Chapter 16: Supporting and Organizing Your Speech

The Motivated Sequence

The motivated sequence is a pattern for organizing a speech (McKerrow, Gronbeck, Ehninger, & Monroe 2000). It was developed by communication professor Alan H. Monroe in the 1930s, originally as a way to organize sales presentations. Now, it’s widely used in all sorts of oral and written communications. In fact, you’ll probably find that you can analyze almost any persuasive message—from political speeches to television advertisements to Internet ribbon ads—in terms of the motivated sequence. The motivated sequence is especially appropriate for speeches designed to move listeners to action (to persuade your listeners to do something). But, you’ll also find it useful for informative speeches as well. Table WebUnit 16.1, presented below, summarizes some the discussion to follow and at the end of this chapter an annotated outline of this type of speech is presented.

The organizational patterns discussed in the text provided ways of organizing the main ideas in the body of the speech. There it was recommended that you divide your speech into three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. The motivated sequence organizes the speech into five parts or steps:

Step 1, attention: Gain your listeners’ attention.

Step 2, need: Demonstrate that there’s a problem, that your listeners have a need.
Step 3, satisfaction: Show how your listeners can resolve this problem or satisfy this need.

Step 4, visualization: Show your listeners what things would be like with this problem eliminated, with this need satisfied.

Step 5, action: Tell your listeners what they must do to resolve the problem, to satisfy the need.

While walking down the street one day, I overheard a young boy with a shoeshine box call out to a Wall Street type executive:

*Hey, man. You look great. But, your shoes are a mess. You don't want to walk into a meeting with mud on your shoes, do you? I can fix that for you. You'll look a lot better for that meeting if you have shined shoes. Sit right here and I'll polish them up.*

In this brief advertisement the young boy executed all 5 steps of the motivated sequence:

*Hey, man. You look great. [Step 1. Attention: caught the attention of a passerby with a simple compliment]*

*But, your shoes are a mess. You don't want to walk into a meeting with*
mud on your shoes, do you? [Step 2. Need: demonstrated that the man had a problem, that a need for change existed]

I can fix that for you. [Step 3. Satisfaction: told man that the problem can be corrected]

You'll look a lot better for that meeting if you had shined shoes. [Step 4. Visualization: showed how things would be better if the problem was resolved]

Sit right here and I'll polish them up. [Step 5. Action: told the man what he had to do to resolve the problem, to satisfy the need]

Let's look at each of these steps in more detail and see how you might use each of them in actual speeches.

Step 1. Gain Attention

In this step you gain the audience’s undivided attention and get them to focus on you and your message. If you execute this step effectively, your audience should be anxious and ready to hear what you have to say. We explain and illustrate these devices in Unit 17.

Regardless of what attention device you use, demonstrate your enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is highly contagious, so if you show that you’re enthusiastic, it’s likely to infect the audience and they too will become involved
and energized. Deliver your opening remarks with appropriate gestures and
variety in bodily movement. Similarly, vary your voice so that it demonstrates
your own involvement in the subject of your speech.

In phrasing your introductory remarks involve the audience directly. Use
“you” if appropriate and use connecting pronouns—“us” and “we”—that show
that you and your listeners are involved in this together.

For example, in a speech in which you try to persuade your listeners to
vote in favor of establishing a community youth center, you might gain attention
by using a provocative question: *If you could reduce juvenile crime by some 20
percent by just flipping a lever, would you do it?* Or, you might make reference to
specific audience members: *I know that several of you here have been the victims
of juvenile vandalism. Thom, your drug store was broken into last month by three
teenagers who said they did it because they were bored. And Loraine, your video
rental shop’s windows were broken by teenagers who, in a drunken spree,
decided to have a rock fight. And. . .*

Step 2. Establish the Need

In the second part of your speech, you’d demonstrate that there’s a
problem, that something is wrong, that a need exists. Your listeners should feel
that they have to learn something (if your speech is an informative one) or that
they have to change their attitudes or do something (if your speech is a persuasive
one). Here are some examples, first for informative speeches and second for persuasive speeches.

