

## 4.2.3: Finding Resources

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of research in developing your topic.
2. Use resources to gather information effectively.
3. Document your sources correctly and avoid plagiarism.

Now that you know your general purpose, have committed to a topic, and have written your thesis statement, it's time to gather information. If you have chosen the topic from your list, you probably already know a lot about it. But in most cases you will still need information from sources other than yourself, to establish credibility, create a more comprehensive speech, and to make sure no important aspect of your topic is left out.

Your time is valuable and you'll need to plan ahead to avoid a rushed frenzy right before your due date. You'll feel more confident if you budget your time wisely and give yourself an opportunity to reflect on what you have prepared, and this will help you feel more relaxed as you deliver your speech, reducing your speech anxiety.

### Narrow Your Topic and Focus on Key Points

By now you have developed an idea of your topic, but even with your purpose and thesis statement, you may still have a broad subject that will be a challenge to cover within the allotted time. You might want to revisit your purpose and thesis statement and ask yourself: how specific is my topic? If flying an airplane is your topic area and you are going to inform your audience on the experience, discuss the history and basic equipment, and cover the basic requirements necessary to go on your first flight. Plus, look at reference information on where your audience could go locally to take flying lessons, you might find that five to seven minutes simply is not enough time. Rather than stating that you need more time, or that you'll just rush through it, consider your audience and what they might want to learn. How can you narrow your topic to better consider their needs? As you edit your topic, considering what is essential information and what can be cut, you'll come to focus on the key points naturally and reduce the pressure on yourself to cover too much information in a short amount of time.

If you haven't presented many speeches, five to seven minutes may seem like an eternity, but when you are in front of the audience, the time will pass quickly. Consider how you feel about the areas of your speech and you'll soon see how it could easily turn into an hour-long presentation. You need to work within the time limits, and show your audience respect as you stay within them, recognizing that they too will be presenting speeches in the same time frame. For yourself and your audience, narrow your topic to just the key points. Perhaps you will begin with a description and a visual image of your first flight, followed by a list of the basic equipment and training needed. Finally, a reference to local flying schools may help you define your speech. While the history of flying may be fascinating, and may serve as a topic in itself for another speech, it would add too much information to this particular brief speech.

As you begin this process, keep an open mind for the reference materials available. The access to information on the Internet is amazing, but not all the information has equal value. Try not to just go with the first three examples, Web sites or sources you run across but instead skim, rather than read in-depth, the information at that relates to your topic and what you find of interest. Look for abstracts, or brief summaries of information, before you commit time to reading an article all the way through. Look for indexes to identify key terms you might want to cover before eliminating them as you narrow your topic. Take notes as you search or bookmark pages with your Web browser in order to go back to a site or source that at first you passed over, but now think may make a relevant contribution to your speech. Consider the source and their credibility. While a high school Web page assignment may prove interesting, the link to the research in the field, the author of a study, or a university source may provide much credible information. Once you have identified sources you consider to be valuable, you will assemble the information and key points needed to make your speech effective much better.

### Plan Your Search for Information

When preparing a speech, it is important to gather information from books, magazines, newspapers, electronic sources, and interviews from people who know a lot about your topic. With information from a variety of sources, you will have many possibilities when it comes to developing your speech. If you keep in mind the key information you need to support your thesis, you will save yourself time, as you can choose and edit information as you go along. Also, consider your other responsibilities in other classes or with work and family. You'll have to schedule time for your investigation and make it a priority, but it will

necessarily compete with other priorities. Perhaps scheduling for yourself time in the library, a visit to the local flight school to interview a flight instructor, and some Internet search time in the evenings may help you create a to-do list that you can use to structure your research. Remember that this investigation will be more fun if your topic is one in which you are actually interested.

Before you go to the library, look over your information sources. Do you read a magazine that relates to the topic? Did you read a recent news article that might be relevant? Is there a book, CD-ROM, or music that has information you can use? Think of what you want your audience to know, and how you could show it to them. Perhaps cover art from a CD, or line from a poem may make an important contribution to your speech. You might even know someone who has experience in the area you want to research.

