

## 13.5: Organizing Principles for Your Speech

### Learning Objectives

1. Identify and understand how to use at least five different organizing principles for a speech.

There are many different ways to organize a speech, and none is “better” or “more correct” than the others. The choice of an organizing principle, or a core assumption around which everything else is arranged, depends on the subject matter, the rhetorical situation, and many other factors, including your preference as speaker.

The left column of Table 13.5.1 presents seventeen different organizing principles to consider. The center column explains how the principle works, and the right column provides an applied example based on our sample speech about the First Transcontinental Railroad. For example, using a biographical organizing principle, you might describe the journey of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804; the signing of the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862, and the completion of the first Transcontinental Express train trip in 1876. As another example, using a spatial organizing principle, you might describe the mechanics of how a steam locomotive engine works to turn the train wheels, which move on a track to travel across distances.

As you read each organizational structure, consider how the main points and subheadings might change or be adapted to meet each pattern.

Table 13.5.1 Sample Organizing Principles for a Speech

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
1. Time (Chronological)	Structuring your speech by time shows a series of events or steps in a process, which typically has a beginning, middle, and end. “Once upon a time stories” follow a chronological pattern.	Before the First Transcontinental Railroad, the events that led to its construction, and its impact on early America...
2. Comparison	Structuring your speech by comparison focuses on the similarities and/or differences between points or concepts.	A comparison of pre- and post-First Transcontinental Railroad North America, showing how health and life expectancy remained the same.
3. Contrast	Structure your speech by using contrasting points highlights the differences between items and concepts.	A contrast of pre- and post-First Transcontinental Railroad North America, by shipping times, time it took to communicate via letter, or how long it took to move out West.
4. Cause and Effect	Structuring your speech by cause and effect establishes a relationship between two events or situations, making the connection clear.	The movement of people and goods out West grew considerably from 1750 to 1850. With the availability of a new and faster way to go West, people generally supported its construction.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
5. Problem and Solution	Structuring your speech by problem and solution means you state the problem and detail how it was solved. This approach is effective for persuasive speeches.	Manufacturers were producing better goods for less money at the start of the Industrial Revolution, but they lack a fast, effective method of getting their goods to growing markets. The First Transcontinental Railroad gave them speed, economy, and access to new markets.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
6. Classification (Categorical)	Structuring your speech by classification establishes categories.	At the time the nation considered the First Transcontinental Railroad, there were three main types of transportation: by water, by horse, and by foot.
7. Biographical	Structuring your speech by biography means examining specific people as they relate to the central topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1804: Lewis and Clark travel 4,000 miles in over two years across America</li> <li>• 1862: President Lincoln signs the Pacific Railroad Act</li> <li>• 1876: The Transcontinental Express from New York arrives in San Francisco with a record-breaking time of 83 hours and 39 minutes</li> <li>• 2009: President Obama can cross America by plane in less than 5 hours</li> </ul>
8. Space (Spatial)	Structuring your speech by space involves the parts of something and how they fit to form the whole.	A train uses a heat source to heat water, create steam, and turn a turbine, which moves a lever that causes a wheel to move on a track.
9. Ascending and Descending	Structuring your speech by ascending or descending order involves focusing on quantity and quality. One good story (quality) leads to the larger picture, or the reverse.	A day in the life of a traveler in 1800. Incremental developments in transportation to the present, expressed through statistics, graphs, maps and charts.
10. Psychological	It is also called “Monroe’s Motivated Sequence” (Ayres, J. and Miller, J., 1994). Structuring your speech on the psychological aspects of the audience involves focusing on their inherent needs and wants. See Maslow and Shutz. The speaker calls <i>attention</i> to a <i>need</i> , then focuses on the satisfaction of the need, <i>visualization</i> of the solution, and ends with a proposed or historical <i>action</i> . This is useful for a persuasive speech.	When families in the year 1800 went out West, they rarely returned to see family and friends. The country as a whole was an extension of this distended family, separated by time and distance. The railroad brought families and the country together.
11. Elimination	Structuring your speech using the process of elimination involves outlining all the possibilities.	The First Transcontinental Railroad helped pave the way for the destruction of the Native American way of life in 1870. After examining treaties, relocation and reservations, loss of the buffalo, disease and war, the railroad can be accurately considered the catalyst for the end of an era.

