

Researching Your Presentation: Getting the Best Stuff

Your presentation can only be as good as the quality of the information contained within it. Using your assignment description as a guide, you will want to:

- Conduct thorough research with the goal of obtaining a variety of sources. Do not begin and end your research with Google!
- Carefully evaluate the quality of what you find. After all, the reputability of your sources directly speaks to your credibility, and you are ethically obligated to present only good, accurate information.
- Carefully consider what in particular, from among the many things you've found, will be most useful and relevant to your presentation's purpose. Not everything you find should be included!

The following reading provides some guidelines as to what to look for and how to use it in a presentation. It is an excerpt from: Fujishin, R. (1997). *The natural speaker* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

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RESEARCHING YOUR SPEECH

What You Sow Is What You Reap

The icy wind blasted against the thin walls of the tent as mammoth sheets of snow fell from the black sky above. Huddled in their warm tent, three Sherpa guides calmly sipped their tea in silence as they listened to the monstrous groans of nature outside. In their silence, they contemplated the ascent from the base camp to the first rim of Mt. Everest the next morning. During the hours that followed, not one word would be exchanged among the three men. Each would sit comfortably in the silence. At ease with one another and within themselves, they had nothing to say, and only the sounds of the storm filled the tent as they sat.

The three Americans in the tent beside theirs were busily discussing the departure from the base camp. They talked about the weather conditions, hoping the storm would subside by early morning. They reminisced about past expeditions. They noisily exaggerated their earlier achievement, as they argued over which of them was the most skilled climber. The tent was filled with the heated words of their good-natured arguments as the storm raged outside.

When asked many weeks after the expedition why he didn't always feel the need to talk, one of the Sherpa guides replied, "There is no need to talk, if there is nothing to say. I am comfortable with my silence." The American who posed the question couldn't really grasp the import of the Sherpa's answer.

Many years ago Dionysus warned, "Let your speech be better than silence, or be silent." Much of our American public speaking, in the classroom as well as in the public forum, often resembles the mindless chatter of our televisions. Superficial topics and unimportant issues

characterize a great deal of what we bring to our podiums. This tabloid mentality of the mass media permeates our daily conversation.

We need to occasionally be silent in this noisy culture of ours. We need to quit talking and listen—really listen to others without constantly interrupting. We need to listen with our whole being, and not just with our ears. We need to turn off the television. We need to turn off the car stereo and simply hear the hum of the car engine as we drive. We need to turn off the Sony Walkman and listen to the rustling of the leaves and the wind in the trees.

We need to experience silence and see what it has to teach us about others and ourselves. All of nature and life is singing to us outside our tents, and we need to take the time to simply listen. Maybe then our speech will reflect a deeper understanding of life and all it has to offer.

Giving a speech involves much more than confidence, delivery practice, and direct eye contact. It requires that what we share with our audience is indeed important, interesting, and, ultimately, life enhancing. This chapter will help you in this area of speaking. We will examine the researching process required for giving speeches that are informative and interesting by showing you what to look for, where to look, and how to record the information.

What To Look For

As you begin researching your speech topic, you must know what types of supporting material to look for. Although there are a variety of systems that classify supporting material, most speech experts will agree on the following seven: definitions, examples, explanations, comparisons, statistics, expert testimony, and visual aids.

Definitions

One of the most helpful and readily accessible forms of supporting material is the simple *definition*. The novice speaker often overlooks the dictionary on her desk as she begins the process of gathering material for her presentation. Yet a definition is not only a powerful tool in clarifying terms for the audience's understanding, it also helps to focus the speaker in her research and preparation of the speech itself. A practical use of a definition might be seen in a husband's attempt to convince his wife they should take a one-week vacation to Hawaii: "You know, Janet, *Webster's Dictionary* says a vacation should be 'a period of suspension of regular work or study.' I would define a vacation as eight days and seven nights in Hawaii. How would you like to vacate for awhile?"

You should always define the most important term or two for any speech. For example, if you were to give a talk on "Honesty in relationships," you would want to define the term "honesty," and include that definition in the introduction or the first main point of the speech. You could simply say, "And what do I mean by 'honesty'? Well, *Webster's Dictionary* defines honesty as, 'The quality or fact of being truthful, sincere, or frank.'" It's always worthwhile to define your terms early in the speech to clarify and limit the scope of your presentation.

