

Write the speech your audience fondly remembers!

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"The devil is in the details"

My mission here is to greatly increase your awareness about what makes a great speech... a speech that has a lasting impact on the audience. There are so many critical details to craft a well written speech. If I had kept this short, it would not have helped you. You have to understand the thinking behind each point covered here to fully apply these ideas.

The information shared here has been broken down into easy to follow points supported with examples that show how to do it. The table of contents is hot linked so you can go to a section you want to review. Once you expand your awareness, you are on your way to writing great speeches and improving all your written and spoken communications.

What makes a great speech stand out

Since I stood up to give my first public speech before 800 people when I was 14, I've been on a quest to learn more about how we impact our audiences. It took me way too many years trying things, stumbling, picking myself up and trying again before I began to grasp what really made the difference.

I can still remember a large audience laughing at me because I started stuttering. There was one member of an audience that said I had "zero charisma." An audience member in another talk said he came to learn, not be entertained. And yes, I still vividly remember every single time I stumbled.

A few thousand speeches later I'm still standing, still learning, still seeking my potential.

Our potential is only limited by our desire to pursue it

In fact, what I've learned in the last few years has given me even better insight into what makes the biggest difference. That's why I rejoined Toastmasters a couple of years ago after having been involved for 18 years off and on. There was something more I needed to learn. I now find myself doing things I only wished I could do years ago.

As our awareness grows, so we grow

Yes, it's all about awareness. How well we speak whether to our family, a meeting at work, or an audience of 1000 depends on our level of awareness about what affects our ability to communicate. You can study and practice improving as a communicator for years and still not be aware of all that shapes the impact you have.

It all comes down to your message. No matter how well you deliver a speech -how charismatic you are, how your voice sounds, and how you move your body - none of that can make up for a message that fails to benefit the audience.

Of course, the better you deliver a speech, the more likely your words will be heard. So delivery and energy do play a major role in being an effective communicator but they are not the most important.

Consider this. I have seen speakers who stood behind a lectern, spoke softly and never moved their arms or hands yet their speech was mesmerizing and memorable. I've also seen speakers who were great at their delivery but made no impact because their message offered absolutely nothing of value.

Back in the 1980's, I was a member of the Sales & Marketing Executives Club of Los Angeles. Every month 400 of us would meet for dinner at the Biltmore Hotel. It was a grand hotel built in 1923 whose main ballroom had a 40 foot high ceiling painted in the beau-arts style with mini balconies all the way around.

400 of us sat their expectantly as our featured speaker was introduced. He was the founder of a large public relations agencies and we were eager to learn something that might help us in our jobs. He started out with a joke and a funny story so he had our interest.

Then another antidote, followed by a joke and another story. He kept on for 40 minutes with these entertaining without telling us what they meant. When he finished, we were relieved. We felt uncomfortable, anxious, and dissatisfied that he hadn't told us one thing about public relations of any value. His delivery and timing were excellent but that didn't mean a thing when it was all over.

Then consider this. Toastmasters conducts an annual inspirational speech contest that culminates after six rounds in the World Championship of Public Speaking. The judging ballot is weighted so that 70% is about the content of the speech and 30% about delivery! Truth be told, it's really a speech writing contest. Those that get to the final round obviously need to be great at delivery too or their content wouldn't be heard. Yet, it's finally the written speech, the message itself, that make the biggest difference.

And finally there is this truth. If you take the time to carefully write a speech that delivers something memorable to your audience, you will find it easier to deliver and you will find your delivery improving faster as you give more speeches. When we're excited about our message and know it well, our voice and body seem to rise to the occasion. A well written speech will give you more confidence and help you to be more expressive.

What follows is about the craft of speech writing - the message you deliver to an audience. It shares what I've learned after several decades of speaking in public. This is my gift to anyone who wants to reach their full potential as a speaker and communicator.

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1. What do you want to leave your audience thinking and feeling?

Would you like to give a speech your audience remembers, applies, and acts on?

You've heard the old expression begin at the ...beginning. In speech writing, you have to reverse that and begin at the end. You have to know the message you want your audience to remember before you can write the speech. That means you have to know where you want to end up before you can figure out how to begin your speech and what to share in the main body of your speech.

The single most important question you can ask yourself when writing a speech is this...

What do you want to leave your audience thinking and feeling after you finish?

If you are engaged by a group to speak before them, the single most important question you can ask the person who asked you to speak is this...

What do you want your people (or this group) to be thinking and feeling when I finish my speech?

This question focuses on the value you want to deliver to the audience. This is what you want the audience to remember and what you want the audience to do as a result of hearing your talk. This is why your giving this speech.

You write your entire speech from the first word to the last breath so you can answer this question. It is the one and only question your speech must answer. You answer this question by doing three things:

- Put your audience first
- Have a clear and concise theme
- Construct your speech so it aligns with the audience and theme.

PUT YOUR AUDIENCE FIRST

Your speech is all about your audience, not about you. Never assume the audience will be interested in what you have to say just because of your position, expertise, or experiences. Your credibility only earns you the opportunity to speak. Once you open your mouth, you're on your own.

A speech is a conversation with an audience on something they consider interesting. You have to create that interest. It will not be bestowed on you because you are such a fantastic person or have the world's longest resume.

What's in it for your audience?

Always ask yourself these two questions to make sure your speech grabs and keeps your audience interest and delivers something of value.

