

How to Give a Speech

Henry H. Fisher

Rules are presented for giving a speech. They were arrived at after years of speaking, listening to others, and collecting ideas from many sources. Every good speaker has his (her) method of presentation, but using the ideas given will help most people.

I've heard many speeches throughout my career. A few have been excellent, more than twice that number were very poor, and the rest fell in between. As part of my work, I've given many speeches and developed a successful technique for speaking. The idea for helping others to give good speeches came from an article describing a speech at a technical meeting that was so bad that the moderator publicly berated the speaker for taking up the time of the audience. In an effort to aid others, my ideas on speaking were formulated into a series of guidelines. This does not mean that ideas on my list are the final rules for speaking since additional ones can always be added to them. My object is to prevent dull speeches because it is really easy to give a good presentation and good speeches are much easier to listen to than bad ones.

Many people think it is difficult to give a speech. Many people have a great fear of speaking before an audience. Hesitant speakers lack confidence. Speakers acquire confidence when they realize that they know more about the subject than anyone in the audience does. Slight nervousness can be helpful when speaking because it keeps the speaker from being too comfortable and "sloppy" and that "sharpens" the delivery. The nervous feeling will disappear as the speaker talks about their subject.

There are two basic types of speeches; those purely for entertainment, and those to provide information, such as formal technical lectures. Some of my rules apply to both kinds of speeches; others are mainly for technical lectures. The first set of rules apply to all types of speeches:

1. Tailor your voice to the type of speech. Sound confident and definitive when delivering an instructional lecture. Use a conversational voice for one that is more entertaining.
2. Vary the pitch and volume (loudness) of the voice to emphasize points.
3. Speak in complete sentences and don't hesitate between words.
4. Be friendly. Look at the audience and make eye contact with different individuals in it; speak to them.
5. Ask questions to engage the audience's attention.
6. Avoid extreme mannerisms such as continuously waving your hands back and forth, the "fig-leaf clutch" (clasping both hands together, down in front), keeping your hands in pockets, leaning on the podium.
7. Know what you want to say and be prepared.
8. Make an outline of speech. It should have an introduction, body, and a conclusion.
Rules for giving a formal lecture:
 9. Know the subject. The speaker knows more about subject than the audience does. If the speaker wasn't the expert then someone else would be giving the speech. Geology is exciting, and the speaker's voice should express that.
 10. Be entertaining. First, grab the audience's attention, then inform them.
 11. Be enthusiastic. Why speak about something you don't like?
 12. Keep it simple. Audience members can't absorb too many facts. For the most part, details are easier to learn if they are read from a book than heard in a speech.
 13. Determine the main point(s) of the speech and stress them. Make sure all important parts are covered.
 14. Keep slightly too much (but less important) material available for the speech. Less important material may be used to fill up time at the end of a speech that is too short. It can be omitted if the speaker runs out of time.
 15. If speech is not memorized, write out notes (key words), not complete sentences. Sometimes the notes can be written after a speech is written as complete sentences. Enlarge the notes on a computer or copying machine to size 20 font, or larger. The speaker can then stand back from the notes (even walk away from a podium), see them, be reminded of the various points to cover, and appear to be quite prepared when speaking. The speaker can walk back to the podium and turn over the note pages from time to time. Speaking from notes forces the speaker to fill in the missing words to form complete sentences and gives the speech a "freshness." **ONLY ACTORS OR PROFESSIONAL SPEAKERS CAN READ COMPLETE SENTENCES AND MAKE THEIR SPEECHES SOUND LIKE ORDINARY CONVERSATION.**
 16. NEVER, NEVER apologize for any mistakes unless they are important technical mistakes that you realize while giving the speech, and then correct them as soon as possible. Audience members probably won't notice ordinary mistakes that many speakers call attention to such as "I forgot to bring slide such-and-such," or "the quality of the slide is poor." Drawing attention to them by apologizing emphasizes them, makes them obvious, and they then appear worse.
 17. Rehearse the speech.
 18. Don't give handouts out too early during speech unless it is absolutely important.

Audience members tend to look at handouts and not pay attention to the speaker. The audience members also may be taking notes and lose track of the speakers thoughts.

