

# Informative Speaking

## Choosing a Topic

Without a great topic, even the most polished and engaging speaker may not go as far as they would like. The following guidelines can be helpful:

1. Make sure it is a topic that EVERYONE in your audience will find interesting – you will have both men and women, older and younger people, etc....
2. It should be a topic that MATTERS – there are lots of topics that are sort of fun – but if you can get one that’s fun AND has some import for our lives, that’s ideal. Another way I like to think about it is – will the audience members (which of course includes your judge!) be glad that they got to see you speak, glad that they got the chance to learn more about that topic?
3. Your topic should not be too big or too small – you should be able to reasonably cover it in your 8 minutes.
4. I search for topics that are fresh and new - (Diamonds and money ARE interesting speech topics – but about 83 kids have done those topics before.....ask coaches and students who have watched lots of Informative in the past few years, to see what topics might have been overdone).
5. You, personally, should care about the topic, or you’ll sound bored. Remember, you are going to have to read a LOT about this topic, and write, rewrite and perform this speech MANY, MANY times!
6. This may be one of my biggest suggestions -- the speech should have what I call “ah-ha!” moments – at least 3 or 4 facts or stories that absolutely amaze the audience – that just leave them thinking, “No Way! I had no idea!” - the kind of facts you will hear them sharing with their teammates and in the judges’ lounge. If you don’t teach them anything new about a topic, then they’re going to feel like you wasted 8 minutes.
7. The topic should have visual possibilities. Of course, you don’t NEED to do VAs with Informative – but I think that well-done visuals can really make your speech more memorable.

### *HINT:*

*Sometimes I think of an interesting topic first and then go and start the research. But more often than not, I find that the speeches I work with are better when I run across a cool fact or an interesting article first, and then decide on a topic that will incorporate that amazing information. Just keep this in mind as you read magazines, newspapers, listen to the radio, or talk to other people about issues and events – something you read or hear may spark an idea for the coolest Info topic. (And conversely, sometimes you can come up with what you think is going to be the coolest topic, only to find that once you start researching, you really aren’t finding that great of information.)*

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## MAKING Visual Aids

VAs are one area that students really have within their control. Not everyone may be a gifted speaker naturally, and not everyone will be automatically confident and engaging as a speaker, but EVERYONE can find a ruler and cut a straight line!!! Raggedy edges or borders that are not symmetrical - in other words – things that are easily fixable to make your speech more professional -- are just not acceptable.

Most of these hints about VAs will come as no surprise to anyone - but it is amazing how many speakers don't follow these common sense guidelines!

## Choosing Words and Pictures

1. Make sure your pictures and fonts big enough to see across a large room. Really have someone stand at the back of a large classroom or lecture hall and check for you.
2. Choose easily readable fonts – scripty ones are often difficult to read. Remember, the audience will not be as familiar with your words as you are, and they only get to look at your VA one time, so don't make them work too hard to get it.
3. While we're on the subject of words, don't use too many, if any at all. Remember, we want the audience to mainly be listening to you, not reading large portions of your speech off a VA.
4. Maintain consistency in color, font, sizing and spacing.
5. Consider using a theme of some sort in your VAs (like, all the pictures bordered in green for a speech on St. Patrick's Day, or using a border that has something to do with your topic) that carries throughout the speech; it adds another level to your speech and makes it more memorable.
6. Cut perfectly straight lines and measure perfectly even borders on pictures and frames.
7. Make your VAs beautiful to look at! Choose stunning pictures! I know that seems obvious – but really, read through your speech carefully to find visual opportunities – or add writing to the speech to incorporate a great visual!
8. Make sure that your VAs are necessary to the speech – they either need to be helping us to understand a point better that you are making, or they need to help make a point more memorable.
9. Don't put too much on each VA – keep them simple. You only want to have up there what you are talking about at the time.

FINAL HINT: Think outside the box in terms of what you can DO with the VAs – not to be weird just for the sake of getting attention – but doing something interesting with your boards can be used to brilliant effect to help illuminate a point.