As you begin to investigate your topic, make sure you consider several sides of an issue. Let's say you are going to make an informative speech at a town council meeting about the recent history of commuter rail service in your town. At first, you may have looked at two sides, rail versus private cars. Automobile dealers, oil companies, and individual drivers wanted the flexibility of travel by car, while rail advocates argued that commuter trains would lower costs and energy consumption. If you take another look, you see that several other perspectives also have bearing on this issue. Many workers commuted by bus prior to the railroad, so the bus companies would not want the competition. Property owners objected to the noise of trains and the issue of eminent domain (i.e., taking of private property by the government). To serve several towns that are separated by open space, the rail lines cut through wildlife habitat and migration corridors. We now have five perspectives to the central issue, which makes the topic all the more interesting.

Make sure, as you start your investigation for information, that you always question the credibility of the information. Sources may have no review by peers or editor, and the information may be misleading, biased, or even false. Be a wise information consumer.

### Ethics, Content Selection, and Avoiding Plagiarism

An aspect of sifting and sorting information involves how you will ethically present your material. You may be tempted to omit information that may be perceived as negative or may not be well received. For example, you may be tempted to omit mention of several train accidents that have occurred, or of the fact that train fares have risen as service has been cut back. If your purpose is to inform, you owe it to your audience to give an honest presentation of the available facts. By omitting information, you are not presenting an accurate picture, and may mislead your audience. Even if your purpose is to persuade, omitting the opposing points will present a one-sided presentation. The audience will naturally consider what you are not telling them as well as what you are presenting, and will raise questions. Instead, consider your responsibility as a speaker to present all the information you understand to be complete, and do it honestly and ethically.

As another example, suppose you work for a swimming pool construction company and are speaking to inform a neighborhood group about pool safety. You have photos of pools you have worked on, but they aren't very exciting. There are many more glamorous swimming pool photos on free Internet sites. Who can really tell if the pool in the picture is yours or not? Furthermore, the "Terms of Use" on the site state that photos may be downloaded for personal use. Wouldn't this speech to inform be considered personal use? In fact, it probably would not, even if your informative speech is not a direct sales pitch. And even if you don't actually tell your audience, "My company built this pool," it would be reasonable for them to assume you did unless you specifically tell them otherwise.

As a student, you are no doubt already aware that failing to cite sources or including a sentence or paragraph you copied from a blog on the Internet for an English essay is called plagiarism and is grounds for an F on your paper. At many schools, plagiarism can even be grounds for expulsion. Similarly, in your professional life it behooves you to be truthful with your audience and give credit where credit is due for several reasons. First, misrepresenting your employer's work could be illegal under statutes related to fraud; it could put not only your job but also your employer's contractor license in jeopardy. Second, someone in your audience could recognize one of the photos (after all, they can browse the Internet as easily as you can) and embarrass you by pointing it out during your presentation. Third, by using photos that display your company's actual work you will feel more confident, reducing your speech anxiety. You have a responsibility to your audience and engaging in plagiarism fails in that responsibility.

### Staying Organized

Before you start browsing on your computer, go to the library, or make the trip for an interview, make sure you have designated a space where you can keep all your materials in one place. Decide on a name for the project and use it to set up a subdirectory in your computer as well as a physical receptacle, such as a cardboard box or a manila folder.

As you gather information online, open a new document in whatever writing program you use and save it as "Sources." Every time you find information that may prove useful, copy the Web address or reference/citation information and paste it into your

document. If you are gathering information from books or periodicals, use one sheet of paper as your “Sources” document. This will save you a lot of time later when you are polishing your speech.

Plan to use your time effectively. What information do you hope to find in the library? Make a list. Try to combine tasks and get your investigation completed efficiently. Go to the library once with a list, rather than three times without one. Ask the research librarian for assistance in grouping information and where to find it.

