



for the
novice

START at

Begin at the beginning." Sage counsel for speech preparation? Not so. Cold beginnings create performance anxiety Toastmasters know all too well. Knowing purpose provides focus. But even the clearest focus becomes vague if you begin your task by staring into the abyss with no idea where to go. There's an easier way to prepare a speech using a technique developed by advertising copywriters. Instead of starting at the beginning with your mind locked on how to start or what to say, start at the end with your objective – what you want to have said – and work backwards to your beginning.

This isn't a radical procedure. It's a simple outline, easy and powerful to use. You may not know it because the formal outlining techniques you learned got better press. But these are outdated and awkward to use. You don't build a house from the roof down, do you? You first need a solid foundation and a blueprint. This is how the Start-At-The-End method works. The purpose of your speech is the blueprint. Your objective is the foundation.

The first step is to make a Laundry List. These are thought and idea fragments jotted down in a what-comes-before-this? free-associative approach. If writing is a problem, use a tape recorder, word processor, typewriter or any other tool you're comfortable with. Record each thought fragment or idea scrap related to your topic. Don't worry about order or structure for now. Just jot down the stuff as it comes. Don't edit. The strength of the Laundry List is that it's not carved in stone but flexible, incorporating the "whatever-works" style of task management.

Take a look at what you've written and see if any categories suggest themselves. If it's still confusing, set the list aside for a few hours. Overnight is best. Come back. Reorganize. But this time look for similar elements that can be keyed or grouped to an idea. Categories and other ideas will appear, so make use of liberal margins. Be messy, not judgmental. No one will ever see

Having difficulty preparing for an upcoming speech assignment? Here's an easy method that uses laundry listing and restructuring techniques that lets you work backwards from your conclusion.

by John Ziemba

it. Draw arrows, bullets, make notes or cut and paste. If you're still bogged down, set it aside again. Or take it with you while you do something else.

The important thing to keep in mind is that the list is a tool designed to complement the way you think. It breaks the mindset of traditional outlining methods, which emphasize form over function. And they fail because traditionalists assume you know where you want to go from the get go. Performance anxiety results from unrealistic attempts at perfect form with no latitude for error. Rarely is perfection achieved with a first draft. Instead of developing an idea, your task becomes that of jamming

round thoughts into square holes. Worries about structure make ideas disappear.

That's why Laundry Lists work. You're relaxed when you make one.

Now when you come back to your list, rewrite it, but this time visualize your target audience. What would appeal to them? What would they like to hear? What presentation would be the most effective? What feels right for you?

Cut and paste. Look at your categories. See any patterns? Rearrange ideas. Use a separate column to list your groupings. Take a look at your list viewed through the screen of your objective. This is where logic and common sense kick in. Use an "If D (objective), then C+B+A" process. "C" is that thought group directly supported by the objective. The "B" group is supported by the "C" group and so on. Each category is an element that logically builds on the previous. Think of this selection process like mapping a route you know where you want to go. So start there and work back to where you are. What you're doing is working backwards from what you know you want to say, by listing the order of the ideas that will take you there.

Once the structure has been laid out, try a few run-throughs to work out awkward phrasings and avoid some

real pitfalls. Are you really saying what you wanted to say? If not, rearrange the order of your listing. Talk it out. No matter how carefully you prepare an outline, writing can't compare to speaking for indications of tone and rhythm. Sometimes a word easily written will twist the tongue. Substitute words for spoken clarity. But don't overdo it - keep everything in your own words to maintain your personalized delivery style. A thesaurus can be a dangerous weapon. Jamming your circuits with unfamiliar words will wreck your delivery. An overblown vocabulary impresses and persuades no one.

Do check all unfamiliar words with a good dictionary or a usage manual. *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E. B. White (1979, 3rd Edition, MacMillan Publishing Company) provides simple but powerful rules on usage. Another is the *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (1992 Edition, Addison-Wesley Publishing) containing common usage guidelines.

Now set your speech outline aside overnight and give it the Overnight Test. During the night your subconscious mind will go to work. In the morning, new ways of improving your speech will bubble up. If pressed for time, you can set the outline aside and turn to a different task. This will work. But overnight seems to work better.

Again restructure and practice. This will eliminate unnecessary "Uhhhs..." and creates neural pathways easily accessed by key words of grouped elements pulled from your list. Key words or short phrases fit nicely on index cards and only require a quick glimpse while you're talking. When enough pathways are tied to your outline format, recall is rapid, so your speech is delivered smoothly and naturally. The eye contact you maintain will create a favorable impression with your audience that you've done your homework and know what you are saying. Time it. Tighten. Polish. Shave those extra seconds with shorter words or sentences.

Visualize your audience. But don't think of them as a collective group of

10, 20 or 500 "out there." These are people who can only listen to you individually. Don't assume you're speaking to a group. By keeping your speech tailored and personalized, you can "talk" to every one of these folks using a friendly "you" approach that makes a strong connection and aides delivery. People pay closer attention when talked to. No one likes a lecture. Keeping it on a personal level adds an emotional element that makes your argument all the harder to ignore.

Mental imaging also helps you to develop a lively approach. You must be interesting. Your words must have appeal. And you must know your words. Don't make the same mistake as the corporate manager who during a meeting with shareholders stood up and said: "My purpose is to discriminate information." He meant that his purpose was to disseminate information. He didn't get the point. The audience did. The rest of the poor fellow's speech was lost in a rising wave of restrained snorts and giggles while he continued "discriminating."

Finally, find some dear and loving soul to practice with. But only when you have the speech nearly complete. No long-suffering significant other or spouse should be forced into a career as a sounding board. Seek honest criticism, not polite niceties. Don't make your secretary or co-worker lie to save face. If your speech stinks, you should be told. Give your sounding board the chance for revenge.

Working backwards from your objective using laundry listing and restructuring techniques is a liberating experience.

By not attempting perfection with the first draft, worrying about format or style and being free to cut, paste and rewrite makes speech preparation an enjoyable task. Practice, polish, restructure and practice some more. Remember that you won't be assessed on the method you use to develop your speech, but on *how* you stand and deliver. **T**

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THE END