

Speak

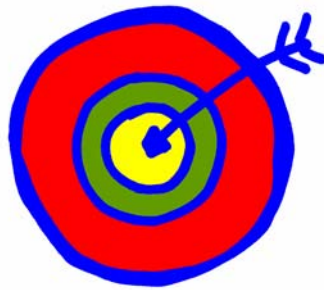
Write!

*A short guide to producing the
perfect speech for any business
or social occasion*

Jim Ewan

Speak *Write!*

Jim Ewan



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by
Jim Ewan

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a response to numerous requests from delegates at my presentation and public speaking seminars. These seminars are designed to take the frankly terrified and give them the confidence to stand up in front of a group of strangers (or worse, their peers!) and make a presentation or speech.

That's fine, they tell me, I now feel confident to deliver, but how do I prepare my presentations and speeches? This slim volume will help.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Swan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "S".

January 2003

BE PREPARED!

There is no substitute for proper preparation. Your audience will sense it, or the lack of it.

For you, knowing that you have prepared well will give you confidence and relax you. That's the good part. The bad part is that you will need up to an hour of preparation for each minute of speaking time!

Do not despair though. Now that I have filled you with gloom, I have a message of hope:

**A speech well prepared is
a speech three-quarters
delivered.**

There, didn't that make you feel better?
No? Well, read on; things will begin to
look up soon.

While there is no shortcut, preparation can
be broken down into a dozen or so, more
or less, 'easy' stages. Those stages form
the rest of this booklet.

THINK.

Think about the purpose of your speech. Every speech must have a purpose - to entertain, to inform, to prompt action or (**you** fill in the blank). Ideally, the purpose should be a single sentence. If you cannot produce this single sentence yet, do not despair. We will talk later about distilling the essence and come back to the topic then.

You may decide on the purpose of your speech yourself. More usually though, it will be forced upon you by your Chairman, your Company, your Sales Manager or any one of a host of third parties. This does not mean that you cannot make the purpose your own, or at least adapt it to suit your beliefs, your inclinations or your style. So mull over the purpose of your speech. Let it simmer away in the background as you go about your daily round. With luck, the opening

and ending of your speech will be revealed to you (but don't worry if they are not!).

Think about your audience. Every audience (like every individual, including you and me) has one overwhelming interest: self-interest. So you must speak to your audience's interests, aspirations and desires. In other words, you must show your audience **WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM**. And you must do it early on in your speech.

If you can identify just one of their problems, then acknowledge and *solve* that problem, you are on your way to a standing ovation. Or, better yet maybe, the biggest sale of your career.

RESEARCH

Research your audience. Find out who are the key members and what makes them salivate. A few "hear, hears" from the top (wo)man present, or merely a grunt and a nod, will shunt the rest of the audience into your arms. You want to be sure that, on the great day, your audience knows that you are one of them and at one with them. Useful questions to ask yourself or your hosts are:

Size of audience?

Age range?

Sex? ('Yes' is the wrong answer. One speaker is reputed to have asked his chairman to let him have details of the audience 'broken down by age and sex'. 'I suppose they are.' was the response.)

Politics?

Ethnic or religious background.

(No Jewish jokes in the synagogue, unless *you* are Jewish, of course.)

Outcome sought?

Specific issues?

Type of speech? (Humorous, serious, entertaining* etc.)

Common jargon / buzzwords?

Start / end times?

What else do you think I need to know?

**all* your speeches should be entertaining!

GATHER MATERIAL

Begin with your own thoughts on the subject. Prepare a mind-map or jot down your thoughts on index cards, one card per topic. When you run out of ideas, go to the library - either a public library or the one belonging to the organisation you will be speaking to, if they have one. Research the subject. Add to your mind-map or topic cards. Create new topic cards. Read all the relevant literature you can lay your hands on; trade magazines, house journals, general newspaper and magazine articles. Cut out relevant snippets (*not* from the library books!) and stick or clip them to your mind-map or topic cards.

