

TOASTMASTER®

March 2010

THE GLORY OF THE STORY

Lessons from
storytellers

**The Better
You Write It,
the Better
You Say It**

**A Curmudgeon's
History of the
Academy Awards**





The Gift You Give Yourself

† My purpose for joining Toastmasters was to find employment. Six weeks after I joined, I found my first job after college, working for U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon. Yet my journey of self-improvement was just beginning.

Even though Toastmasters gave me the confidence to talk my way into a job with Senator Hatfield, I still did not master the art of self-assurance. One month after I joined Senator Hatfield's staff, and two months after I joined Toastmasters, worked at an event for the senator that was attended by almost every past and current politician in Oregon's recent history. Since I love politics, I was in heaven! I easily could have walked over to U.S. senators, governors, state representatives and judges and asked them questions about history, politics or communication. What an opportunity!

What I did was sit in the corner and talk to no one. I was so overwhelmed and uncertain about what to say that I said nothing. I still regret my missed opportunity to mingle with my political heroes.

I discovered that day that I still had more to learn – especially about believing in myself and my abilities. That is where Toastmasters has made all the difference in my life. Upon returning to my club the following week, I promised myself I would never again let my lack of confidence stop me from following my dreams.

Answering Table Topics each week, learning from evaluations, giving speeches, and serving as a leader in my club and district helped build my confidence. Day by day, year by year, I still continue to learn and grow. As do you, in your journey of self-discovery.

In 2004 I had the opportunity to meet then-U.S. President George W. Bush. He was shaking hands quickly with onlookers while moving along a rope line. I really wanted to take my picture with President Bush. When he shook my hand, I did not let go. As the Secret Service began to notice this, with a smile I asked the president for a photo. My friend stood nearby with a camera and I received a snapshot of my moment with history. Toastmasters gave me the confidence to make my dream a reality.

Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh said, "If you hear a voice within you say, 'You cannot paint,' then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced." Fellow Toastmasters, have belief in your abilities, your talents and your purpose. Toastmasters gives us the confidence to courageously achieve our dreams. Your journey of confidence-building begins now!

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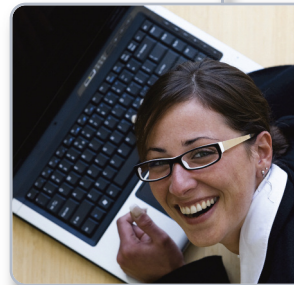


The Better You Write It, the Better You Say It

Remember these key principles of speechwriting.

By Philip Yaffee, CC

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The Toastmasters Vision:

Toastmasters International empowers people to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills, and find the courage to change.

The Toastmasters Mission:

Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.

Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.

It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.

The Traveling Toastmaster

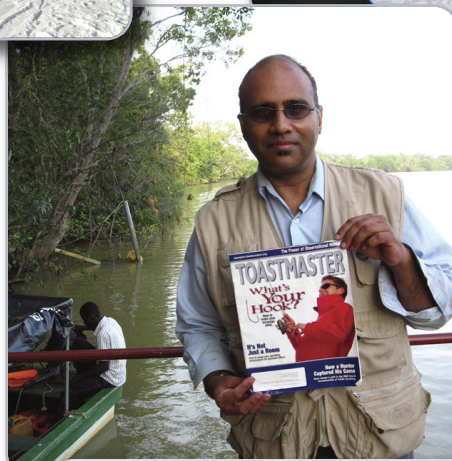
Picture yourself here! Are you planning to climb a mountain or cross the Sahara? Will you travel to Tokyo, Paris or Dubai? If so, be sure to take along a copy of the *Toastmaster* magazine. Pose with it in your exciting surroundings – the more challenging and far-reaching, the better. E-mail the high-quality image to photos@toastmasters.org and it might end up in the *Toastmaster* magazine or on our Web site's Photo Galleries page. **But here's the hitch: You have to have the *Toastmaster* magazine in the picture!**



Sumi Goto of Thornleigh Vital Toastmasters in Thornleigh (Sydney), Australia, hikes Whistler Mountain, BC, Canada.



Bernie Kreiner, of the Evergreens Toastmasters in Vancouver, BC, Canada, treks through the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal.



Tony Pinto, of the Boston Toastmasters club in Boston, Massachusetts, stands on a river bank in Gambia, West Africa.



Charles Barragan of Lakeside Speakeasy club in Oakland, California, relaxes in the South Pacific island of Moorea in French Polynesia.



Livia Cole, of Golden Speakers in Fairfield, Iowa, visits St. Mark's Square in Venice, Italy.



District 59 area and division governors Charles Whitmer, Monika Krolak and Gilbert Bergner pose with Harald Frankenberger, president of Leipzig Toastmasters club, all holding different issues of the *Toastmaster* in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on the weekend of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.



Sandy Bentley and Pat Lingenfelter, members of Delightful Greeters Advanced Club in Bloomington, Illinois, stand in front of the Library of Celsus in Ephesus, Turkey.

When *Good Morning America* called, this Toastmaster was ready for her close-up.

Let's Talk About Woodstock

My cell phone rang one day last August as I was feeding brook trout in upstate New York. The reception was spotty, but I clearly heard the following:

"This is Good Morning America. We saw your interview on PBS last night and would like you to appear on our Woodstock show this Saturday morning. Are you interested?"

Was I interested?! I almost dropped the phone in the water in my haste to say yes.

But seconds later, I thought: *There are only 30 hours to prepare to be on national TV. What will I say? How will I do? Will I make a fool of myself?*

Enter Toastmasters. I'd been a member for the previous year and a half. Thanks to my many experiences with Table Topics, I was well versed in thinking on my feet. Also, having done numerous evaluations, I was skilled at determining what was important and what was extraneous in a speech.

Heck, I was ready for *Good Morning America!*

Taking the Road to Fame and Fun

It had already been an exciting year. My essay on attending the original 1969 Woodstock Music and Art Fair had been accepted in the anthology, *Woodstock Revisited* (Adams Media). I delivered a Toastmasters speech about my Woodstock experience and having my essay published. (I got into the spirit by dressing in costume, complete with headband, bell bottom jeans and colorful, long shawl.)

Amid the approach of Woodstock's 40th anniversary, opportunities arose to publicize the book.

Because of my Toastmasters experience, I felt little trepidation and did a number of book signings, presentations and panel discussions. When I appeared on the PBS documentary, *Woodstock Remembered*, I thought the interview went well.

It went so well, in fact, that *Good Morning America* wanted me.

Returning to Woodstock

The night before the show, we met with staff who informed us what questions Bill Weir, *Good Morning America's* weekend co-host, would ask. I'd have only a minute or two to respond, so I needed to know exactly what I wanted to express.

Once I decided what salient points to make, I reviewed what I'd learned from Toastmasters. If I wanted TV viewers to get to know me in a brief time, I'd need to reveal myself, Ice Breaker-style, in a few evocative words. My time on camera would have to be organized, so I needed smooth transitions. Vocal variety would be important; viewers didn't want to be bored. I'd also need to get to the point quickly. Colorful words, correct grammar, good posture and gestures were essential.

Does all this sound familiar? It should. These lessons all come from the first 10 projects of the *Competent Communication* manual, which I'd just finished. Each of the principles from the prepared speeches I'd given over the previous 16 months proved invaluable.

The next day we gathered at the original site of Woodstock, where the famed Yasgur's farm once stood. The music stage was long gone, but all else looked familiar. A host of memories rushed back but were

soon overpowered by the realities of the moment: The hubbub of *Good Morning America* could not be avoided. The staff pinned us with microphones, gave us tie-dyed blankets to sit on and instructed us not to speak unless spoken to. We suddenly found ourselves on the air.

Prepared for the Pressure

To my surprise, Bill Weir asked something totally different from what I'd been coached on. Prepared by Toastmasters, though, I didn't buckle under the pressure; rather, I swiftly answered the question and elaborated on the theme. Then came another take and multiple trudges across the damp field with an increasingly wet blanket as the sunlight shifted. In the middle of the three-hour event, we were all treated to a special surprise: a concert! We became an attentive audience to Richie Havens, who'd won fame as the first performer at Woodstock.

When the adventure was over, all I could feel was relief. My time on the national stage was brief, but according to many who saw the show and told me about it, I'd comported myself well. I'd used my speaking skills and succeeded in offering America a taste of my Woodstock experience.

Thanks to Toastmasters, I'm ready for my next close-up. **T**

Colleen Plimpton, CC, is a member of the Barnum Square club in Bethel, Connecticut and an author whose recent book is *Mentors in the Garden of Life*. Reach her at www.colleenplimpton.com.

Canadian member with severe stutter turns a corner at age 60.

An Extreme Life Makeover

For 56 years, Kier Barker lived in a world of despair and futility, his days shrouded by a severe stuttering problem. But today he is a new man, one whose life is lit with hope and opportunity. Toastmasters played a major role in this transformation, as it helped Barker work through his stuttering difficulties and develop communication skills – and confidence – late in life.

Barker's change started four years ago, when he was introduced to a fluency device, called a SpeechEasy, which helps people learn to manage their stuttering. He saw progress and a few months later joined the Northumberland Toastmasters club in Cobourg, Ontario, Canada.

"With each successive speech, he had fewer lapses into stuttering," says Bill Netherton, Barker's club mentor. "It seemed he learned to use the device more effectively as he progressed through the Toastmasters program." Netherton says Barker now inspires his fellow club members and says Barker's "sense of humor, colored with a hint of irony, adds to his strong delivery and honest, matter-of-fact presentation."

Barker, who has earned a Competent Communicator award, says the support and camaraderie of the club has given him "an extreme life makeover."

The Cobourg resident was born with spina bifida. He had minimal

feeling from the waist down, and no power or strength to be able to stand. However, he was fitted with braces and crutches and eventually learned to walk. At age 4, Barker developed a severe stutter. Whenever he wanted to speak, his breathing patterns somehow crossed him up; he couldn't exhale that flow of air that enables one to speak. As his lungs continued to fill, his chest became wracked with pain and his face contorted as he gasped with strangled sounds, until his body finally triggered a release of the pent-up air. This process would repeat again and again until he was left physically and emotionally exhausted.

