Name: _____ Date: _____

Three Minutes at the Microphone

Circle group

In many city council rooms, there is a plain microphone on a stand. It may not look like much. But it connects ordinary people to their leaders. In a part of the meeting called public comment, any resident can walk up and speak to the people who make the town's choices.

The steps are simple. Residents sign up on a sheet before the meeting starts. The council posts its agenda ahead of time, so people know what will be talked about. Each speaker gets the same short time, often about three minutes. A clerk may use a timer. When time is up, the speaker sits down.

People bring many kinds of worries. A parent may ask for a crosswalk near a school. A business owner may dislike a new parking rule. A teenager may ask for a skate park. Council members do not usually argue back. They listen. Sometimes they ask staff to look into it. The choice may come at a later meeting.

The time limit can seem hard, but it is fair. If one person could talk for an hour, no one else could speak. The best speakers have a clear request, one or two reasons, and a polite voice. Even if the council does not change its mind, the public record shows that residents spoke up. That matters at the next election.

Questions

1. What is the part of the meeting called when residents may speak?

_____

_____

2. How do residents get a turn to speak?

_____

_____

3. About how long does each speaker usually get?

_____

_____

4. Why do council members not usually argue back during public comment?

_____

_____

5. Why is an equal time limit fair?

_____

_____

6. What helps a speaker do well?

_____

_____

Words to know

council: a group of elected people who make decisions for a town or city
resident: a person who lives in a particular place
agenda: the list of things a meeting will cover
clerk: an official who keeps records and handles paperwork

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Three Minutes at the Microphone

Triangle group

At the back of many city council chambers stands a plain microphone on a stand. It may not look important, but it is one of the most direct connections between ordinary people and their government. During a part of the meeting called public comment, any resident can walk up to it and speak to the people who make the town's decisions.

The process is usually simple. Residents sign up on a sheet before the meeting begins, and the council posts its agenda ahead of time so people know what will be discussed. Each speaker receives a short, equal amount of time, often about three minutes, and a clerk may use a timer. When the time is up, the speaker sits down, no matter how important the topic feels.

Residents bring all kinds of concerns. A parent might ask for a crosswalk near a school. A business owner might object to a new parking rule. A teenager might ask the council to build a skate park. Council members generally do not argue back during the comment period. They listen and sometimes ask staff to look into the issue, but the decision may come at a later meeting.

The time limit can seem harsh, yet it serves fairness. If one person could speak for an hour, there would be no time for anyone else. Speakers who prepare a clear request, give one or two reasons, and stay polite are often the most effective. Even when a council does not change its mind, the public record shows that residents spoke, and that record matters when elected officials face the next election.

Questions

1. What is the part of a council meeting called when residents may speak?

_____

_____

2. How do residents usually get a turn to speak?

_____

_____

3. About how long does each speaker usually get?

_____

_____

4. Why do council members usually not argue with speakers during the comment period?

_____

_____

5. Why is an equal time limit fair?

_____

_____

6. What makes a speaker more likely to be effective?

_____

_____

Words to know

council: a group of elected people who make decisions for a town or city
resident: a person who lives in a particular place
agenda: the list of things a meeting will cover
clerk: an official who keeps records and handles paperwork
effective: successful at getting the result you want

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Three Minutes at the Microphone

Square group

At the rear of many city council chambers stands an unassuming microphone on a stand. It may not appear significant, yet it represents one of the most direct connections between ordinary citizens and their government. During a portion of the meeting known as public comment, any resident is permitted to approach it and address the officials who make the community's decisions.

The procedure is typically straightforward. Residents sign a sheet before the meeting commences, and the council publishes its agenda in advance so that people understand which subjects will be considered. Each speaker receives a brief and equal allotment of time, frequently about three minutes, and a clerk may operate a timer. When the allotted time expires, the speaker returns to a seat, regardless of how important the topic feels.

Residents raise a remarkable variety of concerns. A parent might request a crosswalk near a school, a business owner might object to a newly adopted parking rule, and a teenager might urge the council to construct a skate park. Council members generally refrain from arguing during the comment period. They listen and occasionally direct staff to investigate the matter, although the actual decision may not occur until a subsequent meeting.

The time limit can seem severe, yet it serves the cause of fairness. If a single person could speak for an hour, no opportunity would remain for anyone else. Speakers who prepare a clear request, offer one or two reasons, and remain courteous tend to be the most persuasive. Even when a council declines to change its position, the public record demonstrates that residents spoke, and that record matters considerably when elected officials face the next election.

Questions

1. What is the portion of a council meeting called when residents may address the officials?

_____

_____

2. How do residents usually secure a turn to speak?

_____

_____

3. About how much time does each speaker usually receive?

_____

_____

4. Why do council members generally refrain from arguing with speakers during the comment period?

_____

_____

5. Why does an equal time limit serve fairness?

_____

_____

6. What tends to make a speaker the most persuasive?

_____

_____

Words to know

council: a group of elected people who make decisions for a town or city
resident: a person who lives in a particular place
agenda: the list of things a meeting will cover
clerk: an official who keeps records and handles paperwork

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Three Minutes at the Microphone

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Three Minutes at the Microphone

Easier · 225 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.2

1. Public comment.
2. They sign up on a sheet before the meeting starts.
3. About three minutes.
4. The time is for listening, and the choice may come at a later meeting.
5. It leaves time for many people to speak, not just one.
6. A clear request, one or two reasons, and a polite voice.

Triangle: Three Minutes at the Microphone

This passage · 268 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.6

1. Public comment.
2. They sign up on a sheet before the meeting begins.
3. About three minutes.
4. The time is for listening, and decisions are often made at a later meeting.
5. It leaves room for many people to speak instead of only one.
6. A clear request, one or two reasons, and a polite tone.

Square: Three Minutes at the Microphone

Harder · 277 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 11.8

1. Public comment.
2. They sign a sheet before the meeting commences.
3. About three minutes.
4. The time is for listening, and the decision may not occur until a later meeting.
5. It leaves an opportunity for many people to speak rather than only one.
6. A clear request, one or two reasons, and a courteous manner.