How will my audience benefit from hearing this talk?

What's in it for my audience?

We pick subjects to speak on we are passionate about, we feel are important, that interest us. This doesn't mean the audience feels the same way. Initially, they might not even care about this subject you think about night and day.

You will be giving a speech on something you know a lot about. Whether you gained that knowledge during your speech preparation or you're a leading expert in this field, you are privy to information that your audience lacks. It's your additional knowledge that has convinced you about the importance of this topic. Your audience doesn't know what you know,

It's your job to share enough of your knowledge to create curiosity, build interest, and finally get your audience as excited about your subject as you are. If you do that, you will have written a speech that impacts your audience and they remember. Here are a few questions to ask yourself.

What does your audience need to understand to get curious and interested in your topic?

What problems or issues could affect your audience they need to know about?

What joy, wonder or happiness might your audience experience from taking an action you suggested?

How can the message of your speech improve your audiences life?

What does your audience need to know in order to get truly excited and passionate about your message?

Know your audience

You have to understand who you are speaking before and why you are speaking before them. You use that knowledge so you can write your speech just for that audience. Your message has to speak to them directly. They have to relate to it.

Is it a general audience with varied backgrounds like Toastmasters. Or are you speaking before the Accountants Society or the Association of Embalmers.

Who is your audience? What do they know and what don't they know? What would grab their interest? Why would they have any interest in what you're going to talk about? What are they capable of remembering?

Why would the audience ever be interested in this topic?

Why would this make a difference to those in the audience?

How will this affect audience members in their own life?

Even if you give the same speech repeatedly, you have to give a different speech before each of audience. Maybe 90% of the speech remains the same but there will always be some things you have to adjust for that audience and ways you have to let them know this speech is for them.

You have to connect your subject to your audience which is why you need to learn about your audience before you speak. If you are speaking before the accountants society, maybe you need to make a funny comment about counting. you're talking before the Date Growers Association or corporate executives you need to find a connection.

How do you connect your topic to a specific audience? If you are speaking before a group from varied backgrounds such as Toastmasters or Rotary, you would need to bring your speech to life in a way everyone could relate to the topic and understand why it is important to them. If you are speaking on the same subject before a specialized audience, then you have to connect their interest to what you want to talk about.

HAVE A CLEAR AND CONCISE THEME

Your topic is not your theme!

A subject or topic is the specific area you are speaking about. Anything that exist or can be thought about could be a subject for a speech. Here are just a few examples of speech subjects or topics:

- Leadership
- Dental Hygiene
- A trip you took
- Overcoming health issues
- Trust
- Fixing your car
- Running a business
- Invention and innovation
- Sales
- Texting
- Broccoli
- Discoveries in physics
- What your kids taught you
- Dogs or cats
- Dealing with conflict

And thousands and thousands of more. Anything you can think of can be a speech topic.

Clearly, you have to pick a subject you're interested in. If the topic doesn't excite you, how in the world are you going to get your audience excited about it?

Sometimes you'll pick a topic you know a lot about. Sometimes you're interested in something you know almost nothing about so writing a speech gives you a reason to satisfy your own curiosity.

What is a theme?

Your theme is the clear and concise idea you want the audience to remember. It's what you want your audience to be thinking and feeling when you finish. **The theme is your point of view about your subject.**

If broccoli is your topic, do you want to get us excited about broccoli, learn surprising things about broccoli, or tell us why you hate broccoli?

If you are talking about dogs, do you want us to fall in love with your dogs, understand the history of the domesticated dog and what that says about society, explain how easy it is to train a dog, or entertain us with how your dogs have taken over your household?

If you are talking about physics, do you want us to learn about the latest discoveries at CERN, make quantum physics easy to understand, or encourage us to get our kids more interested in physics?

If you are talking about communications, do you want us to learn easy tips to converse better, deal with break downs in communications, understand why different people see things differently, or how to avoid death by Power Point?

Without extreme clarity on the clear and concise idea we want to share, we can end up meandering all over the place. Our speech on that subject won't have impact because it lacks a very specific point of view you wanted us to remember.

The less clear your theme, the more likely you are to try and cover too much material and too many points. That will make it harder for you to hold your audiences interest. Your speech won't be memorable.

Don't just talk about a subject that interest you. Discover a theme that conveys a very clear message on what you want us to know about this subject and what you want us to do with that awareness. Show us your passion on this topic.

Your theme is the fuel that drives your speech writing efforts. It gives you a compelling focus to develop ideas and find stories, examples, facts, quotes, metaphors and more that will support your theme.

Here are some examples of themes. I put together a fairly lengthy and varied list so you can clearly understand what a theme is as opposed to a topic or subject. Each of these themes expresses a clear and concise point of view the speaker wants you to remember.

Change your choices and change your life
Brushing your teeth for two minutes reduces visits to the dentist
A dog's love is the purest love of all
Cats make much better pets than dogs
A moment of empathy avoids conflicts and strengthens your relationships
Make a healthy sandwich your kids keep asking for
Great adventures await you traveling on our local highways
Never plant a Jacaranda tree in the middle of a lawn
Time is the great healer
Your spouse is always right
Mops are way better than brooms
Even when you don't know what's going on, have faith it will all work out
Lemon juice: the miracle cleaner and insect repellent
Find the stealth value and make the sale
Don't let the experiences of the past limit your vision for the future
How to figure out the right car to buy the first time every time
Forgiveness gives you the gift of life
Your kids will make sure you learn the lessons your parents failed to teach you

Whether you are giving an informative, persuasive or entertaining speech, you have a specific point of view you want to leave the audience thinking and feeling when you finish. That's your theme.

