



AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION TALKING POINTS FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES

(One idea is to start each talk by asking the audience what comes to mind when you say the word “diplomat.” Many stereotypes come up; you can then use your presentation to dismantle those stereotypes.)

*(Another idea is to ask, “Do all of you know that our government sends Americans—who are **not** in the military—to live and work overseas? Why do we do that? What do you think they do?”)*

About the Foreign Service

- American diplomats work for the United States Foreign Service. The Foreign Service is a part of the State Department, the first department created in our government’s executive branch.
- These diplomats are proud to serve our country by protecting and promoting our people, interests, and values. Their work not only helps to prevent war but allows us to work with our allies and confront our enemies when necessary in smarter, more effective ways.
- More than 14,000 Americans work in the Foreign Service in Washington, DC, and in 270 American embassies and consulates all over the world. They work with other countries to address common problems in ways that work for everyone—problems such as terrorism, pandemic diseases, climate change, and massive waves of refugees fleeing their countries.
- In 2016, 73 million Americans traveled abroad. Our diplomats help these American citizens whether they are tourists, exchange students, businesspeople, or couples trying to adopt a child. The U.S. Embassy assists in cases involving any of the “4Ds”—that is, when an American disappears, dies, is detained by local authorities, or becomes destitute. For example, you could suddenly become destitute if your money, passport, and phone were lost or stolen.
- The Foreign Service isn’t just the State Department. We have development experts at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) who deliver food aid and disaster relief to countries that have suffered natural disasters. They also promote democracy around the world by helping countries learn the skills to be self-sufficient. Another agency, the Foreign Commercial Service, promotes American businesses and exports abroad. The Foreign Agricultural Service develops opportunities for American farmers and ranchers to sell their products—from corn to cattle—overseas. Lastly, through the Voice of America, the Broadcasting Board of Governors brings America’s values right to your radio or wireless device regardless of where you are in the world without the interference of local propaganda.



- In addition to these Foreign Service *officers*, there is also a large group of employees called Foreign Service *specialists* who have specific technical, support, or management skills: nurses, doctors, computer experts, security agents, human resources people, construction managers, facilities maintenance experts, and so on.
- With all of this important work happening at embassies all over the world, you might think it costs our government a lot of money. Believe it or not, *all of the foreign aid and international relations work in the State Department and those other agencies is accomplished with less than 1% of the government's entire budget*. That 1% buys us a lot. It buys goodwill, and it buys stability in other countries and regions of the world. And when other countries are economically successful and politically stable, it makes us safer at home.

The Importance of Diplomacy

- With all of the security threats we face today—from ISIS to North Korea, along with ongoing violence in Syria and other places [*or insert current hot spots*—our leaders in the military and in Congress agree that U.S. diplomacy is more important than ever to protect Americans at home and keep U.S. troops out of harm's way.
- If a country can have a “superpower,” **diplomacy** would be our country’s “superpower” without question. You could call it our “first line of defense” in working with other countries. It’s all about relationships. Our diplomats speak the language of the countries where they’re living. They know the politics, the history, the culture, and the people, and they can get things done.
- If America wants other nations to help us fight terrorism or make business deals with us, or if we need to persuade another country’s leaders to take a position or do something that is in our country’s interests, it is the work of our American diplomats that helps to make that happen.
- The United States is a very powerful country, and that’s how many other countries see us. But we want those countries and their people to be proud of their partnership with us and not feel that we’ve imposed a solution on them. That’s where American diplomats, through the relationships they’ve developed, help the countries involved reach compromises or win-win solutions.



Living and Working Overseas

- Every two to three years, Foreign Service officers and their families pick up and move to another country or back to Washington, DC. Living overseas can be a great adventure and learning experience, but it can also be hard on families and children. In many countries, there are American or international schools that children may attend, so you can study the same subjects that kids back in the U.S. are learning. Even so, can you imagine moving and changing schools and having to make new friends every two or three years?
- Social media has made it a lot easier to keep in touch with old friends, but your family may be assigned to a country where the Internet is slow and sometimes doesn't work for hours or days at a time. Not being able to get online may be an inconvenience, but living overseas may expose you to serious hardships and risks, such as infectious diseases, violent crime, and traffic accidents in places where emergency healthcare is limited or nonexistent. [*Insert examples from speaker's experience.*]
- The United States is the only country that sends its Foreign Service officers to all but three countries in the world. Many Foreign Service officers work in war zones or countries that are so dangerous they can't even take their families or pets with them. If you come to the State Department in Washington, DC, you will see carved into the walls the names of the hundreds of brave men and women who gave their lives overseas in service to their country.

The Foreign Service as a Career

Part or all of this section can be omitted if the audience is not likely to appreciate the details about the application process and career tracks.

- The Foreign Service offers a rewarding career, but it is very difficult to get in, and it's not right for everyone. Last year, more than 17,000 people applied, and only about 300 were accepted.
- To get into the Foreign Service, you have to take and pass a written exam, write several essays, and sit for an oral exam. If and *only if* you get through these steps in the application process, you must be able to obtain a top secret security clearance and pass a thorough medical exam that enables you to be assigned anywhere in the world. Knowing a foreign language is not a requirement to be considered for the Foreign Service, but it certainly doesn't hurt.
- As part of the application process, the State Department also asks you to select your career track very early in the process, which can be stressful for applicants who don't yet know what they want to do. There are five different career tracks within the Foreign Service:
 1. **Consular** officers make decisions about foreigners who apply for visas to travel to the United States, and they protect the interests and welfare of Americans traveling and living overseas, including organizing an evacuation if there is a natural disaster or civil unrest.



2. **Economic** officers promote U.S. economic, commercial, environmental and scientific interests, including helping U.S. businesses sell their products, negotiating trade agreements, and encouraging cooperation on climate change.
3. **Management** officers manage the operations of the Embassy, including personnel, budgets, and housing; they ensure that the embassy is obeying local laws.
4. **Political** officers promote U.S. political interests, including human rights and democratic governance; they keep Washington informed about political developments and security threats in the country.
5. **Public diplomacy** officers promote American art and culture to the people of other countries, including through social media. They also advise students interested in studying in the U.S.

Closing

- When we return from dangerous places where we have served our country, we do not expect a lot of fanfare. We find our work fulfilling in its own right. But we do want people to know about the work that we do. Above all, we want to make sure that our fellow Americans are aware of what's going on in the world. It is essential for a democracy to have educated and informed citizens, but all the more so because of our country's unique role in the world. If you take nothing else away from our time together today, please take it as a call to learn everything that you can about global issues, and encourage your friends and family to do the same.
- While we have been together today, I'd like to remind you that more than 14,000 Foreign Service officers and specialists are on watch at some 270 American embassies and consulates all over the world. They are proud to *serve you, the American people*. I hope you will think of them as they do their jobs, often in dangerous and difficult places, to make our country safer, stronger, and more prosperous.