Speechwriting Tips

Writing a speech is not the product of a muse that sits on your shoulder and inspires you. It’s the product of a speechwriting process, a method, a recipe. Here are some tips from top speechwriters around the world to get you started on the road to World Speech Day 2020.

JASON DEUTSCH

Speechwriter at Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australia

1. Choose a subject that you care deeply about.

2. Be clear on what your main message is about that subject.

3. Don’t feel you have to use big words – often the most important things are said simply.

NANCY OLTHOFF

Speechwriter, The Hague, Netherlands

1. Know your audience: what are their dreams, fears, hopes?

2. Make sure your core message sticks like chewing gum. Therefore, keep it short and simple.

3. It is not about you, it is about the story. Feel and embrace the story!

RUNE KIER NIELSEN

Two-time Cicero Award-winning speechwriter. Based in Denmark.

1) Distil your message and wrap it in a personal story of how you came to find it true

2) Choose your metaphors wisely to frame the feel of your speech

3) Leave the audience with a sense that they are already part of something greater than themselves

ELENA APTOWITZER

Head, Speechwriting at National Defence, Canada.

1. Slay hyperbole. Go through your speech, line by line, and make sure that every sentence is true and devoid of hyperbole. I often receive speeches for review that say things like “The Canada-US relationship has never been more important than it is today”, and I think “Really? Not even in those two world wars we fought together?”

2. Move the conversation forward in every speech. So many speeches are full of bland platitudes. Respect your audience enough to make sure that every speech you write includes at least one thought, fact, or idea that the audience hasn’t heard before and will find enlightening.

3. Structure can make or break your speech. Map out a structure for your speech and make sure it makes sense, is logical, and helps your audience follow your thought process.

CYNTHIA STARKS

Former Executive Speechwriter, IBM, USA.

Here’s a simple formula that works:

1. Describe a problem or an opportunity

2. Offer a solution to the problem…or how to advantage of the opportunity.

3. End with a clear call to action

DAN BRADLEY

School Debating Coach, English National Champions.

1. Have a clear structure: set the scene, then explain your message, then try to engage your audience emotionally to spur them to action (even if that's just to change their opinion), based on the message.

2. Never reach for linguistic complexity or content with which you are not comfortable (when in doubt, ask yourself: would your mum or another 'normal' adult understand what you're saying?)

3. It's far better to express one idea really well than many ideas poorly.

BEN ROBERTS

Ministerial Speechwriter, Australia

1. Write like you mean it, write like it matters.

2. A first draft is just a first draft. The best speeches take many drafts to write.

3. A speech does not need to say everything; it needs to say a few things well. Identify a few items that are very important and address them properly: don’t lose the forest for the trees.

BOB DUYNSTEE

Creative Communications Advisor, The Netherlands.

1. Write to the audience: sense how emotional, informative, inspiring, activating or witty your speech can be.

2. What do you want the audience to remember about "your" speech after 3 weeks?

3. Concentrate on the point that you want to make. Not three points. Not two points. No, just ONE!