

The Speech of Tribute

A **speech of tribute**, or commemorative speech, honors a person, a group, or an event, and it can be one of the most moving forms of public address. A special form of this speech is the **eulogy**, a tribute to someone who has recently died. Vivid and memorable examples include Ronald Reagan's tribute to the crew of the Challenger after the shuttle explosion in 1986, Edward Kennedy's eulogy of his nephew John F. Kennedy, Jr., in 1999, and Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Peggy Noonan, presidential speechwriter, captures the power of eulogies:

They are the most moving kind of speech because they attempt to pluck meaning from the fog, and on short order, when the emotions are still ragged and raw and susceptible to leaps. It is a challenge to look at a life and organize our thoughts about it and try to explain to ourselves what it meant, and the most moving part is the element of implicit celebration. Most people aren't appreciated enough, and the bravest things we do in our lives are usually known only to ourselves. No one throws ticker tape on the man who chose to be faithful to his wife, on the lawyer who didn't take the drug money, or the daughter who held her tongue again and again. All this anonymous heroism. A eulogy gives us a chance to celebrate it.⁶

Five guidelines will help you write a eulogy or any other speech of tribute.

First, *establish noble themes*. As you begin developing a speech of tribute, ask, "Why is this person worthy of my respect and praise?" Answer this question by developing themes you want the audience to remember. Focus on the positive. A speech of tribute celebrates what is good about a person; it is not an occasion for a warts-and-all biography. You must be careful, however, not to exaggerate a person's accomplishments. To do so may undermine your speech by making it seem insincere or unbelievable.

Our student Stuart delivered a speech of tribute for one of his childhood heroes: Hall of Fame baseball player Ted Williams. He avoided the trap of organizing his speech as a biographical listing in an encyclopedia. Instead, he highlighted three lessons that all audience members, whether baseball fans or not, could learn from

speech of tribute

A speech honoring a person, group, or event.

eulogy

A speech of tribute praising a person who has recently died.



Cate Edwards celebrated her mother's life, comforting and expressing the sentiments of those who loved and respected Elizabeth Edwards.

ng the years from 1936
present.

ch of introduction
speech introducing a featured
speaker to an audience.

POINTS

Guidelines for the Speech of Introduction

- Focus on the featured speaker.
- Be brief.
- Establish the speaker's credibility.
- Create realistic expectations.
- Set the tone for the speech.

when you are requested, invited, or expected to speak.

The Speech of Introduction

One of the most common types of special-occasion speech is the **speech of introduction**. Some people use that phrase to indicate speeches by people introducing themselves to an audience. As we use the phrase in this chapter, however, we mean a speech introducing a featured speaker. The following guidelines will help you prepare such a speech of introduction.

- *Keep the focus on the person being introduced.* The audience has not gathered to hear you, so don't upstage the featured speaker. Keep your remarks short, simple, and sincere.
- *Be brief.* If you can, request and get a copy of the speaker's résumé. This will give you information to select from when preparing your introductory remarks. The key word in that last sentence is *select*. Your listeners will tune out quickly if your introduction is a lengthy chronology of jobs or events in a person's life. Highlight key information only.
- *Establish the speaker's credibility on the topic.* You do this by presenting the speaker's credentials. As you prepare, ask and answer questions such these: What qualifies the speaker to speak on the subject? What education and experiences make the speaker's insights worthy of our belief?
- *Create realistic expectations.* Genuine praise is commendable; just be careful not to oversell the speaker. Can you imagine walking

to the microphone after the following introduction? “Our speaker tonight is one of the great speakers in this country. I heard her last year, and she had us laughing until our sides hurt. Get ready for the best speech you’ve heard in your entire life!”

- *Establish a tone consistent with the speaker’s presentation.* Would you give a humorous introduction for a speaker whose topic is “The Grieving Process: What to Do When a Loved One Dies”? Of course not. On the other hand, if the evening is designed for merriment, your introduction should help set that mood.

Communication professors should certainly know how to introduce a featured speaker. In the following example, Professor Don Ochs of the University of Iowa did an exemplary job of introducing his longtime colleague Professor Samuel L. Becker, the keynote speaker at a Central States Communication Association convention. You’ll see that Ochs uses some communication jargon because he was speaking to a group of communication professionals. Notice, though, how Ochs’s brief, cordial remarks focus on Becker, establishing his credibility and setting the tone for Becker’s informative and inspirational speech:

Thirty years ago I walked out of an Iowa City store onto the main street and noticed Sam Becker walking about 20 feet ahead of me. His youngest daughter was alongside Sam but she was terribly upset about something, crying, and obviously hurt about something. Sam put his arm around his daughter and, in the space of two blocks, said something that comforted and fixed the problem. She was smiling when they parted company.