Bit by bit Barker was enveloped in the lonely world of those who stutter.

His stuttering problem only heightened in school. Barker says his high school teachers became so frustrated waiting for him to express his ideas that they refused to let him participate in class discussions. Eventually the guidance counselor suggested he quit school and get a job.

He was able to obtain training in air conditioning and heating design, but over the years, although his many bosses were pleased with his work, he was let go time and time again because of his difficulty communicating with others. Even in his



◀ Once seriously hampered by a stuttering problem, Kier Barker now gives motivational speeches to teenagers and nonprofit groups.

volunteer work, his stuttering proved a hindrance. At age 35, he was deemed unemployable and finally agreed to sign up for disability pension. Although he kept busy serving his community in several capacities, Barker wanted to work and feel like a contributing member of society.

First Signs of Hope

In the spring of his 60th year, his sister Donna saw a TV show about the SpeechEasy device and was eager for him to meet with a speech pathologist about it. Tired of trying one therapy after another over the years, Barker was more than skeptical about such a meeting. "Isn't a pathologist someone who studies the dead?" he thought. However, Donna's eagerness made him agree to attend the appointment with her. Barker's first test with this fluency device showed amazing results: 93 percent improvement. It was his first sign of hope in 56 years. "A voice inside me told me that if I could get this device, my life would be totally changed," recalls Barker.

The local Rotary Club helped him purchase the SpeechEasy, and Barker then spent eight weeks in speech therapy, most of it spent unlearning the bad habits he had developed over the years in an attempt to cope. A local newspaper did a front-page story on Barker, and he was invited to talk to a couple of community groups. Around that time he saw an advertisement for the Northumberland Toastmasters club. He went to his first meeting, and although feeling nervous, Kier felt warmly welcomed. He was given much encouragement and support, and before long he was participating in the various club meeting roles.

In his Ice Breaker, Barker talked of how he was finally liberated from years of being unable to communicate well with other people. Club

members were clearly moved. They note that Barker's confidence and enthusiasm steadily grew as he gave more speeches.

"At first, when Kier would speak, his face grew red, there was a quiver in his voice and he would often repeat what he had just said," says Northumberland member Dale Bryant. "Like most new speakers, Kier seemed to be in a survival mode for his first couple of speeches, but unlike many new speakers, who would cut their speeches short, he tended to go on longer than the time that was given to him."

Barker playfully acknowledges his propensity for long presentations: "After 60 years of being very hesitant to speak, my greatest challenge is to finish before the bell."

As he finally became comfortable expressing himself, Barker felt like his life was just beginning and was determined to get a job. After submitting more than 100 resumes, he was hired as a telemarketer. Armed with his Toastmasters training, he forged ahead with his work. "For a person who stutters, one of the most difficult things to do is to talk on the phone," says Barker, "but I make hundreds of calls every day."

A prime example of how it's never too late to make a dramatic turnaround in life, Barker now gives motivational speeches to teenagers and others, urging them to reach for their dreams. He has been a keynote speaker for nonprofits, including two student-leadership camps, and has shared his story with hundreds of high school students. Jeff Kawzenuk, the principal

"After 60 years of being very hesitant to speak, my greatest challenge is to finish before the bell."

- KIER BARKER

of a high school where Barker spoke, recalls how his story of perseverance captivated the students: "They applauded him for his will to achieve and succeed in life."

For more information about Kier Barker, visit www.kierbarker.com.

Helen Harrison is a songwriter, speaker and freelance writer. She is the creator and director of Kid's Company, an after-school program running in Stratford, Ontario, Canada. Reach her at hharrison@cyg.net.

Stuttering Didn't Silence His Story.



20/20's John Stossel knows news. He also knows what it's like to deal with a stuttering problem. John still struggles with stuttering yet has become one of the most successful

reporters in broadcast journalism today.

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As March 7 approaches, you might torment yourself with the question, “Will I really watch the Academy Awards again?” Allow me to offer good reasons to do so. First, if you are a masochist, the gratification is obvious: hours of stupefying boredom mixed with irritating attempts at entertainment. Then, there is the cultural obligation: If these people are “stars,” shouldn’t you know who they are? (Mastering the distinction

between Shia LaBeouf and Emile Hirsch could earn you the respect of most teenagers.) Moreover, those of us of a graying age have a morbid fascination with seeing how our past favorites now look: Who is still glamorous and who should sue their plastic surgeons?

Of course, as Toastmasters, you will want to hear the speeches. If nothing else, they will make you feel superior. The usual speech at the Oscars is terrible – incoherent, rambling and often neurotic. Surprisingly, most of the speeches last only 45 seconds, yet they seem much longer. Indeed, the Academy tries to impose a time limit on the speakers. Notice how the orchestra begins playing at the 46th second of a speech, just as the year’s winning set designer is thanking his acupuncturist. If the speaker ignores that hint, one of the smiling models – who likely have black belts in karate – will subtly pinion his arms and nudge him offstage. But despite this terror-imposed punctuality, a two-hour ceremony somehow lasts four hours or more.

It didn’t start that way. At the first Academy Awards ceremony in 1929, 10 awards were given in 15 minutes. You probably recognize most of the categories: Best Film, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, etc. Today, it takes three hours for these awards to be handed out. Of course, Hollywood could not resist filming itself. The highlights of each ceremony were compiled and

distributed as a newsreel to be shown in movie houses around the world. Until 1952, that was the only way the public saw the Oscars, and through the wonders of editing, every winner was concise, eloquent and sober.

The public never heard Greer Garson’s acceptance speech upon winning the Best Actress award in 1942 for her performance in *Mrs. Miniver*. Not even a transcript has survived, so only in legend and rumor is it remembered as the longest and worst speech in the history of the Academy Awards. According to the *Guinness World Records*, Miss Garson spoke for nearly six minutes. She began with, “I’m practically unprepared” and then commenced a broad philosophical meandering about the nature of film. No one could remember the details; amnesia can be a mercy. Until Garson, the Academy never thought of imposing a time limit on speakers. After her, the limit was set at 45 seconds.

In 1940, Vivien Leigh sounded like a robot put onstage by the producer. Awarded Best Actress for her performance as Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, Leigh said, “Ladies and gentlemen. Please forgive me if my words are inadequate in thanking you for your very great kindness. If I were to mention all those who have shown me wonderful generosity through *Gone With the Wind*, I should have to entertain you with an oration that is as long as *Gone With the Wind* itself. So if I may, I should like to devote my thanks on this occasion to

By Eugene Finerman

Oscar winners through the years have delivered one bad speech after another.

A Curmudgeon’s History of the

that complefied figure of energy, courage and very great kindness in whom all points of *Gone With the Wind* meet: Mr. David Selznick.”

Such fulsome praise of a producer is not usual, and it might even be mandatory in an Oscar speech. In fairness, if any producer actually deserved that idolatry, Selznick did. Through his constant and tireless work, he really did produce *Gone With the Wind*, and it was his gut instinct to cast a minor English starlet as Scarlett O'Hara. But Vivien Leigh's speech was so artificial and stiff, it was practically embalmed. Consider the use of the word *complefied*; it is a form of the Latin past participle for complete. Who in the audience would have understood it except some priests and professors – very few of whom were at the Academy Awards that night. Like the speech itself, the word is contrived and pretentious. Furthermore, Leigh seemed uncomfortable in her recitation, as if she were the hostage of the speechwriter. Perhaps she was, and the culprit was most likely her fiancé at the time: Laurence Olivier.

Olivier certainly knew what sounded Shakespearean but had not quite mastered the coherence. Thirty-nine years later, he showed no improvement. Upon receiving a Lifetime Achievement Academy Award, Olivier expressed his thanks: “*In the great wealth, the great firmament of your nation's*

Forest Whitaker accepts the 2007 Best Actor Oscar for his performance in *The Last King of Scotland*.



Academy Awards

Toastmasters Tips on Awards Speeches

Robert and Rande Gedaliah are professional speakers and longtime Toastmasters. So when they watch the Oscars telecast at home each year with friends – a treasured ritual – they pay particular attention to the award winners’ acceptance speeches. They analyze the content, the length, the body language, the quips, the crying, the thank-yous and other such matters.

The speeches – both the good and the not-so-good – inevitably confirm what the Gedaliahs believe is true of all awards-acceptance speeches: The best ones are short, graceful and come from the heart.

“Let me tell you the approach that I go by,” says Robert, a 20-year Toastmaster and member of the SEC Roughriders club in New York City. “It’s what Franklin D. Roosevelt said: ‘Be sincere, be brief, be seated.’”

“What we’ll all remember is: How did that person feel when they got the award? So be sincere, be brief, say your thank-yous and get out of there.”

Be sure to keep those thank-yous to a minimum, adds Rande, also a member of the SEC Roughriders. Oscar winners who start thanking everyone and their mother’s brother, ticking off one name at a time, put viewers to sleep, she says. “When they thank everybody, they sound like they’re reading their laundry list.”

The Gedaliahs have put their ideas into practice, having received a number of honors over the years. In 1996, the couple, who coach other speakers through their company Speaking for Results, were named co-winners of the Toastmaster of the Year award for Area

42. They delivered their speech in front of a packed auditorium in the New York Times building.

“Using humor is a good idea in acceptance speeches,” suggests Rande. “The acceptance speeches I’ve remembered the most over the years have had humor in them.”

Toastmasters Transforms Forest Whitaker?

One well-known actor who struggled with acceptance speeches was Forest Whitaker.

In the spring of 2007, Whitaker was expected to win a Best Actor Oscar for his performance in the film *The Last King of Scotland*. He had won two major acting awards for the performance earlier in the season, all leading up to the Academy Award nomination. However, his acceptance speeches at both the Golden Globe awards and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) event had been disasters – filled with rambling, nonsensical mumbling. The public’s interest had been piqued and several stories appeared in the news about this powerful actor’s inability to deliver an adequate acceptance speech.

