



THE TWO-MINUTE SPEECH

A basic unit of verbal communication in Presbyterian governing bodies is the “Two-Minute Speech.” Rarely, a committee might allow a commissioner to speak during open hearings for three minutes, but almost always by the time they get to *you*, the time limit has gone down to two minutes, or even one. The reduction of time can rattle unseasoned commissioners, so this essay is designed to help you think through the scope of your message, the construction of your speech, and the most effective way(s) to deliver it.

THE SCOPE OF YOUR MESSAGE

- In two minutes, you can make **one major point**. If you have more than one point to make, write two speeches and have them both available to respond to the flow of the debate. But in two minutes, you can only focus on one main idea and illustrate it.
- Speak to what is **relevant** to the committee listening to you. Understand what action they are considering, and keep your comments focused in that area. If they cannot act on what you are advocating, your speech will have no impact.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF YOUR SPEECH

I. The basic structure of your speech will include four main elements:

1. **Introduction:** “I am Rev. Jayne Dough, minister commissioner from Narnia Presbytery. I stand in favor of Overture 2001.”
2. **Thesis statement:** [see III. below]
3. **Your main argument** in 1:45 minutes
4. **Closing exhortation:** “Please vote yes on Overture 2001.”

II. Here is an excellent way to whittle your ideas down to one main point¹:

1. Spend five minutes freewriting about your topic, *without stopping*. This is your first loop.
2. Look at what you have written. Find the central or most intriguing thought, and summarize it in a single sentence.
3. Starting with the summary sentence from your first loop, spend another five minutes freewriting. This second loop focuses on the first loop, just as the first loop focused on your topic. Look for the central idea within your second piece of freewriting—the basis for the third loop.
4. Keep this process going until you discover a clear angle or something about the topic that you can pursue in a full two-minute speech.

III. Develop an effective thesis statement that introduces your topic to the committee.

Your working thesis has two parts: the topic and one important point about the topic. For example, “Local interpretation of ordination standards will dismantle the PCUSA.” Topic = “local interpretation of ordination standard” and Comment = “will dismantle the PCUSA.”

Evaluate this sentence by asking yourself:

- is this working thesis *interesting* to your listeners?
- is it *specific* enough to be accessible?
- is the scope limited enough to make it *manageable*?²

Adjust your thesis statement until it meets these criteria. You might check it out with a commissioner colleague or advisor, especially to test “interest.”

1 Andrea A. Lunsford, *The Everyday Writer* (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005), 37.

2 Lunsford, 42

IV. Write your speech.

1. Keep your main message in mind, and develop the one point throughout.
2. The time length of the body of your speech is 1:45 minutes. The number of words depends on how fast you talk. Two hundred words a minute is too fast for anything you say to have an impact. One hundred words a minute is quite leisurely, unnecessarily slow. Think in terms of between 125 and 150 words per minute to start out. Practice speaking what you have written, and adjust accordingly. [Very helpful to have access to a computer and its *word count* feature!]
3. Evaluate your speech:
 - does it **inform** (concrete, clear, consistent)? —*are your facts substantiated?*
 - does it **inspire** (engage, express emotion or energize)? —*are your feelings genuine?*
 - does it **involve** the hearers (relate to their task, relate to their experience, call them to action)? —*are your points persuasive?*

THE DELIVERY OF YOUR MESSAGE

1. Practice your speech a few times (get a friend to listen to a run-through). You can verify the length, get feedback, and gain confidence.
2. When it's your turn before the committee, take a deep breath, and speak right up. The microphone is usually "directional," meaning you must have it pointing directly at your mouth to pick up your voice.
3. Don't waste time with superfluous introductions, "Good morning!" or banter. You can waste a precious 30 seconds in preliminary comments, so resist the temptation. Go straight to your written speech.
4. Try to establish eye contact with committee members, at least at the beginning and end of your speech.
5. Speak in your own voice, naturally paced, with good volume. Genuineness counts for a lot, so be your best Spirit-filled self and go for it!