As you search through articles, books, Web sites, and images for your presentation, consider how each element relates specifically to the key points in your speech. Don’t just look for the first citation or reference that fits your list. Rushing through the research process can result in leaving out key areas of support or illustration in your speech, an outcome you may not be happy with. Instead, enjoy the fun of searching for material for your speech—but be aware that it is easy for your list under each key point to grow and grow with “must include” information. As we discussed earlier, narrowing your topic is a key strategy in crafting a good speech. Try not to “commit” to information until you have gathered more than you need, then go back and choose the most relevant and most interesting facts, quotations, and visual aids.

You might think of this as the “accordion phase” of preparing your speech, as the amount of material first gets bigger and then smaller. You’ll feel a sense of loss as you edit and come to realize that your time frame simply does not allow for all the great information you found—but remember that nobody else will know what *didn’t* go into your speech, they will just appreciate the good material you did choose. As you sift through information, look for the promising, effective elements to include and omit the rest. In your English class, you often need to edit and revise a paper to produce a rough draft before your final draft. This process parallels the production of a rough draft. By taking notes with your key point in mind, you’ll begin to see your speech come together.

## Searching for Information on the Internet

Finding information on the Internet or in electronic databases can decrease your search time, but you will still need to budget time to accomplish the tasks associated with reviewing, selecting, interpreting, and incorporating information to your particular use.

The World Wide Web is an amazing source of information, but for that very reason, it is difficult to get information you actually need. Let’s look at two issues that can make searching online easier: where and how to search for information.

Knowing where to go for information is as important as knowing key words and concepts related to your topic. Do you need general information? Do you need to survey what’s available quickly? Do you prefer searching only reviewed sites? Is your topic education-related? Depending on your answer, you may want to consider where to start your search.

Table 4.2.3.1 presents a summary of main search engines and how they might work for you.

Table 4.2.3.1 Some Examples of Internet Search Sites

Description	URL
General Web searches that can also be customized according to categories like news, maps, images, video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the end of this chapter under “Additional Resources,” you will find a list of many Web sites that may be useful for public speaking research.</li> </ul> <h3>Evaluating Your Sources</h3> <p>It is important to be aware of how much online information is incomplete, outdated, misleading, or downright false. Anyone can put up a Web site, and once it is up the owner may or may not enter updates or corrections on a regular basis. Anyone can write a blog on any subject, whether or not that person actually knows much about that subject. Anyone who wishes to contribute to a Wikipedia article can do so—although the postings are moderated by editors who have to register and submit their qualifications. In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression. This freedom is restricted by laws against libel (false accusations against a person) and indecency, especially child pornography, but those laws can be difficult to enforce. It</p>

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is always important to look beyond the surface of a site to who sponsors it, where the information displayed came from, and whether the site owner has a certain agenda.

In gathering information for your speech, you will want to draw on reputable, reliable sources—printed ones as well as electronic ones—because they reflect on the credibility of the message, and the messenger. Analyzing and assessing information is an important skill in speech preparation, and here are six main points to consider when evaluating a document, presentation, or similar source of information (Paul, R., and Elder, L., 2007). In general, documents that represent quality reasoning have

- a clearly articulated purpose and goal;
- a question, problem, or issue to address;
- information, data, and evidence that is clearly relevant to the stated purpose and goals;
- inferences or interpretations that lead to conclusions based on the presented information, data, and evidence;
- a frame of reference or point of view that is clearly articulated;
- assumptions, concepts, and ideas that are clearly articulated

An additional question to ask is *how credible the source* is. This question can be hard to answer even with years of training and expertise. Academic researchers have been trained in the objective, impartial use of the scientific method to determine validity and reliability. But as research is increasingly dependent on funding, and funding often brings specific points of view and agendas with it, pure research can be—and has been—compromised. You can no longer simply assume that “studies show” something without finding out who conducted the study, how it was conducted, and who funded the effort. This may sound like a lot of investigation and present quite a challenge, but again it is worth the effort.

