

How to Write an Impactful Speech In Fifteen Minutes – Scott Minnes

Last week I was sitting in a speech writing seminar with Craig Senior in dumbfounded amazement. I've written maybe 50 or 60 speeches and I realized for the first time that I have been doing it all wrong. It doesn't mean there weren't some good speeches but rather that I've been doing it in a way that complicated it greatly, added unnecessary frustration, took a lot more time and had less effect in the end. I couldn't believe it. **Not only that** I realized that there is almost nobody I know, which includes a lot of very talented Toastmasters, that does it properly. We talk a lot about speech structure and elements of speech in Toastmasters but very rarely about the right process for creating and writing one, as if somehow that part is obvious. Tonight, fellow Toastmasters, hold onto your seats. You are about to learn something truly incredible that will make your speech writing very rewarding and take only a fraction of the time. You will learn how to build a focused, impactful speech in a matter of minutes.

The speech structure is basically 5 main speech elements but they must be worked on in a certain order (please see the diagram). This is really important. **Also, when you do this exercise I'd highly recommend that you get away from the computer and find a nice quiet room.** It is far more creative and interactive that way AND EASIER TO POUR YOUR ENERGY INTO IT. This stage is all about effective brainstorming.

1) FIRST we start by writing **the foundation phrase**. This is a sentence, ten words or less, that sums up the meaning and ***the take away for your audience***. This is a very important step since everything in your speech needs to fit this idea – it will save you a lot of time and energy to do this right. **If you struggle here then you aren't clear on your idea or take away message for the speech.** Typically that is why people get frustrated – they go in too many directions in their speech preparation and become uncertain and eventually the speech lacks pizzazz. Keep

debating that foundation phrase it until you get it right. ***If you are struggling work with a mentor on this.*** Everything in your speech in the end has to support the foundation phrase or idea.

2) The SECOND phase is brainstorming your main supporting ideas. These are the high level ideas that amplify your 'Foundation Phrase'. Just keep writing down possible key ideas (USE POST IT NOTES), and once you are done prioritize them and use the best ones, toss out the ones that don't best support your foundation phrase. ***What do you do if you come up with a brilliant idea that doesn't support your foundation phrase? Bank it in your writing journal for another speech!!***

Keep only two or three headings/main ideas maximum for a 5-7 minute speech.

3) THIRD, write the details that support your headings, again this is a brain storming session where you write down all supporting ideas, then prioritize them and throw out the weaker ones.

- Bullet points only for this part of the exercise. For more advanced speakers Craig Senior actually recommends that you give your speech from those bullet points only. 'Try giving your speech that way and see what shows up'. He also made an important recommendation that in your Toastmasters speeches speak about topics that you are already familiar with so you don't have to spend all kinds of time doing research. Lack of time is probably the biggest reason we avoid preparing speeches and don't benefit.

A reminder - your details support the main ideas which support the foundation phrase – it all has to work as one.

4) The FOURTH step is to write the opening and conclusion. Notice how late in the process this is? How many of you have labored and labored over a great introduction without even knowing what

exactly you are introducing? That is why you labored and labored and eventually had a hard time keeping that writing mojo going. By the same token how many of us have thrown the conclusion together almost as an afterthought ***and missed the best chance to give your audience a clear takeaway?*** Writing the opening and conclusion together as the next to last step (there is one more thing to come!) is a brilliant way to create a clearer, more balanced and more powerful beginning and end. Your introduction and conclusion need to work together, they bookend the speech and clarify the lesson or the take away. They are built around your foundation phrase and they need to support your main ideas and they need to give your audience its take away.

For the opening there should be a challenging or thought-provoking statement that 'hooks' the audiences curiosity. It creates interest as well as introduces the main topic. It also helps to start a speech with a personal story that supports the main idea.

The conclusion gives the audience its takeaway message and should sum up the speech.

5th) the FIFTH and last thing you write in your speech outline is your title. Once all is said and done and you've unified your speech elements around your foundation idea the title should be easy to write. In Toastmasters it should also create a sense of curiosity in the audience as you are introduced and walking to the podium.

I challenge you this week to take fifteen minutes and try this speech structure out. If you have any problems or questions let me know and I'll be happy to help you. If you are amazed at what an incredible difference this makes to your speech writing, then please let me know that too!

Side Notes:

This is also an easy structure for a great evaluation and ideal for project or presentation planning

The goal always is to write good, solid speeches, not perfect ones. The pursuit of perfection is paralyzing and unproductive. The good solid speech will lead to better and better speeches (continual, incremental improvement). One good solid speech delivered is worth 1,000 perfect speeches never delivered.