Persuasion can be defined as attempting to change attitudes, values, beliefs and/or behaviors. Given this definition, it should come as no surprise to learn that persuading others is one of the primary ways humans use communication. Though we may be well-versed at persuading people in our day-to-day lives, we may not know how to do it in a more formal setting. Below are a few tips that should help you develop into an effective advocate for your position, which will improve your persuasive argument and speech.

Tips for Persuasive Speaking:

1) Assess Your audience
Since you are attempting to gain a desired response from a particular group of people (the audience), it helps to understand them as well as possible. First, ask yourself what you want this group of people to know, believe, or do as a result of your speech, and what is the best means of accomplishing your goal. Next, consider the demographics of your particular audience (e.g., age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and cultural backgrounds). Finally, consider not only how interested they will be in your topic, but also their knowledge level, the occasion itself, and their attitudes toward you as the speaker. This background information will help you tailor your argument to the particular audience in order to be as effective as possible.

2) Know the different types of persuasive speeches.
There are three major kinds of persuasive speeches: questions of fact, value, and policy.
- **Questions of fact** deal with the verifiable truth of an assertion. The claims that frequent use of hand sanitizer creates super germs or that the zombie apocalypse is not possible are both examples of questions of fact. Evidence supporting or disproving the accuracy of the conclusion is the most effective way to persuade your audience in this type of speech.
- **Questions of value** call for the listener to judge the morality of a topic. A simple example would be “tattoos are beautiful.” Other value propositions compare two ideas, things, or actions and suggest that one is better than the other. Creating common ground with your audience’s existing values can be helpful in influencing thinking in this type of persuasion.
- **Questions of policy** advocate a specific action—changing a regulation, procedure, or behavior, and include the word should. For example, “Universities should require graduates to participate in study abroad programs.” Effective speakers offer specific changes that will be made to existing policies in place.

4) Connect claims to evidence.
Anytime you offer a piece of evidence to your audience you should have a clear statement of how the evidence relates to both your overall claim (specific purpose/thesis) and your sub-claim (sub-point). While the link between the evidence and claim is obvious to us, it is not always obvious to your audience. So, by offering the link to them you can help them understand your speech more, and more effectively persuade them.

5) Understand ethics.
Efforts to persuade should be grounded in giving people options rather than forcing them to respond in a certain way. To be ethical, the persuader has an obligation to be honest and forthright in crafting messages. Emphasize logical reasoning which is built on facts, statistics, and expert testimony and always supplement proof by pathos with hard evidence. Test the ethics of any persuasive strategy by considering how it will be judged by a thoughtful listener while
acknowledging conditions that might disprove your argument.

6) Construct well-thought out arguments
An argument is a stated position, with support for or against an idea or issue. The core elements of an argument consist of a claim, evidence, and warrants. First, a claim states the speaker’s conclusion about an issue. Next, the evidence supports the particular claim. Finally, warrants provide reasons the evidence is valid or support the claim.

7) Be aware of fallacies.
After the hard work of analyzing your audience, researching your topic, planning your strategy, and developing powerful arguments, do not ruin all your hard work by committing fallacies, or errors of reasoning. Some common fallacies are:

- **Slippery slope fallacy** argues that once something happens, an inevitable trend is established that will lead to disastrous results.
- **Red herring fallacy** where irrelevant material is used to divert attention or the deceptive use of statistical averages in speeches.
- **Either-or thinking** which suggests that there are only two options, and only one is desirable
- **Straw man fallacy** which understates, distorts, or misrepresents the position of your opponent to make it easier to refute.
- **Ad hominem attacks** are directed toward the person, rather than debating the issue itself.

8) Consider Counterarguments
When researching your topic you may run into counterarguments, or claims that go against your reasoning and conclusions. These can be incorporated into your speech and actually make it a more effective speech. You do this by stating what the counterargument is and then explain how your reasoning can account for it, or perhaps why it is a fallacy. It is important to be ethical about the use of counterarguments, so use well-researched and well-supported counterarguments that you can address in your speech.

9) Using emotional appeals (Pathos)
Many of us are used to incorporating statistics and factual information into speeches and papers, but we may struggle with using emotional appeals. Drawing on narrative (either your own, from research, or hypothetical) can be a good way to persuade your audience. Pathos is particularly powerful when combined with statistics and facts used to support these emotional appeals. Be sure not to over-do the emotional appeals as your audience can tune out your reasoning if it is too hard to listen to emotionally (think about ASPCA commercials and how most people will change the channel).

As you can see, there are many challenges the effective persuasive speaker faces; be sure to consider the claim and evidence carefully as you create your persuasive speech. The Speaking Center consultants are happy to help you through this process.