

Speaker Event Checklist



www.secularstudents.org

Bringing a speaker to your campus can be a fun and rewarding event. We've devised this checklist based on input from the campus organizer, our speakers, and student leaders who have been there before in order to help you put on the most successful event possible!

Things You Should Already Have

- Group bank account
- An announcement email list
- Portable contact information (brochures, business cards)
- Tabling supplies
- Established officers
- A professional appearance

Initial Planning (One month or more)

- Brainstorm your event
- Outline a rough budget
- Pick a set of dates
- Pick a speaker
- Pick a topic
- Investigate venues
- Discuss an honorarium
- Get in touch with the SSA Campus Organizer
- Determine the details (speaker, topic, date, time, location)
- _____

Things You Must Do In Advance (One month out)

- Keep in touch! (SSA organizer and your speaker)
- Determine responsibility for arrangements
- Make travel/lodging arrangements
- Reserve your venue & A/V equipment
- Apply for funding
- Design your promotional plan
- Secure merchandise or handouts
- Contact your university bookstore
- _____
- _____

The Month Of: Planning Details

- Keep in touch
- Double check your arrangements
- See if security will be needed
- Check out the rules of your room
- Find out about parking
- _____

The Month Of: Event Details

- Plan to table
- Plan for Q&A sessions
- Plan to record
- Plan to survey
- Plan to show off
- Prepare an introduction
- _____

The Month Of: Advertising

- Design and order materials
- Write your press release
- Personally invite interested parties
- Advertise on the web
- Be prepared to answer questions
- _____
- _____

The Week of the Event

- Flyer & chalk your campus like crazy!
- Send your press release again
- Assemble an "Event Kit"
- Got Directions?
- Put up one last round of flyers & chalk on the day of the event!
- _____
- _____

Just Before and At The Event

- Room check
- Sound check
- Provide water for your speaker
- Get a techie
- Give your speaker some prep time
- Be early – run on time!
- Take pictures
- _____
- _____

After the Event

- Say Thank You
- Follow up with your funding
- Write an article for the SSA eMpirical!
- _____

Event Information

SSA Campus Organizer
Lyz Liddell
lyz@secularstudents.org
309-868-5901

Your Speaker: _____
Email: _____
Phone: _____
Best way to contact: _____

Event Date _____
Time _____
Location _____

Speaker Event Detailed Checklist



This checklist has been created as a tool for you to use in planning your next event. We've tried to be as comprehensive as possible to help ensure that you won't miss any details in planning your event. However, we realize that not all these details apply to every situation, so we encourage you to use this checklist in the way that best helps you plan your event. It's a tool, not a straightjacket.

Planning in advance is critical to having a successful event. The times suggested here should be considered 'deadlines' by which the tasks should be completed; planning for events often begins months before the target date.

We also encourage you to keep in touch as you plan your event. The SSA Campus Organizer is here to help as you have questions, concerns, or wild ideas you're not quite sure about. We coordinate dozens of events annually through our Speakers Bureau – let our experience help your group! It's also important to keep in touch with your speaker so you know everything is on track.

Finally, keep in mind the wealth of advice and information on planning events, delegating tasks, advertising, and more that can be found in our Group Running Guide. We keep a copy on our website at www.secularstudents.org/grouprunningguide for quick and easy access.

Here's to a successful speaker event!

Things You Should Already Have

This is a set of things that every group should already have set up, but are especially important if you're going to be hosting a large event. If you don't already have these, get down to business!

- Group bank account.** Bringing a speaker costs money. Finding the money may not be a problem, but you will need somewhere to keep it, deposit checks made out to your group, etc.
- An Announcement Email List.** Your group should have an email list (or possibly a Facebook group) that members and interested people can sign up for easily.
- Portable Contact Information.** Your group should have business cards or brochures that you can give to people who come to *any* event or meeting. Don't have any? The SSA can provide your group with business cards at <http://www.secularstudents.org/node/2028/>
- Tabling Supplies.** In addition to brochures or business cards, your group should have materials for tabling. These can include brochures from other freethought organizations, flyers for upcoming events, non-tracts, freethought literature, stickers, and more. The SSA can help provide your group with some materials to start.
- Established Officers.** Your group should have more than one officer (for a multitude of reasons!), and these individuals should be established and introduced at all your events and meetings. This helps people know who to approach about questions, proposals (co-sponsorships?), or monetary contributions.
- A professional appearance.** The manner in which you present your group can have a lasting impact. Even if your group is brand new, a set of business cards, an established website or Facebook group, and a little attention to detail can make all the difference between "winging it" and a well-organized event. People are more willing to listen to you, to join your cause, to come to your events and possibly even fund your group if you present yourselves professionally. Plus, your audience will know the difference and appreciate a well-organized event!

