

Giving a Speech

In spite of the fact that several surveys show most people would prefer having a root canal to giving a speech, a well planned and delivered speech can be a very effective tool for winning over and inspiring your community. Following are tips for preparing and delivering a good speech:

- ➔ Be yourself. Be sure to tailor your speech to your own traits and use your own thoughts.
- ➔ Use words that are easy for you to say. If your speech is written by someone else, change their phrases to phrases you use in your everyday conversations. Reword sentences so the speech sounds like you are talking.
- ➔ Choose a subject that really interests you, and tell your audience how you feel about it. If you really care about something, that conviction will show.
- ➔ Know your audience.
- ➔ Learn all you can about the audience, their special interests and what they want to learn from you. If they are senior citizens who want to know how you are using their tax dollars, build a speech around your fiscal accountability. If they are parents who want to know how to help their children in school, talk about your district's parent involvement programs. If the audience is a service club with a history that is represented by certain symbols, use those symbols in your speech. For example, a speech to a group of Masons can recognize the proud traditions of that group by using terms that are associated with building or working with stone. You might compare something to a "cornerstone" or speak about the "foundations" our schools are laying by educating students.
- ➔ Remember that language used when speaking is different in nature from written language. Try to sound as friendly in a speech as you are when you meet a friend for coffee.
 - Generally, written language is more formal than spoken language and can sound stilted and stuffy when presented orally. Spoken language should be simpler in structure and friendlier.
 - Conversational speech is repetitive. It is important to rephrase several times the key ideas you want the listeners to take away with them.
 - Vary the length of sentences.
 - Include figurative language. This adds life and color through imaginative use of illustrations, alliteration, comparisons and other literary devices.
- ➔ Open with a "grabber." Audience members will form their overall impression of the speech and speaker during the first 90 seconds. Therefore, it is important to catch their attention immediately. Start with a creative phrase, a favorite quote or a bit of positive news. Be sure to say something that is easy for you to relate and that is relevant to your presentation.

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- ➔ Structure your speech in a logical way. Your speech is a journey through thoughts, and you are the guide. Give your audience a road map so they glide effortlessly through your content and reach the end through a logical sequence.
- ➔ Deliver your speech with confidence.
- ➔ Eye contact with your audience is critical. It shows that you are sincere and that you care enough to search for their reactions as you talk. If you must use notes, refer to them as briefly as possible. Consider pausing to glance at your notes and then look back at your audience as you speak;
- ➔ Speak forcibly and confidently; and
- ➔ In practicing your speech, be sure to emphasize important phrases by varying the pitch and volume of your voice. Change the pacing of your words so you speak more slowly about some points than others. Tape record your presentation and then listen to yourself.
- ➔ Use visuals sparingly. People came to see **you**, not a set of transparencies. If you use visual aides such as computer graphics, slides, charts or transparencies, use them only to enhance your speech. Be sure to give your attention to the audience rather than to your visual materials.