**HOW TO MAKE**

**A GOOD SPEECH**

* **Remember: an excellent speech does not require a brilliant orator - *you* can do it.** Winston Churchill is commonly regarded as one of the greatest speakers in the English language, yet he regretted the lack of practice in public speaking that he would have gained had he gone to university and he suffered from a slight lisp and a stammer. The key is preparation.
* You are probably making this speech at an event which has a programme which has been published beforehand. So **make sure that the title of your speech is catchy** and then people will be looking forward to it even before the event.
* **Making a good speech starts weeks before with thorough preparation**. You should have been thinking of themes and points, noting down ideas and sources, crafting phrases and sentences.
* The best speeches tell your audience **things they didn't know** and/or give them **insights they didn't have**. So:
	+ In respect of the first, **research some salient, accurate and up-date facts and figures**.
	+ In respect of the second, **look at the subject differently** - think 'out of the box'.
* **You should have finalised the notes or text or slides at least the day before**, so that you can concentrate on reading through the material, becoming very familiar and comfortable with it, and thinking about the actual delivery.
* Remember: **expectation shapes reality**. This means that, to some extent you can have won or lost your audience even before you are really into your speech. If people think you're going to be good, that will help them to perceive you as good. So your biographical details in the programme material and how the chair introduces you are both important and you can influence them. Conversely, if people think you're going to be poor, that will condition them to seeing you as poor. So never begin by saying that you were unsure why you were invited to speak or what you should say and, unless it is obvious (for instance because you have a terrible cold), never admit to feeling anxious, unsure or unwell.
* Once you are called upon to make your speech, **pause for a couple of moments before actually starting your delivery**. If you've had to walk up to a platform or over to a rostrum, this gives you time to steady your breath. If you are nervous as a speaker, it gives you time to take a few shallow breaths and calm those nerves. In any event, it gives the audience an opportunity to settle down and focus on you and your message. But the pause should be a few seconds only.
* **If you are not using a microphone**, be aware of the need to speak sufficiently loudly that the furthest member of your audience can hear you clearly. Take the opportunity to move around a little which will help to command attention.
* **If you are using a microphone**, speak at normal volume, but a little more slowly and distinctly than if you were not using amplification. Don't move around because you'll leave the microphone behind (unless it is fixed to you).
* **You should convey a sense of enthusiasm for the subject**. This will effect your delivery and how your speech is received.
* Occasionally **alter the speed, volume and tone of your delivery**. Speaking slower or faster and quieter or louder and being more cheerful or more serious all adds dramatic effect and keeps the attention of your audience.
* Regularly **sweep your eyes** left-centre-right and back and front-middle-rear and back, so that you engage all members of your audience. The actor Tom Cruise once told an interviewer: *"A lot of the time, what acting is really about is meeting someone's eye"* - the same is true of public speaking.
* It is good to **use your hands expressively** - but do not wave your arms around which will make you look manic.
* **Never apologise for your nervousness or your material**. You and your speech are probably better than you appreciate but, in any event, if you don't advertise any weaknesses in your style or content, they probably won't be noticed.
* **Don't make a rambling opening**. There is nothing worse than the speaker who starts with something like: *"When I was asked to speak on this subject, I wondered what to say .."*
* **Make a dramatic opening** which seizes the attention with the very first words. This might be a stirring statement: *"This year we are going to make a fundamental transformation of our whole organisation"*. It might be a challenging question: *"How can we turn ourselves into an even more successful organisation?"* Whatever you do, don't ask a question that invites a cynical answer from your audience: *"Are we the best organisation in the country?"*
* **Have a very clear structure**. A good technique is to tell your audience what you are going to say, tell them, and then tell them what you have said. A good structure is for the core message to be three linked points which can be sub-divided as necessary.
* Another possible structure which can work well, if it is appropriate is, to **use a narrative or a story**. Stories really engage listeners and give a speech direction and flow. For instance, you might be describing how you chose your career or enjoyed a holiday or how a company found success or came to change strategy.
