

Prepare a speech

Managers are frequently called on to speak at professional meetings, service clubs and community groups, and to present briefings or reports within their organisation. If a speech has been well prepared, with a definite purpose and well-rehearsed, it will be successful.

The most effective public speakers faithfully observe several important steps when preparing for a speaking engagement. As you prepare for your next speech, you may wish to follow these proven guidelines:

1. Understand clearly why you have been invited

Before accepting an invitation to speak, be sure you know why you were invited and what the audience wants to hear. Decline the invitation if you feel you have little to contribute on the topic.

2. Sketch out a brief plan of attack

Three preliminary considerations must be addressed before beginning:

1. Clarify the purpose of your speech – to persuade, inform or amuse? What do you want your audience to feel, think or learn?
2. What do you know about the audience that will affect the way you approach the speech? What are their concerns, training, attitude, background, knowledge and feelings towards you and the topic?
3. Focus on the subject. You know the general theme so now you can focus on a specific topic. Select a working title and identify the thrust of your message.

3. Research your topic

Collect your facts and arguments:

- Brainstorm a list of random ideas relating to your central message.
- Look for natural clusters of ideas which gravitate around your main points.
- Isolate the main concepts you will present and collect further relevant data to support these key points.
- Check your facts.
- Roughly sequence your information.

4. Structure your speech

A good structure is essential. It provides continuity and balance, makes your argument easy to follow, and enables you to drive your message home logically.



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A presentation will consist of three parts:

- 1. Introduction:** Must arouse your audience's interest immediately. Within 60 seconds you must have their attention and interest to listen further.
- 2. Body:** The main part of the speech must present your key points logically, simply and interestingly.
- 3. Conclusion:** Include a restatement of your objective, a reinforcement of what you presented, and a challenge for the audience. The conclusion is your big chance to leave a lasting impression.

5. Prepare your notes

Even if you believe you are word-perfect, never speak without notes. Try to avoid a fully-scripted speech – the audience usually does not like being read to. Instead, use card-size hand-held notes that won't blow away.

On each card write a lead-in sentence to the point you are making, perhaps a few key words or phrases to jog your memory, as well as a brief reminder of an anecdote or quotation to be used while making the point.

Your introduction and conclusion should be on separate cards. Know these very well, ensuring a confident start and a positive end to your presentation.

What are the images you want your audience to remember most? These become your visual aids – flip charts, overhead transparencies (OHTs) and slides. Don't overdo them and keep them simple.

6. Always remember the fundamentals

If it "reads" well, it doesn't necessarily "listen" well. Focus on simplicity, brightness, concrete words and declarative sentences, but avoid jargon. Introduce your ideas little by little. Use anecdotes, real dialogue, personal stories and humour to reinforce your message. Keep it clean – there's always someone you'll offend. Don't bog down in details. And keep it short – few speakers can hold attention for longer than 20-30 minutes.

7. Rehearse

Several practice runs will leave you more confident and at ease. Try this:

Imagine every detail of the event. Actually see the room, the platform and the chairs. Visualise the room filling up with people and the chairperson rising to introduce you as speaker. See yourself rising, walking confidently to the lectern, and looking at the assembled listeners. Control your nerves. Imagine yourself beginning to speak. Work your way through the speech out loud, and don't try to be word perfect.



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8. Check the final arrangements

Provide the chairperson with a brief introductory statement to read. Rather than just listing your accomplishments, use the opportunity to introduce the audience to the style and content of your presentation. Treat the introduction as if it's a part of the speech – include attention-grabbing, relevant material, so you can catch the audience's interest before you even step up to the podium. Make sure you supply in advance a list of resources you will require on the day. Ensure your notes and visuals are in correct sequence. Arrive at the venue in time to check that your audio-visuals are working and will all be seen clearly.

Further information

The following fact sheet provides further information on these issues:

- Deliver a memorable speech