I share this snapshot of Sam with you because, for me, it captures Sam’s approach to life, higher education, scholarship, and our profession.

Sam Becker has figuratively put his arm around difficulties and problems for his entire career. He’s made all of us as teachers and scholars better persons and better professionals with his intellect, his vision, his energy, and his instinctive willingness to help.

As a rhetorician I would much prefer to introduce Sam with figures and tropes, with synecdoche, litotes, and hyperbole. But Sam is a social scientist, so I will be quantitative instead.

How much has Sam helped us? Sam has taught at four universities, written six books, been active in eight professional associations, authored 10 monographs, served on 12 editorial boards, worked on evaluation teams for 32 colleges and universities, served on 36 university committees, lectured at 50 colleges and universities, directed 55 PhDs, and authored 105 articles. Without doubt, he has helped and assisted and supported all of us. Our speaker today, Sam Becker.²

KEY POINTS

Guidelines for the Speech of Presentation

1. State the purpose of the award or recognition.
2. State the recipient’s qualifications.
3. Adapt your speech’s organization to audience knowledge.
4. Compliment finalists for the award.

to entertain
ch designed to make
through the creative,
zed use of humorous
rting materials.

POINTS

Guidelines for the Speech to Entertain

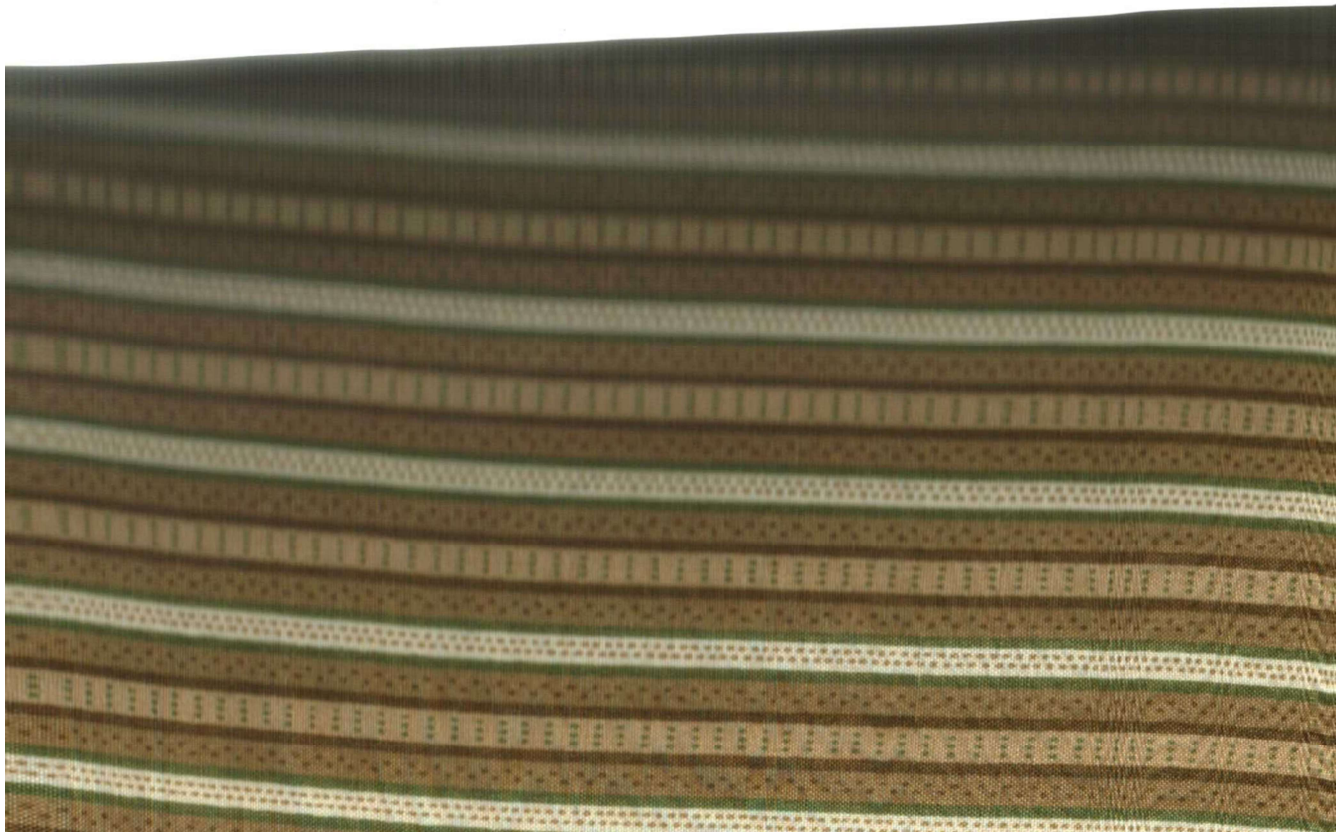
1. Make a point.
2. Be creative.
3. Be organized.
4. Use appropriate humor.
5. Use spirited delivery.

