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How to Write a Speech in 13 Steps

By Brian B. Carter, MS, LAc

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You can see my credentials in my bio. You should also know that I love to write speeches. In fact, I've been accused of being a better speech writer than speech giver! I'm working on that. ;-)

I'll tell you how to write a speech the way I do it, and I'll tell you how to make it great. Plus I'll give you some tips on what to put in, and what to leave out. I love this topic.

How Good Do You Want Your Speech to Be?

From the outset, you should know that how to write a speech depends on how good you want it to be, and how much time you want to put into it. I'll put the most important things first so that you can just go as far as you want, and stop when you run out of time. Remember to leave time to practice the speech three or four times. If you can record the second or third and listen to it, so much the better.

How to Write a Speech People Will Remember

In the old days, and I mean back in the time of the Greeks, much more emphasis was put on the writing of the speech, the content. Now people tend to emphasize presentation, style, vocal qualities, and technology. But writing a good speech is irreplaceable – I'm going to tell you how to get put content in, make it clear, and make an impact on your audience...how to write a speech people will remember.

Here's the process:

(Why 13 steps? It just turned out that way. But if you think public speaking is scary, it fits, doesn't it?)

1. Know your audience: if you forget this, everything falls apart. You can't tell dirty jokes to a Christian women's group. You've seen the commercial where the best man gives the wedding toast and goes on and on about how much of a player the groom was? Remember who's there and what they want to hear. What do they like and dislike? What kind of humor do they like? If they're a mixed audience, you have to be more mainstream in your language and manner. This is the most important part of how to

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write a speech.

2. Know your purpose: the only time you're allowed to break rule #1 is if your purpose is to shock or to inform people about something uncomfortable. In the latter case, you'd need to make up for the shock value by acknowledging it, comforting them, etc. Besides all that, your purpose determines everything else. Visualize a straight line from you through your audience to the purpose. If you want to persuade them, you have to take them from where they are to the place of persuasion. If you want to inform, you have to take their brains from where they are, to where they'll know your information. Knowing them, and taking them there is what it's all about.

3. Know what you want them to think about the speech later: This is another part of your purpose, essential to how to write a speech. If you want them to say, "you really showed compassion in that

speech!" then you have to do whatever you can to demonstrate compassion. If more than anything you want them to remember a certain fact, then do everything you can in the speech to implant it in their brain – shock them, plead with them, amuse them, but make sure they focus on that fact.

4. It's not about you: the only time it's about you is if one of your goals is to impress them, build your credibility, etc. Other than that, forget your fear, your self consciousness, etc. Let those things go in the service of your audience and your purpose.

5. Writing is editing. Editing is writing. The first time you write the speech, don't criticize it, don't edit it, just let everything flow out. You'll organize it and choose better words and rephrase it later. Just be creative.

6. Organize your ideas into an outline. Make sure each idea follows the other logically. Ask yourself if your audience needs to know anything to understand any part of it. Ask yourself if any part needs more fleshing out

7. Rewrite it according to the outline.

8. Beef it up. Use examples for difficult to understand points or concepts. Find some jokes. If no one laughs at the first one, be careful, though. You might lose credibility if they think you're an idiot. You can also find great quotes online, even search on whatever topic you're writing your speech about.

9. Do an edit. Use MS Word for grammar checking. A big part of how to write a speech is editing. The next few steps involve editing and speaking. This step is about editing on paper. Replace long words and rephrase jargon. Imagine if it would make sense to your best friend, your mom, your grandma, etc. (caveat: if jargon is required to impress in business, use it)

10. Say it all out loud. Is anything missing? How does it sound? Change the words and phrases that sound unnatural when spoken.

11. Record it on a tape recorder or your computer. Is it missing anything? Add it. Are any parts of it boring, unnecessary, stupid, offensive? Cut off the fat.

How to Write a Speech in 13 Steps

12. Do it in front of a test audience. Get their feedback. Make sure they know your audience and purpose before you do the speech for the test audience.

13. Go give your speech to the real audience with confidence! If you're interested in tips on the presentation or voice sides of things, you'll need another resource, but...

Now you know how to write a speech!

Brian has been a public speaker for five years, a guest on national radio shows, is president of his local speaking club, teaches medicine, and is the author of *Powerful Body, Peaceful Mind: How to Heal Yourself with Foods, Herbs, and Acupressure* (<http://www.pulsemed.org/>).

After the Speech

By Stephen D. Boyd

Usually the emphasis on making an effective speech is what you do in preparation before the presentation begins. But if you speak very much, what you do after the speech can help you become a more effective speaker.

As soon as possible after the speech, write down impressions of how you felt the speech went. Answer at least two questions about the speech: What was the best part of the speech? What part of the speech can be improved the next time?

Some of your best ideas will come to you as you are speaking. Write them down as soon as the speech is over so you can be prepared to use those lines or ideas the next time you speak.

Think about the peaks and valleys in the speech. Consider when the audience seemed to listen best and when the audience seemed restless and disinterested. Write down your reactions while they are fresh on your mind.

Talk to someone about the speech within the first day after your presentation. You'll remember best what you talked about and you might discover a better way of telling a story or making a point as you summarize your speech to a friend or colleague.

Keep track of stories you tell and case studies you include so you'll not repeat yourself if you speak to that audience again. In addition, keep records of how long you spoke, what you wore, key people you met, and anything unusual about the speaking context. Occasionally look back over your records of individual speeches and look for trends in your speaking that you are unaware of. When you speak to this group again, this information will be the basis for your audience analysis. This is especially important if you speak frequently within your company and your audience will be made up of listeners who have heard you before. You don't want to develop a reputation for telling the same stories over and over.

If the group has speaker evaluations, ask that a copy of the summary be sent to you. Look for any

How to Write a Speech in 13 Steps

pattern in the comments as you analyze the summary. If one person said you talked too slowly, it may be a personal preference and you don't need to give much consideration to the critique. If four or five people make that comment, however, then you might want to consider changing the pace of your speaking for the next speech.

Certainly your main concern should be with your preparation before the speech. However, don't underestimate the effort of what you do in analyzing the speech after the audience has left the room.

Stephen D. Boyd, Ph.D., CSP, is a professor of speech communication at Northern Kentucky University in Highland Heights, Kentucky. He works with organizations that want to speak and listen more effectively to increase personal and professional performance. He can be reached at 800-727-6520 or visit

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