Information literacy is an essential skill set in the process of speech preparation. As you learn to spot key signs of information that will not serve to enhance your credibility and contribute to your presentation, you can increase your effectiveness as you research and analyze your resources. For example, suppose you are preparing an informative speech on safety in the workplace. You might come upon a site owned by a consulting company that specializes in safety analysis. The site might give many statistics, illustrating the frequency of on-the-job accidents, repetitive motion injuries, workplace violence, and so on. But the sources of these percentage figures may not be credited. As an intelligent researcher, you need to ask yourself whether the consulting company that owns the site performed its own research to get these numbers. Most likely it did not—so why are the sources not cited? Moreover, such a site would unlikely mention any free workplace safety resources available and free from sources such as the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Less

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biased sources of information would be the American Management Association, the U.S. Department of Labor, and other not-for-profit organizations that study workplace safety. The Internet also encompasses thousands of interactive sites where readers can ask and answer questions. Some sites, like Askville by Amazon.com, WikiAnswers, and Yahoo! Answers, are open to almost any topic. Others, like ParentingQuestions and WebMD, deal with specific topics. Chat rooms on bridal Web sites allow couples who are planning a wedding to share advice and compare prices for gowns, florists, caterers, and so on. Reader comment sites like Newsvine facilitate discussions about current events. Customer reviews are available for just about everything imaginable, from hotels and restaurants to personal care products, home improvement products, and sports equipment. These contributors are not experts, nor do they pretend to be. Some may have extreme opinions that are not based in reality. Then, too, it is always possible for a vendor to “plant” favorable customer reviews on the Internet to make its product look good. Although the “terms of use,” which contributors must agree to usually forbid the posting of advertisements, profanity, or personal attacks, some sites do a better job than others in monitoring and deleting such material. Nevertheless, if your speech research involves finding out how the “average person” feels about an issue in the news, or whether a new type of home exercise device really works as advertised, these comment and customer review sites can be very useful indeed.

It may seem like it’s a hard work to assess your sources, to make sure your information is accurate and truthful, but the effort is worth it. Business and industry rely on reputation and trust, just as we individuals do, in order to maintain healthy relationships. Your speech is an important part of that reputation and interaction.

### Compiling Your Information

When you have investigated and narrowed your topic, it’s time to compile your information. **Compiling** involves composing your speech out of materials from the documents and other sources you have collected. This process has seven major steps, adapted from a model by Anderson, Anderson and Williams: sensitivity, exposure, assimilation and accommodation, incubation, incorporation, production and revision (Andrews, P., Andrews, J., and Williams, G., 1999).

**Sensitivity** refers to your capacity to respond to stimulation, be excited, be responsive, or be susceptible to new information. This starts with your self-inventory of what you are interested or involved in as you did in the first of the Note 10.1 “Introductory Exercises” for this chapter. If you are intrigued by a topic or area of interest, your enthusiasm will carry through to your speech and make it more stimulating for your audience. You may not have considered, or even noticed,

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elements or ideas associated with your topic, but now that you have begun the process of investigation, you see them everywhere. For example, have you ever heard someone say a word or phrase that you never heard before, but now that you are familiar with it, you hear it everywhere? This same principle applies to your sensitivity to ideas related to your topic. You'll notice information and it will help you as you develop your awareness of your topic and the many directions you could take the speech. Cognitive psychologists use the term "priming" to refer to this excited state of awareness (Yaniv, I., and Meyer, D., 1987).

**Exposure** involves your condition of being presented views, ideas, experiences, or made known to you through direct experience. If you are thinking of giving an informative speech on flying an airplane but have never flown before, your level of exposure may be low. Your level of awareness may be high, however, in terms of the importance of security on commercial airlines after reading about, watching on television, or hearing on the radio stories after the events of September 11, 2001. You may decide to expose yourself to more information through a range of sources as you investigate the topic of airline security. The more you become exposed to the issues, processes and goals of your topic, the more likely you are to see areas of interest, think of new ideas that might fit in your speech, and form patterns of awareness you did not perceive previously.

