

Guidelines for Preparing, Practising and Delivering Your Speech

Preparation

Read your speech through.

Get hold of some white A4 card from a stationer. Cut the cards across the middle to create a set of A5 cards. These will be less distracting than a big sheet of A4 paper flapping about and easier to use than smaller postcards. Also it's easier to see what you are doing and to keep your place. Copy the speech in large letters (I use capitals) and don't try to cram the speech on to as few cards as possible, you'll never be able to read it. Feel free to abbreviate if it means you get a convenient section on one card.

Number the cards in case you drop them.

Highlight, emphasise and underline key words and phrases in coloured ink. Do this while you are practising.

Practising

Practise as many times as necessary to get the phrasing, the pauses, the timing exactly right. One speaker says practise an hour in total for every minute in the speech. So four hours practising for a four minute speech is not excessive.

Speak the speech – don't read it in a dull monotone. Speak it as if you are talking in conversation. Modulate your voice up and down.

How many people will be at the reception? Bear this in mind and visualise them – imagine yourself projecting to the back. If you visualise them you will be less likely to get stage fright on the Big Day. Speak clearly, don't rush it. In your mind's eye see the audience – make eye contact with them and move your gaze around the room as you should try to on the day itself for optimum effect. I have always found that visualisation is a great tool for any learned skill, including public speaking.

Try not to have your eyes stuck on to your card. Read a phrase, look up, deliver it, look down for the next phrase.

If you can stand the stage fright, practise in front of a friend (this is an excellent dry run because it is often more frightening than the real thing). Choose someone who encourages by nature and ask them to give constructive advice on your delivery, projection etc. If you do this it will help you enormously in getting over your inhibitions.

Try recording yourself onto a tape. You will hear your weak points and your strong points. Do this a few times, work on the weaker areas and you will hear a steady improvement.

Remember: Perfect Practise Prevents Poor Performance

On the Day

On the day you will probably experience a certain amount of stage fright. Don't be afraid of it – no actor / comedian / speaker ever delivered a successful performance without a measure of fear.

However stage fright can have unfortunate side effects – sweating, shaking, heart beating furiously, etc. There are steps you can take to minimise these effects before you speak, namely:

1. Find the time to take long deep breaths – breathe right in, deep into your belly; slowly breathe out. Do it repeatedly. It works.
2. Breathe in for four counts.

Hold your breath and tense your toes for four counts.

Breathe out for four counts.

You should feel tension easing.

Repeat with feet, ankles, calves, knees etc right up your body to your neck, chin, lips, eyelids, forehead and scalp.

You should be able to sneak this in while sitting at the table without anyone noticing.

If you have the time repeat these exercises as necessary.

A few notes on drinking:

Some speakers unfortunately try to get over their stage fright by drinking. Nothing is more embarrassing to an audience than a tiddly speaker. It is amazing how silly a drunk speaker sounds. By all means have a half or perhaps a pint, but if you really want to do a good job, save the majority of the bebies until afterwards.

It's also a good idea to lay off tea and coffee. Caffeine will make your jitters worse. Stick to soda water, mineral water or fruit juice.

When all is said and done, even if you have practised endlessly and got your delivery perfect, on the day you will probably feel nervous to some degree. In your nervousness you might imagine that you're shaking like a leaf and everyone can see quite plainly that you're scared stiff. I would like to make three comments:

1. The audience are on your side – most of them would be scared stiff themselves. They're with you not against you.
2. If you don't transcribe your speech onto cards and you do shake, the shakes will be amplified by your speech flapping around like a windsock. See "Preparation".
3. In practise almost every speaker is far more nervous than they look. You might feel nervous but if you practise, prepare and deliver according to these guidelines, people will in all probability come up to you afterwards and say what a good job you've done.

Delivery

Be confident. You have prepared everything that could possibly be prepared for this moment. You have practised a lot, your cards are in your hand, highlighted and underlined. You can have done no more. Be confident in that. At any wedding the audience is on the speaker's side – they want you to do well and will not be critical. Remember that and be confident in that as well.

Stand up. Wait for complete silence – don't be afraid of silences and pauses, they can be as eloquent as words. Don't hurtle into the speech to get it over with as quickly as possible.

Establish eye contact with the audience. Look around at every section of the audience. Remember your visualisation? Put it into practise now.

Weigh your phrases, don't rush them. Really *use* your pauses. After a punchline, wait for them to jolly well laugh and don't start again until they have stopped laughing. Should they not laugh at a joke, it's not the end of the world. Some lines are intended mostly as links and aren't necessarily meant to be riotously funny. Move on to the next line and whatever you do don't accelerate through the speech just because they didn't laugh at one point where you thought they would.

Remain measured, using your pauses to allow the audience to digest your words, get to the end, propose whichever toast is yours to toast and sit down to take your applause.

Concluding Thoughts

A quick note for the Best Man: don't read *all* the greeting cards the Bride and Groom have received. A lot of people dread the Best Man's speech because so many Best Men spend absolutely ages at the end of their speech endlessly droning through a stack of cards which all say much the same thing. By all means read two or three of them, perhaps ones specially chosen by the Bride and Groom.

Good luck and best wishes for a successful day and enjoy the beers afterwards!

My thoughts are with you. You should by now be armed with everything you need – give it all you've got!

From: Sparkling Wedding Speeches

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