Impromptu Structure[1] - Parts One & Two

Different Structures

Impromptu speakers use two primary structures. They're called two-by-two (2x2) and three-by-one (3x1). The first number refers to how many points the speech has and the second number refers to how many examples you use in each point. For a 2x2, there are two points with two examples each. For a 3x1, there are three points with one example each. These structures are effective for organizing your impromptu in the limited time you have to both prep and speech. Other structures exist, and if you've found one that works for you, awesome! These two are just the most commonly-used and may help as a starting point if structure stumps you. Differences between these two structures are not apparent until about halfway through the speech's introduction, so let's start with their similarities in intros and come back to their differences in a moment.

Introductions

Introductions should universally feature an attention-getting device (**AGD**), **link**, **quotation**, **interpretation**, **thesis**, and **preview**. For this walkthrough, we're going to use the quotation:

> *The real crime is not that it happens. The real crime is that*
> *we know about it and turn the page. -Gardner McKay*

The AGD is the first part of your speech and its goal is to do exactly what its name suggests: get someone's attention. An AGD is usually a story with a theme or moral similar to the one in the quotation. Because it's the first thing you say, start it off with something catchy or mysterious! This point in your speech can establish the tone for everything else you say, so pick a fun opening line. In the video, Matt provides an example: "It was a bold move to call a urinal 'art,' but that's exactly what Marcel Duchamp did with his piece, 'The Fountain.'" I don't know about you, but I definitely want to know more now.

Next comes the link, which transitions you from the AGD to the quotation. It often explicitly mentions the theme of the AGD and explains how it is also reflected in the quotation. For the aforementioned AGD/quotation, you might say "Duchamp was not willing to remain complicit in boring art, so he stepped outside the box and innovated. It's this idea of pushing back against complacency that's reflected in the quotation by Gardner McKay." That's all. If you have to over-explain why your AGD fits the theme, it might be too tangential to the quotation.

Now, it's time to read the quotation! Seems pretty simple, but there are a few things to keep in mind. First, read it verbatim. Second, if you're not sure how to pronounce an author's name and there is no phonetic guide, pick a pronunciation and be consistent about it. If the author has one name you know how to pronounce better than the other, stick to using that name instead of gambling. NEVER make a joke about the author's name. Third, old speech conventions dictate that we do not call the quotation a "quote." If it sounds a little ridiculous,

---

[1] If at any point this content is confusing, feel free to return to the first video/document about the basics of impromptu speaking.

that's because it is, but judges will still drop speakers for saying "quote" instead of "quotation." If you have trouble remembering this distinction and you're worried about it, you can also refer to the quotation as the "prompt," "saying," "wisdom," "words of," etc. Just don't let an old, petty judge drop you for a convention.

The next step in the introduction is the interpretation, in which you tell the audience what the quotation means to you. For a more in-depth look at this, refer back to the introductory video on impromptu. Our interpretation for the McKay quotation is: "being complacent to evil is worse than the evil itself." This is the last part of the intro that is the same between conventional 2x2 and 3x1 structures. We'll start with 2x2 and follow each section with the 3x1 counterpart.

[2x2] Typically, this structure is analytical, so the first part of crafting a thesis is stating whether you agree or disagree with the quotation. Your thesis is WHY you agree/disagree. For the sake of this quotation, let's say we agree with McKay's proposition: being complacent to evil *is* worse than the evil itself. Your thesis will sound something like this: "I agree with McKay's words, because complacency is the root of evil." Next comes the preview of points, your roadmap of the structure. A 2x2 structure is typically unified, meaning you provide unique points (one that do not rely on each other) that support your thesis. So we could say "this is true for two reasons: first, because complacency allows even more evil to occur. Second, because complacency spreads easier than evil."

[3x1] Typically, this structure is persuasive in nature, so a thesis for a 3x1 speech could also be considered a call to action. There's no need to agree or disagree; you're just giving us an extension of the author's advice.[2] Suchinder provides the thesis: "we need actively stop evils in our life rather than ignoring them." After stating your thesis, you provide the preview, or a roadmap of where the speech is going. A 3x1 structure usually organizes points into cause, effect, and solution, so your point tags (the ones you say in your preview) will revolve around those. For this quotation, you can preview the speech by saying "to understand how we can take action, let's first, understand the cause of our complacent behavior. Second, uncover the damaging effect of turning the page. Third, we'll consider a solution that will help us fight these evils." It is important to signpost (number) your points verbally so your judge knows which structure you're using.