That’s when Toastmasters stepped in. The organization issued a news release to the media that was picked up by the newspaper *USA Today*. The newspaper published a story specifically offering tips from Toastmasters to help Whitaker give a successful Oscars acceptance speech. A copy went to Mr. Whitaker’s agent, as well.

On Oscar night, Forest Whitaker offered the world a dazzling speech. Those who watched could see that he appeared to follow all the tips offered by Toastmasters. He paused before beginning, controlled his filler words, concentrated on his message, kept names to a minimum and performed the entire speech as though it were an Oscar-worthy script that he had written and rehearsed. At the end of the evening, his wife asked reporters, “Wasn’t that a great speech?”

It was indeed an Oscar-winning speech.

generosities, this particular choice may perhaps be found by future generations as a trifle eccentric, but the mere fact of it – the prodigal, pure human kindness of it – must be seen as a beautiful star in that firmament which shines upon me at this moment, dazzling me a little, but filling me with warmth of the extraordinary elation, the euphoria that happens to so many of us at the first breath of the majestic glow of a new tomorrow.” The individual words were lofty and poetic, and with Olivier’s magnificent voice, the speech sounded wonderful. It just did not make the least sense. And since Olivier was being broadcast live on television, he could not be edited into a passable semblance of reason.

Television has given the Oscars a worldwide audience and the winners the temptation to say whatever they

want on almost any subject. We will hear their political opinions and learn the names of their agents, children and high school English teachers. Some will charm us with their wit, but more will amaze us with their lack of it. Others will mistake us for psychoanalysts and divulge neuroses we didn’t want to know. (Yes, Sally Field, we like you; and please, Gwyneth, stop crying!) Of course, we will wonder why we are watching and make a determined resolution not to look next year. We made the same vow last year.

Enjoy the show. 📺

Eugene Finerman is a writer, a historian and – you must have noticed – a humorist. He lives in Chicago, Illinois. Visit his Web site: finermanworks.com.

Prepare a few well-crafted remarks and be brief, gracious and modest.

Accept an Award with Class

Accepting an award is like walking a tightrope. You need to be gracious, grateful and humble – but not so humble or self-deprecating that the audience thinks you are trivializing the honor. The warm glow of the occasion can suddenly turn chilly or sour with a few ill-chosen words.

I once coached a man who was due to receive an award from a large organization. Two thousand people would be in the audience. “I want to be funny,” he told me, “so I’ll start by saying how desperate they must be to give me this award.” I persuaded him that he’d be insulting the organization and everyone who had ever been honored. We worked together to come up with a gracious acceptance speech; one that was still funny but would leave everyone present feeling great about the evening, the award and the organization.

Sooner or later, you’ll be presented with an award. It may be a surprise, or you may have time to prepare. Use your answers to the following questions to weave a warm, wonderful story that will leave everyone with a big smile (and maybe a tear):

- Who nominated you?
- Who invited you to join this group or encouraged you to get involved in this project or event?
- What is your connection to this group?
- How do you feel about the people and the organization’s goals?
- Why are they giving you this award?

- Have you seen someone else accept this same award?
- When was the first time you attended a meeting and what were your experiences?

People will not remember all the details of what you say, but they will remember the stories you tell. Include a memorable vignette or incident, something entertaining or touching about your connection.

Inspiration From the Oscars

Show biz can provide wonderful examples of great acceptance speeches. When Russell Crowe won an Oscar for *The Gladiator* (2000), he dedicated it to “everyone who has seen the downside of disadvantage.” Then he received the 2002 Golden Globe Award for *A Beautiful Mind*. First, he gave credit to the people on whose life the film was based, offering special thanks to “John and Alicia Nash, for living such an inspirational love story.” He added, “*A Beautiful Mind* is just a movie, folks, but hopefully it will help us open our hearts... to believe that something extraordinary can always happen in our lives.”

It’s okay to be excited. Sally Field’s joy when she won the 1979 Academy Award for *Norma Rae* has never been forgotten: “You like me! You really like me!” When she won the 1987 Oscar for *Moonstruck*, Cher said, “I know this does not mean I am somebody, but I am on my way to become somebody.” I quoted her when I won the 1996 Cavett Award, the highest award

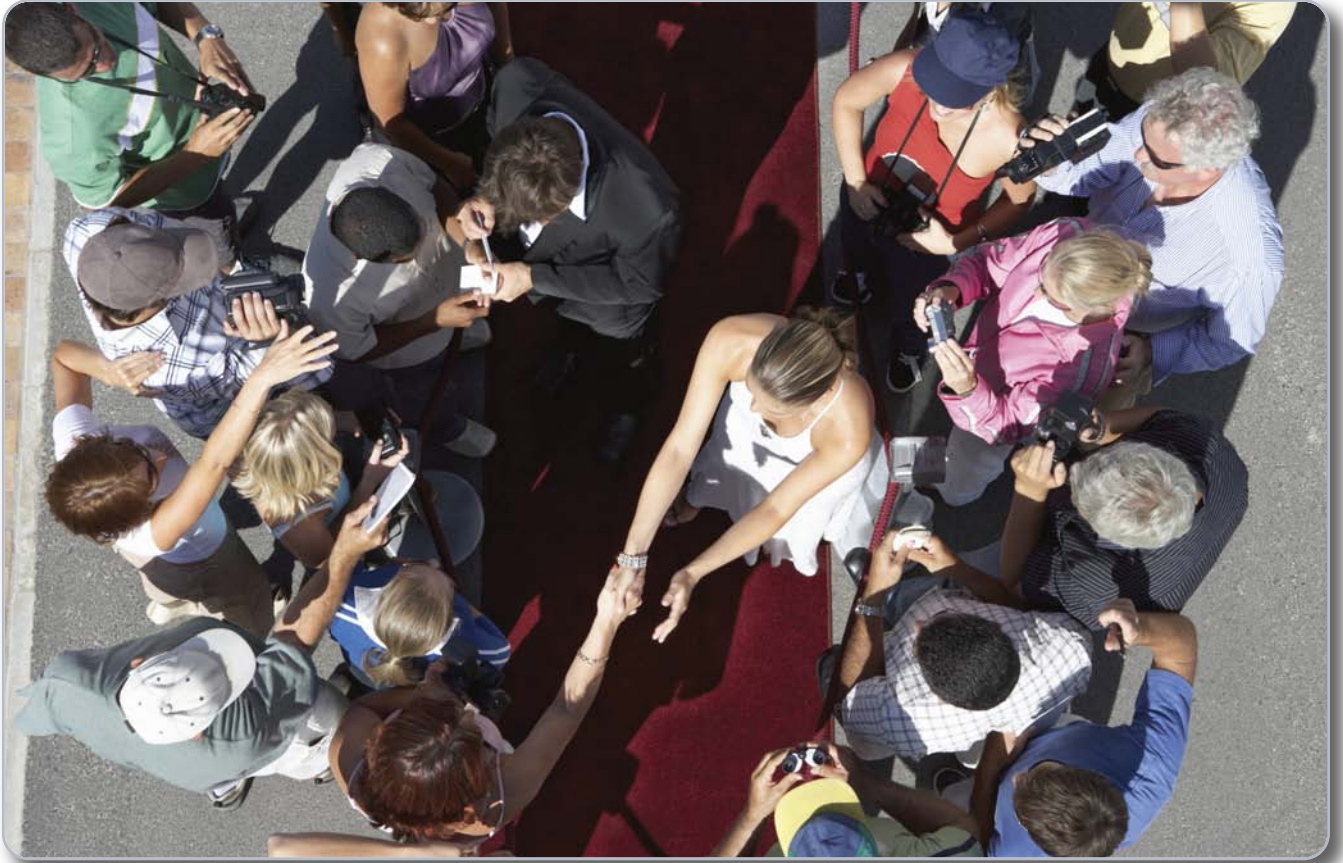
offered by the National Speakers Association.

Action-star “Everyman” Harrison Ford was honored with the Hollywood Foreign Press Association’s Cecil B. DeMille Award in 2002, for “outstanding contribution to the entertainment field” – or more specifically, 35 movies over four decades, including *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Witness*, *The Fugitive* and *Patriot Games*. “In anticipation of tonight,” he said, “I wrote two speeches, a long one and a short one. I’ll give you the short one: ‘Thank you’ But it seems there might be enough time for the long one as well, which is: ‘Thank you very much.’”

Whenever you have some advance notice, be sure to ask how long you are expected to speak. The shorter your time slot, the more you will need to practice! When the time comes, look directly at the audience. Never read your remarks. You can walk up on stage with notes, but they should consist of a few bulleted points.

Whenever you are involved in philanthropy or leadership in your professional organization, your company or your community, you are likely to get an award some day. It’s better to have a few well-crafted remarks ready just in case than to be caught speechless. Or worse, saying the wrong thing. Be gracious. Be modest. Be prepared! **T**

Patricia Fripp, is an executive speech coach, professional speaker and author of *Get What You Want! and Make It, So You Don’t Have to Fake It!* Reach her at www.fripp.com.



Toastmasters share their close encounters of the starry-eyed kind.

By Beth Black

What Do You Say to a Celebrity?

Imagine stepping into a small elevator in a quiet hotel, late at night. You turn to push the “Up” button and discover someone else has stepped inside too. It’s... the original ABBA band member you’d just applauded – an hour earlier – with 18,000 other fans at the Hollywood Bowl. What do you say? *Should you say anything?*

In some parts of the world (like Hollywood), celebrity sightings are more common, but no matter how often you see them, there’s always that one famous person who will take your breath away. Even the smoothest Toastmaster can suffer a tongue-tied moment when caught off-guard by a close encounter with

a star. Here several members share their stories:

Scoring Points with a Sports Celebrity

Lisa Jenks, of the Marsh Winds Toastmasters club in Plymouth, Minnesota, was surprised when it happened to her. She says, “I was working at a local lumber yard as a cashier. Kirby Puckett of the Minnesota Twins baseball team came through my line. It was early in his career, but he was already a very popular player. He wrote a check, and I began to say, ‘Can I see your driver’s license?’ Embarrassed, I caught myself partway through the sentence – ‘Never mind, I know who

you are!’” But as she regained her composure, Lisa figured out exactly what to do. She notes, “Being a huge baseball fan, I could not believe I almost asked Kirby Puckett for identification! I grabbed a scrap of paper and asked for an autograph, which he cheerfully signed.”