One thing you might keep in mind is that a definition should not confuse the audience. Try to avoid technical terms that need defining themselves or definitions that are too lengthy. Select definitions that are easily understood and brief. You don't want to lose your audience before you even get started.

Examples

We use examples every day to support our assertions and positions. If we tell a friend he's usually late for luncheon dates, one of the first things he'll most likely say is, "Oh yeah, when have I ever been late?" In other words, he's asking us to give an example to support our assertion.

One of the most widely used supporting devices is the example. The *example* is a specific instance of a generalization or assertion. *The Random House Dictionary* (we're using a definition already) defines "example" as, "One of a number of things, or a part of something, taken to show the character of the whole." Remember the husband attempting to convince his wife to visit Hawaii a few paragraphs ago? Well, he could use an example such as: "Honey, you're going to love Hawaii. It's such a beautiful place to relax. I was there once when I graduated from high school, and I was impressed with the lushness of the vegetation and the warmth and clarity of the water. I was never more relaxed in all my life."

A good rule of thumb is to have at least one example in each of your main points in the speech. The example is a powerful tool the speaker can use to paint a specific picture in the minds of the audience.

Examples can be brief or detailed, factual or hypothetical. If an example is factual and familiar to your audience, you need only refer to it briefly, since your audience is acquainted with the incident. If you're speaking on the hazards of politics, you could briefly refer to the example of Gary Hart and the 1988 presidential primaries. If the audience is not familiar with an example you are using, you will need to develop it in more detail, with names, dates, and facts. A more detailed example is often called an *illustration*. These illustrations can take the form of anecdotes, personal experiences, stories, or parables.

A *factual example* is an instance or incident that actually took place. Suppose you are speaking about the advantages of buying earthquake insurance. Your example could be drawn from a family who had their damaged home replaced after the 1972 Southern California earthquake, and the bill was paid by the insurance company.

A *hypothetical example*, on the other hand, can also be impressive. You might put the audience in the shoes of an imaginary homeowner who had a home destroyed by an earthquake and was not covered by earthquake insurance: "Suppose you own a home and choose not to purchase earthquake insurance. Your home is destroyed by an earthquake. How do you pay for the thousands of dollars in damage? How will you cope with the stress of the added financial burden?" A hypothetical example is also called a *hypothetical situation*. It can be extremely effective in getting your audience to consider a situation from a different point of view.

Explanations

An *explanation* is used to make an idea clear and easily seen in the mind's eye of the audience. Once again, the husband could use an explanation when convincing his wife to visit Hawaii: "I'm convinced you'll love Hawaii because you enjoy beautiful scenery, you like to swim in warm water, and whether you admit it or not, you do like to get away from the kids." How could she turn this down? But she's still holding firm to her refusal to go to Hawaii.

Well, let's leave those two for a while and examine the three types of explanations you can use: analysis, exposition, and description.

Analysis is the process of explaining or studying something by examining its parts. You might want to explain to your audience how to bake a cake by breaking the process into three parts: gathering the materials, mixing the materials, and, finally, baking the cake.

The purpose of *exposition* is to give your audience information that will increase their knowledge of a topic. Much of any speech is devoted to expounding or explaining so the audience understands more about the topic. A speech on how to make money selling real estate, grow a garden, or improve communication within a marriage will use exposition.

Description uses the five senses of taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing to let the audience know what is being presented. Often the use of description is the most powerful method of painting a picture in the minds of your audience. Suppose you are trying to describe a beach scene to your audience. Instead of simply saying "It was a beautiful beach," you might describe the scene by saying, "Imagine yourself sitting in the warm sand (touch), and the sound of the waves lapping on

the shore (hearing) relaxes you. You smell the salt air (smell), and the blue ocean stretches out as far as you can see (sight)." Which one describes the scene in more detail? The use of description can have a powerful impact upon the minds of your audience.

Comparisons

A *comparison* presents qualities or features that are similar. One of the most effective ways to present a new idea is to compare it to something that is familiar to the audience. Often comparisons attempt to show the connection between what the audience knows and what they do not know. The husband in our continuing vacation saga could use a comparison such as: "Hawaii's water is like Florida's, only clearer. The climate of Hawaii is like Southern California. And the people of Hawaii are as friendly as our own family."