**Assimilation** and **accommodation** refers to the process by which you integrate (assimilate) new ideas into your thinking patterns, and adopt (accommodate) or filter out new sources of information as they relate to your goal. You may have had preconceived notions or ideas about airline security before you began your investigation, but new information has changed the way you view your topic. You might also find issues (e.g., right to privacy) that may be points of conflict with your beliefs as you review information. This stage is important to the overall process of developing your topic and takes time. You need time to be able to contemplate, review, and reflect on how the new information fits or fails to connect clearly to your chosen topic.

**Incubation** is the process by which you cause an idea or ideas to develop in your mind. This might not happen all at once, and you might spend time thinking about the new information, directions, or ways you might develop or focus your topic. Consider the meaning of the word "incubation" as it relates to chickens and eggs. An egg may look ready to hatch as soon as the hen lays it, but it needs time and a warm environment to develop. You might have an idea but need to create an environment for it to develop. This might involve further investigation and exploration, or it may involve removing yourself from active research to "digest" what you have already learned. If you feel "stuck" on an idea or perceive an inability to move on in the development of your ideas or topic, giving it a rest may be the best course of action. You may also find that

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just when you least expect it, an idea, fully formed, flashes into your mind and you ask yourself, “Why didn’t I see that before?” Before the idea escapes you, write it down and make sure you can refer to it later.

**Incorporation** refers to the process by which you bring the information into a whole or complete topic. By now you have investigated, chosen some information over others, and have started to see how the pieces will come together. Your perceptions of how the elements come together will form the basis for the organization of your speech. It will contribute to the logic of your message and help you produce a coherent, organized speech that your audience can follow clearly.

**Production** involves the act of creating your speech from the elements you have gathered. You may start to consider what comes first, what goes last, and how you will link your ideas and examples together. You may find that you need additional information, and can go back to your notes that you taken to find the source quickly and easily. You may also start to communicate with friends, sharing some of the elements or even practicing the first drafts of your speech, learning where the connections are clear and where they need work.

**Revision** is the process by which you look over your speech again in order to correct or improve it. You will notice elements that need further investigation, development, or additional examples and visual aids as your produce your speech. This is an important step to the overall production of your speech, much like revising an essay for an English course. The first time you said, thought, or wrote something it may have made sense to you, but upon reflection and after trying an idea out, you need it to be revised in order to work effectively as part of your speech. You may revisit the place in which you started, and start all speeches, by reconsidering the rhetorical situation and see if what you have produces is in line with the expectations of the audience. Your awareness of the content, audience, and purpose of the rhetorical situation will guide you through the revision process and contribute to the production of a more effective speech.

### Key Takeaway

To find resources for your speech, narrow your topic and plan your search for information. Be aware of ethics, selecting reliable content, and avoiding plagiarism. Stay organized, and be a wise consumer of Internet information. Last, compile your information into a coherent series of main points.

### Exercises

1. Find at least one example of an Internet site that is sponsored by each of the following:
  - Local, state, or federal government in the United States or another country



Description	URL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ For-profit corporation that sells a product or service to the general public</li><li>■ Not-for-profit organization</li><li>■ Private or public college, university, or other school</li></ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. Describe the type of information available on each of your chosen sites. How do they differ from one another? What do they have in common? Discuss your findings with your classmates.</li><li>3. Find a Web site you find particularly useful in terms of information. Write a brief review and then share with classmates.</li><li>4. Find a Web site you find particularly poor in terms of your ability to access information. Write a brief review and then share with classmates.</li><li>5. When creating a speech, is it appropriate to omit certain information? Explain and discuss your thoughts with a classmate.</li><li>6. How can a persuasive speech be ethical? Explain your opinion and give some examples. Compare and share in class.</li></ol> <h3>References</h3> <p>Andrews, P., Andrews, J., &amp; Williams, G. (1999). <i>Public speaking: Connecting you and your audience</i>. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.</p> <p>Paul, R., &amp; Elder, L. (2007). <i>The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and tools</i>. Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.</p> <p>Yaniv, I., &amp; Meyer, D. (1987). Activation and metacognition of inaccessible stored information: Potential bases for incubation effects in problem solving. <i>Journal of Experimental Psychology Learning, Memory, and Cognition</i>, 13, 187–205.</p>

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