HOW TO GIVE A SPEECH (continued)

RULES FOR SHOWING ILLUSTRATIONS:

1. DON'T FACE THE PICTURES WHILE SPEAKING, face the audience and speak to people in it.
2. Use pictures only when applicable – not to merely entertain (during a formal lecture) or kill time.
3. Do not use pictures as an outline for a speech.
4. Many speakers show too many pictures. Choose pictures wisely and don't show all that you have.
5. We learn a lot from hearing. Pictures are useless if a person can close their eyes and learn as much from listening to the speech. This is what makes the TV program 60 Minutes so good. It is really radio with pictures – and it was designed to be that way. The spoken word is the most important part of 60 Minutes. I do not mean to imply that pictures are useless as they can reinforce the spoken word.
6. Consider whether projecting the main points and sub-points as text on a screen really aids the speech. It is possible to emphasize points verbally by a change in the pitch or volume rather than by projecting text.
7. DON'T READ PROJECTED TEXT TO THE AUDIENCE, IT IS INSULTING, those in your audience know how to read!
8. Use pictures to show a specific point, not a generality the audience is familiar with. For example, don't say an area has a landslide and then show an ordinary picture of a landslide; an audience of geologists should know what landslides are like. Showing a specific feature of a particular slip can be done if it will add to the speech.
9. Don't show pictures that would be meaningless to the audience. Don't show a photomicrograph of a specific fos-

sil to an audience of ground water geologists, most of them won't know whether they are seeing the right or wrong fossil, and they probably won't care.

10. Don't show text or diagrams that are complicated or too small to be seen. If such pictures must be shown then the speaker must interpret them for the audience.
11. Depending on the type of speech and the order of presentation, slides and handouts might best be shown after speaking.
12. Show each picture for a minimum of five seconds. If it is worth showing, than it should be seen for a reasonable amount of time.

RULES FOR MAKING PICTURES:

1. All illustrations should be bold and simple.
2. Don't show long formulas or equations.
3. The minimum height of readable lettering on a slide is 3-mm.
4. It is best to show only 1 or 2 curves on a diagram. Three or 4 curves is the maximum, but only if they are well separated.
5. Do not use more than 3 or 4 vertical columns in an illustration; 6 to 8 horizontal lines.

Following this advice will improve most speakers. In conclusion, remember good speakers can "get away" with all kinds of deliveries; and when you're good so can you! And the audience will love you.

Henry H. Fisher, Natural Resource Conservation Service, USDA, 200 North High Street, Columbus, OH 43227.

AIPG 40TH ANNUAL MEETING Glenwood Springs, Colorado October 4 - 9, 2003

PLANNED FIELD TRIPS

PICEANCE BASIN TRIP

Petroleum, stratigraphic and structural geology for tight-gas sands and coals

YULE MARBLE QUARRY

Redstone and the Crystal River Valley

GYPSUM QUARRY AND WALLBOARD PLANT

GEOHAZARDS, COLLAPSE FEATURES, AND EVAPORITES OF THE EAGLE VALLEY

UNCONVENTIONAL RESERVOIRS - TIGHT GAS SANDS,

BASIN-CENTERED ACCUMULATIONS, AND OIL SHALE

ENGINEERING GEOLOGY AND STRATIGRAPHY OF GLENWOOD CANYON

CARBONATE DISSOLUTION AND PRECIPITATION - TOURS OF GLENWOOD CAVERNS AND FAIRY CAVE

HYDROLOGY OF GLENWOOD HOT SPRINGS

WITH DISCUSSION OF WATER RIGHTS

ASPEN AND MAROON BELLS

with ghost town of Ashcroft, lecture on avalanches, Crystal River Valley and Redstone. Geologic stabilization of Highway 82 between Carbondale and Aspen

PALISADES WINERY AND VINEYARD

Geologists and other interested parties who are not AIPG members are welcome to register as non-members to attend the Annual Meeting and participate in the Field Trips and Professional and Technical Sessions. For additional information, please contact AIPG Headquarters at phone 303-412-6205, fax 303-412- 6219, e-mail aipg@aipg.org

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