

SPEECH WRITING

By

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1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

An important starting point for a speech writer is to know their audience. This is done by asking questions on the characteristics of the audience in terms of gender, profession/occupation, age, expectations and the purpose of attending the speech presentation.

A good speech requires the speech writer to have thorough knowledge on the topic of the speech. Such knowledge may result from professional training. An engineer, a financial analyst, a doctor or a lawyer will, ordinarily, have a lot of knowledge on engineering, financial matters, medicine and law respectively.

If one is writing a speech in an area where they do not have professional training or they need to enhance or update their knowledge, they need to do research on the topic of the speech. Such research may take the form of talking to experts, reading magazines and newspapers, listening to relevant programmes on the radio or watching informative programmes on television.

The speech writer should ask themselves what they want to achieve by delivering the speech. A speech may be written with the intention of influencing, inspiring, motivating, persuading, or even shocking the audience so that they take steps in a certain direction.

A good speech, ordinarily, has a clearly defined structure consisting of introduction, the body and conclusion. Consequently, such a speech requires a conscious and careful design. The speech writer should put themselves in the shoes of a commander going to war or a lawyer going to a court of law. The two professionals, if they are worth their salt, plan meticulously to insure victory in the battle field or in the court of law respectively. It is advisable for a speech writer to emulate the two professionals.

2. LANGUAGE

A good speech is characterized by effective use of language. Such language exhibits:

- Appropriate grammar;
- Appropriate punctuation;
- Adequate and appropriate vocabulary;
- Clarity;
- Conciseness;

- Elegance;
- Intensity;
- Cohesion;
- Freshness;
- Gender-neutrality;
- Political correctness; and
- Sensitivity to the sensibilities of the members of the audience.

3. THE THREE-PART SPEECH FORMAT

One of the most frequently used speech designs is the Three Part Speech Format. The three parts of the speech are:

- Introduction;
- Body ; and
- Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

As the name suggests, introduction is the first part of a speech. It consists of:

- The hook (to capture the attention of the audience);
- The theme (or the main idea or subject matter of the speech); and
- The preview (a roadmap to guide listeners through the speech).

The hook

The first few minutes of the speech are crucial for connecting with the audience. Preferably, the introduction should have a strong, dramatic impact on the audience. The introduction should be made in such a way as to:

- Capture the audience's attention;
- Fire the audience's imagination;

- Set the audience thinking; and/or
- Raise audience's curiosity.

There are many sources of hooks, including:

- Short Stories, anecdotes or personal experience;
- Current events, news stories, newspaper pictures or items in news bulletins;
- Quotations from creative works, speeches, autobiographies, etc.;
- Thought- provoking questions;
- Striking visual images or props;
- Important statistics; and
- Proverbs and sayings.

Theme

The hook must lead to the theme or the subject matter of the speech. If the link between the hook and the theme is not obvious, the speech writer has to consciously point out the connection by saying, for instance:

- This proverb leads us to today's topic which is "Ethnicisation of Politics in Kenya"; or
- This news story shows us that corruption is still rampant in our society. Ladies and gentlemen, we are here, this morning/afternoon, to deliberate on the vexing topic of corruption.

Preview

The preview consists of the highlights of what will be presented in the speech. As I have indicated above, it is a roadmap of the speech. It may take the following form:

"My presentation on corruption is divided into five sections. First, I review the nature of the vice during the various political epochs in the country since independence; second, I show the impact it has had on the country's economy and development in general; third, I highlight attempts that have been made to combat the menace and the challenges that have been encountered in the

process; and five and finally, I argue that, in spite of the challenges, we should not give up the fight and that, in spite of losing so many battles, there are prospects for winning the war.

EXERCISE 1

For each of the following three possible speech topics, write a powerful hook and an appropriate preview:

1. My Vision for Kenya
2. Road Carnage in Kenya
3. The Role of Accounts in a Country's Economy

THE BODY

The body of the speech is the main part of the speech. An effective speech body should have:

- Weighty, relevant and convincing points;
- Clearly defined order of thematic development;
- Logical progression of issues moving from one idea to the next with each step propelling the speech forward toward its conclusion; and
- Clear focus on the main idea with all the other information revolving around it to elaborate and deepen it.

Some speeches call for a strict logical ordering of points. Such speeches include those that deal with phenomena where chronology is important or the ones that deal with a cause-effect scenario such as the emergence of problem, its consequences and its containment. If one were to give a speech, for instance, on Kenya's post-independence development it would not to start the speech by talking about the country in the seventies or the eighties. A logical starting point would 1963 when the country became independent. The speech would then follow a chronological order and end with the present. A similar would be expected if one talking about the history of a school. One would need to start at a point when the school was established and then systematically move to the present.

When the speech does not require chronological ordering of sections or a cause-effect sequence, the speech writer has to think of the ordering of sections of the speech that looks natural and gives good results. In a speech on “Cash-Crop in Kenya”, it would not matter much if one talks about coffee before moving to tea or vice versa. A similar free ordering of sections of the body of the speech would also be acceptable if one is talking on the interesting places to visit in Kenya.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of a speech should be powerful and memorable. It should, indeed, be the most powerful and most memorable part of the whole speech. Furthermore, it should be very concise to enable the audience retain it in their memories.

One effective way of concluding a speech is to divide it into two parts. The parts are:

- Review; and
- Final thought(s).

Review

The review is a brief recapping of the main points made in the body of the speech. It serves two functions, namely:

- Highlighting of the points made in the speech thereby drawing attention to their importance; and
- Indicating that the speech is coming to a close.

The speech writer ought to be careful avoid repacking the preview into a review by merely substituting the past tense for the future tense. Whereas the preview contains broad issues that will be presented, a review should comprise distilled the critical points of the speech.

The review can be used to connect the body of the speech and the final thoughts. Preferably, that connecting should be not be contrived but rather smooth and convincing.

Final thoughts

This section of the speech conveys in black and white what the speaker expects or wants of the audience. It should be witty, punchy, memorable and quotable. Strategies discussed for hooks can be used here too. Final thoughts should be related to the body of the speech. Issues that are not related to the subject matter handled in the body of the speech, however important, should be kept out of the final thoughts.

There are a number of options for achieving effective final thoughts. The options include:

- Coming full circle, that is, picking something from the introduction and building on it in a fresh way;
- Calling participants to action especially for speeches that are intended to sell a product or an idea;
- Appealing to the participants to carefully consider the issue or issues presented in the body of the speech;
- Appealing to the audience to think about long term implications of what has been presented in the speech; or
- Making a well-written and a powerful statement that expresses what the speaker views as the vital point of the speech.

EXERCISE 2:

For each of the three topics given in EXERCISE 1 above, write a convincing review and a compelling final thought or final thoughts.

4. FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

It is important to rework the speech after completing the first round of writing. Rewriting is important to ensure that the speech:

- Has language that, besides being grammatically correct, is also clear, concise, cohesive, fresh, intense, elegant and non-offensive;
- Starts and ends appropriately;
- Does not have gaps regarding important information;
- Does not contain unnecessary repetitions;
- Does not have factual errors with regard to statistics, quotations, dates and people's and place names;
- Does not have anything that is morally unacceptable;
- Does not have anything that can lead to the breakdown of law and order; and
- Does not contain anything that can attract legal action.

During reworking (rewriting), some sections of the speech may be deleted and/or new content may be added as the case may be. Furthermore, some parts may be swapped around for better flow of ideas. Rewriting may also involve substituting more appropriate expressions for words or phrases that do not capture specific shades of meaning or excite the intended emotions or mood.

After rewriting, the speech should be keenly edited to achieve finesse.

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