

Simple Steps to Writing a Fantastic Speech

There I was, standing in front of my club with a stomach full of butterflies. I gave the traditional Toastmasters greeting, "Thank you, Madam Toastmaster, fellow Toastmasters and honored guests." Then I went on to stutter through a thoroughly forgettable speech. At different points in the speech I grabbed for my next line and wandered from one insignificant point to another. I wrapped up my speech with a clumsy conclusion until the green light mercifully freed me from my agony. I left that day wondering if I would ever return.

Today I am an ATMB, and the president of my club. I see people who join Toastmasters with the same excitement and enthusiasm I had when I joined three years ago. They give an Icebreaker, stumble through a couple of speeches and stop coming. I know why. They stop because they've experienced the same struggle as I did. The reason people suffer and subsequently become discouraged is that they don't know how to write and prepare for a speech. That is a real tragedy because when these people quit, they leave with great speeches dormant inside of them that will never see the light of day.

It is clear to me that most people don't fear standing up to speak; they

fear standing up and failing miserably. I was fortunate to have veteran Toastmasters give me tips on how to prepare a speech, but many novices don't get that same mentoring. Through experience and coaching, I learned some basic techniques that will help any Toastmaster write a great speech. Follow these techniques and you'll find confidence and authority at the lectern and have an enjoyable speaking experience.

Finding Material

When confronted with the task of writing a speech, most of us suffer from writers block. We get bogged down in our daily routine and find it hard to come up with fun, interesting material. I have a few suggestions:

Pull out your soap box. We all have soap-box issues. Whether your soap-box issue is fitness, family, politics or religion, pull it out and dust it off. It is a subject you are already passionate about, so use that as material. You could probably give a speech on the subject without even writing it. How many times have you preached on your soap box issue to friends and family? Now, you have a captive audience at Toastmasters.

Watch television actively. Flip through the stations and weigh

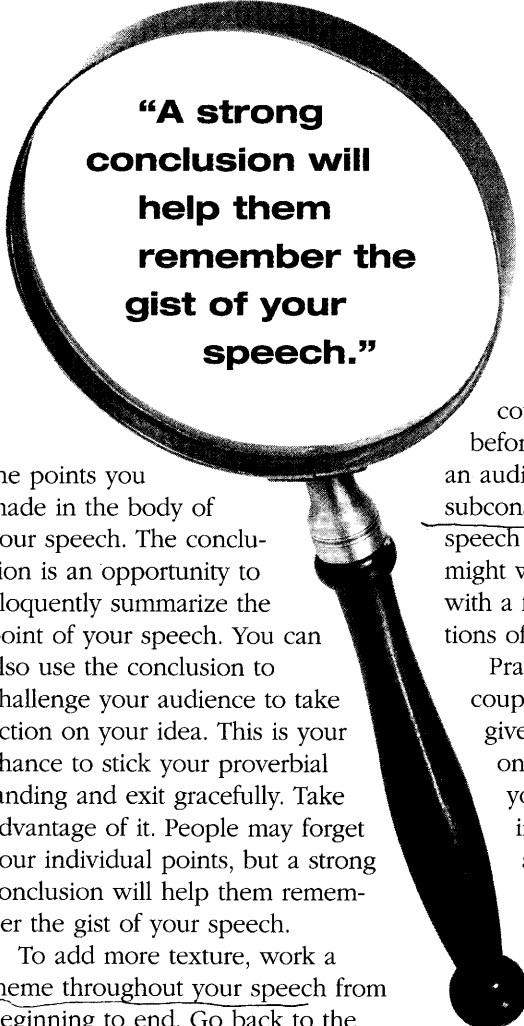
what people are saying on news programs and talk shows. Surely some topic will trigger an emotion in you worth discussing.

Friends and family are great sources of material, too. Pick up the phone and talk to the people in your life. They will remind you about stories and events that helped shape you and make bountiful speech topics.

Organizing Your Speech

After you have searched for material, write down all speech ideas, stories and topics that grabbed you. Write this material down as short phrases. Then circle those phrases and write single words or short notes around the topics you have selected. Pick the first words that come to mind. These words are the reasons you select topics in the first place.

After you go through this exercise, one of the topics will beg to be your speech. Write that topic at the top of a clean sheet of paper. Then write every phrase that comes to mind that might support your topic or your point of view. Do not censor yourself. Just write until the page is full. Review the phrases you wrote and pick three or four points that best support your topic. List them in order of importance. You now have the skeleton for your speech.



“A strong conclusion will help them remember the gist of your speech.”

To flesh out your speech, write examples or ideas that relate to each point. Edit them down to your best two or three subpoints in your speech. These subpoints should help articulate the point and naturally segue into the next point.

Crafting Your Speech

Though you now have the skeleton of your speech, skeletons are not speeches in themselves – they are the bones on which you hang words, themes and emotions. You will need to flesh out the skeleton, and that is where crafting plays a role.

① First, write an intriguing introduction. The purpose of your introduction is to grab the audience's attention and lay the foundation for the rest of your speech. The opening can be a thought-provoking quote, a short story or a joke. Whatever device you choose to use, it should grab the audience's attention and make them want to hear the rest of your message. Then you need to lay out the points you will cover in your speech.

② Next, fill in the blanks using your subpoints as guides to articulate your points. In the process of writing these points and subpoints, you have unwittingly written your speech. At this point, you just need to add color and life by adding stories, examples, facts or explanations. Don't get bogged down in writing these thoughts word for word. You know how to express these ideas. You just need to know where in the speech you will make the point and have an idea about how you will express it.

③ Finally, craft a conclusion. The conclusion should neatly wrap up

the points you made in the body of your speech. The conclusion is an opportunity to eloquently summarize the point of your speech. You can also use the conclusion to challenge your audience to take action on your idea. This is your chance to stick your proverbial landing and exit gracefully. Take advantage of it. People may forget your individual points, but a strong conclusion will help them remember the gist of your speech.

To add more texture, work a theme throughout your speech from beginning to end. Go back to the first piece of scrap paper where you wrote down all your thoughts on the topic. One of those words or phrases described why this topic interested you enough to make it a speech topic in the first place. That word or phrase can serve as your theme. Work the theme into your introduction and your conclusion. The body of your speech will most likely have some elements of the theme in it already. If it doesn't, you can edit the points in your speech to work smoothly with your chosen theme.

Preparing to Speak

I suggest writing an outline complete with topic, points and subpoints. Write out the first few lines of your introduction and conclusion and commit them to memory. Know your points and subpoints so that you can freely talk about those

points without being tethered to your notes.

Practice your speech a couple of times the night before you deliver it in front of an audience. You will find that your subconscious will rehearse the speech while you are sleeping. You might wake up the next morning with a few ideas to liven up portions of your speech.

Practice your speech again a couple of times on the day you give it. You can do it in your car on the way to work or while you get dressed in the morning. Moments before your speech, read over your outline and be sure to have your opening and closing down cold.

When the moment comes, deliver your speech with passion and confidence. Don't dwell on specific words in the body of your speech. The audience doesn't know what you wrote. They accept what you are saying as if it is exactly as you meant to say it, so deliver your speech with confidence.

When your speech is over and the audience is applauding, you will remember why you were excited about being a Toastmaster. You have expressed yourself in a way that only you could. Your speech was organized, and the audience received a gift that only you could give. Delivering great speeches is why we are Toastmasters. ■

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