Initial Planning (Timeframe: more than one month out)

This is the time to brainstorm your event and hash out the basics. It's also a good time to get started on the above items if you don't already have them established.

- Brainstorm your event.** Decide what you want to do. Are you planning to bring in one speaker to present? A panel discussion? A debate? A Darwin Day party, in which a speaker will be only one part? Will you be cooperating with another group (such as a co-sponsored debate)?
- Outline a rough budget.** Consider costs of travel, lodging, transportation, and food for your speaker. Check with your school to find out about any costs involved with getting a room, equipment, and advertising. Don't forget to include costs for flyers, snacks for planning meetings, a thank-you

Co-Sponsoring Events

Cosponsoring an event yields many fruits: cooperation, shared costs, mutual respect and understanding. However, it holds some challenges of its own.

Give yourself plenty of time to plan co-sponsored events. At every stage in the planning process, ask yourself "What do I need the other group to do?" Then make sure they know that you expect them to do it. In return, make sure you know what they're expecting of you, and make sure you follow through.

We encourage groups to plan in advance, so we hope that you will encourage your cosponsors to do the same.

If you have concerns or questions about working with another group, it's a great time to get in touch with your campus organizer.

Speaker Event Detailed Checklist



dinner, and other last-minute expenses. (See the box on Budgeting an Event, next page, for more information.) Check out the Fund-Raising chapter of the Group Running Guide for information on finding funding for your event.

- Pick a set of dates.** Or three, since sometimes a speaker can't make your first choice. Consider factors such as time of year, conflicting events, and day of the week.
- Pick a speaker.** Or three, since sometimes your first choice speaker isn't available. This is especially important if your date isn't flexible (for example, a Darwin Day celebration). See the list of speakers on the SSA Speakers Bureau at www.secularstudents.org/speakers.
- Pick a topic.** Or three, depending on your event and the results of your brainstorming above. Your speaker may have a list of preferred speaking topics, and since you know your community and university better than the speaker does, you'll have a better idea of what presentations will go over well.
- Investigate venues.** The type of presentation you are able to hold will depend on what kind of a room you are able to reserve. This is a good time to see what options are available in your area, what restrictions they have, and find costs for them.
- Discuss an honorarium.** The folks on the SSA Speakers Bureau have already agreed to speak to your group for only the cost of travel/lodging, however many of them are giving up a day or two of work to come speak to you! If your campus or group typically provides a speaking fee to guests, you should consider offering the speakers an honorarium (the amount will vary, but they could range anywhere from \$100 - \$500). In many cases, the amount will be donated to charity by the speaker.
- Get in touch with the SSA Campus Organizer.** The Campus Organizer will help you plan your event, whether your group is new and needs detailed involvement or whether your group is well-established and only needs hands-off, emergencies-only help. This is the person who will put you in touch with your speaker and check in periodically to make sure everything is going all right. Contact the organizer with any questions or concerns you may have about your event – we are here to help!
- Determine the details.** Obviously this is the last step of the Initial Planning stage, and you should be in touch with your speaker as you make these decisions. This is where you settle on the details: an event format, a particular speaker, a presentation topic, the length of the presentation, the exact date and location. Obviously some of these may change, but it's easier to change a plan than to try and coordinate things without one.

Things You Must Do In Advance (Timeframe: by one month out)

- Keep in touch!** You'll need to be in touch with your speaker to make arrangements, and you should keep the SSA campus organizer informed of any changes that occur, or any questions you have along the way. You'll also want

Event-Planning Timeframes

Our years of event planning have shown us that one of the best times to do the *planning* for an event is over summer and winter breaks. Much of the planning must be done well in advance of the event, and while it might seem strange, you'll almost always have more time during break for your officers to meet and accomplish their assigned tasks. Yes, we realize that it takes some discipline, but you'll appreciate the difference once the school year is in full swing and you have the brunt of your work already done.