Clark Luby of the Bay Street Breakfast Toastmasters in Toronto, Canada, hit a home run as well. “A couple of years ago, A.J. Burnett of the New York Yankees baseball team was playing for the Toronto Blue Jays,” he says. “While standing in the will-call line, I struck up a conversation with his mother, who was there to see him pitch that day. Whenever A.J. pitched he got a

luxury box, so his mother invited us up to watch the game with her and a family friend.”

Luby found the experience amazing, yet came to the conclusion that celebrities are human like the rest of us. “The Jays were playing the Boston Red Sox that day and any time Red Sox players Manny [Ramirez] or Big Papi [David Ortiz] came up to bat, she couldn’t even watch, she was so nervous,” he says. “We just acted like ourselves and didn’t try to impress, and I think that was the best way to be. I will always thank her for her hospitality.”

Making a favorable impression is always a good idea. You never know what the future will bring. You might even meet that person again. It happened to Jenks with Kirby Puckett. She says, “I did meet him again a few years later at a charity event and had a brief, but as I recall, funny and engaging conversation with him while we had a picture taken together.” Good thing she’d left a favorable first impression!

Jenks has some advice for those who find themselves in a close-up with a celebrity. “I would suggest being respectful of them as people,” she says. “Don’t approach at an inappropriate moment, during dinner, for example. Be gracious and polite. And don’t be afraid to speak to a celebrity if the situation is appropriate. You don’t want to regret a missed opportunity, and you may end up with a great story to tell!”

Seeing Stars from TV and Film

■ Gina Salamone, of GMACR Toastmasters in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, met Emo Phillips, a comedian whom Jay Leno refers to as “the best joke writer in America.”

“I had seen his stand-up routine recently, and after the show I waited in a line for an autograph,” says Salamone. She overheard the people in front of her bantering

with him. He turned to the next in line, Salamone, and that’s when she froze. “I suddenly realized I had no clue what to say! I didn’t have an interesting story or clever remark,” she says.

But she pulled herself together and thanked him for telling one of her favorite jokes that night. To her dismay, she was so surprised at being able to get some words out, she didn’t catch his reply. Finally, she calmed down enough to get a picture with him.

“Treat a celebrity as a person – who might just have something personal going on at the moment.”

Salamone advises others to keep calm in such situations. “There’s no need to get all worked up and have to stutter and struggle through a simple comment.”

■ At times you should avoid the infamous autograph request – it all depends on the context of the crossed paths. Joy Montgomery of the Amador Valley Toastmasters in Dublin, California, explained that she was in Santa Barbara, waiting for her aunt and a friend to come out of a gift shop when she spied Dennis Franz, of the American TV show *NYPD Blue*, coming out of the shop. She had no trouble recognizing the star. He saw the recognition on her face, then glanced back at the store and across at the restaurant as if determining which escape route would prove faster. She merely smiled and said hi – and nothing else. “He looked grateful and continued across to the restaurant where his wife was waiting for him to join her for lunch,” notes Montgomery. “It seemed like the wrong time to try to engage him in conversation.”

■ Sometimes you can make a star laugh. Pam Alexandra of Placer’s Gold Club in Auburn, California, enjoyed a sweet moment making a famous comic actor laugh. “Early in Steve Martin’s career I had a chance to see him at a club in San Francisco called the Boarding House. Near the end of his act, he put on a rather large fake nose (a professionally crafted nose – it looked real). He was standing outside after the show, briefly shaking hands with some of the guests as they

were leaving. I walked up to him and touched his nose (he was still wearing the fake) and said, ‘You have a cute schnoz.’ He laughed and said ‘Thanks.’”

■ And sometimes you can enjoy meeting a star with a quick wit. Judith Olsen, who plans to join a Toastmasters club in Atlanta, Georgia, was surprised to discover the actor Tom Selleck in an airport in Toronto, Canada. She realized this was more than an opportunity to meet a movie star – it was a chance to have the last laugh with her sister over an old family tale. She hurried over to him and blurted, “Twenty years ago my sister had breakfast in the same restaurant in Honolulu as you did, and she’s been telling everyone for 20 years that she had breakfast with Tom Selleck!” Without hesitating, Selleck smiled and replied, “Tell your sister I said hello.”

(Continued on page 23)

What Do You Say to a Celebrity?

(Continued from page 13)

Hitting a High Note with a Famous Musician

Paul Gleditsch of Lunch Out Loud Toastmasters in Parker, Colorado, took the initiative to meet Ginger Baker (former drummer for the rock band Cream) after a polo match in Colorado. "As he was taking his horse back to his trailer, I told my friend that we needed to go introduce ourselves," says Gleditsch. "Off we went to his trailer, introduced ourselves as fans, and shook hands. The conversation ended quickly as he was off to entertain everyone in his [current] jazz trio." It was a memorable day for Gleditsch, who enjoyed meeting one of his rock heroes. This was prior to Gleditsch's Toastmasters training, he notes. "Today, we could keep a lively conversation going forever!"

Florence Ferreira of Boca Raton Toastmasters in Boca Raton, Florida,

found herself in an unusual predicament in a public restroom. She was reaching for the last paper towel to dry her hands, and her rival for that towel turned out to be singing star Gloria Estefan. What could she do? Each took half and both left with smiles.

Movers and Shakers in Business and Politics

Curt Johnson of the Portland Club in Portland, Oregon, met Bill Gates at a Microsoft company party 19 years ago. Gates was talking about one of his passions – fast cars. Johnson wanted to chime in, but he was speechless and regrets it to this day. "I just listened. Alas," he sighs.

Frank Felsburg of Picket Post Toastmasters in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, offered a little more loquacity when he saw former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at an ice cream shop in St. Michael's, Maryland. "I told him the rum raisin ice cream there was very good," notes Felsburg. He declines to say whether Rumsfeld took him up on his suggestion.

Phyrne Parker of the Inspiring Voices Toastmasters club in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, recalled her adventures with a local politician. She once met the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Saskatchewan. "A few weeks later, I was grocery shopping and she came toward me in the aisle." In the next aisle, they met again, and again in the next. At which point Parker quipped, "You know, this would never happen in Toronto." The Lieutenant Governor

of Saskatchewan stopped and asked what she meant. Parker answered, "Well, for one thing the Lieutenant Governor of *Ontario* doesn't go grocery shopping, let alone meet the general public in the aisle like this."

But the politician had the last laugh with a funny story she shared. She said a bureaucrat from Ottawa had called her assistant because he was conducting a survey of the Lieutenant Governors' offices in all 10 provinces. One of the questions they asked concerned the number of servants the Lieutenant Governor had. The staffer laughed and said, "Perhaps that can best be answered by my telling you she does her own grocery shopping." At that point the bureaucrat decided they hadn't really wanted to include Saskatchewan in the survey anyway!

Should Stardust Blur Your Vision?

John Haran of the Simi Valley Toastmasters club was born and raised in Los Angeles and has seen celebrities many times. What's more, he's worked with them. "I was a bodyguard for a couple of them at movie premieres or provided security at their homes," he says. "Put simply, they are just people like everyone else."

Judging from the variety of close-ups that Toastmasters have shared with celebrities, one important message seems clear: Follow the Celebrity Golden Rule. Treat a celebrity as a person – who might just have something personal going on at the moment. Be aware of that, and be respectful. Beyond this simple courtesy, try to be friendly! You never know who might smile back. **T**

Beth Black is an associate editor of the *Toastmaster* magazine and a member of Unimasters Toastmasters in Lake Forest, California.



Financial-services giant enjoys a wealth of clubs.

Making an International Investment

State Street Corporation is a business with a global presence. A provider of financial services to institutional investors, it's one of the world's leaders in this field, operating in 27 countries and employing more than 27,000 people worldwide. So when it comes to corporate Toastmasters clubs, it's fitting that State Street has an international presence in that category as well.

The company, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, hosts several clubs in the Boston area, and more in Sydney, Australia; Paris, France; and Toronto, Canada. It is currently forming new clubs in Sacramento, California; Hangzhou, China; and Dublin, Ireland.

More may be on the way.

"I have had interest from our

Because State Street's business language is English, most of the clubs operate in the language, meaning that many members of clubs outside the U.S. give speeches in a secondary language. That can be quite daunting, notes Thompson, who has participated in the Australia club. She is impressed with how employees overcome this challenge and move from being just fluent speakers to being confident speakers.

"It really is fantastic to see people learn to give compelling speeches and presentations and then to realize it has been done in a secondary language," Thompson says.

In this global age, international companies increasingly value communication skills, which are not only important from a business aspect but from a cultural perspective, as

State Street's leadership believes in the Toastmasters program so much that it even provides its own club sponsor – Executive Vice President Stefan Gmür offers support to the groups and champions their activities among State Street management.

"The benefits of confident and well-structured speakers representing our business, both internally and externally, are undeniable," says Gmür, "and Toastmasters is an excellent way to allow employees to develop these skills."

Employee Education

Club members come from many different departments within State Street. With members often practicing their sales presentations or speaking about business-related topics, the clubs are a great way for employees to learn more about the company from each other.

Members of the State Street groups talk enthusiastically about their experience, saying that their new skills have made them better at their jobs. Anthony Guiang, who works in the Toronto, Canada, office, is a senior manager in the financial reporting department who often gives presentations to groups of 200 employees or more. He joined the company club to become more confident and says all the practicing in club meetings has helped.

