In the last few instructions, we've talked about how to evaluate various types of speeches and media presentations. One of the most common is the persuasive speech -- one in which the speaker tries to get you to:

agree with him or her
change your attitudes or beliefs, or
take some kind of action

By now, you've probably prepared and delivered several persuasive speeches yourself. But this is a good time to remind you of the **four basic types** of persuasive speech, how they differ and **what kind of proof** is required for each.

Characteristics of Persuasive Speech

As you know, a persuasive speech attempts to affect the attitudes and beliefs of the audience on a subject about which there is disagreement. If there aren't at least two sides to a question, there's no need for persuasion.

As we said, a persuasive speaker is trying to get the audience:

* to agree with him or her
* to change its attitudes or beliefs
* to take action

He or she may be:

* defending an idea
* refuting an opponent
* selling a program or idea

The core of any persuasive speech is its **proposition**. A proposition is the simplest possible expression of what the speaker wants the audience to accept. It may or may not be explicitly stated -- but on a test you may be asked to come up with one after hearing or reading a sample speech.

Here is an example:

Proposition: The new athletic complex should be named Harper Pavilion.

A proposition differs from a thesis statement in that a **thesis statement** must also include the speaker's "reasons why." The thesis statement is **what you actually hear** in a speech -- and it usually comes near the beginning.

Here is the thesis statement for the above proposition:

> **Thesis Statement:** The new athletic complex should be named for Hoop Harper, an outstanding teacher, a great basketball coach, a dedicated mentor and the students' friend.

Now the speaker must **prove** his or her proposition. There are four different types of proposition -- propositions of *fact*, propositions of *value*, propositions of *policy* and propositions of *problem*.

Each type of proposition requires a different type of proof. But the speaker's credibility is an important consideration in all of them. To establish his or her credibility, a speaker must show knowledge of the subject matter, evidence of careful research and respect for the interests and needs of the audience.

Now let's examine the various types of proposition.

Propositions of Fact

A *proposition of fact* attempts to prove that something is or is not true. For example:

> **Proposition**: Auto racing is America's most popular sport.

A proposition of *fact* is best proved by an appeal to the intellect (left brain) and is done by presenting enough evidence to convince the audience that the proposition is true. In this case, attendance statistics for a wide variety of sports (showing that auto racing draws the biggest crowds) would be convincing.

Propositions of Value

A *proposition of value* attempts to prove that something is good or bad, valuable or worthless, moral or immoral. For example:

> **Proposition:** Sex before marriage is wrong.

This is a highly controversial proposition, which makes it an ideal subject for a persuasive presentation.

A proposition of *value* goes beyond facts into beliefs, morals and values. Therefore, its proof must appeal to both the intellect (left brain) and emotion (right brain). This proof will be most effective if it agrees with what the audience already feels and believes.

Value speeches do not specifically call their listeners to action -- but propositions of *policy* do.

Propositions of Policy

A *proposition of policy* specifically urges that some action be taken -- so the words *should* or *ought* are usually included in it. For example:

> **Proposition**: Everybody should get involved in the boycott against California grapes.

Like a value speech, a *policy* speech needs to appeal to both emotion and reason. It can ask for passive agreement or (preferably) for immediate action. If it asks for action, it should be as specific as possible. For example:

> "Picketing begins Saturday. Dress neatly but comfortably, make a sign that says DON'T EAT GRAPES in either Spanish or English and meet at 8 AM in the Safeway parking lot on Orange Avenue."

Propositions of Problem

Some speech teachers also add *propositions of problem* to the list, while others put problem-solution speeches under *policy* or *value.* This type of speech should present listeners with both the problem and the solution.

There are several steps a *problem* speech speaker must take:

1. Convince listeners that the problem exists.

2. Analyze the cause(s) of the problem.

3. Propose a solution.

4. Persuade the audience that his or her solution is best.

If the audience is unfamiliar with the problem, a speaker must spend more time explaining it and analyzing its cause or causes. If the audience knows all about it, more time can be spent on the solution.

In the interests of fairness, a speaker should always compare his or her solution with other solutions -- but most speakers only put forth their own solution or give short shrift to anything else. This is called "stacking the deck." If you are speaking to a hostile audience, this is particularly unwise. You really **should** present opposing viewpoints to your own and not try to accomplish too much. With a friendly audience, however, you would want to identify yourself with the audience and try to get it to take action.

Persuasive speakers - and the media -- have a wide range of motivational appeals and techniques at their disposal, no matter what type of proposition is being advanced.

We'll tell you all about **them** in our next Instruction.