

Winning Edge #8 – 4-Part Persuasive Speech Formula

This is Trevor Bragdon with Commonwealth Partners' *The Winning Edge*: Tips to help conservatives persuade and win.



Today, we're looking at the 4-part persuasive speech formula.

If you needed to persuade millions of people to change their mind on an issue, how would you do it?

Now to make things harder, what if it was 100 years ago—before radio or television. How would you do it then?

This is the exact problem George Creel faced at the start of World War I. America was joining the war and mobilizing troops, but the public wasn't on board to go fight "Europe's War."

The president had tasked Creel with boosting public opinion for the war. But how to do it? There were already stories in the paper about the war. But in 1917, there were few other ways to talk to the public.

As Creel considered his options, he was interrupted by Donald Ryerson, who pitched a solution.

What's something we could add our message to that Americans do right now? What about movie theaters? Millions of Americans go to films each week. There was always a 4-minute break, halfway through the movie, to switch the film reels. Those 4 minutes would be the perfect time to deliver a message to a captive audience.

Ryerson proposed creating what he called 4 Minute Men. A grassroots network of thousands of people from local towns to go and give speeches during these brief intermissions. They would focus on a single issue and have a single action the audience should take.

Creel loved the idea so much he put Ryerson in charge. Ryerson got to work. His team recruited and trained over 75,000 local speakers and wrote hundreds of persuasive speeches for them. Over the course of the war, almost a million speeches were given. They persuaded people to support the war in big and small ways. Donate your binoculars to support the Navy, or buy Liberty Bonds to fund the war.

This 4 Minute Man program worked because they stuck to a persuasive formula. Be short—less than 4 minutes. Grab your audience's attention. Have a single point. Always have an action for the audience to take.

While these grassroots speaking tactics later faded with the rise of the radio and then television, the persuasive principles they used still hold true.

Here's a simple 4-part formula that you can use to create a short, persuasive speech.

- One Question
- One Story
- One Point
- One Call-to-Action

First start by asking yourself, “What’s the one point I want my audience to remember a year from now?” Brainstorm and write down your answer. This one point is the backbone of your speech. Everything in your short speech needs to support it.

For example, if you wanted to build a speech about school choice. Your one point could be: “Pennsylvania needs school choice to help every child have access to a good education.”

Once you’ve decided on your one point, it’s time to outline your speech.

Start your speech with one question that’s framed around your one point. You want to pique the curiosity of your audience with the question so they listen to learn the answer.

For your speech, you could start by saying: *“Politicians say every child deserves access to a good education. But, do we believe them?”*

Next, tell them one story which answers the question. The more memorable the better.

You could say: *“Growing up outside of Harrisburg, Myles Slade-Bowers was stuck in a school that didn’t fit his unique needs. He was locked into one school option because of his zip code. Luckily, because of Pennsylvania’s school choice program, Myles was able to attend a school where he thrived and graduated. But the same choice Myles had isn’t available to everyone.”*

Then you want to explicitly state that one point you want them to remember. Ideally say it in a compelling and sticky way.

“Unfortunately, we have politicians that support school choice on the campaign trail, but then once elected block other students from having a choice.”

Then close with one call to action for your audience. The one small thing you want them to do or think about because of your speech.

“It’s time for lawmakers to give every student an equal opportunity to get a great education.”

The 4-part formula for a persuasive speech:

- One Question
- One Story
- One Point
- One Call-to-Action

To use this formula just grab 4 sticky notes and write out each section. Then practice, and you'll be ready to give your persuasive speech and give yourself the Winning Edge.