

MAKING SPEECHES

A speech is not an essay, but a conversation with a large number of people who are uncharacteristically attentive to your every word.

Leaders — and people who want to become leaders — know that public speaking can be an invaluable tool for changing public policy, catching media attention and enlisting new supporters. Engaged, an audience will follow you to action; bored, they'll tune out immediately.

Learning to captivate an audience is part art, part practice. But speakers who begin with a clear message and an understanding of their audience are one step ahead of the game.

Before you can decide what to talk about, you have to know who you are talking to. Then tailor your speech to meet the interests of your audience. Helpful demographics include not only age, gender and occupation, but also lifestyle, economic status and hobbies.

Do some research. Before you give a speech, find out what your audience's pet issues are and determine how much they know about transportation or environmental issues. Find out whether the organization has taken previous positions on adding a third runway at Sea-Tac International Airport or opposed any potential sites considered for a supplemental airport. Read the group's recent newsletters, look through your library's periodical database and talk to a few members before you take the podium.

Search for a common ground, no matter how unlikely this may seem. For example, many businesses will be adversely affected by increased traffic congestion. This might be a good topic for small business associations. Talk about the 14 million cubic yards of dirt that will be needed for the third runway and describe how dump trucks will need to make 1.4 million trips to haul it all in over four years.

ORGANIZING AND WRITING

An effective speech begins with one single theme. Your audience will remember — and act upon — what you have said if you follow the same basic rules of high school speech classes. The key is repetition: Tell your audience what you will say; say it; then tell them what you just said.

People approach speech-writing in a variety of ways. Some people write simple outlines, one of the most common being the “wheel-and-spoke” method. The main idea of the speech is the “wheel”; supporting points, the “spokes.” They then use these outlines to guide their speech. Other braver, more-spontaneous types even claim to “wing it.”

More typically, speeches are written out verbatim, a process that gives speakers the chance to choose their words precisely and practice delivery. But remember, reading a speech is allowed only for practice. You cannot read and speak directly to people at the same time. Most who try come across as stiff and rehearsed.

When writing your speech, choose colorful, simple and quotable language. Pepper your speech with vivid adjectives and action verbs that invite listeners to create visual images in their minds. Select words your audience understands. But be careful with unfamiliar jargon and avoid using teen slang — both are likely to sound condescending coming from an outsider.

Remember to write for the ear. Your draft speech shouldn't look anything like last week's office memo. Instead, look for a page littered with contractions, dash marks (where you've paused to clarify a point) and sentence fragments — an indication you're writing as you speak.

Today the planes are bigger and louder. There are cracks in the foundation of the house. My mother suffers from asthma — made worse from dirty air. The good news is, they insulated her house last week."

3. **Shockers:** Tell your audience something they don't know or share a dramatic moment that changed your feelings on the issue at hand. For example:

"To any of you who came here today still hoping that the third Sea-Tac runway will prove to be the easy way out, I'm going to give you a dose of reality: The proposed third runway will have major environmental impacts on this community. South King County residents are prepared to fight every step of the way to stop it."

Meaningful middles

Once you've hooked your audience, it's time to tell them why they should believe your main thesis — and why they should support it themselves.

Limit your arguments. A typical 20-minute speech may allow just enough time to tell your audience three or four reasons they should support your position.

Anecdotes and Quotations: You can also share personal experiences to show that air transportation problems are locally relevant. Words of wisdom from noted experts on transportation issues add punch to your speech. But for maximum impact, look for quotes from close-to-home sources and select anecdotes your audience can relate to directly. When trying to illustrate how deeply residents care about this runway issue — and just how far you'll go to stop it — try quoting former Normandy Park Mayor Stu Creighton. As the RCAA president says, rather ominously: "The federal judge who will eventually settle this issue is still in law school."

Look for quotations in your local newspaper, newsletters, traditional quotation reference books or your library's periodical database.

Next, summarize what you have told your audience. Then reiterate your main message and emphasize its importance. Be optimistic. People are unlikely to step up to fight for lost causes.

Key phrases you might use to drive home your main message include:

- The moral of this story is
- Above all else
- If you remember nothing else I have said today, remember this:

Then tell your listeners what you want them to do with this information. For example, if you want state lawmakers to take over the site selection process or reconsider a supplemental airport at Paine Field, you might ask your audience to write their state lawmakers. (Even better: Distribute sample letters and the names and addresses of their lawmakers.)