■ The Speech to Entertain

The **speech to entertain** seeks to make a point through the creative, organized use of the speaker's humor. The distinguishing characteristic of this speech is the entertainment value of its supporting materials. It is usually delivered on an occasion when people are in a light mood: after a banquet, as part of an awards ceremony, and on other festive occasions.

A *speech to entertain* is different from *speaking to entertain*. In their opening monologues, Conan O'Brien and David Letterman are both speaking to entertain. Their purpose is to relax the audience, establish some interaction with them, and set the mood for the rest of the show. Their remarks are not organized around a central theme, something essential to a speech to entertain. If you combine the following five guidelines with what you already know about developing a public speech, you will discover that a speech to entertain is both challenging and fun to present.

The first requirement for a speech to entertain is that it *makes a point* or communicates a thesis. Frequently, the person delivering a speech to entertain is trying to make the audience aware of conditions, experiences, or habits that they take for granted. The following are examples of topics on which we have heard students present successful speeches to entertain:



The imprecision and incorrectness of language, especially that used in some advertisements

Many doctors' failure to speak language that their patients can understand and many patients' failure to ask their doctors the right questions

Our interest in or curiosity about tabloid news stories

The routine, expensive date versus creative, less expensive dating options

In some of these speeches, the speaker had stated the main point fairly bluntly by the end of the speech: Look carefully at the language used to sell you things; you owe it to your health to ask questions of your doctor; you do not have to spend a fortune to have an interesting time on a date. In other speeches, speakers simply implied their thesis.

Second, *a speech to entertain is creative*. To be creative, your speech to entertain must be your product and not simply a replay of an Ellen DeGeneres or a Jimmy Kimmel monologue. A replay is not creative, even if you do a great job of delivering the other person's lines. Moreover, if you copy other people's words and don't credit them, you are plagiarizing. Your speech to entertain should give your audience a glimpse of your unique view of the world.

Third, *a speech to entertain is organized*. It must have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, just as informative and persuasive speeches do. The speech to entertain must convey a sense of moving toward some logical point and achieving closure after adequately developing that point. Failure to organize your materials will cause you to ramble, embarrassing both you and your audience. You will feel like the novice comic caught without a finish, a sure-fire joke that makes a good exit line. The audience will sense that you are struggling and will have trouble relaxing and enjoying your humor.

Fourth, *a speech to entertain uses appropriate humor*. The speech to entertain is difficult to do well for a simple reason: most people associate entertainment with lots of laughter and feel that if the audience is not laughing, they are not responding favorably to the speech. But consider the range of things that entertain you, from outrageous antics to quiet, pointed barbs. Your humor should be adapted to your topic, your audience, the occasion, and your personal style. The following four suggestions should guide your use of humor:

1. *Be relevant*. Good humor is relevant to your general purpose and makes the main ideas of your speech memorable. Michael's speech to entertain discussed the ways we label products and people. One of his points was that the product warnings printed on packaging tell us about various companies' views of their customers. His examples were relevant to that main idea and added humor to his speech by helping him show the absurdity of many product labels.

For example, the first thing I saw on the box my toaster came in was a warning. Warning—do not submerge in water, especially when the plug is connected to an electrical outlet. Now just at a practical level, I'm pretty sure that almost anyone should be able to figure out that the chances of getting your Pop-Tart

2. *Be tasteful.* Audience analysis is vital for a speech to entertain. Taste is subjective. What delights some listeners may offend others. Do your best in analyzing your audience, but when in doubt, err on the side of caution. Remember, humor that is off-color is off-limits.
3. *Be tactful.* Avoid humor that generates laughter at the expense of others. There may be times when good-natured ribbing is appropriate, but humor intended to belittle or demean a person or group is unethical and unacceptable. For that reason, sexist and inappropriate ethnic humor is also off-limits.
4. *Be positive.* The tone for most occasions featuring speeches to entertain should be festive. People have come together to relax and enjoy each other's company. Dark, negative humor is usually inappropriate, as it casts a somber tone on the situation.