Pia Turner from the Confident Speakers Toastmaster Club in Palm Desert, California won 3rd Place at the District 12 Championships in the International Speech Contest with her speech "The Other Side of the Curtain." Of the 40 hours I spent helping her with this talk, 90% of that time was focused on how the speech was written.

She started by sharing all these wonderful stories many of which revolved around her experiences as an actress, producer and agent. These stories could have been used to support several different themes. Clearly, she wanted the speech to use stories from her life to make a point. So her topic was about the lessons her life taught her.

One theme emerged that she was most passionate about. She began to reduce her story list and form a complete speech. As her theme became clearer to her, she cut out more stories, refined the stories she had selected and figured out how to lead the audience on this amazing journey that would bring the theme to life. The final theme of this speech turned out to be...

"We don't regret the things we do as much as we regret the things we didn't do."

CONSTRUCT YOUR SPEECH SO IT ALIGNS WITH YOUR AUDIENCE AND THEME

Construct the introduction, body and conclusion of your speech to bring your theme to life in a way that captures the audiences interest and benefits them. Your theme is your guide on how you write the entire speech. It affects everything you do from the time you open your mouth until you sit down.

What do you need to do in each part of your speech construction so that your entire speech aligns with your audience, theme and accomplishes your purpose in speaking before this group? That's what writing your speech is all about.

Introduction

The introduction is how you begin your speech. This is when your audience starts getting to know you, what you're going to speak about, and decides if they are interested in what you have to say or prefer to tune out. Usually, you write your introduction after you've written your body and conclusion.

Your speech introduction includes four elements. This shouldn't take a lot of time so you have to put some thought into how you write your introduction. For a 7 minute speech, you only have 60 to 90 seconds to give your introduction before moving into the body of your speech. For a 45 minute speech, you have about 5 minutes. There may be an exception to this where you are beginning your talk with a longer story that is both interesting and gives an idea about your theme.

1. Grab your audience's attention

The very first sentence or first few sentences have to grab the attention of the audience. Whatever else they may be thinking about has to stop so they are paying attention to what you have to say.

Don't open your talk by repeating the title of your talk or saying "I wanted to share what happened to me on my trip" or "I'm here to talk about how to sell tough customers." Doing that tells the audience this may or may not be interesting. It leaves them up in the air and may not draw their attention away from the text they just got from one of their kids. There is nothing attention grabbing in this approach.

While you can recover from a bland opening statement like that if you do something that rivets their attention soon after, it's far better to let the audience know from the first sentence that you are worth listening to. People will feel relieved and interested once they know they are in the hands of an accomplished speaker who has something beneficial to say.

You usually write your introduction last after writing the body of your speech and figuring out your conclusion. Now that you know what your speech is and how it ends, you can think about how to open your talk. The opening has to introduce them to the subject your talking on and why it's important to them.

The ways to open a talk are only limited by your creativity. Here are some of the most common ones:

ASK A QUESTION

Have you ever blurted something out you later regretted?

How do you feel when walking down the street and the neighbors dog jumps up to greet you?

Have you ever wondered what happens backstage, in a theater, before the curtain rises?

POLL THE AUDIENCE

Raise your hand (raise your own to encourage this) if you've sent someone a simple text message that was misunderstood?

Raise your hand if you've ever fallen off a chair or ladder?

Raise your hand if you've ever asked yourself "what could they possibly be thinking?"

(You can also use "by a show of hands," "let's do a quick poll...", or simply raise your own hand while asking the question without asking them to raise their hand.)

STARTLING STATEMENT

Doesn't this stylish jacket look nice? It was only five dollars at the Goodwill Store.

I have a confession to make. I like to hit and kick people.... when I'm competing as a black belt in Tae Kwon Do

You have a one in 10,000 chance.... of being injured by a toilet

Every second 2.3 million people search for something on Google

TELL A STORY

You can start your speech with an interesting, dramatic or humorous story then move into your theme and what you want them to learn from your message. That story might be longer than a normal introduction sometimes. This depends on how much you need to say in the speech beyond that story to convey your theme and connect the meaning of the story to the audience.

TOPICAL HUMOR RELATED TO THE AUDIENCE

If you take the time to learn about your audience before you speak, you can often find topical humor which is humor specific to this group

at this moment in time. There may be something they are all talking about or deal with everyday that can be turned into something funny as a way to get them on your side quickly.

WHEN TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE GROUP AND WHO INTRODUCED YOU

Experienced speakers don't all agree on this point. Some believe you have to start by thanking the host and person who introduced you or acknowledge the group and occasion in some way. I have done this and I have also done something to grab the audience's attention before doing this. It's all about what your comfortable doing.

A quick reference to the host and group can allow you to be more personable. I try to do this by using topical humor specific to the group as a way of acknowledging them. This is not always possible. And it does depend on the occasion and purpose of your talk.

There are others who say you should immediately dive into your speech. You can still make references to them after you have their attention and they know you've got something worth listening to.

Acknowledging the host and group briefly at the start won't hurt your speech. You just need to be very brief and move quickly into something that grabs their attention about your message.

