

# Planning and Facilitating a 4-H Public Speaking Workshop

4-H youth development programs focus on experiential learning opportunities that promote life skills development. Essential life skills include decision making, goal setting, responsibility, time management, organization, leadership, citizenship, and communication. Because communication contributes to the successful development of numerous other life skills, it is a foundational life skill.

An important component of communication is public speaking. By definition, “Public speaking is the process of speaking to a group of people in a structured, deliberate manner intended to inform, influence, or entertain the listeners.” (Kadian-Baumyer, 2014). Many 4-H programs offer opportunities for engaging youth in learning and applying public speaking knowledge and skills.

Workshops are a useful teaching format for introducing public speaking concepts. They focus on development of basic oral communication skills and/or preparation for informal or formal public speaking opportunities and events.

Many 4-H faculty, staff, and volunteers are uncertain about how to introduce public speaking to youth. This fact sheet provides a framework for planning and facilitating a workshop along with descriptions of suggested learning activities. 4-H faculty and staff, volunteers, and teen leaders can easily implement and adapt the framework and activities for use with various audiences.

The workshop framework is described below. The planning section is in outline format to allow for quick reference during the planning stage.

## Planning a Workshop

- 1. Select the workshop focus**
  - a. Basic introduction to public speaking?
  - b. Preparation for 4-H project-related talks?
  - c. Preparation for formal public speaking events?
- 2. Identify the audience**
  - a. Age range
  - b. 4-H club members or outreach participants
  - c. Club level or county/city level
  - d. Volunteers/staff (train the trainer)
- 3. Determine the workshop logistics**
  - a. Date
  - b. Time
  - c. Location
  - d. Delivery mode (in-person, online – live or recorded)
  - e. Cost
  - f. Registration deadline and process/details
- 4. Develop “SMART” learning objectives** (Note: Even if you do not plan to collect outcome data, having well-defined objectives is useful.)
  - a. Specific
  - b. Measurable
  - c. Achievable
  - d. Relevant
  - e. Targeted and time-bound  
(Chatterjee and Corral, 2017)

**5. Identify or develop appropriate learning activities and resources**

- a. Activity descriptions/procedures
- b. Supplementary resources (online resources, activity handouts, etc.)

**6. Develop an evaluation plan**

- a. Brief evaluation tool (pre-/post-survey, performance assessment, exit interview, etc.)
- b. Evaluation questions aligned with objectives and desired outcomes (most Extension programs have designated evaluation tools.)

**7. Create an agenda**

- a. Objectives
- b. Background information on importance of public speaking
- c. Learning activities, including instructions and relevant information
- d. Timeline for activities
- e. Required materials
- f. Evaluation information to share with participants
- g. Wrap-up (reflection on key concepts)

**8. Create a list of necessary supplies**

- a. Equipment (computer, projector, wireless connection, easels, etc.)
- b. General supplies (copies of handouts, pencils, sign-in sheet, copies of evaluation, etc.)
- c. Required materials for learning activities
- d. Food/drinks/incentives

**9. Consider costs and cost recovery**

- a. Supplies and activity materials
- b. Food/drinks
- c. Incentives (certificates, ribbons, 4-H items, etc.)
- d. Additional expenses (publicity, building rental, insurance, etc.)
- e. Possible registration fees to recover workshop expenses

**10. Develop marketing materials**

- a. University/Extension logo, 4-H logo, equal opportunity statement, etc. included
- b. Workshop logistics (objectives, date, time, location, audience, cost, registration deadline and details) included

**11. Publicize the workshop and collect registrations**

- a. Print media publications (fliers, newspapers, newsletters, free community publications, etc.)
- b. Digital media submissions (websites, electronic

newsletters, email, social media, blogs, etc.)

- c. Registration process (online, e-mail, phone call, etc.)
- d. Accept registrations: collect/organize participant information

**12. Prepare necessary supplies**

- a. Refer to #8 above
- b. Supply quantities depend on registration numbers

**Facilitating a Workshop**

Depending on the focus of a workshop, the learning objectives and format of activities will vary. Below are descriptions and suggested activities for the three focus areas shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Three major 4-H public speaking workshop focus areas



There are several ways to introduce public speaking to youth audiences. It is important to engage youth with interactive, hands-on learning activities. Emphasizing the fun element helps alleviate the fear that many youth naturally feel when they think about speaking in front of others. Below are suggested fun, non-threatening activities for introducing public speaking to 4-H members and other youth who have little or no prior public speaking experience. Some of the activities below are adapted from Hall (1999).