A comparison can be either figurative or literal. *Figurative comparisons* describe similarities between things that are otherwise different. "He's as slow as molasses" or "The heart is like a pump" are examples of figurative comparisons.

A *literal comparison* is an actual comparison. This type of comparison gives your listeners a clear mental picture of what you're talking about. You can tell your audience that the airplane weighed as much as seven pickup trucks or the tomato was the size of a softball.

Noting differences between two entities is using *contrast*. Here the emphasis is on differences rather than similarities. An example of contrast can be seen when a mother tells her daughter that when she was 20 years old, college cost \$300 in annual tuition. But now, an annual tuition bill of \$10,000 is not unusual. Things sure have changed.

Statistics

Many of your listeners will be interested in and impressed by statistics. *Statistics* are numerical facts, such as: one out of four Americans will experience some form of cancer in his or her lifetime; 50 percent of all marriages will end in divorce; and Apple Computer stock doubled in the past five years. Once again, in his attempts to persuade his wife to go to Hawaii, the husband might use a statistic: "One out of every three Americans prefers vacationing in Hawaii to any other place in the world."

Wisely used, statistics can have a powerful impact on your audience. Unwisely used, they can bore, confuse, and even deceive the audience. When using statistics, try to keep them simple and easily understood by the average audience member.

There are some important rules to keep in mind when you use statistical information in your speech.

1. Your most important concern is the accuracy of the statistics you are using. You should take statistics from reliable sources. Is the magazine, book, journal, or newspaper a trusted, proven source? Is the author or the researcher of the statistics a credible source? Check these things out before using the information.
2. Your statistics should be recent. What may have been true just five or ten years ago could be outdated now. Try to have your statistics reflect research that is no more than five years old. The more recent, the better.
3. Limit your use of statistics. Once you have researched a topic thoroughly and have collected reams of statistical information about your subject, there is a tendency to want to use all of the data in your speech. If you did, you would run the serious risk of overwhelming your audience. You must realize that your listeners can accept and remember only a few statistics during the course of a speech. It is better to have a few well-placed statistics in your speech than to overload your listeners with an avalanche of numbers. Choose those statistics wisely.
4. Use your statistics for comparative purposes. For instance, when discussing the number of lawyers in America, you might tell your audience that in 1987, one out of every 360 Americans was a lawyer. But the picture changes when you compare that statistic to 1967, when only one out of every 1,210 Americans was a lawyer. The comparison gets even more interesting if you compare our statistics to those of Japan, where in 1987 only one out of every 9,600 Japanese citizens was a lawyer.
5. Round off your statistics. Present your statistics in a way that will make them easy for your audience to understand. Instead of saying the average annual wage of a field worker in Chile is \$129.83, round off your statistic so that it will be more easily heard and remembered by the audience. With this in mind, the average wage of the field worker in Chile becomes \$130 annually. Much easier to hear and remember.
6. Use visual aids to present your statistics. For many people, it is difficult to visualize even the simplest statistic as it is being rattled off by the speaker. If the speaker shoots out too many statistics and numbers, the audience often will simply tune the speaker out. The human organism avoids pain and suffering, in the auditorium as well as in personal life. If you have a lot of statistics to present, you might try presenting them in the form of a visual aid—a chart, graph, table, or diagram. We examine this in more detail later in the chapter.

Expert Testimony

The testimony of an expert or authority on a particular subject adds credibility to your speech. The most important benefit of *expert testimony* is to show your audience that you are not alone in your thinking—your ideas and convictions are also held by experts in the field.

You're probably wondering if that wife has decided to visit Hawaii yet. She hasn't. What will it take to convince her? Maybe the husband could present some expert testimony: "Sylvia Bass, our travel agent, told me that of all the places she's vacationed in the world, Hawaii is her favorite." The wife is smiling, but still shaking her head. Well, while she's deciding, let's discuss who to interview if you plan to offer expert testimony in your speech.

You must turn to experts or authorities when researching your speech topics. If your subject is drug abuse, your attention turns to the medical doctor and the drug abuse therapist. If your subject is inflation, your attention turns to the economist. If your subject is engine repair, your attention turns to the auto mechanic. The source of expert testimony changes with each topic.

There are two ways you can support your views with the expert testimony of others. You can quote them word for word, or you can paraphrase what they said in your own words. You can paraphrase the expert's testimony if the material is longer than a couple of sentences in length or to simplify the statement in an accurate manner. The shorter the quotation, the greater the impact it will have on your audience.

