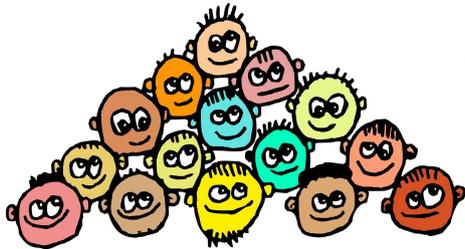


# Wolverhampton Speakers Club

## The Gentle Art Of Persuasion - A Beginner's Guide



Go on then - persuade us!

OK - I will ...



Argument and persuasion is a big subject and there are many books, articles and websites out there all dedicated to being successful - especially in a business context.

There's also a lot of detail in the WSC '*Guide to Public Speaking*' about writing and delivering persuasive speeches, but this is simply a brief guide for those of you who are just starting out.

### What is a persuasive speech?

A persuasive speech is built around an argument or point of view that you are trying to get across to your audience. You are an advocate for your argument and you are aiming to convince your audience - invite agreement rather than disagreement - to get them to accept, and maybe act upon, your point of view.

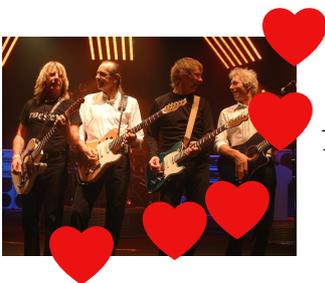


You need to convince your audience by what you say AND how you say it - you use both logical and emotional appeals

Yes Dave, that's right - consider what you want them to know, what you want them to feel and what you want them to do



### The status quo



Not ... **THE** Status Quo!!!

No, sorry - not them!  
This is something quite different ...



'**Status Quo**' basically means the existing state of things - the situation as it is before you start to persuade your audience. So when you try to persuade your audience you are arguing for either:

- A change to the status quo, or
- No change to the status quo (i.e. leave things as they are)

So you will need to be clear what the status quo actually **IS** so that you can be clear about your argument.

**For example:** WSC, unlike a lot of speakers clubs, doesn't use a General Evaluator - a senior member who will evaluate the whole meeting, including the Chair and the Evaluators and the Topics - **this is the status quo at WSC**. Imagine now that the club has a meeting to decide whether to start using a General Evaluator ...



I support having a General Evaluator - so I shall argue to **change the status quo** and I'll marshal my arguments to say why we should change

I think a General Evaluator is unnecessary so I shall argue for **no change to the status quo** and I'll say why we should stay as we are



Both Dave and Jasmine have identified the status quo on this issue and they can now go on to work out their arguments.

## Clash points

Remember to meet your audience where they are at present - that implies that you first have to try to get an understanding of their position. Try to identify any potential '**clash points**' between their position and yours – this will help you plan your argument.

Yours is the burden of persuasion to change or not change the status quo in the eyes of your audience, so ask yourself what is the threshold you have to get them to cross so as to win your argument? Whether it is a high or low threshold will determine what needs to go into your argument and how you present it.

## How to succeed

Knowing the status quo means that you can get on with your speech. To succeed:

- Prepare your argument thoroughly - do research if you need to
- Write a well-structured speech that is logical and easy to follow
- Deliver the speech with logical and emotional appeals

## Your speech structure

We still need to use our familiar speech structure for a persuasive speech - still beginning, middle and end.

The **beginning** should set out the issue you are speaking about and why you are qualified to speak about it. Use the structure of the **middle** of your speech to speak passionately about your take on the issue and discuss solutions and outcomes. The **end** of your speech should be a call to action outlining specific steps or proposals.

## Counter-arguments

To every argument there is a counter-argument – maybe serious, maybe trivial – that your audience may be thinking about, and you should try to work out and address what those might be when you are writing your speech. Counter-arguments can be useful to you in three ways:

- To include them in your speech so that your audience can see that you have been balanced and have taken them into account, or
- To work them out beforehand and keep them in reserve so that you can counter them if they are brought up by your audience, or
- Use them to inform your argument without stating them explicitly, hoping to pre-empt any objections

If the audience's position is close to yours and the threshold of persuasion is low then you are not likely to need to worry too much about counter-arguments. When you do need to consider them, work out what you need to respond to (not everything needs a response, so pick and choose) but whatever you do don't worsen your position – you must still be persuasive!

You are most often going to need to respond to counter-arguments that arise from where you and your audience disagree – so what is their stance, what do you have to respond to (you can't ignore serious points) and how do you respond effectively?



Anticipate your audience's counter arguments in terms of ...

Facts, Policies and Values

- You can introduce new evidence that challenges the audience's preconceptions
- You can show the unintended consequences of the opposing position (but be wary of unintended consequence of your own argument!)
- You can put the counter-argument in the perspective of a larger concern to show that there are more things at issue
- You can address the costs and benefits

## Traps For The Unwary

A persuasive speech is made up of both logical and emotional appeals.

**Logical appeals** are arguments that present information and show why your argument must rationally be true. **Emotional appeals** seek to make the audience feel a certain way so that they will accept your conclusion.

You have to balance logical and emotional appeals but you must check your logic carefully because this is where you might fall into one of a number of traps that can undermine your argument.

### Fallacies



Fallacies are flawed arguments that might arise from the claims you make or the data you use.

You can be sure that they'll be picked up by your opponents - so examine your logic carefully!



#### **Ad hominem**

This is where we attack a person to try to discredit their ideas or stance. Look at the argument, not the person. A 'straw man' is a caricature of an opposing view.

#### **Begging the question**

Sometimes called a 'circular argument' this is when we use our conclusion to support our argument rather than our argument to support our conclusion.

#### **Ad populum**

This is where we appeal to the audience to go along with the crowd - 'everybody knows' or 'everybody's doing it' - using popular support as the basis of your argument.

#### **False dilemma**

This is reducing the options you consider to just two, when there are more that should be considered, hoping to make your argument easier to present.

#### **Red herrings**

This is raising irrelevant data to distract the listener from your arguments – whether intentionally or not – an astute audience will see through it.

#### **Non sequiter**

This is drawing a conclusion that is not a reasonable inference from your argument - it simply doesn't follow (Latin, 'non sequiter').