Notes for Unit 5

In the unit, students are introduced to one of the most common speech types in English—problem-solution. At stated in the introduction to the unit, speech topics can be easily adapted to conform to this structure. The typical problem-solution speech has four parts: situation, problem, solution, evaluation. However, there may not be an obvious separation between the situation and problem, or between the solution and evaluation. Some speakers may, for example, begin by stating the problem and then give additional background information. The solution section may combine an explanation of the proposed solution with some of its proven advantages.

The unit is somewhat long, but it has been designed to give instructors flexibility in planning their syllabus. For example, some sections can be omitted if time is short. Or instructors can assign two problem-solution speeches, a shorter one following discussion of the basic information in the unit and then a longer presentation after finishing the rest of the materials. Specific suggestions are found below.

Task 1 contains a problem-solution speech on a potentially uninteresting topic, Purple Loosestrife. However, the speaker sparks interest in the topic by involving the audience in the speech opening and then contrasting the plant’s beauty with its devastating effect on the environment. She presents a fast-paced list of solutions that have failed. And finally, she offers an alternative that is both simple and clever.

Many activities in the unit are built around the Purple Loosestrife speech, and thus it is difficult to omit. However, Thyroid Hormone Replacement can be easily substituted by Are Curfews a Solution to Juvenile Crime? on page 148 or another speech containing evidence to support claims.

Strategies to Signal Problems or Disadvantages and Strategies to Signal a Solution present alternative ways for the speaker to signal to the audience that s/he is moving from one part of the problem-solution speech to another. Both problems and disadvantages can be introduced using the same strategies. This section can be discussed quickly, especially with higher-level students. Instructors may wish to stress the use of the infinitive as a means of signaling a solution.

Listing presents a variety of ways that speakers can orally list information in English. While most students use listing connectors regularly, the main purpose of this section is to illustrate how one listing strategy can be more effective than another. The Purple Loosestrife speech uses several of these strategies, which the class can identify before going over common listing connectors in English.
Speaking to Persuade: Providing Evidence is relevant to students from all academic areas. However, it can be omitted, along with tasks 2 and 3, Revealing Disadvantages to Your Solution, and task 4 if instructors would like their students to present a problem-solution speech in which they are not required to give supporting evidence. (Some speakers will automatically include it.) Another option is to require two problem-solution speeches, a short one in which students aren’t expected to give supporting evidence and a second longer one that specifically requires supporting evidence. Speakers can be asked to speak on the same topic for both speeches or on two different topics. Instructors can then postpone discussion of Speaking to Persuade: Providing Evidence, tasks 2 and 3, Revealing Disadvantages to Your Solution, and task 4 until after the first speech.

Task 2 brings home the points that “respectable” evidence may vary from one academic area to another and that certain types of evidence may be used at different stages of a problem-solution presentation.

Task 3 focuses on the speech Thyroid Hormone Replacement, which is on a medical topic. Members of the audience from other fields will likely relate to the speech positively since the speaker uses a research study as evidence to support his claims. He also relies on anecdotal evidence from individuals, which is probably not as highly regarded. This speech can be substituted for the speech in the Supplementary Materials or another speech with evidence, perhaps one by a former student.

Revealing Disadvantages to Your Solution and Hedging: Qualifying Your Claims briefly discuss ways speakers can protect themselves from criticism from the audience. Tasks 4 and 5 can be expanded by the instructor. (See activity 5 under Additional Activities below.)

Until now, there has been little discussion of strategies students can use to conclude their speeches. In task 6, under Concluding Your Speech, pairs or small groups of students discuss various strategies that speakers use to conclude their speeches. Different opinions will arise as to which examples are the most effective. In some cases, two or more conclusions are on the same topic (e.g., 1–4 on polymers, 5–7 on the harp, and 9–11 on loosestrife) so that students can explain why they like one more than another. Like openers, conclusions may be somewhat conventional or more innovative. Tastes vary, but speakers should keep the main purpose of their speech in mind when designing their conclusion. (Also see activity 3 under Additional Activities below.) Not included here is a conclusion in which the speaker refers back to something that s/he said in the introduction of the speech. Instructors may wish to illustrate this common type of conclusion using one of their student’s speeches. Tips on Concluding Your Presentation contains a series of questions to encourage presenters to think about the purpose of their conclusion and how it will influence what they will say.
In task 7, under Providing an Overview or Outline Summary, students are asked to read an alternative situation section of the Purple Loosestrife speech. This alternative contains an overview of the speech, which is a simple outline of the entire speech. The characteristics of an overview are discussed and its advantages are listed. Students should be encouraged to use a speech outline for at least one of their presentations. (Also see activity 1 under Additional Activities below.)

Making a Transparency to Accompany an Overview suggests one way to include the overview outline on a transparency. Here the speaker separated it from her speech outline. This gives her the option of showing the overview outline without revealing her entire speech outline. When giving her overview, she can cover up the second half of her transparency. She could have also omitted the overview from her transparency or could have used two transparencies. (Also see activity 2 under Additional Activities below.)

