, the third main point will be **implications**, or what your topic means to society as a whole. To begin developing a structure, brainstorm what you find interesting about your topic, and write down a list of things you would like to include in your speech. From there, go through the list and start separating it into six different categories. Try to make the categories broad enough to contain lots of information, but distinct enough to keep them separate from one another. Upon completing and categorizing this list, you will have a good idea of how to organize your speech!

To illustrate this concept in action, pretend that you would like to do an Informative on the Fairphone, a European smartphone built with ethically purchased parts and built to last longer than conventional smartphones. You might generate a list like this:

- The most recent Fairphone, the Fairphone 2, is modular (it can be taken apart and have parts replaced easily).
- Availability of the phone, cost, etc.
- The company releases where the minerals needed to create the phone are purchased from, who manufactures the phone and how both of these processes (mining and manufacturing) are handled ethically.
- How could Fairphone affect e-waste?
- How smartphones are normally made.
- History of the company.
- How they differ from other smartphone manufacturers.
- Barriers to entry.
- Is Fairphone going to benefit or compromise itself by setting industry standards?

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From there, this uncategorized list can be changed to a list organized by theme:

1. What Fairphone is:
  - a. History of the company.
    - i. How they differ from other smartphone manufacturers.
  - b. Availability of the phone, cost, etc.
2. What makes Fairphone unique:
  - a. The most recent Fairphone, the Fairphone 2, is modular (it can be taken apart and have parts replaced easily).
  - b. The company releases where the minerals needed to create the phone are purchased from, who manufactures the phone and how both of these processes (mining and manufacturing) are handled ethically.
3. Implications
  - a. How could Fairphone affect e-waste?
    - i. Find information demonstrating that e-waste is an issue.
    - ii. Find out what the average life cycle of a smartphone is.
    - iii. Does Fairphone effectively combat that?
  - b. Is Fairphone going to benefit or compromise itself by setting industry standards?
    - i. Introduce Project Ara, Google's planned modular smartphone.
    - ii. Find examples of small companies innovating first, then closing down because a bigger company borrowed their ideas on a much bigger scale.

As you can see, the initial list has transformed into three categories of information, each with a broad enough label to include lots of detail, yet distinct from one another. In this case, the structure would likely be using the first two categories as main body points, with the information covered within them as subpoints, and the third category would be implications. Going through this process will give you a rough outline, detail what you need to research more, and help guide how you think about your Informative Speech. Additionally, it can help determine if you want to use VAs! In this particular example, a modular smartphone is much easier to understand when you see one than when the concept is explained, so it might be a good idea to plan on including a VA.

Lastly, you may notice that the categorized list is not uniform—meaning, some subpoints have a few pieces of information included in them, others do not, etc. This is intentional! Your rough outline is supposed to be messy. There will be items that you generate that don't make the cut into the categorized list. There will be things you never thought of that are added later. That's totally okay! In fact, looking at your categorized list will give you a good idea of what gaps you have in your speech. In the example above, 1A has the most information through the first two points, so you would know to expand upon the other points when you revise your outline and research. Don't expect to have a perfect outline the first time you try. It is a continually evolving process made easier the more willing you are to put your thoughts to page and begin generating ideas!

### Should I Use Visual Aids?

There is no single answer to this question; it depends on your topic and speech. **Visual Aids, or VAs, are wonderful tools to demonstrate and explain concepts that emerge in your speech.** For instance, if you are talking about a new water purification technology that can decontaminate water in four distinct steps, having a flow chart of those steps will give the audience a clear and tangible idea of how the technology works. Being able to explain your topic visually will reduce the burden to verbally illustrate complex parts of your topic.

Conversely, if your topic is more abstract, you are less likely to need a VA. An Informative about an economic ideology, for instance, will not benefit as clearly from a VA as the example above. When deciding whether or not to use a VA, consider the

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following: Is there a part of the speech that people are having trouble understanding? Do I have a specific VA in mind? Would I need to revise my speech heavily to include a VA? While this list is not exhaustive, it is a good starting point. If your audience and judges can easily understand your speech, then you likely don't need a VA.

**When using VAs, make sure to write with them in mind.** Writing to reference a VA is different from the typical writing you will have done in speech and debate. The most immediate difference is to use language that refers to your VA as a replacement for language you would have used without it. Much like using a PowerPoint in a class presentation, do not repeat the information your VA conveys; instead, guide your audience through the relevant information that is presented visually. For instance, a speech on the Olympics may highlight the famous image from the 1968 Olympics featuring the gold and silver medalists on the podium with their heads bowed and arms raised in protest. Instead of describing the scene, as in the sentence prior, write with the knowledge that you can gesture toward a specific part or person in the VA and tailor the information to highlight the important aspects of the photograph.

**Keep in mind that VAs are not required!** While they can do wonders to enhance and augment your speech, they can also distract and clutter your speech when they are not carefully considered. Just like any other part of your speech writing process, decide what is best for you when choosing whether or not to use a VA.

### Time

This section will be brief, but it is the most important consideration in your speech. **Be certain that your performance is consistently in time.** Speech is a subjective endeavor; there is always going to be variance. However, one of the only guaranteed ways to ensure that your performance ranks poorly in a round is to be over or under the time limit. Worrying about time in your performance is neither fun nor exciting, but that doesn't mean it isn't necessary for success.

### Ballot Criticism

**Ballots are the most direct and important feedback you can receive on your performance, and merit much of your attention.** Here are a few strategies to break them down into actionable plans for improving your performance. Be sure to keep all of your ballots throughout the year, and from time to time, look through them and sort the feedback into categories, focusing on the type of comment and how many times it comes up. For instance, if you receive a comment on 60% of your ballots asking you to slow down, it's time to slow down and cut from your speech. Paying attention to how often you get a certain type of comment is an indispensable way of making your performance accessible for a large audience.

Next, sometimes you'll get feedback that points out a problem, but does not offer a clear solution. While this can be frustrating, that doesn't mean it isn't valuable. Receiving a lot of comments that say your first point is confusing illustrates the problem you need to solve. With feedback like this, brainstorm possible solutions and pay attention to how these changes are perceived on ballots after they have been made. Once you stop receiving feedback about clarity in your first point, you know you have successfully solved the problem!

Finally, don't ignore comments if they only appear on one ballot. Good ballot analysis is a balance between quality and quantity of feedback. If you read a comment that makes you stop and think about how you've constructed your performance, then it's likely a very good piece of feedback even if nobody else has pointed it out. The next time you hit a roadblock when thinking about how to improve your performance, look through your old ballots. Often enough, a comment you had forgotten about or written off earlier will provide you the inspiration you need to make the necessary changes!

### Learn More!

The **National Speech & Debate Association** is the leading provider of competitive and educational resources to aid students and coaches as they explore our competitive events. Take advantage of the amazing benefits of being a member by using our resources to help you advance yourself in competitive speech and debate activities. Visit [www.speechanddebate.org](http://www.speechanddebate.org) for more information concerning the rules and guidelines for participating in National circuit competition.