

Chapter 11

11 Speechwriting, presentations, and media interview – public relations

- The art of speechwriting
- Objectives and approach
- Research
- Writing the speech
- Coaching the speaker
- Giving a speech or presentation
- Preparing a visual aids
- Media interviews
- Media and techniques
- Summary

Objectives

At the end of this chapter students will be able to:

- Understand and handle speechwriting
- Demonstrate knowledge on coaching the speaker
- Giving a speech or presentation
- Understand and handle media interviews, radio and television interviews
- Demonstrate knowledge on preparing a visual aids and media techniques.

11.1 THE ART OF SPEECHWRITING

Working in public relations requires excellent knowledge of interpersonal communications and one form of this is speechwriting. Other form of face-to-face communication are giving speeches and presentations, conducting one-on-one media interviews, organizing news conferences, and even hosting journalists on a press tour.



Public relations practitioners often are called to write speech for their employers or clients. As speechwriters, their role is a hidden one. They labour silently to produce the words that may sparkle when their employer or client lecterns for conventions, civic banquets and annual meeting.

Speechwriters are in demand and well paid. Most large corporations employ speechwriters, some of whom receive annual salaries in the six figures. Still other organizations simply have speeches written in-house by their own public relations staff, which often has other duties in addition to speechwriting.



11.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF A SPEECH

Preparing a speech takes a great deal of energy and time on the part of the speech-writer and the speaker. It is important to determine and understand what the speech is supposed to accomplish, and the exact information and opinions the audience should have when the speech is conducted.

A speech possesses five main characteristics:

1 It is designed to be heard and not read.

The mistake of writing for the eye instead of the ear is the most common trap of bad speeches. Speeches need not be a masterpiece but they ought to sound good.

2 It uses concrete language.

The ear dislikes generalities. It responds to clear images. Ideas must be expressed sharply for the audience to get the point.

3. It demands a positive response.

Every word, every passage, every phrase should evoke a response from the audience.

4. It must have clear cut objectives.

The speech and the speaker must have a point – a thesis. If there's no point, then it is not worth the speaker's or the audience's time to be there.



5 It must be tailored to a specific audience.

An audience needs to feel that it is hearing something special. The most frequent complaint about organisational speeches is that they all lack uniqueness.

Beyond adhering to these five principles and before putting words on paper, a speechwriter must have a clear idea of the process – the route – to follow in developing the speech.

11.3 THE SPEECHWRITING PROCESS

The speechwriting process breaks down into four components:

1. preparing
2. interviewing
3. researching, and
4. organising and writing



1 Preparing

One easy way to prepare for a speech is follow a 4W checklist: Answer the questions who, what, where and when.

- **Who**
The ‘who’ represents two critical elements: the speaker and the audience. A writer should know all about the speaker – manner of speech, use of humour, and reaction to an audience, background, and personality. It is almost impossible to write a speech for someone you do not know. The writer should also know something about the audience. What does this audience think about this subject?
- **What**
The ‘what’ refers to two things: i) the subject, the assigned topic of the talk and ii) the ‘object’, the speaker’s intent to convince the audience to take some specific action.
- **Where**
The ‘where’ is the setting. A large hall requires a more formal talk than a roundtable forum. Often the location of the speech – the city, state, or even a particular hall – bears historic or symbolic significance that can enhance a message.
- **When**
The ‘when’ is the time of the speech. People are more awake in the morning and get sleepier as the day progresses. The ‘when’ also refers to the time of year. A speech can always be linked to an upcoming holiday or special celebration.



2 Interviewing

Interviewing speakers in advance is essential. A good interview with a speaker often means the difference between a strong speech and a poor one.



In the interview, the speechwriter gets some time to observe the speaker firsthand and probe for the keys to the speech. The interview must accomplish at least three specific goals for the speechwriter:

- i. ***Determine the object of the talk.***
The object is the purpose of the speech – that is, what exactly the speaker wants the audience to do after he or she is finished speaking.
- ii. ***Determine the speaker’s main points.***
Normally an audience can grasp only a few points during a speech. These points, which should flow directly from the object, become touchstones around which the rest of the speech is woven.
- iii. ***Capture the speaker’s characteristics.***
Most of all, during the interview, the writer must observe the speaker. How comfortable is the speaker with humour. How informal or deliberate is he or she with words? What are the speaker’s pet phrases and expressions? The writer must observe these, recall them during the writing process, and factor them into the speech.

