

Persuasive Speeches: What Are You Questioning?

A **Question of Fact** asks what is true and what is false. These questions can be answered with a fact that can be verified in a reference book.

Example: Which building is the tallest in the world? Who is the richest person in the U.S.? Who scored the most points in the NBA last season?

- Because these types of questions are so cut-and-dry, there can be little debate about them, making them weak topics for a persuasive speech.

A **Prediction of Future Events** can make a good persuasive speech topic, because it addresses issues that will eventually become matters of fact.

Example: Who will be the next president of the United States? Who will win the Super Bowl next year? Will there be a third world war in the next five years?

- Although none of these questions can be answered with certainty, a persuasive speaker could build an effective case predicting the answer to each.

An **Unverifiable Question** can also be the basis for a good persuasive speech. These are questions in which the answer cannot really be proved.

Example: Can hypnotism enable a person to relive past lives? Is there intelligent life in outer space?

- On the surface, these types of questions may appear more appropriate for an informative speech than for a persuasive one. However, considering the difficulty of persuading an audience, you can see that they can offer rich possibilities for persuasion.

Hogan, J. M. (2011). *Public speaking and civic engagement* (pp.279-281). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
Seiler, William J. *Communication, Foundations, skills, and Applications*, 3rd Ed

A **Question of Value** asks whether something is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. A value is something that requires a more judgmental response than does a question of fact. \

Example: Who was the most effective political speaker during the twentieth century? Have American businesses lost their will to compete in the world market? Are today's college students better educated than college students were ten years ago?

- Values vary dramatically from one person to the next; therefore, you will need to do a great deal of research and gather evidence to build a strong case supporting one value over another. Even though you believe your values are right, your readers might not.

A **Question of Policy** goes beyond seeking judgmental responses to seeking courses of action. Whereas a question of value asks if something is right or wrong, a question of policy asks if something should or should not be done.

Example: Should student parking on campus be more accessible? Should universities provide birth control to students? Should student athletes be given special treatment over non-athletes?

- Questions of policy involve both facts and values and are therefore never simple. When discussing questions of policy, persuasive speakers usually focus on three considerations: need, plan, and suitability. If you believe that things are not fine as they are, then you must argue that there is a need for change. When you advocate change, you must provide a plan or solution. The plan tells the audience what you think should be done. Finally, you must defend your plan by explaining its suitability for the situation.