



TOASTMASTERS
INTERNATIONAL

SELECTING YOUR TOPIC



The Better
Speaker Series



**WHERE LEADERS
ARE MADE**



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The Better Speaker Series

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www.toastmasters.org

THE BETTER SPEAKER SERIES

Toastmasters International's *The Better Speaker Series* is a set of presentations offering instruction on basic speaking skills. Designed to be delivered by members to their clubs, presentations in this series provide new speaking techniques and facts that can help all club members develop their communication skills.

Presentations in *The Better Speaker Series* may be offered by any club member and require 10 to 15 minutes to present.

CONDUCTING THE PROGRAM

"Selecting Your Topic" identifies several different approaches for choosing a subject that will suit the audience, the occasion, and the abilities of the speaker. This product consists of four parts:

- ▶ Definition and explanation of the presentation
- ▶ Guidelines for your introduction to the audience
- ▶ Outline for the development of your speech
- ▶ CD of a PowerPoint presentation to be viewed along with your speech

In Your Own Words

The outline is not a script and should not be read word-for-word. Instead, use the document as a guide for presenting the material in your own words and with your own narrative style. The outline is a structure on which to build your presentation. Use the points of the outline to develop your speech, but be the author of your own oration.

Here are some tips on using this program to develop and deliver your presentation:

- ▶ Study the outline in this manual carefully. Familiarize yourself with the general structure. Preparation is the key to a successful presentation.
- ▶ Use the outline to build your own speech using your own words. Prepare a set of notes indicating where you wish to pause, gesture, or add special verbal emphasis. Highlight key words or sentences to help you present the material most effectively.
- ▶ Be expressive when delivering your speech. Use all of the presentation skills you have learned as a Toastmaster including vocal variety and gestures.

USING VISUAL AIDS EFFECTIVELY

Visual aids add interest to any presentation and help your audience retain information. You are encouraged to use them. If you plan to use the PowerPoint slides for this program as visual aids, you will need a data projector, a laptop computer, a table to support them, and a screen for viewing. In the outline, there are indications for placement of the PowerPoint slides. Each is numbered. For example, V1 refers to the first visual.

Please note that the first slide in the PowerPoint show is a title slide and is not included in this numbering system.

If you cannot arrange for projection equipment but still would like to use visuals, you may copy the material on the visuals onto a flipchart. Do this before the presentation. Use a heavy marking pen that does not seep through the paper, and write on every third or fourth page so succeeding visuals will not show through. Also, make your letters large and heavy with plenty of space between them.

Follow these tips when using visual aids:

- ▶ Set them up and test them before the meeting begins. Place them so they are easily visible to listeners. Place your projector so it projects a large, high, undistorted image on the screen. Focus the image.
- ▶ Bring spare equipment, including a projector bulb, extension cord, extra marking pens, etc.
- ▶ Display your visuals only when they are needed. If you are using a flipchart, flip the page back out of view when you are finished with it.
- ▶ Remember not to stand between the screen or flipchart and your audience or you will block their view.
- ▶ Maintain eye contact with your listeners. Do not talk to the screen or flipchart. If you must turn your back to point out something, pause as you point it out, and then resume speaking only after you are once again facing your audience.

EVALUATION AND THE ADVANCED COMMUNICATOR SILVER (ACS) AWARD

Because this is an outlined presentation, for presenting it you will not receive credit toward completing a manual speech project, but you may receive credit toward your Advanced Communicator Silver (ACS) award. Ask your vice president education to assign an evaluator for your presentation.

Conducting any two presentations from *The Better Speaker Series* and/or *The Successful Club Series* is one component of qualification for ACS recognition. For further details, please view the Toastmasters International Web site: www.toastmasters.org.

SELECTING YOUR TOPIC

Introducing the Presenter

TIPS FOR THE PRESENTER: WRITE YOUR INTRODUCTION

All prepared speeches in Toastmasters require an introduction. A proper introduction of you and your speech is important to the success of your presentation. Use the following as a guide in writing your introduction:

- ▶ Include the purpose of *The Better Speaker Series*.
- ▶ Explain why “Selecting Your Topic” is important for a Toastmasters club, stating the purpose and one or more objectives of your presentation.
- ▶ Incorporate some personal background about yourself.
- ▶ Read *When You’re the Introducer* (Item 1167E) for further details on giving a proper introduction.
- ▶ Give your finished introduction to the person who will be introducing you.

TIPS FOR THE INTRODUCER

- ▶ Ask the presenter any clarifying questions.
- ▶ Rehearse the introduction.