Since the information you are presenting is not yours, you must *give credit* where credit is due. You must orally document the testimony by telling the audience who said it, where you got the information, and the date of the testimony. It may be stated as simply as, "In the June 1989 issue of *The California Therapist*, Dr. Salvador Minuchin states . . .," or "President Bush, in the June 13, 1989, issue of *Time Magazine*, warns . . ."

You can add more credibility to your expert, especially if your authority is not well known to the audience, by presenting some background information before you give his or her testimony. For example, with the first quotation from Dr. Minuchin, you could preface his remarks by adding, "Dr. Minuchin is a world-famous family therapist, the author of three textbooks on family therapy, and an internationally acclaimed lecturer on family dysfunction." Keep in mind that your documentation and background information on your expert has more impact if you present them *before* you give the testimony.

Visual Aids

The old Chinese saying "One picture is worth a thousand words" holds true in public speaking as well. The final category of supporting material is *visual aids*. Visual aids can improve your speech by focusing the attention of your listeners, making your ideas easier to understand, and helping your listeners remember what you said.

This is our husband's final attempt to convince his wife to vacation in Hawaii. He will use a series of visual aids: "Honey, just look at these recent snapshots Sylvia took on her last vacation to Hawaii. Look at the beautiful water. Doesn't the sand look clean? Can you imagine yourself on that beach right now?" She finally says "Yes!" The visual aids did the trick! She's going to Hawaii. But we're not, so we need to examine different visual-aid forms.

The various forms of visual aids include the speaker himself, the chalkboard, models, objects, drawings and sketches, charts, and electronic media. Let's examine each of these forms of visual aids in more detail.

The *speaker himself* can be a very powerful visual aid. Not only do dress and appearance help provide the audience with a strong visual message and a means of evaluating the overall message of the speaker, but body movement, gestures, and facial expressions can also play an important role in helping the audience visualize the speech.

The speaker's body can demonstrate how to move when skiing, dancing, and kicking. Her hands and gestures can show how to massage a neck, hold chopsticks, or throw a football. Her face can display a range of emotions that can help the audience visualize a scene from a story or anecdote. Don't be afraid to act out or demonstrate portions of your speech that can only be appreciated and understood when they are seen by the audience.

The *chalkboard* is another readily accessible visual aid that may help the audience visualize portions of your speech. Chalkboard use is best for impromptu speeches, when the speaker has no preparation time to construct a prepared drawing or chart. The disadvantages of chalkboard use are many. Often the speaker will speak to the chalkboard and not the audience. And the speaker's body will partly obscure much of what is being put up on the board. The chalkboard should be used only as a last resort. If you prepare properly for your speech, you will have adequate time to construct a prepared drawing or chart that will prove much more valuable to the audience.

The *object itself* is an excellent visual aid. Showing the audience the actual computer, quilt, vase, or surfboard leaves little to misinterpretation. Often, however, the actual object is impractical to bring to the classroom or auditorium.

A *model* makes a very helpful visual aid. A model is a representation that serves as a manageable copy of the object itself. If you were giving a speech on airplanes, A-frame cabins, or the water molecule, a model would serve as an effective visual aid. One thing to remember about models is they don't have to be works of art. One speaker spent over \$40 having a plastic model of a jet engine constructed, when a balloon would have done just fine. Make sure that your model is large enough for your audience to see, and that it gives your audience a rough idea of what you're talking about.

Drawings and sketches are perhaps the easiest of all visual aids to construct. Now, you might be thinking, "I'm no artist," and skip the rest of this paragraph. But hold on for a moment. As in model construction, your drawing or sketch doesn't have to be a work of art. With a few felt pens, a compass, a straightedge, and some patience, you can create a drawing or sketch that will add clarity and dimension to the speech.

Keep your drawings simple. Don't overload the audience with unnecessary details when a stick figure sketch would suffice. Make your drawings, sketches, and lettering large enough so that the people in the back row will be able to see them. After you're done with the first draft of the drawing, move as far away from the drawing as the back row of your audience and give it a glance. If the drawing can be seen from there, fine. If not, it's back to the drawing board for a larger version.

The colors used in your drawing or sketch should stand out at a distance. Colors such as black and red on white cardboard are easily seen. Pink and yellow on a white background cannot be seen. Use 2 × 3-foot white cardboard (the kind you buy at stationery stores for a couple of dollars) for drawing your sketches; they stand up better on easels than sheets of regular paper.