"I do feel less nervous speaking in front of a large crowd," says

"The benefits of confident and well-structured speakers representing our business, both internally and externally, are undeniable."

employees in Hong Kong and Bangalore, India, who have heard about the benefits of Toastmasters," says Heather Thompson, assistant vice president for State Street's Global Human Resources department. "Many of our newer clubs have been inspired by the success of other State Street Toastmasters clubs."

well. To that end, State Street is a staunch supporter of its Toastmasters clubs. It provides each with a location to meet as well as a budget that covers materials, conference fees, educational events and even employee rewards for achieving Toastmasters milestones, such as earning a Competent Communicator award.



◀ Frank Wu, of State Street club in Boston, Mass., receives his CC award. He's flanked by fellow members Richard Smith (left) and Ron Dagostino (right).

Guiang. “The jitters never really go away but I’ve learned how to manage them.”

Natalie Sterck works at State Street Global Markets in Sydney, Australia, and is a founding member of its two-year-old Toastmasters club. Club president in 2008-2009, she has given speeches on a variety of topics.

“Being on the club executive committee really helped me improve my leadership skills, including how to motivate and engage a group of people, how to lead the club executive meetings, the basics of planning an agenda and following up action points, all of which were directly transferable to my [job] duties,” says Sterck, assistant to the head of State Street’s Asia Pacific operations. “My manager, who is a big supporter of Toastmasters and a new club member, recognizes the development opportunities offered by Toastmasters and has included it in my performance goals and review.”

Tien Truong recalls her first-ever visit to the State Street club at the Boston headquarters, where she works: “I was really impressed by a person I met there, because she was giving her first speech and spoke so

eloquently and confidently, and was so poised. I was sitting in the back, extremely nervous, and I wished I could be that person some day. I joined the club the very next day.”

Making a Wish Come True

Since taking that first hopeful step nearly five years ago, Truong has indeed transformed herself, becoming an enthusiastic and accomplished speaker. She attends two State Street clubs in Boston, has served in several officer roles – including club president and division governor – and is close to earning her DTM. During the last couple of summers, she has helped lead a well-received Speechcraft program for managers at Boston’s Four Seasons Hotel. Truong also uses her communication skills to volunteer in community programs such as Junior Achievement.

“When I first joined the State Street club, I was so nervous that I couldn’t even get up to speak in Table Topics,” recalls Truong, a vice president for State Street Alternative Investment Solutions. “I would kick myself because I knew there was always one question I wanted to answer but I wouldn’t get up to answer it.

“Now I get up there and I feel very comfortable speaking because of everything I learned from Toastmasters. It has built confidence in me. Without Toastmasters, I wouldn’t have been able to do business mentoring for Junior Achievement, where you stand up in front of a classroom of 30 high school students and help them build a case study in business.”

Truong feels the impact at work, too. Recently, she attended a large meeting held by top executives in her unit. During the Q&A session that followed, she stood up and asked a couple of questions. “Afterward, my boss said, ‘You did well. It must be your Toastmasters training that really helped you.’

“I said, ‘Yes, indeed it is.’”

Ron Dagostino, who works at State Street Global Advisors in Boston, has experienced a similar improvement. When he visited his first State Street Toastmasters meeting a couple of years ago, the thought of public speaking scared him – so he knew he had to join. A vice president and senior software architect, Dagostino is glad he tackled the challenge, because the Boston club has given him new skills and self-assurance.

“It’s definitely helped my work,” he says. “I’m much more confident in any meeting-type situation or any situations where I have to make a formal presentation.” ■

Paul Sterman is a Toastmaster in Orange, California, and an associate editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine.

THE GILDORRY OF THE STORY

How storytellers and Toastmasters can learn from each other.

Toastmasters and storytellers have much in common. Each group entertains, informs and inspires listeners, and receives applause in return. In fact, many Toastmasters clubs are dedicated to the art of storytelling, and Toastmasters conferences and conventions often offer sessions dedicated to this topic. Conversely, many professional storytellers belong to Toastmasters clubs and use club meetings to polish their craft and develop new material.

As an active member of both communities, I've come to believe each group has valuable lessons to teach the other.

Five things Toastmasters can learn from storytellers:

1 Vocal Variety – Stories often feature characters, each with a unique voice. Tellers develop the ability to make different characters distinct by using vocal variety, inflections and nuances, as well as pitch, volume and accents. *In your next speech, instead of describing dialogue, actually deliver it using different voices for each participant.*

2 Stage Presence – Many Toastmasters find themselves tethered to a lectern, planted in front of a microphone or glued behind a table. They rarely make full use of the stage or podium. Storytellers take advantage

of their space, moving upstage, downstage, to the left or right – to say nothing of kneeling, teetering and more. *Expand your speaking platform. Own the stage area and use it to further your presentation. Inhabit your environment.*

3 The Power of the Pause – Storytellers understand that the pause is a valuable mechanism for building drama, adding suspense and imbuing key words and sentences with added meaning. Pauses signify to audiences that something profound, important or special has been – or is about to be – said.

Professional speaker and storyteller Lou Heckler is known as a master of the pause. He expressed its poignancy well: “The main reason I love to use pauses is that they turn the monologue of the speech into a dialogue with the audience.” He says a pause draws the audience in. “While the audience is not really



such as metaphors and strong adjectives, to convey color and detail. So should Toastmasters. Sometimes Toastmasters give the facts and little else. Storytellers excel at all the particulars that build dramatic effect: the sights, smells and sounds of scenes; the nuances and subtleties of situations; the specifics of settings. Each adds to the power of a piece. *Use imagery evocatively to enrich your speech, Table Topic or opening and closing thought.*

5 Setting the Stage – Every story is different. Like Toastmasters, storytellers “paint” through body language, gestures, facial expressions and vocal variety. While Toastmasters are often given guidelines and manuals to help them structure their speeches, it’s important not to be too rote in using speaking techniques or too rigid in following strategies and suggestions. Each time a storyteller takes the stage or begins a story, he or she has a blank canvas on which to paint.

“Since we are not in a theater that provides lights, sets and music, setting the stage is 100 percent up to us,” says veteran storyteller Judith Black of Marblehead, Massachusetts. “We must create the environment we want to share our work in.” Black, a Circle of Excellence inductee of the National Story-

speaking, the pause allows them time to consider what’s going on in the story and makes them guess what comes next. Right or wrong, they’ve had a feeling of being on stage with you and it really links them to the rest of the presentation.”

You can do this, too. *Review your speech script or outline and look for key spots to introduce pauses for heightened effect.*

4 Imagery – Storytellers paint vivid verbal images of scenes and settings. They use literary techniques,

telling Network, says the most important aspect of your performance is engaging the audience: “Rather than hard-and-fast rules whose rigidity could cause a caustic response from hosts or participants, it works best to ask [yourself] a question: What will best help participants become completely invested in the work? Your answer determines the setting you try to create.”

Toastmasters can begin each presentation by setting the stage appropriately – through posture, voice and gestures, as well as employing elements such as surprise, shock, mystery or suspense.

Five things storytellers can learn from Toastmasters:

1 Speaking “In the Moment” – Toastmasters regularly participate in Table Topics, where we are asked to speak “off the cuff” for one to two minutes on a random topic, without any warning or preparation time. As a result, we become adept at thinking, listening and speaking on our feet and reacting to whatever comes our way. *This skill can help storytellers with their pre-, post- and between-story interactions with audiences, as well as when the unexpected occurs: A cell phone rings or, say, a train passes nearby and toots its horn.*

2 The Value of the Introduction – As Toastmasters, we pride ourselves on mastering the art of the introduction. We delight in introducing each other in ways that draw in audiences, predispose them to listen, build credibility in the presenter and foreshadow the presentation to come. *Audiences are naturally curious about tellers, too. Your introduction can help audiences get to know, appreciate and admire you (or the teller you’re introducing), and deepen their connection to you and your stories.*

3 Developing One’s Internal Time Clock – Toastmasters time all aspects of their meetings, with special attention to speeches. Whether we give a six-minute speech, a two-minute evaluation or a one-minute Table Topics response, the result is an excellent ability to measure presentation time. Toastmasters contests are won (or lost) in part through adherence to prescribed time limits.

Professional speaker Patricia Fripp, whose career began in Toastmasters, offers this advice for sticking to time limits: “Use a big kitchen clock to prepare, always prepare your piece to be shorter than the limit and always prepare in advance.”

Fripp is a meeting planner’s best friend. When a conference or convention is running late, she will generously allow the planner to choose whether to receive the full Fripp program they booked or to cut a piece of her program to get the event back on schedule. That shows mastery of her material, to say nothing of great customer service. It derives from her ability to speak within prescribed time limits – a skill honed in Toastmasters.

Storytellers, too, can develop a feel for how to tell a two-minute tale, a seven-minute story or something in between.

4 Live Audiences – Toastmasters clubs provide members with a ready-made audience. Tellers can benefit from an audience of poised listeners who laugh, sigh and cry in response to what they hear. How wonderful for tellers! Oh, did I mention Toastmasters’ proclivity for clapping? Tellers can only practice so much in isolation.

Storyteller and Toastmaster Penny Post, DTM, explains it well: “One of the hardest things for storytellers to invent for themselves is how an audience will react to a presentation. Club after club of Toastmasters will welcome a guest speaker and be riveted by the emotional content a story provides. The attention alone is inspiring!”

Tellers can use audiences to refine their material, fine-tune their timing and gauge comprehension, appreciation and reaction.


5 Immediate Feedback – Toastmasters evaluate all presentations. We are skilled at acknowledging strengths and recommending areas for improvement. Our blend of motivation and specific recommendations provides tellers with immediate feedback on what is perceived to be effective and where improvement can occur. Post says the valuable feedback storytellers get from Toastmasters is often quite different from the kind of feedback storytellers hear from each other. A veteran coach to other storytellers, Post counsels them to use Toastmasters speaking opportunities to gather evaluations – written and oral – from which to improve their stories.

Tellers can gather many data points about their stories through the written and verbal evaluations Toastmasters provide at each meeting.