2. Relate to the specific audience and build credibility

Say something that relates to the audience to personalize your talk where possible to show you are paying attention to them and their interest. This shows you respect and care about your audience.

If you're talking to a Rotary Club, listen to what goes on before your introduced. Rotary Club's have lots of fun ways to collect money for charity that occur during the meeting you could refer to. Or refer to their Four Way Test.

If your speaking before community college administrators, chamber of commerce, hospital nurses, restaurant managers, or any other group, learn something about them you can refer to so you can connect with them more personally. It could be about the job they do, or what they all have in common, or what has always puzzled you about them.

If it's a more general group made up of people from many walks of life and varied interest, reference something they could all relate to such as the reason why they are gathered or what they would have in common.

You may need to add something that makes you credible to speak on your topic especially if the introduction didn't cover it. It is usually a good idea to have a written introduction to give to the person who will introduce you. That makes their job a lot easier which they like. It also prepares the audience for your talk.

If you are talking about dogs or cats, you would want to quickly tell them the number and type of pets you have. Unless this is a humorous speech about why you don't have any pets and find pet owners annoying.

If you are talking about travel, you might mention you just took a trip to the place you're going to talk about. Or, if it's a speech about the places you want to visit, you would refer to friends you've talked with who've been to these places...but never invited you to join them!

If you need to establish professional expertise, you might mention how many years you've been involved with this or how many people you've dealt with then say you're going to share what all this has taught you.

If you're giving an entertaining talk, you may want to make fun of yourself depending on the tone you want to establish. For example, if you're giving a funny talk about fixing things around the house, you could mention how proud you are that your many years as a home fixer upper expert has only resulted in 10 trips to urgent care!

If this is a topic you had to research, mention how many articles, sources and interviews you conducted to learn about your subject.

If you're talking about your favorite book author, mention how many of their books you've read or how many times you've read the same book.

If you're talking about how to raise kids, it would be a good idea to tell the audience how many kids you have and how old they are. Unless this was a humorous talk about what you've learned observing other people's children (we hope for your own safety that this is indeed a humorous talk!)

3. Tell them what you are going to talk about

This may or may not be different than point 4 about introducing your theme. It depends on how much time you have for your introduction and how much you need to cover to prepare the audience for the rest of your speech.

In whatever way works, you do need to tell the audience what you are about to tell them. Give them the "short and sweet" answer to what you're going to cover in your talk.

If you're going to talk about how to buy a car, you might tell them you're going to talk about internet and magazine research, talking with people you know, and actually test driving cars you're interested in.

4. Introduce your theme and why this speech is important to them

Your theme is more than just your core message and guide in writing your speech. You need to turn it into a phrase or sentence you can share with the audience. You might vary the statement and use it in a variety of ways during your speech. You need to introduce the audience to at least a hint about your point of view and where you want to end up.

Doing this can help to build curiosity and interest in the rest of your speech. Clearly, a theme implies a benefit to the audience...what's in it for them. It also shows you have a point of view.

Your audience needs to get a glimmer of where you're going and where you want to end up. That doesn't mean you can't have a surprise for the climax of your speech. It just means the thematic direction you're going in needs to be clear enough to the audience so they can connect the dots as you go through the body of your speech.

Depending on the purpose of your speech, you may need to offer a good reason why this speech is important to the audience. If you're talking about how to brush your teeth, you should have a couple of startling facts about what happens if you don't do that. You need to create a need in your audience to hear your message.

These 4 elements are not set in stone. They give you an idea about what you need to do to launch your speech so you engage your audience and get them interested in hearing the rest of your speech. You can be flexible in how you approach your introduction as long as you grab the audience's attention, let them know what your speech is about, and share how it will benefit them.

Body of your speech

You devote the largest portion of your speaking time to the body of your speech where you go into depth about your topic and message. There are more ways to write the body of speech than you can imagine. We will devote some time to how you write the body of your speech and include a lot of examples so you can learn how to do it.

How you write the body has everything to do with your purpose and tone.

Are you trying to persuade the audience to do something or make them aware of how important something is?

Are you trying to make them more informed about something?

Do you want to inspire them with an uplifting message?

Do you want to entertain them with a humorous talk?

Do you want to share something you've enjoyed so they can enjoy it too?

STRUCTURE

Let me share a list of a few structures you can use in writing your body. This is not a complete list. Be creative. Let your theme guide you toward the most effective way of bringing your message to life.

Don't be limited by the common idea that a speech is supposed to have three main points. It might and then again it might not. If two is all you need, go for it. Maybe there is only one main point and you use various stories, metaphors, quotes, examples and more to bring this point to life. Maybe you have three sub points to show different aspects of one main

point for your body. Always let your theme guide you to do what you feel will create the greatest impact.

When you write the body of your speech, focus on the most important ideas you want to share with the audience. Don't worry about putting them in an outline or numbering them. If you actually like doing these sorts of things or feel compelled to do so, we won't stop you,

Just be aware that using outlines and numbered points can sometimes restrict our thinking and even blind us to what is really the big idea we want to share. You always have to question if your points, sub points, and supporting materials align with your theme and are the most important things you could possibly share to bring your theme to life.

Remember, put your audience first when writing your speech. How will your speech help them to understand your theme in a memorable way?