Charts permit the speaker to present a wealth of information in very little space. Word charts, number charts, steps in a process, organizational flow charts, and maps add important visual dimensions to any speech. Line graphs, pie graphs, and bar graphs can also be utilized to present statistics so that large amounts of data can be seen at one glance.

When constructing a chart, keep it as simple as possible. The lettering and numbering should be large enough to be seen by all your audience. Using lettering and numbering so small that only the speaker can see them is a common mistake made by those speakers who forget the chart is for the audience to see, not for the speaker.

Finally, the use of *electronic media*, such as videotape playback recorders, overhead projectors, and slide projectors can also be considered when planning the visual-aid portion of your talk. When you consider their use, remember that electronic media may not be appropriate for some speeches. If you have only five minutes to get a group of people

to vote in tomorrow's election, electronic media may not be the best approach to convince your audience, since five minutes does not give you adequate time for preparation. On the other hand, if you're trying to convince a group of teenagers to not drink and drive, and you are given adequate preparation time, a videotape of a fatal car accident scene may have an impact on your audience that words cannot provide.

After considering the advantages and disadvantages of using electronic media, it would be wise for you to practice with the device ahead of time. When you practice your speech, include the use of the machine. There's nothing more embarrassing than trying in front of an audience to figure out how some machine works.

Suggestions for Using Visual Aids

If you decide to use any visual aids in your speech, here are some recommendations you may find helpful:

1. Make sure the visual aid is large enough to be seen.
2. Keep your visual aids simple. Your audience must be able to grasp their meaning immediately.
3. Use visual aids only if they clarify or reinforce a point you are trying to make. Don't overdo the use of visual aids. You don't want to overwhelm or overload the audience.
4. Show your visual aids only when you are talking about them. When you are not using a visual aid, place it out of sight. You don't want to distract your listeners.
5. Never pass your visual aids around to the audience. You will lose their attention. No matter how mature or sophisticated your audience appears, they're all kids at heart, and you'll lose their attention as they fiddle, tug, stretch, and bang your visual aid.
6. Maintain eye contact with your audience when using your visual aid.
7. Don't talk to your visual aid. Talk to your audience.
8. Practice with your visual aid. A common mistake for the novice speaker is to think that she will know how to handle a visual aid without ever practicing with it. Get the feel of your visual aids before you give your speech.

Where To Look For Speech Information

Now that you have an idea of what to look for when you're researching your speech, we need to spend some time discussing where to look for

this information. There are three primary areas to explore—your own experience and knowledge, library resources, and interviewing.

Your Own Experience and Knowledge

Most people would rush off to the library when they are faced with the prospect of researching a speech topic. And by doing so, they overlook one of the richest sources of speech information—their own experience and knowledge.

If you sit quietly for a moment or two and scan your prior experience and knowledge of the speech topic you've selected, scenes from the past, bits and pieces of knowledge from old lectures or conversations, and anecdotes from personal experience will parade past your mind's eye. Each one potentially provides unique and interesting information for the content of your speech. A woman giving a speech on parenting may remember stories about her parents, movies that depicted the struggles and rewards of parenting, the highlights of an old college lecture on raising children, and an anecdote or two about raising her own children. This information from past knowledge and experience serves as an original and colorful source of speech information.

The brainstorming technique can be utilized here when surveying your past experience and knowledge. Simply jotting down every related experience and piece of knowledge, no matter how small or trivial, will provide a springboard from which you can begin your research.

Library Resources

The library might not be your first choice for exciting places to visit on a Friday evening, but it does serve as one of the most rewarding sources of speech information. Every library, regardless of size, usually provides the following sources of information that you will need to research your speech:

The *computer* or *card catalog* indexes all of the library's information by author, title, and subject. This catalog is your primary guide to the books in the library. If you are unfamiliar with its operation, ask the librarian on duty for assistance. He will be more than happy to assist you.

Magazines and *periodicals* are another source of information for your speech. The *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* will be your most valuable resource for locating magazine and periodical articles that are related to your speech topic. The advantage of magazine or periodical information is that it is generally more current than information provided by books and encyclopedias. The *Reader's Guide* indexes the arti-

cles of more than 130 American journals on a wide range of topics. In addition, you may wish to consult other indexes such as the *Education Index* for topics related to education or the *Index to Behavioral Sciences and Humanities*.