1. **Silent Speakers** – Ask the youth to go to the front of the room/area one at a time and stand still, make eye contact with the audience, and smile. Then have them return to their seats. Repeat this several more times, gradually adding speaking roles such as stating their names, grades, ages, interests, etc. For an activity extension, prepare cards with tongue twisters on them and allow the youth to take turns quickly saying them. Tongue twisters are intended to cause mistakes. Therefore, youth can have fun practicing speaking without fearing potential mistakes.
2. **Getting Alphabetter at Speaking** – Ask the youth to go to the front of the room/area one at a time, stand still, and recite the alphabet or count to 50. Have them concentrate on eye contact, inflection/volume/tone of voice, and gestures/movement. This approach enables them to focus exclusively on presentation style instead of content. Allow them to enunciate the letters in any way they see fit as they proceed from A to Z.
3. **Imaginary Creatures** – In advance, prepare a list of imaginary creature names (ex: pancrab, urfin, puffalo). Allow the youth to work in small groups. Provide each group with paper and markers or colored pencils. Have each group select one of the creature names and collaboratively write a detailed description of or a story about the creature. They may also draw a picture to represent their concept of the creature’s appearance. Next, ask the youth in each group to take turns sharing aloud various parts of the creature’s description. Be sure that everyone has a chance to participate.
4. **What’s in the Bag?** – In advance, prepare activity grab bags by obtaining several more paper bags (or other bags/containers) than the number of participants you will have. Next, add a random object (apple, flag, stapler, toy, deck of cards, coin, etc.) to each bag and close the bag. During the activity, have each youth select a bag, observe the object inside it,

and describe the object to the audience without using the actual name or part of the name. The focus should be on descriptive words, sounds, gestures, and creativity. Allow the audience to guess what the object is. (Note: As an adaptation for youth with special needs, you may prepare bags with objects that are more familiar and simpler/easier to describe. An adaptation for young children would be to have them show the object as they describe it.)

**Workshop Focus 2:  
Preparation for 4-H Project Talks**

Many 4-H clubs and groups encourage members to “complete” projects each year. Completing a project typically involves participating in project learning activities, exhibiting project work in a public setting, and giving a project talk. The two main types of project talks are demonstrations and illustrated talks. Educators with a goal of preparing members for project talks will most likely want to focus on these two formats.

**Demonstration**

During a demonstration, a youth describes in detail the step-by-step process involved in performing a task. Demonstrations typically relate to 4-H projects. The presenters may use props and diagrams to convey to the audience what is happening during each step. Typical demonstrations last 10 to 15 minutes. A sample demonstration topic for younger children is



“Building a LEGO Car” and for older children and teens is “Setting up and Preparing an Aquarium for Tropical Freshwater Fish.” Below are suggestions for workshop demonstration activities.

1. **Order, Order** – In advance, print the steps of several processes (washing dishes, making a craft, etc.) on individual index cards and place the cards for each process in an envelope. Allow the youth to work independently or in groups. Have them arrange the steps in sequential order, read the steps aloud, and ask others to identify ways to improve the sequence.
2. **Step-by-Step** – Instruct each youth to think of a simple process (making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, getting dressed, etc.). They should create a detailed list of every step involved in the process. Next, ask the youth to take turns reading the steps of their processes aloud as others act them out (like mime/charades) and request clarification when any step of a process is unclear.
3. **Prop Proposal** – In advance, prepare several information tables with the steps of simple processes listed vertically in the left column. Add empty columns to the right labeled “no prop,” “simple prop,” and “advanced prop.” For each step, ask the youth to read the process and decide if including a prop (physical object) would help the audience better understand that step. If a prop is necessary, have individuals or groups think of a simple item that could be used as a prop (photo of a dog, plastic food models, etc.) along with something more advanced that could be used to illustrate it (live dog, fresh produce, etc.) Allow the youth to discuss their ideas and offer ideas to others.
4. **Demo Design** – In advance, create a demonstration planning organizer form or locate one online. Include these sections: Topic, Materials/Props, Introduction (background, description, and rationale), Procedure (include space for individual steps of process), and Summary. Give each youth a copy of the form and ask them to write in every step involved in a process they might like to demonstrate. Allow several minutes for planning. Next, have the youth read the steps of their

demonstrations aloud and share ideas for props that could accompany each step. Others may offer suggestions for improving the process or selecting better props.