Untold Stories – Misnomers on Both Sides

Just as many presume storytelling is only for children, so too, do many people regard Toastmasters as only for those who are afraid to speak. In fact, storytelling is for everyone, and Toastmasters holds value for both novice and advanced presenters alike. Storytelling fits well with the Toastmasters meeting format. Whether in prepared speeches, Table Topics or opening and closing thoughts, stories are appropriate.

This Story is to Be Continued...

So what are you waiting for? The story doesn’t end here. You’re the central character in this tale. It’s your move. Find a specialty club in your district that emphasizes storytelling. If there isn’t one, e-mail me and I’ll help you build one! A large storytelling community is out there, just waiting to connect with you. 

Craig Harrison, DTM, is co-founder of LaughLovers club in Oakland, California, and the founding chairman of the NSA’s Storytellers Professional Emphasis Group. In 2006, he visited the People’s Republic of China with three dozen professional storytellers as part of a cultural exchange. Tell Craig about your experiences with Toastmasters storytelling clubs at Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.

Know the three I's: Invitation, Imagination and Impact.

Mastering Storytelling

✦ You're on the road to becoming your company's Chief Storyteller. Let's begin with some good news: You're already better than you might think. You tell stories every day.

Here we'll explore three capabilities that will take you well on your way to becoming a professional storyteller.

Remember the "Three R's" of your early education: Reading, Writing and 'Rithmetic? Now consider the "three I's" of storytelling: Invitation, Imagination and Impact. Here's how you can master them:

1. **Invitation.** Remember Steve Jobs' famous invitation to Pepsi's then-CEO John Sculley when he lured him to Apple by asking "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?" Engage your listeners by stimulating their curiosity and asking them to share in something exciting with you.
2. **Imagination.** Enlivening people's imaginations is easy. What happens before you visit the doctor? Or when you're waiting for the board's reaction to your latest strategic plan? Your imagination puts on quite a show. Who needs PowerPoint or tech - nological wizardry?

In 1961, United States President John F. Kennedy recognized the need for a new narrative to galvanize the space race. Before a joint session of the United States Congress, he boldly announced that by the end of the decade the country would be dedicated to "landing a man on the moon and returning him

safely to the Earth." Despite widespread doubts, and the fact that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had not yet even sent a man into orbit around the Earth, he electrified the collective imagination of the country.

Imagination is the direct access point to our creativity. Simply say "Imagine this..." and people's creative juices start flowing. They're transported to a different and vivid new reality without leaving their seats.

3. **Impact.** We crave impact. We want to be seen and know that what we do has meaning. In baseball terms, it's called "looking the ball to the bat." As a storyteller, that means watching your audience closely to see how your content is affecting them.

In 1995, Nelson Mandela knew he had to shore up his government's tenuous hold on post-apartheid unity. Adopting the strategy of "Don't address their brains, address their hearts," Mandela convinced the Springboks rugby team, until then the country's symbol of white supremacy, to join him. At the commencement of rugby's World Cup final being held in South Africa, Mandela and the team symbolically broke all barriers by singing "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," the anthem of the black resistance movement, to a still-divided nation and a worldwide television audience. The Springboks won the World Cup and South Africa moved toward reconciliation.

Brilliant ideas without brilliant human connection usually die fast. That connection builds trust and

cultivates relationships. When you see how you move others and are moved by them, you grow in stature and authority.

Keep this in mind: What you're saying isn't for you. It's for your team.

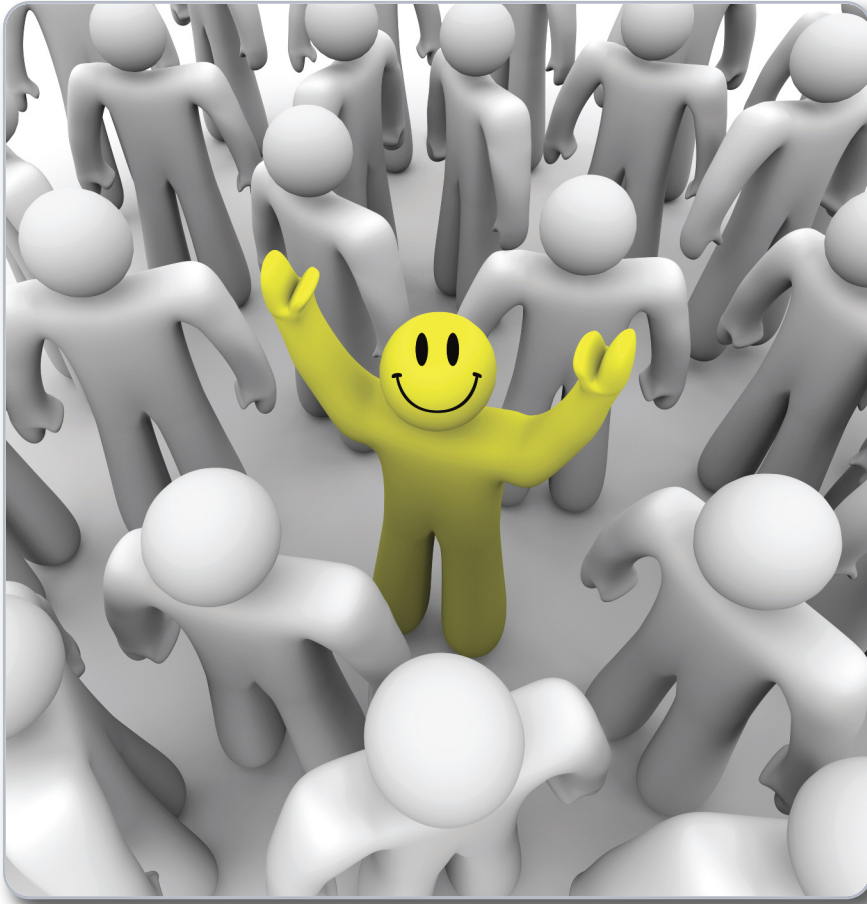
Practice Time

Try these techniques at your next team or client meeting and note what happens:

- Be an "investigator" – not a content dumper. Ask, don't tell.
- Watch carefully how what you're saying impacts your team.
- Don't leap to the next point until you see them absorb the previous one. Don't assume everyone's with you. Ask questions like "Are you with me?" or "How do you relate to this?"
- Slow down. Don't race your narrative simply to get to the end. Consider practicing on someone first.
- Create images to get the client engaged in your story: "Imagine this..." or "Picture that..."
- Stop occasionally and observe your effect on everyone in the room.

Remember, your team and your clients are your creative partners. Katherine Hepburn said, "If you give audiences half a chance, they'll do half your acting for you." 📺

Allen Schoer is founder and CEO of the TAI Group, a consulting firm pioneering new directions in executive leadership and organizational change. He can be reached at www.thetaigroup.com.



Strategies for making your speech stand out with audiences tired of information overload.

By Emily Osburne, ACB

Be Unforgettable!

How much of your message will a typical audience member retain one day after hearing your speech?

One week later?
One month later?
One year later?

According to a Dun and Bradstreet study, 80 percent of the average speech will be forgotten within 24 hours. You have probably witnessed this phenomenon. You cheer for an impressive speech on Monday morning but by Tuesday afternoon, you struggle to recap the main points to a co-worker. You miss a Toastmasters meeting and although everyone agrees that Sam's speech was top-notch, no one remembers his title two weeks later.

This low retention rate could be caused by the large amount of

information we all receive on a daily basis. *Workforce* magazine estimates that the average Fortune 1000 worker sends and receives 178 e-mails a day. Dharma Singh Khalsa, in his book *Brain Longevity*, writes that the average American sees more than 16,000 advertisements a day. We are bombarded with information, so it's our responsibility as speakers to make sure our listeners are not deleting our words like they disregard spam or throw out junk mail.

Even if a speech is delivered beautifully, with a thoughtful opening, body and conclusion, it can still be forgotten. Even if a speech is

free of filler words like "um," "ah" and "you know," it can still be forgotten. Even if it's interesting and relevant, it can still be forgotten.

The good news is that it is possible to stand out from all the mental noise. Here are a few simple tricks to help your overwhelmed audience retain the information you are presenting:

Start With a Picture

Our brains have the ability to remember pictures more easily than words. Before developing your speech, ask yourself, "What picture do I want to leave in the minds of the listeners?" Forget the famous "three points." Your listeners can better remember one single picture.

For example, by the end of this article, I want you to remember

how overwhelmed people are with data. So picture this: You're sitting in a white room with stacks and stacks of paper. On each piece of paper is a fact that you have been told at some time in your life. As you rifle through the papers, you discover one sheet with a colorful picture of a lake resting beside a majestic mountain. Which piece of paper is likely to take up permanent residence in your memory? The one with the picture is much easier to remember. You can apply that principle to speaking as well. Help your listeners by painting a picture with your words or even showing them a picture that describes your topic.

Tell a Story

Another way to stand out in the minds of your listeners is through storytelling. Not all stories are created equal, though. According to Dan and Chip Heath, authors of *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, your story will likely be retained if it is **emotional** and **unexpected**. Emotions are the gatekeepers of the mind. The more emotional a moment, the more likely you are to remember it. That explains why most people remember their wedding day or where they were standing when they heard terrible, shocking news. Make sure that your story is a little bit more exciting than the listener's everyday life. It can be thrilling, scary, shocking or even heartbreaking, but make sure it is not boring.

Twanda Mickle, DTM, has heard hundreds of speeches during her Toastmasters career. She says, "The most unforgettable speech I've ever heard came from a speaker who infused his personal successes, struggles and celebrations into a six-minute emotional roller coaster ride that left me in tears, laughter and

utter exhilaration. I didn't *hear* a speech; I *felt* it."

Lesson learned: Don't be afraid to be vulnerable and openly share yourself and your story in your speech. The audience will respect, appreciate and remember you for it.

Audience Participation

To engage your audience members, thus stimulating their brains, craft interactive moments that require your audience to move,

"Emotions are the gatekeepers of the mind."

talk or role play. Involvement such as raising hands or signaling with "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" can be helpful. Ask your audience to make a decision or rate a favorite item or idea. Solicit feedback that requires a thoughtful response or a healthy debate. Disagreement is better than dullness. Wake up those audience members with hands-on activities that require movement and interaction.

