

Suppose you are asked to prepare a speech

AES employees have a reputation for doing serious, scientific work, yet many of them get to play a social role. Sooner or later they will be invited to give a speech. Or failing that, they will be asked to *write* a speech for someone at the ministerial, managerial or supervisory level.

The American humorist Mark Twain once said, "... it usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech." He was exaggerating of course, since there is no such thing as a successful, "off-the-cuff" speech. Preparing an address takes knowledge, research, patience and time. If you include time for reflection, library research or interviewing "experts", it all adds up to a lengthy period. The yardstick is to allow one hour's work for every minute of actual speech delivery.

Although it rightly ranks as a social occasion, a speech is far from being an entertainment. Public speaking nearly always has a goal. Its basic duty is to inform and give fresh insights, but it can also be used for "pep-talks" or morale boosting. It is an ideal tool for convincing people to change their minds, and it can even stir them on to action.

Organizing the structure

Like most forms of communication, a speech has a definite structure. A brief opening section is followed by a clear enunciation of the thesis. This is further expanded in the body of the speech and is usually broken down into three or four main points. The close of the speech should be brief and challenging, and aim to leave the audience with a lasting impression of the speaker.

The first 15 seconds of the speech should avoid serious argument and simply establish the speaker, create goodwill and try to set up a common bond between audience and orator. If it blends in naturally with your style, it's a good idea to throw in a short anecdote or humorous story, but it is unwise to use gimmicks. Telling certain jokes can actually be risky, putting the speaker in a win or lose situation. A better way of pleasing your listeners is to pay them a



George McPherson, director AES Ontario region, is frequently asked to give speeches about his work and AES policy to a wide variety of audiences. He always writes his own.

good, honest compliment.

Organizing the body of the speech is the main task. There are several approaches, depending on your work patterns and way of thinking. One method is to place the speech components into shoeboxes. One configuration could arrange them geographically into "land", "air" and "underwater" boxes, another chronologically into "past", "present", and "future". A persuasive speech could divide up into just two boxes, labelled "problems" and "solutions". Of course there's no need to use physical shoeboxes. Speech components can be organized with lists, cards or paste-ups.

Whatever method you use, you will likely be injecting a few main points into the body of the speech. These should be brief and clearly numbered, and to avoid confusion, should not go higher than four. As you enumerate the various arguments, you should throw in such transition phrases as "turning to", "moving on then", or "recapitulating".

Assertion contains logic, emotion and integrity

One problem facing many speakers is that they are forced to give "assertive"

arguments without wishing to sound too aggressive. This assertiveness has nothing to do with the subject. It is just a facet of all speeches dating back to Aristotle. By their very nature theses contain assertions or statements that are either clear or unclear, true or false.

The speaker's aim is to persuade listeners to *believe* an assertion. Aristotle said this could be done in three ways: by appealing to logic, the emotions or the speaker's integrity. The first is realized through presenting a good, strong well-reasoned argument. The second might require you to drum up feelings, from defending patriotism against personal greed, to instilling fear of pollution or energy shortages. (Don't overdo it however, or you will turn yourself into a scaremonger). Finally, you can convince through the power of the speaker's own character or integrity.

There is a problem if you are writing the speech for someone else at a higher level. Often heavy workloads or protocol prevent access to the speaker and stop the writer from carrying out a personal interview. In many cases you will have to learn from associates, friends or members of the speaker's own family

what the speaker's real personality is like, including details of his/her background, hobbies and outside interests. You must certainly obtain enough to work in a few personal references. As a last resort you can dig up past speeches or policy reports from the files and follow the same style and philosophy.

To write for someone else you should also know something about his delivery and the way he is received by an audience. This involves doing "audience research": assessing the size, composition, friendliness or potential hostility of the crowd the speaker is likely to face. If you will be writing more than one speech for the same person, it is wise to attend the speaking engagement personally and watch the performance yourself. Check to see if the speaker sounds natural or pompous and egotistical. If the latter is the case, try and prevent him using words like "honest" and "candid" since these tend to make him seem insincere.

