

How to prepare a speech contest

by J.A. Gamache, 3rd place Champion at the 2001 Toastmasters International World Championship of Public Speaking



1- Write your theme (your message) in one sentence.

That's the toughest part. What do you REALLY want to talk about? In a five-to seven minute speech you don't have time to develop more than one theme. The moment you are able to express your theme in one sentence it will become easy to find material to support your message. You'll be amazed. And more importantly, your message will become crystal clear for your audience ... and for the judges.

2- Look for material to illustrate your theme.

There are many places where you can find good ideas to prove your point.

Personal stories. It could be your own, or stories you heard from relatives and friends.

Stories from others. You can find them in books, magazines, newspapers, etc.

Statistics. They add credibility to your message.

Jokes. Use them only if they are relevant to your theme.

Quotes. They also add credibility to your message.

3- Illustrate the antithesis of your theme.

What do I mean by the antithesis of your theme? Simply this: say the contrary of your message. Illustrate what would happen to your audience if they do the opposite of your theme. For example, if your theme is: "physical exercise is good for your health", it could be a good idea to give examples of what happens to your health when you do not exercise.

4- Make it a signature speech.

Find something so original that your audience will remember it. It could be a gesture you make, a sentence you repeat over and over, a prop, anything! Be different. The crowd will love it ... and the judges too.

5- Calculate your "speaking flow" to determine the length of your text.

How fast do you speak? How many words do you say in a minute? It's what I call your speaking flow. To measure it, just read any text out loud, stop after a minute, and count the words with your computer. That's all. Let's say that your speaking flow is 100 words per minute. How many words should be in your speech if you want it to be six-and-a-half minutes long? That's right! 650 words.

6- Limit yourself to a 6:30 minute speech so you won't go over time.

In a Toastmasters speech contest your talk should not exceed 7:30 minutes. I would suggest that you write a 6:30 minute speech. This way you still have a buffer of one minute just in case you draw a blank or people laugh longer than expected. Use your speaking flow to determine how many words there should be in your six-and-a-half minute speech.

7- Write your speech.

There are many ways to write your text. Here is a structure I often use in competitions:

Introduction: Introduce your theme, i.e. tell them what you are going to talk about.

Body: Elaborate on your theme and you could use the antithesis of your theme to reinforce your message.

Conclusion: Use your theme in your call to action.

8- Look for feedback to deliver a clear message.

Rehearse in front of many groups. At this stage, you want to know if your message is crystal clear. To get an efficient feedback, ask your audience to concentrate on answering the following questions:

In your opinion, what is the message of my speech?

Is there something in my speech that is not clear?

Is there any question that came to your mind during the speech that I did not answer?

9- Practice delivery with coaches.

When your message is clear then rehearse in front of friends. Ask them: "How should I move? What words should I emphasize? Where should I make longer pauses?" etc.

Do yourself a favour. Wait until you have a clear message before concentrating on delivery. Don't do it the other way! To make your speech clearer, there will be parts of your text that will have to be edited. What if it is one of the parts you worked so hard to make funny? Wouldn't that be a waste of time?

10 - Visualize yourself winning.

This is one of the most important aspects of your preparation. When you close your eyes, can you picture yourself on stage, having fun? Can you see smiling faces in the audience? Visualizing yourself winning will not make you win but it will give you the attitude of a winner ... and judges love that.

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About J.A. Gamache, inspirational speaker :

A bachelor in business administration, J.A. Gamache is a bilingual (French and English) professional speaker from Montreal, Canada. His presentations are humorous, inspirational and lead audiences to take action immediately.

In 2003, He was the president of the Montreal's Chapter of the Canadian Association of Public Speakers (CAPS).

A proud Toastmasters member since 1993, J.A. Gamache is the only Quebecer to ever win a podium (3rd place in the 2001) at Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking and was a finalist in that same contest in 2005 and 2007. Over 35 000 contestants participate in this prestigious event every year.

His free newsletter "Public Speaking with J.A." is read in more than 50 countries around the world by over 3000 readers.

Invite J.A. Gamache at your next convention! Visit: <http://www.jagamache.com> or phone 450-962-4342