Budgeting an Event

Things to consider and plan for when assembling your budget. Always plan for the higher cost, and ask for what you need. It's a rare source indeed that offers you more than what you ask for.

- \$_____ **Transportation.** How are you getting the speaker from their home to your city?
- \$_____ **Lodging.** Where will the speaker stay in your city? (Some speakers are happy to stay with students; others prefer a hotel room. Ask!)
- \$_____ **Ground transportation.** How is the speaker getting from where they're staying to your event? (Again, some speakers are fine with getting rides from students – ask what they'd prefer!)
- \$_____ **Other speaker-related fees.** Does your speaker need to have meals covered? Parking on campus? You know your city and university better than the speaker or the SSA!
- \$_____ **Room reservation.** Some campuses provide rooms for free; some charge for larger spaces. Does your room require insurance for large audiences? Security for a high-profile speaker? Find out! Ask about any possible discounts for student groups.
- \$_____ **Equipment.** If you need a video projector and a screen, two microphones and a sound system, find out what it will cost to have them provided. Don't forget to ask about a lectern/podium while you're at it. You also might have to pay for someone to operate the equipment – make sure you find all this information early!
- \$_____ **Publicity.** This is a big one! Include costs for flyers and tape/staples/staplers/tacks, posters, Facebook ads, newspaper ads, radio ads, and any other publicity you might want.
- \$_____ **Tabling supplies.** Brochures, informative flyers/programs, business cards, stickers, t-shirts – anything you'll want to have available at the event.
- \$_____ **Thanking your speaker.** Are you taking him out to dinner? Your whole group? Sending a card? Whatever you decide to do, be sure to budget for it!

Speaker Event Detailed Checklist



to provide at least two phone numbers that are sure to be answered, so that the speaker can reach you when unexpected events happen.

- Determine responsibility.** Decide who's arranging for travel and lodging and who's paying for it. While the SSA does cover costs for the Speakers Bureau, it's done on a reimbursement basis. Either your group or the speaker needs to purchase that plane ticket, and then get in touch with the SSA to cover the costs. Always keep receipts!
- Make travel/lodging arrangements.** If your group is responsible for making the arrangements, take care of them early! Airfares are cheaper in advance, and hotels can fill up quickly. Make sure you consider details like how the speaker will get from the airport to the hotel and university. Most speakers are flexible on this sort of thing – keep in touch with them to see what their preferences are. Also investigate local options – many universities have a faculty club or similar facility where overnight guests of the college may stay, often for less than a local hotel. In some cases, speakers are even willing to crash on a group member's spare bed or sofa!
- Reserve your venue & A/V equipment.** Contact your university to reserve the room or hall you plan to use. Don't forget to also reserve any equipment such as microphones, A/V equipment, a projector, recording equipment, and even simple details such as a lectern or podium.
- Apply for funding.** If you're planning to get funding for your event from your university, the SSA, or other sources, you need to apply in advance. Requests for SSA funding must be submitted at least 30 days in advance, and many universities require even more time.

Working with local organizations

Building a relationship with local freethought organizations can be tremendously helpful to a student group, particularly in planning an event. Cooperation with these groups can lend experience, extra hands, audience members, and maybe even some funding for your project now and possibly in the future. There are innumerable benefits to working with an off-campus organization, and if you haven't already been working together, now is a great time to start!

- Design your promotional plan.** Decide on what publicity you will be using for your event. Consider flyers, chalking, newspaper ads (student paper or local paper), Facebook ads, press releases, and other options your university might have. Set up a timeline and specific budget.
- Secure merchandise or handouts.** Decide what kinds of things you want to have on hand for your event and make sure you have them. If you don't have brochures or business cards, now's the time to do it. You may also consider things like T-shirts (group logo shirts, OUT Campaign shirts, SSA shirts), flyers for your next event, or cookies. Whatever you want to have, get them ordered now so you have them by the event.
- Contact your university bookstore.** If your speaker has published a book (or has had a book published about him), contact your university bookstore about ordering copies to have for sale at your event. Bookstores are usually willing to cooperate for this sort of thing. Let your speaker know so she is prepared to sign books.