Many years ago, I attended a workshop where the speaker wanted us to learn to buy stocks based on trusted market signals rather than emotions. He asked us to hold up a piece of paper and pretend it was a stock we had just bought. He asked us to kiss the stock. We felt silly, but we kissed it. He told us to hug the stock. We felt ridiculous, but we did it. What was the point? It's just as silly and ridiculous to be emotionally attached to a stock! Although that seminar was seven years ago, I have never forgotten the point.

New Information

Avoid using examples and statistics that your audience is already familiar with. As a speaker, you

have probably heard something like this more than once: "Public speaking is ranked the highest fear among adults, even higher than the fear of death." Though this is interesting, it is not unique. Put your own spin on an old quote. For example, you could add a tagline like: "I say public speaking is ranked the highest in *fun* among Toastmasters, even higher than the joy of ice cream."

You might also share facts from recently published articles. Audience

members should be saying, "I have never heard that," or "I have never heard it explained that way." New information requires the brain to *process* it, rather than ignore it.

Devices

In fourth-grade math class, I memorized the following sentence: "Please **Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally**." This sentence helped me to remember the order of operations, which are **P**arentheses, **E**xponents, **M**ultiplication, **D**ivision, **A**ddition and **S**ubtraction. If you provide the audience with more than three points, look for a mnemonic device to aid long-term memory.

Out-Think the Competition

Urgency is the name of today's game! We receive urgent e-mails. We send urgent overnight express deliveries. Our co-workers send us emergency text messages at all hours. Your speech is competing with the urgent messages floating around in the minds of your listeners. Make sure to show the audience why your message is urgent and relevant enough to earn their attention, make them take notes and take up space in their brains.

Use Repetition

Advertisers know that if you hear their short, silly jingle enough times, it will be ingrained in your memory. In fact, you can probably sing songs from commercials that have not aired in 10 years. Repetition works. The simpler the better. Repetition works. Try it. You will not be disappointed. Repetition works.

Triggers

What is the likelihood that your audience members will even think about you after leaving the auditorium, classroom or conference room? Give your audience an assignment so they will reflect on what you have said shortly after hearing you. For example, I want you to think about this article whenever you watch a commercial on television. Ask yourself, "Which


one of these techniques did the advertisers use?"

- Did they flash memorable images in front of you or did they tell a story?
- Were they trying to bring in new information?
- Did they repeat their slogan more than once?

This small trigger reminds your brain to think of this article again. As a speaker, give your audiences a task so they will ponder your words again in the future.

It is estimated that more information has been generated in the past 30 years than has been generated in the 2,000 years before it. We have unofficially moved from the Information Age into the Information Overload Age. Your audience members are receiving messages

via TV, radio, cell phone, Internet, publications and books on a regular basis. Their brains will naturally disregard anything that does not appear to be relevant.

So help them out! Make it easy for them to remember your message. Apply one or two of these tricks and your audience will remember you for a few weeks. Apply three or four, and they might remember you for a few months. Apply all eight tricks and your speech will stand out in the minds of your listeners for a lifetime. 

Emily Osburne, ACB, is a member of Henry County Toastmasters in Stockbridge, Georgia. She is the author of *Everyday Experts on Marriage* and leads marriage workshops with her husband. Reach her at www.emilyosburne.com.

Wish You Were FUNNIER?

Dear Fellow Toastmaster:

Do you wish you were **funnier**? Do you believe that "funny people" **think differently**?

The truth is... funny people *do* think differently. Truer still; **you will never be funnier unless you change the way you think**. That is exactly what *Get More Laughs By Next Week™* will do for you. I Darrentee it.

Would a **step-by-step process** for getting laughs be helpful?

I never got laughs. I was quiet and shy and had severe stage fright. It was quite an epiphany for me when I discovered the simple exercises comedians use to develop material. A whole new world opened up for me when I was shown that humor was a *learned skill*, as opposed to a trait one must be born with.

Naturally, I did things the hard way, so it took me years of struggle and tens of thousands of dollars to uncover the steps that would take me from bumbling amateur to sought-after professional. This is a *proven* system. I've been teaching this process for more than ten years.

Stage time,



Darren LaCroix
2001 World Champion of Public Speaking

**P.S. Don't take my word for it...
see what my graduates say!**
Go to: www.GetMoreLaughsByNextWeek.com



Get Darren's secrets now: www.GetMoreLaughsByNextWeek.com or call (888) 528-4451



Remember these key principles of speechwriting.

The Better You Write It, the Better You Say It

By Philip Yaffe, CC

Have you ever heard the adage that communication is only seven percent verbal and 93 percent nonverbal? If so, I recommend you ignore it.

Excluding pure entertainment, the objective of most speeches is to convey information, or to promote or defend a point of view. Certain tools, such as vocal variety and body language, can aid this process. But they communicate only emphasis or emotion.

If your words are incapable of getting your message across, then no amount of gestures or tonal variety will do it for you. Thus, when preparing a speech, your first objective must always be to carefully structure your information and look for the best words or phrases to express what you want to say.

This is why the Toastmasters *Competent Communication* manual devotes the first four assignments to organizing the speech itself, including a chapter specifically on the importance of words in conveying meaning and feeling. Only in projects five and six does the manual cover body language and vocal variety.

But if *writing* your speech is the key to success, how should you go about it?

Getting Started

The problem with most articles and books on good writing is that they are – well, poorly written. This is because they concentrate on the use of language and not on the fundamentals of writing itself. The principles of good writing are few, and they're easy to understand; all too often, the absolute essentials are buried under an avalanche of verbiage about technique.

For example, I recently searched the Internet for “clear writing” and came up with a list of “10 principles of clear writing.” Each principle offers good advice; however, the list has a fundamental fault: These 10 principles are not really principles at all, but rather tips and techniques.

What's the difference? Tips and techniques tell you *what to do*; principles tell you *why you are doing it*. Understanding why you are doing something, i.e., the benefits you will gain, helps ensure that you will do it consistently. Too often, when we are told only what



to do, we follow the instructions half-heartedly, inconsistently or not at all, with disastrous results.

During my senior year at the University of California, Los Angeles, I tutored writing to earn much-needed cash. One day, a first-year student showed me a note from her professor that said, “Young lady, I advise you either to leave my class immediately or prepare to fail it.” I determined that she had been misapplying a fundamental writing principle in her class work, so I explained it to her and had her do a few simple exercises to be certain she understood it. By the end of the term, the expected “F” shot up to a gratifying “B.”

This was not an isolated case. In my experience, when students have difficulty writing, it’s generally because they are: 1) unfamiliar with a fundamental principle, 2) inconsistently applying it, 3) improperly applying it or 4) not applying it at all.

The same thing occurs with speechwriting. During my 40-year career in journalism, marketing and

communications, I have been continually appalled by how poorly top business executives, academics, researchers and other clearly intelligent people express themselves.

The Principles of Success

Some years ago I analyzed this discouraging phenomenon and defined three key principles that underlie virtually every kind of nonfiction writing as well as public speaking. For added strength and substance, I cast the principles in the form of semi-mathematical formulas. As formulas, these principles not only tell you what to do, they also tell you why you are doing it and how to go about it correctly.

In fact, these principles act like tests for effectiveness. If your speech fails these tests, it must be revised. If it passes them, then – and only then – should you look at the other aspects of public speaking to make your already good speech even better.

Learn these principles, the formulas and the tests to better control the words in your speeches:

1 Clarity – Being clear is not a matter of personal appreciation. Do you find your text clear? You should – after all, you wrote it. But how can you be certain that it will be clear to others? According to the clarity principle, to be clear you must follow this formula:

$$CI = EDE$$

- **Emphasize what is of key importance.** Before you start writing you must first determine the main ideas that you want your readers or listeners to take away from your text. This is not always easy. It's far simpler to say that *everything* is of key importance, so you put in everything you have. However, unless you do the work of defining what you really want your audience to know, the audience won't get your point. They will simply get lost in your verbiage and either give up or never realize what they were supposed to have learned.
- **De-emphasize what is of secondary importance.** Next, as you write your text, you must be certain to de-emphasize what is of less importance. Why? Because if you really want your readers or listeners to recognize and retain the key ideas, you don't want them getting lost in the details. Details (information of secondary importance) explain and support the key ideas. They must never overwhelm them.
- **Eliminate what is of no importance.** Finally, you must ruthlessly eliminate what is of no importance. Why? Because any information that adds nothing to explaining and supporting the key ideas will tend to obscure them, which is exactly the opposite of what you want.

2 Conciseness – In order to be concise, your text must follow this formula:

$$Co = LS$$

According to the formula, your writing should be:

- **As long as necessary** – “As long as necessary” means covering all the key ideas you identified under “clarity,” and all the information of secondary importance needed to explain and support them. Note that nothing is said here about the number of words, because it is irrelevant. If it takes 800 words to be “as long as necessary,” then 800 words must be used. If it takes 1,800 words, this is alright, too.

- **As short as possible** – “As short as possible” means staying as close as you can to the minimum. Not because people prefer short text; in the abstract, the terms “long” and “short” have no meaning. The important point is: All words beyond the minimum tend to damage clarity. Subconsciously, readers will continually try to understand why those words are there, and will continually fail because they serve no purpose.

3 Density – Density is a less familiar concept than clarity and conciseness, but it is equally important. According to the density principle, your text should follow this formula:

$$D = PL$$

This means dense writing should contain:

- **Precise information** – Using precise information rather than wishy-washy weasel words aids clarity. For example, if you say it is a “hot” day, what do you mean? Mention a temperature and everyone will better understand your meaning. Using precise information also builds the audience's confidence in your knowledge of the subject.
- **Logically linked** – Precise facts – data – are insufficient alone. To be meaningful, data must be organized to create “information.” Apply these two important tests when converting data into information:

Data Test One: Relevance – Is a particular piece of data really needed? Any information that fails to aid understanding or promote audience confidence should be rigorously eliminated.

