

TOASTMASTERS ST. GALLEN

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE SPEECH.

By Alberto Halfeld

Introduction

Message

E/I Points

Structure

Delivery

INTRODUCTION

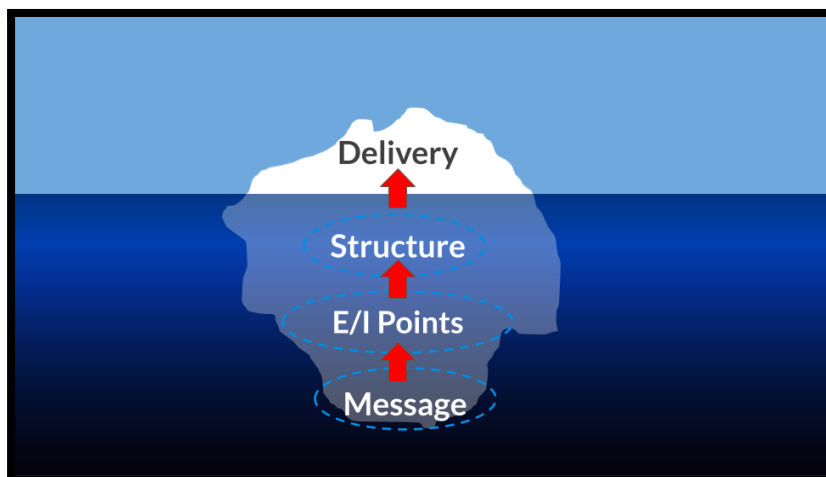
Hello, reader!

Welcome to this e-book which way longer than it has any right to be! I promise it's an easy read, though. It has lots of sexy white space.

My goal here is to explain the way I view how great speech should be constructed and help you apply it to your own work. But above that, I want to give you the best MINDSET when preparing a speech.

Most speakers fall into the trap of the speech iceberg.

This is when one watches an impressive speech and focuses on the superficial qualities they are able to perceive, instead of breaking the speech open to understand its inner workings.



The elements underneath the water are the Message, E/I Point and Structure.

Notice the little arrows between these items. The reason the arrows are there is that each element will dictate the next element.

In other words, your message will tell you how your emotional/intellectual points should be. Your message and E/I points will tell you how the structure should be. Your message, E/I points, and structure will tell you how you should deliver your speech.

It will all make sense as I talk more about each element individually. This is exactly what I plan to do for the first part of this guide!

Just to make myself clear, I do not mean that you need to START preparing your speech in this order.

You probably won't have a clear message when you first have an idea for a speech. Maybe you just have a fun story you want to tell or an interesting topic that can lead to some strong E/I Points. Or you just want to try a creative way to deliver an idea. That is perfectly fine.

What I am saying is that, at some point, you'll have to figure out what you truly want to say. At some point, you will need to have a strong message, that dictates your points, that dictate your structure, that dictates your delivery. You don't have to *start* in this hierarchy, but you must *deliver* a final product that follows this hierarchy.

And, if for the next year, you focus on mastering these three elements, you will be light years ahead of most speakers.

Buckle up.

MESSAGE

The message is the core of any speech.

Always. Always. Always.

This is the core purpose of a speech: to add value to an audience's life. Because of this, if I had to define "Message" it would be any thesis statement that answers the following question:

What do you have to say about life and how it should be lived?

Because of this, at its essence...

A speech is a short guide to life.

This applies to both informational as well as entertaining speeches.

Yes, you can make a speech that makes the audience laugh. Yes, you can make a speech that makes the audience cry. You *can* be entertaining. But entertainment is not the *core purpose* of a speech. Entertainment is just an *after-product*. The goal is to add value to your audience. After all, what use is an entertaining story if it doesn't tell me anything about life, even on a small scale?

What is the key to a powerful message?

Simple:

BRUTAL, UNCENSORED HONESTY.

Yet, this is where 90% of speakers fail at.

Most mediocre speeches I see have messages that are either non-specific or disingenuous.

People think that they need to say what the audience wants to hear. What is politically correct. What is safe, what is right. To a speaker, that might be comfortable and reassuring. But to an audience, that is absolute *poison*.

Here's an exercise. I made two sets of messages. A and B. These are messages that could be part of different speeches. If I just told you that these are the messages of a selection of speeches, which group of speeches would you be the most interested to watch? A or B?

Set A: "Follow your dreams"; "The key to good childhood is positivity"; "Motivation is the key to success"

or

Set B: "Following one's dreams is actually misguided career advice that results in starving artists"; "Crying is healthy and part of growing up"; "Motivation is the human's brain excuse for lack of discipline".

So?

