

## Informative Speech

General Purpose: to inform

Specific Purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will be able to understand the magnitude and ingenuity of the first Ferris wheel.

Central Idea: The building of the first Ferris wheel was an amazing accomplishment in 1883, and is still impressive when we learn about it today.

Organizational Form: Chronological

### Introduction

I. "There is nothing in the World's Columbian Exposition that compares in genuine novelty and sensationalism with the great vertical wheel which stands in the very center of the Midway." So said Robert Graves, a reporter for the newspaper "The Alleghenian" in July of 1893. Mr. Graves was referring to the Ferris wheel, a new marvel created for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair by engineer George Ferris.

II. Most of you have ridden on a Ferris wheel at some point, probably at a county fair or amusement park. You may have enjoyed the view from the top, or the wind in your hair.

III. My favorite part of riding the Ferris wheel is the wheel revolves. Imagine how it would feel if the highest point was 264 feet in the air, as that first one was.

IV. The building of the first Ferris wheel was an amazing accomplishment in 1883, and is still impressive when we learn about it today.

V. In the next few minutes, I will discuss the engineer who created the Ferris wheel, the building of the wheel itself, and the public's reaction to it at the Chicago World's Fair.

Transition Statement: Let's start with George Ferris himself.

### Body

I. The Ferris wheel was designed by George Ferris, an engineer from Pittsburgh, to be placed at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

A. Engineers across the country had been asked for their designs for a central creation for the fair.

1. According to Erik Larson's 2003 book *The Devil in the White City*, which covered the history of the Chicago World's Fairs, the fair's director wanted a design that would outshine the Eiffel Tower, which had been built for the previous World's Fair in Paris just four years earlier.

2. Many designs were received, but none original enough to best Eiffel. That is, until George Ferris revealed his design for a 250 foot revolving wheel.

B. At first, the Fair's committee was unwilling to have the Ferris wheel built.

1. As noted in *The World's Columbian Exposition*, a book by Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, many fair leaders thought that Ferris had "wheels in his head," and that the whole idea was ridiculous.

2. The design seemed fragile, and they thought that the public would be afraid.

3. However, Ferris was committed to his idea. He made more detailed drawings, and raised enough money from investors to finance the project himself. According to Larson, in December of 1892, the committee finally gave Ferris permission to build his wheel on the fairgrounds.

Transition Statement: Now that Ferris's plans had been approved, it was time for the construction of the wheel to begin.

II. The Ferris wheel was unlike anything that had been built before.

A. The enormous size of the structure was the main challenge in building the wheel.

1. The plans called for a wheel which was 250 feet in diameter, and it had to be sturdy enough to support the 2,000 passengers that would ride on it each time it made a revolution.
2. In order to accomplish this, the builders sunk eight 140-foot towers into 32 feet of cement. These towers would support the Ferris Wheel's giant axle.
3. According to Stanley Appelbaum, author of *The Chicago World's Fair of 1893*, the 45-foot-long axle of the Ferris wheel was the largest single piece of steel that had ever been forged. Together with its fittings, the axle weighed 142,000 pounds, approximately the weight of 24 Hummer H3s.
4. **Visual of wheel in construction, from Bolotin and Laing's *The World's Columbian Expedition*.**

B. There were also the time constraints to consider.

1. By the time Ferris received permission to build his wheel, there were only five months left until the Fair's opening day.
2. Even with a large team of builders, Ferris was unable to meet this deadline. However, after much pressure from the Fair's Committee, the wheel was finally ready on June 21, 1892.

Transition Statement: Now that the wheel was ready, it was time to see what the public thought of it.

III. The Ferris wheel, upon completion, was the highlight of the 1893 Chicago World's fair.

A. The people that came to the fair had never seen anything like the Ferris wheel before, and many were eager to ride on the new creation.

1. According to an article by Jack Klasey in the September 1993 issue of "American History Illustrated," the Ferris wheel carried 36 passengers each. The cars had large windows, to provide visibility, and rows of swiveling chairs so that the passengers could enjoy their ride in comfort.
2. **Visual of completed wheel from the World's Columbian Expedition.**
3. The wheel carried up to 2,000 passengers at a time, making two full revolutions in twenty minutes. The highest point was 264 feet, which is 50 feet higher than the tallest building in Eugene, Ya-Po-ah Terrace. (Point out people in visual for scale.) From the top, there was an excellent view of the whole fairgrounds.
4. During the four months that the wheel operated, almost 1,500,000 people went for a ride on it. This is equivalent to every single resident of Eugene riding the Ferris wheel 10 times! As Klasey points out, it was one of the fair's most popular attractions.

Conclusion

I. So that, in short, is the story of the first Ferris wheel.

II. I've told you about the wheel's designer, George Ferris, the building of the wheel itself, and the public's reaction to it.

III. Next time you're on a Ferris wheel, think for a moment about the amazing design and construction that went into the wheel for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Not only was this invention a delight for fairgoers everywhere, it was also a major feat of engineering.

IV. As Joshua Korenblat notes in a September 2004 "national Geographic" article, George Ferris took "the Eiffel Tower, put it on a pivot, and made it move."

#### Works Cited

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