

Choosing a persuasive topic

- **Choose something you feel strongly about.** If you don't feel strongly about your topic, how are you going to persuade the audience to feel the same way? Students sometime say, "But I don't feel strongly about anything!" Yes you do. Sit down with a piece of paper and brainstorm. If you like baseball, give a speech for or against salary caps. If you like rap music, give a speech on why rap music is not as violent as many people think. You get the idea.
- **Avoid your "hot button" topics.** Don't pick something you feel *too* strongly about. Hot button topics are issues you feel so strongly about that it's hard for you to understand where the other side is coming from. In order to give a good persuasive speech, you need to understand the other side's point of view, because how else will you change it?
- **Choose something controversial.** It doesn't have to be extremely controversial, but you do need to present a topic that not everyone agrees with. Otherwise there's no persuasion going on, and it's not a very good persuasive speech. For example, don't give a speech on why smoking is bad for your health. Who's going to disagree with that? Instead, try giving a speech for or against a campus-wide smoking ban. Now you have some controversy and a super topic.
- **Avoid "tired topics."** Tired topics are those that students pick all the time and that your instructor has heard over and over again. Yawn. Be creative.
- **Choose a current event.** Having trouble thinking of a topic? Go read a newspaper. What's going on in the world? If there's an election, endorse a candidate or a ballot referendum.
- **Choose a campus or local issue.** Are there controversial issues around campus? Are there controversial issues in your college town? These topics will be very relevant to your audience members.
- **Choose an issue of interest to the audience.** Give a speech about cell phones, or music downloads, or tuition hikes, or something the audience cares about. If they don't care about your issue, they won't be persuaded.
- **Choose a smaller part of a big issue.** Don't try to change people's mind about a huge issue in your short speech, because you can't. Think you can change your classmates' mind about abortion in a 6-8 minute speech? Of course not. However, you *might* change their minds about a portion of this issue, like parental notification laws.
- **Be cautious with issues that some audience members might find offensive.** Speech topics that some students might consider to be racist, anti-gay, or something along those lines are not great topics. Think about this: the object of this speech is to *persuade* your audience. If some of your audience members feel offended on a personal level, they aren't going to be persuaded. **I'm a huge free speech advocate, but you might consider finding *another* outlet to express certain ideas than a persuasive speech.**