I bet you picked set B. Even if you don't agree with those points, you are still more interested in listening to how the speaker will illustrate them. It seems like thought was put into them. It might even be a perspective you've never heard before.

Why? Because, surprise surprise, those were my honest opinions. They came from a specific person's uncensored conclusions and views in life. Maybe you don't agree with them, maybe you think they

are flawed, but even then, you'll be more interested in listening to them than something you have heard one million times before.

Honesty = Originality.

Why?

Because there are not enough speakers being honest.

And if you're honest, originality will naturally come.

Go say something that will probably make people disagree with you. Something that may make you look like a fool or crazy. Risk people seeing your vulnerable side. Even if they don't fully agree with your point, they will respect you for speaking your mind.

Note that when I mean "saying something about life" it does not have to be on an existential scale of life and death, morality is God real, are guns bad. No, not at all. You can talk about how life should be lived on a small scale. How to make an effective schedule to be productive. How this one funny story in the supermarket taught you when to shut up and listen to people.

As long as it's something that REALLY MATTERS to you. If it doesn't genuinely and honestly matter to you, trust me, audiences will sense it. And it won't matter to anyone else.

If you can reach honest and original messages, you'll be light years ahead of 90% of speakers. Speakers who are only worrying about whether their eye contact is good or not.

Your message is something that you should be able to write down in a *single sentence*.

Actually, go ahead and write your messages in single sentences. Do this for every speech you have. It forces you to be clear about it and say it with as few words as possible. If can't write your message in a single sentence that might be because you don't understand your own message, or you don't even have one.

You don't have to include this sentence in your actual speech, but you can write it down it for yourself. Use it as a reminder of what are you trying to accomplish with this particular speech.

An exception to having a clear message is an open-ended speech. This is when you don't reach a specific conclusion, but you present two sides of an argument and you let an audience decide for themselves what they believe in.

This is also fine. However, notice what is actually happening here. In an open-ended speech, you don't have zero messages. You actually have TWO messages. A-ha! Two sets of values say something about life and how it should be lived. The only difference is that you don't pick the winning message. You let the audience do that. You can't escape the power of the message!!

EMOTIONAL/INTELLECTUAL POINTS (E/I POINTS)

If your message is the theory, your E/I points are the *application* of that theory.

These are the points that aim to illustrate why your message is true. This is the meat of your speech. These are the parts that your audience will remember weeks later after you deliver your speech.

See how the E/I points naturally come from the message?

Entertaining speeches will have emotional points while informational speeches will have intellectual points.

How to make good E/I points?

I'm not going to tell you "just be original" because that is not helpful or practical. However, there are three points that, if you nail them, you'll automatically create great E/I points.

1. Specificity
2. Acknowledging opposing arguments
3. Focus

I. Specificity

I'm putting this as number one because I see SO MANY potentially good speeches that are ruined by being generic or vague with their

points. Half of the speeches you see could be significantly improved just by nailing this aspect.

You would think that, in order to relate to dozens or hundreds of people, you would have to make your speech as general as possible. However, in reality, it's the complete opposite.

There is this bizarre reverse relation where the more specific you are in your stories or points, the wider the general audience that is able to relate to it.

There are two easy ways you can achieve specificity:

a) Personal Experience

What is more emotionally honest to you:

"Easter is a time of celebration of family and life. Easter is not just about buying and eating chocolate or making egg hunts. We should get past this and associate it with family.

Or

"When I was seven, every Easter, my father and I would go to the swiss alp of Regi in order to ski down the slopes. I used to go into the kid's track because I was not old enough to ski down the bigger slopes. But nevertheless, he taught me how to pizza-shape my skis and how to stop by tilting my torso. Every time I think of easter, I don't think of chocolate. I think of snow. I think of bending my knees as I zoom past another slope. I think of my father. And I hope people can associate Easter with something different from what you can buy at a store".

I'm sure it's the second.

Yeah, maybe I am not able to relate exactly to go hiking with my father in the local swiss alps. But I am able to associate the EMOTION of your story with something that is EMOTIONALLY similar to me. Maybe I relate your swiss alp story with me fishing with my grandpa during Easter time in Brazil. Someone else will relate it to having a picnic with their brother at the beach. And so on.

And this emotional association is only possible to be achieved when you are very specific with the stories you tell.

I don't know if you have seen the famous horror movie *Get Out*, but it's a great example of this. It's about a black guy who is dating a white girl and goes to visit her parents. He slowly figures out something darker is happening there.

I have my problems with *Get Out*, but you have to recognize that this movie was a breakout hit with all audiences, black, white, Asian, Latino, etc. This is because the writer-director drew from his personal experience as a black man and showed a specific portrait of the "black culture" of his main character and his story. This allowed non-black people to, for the first time, see the world through the eyes of a black man. White people could experience brotherhood, racism, and cultural differences. By the end of the movie, an audience of white people was actually rooting for a black guy to kill a family of white folks. That's insane. And all of this was due to specificity that came from the personal experience of the writer-director.

b) Research

This can come in the form of statistics, historical events, current events, interviews with famous people (or with someone you know), scientific studies or more.