Responding to Questions from the Audience is a rudimentary discussion of ways speakers can prepare for questions from the audience. In task 8, students are asked to come up with ways to avoid answering questions, such as “I’m going to answer that question in the next part of my speech” and “That’s a good question. Unfortunately there’s not enough time to answer it now.” In addition, they are asked to think about the types of questions the audience may ask (tasks 9 and 10). As part of the speech-making process, students should be expected to anticipate and prepare to handle both requests for further information and questions and comments that point out weaknesses in their proposed solution. Additional Tips on Answering Questions from the Audience offers further tips for responding to questions. (Also see activity 4 under Additional Activities below.)

Instructions for the final activity are in task 11. Instructors are encouraged to consider modifying this task to suit the needs of their students.

A list of Ways to Critique a Solution and self- and final evaluation forms are included in the unit.

Supplementary Materials

The first part of Pronunciation: Unstressed Words, Unstressed Syllables discusses unstressed words. By now students should have a good understanding of the importance of stress. However, they may still be stressing words in the sentence that convey little meaning, such as articles, forms of the verb to be, and two-letter prepositions, such as of, in, on, and at. Task 12 gives students practice saying sentences with several unstressed words. They should notice that each sentence has a different rhythm, depending on which words in the sentence are stressed and which are left unstressed.

The second part of the pronunciation section covers the use of the unstressed vowel sounds /h/ and /ə/ in unstressed syllables of words. Instructors will notice
that no time is spent on the unstressed vowel sound /ə/ in either section. This is
because /i/ and /ə/ are much more frequent and thus are more likely to interfere
with comprehension. **Task 13** provides practice in pronouncing words with un-
stressed syllables. No distinction is made here between /i/ and /ə/. This is be-
because it is often of little consequence if a speaker uses one instead of the other.
Native speakers are generally unaware of which of the two sounds they are using.
In certain circumstances, because the sounds are closely related, speakers may
substitute one for the other.

**Task 14** provides suggestions for further work with unstressed words and un-
stressed syllables.

The supplementary materials in *Additional Work with Problem-Solution
Speeches* are intended to provide the instructor with extra materials or alterna-
tives to the material in the main part of the unit. **Task 15** includes a speech on
Welding that can be used for homework after the Purple Loosestrife speech on
page 120 is introduced. It reviews some of the main points covered in the discus-
sion of the “Loosestrife” speech, such as strategies that signal problems and solu-
tions and listing expressions. If the instructor is short of time or working with
lower-level students, Welding is a nice example of a four-part problem-solution
structure and could be assigned instead of the “Loosestrife” speech.

**Task 16** contains the speech on juvenile curfews. It was included as a possible
substitution for Thyroid Hormone Replacement. The questions that follow fo-
cus on the types of evidence the speaker presents to support her position on juve-
nile curfews. The speaker uses an interesting approach in developing her speech.
In response to the problem of juvenile crime, she presents a solution that has been
adopted in a number of cities, juvenile curfews. However, in her evaluation of ju-
vilie curfews, she stresses their disadvantages. She then gives an example of an-
other viable solution. Unlike the speaker in the Thyroid Hormone Replacement
speech, she does not discuss or respond to weaknesses in her own solution. In-
structors may wish to ask students what weaknesses they foresee with the solu-
tion or what further evidence the speaker may need to convince her listeners of
this solution. See Revealing Disadvantages to Your Solution on page 129.

**Task 17** on ways to hedge or qualify claims can be used in place of task 5 on
page 130. The speaker in this case qualifies many of her statements perhaps be-
cause, even though her claims are worthy of consideration, she does not have
specific evidence to back them up.

### Additional Activities

1. Have students present the situation and overview of their speech to the en-
tire class or to a small group before doing their entire presentation. This
way they can receive feedback on this section of their speech and have the
opportunity to revise it before their final presentation.
2. Ask students who wish to include an overview in their speech to bring their visual aid to class for evaluation.

3. Have students write a conclusion of their problem-solution speech for comments before they do their final presentation.

4. After preparing their speeches, ask speakers to submit a short list of questions that they think audience members may ask them. These questions can be distributed to the audience to ask either during or at the end of the speaker’s presentation. Some of these questions can be designed to point out weaknesses in the speaker’s presentation.

5. After students give their speeches, have them discuss two or three of the hedging strategies they used.

Using the Unit with Future Teaching Assistants or Graduate Teaching Instructors

This unit contains a wealth of material for TAs/GSIs. The section Providing an Overview or Outline Summary on page 133 should be emphasized since instructors rely on outline summaries to tell their students what they plan to cover in class. (Some examples can be found in the MICASE transcripts on the Web.) Tasks on responding to questions from the audience (pages 135–36) prepare TAs/GSIs to better handle questions from their students.

Using suggestions in this manual on units 1–4, TAs/GSIs may wish to make a presentation in which they introduce themselves on the first day of class, give some background information about themselves, provide an overview of the course, and then tell the class what they plan to cover during the first day. Listeners can be encouraged to ask questions throughout the presentation.

Using the Unit with Native Speakers

Native speakers of English may not be familiar with the problem-solution structure as a means of organizing their oral and written academic work and thus should benefit from the discussion of problem-solution speeches in this unit. While it is unlikely that native speakers need to review the strategies that signal problems and solutions, much of the other material in the unit will be helpful to them, especially the sections on persuasion and evidence, hedging, making outline summaries, and concluding their speech. Choosing listing strategies for a particular effect may also be worth covering briefly.