Up to One Month Out (Timeframe: a month in advance until the week of the event)

This is when the major work of the event gets done. We've broken up this list into three categories: planning, event details, and advertising. Here is the time when delegating becomes crucial: find volunteers to help your officers and keep track of who's responsible.

Up to One Month Out: Planning Details

- Keep in touch.** You'll want to be in touch with your speaker and the SSA campus organizer as you come up with questions, or if any bumps come up. Make sure your speaker knows the travel arrangements and the plan for the event. Find out any special requests your speaker might have.
- Double check your arrangements.** If your request for microphones got dropped by the university facilities center, you want to find out now, not on the night of the presentation! You might also want to get a phone number of who you should call if something goes wrong with the equipment at the event.
- See if security will be needed.** For some speakers, their mere presence may be enough to elicit protests! Will you be needing security? Your campus and speaker can help you answer this question and let you know if this must be paid for.

Time with the Speaker

Your speaker may be traveling hundreds of miles to visit your university. Chances are, you'll have at least a few hours to spend with him or her outside of the presentation. Don't be shy about taking advantage of that time!

It's very common for a group to take their speaker out for dinner or a similar social activity before or after the presentation. Most speakers value this time with students, and there is so much that students can learn from casual time spent with an established figure in the off-campus freethought movement.

You may also want to provide your speaker with some information about the city, especially if they are spending more than a few hours there. You might want to let her know about good restaurants, local attractions, an interesting museum exhibit or anything else that someone might want to check out while in town.

Speaker Event Detailed Checklist



- Check out the rules of your room.** You'll want to be aware of any special rules or restrictions about the room you'll be using. Can you tape flyers or banners to the wall? Are guests allowed to have food or drinks? Can you ask for donations without incurring fees or fines? Do you have to be out by a certain time?
- Find out about parking.** If your speaker is driving to the event, find out where he or she can park. Talk to your security or parking office about the possibility of a visitor permit.

Up to One Month Out: Event Details

- Plan for Q&A sessions.** Will your event have a Q&A session? How will you handle the questions? Passing around a microphone? Raised hands (and who will call on them)? A standing microphone where people line up? Notecards collected and read by a moderator? Talk with your speaker to find a method that will work best, advise them of your ultimate decision, and don't forget to secure any equipment or materials you'll need to pull it off. Also remember to include a mention of the process in the introduction to your event.
- Plan to survey.** Large events are a great time to get information about freethinkers in your area! Decide on a few quick questions (How much did you enjoy the event? How much did you learn? Did you change your mind about ____ as a result of attending?) and prepare small paper surveys to hand out (and collect!) at your event. The information will help you make group-running decisions and also help in fundraising later on.
- Plan to record.** If you have the capacity, consider making a video or audio recording of the presentation. Check with your speaker to secure his or her permission, and prepare a waiver for them to sign when they're there (get one at www.secularstudents.org/waiver). Reserve or secure any equipment needed to make these recordings.

Up to One Month Out: Advertising

- Design and order materials.** You'll need to design flyers, ads, banners, and any other promotional materials you'll be using. This is also the time to place orders for duplicating, printing, or reserving ad space in a newspaper.
- Write your press release.** A press release is basically a door to free advertising for your group and your event. The SSA can help you develop a good press release and can provide a list of media contacts. Go to <http://www.secularstudents.org/media> for more info.
- Advertise on the web.** Create an event on Facebook, Google Calendar, your university website, and any other resource you can find. Invite as many people as you can. Consider advertising your event through Facebook or other networking sites. Be sure to list contact information.

The Introduction

These are some common things you might want to include in your introduction. You may have other things you want to mention, and you may not need to use everything in this list. Consider it a starting point.

- Introduce yourself and your group as the host of the event.
- Background – who the speaker is and any special occasions that might bring them.
- Topic – what the speaker will be talking about
- Logistics – how does Q&A work? When can I get my book signed?
- Reminder to turn off cell phones
- Reminder that stuff (books, t-shirts, brochures, etc) is available, free or for sale, and where.
- Thank the audience for coming
- Thank any groups who helped make the event happen (if this is a Speakers Bureau event, you must acknowledge the SSA!)

