“Taking a Stand”

Answer the following questions to find a topic you are passionate enough to speak about.

1. Three problems the world has that concern me are...

2. Three problems my nation has that concern me are...

3. Three problems that my community has that concern me are...

4. The news event that has made me the saddest lately is...

5. The news event that has made me the angriest lately is...

6. The news event that has made me happiest is...

7. I wish my peers would...

8. I wish my parents would...

9. I wish my teachers would...

10. I think the greatest injustice in the world is...

11. People should care more about...

12. We could make the world better if everyone...

13. We could make our school better if...

14. If I were President, I would make ______________________________ my top priority.

15. I think schools should...

16. The solution to _____________________________ is _____________________________.

17. If I could convince my peers of something, it would be ____________________________.

18. More people should _________________________________________________________.

19. Fewer people should _________________________________________________________.
Things to Think About

Things to think about as you select the topic for your speech.

Pick 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?

Pick 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. Here are a list of tired persuasive speaking topics to avoid.

Pick 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.

Pick 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.

Pick 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.

Pick 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 sure 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.