Quotation books provide another rich source of information for your speech. *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, a reference book containing over 1,500 pages of quotations on every topic imaginable, is one of the most popular collections of quotations. One-third of the book is an index to help you find a suitable quotation on just about any topic. Your library should have a copy of *Familiar Quotations*, along with a few other similar reference works. A quotation often provides an ideal beginning or ending to your speech.

Your library should have one or two of your local daily *newspaper indexes*, in addition to the *New York Times Index*. Although newspapers don't always provide the most scholarly writing on a given topic, the articles can be a source of recent and local information for your speech.

Interviewing

The final source of speech information we will discuss is the *interviewing* of experts. Although many speakers are reluctant to ask for an interview from a local expert, the rewards of doing so can go beyond those of simply giving a well-researched speech. Many a friendship, both professional and personal, and many a job have blossomed because of a 15-minute interview.

For a given speech, don't interview more than one or two experts, since the interview process involves more time and effort than you might imagine.

The first step in conducting an interview is to decide *whom* you want to talk with. If your speech is on sleeping pills, you may want to speak with a pharmacist or a physician. If your topic is automobile engine repair, you may want to talk with an auto mechanic who specializes in engine overhauling. Or if your speech is on the planet Jupiter, you may want to interview an astronomy instructor at a local college or university.

The second step is to *request an interview*. Whether you request an interview in person, over the telephone, or in a formal letter, keep your request brief and friendly. Let the person know who you are, that you are researching a speech topic in his or her field of expertise, and that you would like a 15-minute interview at his or her convenience (not yours). If the person cannot or will not grant an interview, thank him or her for the time and try the next candidate. If he or she agrees to the interview, great!

The third step is to write a list of *questions* for the interview itself. This should be done only *after* you have researched the topic from your own knowledge and experience and have conducted your library search for material. This prior research will enable you to ask more enlightened, specific, and articulate questions.

The fourth step is the *interview itself*. Be punctual. Nothing is more annoying to your interviewee than for you to arrive late to a meeting that you requested. Dress up for the interview. Don't arrive in your tank top and old Levis. Show a little respect. And stick to your time limit of 15 minutes. You can cover a lot of territory in that period of time, as long as you stick to the task at hand. Bring your list of questions and a pen to jot down noteworthy remarks. At the end, thank the interviewee.

Finally, after you've returned from the interview, take a moment out to write a brief *thank you card* or letter to the person you interviewed. The few minutes and the cost of the stamp will add that touch of class that few interviewers ever consider.

How To Record Your Speech Information

Now that you have a better idea of what to look for and where to look for it, let's briefly discuss how to record the information you will be using.

In your research, you will find a variety of examples, quotations, statistics, and comparisons that you will want to correct. You may not use all of the information, and you may not even know the order in which you will present it. So, you will have to find some way of recording all this data. People have used everything from professional calligraphy paper to the clean side of a McDonald's hamburger wrapper to record their speech information.

The best material to use for recording your information is the 3 × 5-inch index card. You can purchase a pack of 50 cards at any drug or stationery store for less than a dollar. Index cards are recommended because sorting and rearranging your material is much easier when each piece of information is recorded on a separate index card, as opposed to one large sheet of paper.

When recording your research material, you should note the author's name and book title, magazine, or newspaper on the upper left-hand side of the card. If your evidence was taken during an interview, list the interviewee's name and professional background. The quotation, statistic, example, and so on, should be recorded in the middle of the card. A finished note card should look something like this:

Lee Iacocca
Talking Straight

"There is one lawyer for every
9,600 people in Japan."

When researching your material, you should collect about *three times* the amount of material you will need for the speech. In the average five-minute speech, you will most likely need about two minutes of research information. So if you read all your researched information orally, and it takes you about six minutes, you probably have enough information to choose from for the speech.

Regarding the number of sources you should consult, you should present at least three different sources of information. Three is the minimum. Fewer than that would not ensure sufficient depth or breadth of research.

A final word of caution would be to begin your research as soon as possible. Most people tend to procrastinate and let things slide to the last minute. But tardiness in your research will only increase your anxiety and wreak havoc on your sleep. Don't wait until the night before you are scheduled to speak to begin your research. That will only make you old before your time.