- Plan to show off.** If you have a room with AV equipment already set up, consider assembling a slide show with information about your group and/or your speaker to play while the audience comes in and gets settled. It looks sharp and gives people something to look at.
- Plan to table.** Will you have a table at your event? Where? When? What will you have at it? Consider SSA brochures, group business cards, flyers about recent and/or upcoming activities, freethought literature, books (through your university bookstore – see above), t-shirts, and other things. This is an ideal place for a sign-up sheet for your listserv, or an internet-enabled laptop where people can log in to Facebook and join your group.
- Prepare an introduction.** Research your speaker and write an introduction. See the sidebar on things you may want to include. Practice it!

- Personally invite interested groups and people.** People will be more likely to show up if you invite them than just by seeing a flyer or ad. If you're bringing a speaker to present about evolution, walk over to the biology department with a stack of flyers and talk to as many professors as you can. See if they'll invite their classes. Get in touch with campus groups with a similar viewpoint. Contact groups with an opposing viewpoint and invite them. [Go to other groups' meetings if you can.](#) Get in touch with local off-campus (adult) organizations that might be interested (local chapters of freethought organizations, Unitarian Universalist churches, humanistic jewish congregations, ACLU chapters, and anyone else you can find) and invite them as well. And don't forget your faculty advisor!

Speaker Event Detailed Checklist



- Be prepared to answer questions.** People will have questions. Be sure you are prepared to answer in a polite, professional manner. You may have to research answers – don't leave the inquirer hanging. If you list a certain email address, make sure you are checking it regularly. If you list your phone number, make sure your voicemail greeting is appropriate.

The Week of the Event

- Flyer & chalk your campus like crazy!** Check out chalking and flying advice in our Group Running Guide. (<http://www.secularstudents.org/grouprunningguide>)
- Send your press release again.** Don't forget to update the dates! Did you contact other like-minded groups on campus? Off campus groups?
- Assemble an "Event Kit."** This is a box or bag with all the supplies you might need at the event. See the sidebar on things you might include in your kit.
- Got Directions?** Does your building need signs to help people get to the right room? Make some big arrows, and don't forget to bring a few extras just in case.
- Put up one last round of flyers & chalk on the day of the event!**

Just Before and At The Event

- Room check.** Make sure everything you're supposed to have is where it's supposed to be. Hang any banners or signs about your group.
- Sound check.** Make sure the microphones, AV equipment, recording equipment, and anything else you need is working correctly.
- Provide water for your speaker.** It's expected that you will have a glass of water for your speaker. You might want one for your introducer, as well. If your venue doesn't have a source of drinking water, bring bottled water.
- Get a techie.** Try to have someone on hand who can help with computer, A/V and other technical issues.

After the Event

- Say Thank You.** You might take your speaker out to dinner, send him a letter or card, or find some appropriately creative way to thank your speaker for coming to your university. Many times, even a thoughtful email will suffice. Most speakers value feedback on their presentations, so let them know what you liked!
- Follow up with your funding.** Many grants, including SSA Project Grants, require a post-event write up. Others (such as individual donors) require thanks. Don't forget this step – it's crucial to building goodwill for your group.

The "Event Kit"

You never know every last thing you might need, but you can be prepared for the big ones by preparing this kit. You'll find things you might need as you go – add them to your box for next time!

- Glasses or cups, and maybe bottled water**
- Cameras**
- A clipboard, attached pen, and paper sign-up sheet for your email list.**
- Attendee handouts** (business cards, brochures, stickers, flyers, etc.)
- Anything the speaker requested**
- Tape & thumbtacks, duct tape and safety pins**
- A waiver for your speaker to sign to give permission for audio or video recordings**
- A group banner, sign, poster, etc.**
- A donations box/jar/basket** (as long as it's within your university rules)

- Give your speaker some prep time.** Provide your speaker with at least 30 minutes to set up, go to the bathroom, meet with attendees, etc.
- Be early – run on time!** Make sure everything runs on time. Nothing says unprofessional like a rushed, 15-minute late preparation while the audience sits restlessly. It's far better to have everything done with time to spare.
- Take pictures.** You will want to have pictures of your group with your speaker, the audience, your speaker during the presentation (but don't cause a distraction!), and anything else fun and exciting that goes on.

- Write an article for the SSA eMpirical!** We love to feature things our students are doing. We especially love photos! Publishing an article with us is a great way to show off your group and good experience for any English or journalism major.