If you are asked to make a persuasive speech, you should know how to present pro and con arguments. If the audience is reasonably receptive and intelligent, you should have no trouble presenting both sides. It should be done subtly however, and with minimum use of "loaded words". Terms like "profit" or "exploitation" can backfire, and it is better to stick to safer words like "earnings" and "utilization". The way to use a counter-argument is to state it, acknowledge its validity, then move on. Or you can mention the counter-argument, then immediately refute it. Never apologize.

Ending a speech should take around 30 seconds. The close should be clear, definite, and should restate the main thesis briefly and forcefully. If possible, wrap the whole thing up with a suitable quotation. You should end with a strong, affirmative rhythm, and if you can work in a thank you to the organization that invited you without slowing the pace — so much the better. Leave the audience with a challenge, a sting in the tail, and a vivid memory of the speaker.

Useful style rules

The majority of AES personnel addressing local clubs or associations will likely keep their remarks at the information level, whether they describe the operation of a weather office or outline their fight against acid rain. Other, more

senior personnel will be called to give "pep-talks" at long service awards, or retirements. At a still higher level AES officials will be required to give speeches on important environmental issues with the object of calming or arousing public opinion. And the most skilled of all will be asked to change people's opinions, or stir them on to new action. Whichever type of speech you give or prepare, there are some useful style rules to follow:

Use a conversational, not a formal written style. Avoid big words you would not use in everyday talk. Be concise, succinct and to the point. Speeches commonly suffer from information overload. You can often cut the draft copy in half, and with a little polishing, come up with an excellent speech. Be careful about the rhythm. Alternate long sentences with short ones, even brief phrases.

When you have finished, read the speech into a tape recorder, or if you are writing the speech for someone else, get them to read it out loud. Sometimes a senior official who feels too inhibited to rehearse with his peers, succeeds admirably with an aide.

Be clear, accurate and specific. Avoid jargon, incomprehensible to outsiders. Avoid sexist allusions like "An Englishman's home is his castle" or calling a grown woman a girl. Use forthright, vivid language that makes your audience both *feel* and *smell* your point as well as hear it. Relating earthy facts like: "Ten pounds of manure is enough to hatch 12,000 flies" is one way to make an audience sit up and take notice. Humor should only be used where relevant and when it does something to help the speech along. It should be fresh, in good taste, and culled if possible from your own experience. Since printed humor often falls flat, make it appeal to the ear.

Audio visual aids

The old adage about one picture being worth a thousand words is an exaggeration as far as public speaking is concerned. While many oral presentations can be enhanced with the use of slides and other audio-visual material, they can also become cluttered with too many explanations trying to keep pace with too many frames. A dozen well chosen, well-placed slides, accompanied by brief commentaries may add substantially to the value of a speech but, they can never

replace its true purpose to convey facts and arguments verbally. Even when showing, it is best to keep the room fully lit all the time.

Some speakers also like to hand out pamphlets and other information material at the end of the speech. This is often a good way of making an audience remember what you said after you have left the hall. There is a danger, however, that hand-outs distributed or circulated while you talk will distract audiences from absorbing your remarks. In contrast to slides, it is best to wait until the speech actually ends before distributing the pamphlets.

Establishing priorities

If you are writing a speech for someone else, a major concern is to give yourself enough lead time. The one-hour's-work-per-one-minute-of-speech rule is certainly worth considering. It means that an "ideal" 20-minute speech is going to need 20 hours of preparation. The speaker should prepare guideline material for the speech writer well ahead of time. This will enable the writer to establish the right priority for the speech in question, do the necessary research, obtain the needed approvals and establish procedures for word processing.

At first glance it may seem unusual that a service, whose stock in trade is in-depth research and scientific observation, should spawn an army of public speakers. But it is obvious that everyone from the presentation technician relating the intricacies of his job, to the Minister defending a thorny environmental issue before a testy group of businessmen, needs a public platform to communicate.



Props for writing a speech: typewriter, dictionaries and a shoe box for sorting ideas.