If you want to talk about a certain topic, but you do not have enough experience to do so with SPECIFICITY, go research. People can tell if you have done research or if you're just drawing from common knowledge. Go research.

Not only does research make your arguments stronger as you have concrete evidence to back them up, but it will give you specificity that you would never be able to reach only with your general knowledge.

Usually, personal experience is more appropriate for entertaining speeches while research fits intellectual speeches. But that does not mean you cannot add some of your personal experience into an intellectual speech nor drop some data into your entertaining speech. Just don't overdo it.

II. Deeply Acknowledge the Opposing Side.

By opposing side, I mean acknowledging the arguments of people who will disagree with your message.

If your message is that "waking up early regularly can lead to a more productive work life" you need to keep in mind there will be a lot of people that will say "But I'm a night owl, I know I am way more productive at night than in the morning" or "I go to sleep late because of work and I need lots of hours of sleep, so I can't get up early".

This is actually good. It may seem like it's not good because there is criticism to your message. And you don't want your message to be

criticized! But instead, see this as an opportunity to make your message even stronger by acknowledging this criticism instead of pretending it does not exist.

How? Very simple:

1. Bring up the opposing arguments
2. Disprove them

"You might think that you are a night owl and because of that, waking up early won't work for you. But actually, there is no such thing as early birds or night owls. There is only people who have practised waking up early and those who haven't. You are not biologically programmed to be more productive at a certain time of day. Therefore, with a week of waking up early, you can train your brain to be productive in the mornings. Your productivity is malleable, not fixed".

This will make your message **STRONGER** because you show that it stands on its feet in the face of criticism.

If your speech is a story, this can be achieved by having a character that believes the opposite of the message. They will act in a way that challenges the message and its validity. In order to disprove them, we can have them fail or pay a price for their actions, showing that their beliefs are flawed.

III. Focus

The name says everything.

You need to see your speech with a laser focus lens. You have 5 - 7 minutes to fully get a message across. That is not a lot of time.

Because of that, **EVERY E/I point you use must either support or challenge your message. Otherwise, they should NOT be included.**

If a point in your speech is not serving your message, it is taking attention away from it.

And we cannot afford this in such a short period of time. Either CUT the E/I point, or REPURPOSE it in order to be aligned with the message, either supporting or challenging it.

STRUCTURE

The reason structure comes after Message and E/I points is because the format is here to serve the message and the E/I points.

Good structure is not about LENGHT. I won't be telling you how long to stay in each section. Good structure is about purpose.

What I am presenting now is not a structure that is meant to fit a cute format asked by Toastmasters. This is a structure that is here to serve your message and your I/E points. Let's see:

HOOK

SET-UP

E/I POINTS

REPRISE

CLOSING

HOOK

This is your very first moment. As I have said multiple times at meetings, you should accomplish two things.

- Be exciting, intriguing, scary, funny, creative.
- Hint at the topic.

That's it.

However, do NOT give away the message here! Just hint at the topic.

SET-UP

This is your transition from your hook into your E/I. Yeah, sure, this can be the moment you say "Fellow toastmasters, dear guests, today..." Sure, this can be the time when you explain the topic you will be talking about. These can be fine examples of Set-Up.

But the one thing you MUST do in this part answer the BURNING QUESTION everyone in your audience will always have:

Why should I care?

Answer this question clearly and as *strongly* as you can.

For instance, if you want to talk about the positives and dangers of social media...

"In summer of 2016, I met an Indian friend at summer camp. We got along, shared our passion for musical theater, and similar sense of humour. But as the summer ended, we had to go our separate ways. Thankfully, platforms like Whatsapp, Letterboxd, and Hangouts,

allowed my Indian friend and I to keep in touch, share laughs, and become very close friends despite not meeting face to face for over six years. But, at the same time, these calls and messages kept me distracted from school and my grades worsened. I realised that neither the deep bonding nor the bad grades happened just because of my friend. It happened because of social media and how I used it. Whatsapp, Letterboxd and Hangouts gave me one of my best friendships, but also some of my worst academic performance. For this reason, I've decided to find out if it's worth having social media at all and what I found surprised me".

Now we have an interesting dilemma. First, the use of a SPECIFIC personal story makes us more invested. Not only do we all use social media, but social media, to some degree, can dictate our success or failure in life. And you have researched how, or if, we can use it.

Now I *have* to listen.