Even a couple of ideas may be enough to drive home your theme. Take those ideas and support them with stories, examples, quotes, facts, metaphors and more. Now you've brought each idea to life and the body of your speech is roughed out. You can always change things, add an idea, cut supporting material out, rearrange the order. Just play with it until all the pieces support your theme in a memorable way.

Problem - solution

You devote most of your speech to helping the audience understand how serious a problem is and how it affects them directly then focus on how to solve the problem and end with a call to action for them to support the solution.

This may be the most commonly used structure. You have to create a need in people to do something. That need is the problem, issue, challenge, threat or concern they face. The audience has to be motivated to want to do something about the problem before they will embrace your solution.

Past - present - future or chronological order

This could be about a problem or it could be a speech to inform. You give them a little history, talk about what's going on now, and share what will happen in the future.

A structure like this could also be used for an inspirational talk. The past wasn't so good, the present is much better, and the future looks bright.

You could even use this structure to do a biography on someone's life or an autobiography on your own.

Pros & Cons or Advantages & Disadvantages

Everyone might agree there's a problem but disagree about how to solve it. So your focus might be on why one solution or path is better than another. You contrast different approaches to show which is better.

This doesn't have to be about a problem. It could be a talk about different ways to fix things and why one may be better than another. Or different ways to cook something. Or different ways to raise kids. Or different places to shop.

Remember, that any of these structures could just as easily be used in a humorous talk. Don't think they can only be used for a serious subject. Lighten up!

A journey

This doesn't necessarily mean an actual journey though it does make sense for a travel talk. It's about taking the audience on a journey through stories, metaphors, examples and more that lead them toward your conclusion.

You might construct an inspirational talk by telling several personal stories. Each story carries a certain message that supports your theme in a slightly different way. So they are variations on your theme to help people better understand it. As you tell each story, you end with how that story supports your message then transition into the next story until you are ready to end your talk with a big finale.

How you got through a tough time in your life or overcame something horrendous can be told as a journey. You want this journey to naturally lead to a climax at the end of your talk. Or the journey could be the story of how you raised your kids or raised a pet.

You can use the journey structure to give a funny talk too. Maybe you want to turn shopping at the grocery store into a funny experience. You construct a journey through the store where you make fun of things like how in the world do you pick a pasta sauce when today's supermarkets offer 67 different types. Does America really need 100 varieties of commercially grown apples?

If you are giving a travel talk, think carefully about the order of what happens and what you want the audience to learn from each experience you share. Don't just tell them everything. Carefully select what you share from your trip so it supports your theme and what you want them to remember. Leave the audience wanting to know more about your trip.

The story

Sometimes the body of a speech can be one story that illustrates your theme in a memorable way. Usually, you only do this when you have a story you can dramatize. You don't just describe something that happened as if seeing it from a distance. You take the audience inside of it and bring it to life. This might be done in the first person or as a close up observer. Either way, you want the audience to experience the story as if they are actually there.

You do need to step away from the story at some point to tell the audience what this story means to them. How does this support your theme and what you want them to remember? If the body is made up of one story, than your conclusion would drive home the theme.

I competed in the Toastmasters International Speech Contest and went to the District Finals with a speech that was one story. My introduction to the theme and issue I was addressing took one minute. Then I launched into the story which took 4 1/2 minutes. That left me 1 1/2 minutes to drive home the theme with a call to action. The story was about the night I came home from a business trip to discover my wife Lia was keeping a scorpion alive under a glass cake dome on the hallway floor. "Sting the Scorpion" was a memorable story that drove home a message about our need to understand why other people do things before we blurt out our reaction.

CONTENT

Regardless of how you structure the body of your message, each point, element or perspective needs to be brought to life in a clear, understandable and memorable way. Here are just a few of the most common ways to write content.

Ideas

Your core message is a collection of thoughts. These ideas can be broken down into supporting ideas and sprinkled throughout the speech. What's important is that you do need to express some ideas. These could give meaning to a story, draw a conclusion, tell the audience what you believe, use a repetitive phrase to emphasize your theme, or explain the why behind what happened.

If you only describe an example or tell a story without drawing any conclusions from these, you leave your audience hanging about what you were trying to say. Even

if it's a gripping story or funny incident, why did you put it in your speech? Why was it important to share this? You need ideas to wrap around your supporting material.

At the core, a speech is about ideas. Ideas are what gives your speech meaning. Ideas build on your theme so the audience clearly understands and remembers your message. Ideas express your point of view. Even a humorous talk needs to express an idea or message. That's the difference between a speech and a standup comedy routine.

Stories

There are personal stories and stories about things you either observed or read. Both can be effective in a speech.

Personal stories involve you and helps the audience relate to your material. This makes the speech human and personal. Even speeches on very serious topics can include one or more personal stories.

A speech that includes ideas, facts, statistics, and analysis might be very well thought out but it will lack something personal. You are speaking before real human beings, not machines. Use stories to help your audience relate to your message and understand it better. Your audience might not remember most of what you said but they will remember your stories.

Examples

An example is something specific you describe to support what you are saying. It's not a story and it's not about you personally. You could talk about something a business, organization or country did whether good or bad. You could talk about what about a specific person did or who they were. Something about a car, pet, garbage disposal or anything else could be used as an example that supports your message.

Facts

Facts are everywhere. If there is a fact that can illuminate your message, you could include it in your talk. When you use facts, make sure to do your due diligence. You may have read the "fact" in an article or book but sometimes the author didn't get their facts straight. Use Google to learn more about the fact so you can determine if it is true and under what conditions it may or may not be true. I always try and find the original source for a fact and cite the source where possible.

