



Center for Writing and Speaking

P NO. 8 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Using Examples and Stories

Often, the most important element in a good speech is not the topic itself, but how it is developed and supported. Good speeches contain accurate, relevant, and interesting supporting material. This handout addresses two closely related kinds of supporting material: examples and stories.

EXAMPLES illustrate, describe, or represent things. They add interest and clarification to your points.

- **Brief examples** offer a single illustration of a point. In a speech about how much having a dog has made me more responsible, I could use this example:
 - I used to sleep in all the time, but when we got Fluffy, I had to start waking up every morning at five to let him outside. He would jump on my bed at 4:55 and lick my face like a 35 lb slobbering alarm clock.
- **Extended examples** are like brief examples, except they are longer in order to allow you to offer multifaceted illustration of an idea.
- **Hypothetical examples** are brief or extended like real examples, but they have the added bonus of being made up. This is particularly helpful when your speech addresses possible future outcomes of something that hasn't happened yet.
 - For example, if you were giving a speech about the social ramifications of achieving gender parity in elected positions in this country, you could use hypothetical examples to show what that might be like.

STORIES are one of the most engaging, poignant, and powerful meanings of conveying your message. Narratives can be real or imaginary, short or long, funny or sad, shocking or serious.

For example, Bonnie Campbell used the following real life to introduce her speech on domestic violence: *Last November 26, Christopher Bailey of St. Albans, West Virginia, finished the argument by beating his wife, Sonya, until she collapsed. Then he put her in the trunk of their compact car and drove for five days through West Virginia and Kentucky before taking her to the emergency room. Sonya Bailey suffered irreversible brain damage and remains in a permanent vegetative state—becoming another domestic violence statistic.*

CHECKLIST for selecting the right example or story:

- ✓ Does the example or story truly illustrate or support the point I need to make?
- ✓ Are there sufficient examples?
- ✓ Are the examples representative?
- ✓ Is it suitable for the audience's background and experiences, or would another illustration be more appropriate?

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