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
12. Ceremonial: Events, Ceremonies, or Celebrations	<p>Structure your speech by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thank dignitaries and representatives.</li> <li>2. Mention the importance of the event.</li> <li>3. Mention the relationship of the event to the audience.</li> <li>4. Thank the audience for their participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration.</li> </ol>	<p>Thanking the representatives, builders, and everyone involved with the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. The railroad will unite America, and bring us closer in terms of trade, communication and family. Thank you for participating in today's dedication.</p>
13. Awards	<p>Structure your speech by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thank everyone for coming together.</li> <li>2. Discuss the history and importance of the award.</li> <li>3. Give a brief biography of the person who will receive the award (often nonspecific to keep people guessing and to build suspense).</li> <li>4. Announce the name of the award recipient.</li> <li>5. Present the award (present award with left hand, shake with right).</li> <li>6. Award recipient may give a speech.</li> <li>7. Transition to the next item or thank everyone for participating.</li> </ol>	<p>&gt;Thank everyone for coming together. The Golden Spike Award was created in honor of all the great men and women that made today possible. The person receiving this award needs no introduction. His/her tireless efforts to build partnerships, coalitions, and raise support for the railroad have been unwavering. (Name), please come and receive the Golden Spike Award. (Speech/no speech.) Thank you, everyone, for coming.</p>
14. Toast: Weddings or Similar Gatherings	<p>Structure your speech by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thank everyone for coming together.</li> <li>2. Discuss the importance of the event (wedding).</li> <li>3. Mention the relationship of the couple to the audience or the speaker to the person being celebrated.</li> <li>4. Add one short sentence.</li> <li>5. Optional: Conclude, thanking the audience for participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration.</li> </ol>	<p>Thank everyone for coming together. I've know the groom since he played with toy trains and only now, with (partner's name), can I see how far his involvement in our new cross-country train got him. "All the best of healthy and happiness." Thank you everyone for joining us in this celebration of (name) and (name) (point 5 is optional).</p>

Organizing Principle	Explanation	Applied Example
15. Speaker Introductions	<p>Structure your speech by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thank everyone for coming together.</li> <li>2. Provide a brief biography of the person who will speak or establish their credibility.</li> <li>3. Discuss the speaker and his or her topic.</li> <li>4. Announce the name of the speaker, and possibly once their speech has concluded.</li> <li>5. Transition to the next item or thank everyone for participating.</li> </ol>	<p>Thank everyone for coming together. Today's speaker has a long history in the development of the train, including engineering technical aspects of steam locomotion. Today he/she will address the steps that lead to our very own cross-country railroad. Please help me welcome (name). (Optional after speech: Thank you, everyone. Next we have...)</p>
16. After-Dinner Speech	<p>Structure your speech by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thank everyone for coming together.</li> <li>2. Provide a fun or humorous attention statement.</li> <li>3. Discuss the topic in a light-hearted manner with connected stories, anecdotes, or even a joke or two.</li> <li>4. Connect the humor to the topic of importance</li> <li>5. Thank everyone for participating.</li> </ol>	<p>Thank you for coming together to celebrate the driving of the Golden Spike. There have been many challenging moments along the way that I would like to share tonight (stories, anecdotes, or even a joke). While it's been a long journey, we've made it. Thank you for coming tonight.</p>
17. Oral Interpretation	<p>Structure your speech by focusing on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Draw attention to the piece of literature.</li> <li>2. Explain its significance, context, and background.</li> <li>3. Interpret the manuscript for the audience.</li> <li>4. Conclude with key points from the reading.</li> <li>5. Reiterate the main point of the piece of literature.</li> </ol>	<p>Today I would like to share with you the proclamation that led to the railroad you see before you today. (Interpret the proclamation, using your voice to bring the written word alive.) Without the foresight, vision and leadership we can now see, this railroad might still be a dream.</p>

## Key Takeaway

A speech may be organized according to any of many different organizing principles.

## References

Ayres, J., & Miller, J. (1994). *Effective public speaking* (4th ed., p 274). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.

Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Shutz, W. (1966). *The interpersonal underworld*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

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