3 Researching

A speechwriter sometimes develops writer’s block, the inability to come up with anything on paper. One way around writer’s block is to adopt a formalized research procedure.



- i. ***Look into all literature, books, pamphlets, articles, speeches, and other writings on the speech subject.***
A stocked file cabinet is often the speechwriter’s best friend.
- ii. ***Think about the subject.***
Bring personal thoughts to bear on the topic. The writer should amplify the speaker’s thoughts with his or her own.
- iii. ***Seek out the opinions of others on the topic.***
Perhaps the speaker is not the most knowledgeable source within the organisation about this specific subject. Outside sources, particularly politicians and business leaders, are often willing to share their ideas when requested.

4 Organising and Writing

Once, preparation, interviewing and research have been completed, the fun part begins. Writing a speech becomes easier if, again, the speech is organised into its four essential elements: introduction, thesis, body and conclusion.



i. Introduction.

An introduction must grab the audience and hold its interest. An audience is alert at the beginning of a talk, and the writer's job is to make sure the audience stays there.

ii. Thesis

The thesis is the object of the speech – its purpose or central idea. A good thesis statement lets an audience know in a simple sentence where a speech is going and how it will get there.

iii. Body

The speech body is just that – the general body of evidence that supports the three or four main points. Although facts, statistics, and figures are important elements, writers should always attempt to use comparisons or contrast for easier audience understanding.

iv. Conclusion

The best advice on wrapping up a speech is to do it quickly. The conclusion must be blunt, short, and to the point.

A Sample Persuasive Speech

Dear students, where are you going to be in five years? What will you be doing from 9 till 6 every day? In what sphere will you work? In other words, what are your career objectives? Some of you must be thinking that the third year of studies is yet too early to ask such questions. Let me assure you that it is high time to decide upon this issue.

In fact, as my 7 year-long experience as HR-manager shows, there are only two alternatives. Either you think about your career beforehand - now! - or you graduate in two years with an empty track record, and cling to the very first job available with the highest salary. "Not bad at all", some of you might think. Still, believe me that you will soon get bored, for money is not the sense of life. When you hate what you do every day for eight hours, when you go to work only to receive your monthly salary - your life is not complete to say the least. I like the quotation by Elizabeth Kubler Ross who said that "people are

like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within". The source of this inner light is love for everything that surrounds you - your family in the first place, but also your work! It should give you delight, ensure your professional and personal growth and provide you with a sense of achievement and importance of what you do. Trust my experience: such people rarely get bored with their work in the course of years and are much happier than disillusioned money-earners.

The most difficult thing here is to find the right kind of job. Every person is unique and is best suited to a particular sphere or position. You will never know which exactly is perfect for you until you try. In two years you will graduate the Linguistic department. Where will you go when the diploma is in your pocket? The earlier you start searching, the sooner you will know the answer. Some of you will pursue the direct specialization and work as translators, interpreters or language teachers. Others will plunge into a neighboring sphere and will carve out a career in the tourist business, management etc. Whatever sphere you choose, it should be your cup of tea, not just means to earn your living or beguile eight hours of your day. I call upon you to assume an active attitude to you career, and investigate the possible fields of interest right now, while you still have time to be mistaken and opportunity to work part-time. Two years is the term long enough to understand what you actually expect from your job and find at least the direction of your path. You will know the practical advantages of a definite job - and its drawbacks as well. The more you do now, the less confusion you'll feel when the university door is flung open and you are welcome to go - but where? Even small working experience will help you to answer this question and find your true self by becoming a skilled professional.

According to my deepest conviction, happy person is the person who always brings his own sunshine, wherever he goes and whatever the weather. Hope to see these sparks in you in two years by the time of your graduation. Thank you.

11.4 COACHING A SPEAKER

In addition to writing a speech, a speechwriter often serves as a coach for the speaker. Whether the speech is memorized (rare) or read, a coach helps the speaker rehearse and polish the delivery so that he or she becomes totally familiar with it. The tone of voice, emphasis given to certain words or phrases, pauses, gestures and rate of delivery are all important.