As the day on which you will deliver your speech draws near, keep alert for topical material. Television, radio, newspapers and plain gossip may provide you with up-

to-the-minute additions. Referring to current news and to personalities who are making the headlines will give your speech a freshness and immediacy that will keep your audience alert and interested. Additionally, doing this kind of thing gives the appearance of 'up-to-dateness' that can be a real boon if your material is a bit old and tired.

PRUNE

Make two piles of topic cards. Pile one is the essential material, relevant to the topic, the audience and this particular speech. Pile two is the rest. *Do not ditch pile two.* Some of it will go back into pile one as you progress. If you are using a mind map, highlight the 'pile one' data. Later you will find that you need to highlight some of the 'pile two' data also.

'Pile one' is not sacrosanct. Be ruthless if you find that some of it does not fit. Irrelevant data is almost certain to bore or otherwise annoy your audience. Always remember - they will forgive you pretty well anything provided you do not bore!

DISTIL

Now, if you have not already done so, you must define your purpose in a single sentence. Preferably a sentence of seven or fewer words. This is your fine focus, your distilled essence, your opening statement or perhaps even the title of your speech. These are the words that your audience will recall and repeat when later they discuss your speech (as they will, for it *is* going to be memorable). You will return to this statement time and time again as you create your masterwork. Every sentence, every phrase, every word of your speech must be matched against this definition and instantly expunged if it does not complement your purpose.

ASSEMBLE

The time has come to assemble the skeleton. The skeleton is what holds the body of your speech together. It is the framework that prevents the muscle of your prose from subsiding into a gooey mess on the floor of the stage, taking you with it.

From your essential (pile one) information, you will now select and sort your arguments into no more than half-a-dozen or so key sentences arranged in order of strength or impact. The strongest sentence should be the final one, naturally. You do want to finish with a bang, don't you? (Yes, you do!)

When you have completed your skeleton, it should have:

A head. This is your opening statement and its development.

A neck. Supporting material for the opening statement.

A torso. The main points, their development and support.

Legs. A summary of the main points; your final argument(s).

"Wot, no arms?" I hear you say. That's right. Arms are a speaker's worst enemy. Let this be a reminder that, when you come to deliver your speech, flapping arms or meaningless gestures distract audiences and make them as irritable as hell. On the other hand, *meaningful* gestures can enhance your speech beyond measure.

FLESH

Add flesh to your skeleton; with explanations, anecdotes, facts & figures, supporting statements and visual aids.

Beware – you could find yourself emulating Dr Frankenstein. This is the point at which your speech can turn into a monster. Too many facts and figures will send 'em to sleep. Badly chosen or tasteless* anecdotes will reduce your stature in their eyes. Weak supporting statements will invite contempt for your arguments.

*Your taste may not be theirs!

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

What this magnum opus needs is an *impactful* opening. (I think I invented a new word there – according to my spellchecker, anyway.)

You pretty well know what you are going to say. Now you need to make sure that your audience gives you its full attention right from the start. So smack 'em between the eyes with a controversial statement, a loaded rhetorical question or (careful!) an insult. (This may, of course, be your seven-word purpose sentence.)

And should you doubt *me*, let me remind you that Winston Churchill once said that a speaker has only thirty seconds to 'grab his audience by the throat'. And that applies equally to her audience.

CONCLUSION

Fashion an unforgettable conclusion! Your whole speech has built up to this moment. You have led your audience through the arguments, convinced them of the justice of your case, entertained and amused them. Tomorrow something else will hold their attention and you will be a fast fading memory.

Make sure that your final words are unforgettable.

DRUDGERY

Now, write the whole thing out from start to finish, editing as you go. Use simple words and short sentences. Long, involved sentences and obscure, polysyllabic words only work on the page, where one can go back and re-read or put the book down and search for the dictionary. If your listeners do not understand a word or become lost in a convoluted sentence, they will fall asleep - *all of them!* Worse, you may not realise that they are asleep for their eyes may still be open. But when it comes to question time or the social chit-chat afterwards, you will swiftly come to know what has happened. And you will be mortified to realise that *it is all your fault*. That's correct. It's no use trying to blame the audience for their lack of attention. The responsibility lies always with the speaker.

