



Speechwriting 101

Developed by Stacy Carlson

Introduction

Successful public speaking requires preparation and clarity. For a formal speech, short remarks or even asking a question in a public forum, a framework to guide your thoughts will help you deliver your message more effectively. That will increase your confidence and help get better results. Below, we present five basic steps to get you started.

Step 1: Get Started: The Basics

Who is coming? Who and how many will be in the audience? What organization is sponsoring the speech? Learning about your audience and your hosts helps your writing and presentation.

What are you talking about?

Why do you care about it? Why does your audience care?

Where is the speech? A large hall? A classroom? Outdoors?

How long should it be? Never more than 20 minutes (unless your culture requires longer speeches). Will you take questions afterwards?

Step 2: Preparing to Write – Gather your Raw Material

- ✓ What are you talking about and why do you care about it? Write it down.
- ✓ What is your message? Write it down.
- ✓ What factual and logical points support your message? Write them down.
- ✓ Are there stories – with a beginning, middle and end – or anecdotes that support your message? Write them down.

This is the raw material you will organize, shape and refine to create your speech.

Step 3: Writing and Revising

Length:

- ✓ People speak at rate of 125 – 150 words per minute.
- ✓ A 20-minute speech would be 2500 – 3000 words (word count function on computer) or about 8-10 typed pages, double spaced.
- ✓ Speaking for less time is better than speaking for a long time.
- ✓ Speaking slow is better than speaking fast.

Structure of your Speech: Beginning, Middle and End

Beginning of the Speech

- Thank your host and audience.
- Introduce yourself and the reason why you're there.

- Announce your subject and point of view. Define what you want to say in a sentence or two. Or think of it as a headline reporting on your speech.

Example: I am going to the City Council to explain why women should be included in and help lead the political process. Headline: “Women Must Be Part of Political Process,” Carlson says in speech, “We are stronger when we work side by side.”

Possible opening: “Thank you for inviting me here to address the City Council. This is a great opportunity to explain how our community has and will benefit from greater participation by women in our political process.

“I’m delighted to have these few minutes to talk about the possible benefits and progress, and then spend a few minutes outlining the steps we can and should take. We know it takes a lot of work to turn theory into reality, but let’s start by talking about why we need to do this.”

Middle of the Speech

- This is where you make your case with facts, stories, and logic.
- Pick the essential, most effective points from the raw material and make your case.
- Don’t talk about everything. Narrow down to the important things that support your message.
- Organize your points in a logical, compelling argument with facts, stories or anecdotes that persuade and motivate.

“A speech about everything is a speech about nothing.”

Former White House Speechwriter Peggy Noonan

- Don’t be afraid of devices, like numbering:

“I want to say *five things* about women’s participation in the political process.

“*First*, when women have a role in governance and decision-making, the economic, political and social well-being of their country improves. (*Elaborate with a compelling example or story; use statistics if they really emphasize your point.*)

“*Second*, ...”

(In your conclusion, you can come back and restate the five things in shorter version. “There are many reasons women should have a role in our country’s political process, today I have mentioned only five. First, because it will benefit our country. Second, because...”)

- Don’t be afraid of devices, like repetition:

“Why should women be involved in the political process? Because when they are, the economic, political and social-well being of our country will improve. (*Elaborate with a compelling example or story, use statistics if they really emphasize your point.*)

“Why should women be involved in the political process? Because they offer a wise, calm voice in conflict resolution and can help lead us to keep peace rather than war. *(Elaborate with a compelling example or story, use statistics if they really emphasize your point.)*

End of the Speech

- Repeat/re-state your message. You can sum up your logical and factual points and/or make one all-encompassing statement.
- Thank your audience for listening.

Writing: Tips and Must Do's

- ✓ Write like you talk, don't try to impress with fancy words or complicated sentences.
- ✓ Use short and clear sentences.
- ✓ Don't overdo jargon or statistics.
- ✓ If you use statistics or facts, make sure they are correct. You say, “There were 500 women at last week's meeting.” Do you know for sure, or is that what you read in the news? Instead do you need to say, “The Daily Press reported 500 women were at last week's meeting.”
- ✓ You will write a lousy first (second, third...) draft. Keep at it. Take a break. Then come back. Writing is re-writing. You may have dozens of drafts.
- ✓ Your goal is to make people think, not to make them cry or angry. The most effective thing in a speech is logic. The most effective speeches persuade minds or motivate people to act.

It may be helpful to refer to the WDN training “#What's your Why?”

- What's the right message, what do you want people to know or not know about you?
- These same elements of a good message go into a good speech – what is the main point you want to make?
- Add personal touches -anecdote with a purpose, point that fits.
- Quote that emphasizes the message; personal story that matches the message.

Step 4: Practice

- Read your speech aloud. Edit what doesn't sound natural or isn't easy to pronounce.
- Read your speech aloud in front of family or friends and get their response.
- Time your speech when you read it out loud, adjust length as needed.
- Your delivery will be more compelling if you practice a lot and know the speech well.

Step 5: Presentation

- The day is here. You'll do great. (If you don't, you'll survive and try again.)
- Be You!