

# Speechcraft

by Bill Morgan, DTM – Presented to Parker Toastmasters on July 19, 2018

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Speakers can have trouble just getting started on their speech. And once you sojourn on that path how might one find one's destination? I endeavor to provide you direction on how the process works, start to finish.

Let's break it down to discrete steps, shall we?

## Inspiration/Ideation

This is the stereotypical idea on a napkin phase. While not recommended, sometimes we don't have all the materials needed to capture our ideas when inspiration strikes us. When you are ready, write down anything and everything that pops into your head. Mark up a whiteboard, use up a whole packet of Post-It notes – it doesn't matter exactly how you do it but it matters that you DO document it. Look up mind mapping as a creative way to document your ideas.

You never know when inspiration will visit. Carry around a notepad or use an app on the smartphone or tablet that you carry around to jot down these little lightning bolts of insight.

There is a good point in choosing analog vs. digital. There is real value in capturing free-flowing thoughts on a blank sheet of paper or whiteboard vs. just typing words in Word or PowerPoint. This is because we tend to edit while we write digitally, and less so when we hand-write, draw, shape and scribble.

## Organization

Remember the outlines we used to do when they first made us write papers in school? We hated them, didn't we? But they are a necessary evil. They allow us to structure our ideas in the light of day. What is different here is that this used to be the first step, now it's the second. So we have a font of ideas from which to harvest.

Building an outline is a crucial step to help you examine your topic.

Remember that every speech should have a beginning, middle and an end. The beginning is your opportunity to introduce your idea. It may have clues but don't give everything away....yet.

The middle allows you to go into more detail. Keep in mind that for the middle audiences connect to story better than a robotic repetition of information.

The end should thematically connect to your beginning so that the audience can make sense of the whole speech, and leave them satisfied, in the know.

## Fermentation

You've caused a little churn in your cerebellum and now it's time to rest your hyperventilating head. Put away all your materials in a folder, no matter digital or physical. Seriously. Do it.

Now it's time to go for that walk. Rearrange the pantry. Play with the kids. Detail the car. Keep busy and active and whatever you do, don't look at your materials. I recommend you wait at least a day or two, but why do I insist do you this?

The reason is because of so-called shower inspiration. I'll never forget this – when a very good friend of mine was in college he had a brilliant professor who admonished his students to pay attention, even in the

shower, for interesting thoughts to appear. Why is that? When we give our conscious mind a break we drop our guard, and it relaxes our subconscious, and suddenly it's invited it to the party too.

This is this time that your thoughts will percolate just below the surface of conscious thought, and what they create will be wonderful.

When the break is up, you are refreshed and you can continue your journey. And you will look at your speech with fresh eyes. Which leads us to the next step....

## Formulation

Formulation is where have finished the outline and are now beginning to put complete sentences and paragraphs together into your burgeoning presentation. The break you took will bring in new insights and creativity, and you will probably write a lot. Maybe too much. But go as far as your thoughts allow on your topic. You don't want to edit here but rather continue to capture all your formulated thoughts.

To make a blunter point: Yes, there will be words. Lots.

Did you know that Word and Google Documents both have functions which allow you to track how many words you write in a document?

Now that your writing is finished take stock of your word count. Quote finished unquote.

A rule of thumb is that the average English speaker can speak out loud in normal conversation 80-100 words per minute. That means for a typical speech of 5 to 7 minutes you are going to need to write from 400 to 700 words.

You may be above or below the content you need for a complete speech so you might not be as quote finished unquote finished as you originally thought. Some speakers find that they have enough extraneous material to put into another speech so don't just delete – extract and save because you may have excellent formulations that don't belong in this speech but perhaps belong in the next one.

Sometimes it can be fruitful to return to the fermentation stage after some writing. It's up to you. This is also a place where you can get feedback from someone else. I have a work colleague located in

California – Amy. She’s active in my company’s Toastmaster club there and I like to get her feedback on my outlines and drafts of speeches. And I share my successes – and failures too, to figure out the lessons learned. Case in point – my Godzilla poem, which went over just as well as a radioactive lizard trashing Tokyo.

## Execution

Execution begins with practice and culminates in the delivery of your speech before an audience. You may be surprised to hear my recommendation that you should limit the amount of times you practice delivering a speech. Usually practicing 2-4 times will provide you the comfort level you need to deliver the speech.

Certainly there are exceptions to this rule. For example, let’s imagine that you are delivering a lengthy keynote speech in front of a big audience, at an important conference. Of course use good judgement in determining the right amount of practice. Here, you would probably have to practice many more times.

The good news is that right now we don't have to prepare that much because we are here to train ourselves in incremental steps. We are developing our basic skills each time we practice. Verbal calisthenics, if you will.

And speaking of practice - I cannot emphasize this point enough - there is no equivalent to delivering a speech before a live audience. This is where you learn how your speech delivery connects you and your ideas to other people. I believe wholeheartedly that it is the only way to improve your public speaking skills.

So once you practice and then execute your speech, is it over? Hardly. Because of the evaluation you will receive you get immediate feedback on the results, and some pointers on making your next one even better. Take notes here - your evaluator is providing you valuable improvements to use on your next speech. She is giving you a valuable gift of insight.

## Practitioner

Now that you have tried a few speeches, you are in the know. You are a player on the field beginning to master the game and the rules. Use this to your advantage – you now can engage with your fellow speakers to compare notes and learn from them. Don't be afraid to ask questions – someone will be flattered that you are interested and they will certainly enjoy the exchange.