State the problem or need. If you’re giving an informative speech, the problem or need might be the lack of information. For example, in an informative speech on how to gain access to your credit history, you might establish the need for information by saying: *You need access to your credit history because it’s the best way to prevent yourself from being a victim of fraud.* Or *Millions of people become victims of credit fraud because they don’t have access to their own credit history.* Or *You’re more likely to become a victim of fraud if you don’t regularly check your credit history.*

If you’re giving a persuasive speech, you might focus on your listeners’ need to change their attitudes or their behaviors. For example, in a speech to persuade your listeners to participate actively in the political process, you might establish the need by saying something like this: *You need to participate actively in the politics of your city if you want elected officials to address your needs and the needs of people like you.* Or, in a speech on the need to establish a community youth center as a way of reducing juvenile crime, you might say: *Juvenile crime has been increasing dramatically in our community over the last several years. We need to do something about it.*

Show why this is really a problem. Make sure your audience understands that this problem is a problem that affects them directly, that it is not simply some
abstract problem that will not touch them directly. You might also support the existence of the need with illustrations, statistics, testimony, and other forms of support we already identified in Chapter 4. Too, you might show your listeners how this need affects those values that motivate their behavior such as their financial status, their career goals, and their individual happiness (motivators that we explain in more detail in Chapter 10). In the speech on the youth center, you might say: Federal crime statistics show that juvenile crime is likely to increase over the next several years, and it will happen in our community if we don’t take a stand and do something about it NOW. Or Next year, your store, Jack, or yours, Shauna, may be broken into.

Step 3. Satisfy the Need

In this step you’d present the "answer" or the "solution" that would eliminate the problem or satisfy the need that you just demonstrated in Step 2. On the basis of this satisfaction step, your listeners should now believe that what you’re informing them about or persuading them to do will effectively satisfy the need. So, show here how the problem can be solved and why your solution will work.

Show your listeners that your plan will satisfy the need or solve the problem. Here you might say quite simply: The best way to reduce credit card fraud is to check your credit history regularly. Or Like our neighboring towns, we
need a youth center for high school students in order to reduce juvenile crime and vandalism.

*Show why your solution will work.* You want your audience to understand that what you’re asking them to believe or do will actually lead to resolving the problem or satisfying the need you demonstrated in Step 2. So you might say something like: *Youth crime has been dramatically reduced in all of our neighboring towns after they established youth centers. The same will happen here.*

This step is also a good place to answer any objections you anticipate your listeners might be thinking. For example, if you anticipate that they’ll object to the youth center because it may increase their taxes, you might answer this here. For example, you might say: *A major portion of the financing will be secured from New York State grants, and local merchants have already agreed to contribute whatever additional financing is needed. So, this youth center will impose absolutely no financial burden on anyone.*

Notice that in an informative speech you could have stopped after the satisfaction step because you would have accomplished your goal of informing the audience about the youth centers and how they can effectively reduce juvenile crime. In a persuasive speech, on the other hand, you must continue at least as far as Step 4, visualization (if your purpose is limited to strengthening or changing attitudes or beliefs) or to Step 5, action (if your purpose is to get your listeners to
Step 4. Visualize the Need Satisfied

In this step you take the audience beyond the present time and place and enable them to imagine, to visualize, the situation as it would be if the problem was eliminated, if the need were satisfied as you suggested in Step 3. Through this visualization you would intensify your listeners’ feelings or beliefs. You can achieve this visualization with any one or combination of these basic strategies:

*Demonstrate the benefits that your listeners will receive if your ideas are put into operation.* You might, for example, point to the decrease in crime that accompanies the establishment of youth centers or the social and vocational skills that the students will learn at this center. Or, you could visualize the need satisfied by returning to your introductory examples and say something like: *Wouldn’t it have been great if Thom’s drug store was never broken into and that the time, energy, and expense that Thom had to go through could have been spent taking a well-deserved vacation? And Loraine, wouldn’t it have been nice if your windows were never broken? And. . . .*

*Demonstrate the negative effects that will occur if your plan is not put into operation.* Here you might argue, for example, that without such a center, juvenile crime will increase or that the students will fail to learn the safe sex practices normally taught at these youth centers and that are not currently taught at home or
in the schools.

*Demonstrate the combined positive and negative effects.* You might combine both the demonstration of the positive effects that will result if your plan is put into operation as well as the negative effects that will result if your plan is not put into operation. You might, then, say something like this: *Without a youth center teen crime is likely to increase, as the statistics from similar towns that I’ll show will illustrate. But, with such a center juvenile crime is likely to decrease, and I’ll also show you very recent and very dramatic statistics from towns just like ours that had the foresight to establish such centers.*

Step 5. Ask for Action

In this final step, you’d tell the audience what they should do to ensure that the need (as demonstrated in Step 2) is satisfied (as stated in Step 3). Here you want to move the audience in a particular direction, for example, to speak in favor of additional research funding for AIDS or against cigarette advertising, to attend the next student government meeting, to contribute free time to read for the blind. In completing this step consider two basic strategies.

