

GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING, WRITING, and GIVING TESTIMONY

Giving testimony is one of the most effective ways to educate legislators and policymakers about the impact, either positive or negative, that proposed legislation or legislative change might have. Legislators and other policymakers aren't always aware of all the implications a particular piece of legislation may have on their constituents.

Oral testimony is very powerful, especially when the testifier speaks directly instead of reading from their written testimony. Your testimony should be short—no longer than 3 to 5 minutes. It is most effective when you speak from your own personal experience. As a general rule, testimonies should be delivered verbally and also submitted in writing.

It is best to type your testimony using a computer or like device from which you can print because you will be submitting copies of your testimony for distribution to your state legislators at the hearing. Bring enough copies of your prepared statement for the entire committee or task force. Be sure the committee or task force clerk has a copy for the official record of the hearing.

Many speakers write down their speeches and read directly from that written text, which audiences find dull. Others forgo notes and memorize their speeches; but if they forget something, they often become completely lost and are unable to continue. The key to preparing notes for public speaking lies between these two extremes: notes remind the speaker about what to say, but don't tell the speaker how to say it. Yet, the first step in offering effective testimony is to write down your speech. Here are some guidelines:

Write your speech. Construct an opening, well-organized paragraph, effective transitions, and a memorable closing. Pay attention to sentence structure and word choice.

Follow this outline for preparing your statement:

- 1) Identify yourself and the organization you represent (if applicable)
- 2) Greetings
- 3) Clear presentation of your position: State your position as “for” or “against” the proposed bill; identify the bill name and number
- 4) Factual arguments and data as evidence to support your position, if available
- 5) Personal story or anecdotes to demonstrate your position. This is often the most powerful part.
- 6) Conclusion: Restate/review your position at the end of your testimony
- 7) Thank the committee or task force for the opportunity to speak

Highlight the keywords in each sentence.

Rehearse your testimony! Read your speech out loud and make changes. If you stumble over a certain word or combination of words, choose alternatives that will be easier to say. Listen for the rhythm and flow of your speech and make changes so that your reading proceeds smoothly from start to finish.

Try reciting the speech from memory by referring to your highlighted transcript. Try to remember what to say based only on the keywords you've highlighted. If the keywords don't help you, find new ones.

Transfer only the keywords to a paper or notecards. Which you will use depends on the speaking situation and your own preferences.

Exceptions: Write out lengthy quotes, complex statistics or other information that must be exact on your notes. Read these word for word in your speech. In these situations, your audience will appreciate that you're taking the time to make sure you're accurate.

Use a sheet of paper (or 2 if you need more room). Put your notes on the lectern and occasionally glance down at your keywords. This will allow you to look out at your audience most of the time, which will keep them engaged.

- Don't use more sheets than necessary for your notes. The movement and sound of turning pages over during your speech will be distracting to your audience.
- When using paper for notes, organize the keywords in a way that makes sense to you. You may want to number them, list them under general headings or use different colors. Write the keywords large enough to keep you from having to lean down and squint in order to read them.

Practice your speech using your notes. Because you haven't memorized it, your speech will be a little different each time, but it will sound more natural than a memorized speech.

- Use the notes you create to practice. If you practice from an outline and then try to use a keyword sheet or notecards when you give your speech, you'll likely become flustered.
- If you can't deliver your speech smoothly and completely, make changes to your notes.

Think carefully before you talk. Use silence; it can be a great ally and cause the audience to hang off your next words, wondering what you are about to say. Don't be intimidated by silent moments.

Anticipate questions you might be asked and practice answering them.

ON THE DAY OF THE HEARING

Arrive early and sign up. Make sure you follow any procedures that have been published, and indicate that you wish to testify. Generally, speakers will testify in the same order as their names appear on the sign-up sheet.

If there is a microphone, speak directly into it (keep the mike about 6 inches from your mouth). If necessary, move or adjust the microphone. If you cannot be heard, your testimony will not be effective, regardless of how carefully your statement was prepared.

Do not repeat points made by speakers ahead of you. If all of the points you wanted to make have been made, tell the committee you agree with the testimony given by the preceding speakers and urge them to take the appropriate action.

Answer only those questions that you can answer correctly, and answer as clearly and succinctly as you can. Offer to find the answers to other questions and promptly get back to the committee members with the information.

Do not argue with members of the committee or with people giving opposing testimony.