* If you use a narrative structure, **you don't necessarily have to begin at the chronological start**. When I gave a speech on the life and wartime exploits of my father-in-law - a night fighter pilot in World War Two - I did not begin with his birth and upbringing but with the night that he scored his first victory. Having begun with a dramatic entry point, you can then jump back to the chronological beginning of the story and work forwards. Many novels and films use this structure and it can work for speeches too.
* If you use a narrative structure, **you don't necessarily have to finish at the chronological end**. You might want to conclude your speech at a dramatic high point - such as when you or the company achieved a particular success - and leave the aftermath to come out in the question and answer session which usually follows a speech. It can be very effective to leave an audience wanting more (rather than the frequent experience of wanting the speaker to hurry up and finish!).
* If it is appropriate, **use PowerPoint**. It ensures that you stick to your structure and that the structure is clear to your audience. It looks professional and you can use images as well text.
* PowerPoint slides should not consist of simply a few words or conversely a mass of text. **Three or four bullet points of four or five words each is ideal**.
* **Put the main verb early in the sentence**, especially if it is a long sentence. So, not: *"When we have all the facts and we have considered all the options, we shall make our decision"*. But instead: *"We shall make our decision, when we have all the facts and we have considered all the options"* .
* **Consider the use of short sentences or even short phrases** for dramatic effect. Examples of short sentences: *"Failure is not an option"* or*"The place is here. The time is now. The prize is great"*. Examples of short phrases: *"Never again"*, *"No excuses"*.
* **Use striking adjectives and adverbs**. Not simply: *"We face many challenges"* but *"We face many exciting challenges"*. Not simply: *"We will work on our problems"* but *"We will work energetically on our problems"*.
* **Consider the use of striking images** in the form of metaphors or similes. For example: *"an iron curtain"* (Winston Churchill, 1946), *"a paper tiger"* (Mao Zedong, 1946),*"the axis of evil"* (George Bush, 2002).
* **Make moderate use of alliteration** in phrases or sentences. For example, some phrases: *"broadband Britain"*, *"the digital divide"*, *"silver surfers"*. For example, some sentences: *"The ballot is stronger than the bullet"* (Abraham Lincoln, 1856) or *"Now let us fulfil our mandate and our mission"* (Gordon Brown, Labour Party Conference 2002) or *"At our best when at our boldest"* (Tony Blair, Labour Party Conference 2002).
* **Consider the use of rhyme**. For example: *"We will fight to show that we are right"*.
* **Use contrasts**. For example: *"Politics is war without bloodshed, while war is politics with bloodshed"* (Mao Zedong, lecture, 1938) or *"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few"* (Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 1940) or *"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country"* (John F Kennedy, inaugural address, 1961) or *"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"* (Martin Luther King, letter from jail, 1963).
* **Make temporal comparisons**. For example: *"When the company was first founded .."* or *"When we first moved to this office .."* and *"Many challenges are still the same"* or *"The situation now is so different"*.
* **Make geographical comparisons**. Compare and contrast your situation with other companies or other organisations or with other regions or other countries. What does this tell us?
* **Use three-part lists**. For example: *"Government of the people, by the people, and for the people"* (Abraham Lincoln, 1863) or *"I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished"* (Franklin D Roosevelt, second inaugural address, 1937) or *"The ultimate case for the third way is that it works - good values, good vision, good policies"* (Bill Clinton, Labour Party Conference 2002). Technically this figure of speech is called a tricolon. Tony Blair was particularly fond of it.
* Very occasionally, **consider a longer list**. For example, a list of four: *"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"* (Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 1940). Another example, this time of five parts: *"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty"* (John F Kennedy, inaugral address, 20 January 1961).
* **Repetition can be very effective**. Martin Luther King was the absolute master of judicious repetition. For example: in his Washington speech of 28 August 1963, he used the phrases *"I have a dream .."* and *"Let freedom ring ..."* again and again (seven times and eight times respectively). The same technique was used by Barack Obama in his speech following the 2008 New Hampshire primary when he repeatedly used the phrase *"Yes we can"*.