Nonverbal communication is an essential part of the speech. Some speakers prefer to have certain phrases underlined and to have detailed cues in the script such as “pause”, “look at the audience” or “make point with arm raised”. Others do not want such cues; it is a matter of preferences.

Format is the also a matter of personal preference. Some people prefer to have a speech double-spaced; others want triple space. A few like to have the speech in all capital letters, but the standard practice is capitals and lowercase with heads and subheads in boldface type. A speech is often printed in large type, 14 to 20 points, so the speaker can easily read it, even in a dim light.

The speaker should be sufficiently familiar with the note cards or prepared text to permit abridgment on brief notice. Such advance thinking is particularly important for a speaker at a luncheon meeting. All too often, the meal is served late or the group takes an excessive amount of time discussing internal matters or making general announcements, leaving the speaker far less time than originally planned.

11.5 GIVING A SPEECH OR PRESENTATION

An individual speaking at a conference, a news conference or even in a one-to-one interview with a journalist communicates a lot through his or her body language. Giving a speech or presentation is all about delivery. Public relations practitioners in the course of their daily work may not give many formal speeches to large audiences, but they do give any number of presentations to their employers and clients about proposed new programs, progress on current programs, or the results of a particular campaign.



There are some guidelines that can be used to deliver a very effective speech or presentation:

- ◆ ***Appealing to the ear*** – The average speech or presentation has only one brief exposure - the few minutes during which the speaker is presenting it. There is no chance to go back, no time to let it slowly digest, no opportunity for clarification. The message must be clearly understood at the time it is given. When the speaker begins to talk, the audience is still



settling down. Therefore, the first words of a speech often are devoted to setting the stage thanking the host, making humorous comments or saying how nice it is to be there. As your speech progresses, it is a good idea to restate and summarize the key points. The words use should be clear, concise, short and definite. Use words that specify, explain, and paint pictures for the audience. Avoid delivering a speech in a monotone voice.

◆ **Keeping the audience in mind.** The first step in speech writing is to determine the composition of the audience. Talk to some members of that particular profession. Get an idea of the issues or problems they face. Another approach is to go online to the site of the organization, whether it is local or international and see what is posted. Some speakers may even visit the local library and look through some issues of the organization’s national magazines.

Here are some tips about keeping the audience in mind:

- **Know your listeners.**
By conducting a demographic investigation to identify their age, income, education, occupation, and gender
- **Use their language.**
Use terms and expressions that are familiar to the audience.
- **Use visual.**
Audience remember better if information is presented in visual forms such as charts or bulleted slides.
- **Use humour carefully.**
Avoid side comments and jokes that may offend.
- **Watch our facts.**
Be absolutely certain that the information is accurate
- **Focus on the benefit.**
Any speech must tell listeners what they will gain from the ideas presented.



◆ **Length of the presentation.** With regard to the length of a presentation, the axiom “less is best” is a good one. Most speeches and presentations, except those given at an academic conference or technical seminar, should be 20 to 30 minutes in length. A 20-minutes speech is about 2,500 to 3,000 words, or about 10 pages double-spaced. The general rule is that a speaker can read about 150 to 160 words per minutes.

◆ **Eye contact and gestures.** Do not read a speech with your eyes glued to the lectern. It is important to look frequently at the audience and establish eye contact, which is another reason for being totally familiar with your text or note cards. Experts recommend that a speaker should look at specific people in the audience for several seconds before moving on to another part of the audience. Eye contact, according to research studies, is a major factor that establishes a speaker’s rapport and credibility with an audience. Gestures also play a

major role in establishing credibility. Gestures, however, should agree or complement the vocal message to be effective.

11.6 PREPARING A VISUAL AIDS

Many speeches and presentations, however, benefit from the use of visual aids to present information in a memorable way. It is important to understand the advantages and disadvantages of each visual aids technique to determine what is most effective for a given situation. If the presentation is at a workshop or seminar where the objective is to inform and educate an audience, a power point presentation may be the best approach.

◆ Power Point.

Power point is the leading presentation software. One key rule is to keep it simple. If the slide is too cluttered with text, borders, and even clips art, it cuts down on readability and retention. Use no more than four bullets and no more than four or five words for each bullet. In terms of type size, the standard rule is 24-to 28-point type for all words. Anything smaller will be difficult to see from the back of the room.



◆ Slide presentation.