*Tell the audience exactly what they must do.* Frequently, speakers use emotional appeals here. Or, you might give your listeners guidelines for future action, saying something like this: *Proposition 14, establishing a youth center in the old Post Office, is coming up for a vote next week. Vote “yes” and urge your
family members, your friends, and your work colleagues to also vote “yes.” It will make our town a better place for us all.

Remind your listeners of the connections you’ve established throughout your speech. Throughout your motivated sequence speech, you’ve established a number of important connections and relationships. Make sure your listeners remember them and see that how the action you ask for here is related. Make sure they see that the action you ask for here will satisfy the need and enable them to live in a world (in a community, in our example of the youth center) that is a lot better than it would be otherwise.

Analyzing the Motivated Sequence

This outline was developed to illustrate the way in which you might construct an outline and a speech using the motivated sequence. This outline focuses on the example that we used in the chapter to illustrate the five steps in the motivated sequence—the establishment of a youth center as a means of combating juvenile crime. In a longer speech, if you wanted to persuade an audience to vote to establish a youth center, you might want to select two or three issues and not limit yourself to the one issue of reducing juvenile crime. Read the outline and the annotations and respond to the questions in italics in the Comments column.
The Youth Center

**Thesis:** a youth center will reduce juvenile crime

**General Purpose:** to persuade

**Specific Purpose:** to persuade my listeners to vote in favor of Proposition 14 establishing a community youth center.

Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. If you could reduce juvenile crime by some 20 percent by just flipping a lever, would you do it?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A.</strong> Thom’s drug store was broken into by teenagers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B.</strong> Loraine’s video store windows were broken by teenagers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments**

**Attention step**

Here the speaker uses a simple question to gain attention and follows this with specific examples of juvenile crime that audience members have experienced. The question and the specific examples focus on one single issue, namely, the need to reduce juvenile crime. If the speech were a broader and longer one that included other
reasons for the youth center, then it would have been appropriate to preview them here as well. If you were delivering a speech to persuade members of your community to vote for the establishment of a youth center, how would you gain their attention?

II. Juvenile crime is on the rise.

A. The overall number of crimes has increased.
1. In 1995 there were 32 juvenile crimes.
2. In 1998 there were 47 such crimes.
3. In 2000 there were 63 such crimes.

B. The number of serious Need step
The speaker here states the need very directly and very clearly and shows listeners that a problem exists. The speaker then moves on to demonstrate that the rise in crime is significant both in absolute numbers and in the severity of the crimes. To increase the listeners’ ability to understand these figures, it would help if these figures were written on
crimes has also increased. 1. In 1995 there were 30 misdemeanors and 2 felonies. 2. In 2000 there were 35 misdemeanors and 28 felonies.

Satisfaction step In this step the speaker argues that the youth center will satisfy the need to reduce juvenile crime by showing statistics from neighboring towns. The speaker also answers a possible objection that many in the audience might be thinking, and that is that their tax burden will be increased.

III. A youth center will help reduce juvenile crime.

A. Three of our neighboring towns reduced juvenile crime after establishing a youth center.

1. In Marlboro there was a 20 percent decline in overall
juvenile crime. The speaker effectively removes this possible objection by showing that

2. In both Highland and Ellenville the number of serious crimes declined 25 percent.

B. The youth center will not increase our tax burden. The speaker shows the listeners that the proposal to establish a youth center has a great benefit and no significant drawbacks. How would you satisfy the need that you established in Step 2?

1. New York State grants will pay for most of the expenses.

2. Local merchants have agreed to pay any remaining expenses.

IV. Juvenile crime will decrease as a result of the youth center. Visualization step

A. If we follow the example of town would be like if the youth
our neighbors our juvenile crime rates are likely to decrease by 20 to 25 percent.

B. Thom’s store would not have been broken into.

C. Loraine’s windows would not have been broken.

V. Vote yes on Proposition 14.

A. In next week’s election, you’ll be asked to vote on Proposition 14, establishing a youth center. In this step the speaker asks for a specific action—to vote in favor of the youth center and to urge people the listeners know to do likewise.

B. Vote yes if you want to help reduce juvenile crime. The speaker also reiterates the main theme of the speech, namely that the youth center will help reduce juvenile crime. How would you urge your listeners to take action that would satisfy the need (that you

C. Urge your family members, your friends, and your work colleagues to also vote yes.
identified in Step 2, satisfied in Step 3, and visualized in Step 4?