In the words of Leonardo DiCaprio's character in Django Unchained:



You grabbed our curiosity in your first 10 - 20 seconds, and now you got us emotionally or intellectually invested in what you have to say. You have us.

E/I POINTS

This is the meat of your speech. I won't tell you how many points to include here, this is up to you. Toastmasters recommends 3, but do whatever you want.

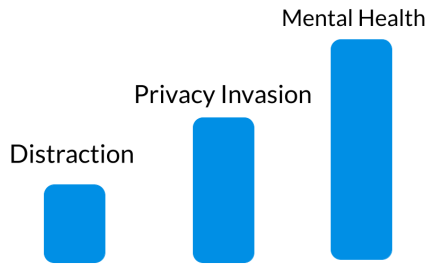
However, what you should ensure, is that each one of your points has a sense of ESCALATION. In other words, if you have an entertaining speech, each moment in your story must be more exciting/funnier/scarier/more touching than the one that came before. In an informative speech, each point you bring up needs to be more interesting or persuasive than the last one.

Say you want to talk about the negatives of social media. You have: "Privacy Invasion, Distraction, and Mental Health". You could order this in a way that increases the level of proximity to the audience, and thus, the increases how scary social media can be.

Start with distraction. Sure it's a negative, but it's not the end of the world. It's a small external problem it can cause.

Now we move into privacy invasion. Now that's scarier because it's closer to us. It's something personal that is being invaded.

Next, we end with mental health. Nothing can be more personal to us than what happens inside our heads.



This way, your speech only gets scarier and scarier. Or in any context, better and better.

REPRISE

Okay, this is my terminology coming into play. In musical theatre, a reprise happens around the end of the musical, where various melodies and songs from before all come back together in a very satisfying way.

Thus, in a speech, **the reprise is when you bring all of your points together in order to find what is in common with them so you can derive your message.**

Bringing back elements that were already established is extremely satisfying for an audience. And it is even more powerful when we bring back elements that reveal the message.

This is the "aha-a! moment" for the audience. Where all the pieces of the puzzle fit and they can see the image formed.

CLOSING

Keep it short and punchy. Load the gun and shoot it. Click-BOOM!

Once an audience realizes that you are reaching your conclusion, it's a ticking clock for you to finish. Otherwise, they will get "ending fatigue". This is when they feel that the ending of the speech is coming but it never actually ends. A bad ending can kill an otherwise good speech. So make it count.

Here are some classic kinds of ending that can work with different kinds of speeches:

1. End with an emotional punch. This can be the climax to an emotional scene, a final killer joke, or a final scary moment.
2. Loop back to the start. Audiences love when things that were established earlier come back. And nothing makes them go wetter than when your beginning connects with your ending.
3. Call to action. This is when you end your speech by inviting your audience to partake in the same journey as you. It leaves them with a sense of excitement and they keep your message in mind long after the speech is over.

So, just one last time, to wrap it up:

HOOK - Grab their interest

INTRO - Why should I care?

E/I POINTS - Points that serve your message, with escalation

REPRISE - Bring everything together

CLOSING - Click-BOOM!

DELIVERY

By delivery, I mean all the SURFACE-LEVEL elements we experience when watching a speech. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Body Language
- Voice
- Moving on the stage
- Eye contact
- Slides
- Props
- Interaction with the audience

My gripe with public speaking is that almost all people focus on delivery. People think that good speakers are the ones who talk the most confidently, and not the ones who add the most value to their audience.

I am not saying that these elements are not important. They are. However, they are like ornaments on a Christmas tree. Yes, the most beautiful Christmas trees are the ones with shining lights, stars, and snowflakes. But when you're putting up a Christmas tree, you can't start with the ornaments. You need to start with the foundations: putting the trunk firmly, setting up the base, and adding all of the branches. Only then, should you put the star on top of the tree?

Thus, **the ONLY purpose of delivery is to *support* your message, your E/I points, and your structure.** And that's it. The End.

For example, if you have a positive uplifting message about life, your body language should also be positive and uplifting. Your walking on stage can help emphasize your structure, as you move around

according to each part of your speech. Your slides are there to help clarify your intellectual points with the use of images, graphs, and videos. And so on and so forth.

However, delivery is NOT here to wow your audience. Delivery is NOT here to mask the fact that your message is bad and maybe people won't notice it because you have good body language.

What I am saying here is going to ruin 80% of speeches for you. Sorry. Because now you'll see through every speaker's delivery. You can see all the tricks they are using to disguise a boring message, weak E/I points, and confusing structure. They are masking the elements that really matter with "public speaking fairy dust".

You're taking the red pill, Neo, and this is the rabbit hole.

So, one last time, this is the pyramid of importance for any speech. Each element dictates the next one.

Message → E/I Points → Structure → Delivery