### Illustrated Talk

During an illustrated talk, a youth presents a topic with the help of one or more visual aids. Talks usually relate to 4-H projects. Visual aids include posters, diagrams, tables/graphs, and slide shows. Unlike demonstrations, illustrated talks focus on developing a topic through supporting details and are not process-focused. A sample illustrated talk for younger children is “The Parts of a Rabbit” and one for older children and teens is “The Importance of Proper Auto Maintenance.” Below are suggestions for workshop illustrated talk activities.

1. **Do or Don’t?** – In advance, prepare a set of index cards with each having a characteristic of visual aids that may be a good idea (example: make font large and easy to read) or a bad idea (example: fill/overcrowd all the space on your poster with words/images). Draw random cards and read them aloud. Ask the youth to move to one side of the room if they think the card has a good idea for creating visual aids (DO) or the other side of the room if they think the card has a bad idea (DON’T). Allow them to discuss reasons why each idea is good or bad.
2. **Illustration Imagination** – In advance, prepare a set of index cards, each with a sample topic for an illustrated talk. Ask the youth to take turns randomly drawing three topics. For each topic, they should try to imagine types of visual aids that would complement a talk for that topic (photo, diagram, poster, slide show, etc.). For example, a talk about styling hair could include a board with



photos depicting hairstyles or diagrams of hair cutting tools. For a talk on rocketry, a labeled diagram depicting parts of a rocket or a poster showing types of rockets may be appropriate. Allow the youth to share their ideas and give reasons for their suggestions. Others may suggest additional kinds of visual aids that might be helpful.

3. **Just the Facts** – In advance, choose several potential illustrated talk topics. For each topic, create a list of useful and less useful facts that could be included in a talk. Prepare envelopes, each with the name of a topic. Print the facts on individual index cards and place them in the envelopes for the corresponding topics. Ask each youth or group of youth to select a topic, spread out the cards, and find cards with facts that would be useful to include in a talk. Next, ask the youth to arrange the cards in a logical sequence. Finally, allow them to read the facts aloud in order. Others may offer suggestions for improving the sequence, or they may suggest additional facts to improve clarity.
4. **Presentation Planning** – In advance, create an illustrated talk organizer form or find one online. Give each youth a copy of the form and tell them to plan a project talk they might like to give. Allow several minutes for planning. Next, allow the youth to describe their ideas for talks and describe potential visual aids that would best support their talks.

**Workshop Focus 3:  
Preparation for Formal 4-H  
Contests and Events**

Youth have opportunities to participate in formal public speaking contests and events at club, county, regional, and state levels. Regional and state contest eligibility is usually determined by performance/placing at the county

level. Public speaking contests consist of categories such as prepared speech, extemporaneous speech, interpretation, and radio spot. Each category has its own specific format, purpose, rules, and time limits. Typical categories are described below.

**Prepared Speech**

Youth plan, write, and practice prepared speeches at home prior to a contest. Speech topics may but do not have to relate to 4-H projects. Topics include 4-H interests and achievements, favorite school subjects, hobbies, community service causes, position statements related to current events, and other areas of interest. A typical speech consists of an introduction, body with several sub-topics/main points and supporting facts, and a conclusion. Youth are encouraged to prepare note cards with keywords and phrases but (with the exception of young children) are discouraged from verbatim reading of scripted speeches. Unlike demonstrations and illustrated talks, prepared speech presenters may not use visual aids. As an introduction to speech planning, consider the following activities.

1. **Topical Storm** – In advance, prepare a set of index cards with each card displaying the name of a general topic area such as those listed above (interests, achievements, school subjects, hobbies, etc.) Ask the youth to work with partners and pull a card from the stack. Have them brainstorm and list in three minutes things they are interested in that relate to that topic area. Repeat the process for two more topic areas. Next, have the youth prioritize the topics on each card according to their interest (1 = highest, 2 = moderate, 3 = lowest), write all the #1 topics on a blank card, and repeat the process until they have narrowed their topic choices to no more than three of the highest interest.
2. **Speech Map** – In advance, create a speech graphic organizer (concept map, web, etc.) that includes these sections: Topic, Introduction (opening statement/main

topic overview), Body (sub-topics 1, 2, and 3/ supporting facts for each), and Conclusion (summary/ final statement). Ask the youth to work with partners and choose one of their three final topics from the Topical Storm activity. Allow them 10 to 15 minutes to plot the basic structure and details of a speech related to that high-interest topic. Next, have the pairs present their speech ideas. Others may suggest additional sub-topics or supporting details to enhance the speeches.

