

Make time to prepare, practice speeches

Most people who agree to give a speech find themselves scrambling for preparation time at the last minute.

They frantically jot down notes the night before or in the car on the way to the event.

They are left with no time to rehearse. The odds of giving a good speech are stacked against them before they even arrive.

You will deliver a memorable speech with more confidence, better voice inflection and enhanced body language if you adequately prepare and practice. Here are some tips:

1. Don't assume you can "just wing it" because you are an expert. A good speech is tailored to the audience and full of examples and stories that will strike a chord with them. This takes thought and preparation.



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2. As soon as you agree to give a speech, set aside time to prepare and rehearse. Manage your calendar so that you can put the finishing touches on your speech and rehearse at least twice.

3. Rehearse in private, in front of a mirror. The benefit of this technique is seeing yourself as others see you.

4. Say your speech out loud in front of the mirror and time it. Pretend you are at the podium and gesture. Listen to yourself to make sure you are using good voice inflection.

Revise the sentences you stumble over to make them flow more smoothly. Shorten the parts that drag or go into too much detail.

If you are asked to speak for 20 minutes, make sure your speech takes no more than that. Leave your audience wanting more, not less.

To deliver a good speech, you must prepare and practice. Consider the time spent an investment in your professional reputation.

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THE PRESENTATION

Timing is everything in speaking

Recently, the chief executive officer of a highly successful company headquartered in Michigan was honored at a major business luncheon.

His speech was jampacked with information and anecdotes about his company, causing him to speak well past his allotted time. He lost his audience.

An easy way to avoid the trap of trying to tell everything in a single speech or presentation — whether three minutes or 30 minutes — is to time your presentation in advance.

Here are some useful tips that will keep you out of the penalty box:

► **Ask in advance how long you are expected to speak.**

Request no longer than 20 minutes, which is the optimum length. Then, prepare your remarks to fit the time frame. Allow time for questions.

► **Time your speech for best results.** Shorten and simplify your remarks so that your key messages stand out.

► **Take time to breathe.** Timing yourself in front of a mirror will help your pacing. Build in time for pauses after each main message and make eye contact with the audience.

► **Use PowerPoint slides sparingly.** Allow two to three minutes per slide. Resist the temptation to drag your audience through too many slides. They can't keep up and will quickly lose interest.

Make sure your slides are legible from the back row.

► **Respect your audience.** Finish early and open the floor for questions. Appoint someone to give you an obvious signal when you have two minutes remaining. Then, conclude your remarks even if it means leaving out an important point.

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