Power point presentation as previously mentioned can be converted to 35-mm slides. This format is often used for presentations in a school classroom and at civic club



meetings where an LCD projector may not be readily available. Speakers using a slide presentation often write their speeches in a two-column format, with the slide number or description on the left side and the text on the right side, in much the same manner that a video news release is formatted. The timing of the slides in a presentation varies. It is possible to make a good presentation with just a few slides.

◆ Chart and graphs.

These also can be formatted in power point and enlarged onto large poster boards or projected onto the screen. Common charts are pie charts or bar graphs. The main rule is to keep them relatively simple so they can be readily understood by the audience.



11.7 MEDIA INTERVIEW

Another widely used spoken method of publicizing an individual or a cause is the interview, which may appear in print form in newspapers and magazines or on television and radio. The ability of the person being interviewed to communicate easily is essential to success.



11.7.1 Purpose and objective

In all interviews, the person being questioned should say something that will inform or entertain the audience. The practitioner should prepare the interviewee to meet this needs. An adroit interviewer attempts to develop a theme in the conversation – to draw out comments that make a discernible point or illuminate the character of the person being interviewed. The latter can help the interviewer – and his or her own cause as well – by being ready to volunteer specific information, personal data, or opinions about the cause under discussion as soon as the conversational opportunity arises.



In setting up an interview, the public relations person should obtain from the interviewer an understanding as to its purpose. Armed with this information, the practitioner can assemble facts and data for the client to use in the discussion. The practitioner also can aid the client by providing tips about the interviewer's style.

11.7.2 Radio and television interviews

The possibilities for public relations people to have their clients interviewed on the air are immense. The current popularity of talk shows, both on local stations and syndicated satellite networks, provides many opportunities for on-air appearances in which the guests expresses opinions and answer call-in questions. A successful radio or television broadcast interview appearance has three principal requirements:



- ◆ **Preparation.**

Guests should know what they want to say.

- ◆ **Concise speech.**
Guest should always question and make statements precisely and briefly. They should not hold forth in excessive detail or drag in extraneous material. Responses should be kept to 30 seconds or less, because seconds count on the air. The interviewer must conduct the program under severe time restrictions.
- ◆ **Relaxation.**
Guest should concentrate on talking to the interviewer in a casual person-to-person manner, forgetting the audience as much as possible. Guests should speak up firmly; the control room can cut down their volume if necessary.

A public relations adviser can help an interview guest on all of these points. Answers to anticipated questions may be worked out and polished during a mock interview in which the practitioner plays the role of broadcaster. A tape recording or videotape of a practice session will help the prospective guest to correct weaknesses.



11.8 SUMMARY

The art of speechwriting is a systematic process that requires research into the prospective audience and a thorough understanding of the speaker's belief and how he or she expresses them. The objectives and key message points must be decided upon. First an outline is done and then a draft of the speech is written. The writing style and word choice must be designed for the ear. Writing should be conversational, concise, and clear. Simple sentences are preferred and words should paint pictures in the minds of the audience. All speeches have a beginning, a middle and ending.

Unlike journalistic writing, in which the most important point is in the lead paragraph, a speech builds up to a main point. Before speaking to a group, it is wise to find out as much as you can about the group and its interests. Nonverbal communication is an important part of any presentation. A speaker should be enthusiastic, maintain eye contact with the audience, smile and use gestures appropriately. Most speeches should be between 20 and 30 minutes long.

People retain more information if they can hear and see it at the same time. The most common presentation software is power point, which can be used in a variety of ways. The major point is to keep slides simple and uncluttered. Other visual aids can include transparencies, charts and graphs, and flip-charts.

A face-to-face interview with a print or broadcast journalist is a good way to communicate an organization's perspective. Before being interviewed, however, the individual should have a clear idea of what the journalist needs and how key messages of the organization can be effectively communicated.



11.9 QUESTIONS

Section A:

Short answer questions.

1. What are preliminary steps should be taken before writing a draft of a speech for an executive in the organization?
2. Why is it important to establish the objective of and approach to a speech before writing it?
3. Why should an executive work with a speechwriter on drafting and formatting a particular speech or presentation?
4. Give at last five tips about the use of words in a speech.
5. Why is it necessary to know the demographics and interests of your audience before you speak? How do you find this information?