### Extemporaneous Speech

In contrast with prepared speeches, youth plan, write, and briefly practice extemporaneous speeches after they arrive at a contest. They pull several (usually three) random topics from a container, choose one, and have a designated amount of time to plan a speech. Topic choices are general enough to be broadly applicable. They include the topics listed above for prepared speeches and others such as favorite vacation destination, why citizenship is important, future career plans, and current issues/events. Youth are encouraged to write key terms, ideas, and notes on index cards for reference during their speeches. As an introduction to extemporaneous speech planning, consider the following activity.

1. **Good Topic, Bad Topic** – Using the index cards from the Topical Storm activity described above or a similar set created for extemporaneous speeches, have the youth work with partners and draw three cards at a time. Ask them to prioritize the topics based on their interest (1 = highest, 2 = moderate, 3 = lowest) and create a list of reasons why the top choice is better for an extemporaneous speech than the other two. Repeat this process a few more times. Then have the youth discuss the general characteristics of a good extemporaneous topic: high interest for presenter and audience, relates to personal experience or opinions, connects to prior knowledge base, etc.

### Interpretation

An interpretation is a public speaking format that allows youth to express their creativity. Presenters memorize an entire selection of published literature or an excerpt from a long selection. At the contest, they recite the piece verbatim and/or act it out in a dramatic or humorous manner. Presenters may dress in costumes and/or use props that support their performances. Selections include poems, essays, famous speeches, passages from books, etc. To prevent the event from becoming a talent show, singing is not permitted. As an introduction to interpretation planning, consider the following activity.

1. **Literature Review** – In advance, assemble a variety of literary works including poems, essays, famous speeches, and passages from books. Ask the youth to review the literature and select one piece from each category. Allow them to take turns reading the first several lines of one piece. Repeat the process until they have explored all the literature categories. Next, have each youth choose a favorite piece. Allow everyone to take turns repeatedly reciting the first several lines until they reach a good comfort level. Gradually focus on other components of the recitations including eye contact, inflection, and volume. Some youth may eventually memorize the lines and be able to recite them from memory. Finally, discuss ideas for potential costumes or props that could support the performances.



### Radio Spot

A radio spot is a 30-second informative talk that is similar to a radio commercial or public service announcement. Youth may talk about any topic as long as they also connect to and promote 4-H to the audience.

They may include sound effects for an enhanced experience. Radio spots are unique because youth are heard but not seen. They stand behind a screen or behind the judges to simulate a radio broadcast. The primary challenge is conveying a full concept and sharing promotional information in a span of only 30 seconds. Radio spots are good introductory public speaking activities because youth are able to write and recite them within a workshop timeframe. As an introduction to radio spot planning, consider the following activities.

1. **Super Spots** – In advance, pre-record several radio or television commercials or find links to online commercials. In addition, record several youth as they deliver radio spots at a contest. Have the youth work in small groups. Play each commercial and ask the groups to list characteristics that make it effective or ineffective. Effective commercials may include enthusiasm, good volume, good pacing, and an appropriate level of humor or seriousness. Ineffective commercials may exhibit opposite traits and may even be misleading or confusing. Next, repeat the process with the recorded radio spots. Lead a discussion comparing and contrasting effective commercials and radio spots. Finally, generate a list of radio spot Do and Don't tips.
2. **Radio Map** – In advance, prepare a simple radio spot graphic organizer (concept map, web, etc.). Include the following sections: Main Message, Sound Effects, Opening Statement, Supporting Facts or Details, and Final Statement or Idea. Ask the youth to make a list of things they like about 4-H. Then have them select their favorite item from the list and use it as the main topic of a radio spot. Allow 10 minutes for mapping out a radio spot and another 10 minutes for turning their ideas/details into written radio spot scripts. Conclude by allowing the youth to take turns standing behind a screen, reading their scripts, and receiving feedback from others.

If you have questions and/or would like to discuss the topics covered in this fact sheet, please contact the authors.

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