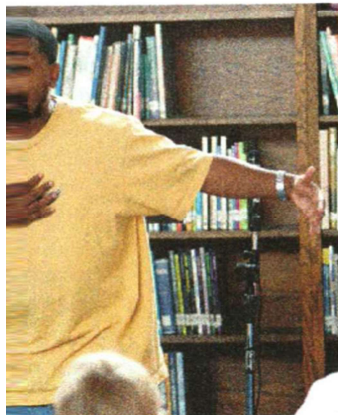
TIPS

Guidelines for the Impromptu Speech

- Speak on a topic you know well.
- Use the most of the preparation time you have.
- Focus on a single or a few points.
- Be brief.

Impromptu speech

- Is delivered with little or no advance preparation.



At the end of this course, you

Finally, a speech to entertain benefits from spirited delivery. We have often heard good speeches to entertain and looked forward to reading transcripts of them later. We were usually disappointed. The personality, timing, and interaction with the audience that made the speech lively and unforgettable could not be captured on paper. We have also read manuscripts of speeches to entertain that promised to be dynamic when presented, only to see them diminished by a monotonous, colorless, and lifeless delivery.

The Impromptu Speech

You are standing in the back of a crowded orientation session when, to your surprise, your supervisor introduces you and says, “Come up here and say a few words to these folks.” Or you receive an award you didn’t know you were being considered for. As people begin to applaud, you start walking to the front of the room. These are but two situations in which you would deliver an impromptu speech.

The **impromptu speech**, one with limited or no advance preparation, can be intimidating. You have not had time to think about the ideas you want to communicate. You begin speaking without knowing the exact words you will use. You have not practiced delivering your speech. Don’t panic! By now you have a pretty good understanding of how to organize, support, and deliver a speech. You have practiced these skills in prepared speeches. All this practice will help you in your impromptu speech. With experience comes confidence. If you follow these four guidelines, you should be ready for almost any impromptu speech that comes along.

First, if you have a choice, *speak on a topic you know well*. The more you know about your topic, the better you will be able to select

that two or three points will help them remember this:

Third, *focus on a single or a few key points*. If you have been asked to explain why you support building a new library instead of renovating the existing facility, think of the two or three most important reasons underlying your position. And remember to use the “4 S’s” as you present those reasons to your audience.

Finally, *be brief*. One public speaking axiom is, “Stand up! Speak up! Shut up! Sit down!” Although this can be carried to an extreme, it is probably good advice for the impromptu speaker. An impromptu speech is not the occasion for a long, rambling discourse. Say what you need to say, and then be seated.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

TIP

The Question–Answer Period

Holding a question–answer period following your speech gives you the opportunity to interact directly with your audience. This usually results in a natural, lively delivery and makes for better speaker–listener rapport.

If questions are friendly, that is a high compliment: the audience is genuinely interested in you and your topic. If questions stem from audience confusion about your presentation, you have an opportunity to clarify. If someone asks you a combative and contentious question, you’ve just been given a second chance to win this person over to your point of view.

You will find the following guidelines helpful when you stand in front of an audience and ask, “Are there any questions?”

1. *Restate or clarify the question.* This is important for three reasons. First, repetition makes sure that the entire audience has heard the question. Second, repeating the question gives the questioner the opportunity to correct you if you misstate it, saving you the embarrassment of beginning to answer a different question. Third, if the question seems confusing to you or somehow misses the point, you can rephrase the question to make it clearer, more focused, and more relevant. Never answer a question you don’t understand.

2. *Compliment the question whenever possible.* We have all heard speakers say, “I’m glad you asked that.” Of course, you cannot repeat that same remark after each question. But you can say, “That’s a good (or perceptive or interesting) question” or “I was hoping someone would ask that.” This applies even to hostile questions. Sincerely complimenting a hostile questioner can defuse a tense situation and focus attention on issues rather than on personal antagonism.
3. *Answer the question.* Of course, the content and the form of your answers depend on the specific questions; nevertheless, the following suggestions may be helpful.
 - *Know your topic thoroughly.* Your success during the Q–A period will depend in large part on your research and preparation for your speech. You should always know more than you include in your speech. Most of the time, poor answers reflect poor preparation.
 - *Be as brief as possible.* Obviously, some questions require longer, more thoughtful answers than others. The question, “How much did you say it will cost to complete Phase II of the new library?” can be answered simply, “Two and a half million dollars.” The question, “What will that \$2.5 million provide?” will require a much longer answer.

(Continued)