* **Use short, pithy quotes**. Clever people over the years have created witty aphorisms, so you should borrow them when it is appropriate. For many examples [click here](http://www.rogerdarlington.co.uk/Thoughts.html).
* **Try humour** - not by telling a story or a joke as such, but by using a short, witticism. For example: *"I don't mind how much my ministers talk, as long as they do what I say"* (Margaret Thatcher, 1980). A little humour in the opening sentences of a speech relaxes the audience and positions them onside with the speaker. Humour in the last sentence or two of a speech leaves the audience with a warm feeling towards the speaker.
* **Self-deprecating humour - that is, humour at the expense of the speaker - often works well**. Consider these example: President Ronald Reagan reassuring an audience: *"I know you fellows think I'm lazy, but this week I've really been burning the midday oil"* or former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher telling a Conservative Party Conference that, on the way to the event, she had seen a cinema advertising *"The Mummy Returns"*.
* **Try puns**. For example: *"Vodafone is now the largest telephone company in the UK which makes its Chief Executive the Lord of the Rings"*. Another example: TUC General Secretary Tony Monks, when asking for the President of the European Commission Jacques Santer to include a particular provision in a measure, said it would be known as *"the Santer clause"*.
* **Sometimes you can use the same word** but in a different context. For example: *"There can be no whitewash at the White House"* (Richard Nixon, Watergate broadcast, 1973).
* One way of commanding attention is to **use a redundant, but attention-seeking, short sentence**. Tony Blair is very fond of *"I say this to you"* or *"Let me be clear"*.
* **KISS (Keep it simple, stupid)**. Don't try to impress with over-complicated terminology. For example: when he was Labour's Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown famously praised *"neoclassical endogenous growth theory and a symbiotic relationship between investment in people and infrastructure"* (1996). In the introduction to his compilation "Speeches That Changed The World", Simon Sebag Montefiore states: *"As a rule, simplicity of language marks superb speeechmaking"*.
* Remember that 50% of statistics are meaningless (see what I mean?). So, **if you are intending to use statistics** - and some well-chosen figures can add credibility and authority to your arguments - be sure that you understand them, that they are meaningful, and that they are both reliable and up-to-date. Be ready in the question and answer session, or if approached later, to be able to source your statistics and supply the full context.
* **Make clever use of the pause**. If you expect laughter or applause or you would like to create a sense of drama, pause for a couple of seconds, before continuing your speech.
* **Finish with a strong, affirmative statement**, possibly referring back to the opening sentence or question (note how many film scripts end with a variation of a line from the beginning of the movie).
* **Only use the techniques appropriate to the occasion**. A speech in the mode of *"We will fight them on the beaches"* is not ideal for opening a church bazaar. An after-dinner speech needs lots of jokes, whereas an academic lecture needs lots of facts. In many respects, the most difficult speeches are family occasions like weddings and funerals - there are many sensitivities here, so think carefully about what you're going to say.
* **If you are speaking to an international audience** (especially if your words are being translated into other languages), don't use any of the language-specific tips such as alliteration, rhyme or puns and be careful not to use culturally-specific allusions or organisational jargon. I once gave a lecture on British industrial relations to a group of Russian trade union officials and they were baffled by my apparent reference to a department store which never opened. I had mentioned the *"closed shop"*!
* **Beware of speaking for too long**. The British aristocrat Lord Brabazon once said: *"If you cannot say what you have to say in twenty minutes, you should go away and write a book about it"*. Abraham Lincoln's address at Gettysburg in 1863 lasted a mere two minutes, but it is one of the most memorable speeches ever delivered. Nobody ever complains that a speech is too short - and there's usually a question and answer session to use up the rest of the time and to make further points.
* When it's all over, **consider creating an on-line version of the speech**. If you put the text on a web site, you can add hyperlinks to more detailed information and provide up-dates to keep the material topical and relevant. In this way, you have a 'live' document and you reach a much wider audience.

**FURTHER READING**

"Speeches That Changed The World" with introduction by Simon Sebag Montefiore (Quercus, 2005)

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