Remember: A good speech is a short speech. People complain about 20-minute speeches lasting half an hour, not those that last 15 minutes.

Keep an eye on the length of your speech even as you write the piece. A 20-minute presentation will equal approximately ten pages, double-spaced, using type as large as is used in this handbook.

POLISHING YOUR DELIVERY

Effective public speakers don't read their speeches, they speak their minds. Or, at least, that's how it seems. In reality, making your thoughts flow well while speaking extemporaneously is the result of much practice and a good, solid outline.

Rehearsing your speech

For rehearsal, rewrite your speech in an easy-to-read format, so you can practice making eye contact with your imaginary audience.

Double- or triple-space your manuscript, using large type and wide margins. Don't split paragraphs between pages. Use a colored marker or highlight pen to mark pauses between ideas and emphasized words.

Practice your speech in front of friendly audiences — enlist your friends, your family, your coworkers. Sometimes, videotaping a presentation helps speakers assess timing and delivery.

Question-and-answer sessions

Some corporate executives liken Q & A sessions to overtime in a basketball game. The key is that you are still playing the same game. While the audience may want to delve into a variety of different tangents, you want to stick to your main theme.

It doesn't matter what questions are asked. You can refocus audience attention on your main topic with a technique called bridging. Using key phrases, a speaker can answer the question while returning to the main topic of discussion. Some examples of bridging phrases are:

- ... but the real issue is ...
- ... but let me first talk about ...
- ... something more important is ...

PRESENTING YOUR SPEECH

Finding a place to speak

It's quite uncommon to be invited to be a speaker. It's up to you to proactively seek out speaking engagements.

First, you must identify groups of people you would like to enlist to support your agenda. These might include business and professional associations (perhaps those in travel and transportation industries) and political groups. Don't overlook groups of retired professionals or college students — these people might have more time to volunteer to help your cause.

Most associations will have someone in charge of scheduling speakers. You will need to call your local affiliate and find out who that is. However, before you talk to this person, make sure you are ready to tell them what you'd like to talk about and why your message is important to these people.

If you haven't given many speeches recently, or are simply a bit uncomfortable in large public forums, you may want to start small. Talk to members of your local chamber of commerce business roundtable — a group of about 10 or 20 people — rather than the full membership.

Most organizations schedule speakers months in advance. Therefore, it's best to plan early. Write a letter to the person in charge of scheduling, then follow up with a phone call. Remember, some groups might turn you down at first, but will keep your letter in a file for future use or if another speaker cancels.

Know your speaking environment

Before presenting your speech, you should check out the electronic capabilities, the stage and the seating arrangements.

3. Change your perspective: Think optimistically. Jittery nerves bring out the fight-or-flight instinct — try thinking of using your increased energy as a tool to face this challenge, not run from it. Envision yourself a teacher, rather than a performer. Think about the needs of your audience, rather than your own.

4. Reduce barriers: Sometimes, removing the barriers separating a speaker from an audience can be calming. If nerves plague you, try a few speeches first without a podium or lectern, away from the stage.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SPEECH

Once you have gone to the work of creating and polishing a speech, you should consider expanding your audience. Recycle your carefully-crafted words into other forms of correspondence. Invite the world to listen to your wisdom.

Media coverage

One way to expand your audience is to invite reporters to attend your speech. Send information about your speech to your local newspaper for inclusion in its community calendar section. Briefly describe your topic, tell them who you are, and list the time, date and location of your speech. Include a phone number to call for more information.

If you have written your speech, you should prepare a copy for reporters in your audience. This can increase your chances of being accurately — and completely — quoted by journalists who would otherwise rely upon hastily-scribbled notes. Do not distribute the same copy you used to practice your speech. Reprint the material in traditional type size and manuscript format.

If you plan to use a speaking engagement to make an important news statement — say, releasing a survey in which the majority of King County voters said they'd prefer to fly through an Eastside airport — write a press release about your plans and send it to your local newspapers, news radio and television stations. Consider setting aside a special time to take media questions following your presentation.

Recycling your speech

You can also reuse the information you've compiled in your speech.