



## **INTRODUCTION SKETCH**

OSUN Connected Learning Contest Winner

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**Courses: Freshman Composition/Introduction to Public Speaking**

In my composition courses the presentations come toward the end of the semester. I don't have much time to offer student public speaking skills (usually three class sessions). I begin the speech unit with a crash course on delivery and structure. At the end of that session we zoom in on the aspects of speech introductions, and how crucial the first two minutes are in terms of grabbing attention, establishing credibility and relevance, and giving audiences a framework to understand the speech. I show them sample introductions from online speeches on YouTube—two from excellent presentations, one from a terrible and ineffective speech. I assign the Introduction Sketch for students to work on outside of class in groups of two to three. The next class is devoted to students delivering their mock introductions and the rest of the class offering short critiques based on how well they managed the elements. This assignment forces students to think about structure and to see what works, or not, in the presentations of their peers.

### **Freshman Composition/Introduction to Public Speaking**

I used this as an online exercise in my freshman composition class last semester. In addition to writing a persuasive and analytical research paper, students give short speeches/research presentations at the end of the semester. I've also used it as an early exercise in my Introduction to Public Speaking course.

### **Practical and pedagogical value**

I've been teaching Composition and Public Speaking for over 16 years. In searching for exercises, both online and in Public Speaking texts, I discovered a total lack of exercises that

allowed students to practice structural elements. Almost all exercises are devoted to the delivery aspect of speeches—voice, body, anxiety.

I developed this exercise so students could practice these structure elements in a low stakes environment before developing and delivering their own speeches. It's useful, too, for students to see what others invent with the same topics (as there is overlap in topic choice from the provided topics), helping them realize there are numerous ways to, for example, “hook” an audience and to narrow and focus a topic. It also offers students a “warm up” opportunity to speak to the whole class prior to their actual presentation, which allays speech anxiety a tiny bit. The class critiques, of course, hone students' abilities to detect the elements of introductions, see them in action, and evaluate whether they were effective. Finally, learning to take criticism for one's public speaking is invaluable.

This assignment works especially well online because students tend to be more relaxed behind the screen, and more able to hone in on delivering solid speech introductions. It offers them experience, prior to the graded speech, to get comfortable with the technical aspects of giving a speech online (testing their audio and video, using headphones or not) and to get feedback on how their voice, posture and eye contact online comes across. What's more, I've found students speak more candidly online when providing constructive feedback to their peers—since this is done on mic or in the chat box. The chat box also enhances the critiques, as students are more prone to comment on other student's feedback. too, which engenders excellent critical discussion.

### **The assignment**

In small breakout teams (starting in class and finishing preparation of the assignment out of class) students develop an introduction to a mock speech, based on a provided topic. Students, as a group, choose a topic from the list on the handout, brainstorm their approach, outline a “beta” introduction that includes the key speech introduction elements of hook, introduction to topic, statements of relevancy and credibility, and preview. Students then, in the next online session, deliver the mock introductions to the class and receive a short, workshop-style critique from the class and the instructor.

### **Suggestions for Assignment:**

- Be sure to leave adequate time at the end of the class, when you assign the sketch, to establish student groups and clearly explain the assignment and expectations.
- Don't be afraid to over-emphasize that students must create an *introduction* to a speech, and *not* the whole speech. This is the most common mistake: drafting a mini-speech, rather than just the speech's introduction.

- I allow students to invent research and credentials for themselves, if they want. This makes the assignment more fun (a tiny breather from databases and documentation) and lets them imagine support. The focus of this assignment is structure, not academic and ethical research, and this caveat allows students more time to focus on the assignment's objective.
- The sample topics here are for an expository composition class. You can switch them out for whatever you want, but it's best if the topics are provocative or verging on outrageous (e.g. "Terrorism is necessary" and "Cockroaches are the food of the future" are two I use in the Persuasive Composition class). Students engage with wild topics better. Emphasize that they should have fun with the assignment but take it seriously.
- Groups can be pairs or groups of three. If you have the time, you might consider asking more than one of the students to deliver the introduction to the class—I've done this when using the assignment in Public Speaking. It's useful for the students to hear the same introduction presented by two different speakers.
- In critiques I have a rule that the first comment must be a positive one, after that they can be critical about anything as long as it's framed and delivered constructively. Establish clear critiquing guidelines so students get something out of it, and students feel "safe" enough to be honest.
- Remind students to rehearse with partners watching remotely. Tell them to test out their tech before the class so things work smoothly.

### **Introduction Sketch**

For this project you and your partner(s) will co-craft a "beta" introduction for a supplied speech topic. The introduction should be approximately a minute to a minute and a half and no longer. Feel free to invent whatever statistics/"research" you need. (Yes, you can make stuff up.) In our next meeting, students will deliver their introductions to the class for critique. Be sure to rehearse your introduction in front of your remote partner before delivering it to the class. This will make your delivery more fluid, and give you a chance to address technical issues prior to class.

### **Guidelines:**

--Choose one of the topics below. Decide who will deliver the introduction to the class, and who will take brainstorming notes and write out the sketch. You should divide the assignment duties fairly. Most of these topics are quite broad and will need narrowing and *focus*.

--As a group, develop an introduction for an imaginary speech. Remember, this is not a mini-speech. You're creating a full introduction for a speech, but *only* the introduction.

Your introduction **must** include:

-An **attention-grabbing opening**. Use one of the “hook” strategies discussed in the previous class.

-An **introduction** of your subject, i.e. a clear statement of what your speech will be about. Some of these topics are broad. Try to narrow them down to a specific purpose.

-A **preview** of your hypothetical speech.

-A **statement of relevancy or common ground**. Connect the topic to the audience and give them a reason to listen.

-**Establish your credibility**. Why should we listen to you?

-A **preview** of what the speech, if it were to continue, would contain.

-A **signpost/transition** that moves the audience from the end of your introduction into what would be the body of the speech. Again, your assignment will *not* have a body or a conclusion. It consists only of the introduction for a mock speech.

### **Topic Choices:**

How to commit the perfect crime

How computer games can better your life

Guide to cheating on a test

Near death experiences

Dream interpretation theories

How to commit the perfect crime

How computer games can better your life

Guide to cheating on a test

Near death experiences

Dream interpretation theories