Data Test Two: Misconceptions – The logical link between data must be made explicit to prevent the audience from coming to false conclusions. To ensure that a logical link is clear, place the two pieces of data as close to each other as possible, preferably right next to each other. When data are widely separated, their logical link is masked.

Now, the 10 Tips and Techniques

Keeping these true principles – *clarity*, *conciseness* and *density* – firmly in mind allows us to re-evaluate the following oft-quoted “10 tips of clear writing,” thereby making them more meaningful and useful.

- **Keep sentences short.** This is usually interpreted to mean an average sentence length of 15 to 18 words. Readers

and listeners could handle longer sentences; however, when the length rises above this average, sentences are likely to be poorly constructed, thereby damaging clarity.

But remember, an *average* sentence is 15 to 18 words. Don't shun longer sentences. A well-constructed long sentence is often clearer than two or more shorter ones. Why? Because the longer sentence might better show the logical linkage among the various elements, which often is lost by splitting it apart.

- **Prefer the simple to the complex.** If the precise word is long, don't be hesitant to use it, because not using it would damage clarity. On the other hand, if a shorter word would do just as well, choose it. For example, *dog* is usually better than *canine*, and *change* works better than *modification*.

- **Prefer the familiar word.** This is a variation of the second point. If you have a choice between two words, use the one that most people are likely to recognize. For example, *daily* is more commonly used than *quotidian*.

- **Avoid unnecessary words.** Be concise.

- **Use active verbs.** Active verbs tend to enhance clarity; conversely, too many passive verbs tend to damage it.

- **Write the way you speak.** This is a useful technique, but don't take it literally. When we speak, we generally use simpler vocabulary and sentence structures than when we write. Writing the way you speak is a good way to produce a first draft. However, when we speak, our sentence structures are often confused and our vocabulary imprecise. These faults must be rigorously corrected in the second or third drafts.

This is even more important for writing a speech than writing a document. In a printed text, if people don't understand something, they have the luxury of reading it again. If you say something they don't understand, it's there, and then it's gone.

- **Use terms your audience can picture.** In other words, follow the density principle. When making a statement, be sure to support it with concrete data.

- **Tie in with your readers' experience.** Again, this is about density, about using precise information. The

words you choose should be compatible with your readers' experience. If you need to use a word that's new to your readers, define it the first time you use it. If it's really key, define it again later on.

Also be wary of words that look familiar but change meaning in the context of your subject. Example: *Insult* is medical jargon for an injury or trauma. Talking about an *insult to the heart* without first explaining the medical

“If you conscientiously apply the principles of clarity, conciseness and density, you will almost automatically introduce variety of sentence length and structure into your presentation.”

meaning of the word might leave your audience scratching their heads.

- **Make full use of variety.** If you conscientiously apply the principles of clarity, conciseness and density, you will almost automatically introduce variety of sentence length and structure into your presentation.

Avoid introducing too much vocabulary, though. Constantly changing terminology for the sake of variety affects clarity. If several words mean essentially the same thing, pick one or two of them and forget the others.

- **Write to express, not to impress.** The purpose of most nonfiction writing and public speaking is to inform or instruct. In fact, the better you write your speech, the less people are likely to notice. Keep your audience's attention by focusing the speech on a message rather than a series of facts.

So there you have it: a list of 10 writing tips and how they relate to the three fundamental principles of writing. With these principles – clarity, conciseness and density – you can make your speeches shine. 📖

Philip Yaffe, CC, a member of the Claddagh Toastmasters in Brussels, Belgium, is a former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* who teaches persuasive communication techniques. This article is based on his new book, *The Gettysburg Approach to Writing & Speaking Like a Professional*. Reach him at phil.yaffe@yahoo.com.

“Poetry consists of the best words in their best order.”

– SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

How to Read Poetry to Others

Since becoming a poet – following a career as a technical writer in California’s Silicon Valley – I’ve found that I have a lot of company. Each year *Poetry* magazine receives more than 90,000 submissions from all over the world, and every month one million poets and poetry lovers visit the Academy of American Poets’ Web site (Poets.org).

Like many of my fellow poets, however, I found I had a big problem: Reading my poems in front of an audience terrified me. After participating in several poetry readings when my work was published in literary magazines, it became clear that I had a lot to learn. In fact, until I discovered Toastmasters, I had no idea that more was required

to go to the dentist.” It was obvious that he, on the other hand, was actually looking forward to his turn at the microphone.

Clearly, it was time for an attitude change. I went to my first Toastmasters meeting the following week and have been a member of Evening Toastmasters in Capitola, California, ever since.

Not only has Toastmasters changed my attitude toward public speaking, it’s enabled me to learn specific tips and techniques that can make an ordinary poetry reading extraordinary. Whether you’re a featured reader at a well-publicized program or a fledgling poet participating in an open-to-all event, here are some ways to ensure the success of your next poetry reading:

coffee shops to libraries. To find one nearby, search on the Internet or in your local newspaper. Arrive early at such events to put your name on the sign-up list, as available time slots often fill up fast. Use a larger font size (say, 14 point instead of the typical 12 point) when you print out the poems you’ll be reading, especially if you’re headed for a dimly lit café.

- **Prepare a short introduction.** The audience will appreciate your poetry more if they feel a connection to you. Over the years, I’ve attended a lot of poetry readings, given by both amateurs (who do it just for love) and professionals (who are often on tour promoting their latest books). The best readings occur when the poets connect with their audience members by sharing something about themselves, their creative process or the origin or inspiration for a poem. Even if you’ll only read for a few minutes, start off with a personal touch: Comment on the season or on what prompted you to write this particular poem. Preferably, this comment will segue seamlessly into the first poem you plan to read.

- **Maintain your connection.** Practice, practice, practice. Be so familiar with the poems you’ll read that your eyes are free to rise from the printed page occasionally. Making eye contact maintains your connection with the audience, just as moving out from behind the lectern

“Presenting poetry to an audience makes use of the same set of skills as delivering any other kind of speech.”

for a successful reading than simply reciting the poems from the page.

The turning point in facing my public-speaking fears came one day when I was signing up for an open mic poetry reading, thinking out loud about which slot to choose. “If I go first,” I muttered, “I’ll get it over with quickly. Then I can relax and enjoy hearing the rest of the poets read.”

The poet who was next in line overheard me. He chuckled and said, “You sound as if you’re about

- **Start small, aim high.** Hone your technique with short readings at open mic events before moving on to half-hour-or-longer presentations. (The terms “open mic” and “open mike” are commonly used abbreviations for “open microphone,” referring to an event that anyone can participate in.) Such programs provide an excellent opportunity to share your work with a ready-made audience. Open mic poetry programs often take place on regular schedules in places ranging from

How to incorporate a piece of verse into a larger presentation.

Putting Poetry in Your Performance

† Poems can be powerfully moving, evocative and even funny. Using a piece of poetry within your speech can add quality and depth to your message.

Throughout history, prominent leaders have incorporated poetry and lyrics into their speeches. When William Lloyd Garrison, a 19th-century American social reformer, gave his speech “On the Death of John Brown” – in tribute to Brown, an abolitionist – he included his own lines of verse: *“Onward, then, ye fearless band/Heart to heart, and hand to hand/Yours shall be the Christian’s stand/Or the martyr’s grave.”*

Speaking to an audience about the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Kennedy quoted the ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus: *“Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop, upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.”* The late Edward Kennedy, longtime senator of Massachusetts, gave what is regarded by many as his finest speech ever when he delivered the keynote address at the 1980 Democratic Convention in New York City. Titled “The Cause Endures,” it included bits and pieces from the Tennyson poem, “Ulysses”:

*“I am a part of all that I have met...
Tho’ much is taken, much abides...
That which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts
... strong in will.
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”*

Poetry is for Everyone, Including You

Adding poetic segments to your speeches provides a great opportunity to expand your gestures and vocal techniques. It’s an excuse to become more theatrical in your delivery. As a prolific writer of rhyming verse, I have incorporated poetry into my speeches since becoming a Toastmaster more than four years ago. Audiences have offered plenty of positive feedback and encouragement. They’ve said my face lights up, and I grow more animated and enthusiastic.

To effectively present a piece of poetry within a speech, it is best if the poem is fairly short (maybe a couple of verses at a time). It is possible to fit more than one example of poetry into a five- to seven-minute speech, but you need to maintain a balance between the poetry and your prose so that the poem doesn’t take over your speech.

Rehearse the Verse

Memorize the verses thoroughly and you’ll enjoy many benefits. They become an anchor-point within your speech, making it easier to remember the other parts of your presentation. Thus, you become less dependent on your notes and freer as a speaker. Most important, when you memorize the poetic section of your speech you feel more confident, which energizes your presentation.

When you have a poem that encapsulates the sentiments of your speech, it’s tempting to place it at the beginning – and start with a bang. Unfortunately, this is like giving a stranger an enthusiastic hug before you’ve been introduced. It may be

appreciated, but your audience is left wondering, “Wow. What was *that* about?” A good speech needs an introduction – and so does a poem. Prepare your audience so they will be able to savor its subtle flavors when it’s delivered within the body or conclusion of your speech.

If the poem is not of your own creation, you need to acknowledge the author. This is best done before reciting the poem so that the factual information doesn’t interrupt the momentum and emotional impact of the poetry.

The Beauty of Poetry

Reading poetry on your own can benefit you in many ways, whether or not you incorporate it into your speeches. If you are struggling to find a topic for your next speech, poems can provide what you’re seeking. Many poems can be interpreted in different ways and touch our hearts and minds with their revelations. When you find a line of verse that positively resonates with you, it will help to fire up your writing for that next dynamic speech.

Poetry is not to everyone’s liking and can be an acquired taste. But you must start somewhere to acquire that taste. Through your speeches, you might be the ideal person to introduce poetry to your club members, providing them with the opportunity to enjoy this diverse and inspirational art form. †

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