
Shortening a Speech

Why shorten your speech?

Most speaking opportunities have time constraints, whether explicit or implicit. If you go far over the time, you risk a negative impact on your grade or evaluation, losing your audience's attention, and even your own focus. Sometimes running over your speaking time indicates a lack of preparation or a lack of understanding of your material.

How to shorten

Cutting down the length of your speech can seem daunting, but there are some simple things you can do to help:

1. Keep your focus on what you want to accomplish. If you cannot state the main point of your presentation in one sentence, you are probably not focused enough.
2. Narrow the points you want to make – ask yourself if each of the points you included really helps your overall focus. If not, cut it.
3. Break your speech into sections (e.g., introduction, main point 1, main point 2...). Look for places to tighten each of those sections.
4. Ask yourself if each detail or example is necessary. Often, one direct example is more impactful than a long list of tangential examples.
5. Practice! While you may not always hit the exact same time with each rehearsal, you should gain a better sense of your time. Plan for certain time points within the practice so that you know that if you haven't gotten to a certain point in the speech by a given time, you are running long.
6. Have someone else listen. Another set of ears (whether an OCC tutor or a friend) can provide valuable feedback about times when the focus strays or when examples could be cut.