Statistics

Statistics can be impressive when they are used effectively and not overused. Once again, verify the accuracy of the statistic and thoroughly understand it. In the case of both facts and statistics, you may want to cite the source to make them more credible.

With numbers, you should consider ways to make the number easy to understand.

The U.S. debt is a stack of thousand dollar bills 600 miles high

All the people who stood in line to watch this movie placed in one long line would stretch from New York to Los Angeles.

The percentage of people who have experienced this is equal to the population of Chicago.

When Nik Wallenda walked on a wire across the Grand Canyon, he walked the length of four football fields.

There are twenty people in our meeting today. According to the Harvard School of Health, one of you is likely to end up like this.

Compare the statistic to something people can relate to so they can grasp what it means. Round your statistics to whole numbers to make them easier to understand. Used in just the right way without overdoing it, statistics can add a powerful punch to a speech.

Quotes

There are an abundance of quotes you can use to spice up your speech. Don't overuse quotes. Select them carefully.

Where possible, avoid quotes that are overused and instead find ones that are less well known. A quote doesn't always have to be from someone famous. It can be from an expert or even someone that just has a way with words.

Once again, try to verify if this person really said this quote. There are some well known quotes which the individual in question never said. The best example of that is the quote "Be the change you wish to see in the world." No, Gandhi never said this and it is inconsistent with his actual point of view. I read an article where the author reviewed

everything ever written and said by him to verify he never said this quote. Nelson Mandela, Thoreau, Picasso and many others have quotes attributed to them they never said.

Metaphors and similes

One of the most powerful ways to bring your point to life is by comparing your idea to something the audience already knows. This creates interest and helps the audience understand your point better. The best form of comparison in a speech is a metaphor where you are literally saying "your idea is this thing." If you use the words "like" or "as" then the metaphor would be called a simile. That is also a comparison though not as strong. It might be effective in some situations. Both can work.

Metaphor examples

My wife was boiling mad.

The drive was a breeze.

The Kodak camera is a mirror with a memory.

Cosmetics are a bottle filled with hope.

A library is the delivery room for the birth of ideas.

Opportunity eagerly stretches out her arms to us.

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

William Shakespeare

The meeting turned into a train wreck

Your futures so bright you've got to wear shades.

The streets were a furnace, the sun an executioner

The rain came down in long knitting needles

When you trust, you jump off a cliff without a net

Simile examples

"I'll be floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee"

Mohammad Ali

Her smile lit up the room like a thousand suns

He made a noise like a pig swallowing half a cabbage

"A hippie is someone who walks like Tarzan, looks like Jane and smells like cheetah."

Ronald Reagan

Her presence on the stage stood out like a soprano amid a choir of baritones.

Imagery

Adding colorful and descriptive language in an usual way can capture an audience's imagination. One of the best examples of this is from the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speech "I Have A Dream":

“Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand's of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.”

Participation

When you actively involve the audience in your presentation, you not only hold their interest, you help them to experience your message and understand the point you're making. People believe their own thoughts and experiences more than yours. Instead of just telling your audience let them experience it or see it for themselves.

The most common way is to ask the audience a question. You ask a question where you want people to raise their hand. This can be done simply so everyone can acknowledge they have experienced something.

Or, you can actually conduct a poll by asking more than one question to see what portions of audience agree with certain things or have experienced the same thing. Use the poll results to make your point.

You have to think out the question or questions you are using carefully to make sure the way the audience answers will help you make a point or create interest.

I often start my speeches by asking my audience a question or two. Sometimes, I ask them to raise their hands. Other times I might not. By doing this, I not only involve my audience immediately, I also began to train my audience to raise their hand when I ask other questions during my talk.

Participation can go beyond questions. You could have people in the audience pair off and do something so they experience the point you were making. You can have the audience stand up or do an exercise. It's your audience. If you've got their interest and they like you, they will do what you want (up to a point!).

I use an 8 minute participation experience to help an audience understand how people from different cultures make different decisions because of different values. I tell them a true story about two people from different cultures having dinner together where a hypothetical problem was posed that had no right answer. Before giving the audience the two individual's answers, I ask the audience how they would deal with the hypothetical situation. Then I share the answers given in my story so they can see how value differences affect our decisions. It's a lot of fun and makes the point better than my just telling them.

Involvement helps your audience experience the point your making. It makes them a part of your talk.

Transitions

No matter how your structure and support the ideas presented in your speech, you need to transition from one point to another, one content element to another. It is rather crude to say "and now point number 2, point number 3" and so on. You want to find a way to link what you just said to what you are about to say. Move the audience smoothly from one place to another.

Suppose you are giving a speech about how to buy a car. Your first point is to do magazine and internet research. Your next point is about talking with people. Here is how you might make the transition:

"All the research in the world won't really make sense until you've talked to some people you know about their experiences."

Pia Turner's transition from her first to her second story in her speech "The Other Side of the Curtain."

"Sometimes, we stay on this side of our curtain because we follow the advice of others. But their advice is based on their hopes, their dreams, and their fears... not yours. This proved so true when I was in Canada."

My speech "Lead with Trust" includes two key points - 'Act as a Role Model' and 'Serve Your People with Humility.' Here is the way I transition from one point to the other.

