



# Quick Guide to Writing Presentations and Speeches

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# 1 Introduction

The words we use are the most powerful tool we have to communicate concepts and convince audiences. In delivering a speech, we ideally want to influence, entertain and stimulate our audience. Crafting an effective speech requires careful consideration of the words and concepts that will resonate, and the structure that will be most effective. This brief guideline distils our experience of writing and delivering speeches and presentations over the last 10 years, as well as advice gathered from other sources such as the Economist Style Guide and Strunk and White's "Elements of Style".

## 2 Steps in Speechwriting

### 2.1 Set Objectives

Before starting to write the speech, the speechwriter should define for themselves what they hope to achieve - what would be their ideal outcome? Do you want to educate the audience, inform them, inspire them, move them, convince them or sell them something? Clarifying what you want to achieve will help you structure your speech.

### 2.2 Know Your Audience

Who are you giving the speech or presentation to? Do you know them or are they an entirely new audience? What do they want, what are they concerned about, what do they expect from you?

Knowing who will attend your speech will enable you to tailor the content accordingly - e.g. if they are a group highly knowledgeable in your area of expertise, you can aim the speech at a more detailed level. If the audience is unfamiliar with you and your focus of interest, you may have to focus the early part of the speech on an introduction.

### 2.3 Timing

Be clear on how much time you have. If there is no set limit, try to be brief but informative. Our guideline is to keep the speech under 25 minutes in length if possible.

### 2.4 Lay Out the Structure of Your Speech

Speeches should generally follow a clear, simple structure - beginning, middle and end. Audiences love structure. Most of us have attended a speech or presentation that seems to meander without direction, and we know that it generates a poor impression. Adopting a structure, and making that structure apparent to the audience, will increase the likelihood of gaining their attention.

### ***INTRODUCTION***

First impressions count. The beginning of your speech is the most important element - you must use the first few minutes to establish an interest among your audience, and to establish your credibility. Try to think of some kind of hook that will catch the audience's attention at as early a point as possible - an unusual fact, a joke or anecdote that will cause them to take notice. You should also let the audience know the key themes you will be covering - "tell them what you're going to say, say it, then tell them what you said". The reason for this reinforcing is that during a spoken presentation your audience do not have the opportunity to 'read' back a page to remind themselves of what you intended to say. You have to emphasise this structure by repetition and verbal markers.

You should use the introduction to tell your audience what you hope to persuade them of, and why they should listen to you i.e. by listing an important benefit.

### ***BODY OF SPEECH***

The middle of the speech should address the key themes or topics you have identified that will help you achieve your objectives for influencing the audience in some way. Our advice is to keep the number of topics or themes to three or four maximum - anything beyond that is likely to be too complex for your audience to fully retain.

### ***CONCLUSION***

Finally, the most important part of the speech after the introduction is the wrap-up. Here you are trying to ensure that the audience has digested the key points you were trying to make while also ensuring that they have been entertained and stimulated. You want them to leave the room with your ideas in their heads, and with your suggested actions clearly at the forefront of their minds. Use the conclusion to review the key themes, reinforce your key messages and to plant an interesting or unusual thought in the audience's head. And most importantly, know when to stop - have a clear cut off point in your speech and stick to it.

### ***FEEDBACK***

Prepare where appropriate for a question and answer session or some other form of audience interaction at the end of your speech. Try to anticipate objections or badly phrased questions and how you will link these back to your main themes.

## **2.5 Don't Try to Say Too Much**

*"The best way to be boring is to leave nothing out" - Voltaire.*

This quote touches on our note above about keeping to a maximum of three or four topics. You may have a hundred things you could tell your audience, but you have to be strict in ensuring that only a few topics are chosen, and that these topics support the objectives you've identified in step 1. Whereas in a written article or report you can cover a greater range of topics in more depth, a speech does not lend itself to conveying large amounts of complex detail - you will bore and confuse your audience.

## 2.6 Provide Evidence

Where possible, provide real examples or figures that support your key topics. Objective information that reinforces your key topics will help convince your audience.

## 2.7 Use Stories

The best way to communicate an idea to an audience is to relate it to a personal experience or narrative - a story. The ideas and concepts in your speech may be intangible and difficult for your audience to grasp, but connecting these concepts to simple personal stories makes the intangible tangible.

## 2.8 Use Short Words, Plain English, Simple Structures

*“Clarity of writing usually follows clarity of thought. So think what you want to say, then say it as simply as possible”*

*The Economist Style Guide*

Complex words and sentence structures create a barrier between you and your audience. And a sentence structure that reads well on paper may cause you unexpected difficulties during spoken delivery. Keeping words, sentences and the overall structure of your speech clear and simple will help you and your audience.

*“Use definite, specific, concrete words and omit needless words. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph should contain no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts”*

*The Elements of Style, Strunk and White*

## 2.9 Rehearse

Delivering the speech is the most effective way to measure how effective it is. You should practice the speech, try if possible to record yourself or have someone provide you with feedback. Only by speaking the words and gauging their effect can you improve the speech before it is delivered to the intended audience.

## 2.10 If It's Not on the Page, It's Not on the Stage

During delivery of a speech a new idea may occur to you, or an amusing anecdote, but that is not the time to start editing your speech. Do not be tempted to ad-lib or extemporise - stick to your script. Preparation and rehearsals are the opportunity for edits.

## 3 Preparing for Interviews

Interviews should be regarded as unscripted speeches. You can prepare effectively for interviews, although there is obviously a greater degree of unpredictability. Here are some tips that may be useful.

### 3.1 Press Interviews

Radio/ Newspaper interviews may result in a large amount of coverage. For this reason there are a number of rules to ensure that the interview portrays you and your organisation in the best possible light:

Never

- Answer a question with information that you are unsure of – instead always advise that, if possible, you will revert back to the interviewer/journalist when you have checked the information. Alternatively, find someone in your organisation who is knowledgeable on the topic
- Refuse to do an interview
- Say “no comment”
- Refuse to talk to a particular interviewer or journalist due to a previous bad experience
- Get into an argument, airing personal rather than professional views

Do

- Emphasise a key point or “bite” that you would like to see broadcast or see in print
- Suggest other persons who may be able to provide further information
- Know who the audience is and adapt accordingly
- Quote examples

### 3.2 Radio Interviews

Do

- Know who the audience is, this will dictate the manner in which you present your points
- Have a good idea of the areas to be covered - this will allow you to prepare answers to likely questions
- Know if there will be anyone else taking part in the show - is it a debate?
- Know if it is a live or pre-recorded interview
- If given the option, offer to do a live broadcast - this ensures that your points are not edited
- Be prepared

Follow the 'Five W's'

*Who* is the interviewer?

*What* is the interview about?

*Where* is the interview being held?

*When* is the interview being broadcast?

*Why* is the interview happening?

Don't

- Shout across the interviewer/ panellists
- Read directly from notes
- Use the interviewer's name in every sentence
- Become involved in personal arguments



## 4 About Us

DohertyWhite is a full service Marketing, PR, and Digital Marketing agency. We can help you with effective search engine marketing, public relations, lead generation, advertising, event management and much more. Talk to us to see how we can help you grow your business.

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