SELECTING YOUR TOPIC

Outline

INTRODUCTION

As a Toastmaster, you are encouraged to give manual speeches that follow specific guidelines. However, there will be times outside of your Toastmasters experience when speaking assignments may not be so well defined. Even within the organization, you may occasionally find it difficult to select a topic for a manual speech. Do not be discouraged - there are techniques you can apply to help you select a great topic with a minimum of effort.

TWO SOURCES

When selecting a topic becomes difficult, it is time to consult two general sources of information:

- ▶ **Personal Experience:** The more personal involvement, interest and enthusiasm you bring to a speech, the more likely your audience will respond positively. Personal experiences cause the speaker to deliver the speech with conviction, because the subject matter is not separated from the speaker's daily life or history. There is a surplus of subject matter related to your personal experience. Here are a few examples of personal topics that will generate ideas:
 - **Interests:** Sports, hobbies, travel, entertainment, values, and goals.
 - **Career:** Business processes, ethics, investments, or retirement.
 - **Family:** Ancestors, child-rearing insights, marriage, or traditions.
 - **Education:** Study habits, achievements, memorable teachers, and subjects.
- ▶ **Reference Material:** An unlimited amount of ideas is no further away than your fingertips on the Internet. You also can visit your local public library. You'll discover a great deal of inspiration in:
 - **Websites:** Media sites, university research, medical sites, etc.
 - **Books:** Reviews of various genres, possible re-writes, analysis, and theory.
 - **Magazines:** Economic trends, human-interest stories, discoveries in science, and entertainment.
 - **Newspapers:** Current events, opinions, editorials, travel, and advertisements.

Remember...

If you make use of resources in your speech that are helpful to selecting your topic, make sure the resources are notable and legitimate sources.

V1

V2

V3

GET INSPIRED

You already know from experience that inspiration can be sudden and elusive. Sometimes, all it takes is a television program, a conversation with a friend, or a quiet early morning walk. Suddenly, an idea flashes into your mind. Even the most mundane of activities can set the stage for an inspired thought or concept. Remember to write it down on paper. Creative speech concepts are often fleeting, so keep a notepad and pen close by. Even if you do not end up using a particular idea, keep your notes and clippings in an organized file to be referenced for future speeches.

V4

NARROW YOUR SELECTION

Typically, your main challenge is to narrow your selection. This can be accomplished by using the following criteria to evaluate each potential topic:

- ▶ **Your Audience:** Before you speak, research your audience. To maximize success, match the content and direction of your speech to the needs of those who will be attending. You should ask:
 - How many people will attend?
 - What is their age range?
 - Will they already be familiar with the subject or will you need to carefully define basic terms and concepts?
 - Does your audience have similar education, interests, backgrounds, and experiences?
- ▶ **The Occasion:** Consider the event itself. Your speech may serve a specific purpose and several questions should be asked:
 - Does the event have a theme?
 - When are you scheduled to speak during the program?
 - What will happen after your speech?
- ▶ **Your Own Abilities:** Now that your decision is close to being finalized, review your knowledge and interest in the subject once again. Think about your subject and ask yourself:
 - Do you have enough enthusiasm and interest in your topic to capture the audience's attention?
 - Do you have the knowledge base required to present such a topic?
 - Will they accept you as an authority?
- ▶ **Be Specific:** Whether your speech may be five to seven minutes at your club meeting or a 30-minute speech to business associates, it is important to be specific. Avoid a broad speech topic. You should ask:
 - Is the topic specific enough for the time allotted?
 - Do the sub-points support the topic and add to the speech?
 - What can be cut from the body of the speech?

V5

V6

V7

CONCLUSION

Speech topics are all around us. There is no need to feel overwhelmed when faced with selecting a topic, but it does take some careful decision making. With a little determination and persistence, selecting your next speech topic will be no problem. Once you have chosen a subject of personal interest that fits your audience, the occasion, and your own speaking abilities, you will find yourself coming closer to that ideal of every speaker: a finely crafted speech.



V8

Evaluation Guide

Evaluator's Name _____

Presentation Title _____ Date _____

- ▶ How effective was the speaker's introduction in helping the audience understand the purpose of *The Better Speaker Series* and the presentation itself?
- ▶ Was the presenter adequately prepared? How heavily did the presenter rely on notes?
- ▶ How did the speaker use vocal variety to enhance this presentation?
- ▶ What other techniques did the speaker use to personalize and augment the presentation? Were they effective? How?
- ▶ Did the speaker display the visuals smoothly and at the appropriate times? How could the speaker improve?
- ▶ What aspect of the speaker's presentation style did you find unique? Why?
- ▶ Did the speaker present the material clearly and simply so audience members could easily use the information to improve their own speeches?
- ▶ What could the speaker have done differently to make the presentation more effective?
- ▶ What did you like about the presentation?



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