"The best way to be a role model your people will gladly join with is by being of service to them so they can do their best."

Conclusion

You captured your audience's interest and attention. You let them know where you wanted to take them. Then you took them there. Now you need to wrap up your speech in a climatic and memorable way.

This is where you state your theme loud and clear. You share what you believe and your point of view in a clear and powerful way.

Often, you may want to refer back to something you said at the beginning of your speech so your conclusion and introduction wrap your body in a nice package. You may briefly summarize key ideas you shared.

How you end depends on your purpose and what you want the audience to do. You may have a short story or quote you want to include though that is not always done. In a shorter speech, you want to wrap up quickly so you won't have time for a closing story in most cases.

You want to close by asking something of your audience. That may be a call to action, a commitment to pay attention, or simply encourage them to enjoy the same experience.

Except for humorous speeches or ones that are informational, you will usually end your speech with a call to action. Even in a speech to inform, you often ask your audience to do something or remember something.

Here is the call to action and ending Pia Turner used in her award winning speech "The Other Side of the Curtain."

"The next time you look through the holes in your curtain, you might be looking at a fabulous future. This life is not a rehearsal. Take a deep breath, step forward, pull that curtain back and Go For It. You never know what's waiting for you on the other side of Your curtain!"

2. Crafting a great speech - writing tips from the pros

Write like you talk

A speech is a conversation with the audience, not an essay. Read your copy out loud, record it and play it back. Listen to how the speech sounds then edit it to make it conversational.

Write for a real person

Write your speech with a real person in mind, someone who represents the majority of your audience. When you think about talking to a real person, it helps you focus on what they really need to hear and how they need to hear it.

Use concrete words and phrases

As you speak, the audience needs to quickly understand what you are saying. The more you can use concrete words and phrases and keep abstract ones to a minimum, the easier it will be for the audience to stay with you.

Turn your stories into a drama

Whether funny or serious, use the art of storytelling to create interest, get your audience to visualize the story, and make it memorable. Tell it in the first person with vivid descriptions, act out conversations, and have unexpected twist and turns so your story entertains the audience while making a point.

Make it memorable with repetition

Repeating a phrase, sentence or a sentence structure can lift your speech to a much higher level. Martin Luther King Jr. included in his speech "I Have A Dream" four consecutive sentences that started with "Now is the time to..."

Winston Churchill's 1940 speech before the House of Commons included this:

"We shall go on to the end,
we shall fight in France,
we shall fight on the seas and oceans,
we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air,
we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be,
we shall fight on the beaches,
we shall fight on the landing grounds,
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets,
we shall fight in the hills;
we shall never surrender."

In Justin Trudeau's eulogy for his father, former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, he repeated the word 'every' using a repetitive phrasing structure.

"My father's fundamental belief never came from a textbook. It stemmed from his deep love for and faith in all Canadians and over the past few days, with every card, every rose, every tear, every wave and every pirouette, you returned his love."

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

Cut out extra words and unnecessary phrases. Use short sentences. Fewer words makes your point clearer and more memorable. We can fall in love with what we've written. You have to be very disciplined to cut out anything that doesn't move your theme forward clearly and convincingly.

Acknowledge things that happen before and during your talk

This is the part of a speech you can't write in advance. You have to create it in the moment. This is why learning to speak off the cuff is so important. You always need to be ready to add or change something in your speech because of

what occurred before you were introduced or what happened in the middle of your talk.

Before you are introduced, something could occur that affects the audience's mood or calls for a slight shift in the emphasis of your speech. If you planned to open with a funny joke and right before you're introduced there is a somber eulogy to someone who just passed away, you need to start in a different way. The audience needs to transition into your message.

If the group has just received an award for its fund raising efforts, you want to acknowledge that and say something about how impressed you are. You need to pay attention to what happens before you stand up so you are prepared to mention something if appropriate.

During your talk, things can happen which could distract the audience. If it is a major or obvious distraction, you will want to mention it. Sometimes you can use these to say something funny where appropriate.

- A water glass or plate crashes
- The power goes out
- A crew starts repairing the roof above you
- Your slides or microphone don't work
- A cell phone rings
- Someone spilled juice on you
- A loud siren drowns you out
- You tripe and fall
- An earthquake shakes the room
- Music starts blasting from the next room

Don't ignore the 800 pound gorilla in the room!

Take your time

Don't rush writing a speech. You need time to work through what you want to say so the entire speech moves your theme forward. You may go through several drafts. You need to allow time away from the speech so you can review it with fresh eyes. As the days go by, you will find ways to improve your speech.

3. Unleash your creativity - how to find and hone your message

How do you come up with topics, ideas, themes, stories, metaphors, quotes and more so you can write your speech? Sometimes, there's something important to us or on our mind we can use as a topic. Sometimes, we might be scratching our head about what to speak on or how to turn that idea into a speech.

Willing our mind to give us what we want when we want it usually doesn't work as well as we'd like. Here are two ways you can expand what comes to you and build a library of speech writing materials that's there for you when you need it.

Learn more to expand your creative output

The human mind does most of its work in your unconscious. There is already an amazing amount of material stored there from the life you lived but it may be filed in dusty and dormant memory cells.

Have you ever thought up something while taking a shower, cooking, driving or doing nothing? The brain brings ideas and memories to us when we are relaxed, thinking about something else, or when it has worked on it for a while.

