

“Show and Tell” Persuasion

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Objective: To engage in the process of formulating compelling persuasive arguments

Type of speech: Persuasive

Point value: Incorporated into participation points

Requirements: (a) References: 0; (b) Length: 1–2 minutes; (c) Visual aid: No; (d) Outline: No; (e) Prerequisite reading: Chapter 19 (DeVito, 2003); (f) Additional requirements: None

All students have opinions about a variety of subjects and issues. What they often lack, however, is the ability to clearly express their opinion in a persuasive manner. The goal of this assignment is to show students how to formulate a compelling persuasive argument, after which they should be able to think carefully about arguments before the arguments are made, consider the basis of their opinions, select and create the best persuasive appeals to express their opinions to others, and consider the possible counter-arguments to their opinion. In short, this assignment provides students with the opportunity to “show” the validity of their position and then “tell” that position to others.

Directions

(Note: Students should be placed in groups of 4–5 students and given 30 minutes to complete this assignment.) A handout containing the following information is distributed: A network television station has announced plans to cancel your favorite program at the end of this season. Because your group thinks the program is worth keeping on the air, you decide to present a 1–2 minute speech to network executives in an attempt to alter their decision. To fulfill this assignment, complete the following steps:

1. Think carefully about your reasons for keeping the program on the air by identifying your favorite program and determining why it is your favorite program.

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2. State three opinions why the program should not be cancelled. Support each opinion with two reasons.
3. As in advertising, persuasive messages appeal either to our minds or to our emotions. Ads that emphasize a product's quality present factual information which appeals to our mind and sense of reason (e.g., "our vitamins contain a natural multi-vitamin complex"). Ads with emotional appeal present information in ways that we find attractive (e.g., "our vitamins have a refreshing pina colada flavor"). In either case, these persuasive appeals provide us with proof for why we should buy the product. Review your opinion statements and your supporting reasons above. Identify appeals to the mind by *underlining* the appeals; identify appeals to emotion by *circling* the appeals.
4. Identify the three most compelling appeals you believe will convince network executives to keep your program on television.
5. You really cannot defend your own opinions unless you also understand the opinions that differ from your own. If you can better understand the reasons behind other people's opinions, it may be easier to change those opinions. Consider the possible opposing opinions (counter-arguments) for each of the persuasive appeals you formulated in Step 4.
6. Now it is time to prepare your speech! On a separate sheet of paper or on the back of this handout, write a 1–2 minute speech for the network executives, asking them to not cancel your favorite program. Make sure your speech clearly states your opinions for why the program should not be cancelled; emphasize the reasons behind your opinions; utilize only the most compelling appeals to mind and/or emotion; and consider the possible counter-arguments that might arise when executives read your letter. One member of your group will present this speech to the class once all groups have written their speeches.

Debriefing

1. In this speech, which appeals were focused on the mind and which appeals were focused on emotions?
2. How effective were these appeals? Are there any other possible appeals (e.g., logical, motivational) that may have been more effective?
3. If a speech focused primarily on emotional appeals, how ethical is it to attempt to persuade someone on the basis of emotion alone, especially at the expense of the facts?

Appraisal

Students report varying degrees of difficulty with the assignment. Students report that the difficulty is not in stating their opinions but rather in defending their opinions and considering alternative points of view. Once this assignment is completed, students' ability to select appropriate and effective persuasive appeals, as well as their ability to address possible counter-arguments in their graded persuasive

speeches, generally improves. Furthermore, because this is a group activity, students often spend time bargaining, negotiating, and persuading one another in selecting a favorite television program. Due to the relevance of this situation to students, they become immediately engaged in active and sometimes heated discussion. As an alternative, a situation involving the impending threat of their favorite campus eatery being closed by university officials can be presented.

References and Suggested Readings

- Borchers, T. A. (2002). *Persuasion in the media age*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- DeVito, J. A. (2003). *Human communication: The basic course* (9th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
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