Body of Speech
[2x2]

On-tops take you from intro to point one, between points, and point two to conclusion. They're usually pretty simple and just set up what you're talking about next. Let's go with the same quotation as before and walk through the transition from intro to point one, which we said is about complacency allowing more evil to occur. "Gardner McKay is telling us that by turning the page, we are turning a blind eye to injustice, making atrocities more likely to persist. So the first reason why ignoring the crime is the *real crime* is because complacency begets more evil. To better understand this, let's look at [example] and [example]." Breaking it down further, this on-top explains a bit of the metaphor in the quotation, rationalizes the point, restates the thesis

---

[2] This is true unless it's terrible/morally repugnant advice, in which case you can disagree and provide a counter-call to action. This is remarkably uncommon, so don't worry too much about it.

and point tage, then provides an internal preview. That last part sets up the examples you'll use to explain the argumentation.

There are two primary ways to use examples in a 2x2 point. The first ways is just having two examples. They should be distinct enough to hold their own next to each other in the speech but share the theme of the point. Two examples provide unique real-world instances of the quotation's message. Another method is called theory-application, or theory-example. The theories most useful in impromptu are in social science or humanities because they explain human nature or behavioral traits. For a speech about complacency, Spiral of Silence Theory might be perfect! In a theory-application style, the first example in a point is the theory, and it's followed by an example that clearly embodies both the theory and the point. Both styles are totally valid, but if you love theory and need an outlet, this might be for you. In any case, when examples are told and connections are made to the point/thesis/quotation, wrap up the point with a reminder of what we did! "So, through [example] and [example], we understand that complacency is the real crime because it begets more evil." Repeat this with the second point and you're good to go.

[3x1]

Each point in a 3x1 is different, but because it's almost always a cause-effect-solution speech, they hold similarities. On-tops for 3x1 speeches are similar to 2x2 insofar as they explain a bit more of the quotation, justify/tag the point, and preview the example. Each on-top will be specific to the point. Let's say we're transitioning from the intro to the cause point. "McKay tells us that turning the page is the real crime, but it's easy to dismiss that because it isn't a tangible wrongdoing. The reason we remain complacent is because it doesn't have immediate consequences, and we'll understand this better through [example]." The effect transition will likely focus on consequence, and the solution will inspire hope in the listeners.

A 3x1 requires fewer examples than a 2x2, but they must fill more specific needs. For this reason, theories make for great examples in cause points because they explain *why* people act/think in specific ways. Effect examples generally have negative outcomes because effect points tell us what catastrophes happen when we don't address the cause. Solution examples typically have positive outcomes because they show us the power and joy of reversing the cause. At the end of each point, you should give yourself a little bit of time to tell us how the moral/theme of each example apply to your listeners' lives. Remember, a 3x1 is a persuasive speech; you're telling us how to change our lives for the better. Connect with us, review the example and tag, then transition away.

Conclusion

Conclusions are very similar between the two structures. The operate almost like introductions in reverse. The necessary parts of the conclusion are: return to quotation, restate interpretation/thesis, review point tags, return to AGD. These pieces are ones we already heard in the speech, so they just act as reminders that you can find creative (but not *too* different) ways to make us remember you as a speaker.

Time Allocation

[2x2]

If you take 1 min 30 sec to prep, time allocation for 2x2 should be:

- 1 min introduction
- 15 sec on-top one
- 1 min 30 sec point one
- 15 sec on-top two
- 1 min 30 sec point two
- 45 sec conclusion

This gives you 15 seconds of wiggle room. Remember, you get visual time signals if they help you. This means that when you see the '5,' leave the intro. At the '3,' get out of point one. At the '1,' wrap up point two.

[3x1]

For 3x1, time allocation should be:

- 1 min 30 sec prep
- 1 min intro
- 10 sec on tops
- 1 min 5 sec points
- 45 sec conclusion

For both types: by the last five seconds, try to end with two seconds remaining. You don't have an excuse for going overtime if you can see the time signals. If you need alternative time signals, make your needs clear to the judge prior to prepping.