## Where to Find Pictures

- Google Images – the old standby ☺

- ❑ Flickr ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)) - this is a site where people add their own pictures. We have found that the resolution is higher and the size of the images larger, both of which make them better for reprinting in large format.
- ❑ Your own collections! Consider using a picture of yourself in your speech, or take pictures of something obscure you need photographed.
- ❑ Use Kinkos or similar print shops to enlarge photos. They can print really big images for just a few dollars (much bigger than 8 x 11) and if you want a REALLY big picture, they can do something called “tiling” where they print out a photo in pieces, on separate pieces of paper, that you then glue together.

Note: don't let them waste your time on their “pay per minute” computers. Go at a time when they're not busy and have them just pull up your pictures on their screens and show you what they can do with it. It's WAY faster that way.

## Supplies to Use

1. Use rubber cement to glue on your paper, as you can peel it off later. The spray on glue is really tempting, because it dries SO flat – but you can never change your VA after you put it on. (Also, bring a bottle to tournaments, in case corners start flapping up) NOTE: Many stores require you to be 21 to buy rubber cement.
2. Use a paper cutter to cut your pictures, rather than scissors.
3. I like to use mat board from an art supply store, for the following reasons:
  - ❑ They're cheaper than the boards you can buy at Office Max or Target
  - ❑ they look more professional
  - ❑ you can fit more of them on your VA stand, as they are thinner than traditional foam board
4. Look for cool background papers to use. Again, if you have the opportunity to go to an art supply store, they often have really amazing options, that I have found ended up being cheaper than buying colored construction paper.

We look for papers that have subtle textures, really unique colors or very subtle prints to them, to make the pictures more eye-catching, or to match the topic better (for example, last year, for our speech on bamboo, we found paper that was made of bamboo!). Wet Paint Art Supply in St. Paul (651 – 698 – 6431) had over 1500 different kinds of paper!

5. Protect your VAs – you can get really decent, heavy duty, cloth, black bags from art supply stores (Wet Paint Art Supply has them for only \$13).

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## USING Visual Aids During your Speech

1. Make sure to point out what you are talking about on the VA; don't leave us wondering why a picture is up there or what it even is. A good rule of thumb is that if you don't talk about a picture

specifically in the speech, then don't have it on the VA. Or, add a sentence into the speech that addresses that picture.

2. Only have pictures showing what you are *currently* talking about in the speech – don't reveal a VA and then talk for another 3 sentences before you tell us what that is.
3. Likewise, cover VAs as soon as you are done with that point, so that we're not distracted by them as you move on to a new point.
4. Again, don't put too many pictures on one VA – let us focus on one idea at a time.
5. Really consider carefully which sentences you are going to reveal and hide your VAs on – we have found that sometimes we need to tweak the writing of the speech to give us more time to do one or the other.
6. Practice, practice, practice changing them gracefully, quietly, and while still looking at the audience.
7. Practice walking and where you are going to stand in relation to your VAs. There are lots of different walks/steps that work great – just decide what will work for you and your topic and own it.
8. Use a silver sharpie or white out pen to mark VAs that you need to change quickly.

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## Research and Writing

- ❑ Use a variety of sources and cite them in your speech – at least 4-6, depending on the topic and if people are going to want to hear more sources to “buy” it.
  - It is amazing how easy it is for judges to miss sources that you mention. So, don’t rush over them as you speak.
  - I would try to avoid citing web sites. They just don’t sound as legitimate as more traditional print sources.
- ❑ It’s ok to use a little humor in the speech. The really obvious, punny humor sometimes can come off a little forced, but a nice little turn of phrase here and there, or a lighthearted comment to help connect with the audience is fine – who doesn’t want to be a little entertained?
- ❑ The organization of the speech is very traditional – it should include:
  - Introduction with an attention getter, relate to the audience somehow, and clear signposting
  - Usually three main points about the topic – could do 2 or 4, but 3 is standard
  - Conclusion that reviews points and possibly brings the speech back to the AG
- ❑ Decide on what your three main points will be AFTER you do your research – see what information you find. Also, I would have your third section be the one with the most impact on your audience, or be the most interesting one, since that will be the one in their mind when you end your speech.
- ❑ Consider using a vehicle or metaphor of some type to bring you through the speech
- ❑ Use interesting vocabulary, this speech might be as simple in its construction as a seventh grade research paper, but the writing doesn’t have to sound like that!
- ❑ Make sure your points are easily understood by all. Remember, they only get to hear it one time.