

Seven Tips on Speech Writing

Brian Jenner, one of The Aziz Corporation speechwriters, has put together some tips for you on constructing a presentation:

One of the first principles of structuring a good speech is to: Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you told them.

My first tip is to be persuasive

In the ancient world that's what they thought public speaking was about - the art of persuasion.

When you sit down to construct your speech you should be asking yourself, what do I want the audience to do? If you want them to buy your product, you should list the benefits of your product and then end with a call to action: come and buy my product at the desk.

If you're persuading people, you are not necessarily trying to impress them with your public speaking skills. There is a good story about Aeschines and Demosthenes.

When Aeschines spoke they said, 'How well he speaks'.

When Demosthenes spoke they said, 'Let's march'.

It's rather like the problem of William Hague, when he gets up to speak, everyone says how wonderful he is. But he never persuaded anyone to vote for him, so it was a bit wasted.

My second tip is be positive

I was recently asked by a president of a golf club to do a speech for him at a big dinner.

He wanted it to be witty and genial. However, he wished to get across the fact that he was opposed to the admission of women to the club, the relaxation of the dress code and the general fall in standards. I couldn't help him. At a boozy dinner nobody wants to hear griping. They want jokes. Similarly most audiences have low morale, they're bored or depressed or uninterested. Your job is to inspire them, to lead them and to get them moving. If you want to write depressing things go and work on Eastenders.

My third tip is be imaginative

If you want to give people some detailed information send them a letter. A speech is an opportunity for you to show off your personality, and to give us the benefit of your experience. One aspect of being a speechwriter for instance is that I'm self-employed. Now I could give you a list of the tax benefits of being self-employed, but it's much better to talk in terms of similes and metaphors. Being self-employed is like taking early retirement. For the past three years I've spent most days getting up and pottering round the house in my slippers. So whenever you're talking about a subject in a speech, make it visual, make it colourful and don't confine yourself to reeling off facts and figures.

The seven tips are:

- be persuasive,
- be positive,
- be imaginative,
- be topical,
- be simple,
- be humorous,
- be brief

My fourth tip is be topical

When you stand up in front of an audience, there's you and there's the audience. Now it's very important that the two are plugged in. You've got to get their attention. Ken Dodd makes three jokes about the audience at the beginning of his act.

My fifth tip is be simple

It's best if you don't use notes. That helps you to communicate with the audience.

I used to have terrible trouble remembering my wonderfully honed lines. I used to take part in regular humorous speech contests. But on one occasion somebody laughed in the wrong place and it threw me. I had to sit down and retire from the competition. Now I save time. I just try to make one or two points, and it's a lot easier to memorise.

My sixth tip is be humorous

You need to have a bit of lightness in every speech. I know a professional public speaker and he uses the same jokes every time.

They don't need to be great gags. But bear in mind what Walt Disney once said: 'People spend money when and where they feel good'. Or what Peter Ustinov said, 'Comedy is a funny way of being serious'.

You always find humour when dealing with the public, find some anecdotes from your own trade or profession. For instance in public speaking you always warn people not to stand in front of a lectern that's taller than you are.

My seventh tip is be brief

Nobody is ever likely to complain if you finished speaking five minutes earlier than expected. But if you go over time, everybody is irritated.

Note here from Khalid Aziz:

Remember the Aziz definition of a joke - 'Something which makes the audience laugh - instantly'. If you have to explain it, it probably isn't funny - not to that audience at least. Jokes or better still humorous stories told against yourself are best as it's virtually impossible these days to tell a joke without offending someone.

So to recap. To write a good speech, you must be persuasive, you must be positive, you must be imaginative, you must be topical, you must be simple, you must try to be humorous and you must be brief.