You can help this process along by adding more to your brain in an intense or concentrated way. If you start learning as much as you can about something by reading and other means, you fill your brain with new information. The brain has to file all those in its memory so it starts moving things around. This is much like what happens when you clean the garage, kitchen cabinets or your file cabinets. Ahhhhh.....there it is!

The more new information, observations and awareness you can stuff in your brain, the more your brain will return ideas, stories, themes and more to you. If you have a topic in mind, you can read about this subject.

If you don't have a topic, you can read about many different topics you find interesting. This forces your brain to have to find a place for this information. You are telling your brain you want it to output ideas.

Within a day to a week, you will suddenly start receiving new ideas and remembering events from the past that might make a good story. When you force feed your brain with the intent of getting some new output, your brain will give you what you want. Often this will occur when you are thinking about something else or just relaxing.

Capture your thoughts, feelings and memories

The other way you train your brain to give you more creative output is to capture what enters your conscious mind. Thoughts, feelings and memories come to us all the time. Do you do anything to capture those so you can refer back to them when you need it?

Write down any ideas, topics, themes, stories, quotes, facts, feelings and more that come to you. How you organize this material is up to you. Over time, you will reorganize it in ways that are more useful for you. The more you do this, the more your unconscious brain will send material to your conscious awareness.

Here are some examples of documents you can create in your computer or use a paper file if you prefer the good old days. I list these as separate files but you could start with just one speech file using these as headings. You can add more headings that suit your needs. When the file gets too long, you can create separate files for each type of material and put all these files in a folder.

Topic and idea file
Theme file
Personal Story file
Story file
Metaphor file
Example file
Quote file
Audience participation file

My files include additional ones for business examples, case studies, research studies and more. 90% of what I've written down has never been used in a speech but the 10% I have used wouldn't be there if it wasn't for the other 90%.

Many times I'll write down an idea or theme that comes to me. That gets me thinking and suddenly another idea comes to me. Or I'll remember something that happened to me 30 years ago I had never considered as a possible speech story. Then that will lead me to remember some other events in my life.

When I start working on a new speech, I will review these files. Sometimes reviewing the list of personal stories or experiences gives me an idea for a speech theme or topic I hadn't thought of before. So topics don't just come from the topic file. When a story inspires a theme, then I will write that in the theme file. There are no rules as to how you do this.

These files helped me write the speeches I used in the 2016 Toastmasters International Speech Contest where I went to the District finals. Yes, speeches in the plural. That's a story worth telling.

My topic and theme file had something about building trust. Trust is something I talk about in my professional speeches but I had never reduced it down to a 7 minute talk. I decided to write some new material on how to build trust and why it's important.

That led me to my story files. I found a really good story about when my stepson Ryan was learning to drive and another story about the first person to walk on a tightrope across the Niagara Falls gorge. With this material in hand, I wrote, gave and won my club's contest with this speech on a Wednesday.

The Area contest was 10 days away so I worked on improving the speech. By Saturday morning, I realized the speech wasn't good enough for higher levels of this competition.

So with only 7 days left until the Area competition, I decided to write a new speech. My topic and theme file wasn't helping me at all so I read through my personal story file. There was a story listed there I had never used that jumped out at me. I only had a one sentence description of what happened so I didn't even know what the theme would be or if it would work.

There's only one way to know. I proceeded to write out the story in the first person. As I began, I found myself getting into the story and coming up with some very funny ideas about how to bring it to life. After writing out the entire story, the message of the story jumped out at me and there was my theme.

This is how I wrote the first draft of "Sting the Scorpion" and then spent 7 days rewriting and practicing it. I gave this speech for the very first time before a live audience at the Area competition which I won along with the Division contest that followed.

You never know how you might use what's in your files. You just need to capture as much as you can so it's there for you when you need it.

4. A great speech waits inside you right now

Yes, you have a great speech inside of you right this moment. Your life has given you so many experiences and feelings about those experiences. You are brimming full of ideas that are crying out to be heard.

Your life contains many inspiring, interesting and funny stories that contain messages and themes an audience would value. When you add up your personal, community and work experience, you have a lot of great messages to share.

You are now ready to write the speech your audience fondly remembers!

About Don Shapiro

Don has inspired hundreds of groups with his high energy, fun and interactive programs. As a professional speaker and trainer, he has shared his innovative ideas at conferences, conventions, and corporate meetings. Don is best known for his fresh insights on leadership, influence, communications, employee retention, customer value and embracing change.

As President and founder of First Concepts Consultants, Inc., Don has worked with organizations in 33 industries to help solve their most vexing problems. His clients often say Don asked the questions no one else ever asked. His work with executives, managers and employees helped him discover many of the insights he shares with his audiences.

During his career, Don has worked at a wide variety of jobs from dishwasher, shipping clerk, janitor, cook and chef to sales representative, manager, operations executive and Chief Marketing Officer. He is an active member of the [Confident Speakers Toastmasters Club](#) and is a co-author of the book [The Character-Based Leader](#).

In his spare time (cue the laugh track), Don's been writing the book ["Life Is A Fork In The Road"](#) about how our choices shape our journey through life and how trusting our inner wisdom can improve those choices. He also inspires audiences about how to make better choices in life.

Please visit the First Concepts website to learn more about Don and read some of his insightful articles. If you have any questions for Don or want to book him as a speaker, please email him.

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