Having written it out and read it through often enough to have become familiar with it, turn it into one-word notes. That's one word per idea! Just enough to remind you of the gist. This bit worries some people. No, it actually worries *everyone*. What if you forget that fine turn of phrase? Those precious sentences that you struggled to create may come out differently if not read word for word. And a good thing too! Read from the page, your words will die. The only way to achieve the illusion of spontaneity is for it not to be an illusion! Your carefully crafted phrases only sound good to *you* in any case. Much better is the phrase created on the fly from memory. Remember this:

Poor speakers read their speeches*
Good speakers use notes*
Great speakers read their speeches*

It will be many years before you are great, if you ever are. So forget reading – it will

make you a poor speaker. Take your courage in both hands and use single word notes. I guarantee your material will be better for it.

*Generalisations. Remember that all generalisations are lies – so you will just have to trust me on this.

VISUAL AIDS

Strictly speaking, you should be thinking about and preparing your visual aids as you go along. But now is as good a time as any to pull them together and assess whether they are to be included or not.

YOU MUST BE RUTHLESS!

Ask yourself - Is it necessary? Does it enhance things? Does it clarify a point that could otherwise be obscure? And if you get a "No" answer, out it goes!

As a rough guide, and here I hesitate to be pedantic because there are so many possibilities, but as a *very* rough guide, have no more than ten visuals per hour. With any form of public speaking, less is more and that goes double for visual aids, especially if you are using computer-

generated material. There is an awful temptation to use presentation software and all its gimmicks just because it is available. Resist temptation! A flip chart and a pen are almost always more effective, properly used.

THE END

You've reached the end - almost!
The hardest part is over at least.
You have created a speech,
presentation, whatever. You've done it
from scratch, on your own. Or maybe you
had help from your team? It doesn't
matter; the next stage is critical.

Having successfully got this far, lock the damned thing away in a desk drawer and forget about it for a couple of days. Then haul it out and read it. Out loud. It will sound terrible. Now you must be ruthless once more. Prune, prune and prune again. Change sentences around. Cut out obscure words and phrases. Hack out whole paragraphs. Strive for clarity. Struggle to be concise (this alone will make you almost unique). Search for neater phrases.

*Should you find that you have shortened your speech by a quarter, a third or even a half, fear not. It will be 25%, 33% or even 50% better for its brevity. Trust me. **SHORT IS BEAUTIFUL!***

And now amend those one word notes!

SPEAK

To your wife/husband/lover/mirror
(often)/cat/dog/children. On second
thoughts, forget the cat and the
children. They will destroy any confidence
you may have had in mere seconds.
Anyone else though, is fair game. Ask
them to comment, to make suggestions
and, most important of all, to ask
questions. (The dog may not be much use
here. But he/she will adore your speech
and give your confidence a boost it
probably now sorely needs.)

Consider all comments and suggestions.
You may accept or reject, incorporate or
dismiss them. But the questions will reveal
the areas where you are obscuring your
message, where you are leading your
audience into an unintelligible wilderness.
These are the portions of your speech that
you *must* work on. While it is common to

have a question and answer session at the end of a talk, it is not there for the clarification of your opaque prose. So rewrite, simplify and try it out again. And amend those one word notes yet again!

Time yourself during these practice sessions. You will probably find that you are gabbling along at 160-180 words a minute. This is too fast. Your listeners could have trouble following you. Slow down and try for 120 or thereabouts. If you naturally speak slower than this, good. (Probably - slow is good, sloooow and monotonous is very bad.)

LAST MINUTE CHECK

The day before your “performance”, check with the organisation running the show to make sure nothing vital has changed. If the Managing Director dropped dead a couple of days ago and you have included a jocular reference to his/her blood pressure, your reception may well be muted! And *they* will not remember to tell you, I can guarantee.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Do the Chairman (and yourself) a favour. Write your own introduction. If the Chairman is experienced, he will embellish your words to your advantage. If he is *not* experienced you certainly don't want him starting you off on an uphill gradient!

GOOD LUCK!

Finally:

**Why not book Jim Ewan as guest speaker at your
next conference, dinner or seminar?**

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