SPEECHWRITING GUIDE

For the Air Force Speechwriter

"It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech."

> -- Mark Twain (18:35-191 0), pen name for
> Samuel L. Clemens, great American
> author and wit.

This guide is intended to help you, who for the first time has heard these frightening words: "Here, write a speech for the boss." Resist fear. Avoid being glum. Abandon anxiety. The task may be far simpler than imagined.

Speechwriting, as the experts note, is a talent that uses certain basic principles. When these principles are followed, the result can be satisfying for everyone: the speaker, the audience and you, the writer. When a speech hits the mark, the Air Force benefits by gaining the understanding and support of the listener, the American taxpayer.

The following is meant to be a practical how-to guide. Obviously there are many ways to tackle the speechwriting challenge. Our intent is to provide some basic building blocks. The polish and trim will depend on your own artistic ideas and your efforts.

SPEECHWRITER - A Job Description

A speechwriter's job is twofold: (1) formulate the message and (2) write it in such a way that the speaker can achieve a winning delivery. The successful speechwriter brings the audience and speaker together.

The speechwriter's written "message" must reflect what the speaker wants to say, coupled with the interests and needs of the audience. Most importantly, the speechwriter must take advantage of this opportunity to restate corporate messages that have broad reaching implications for the United States Air Force. While corporate and local messages must compliment each other, significant attention must be given to elimination of any contradictions from what is being said nationally or internationally and what the speech writer provides to his boss to say at the local level.

Not unexpectedly, the speechwriter performs many functions in the process of preparing a speech. You will be a researcher, a coordinator of ideas, an innovator, an advisor and a wordsmith. An evaluation step closes the loo

BASIC RULES FOR SUCCESS

"A great speech is 90 percent great material, and only 10 percent great delivery."

If you observe a few simple rules before you begin your speechwriting assignment, the results may be greatly improved. Following these rules will go far toward giving your boss the great material that makes a great speech:

Rule 1: Know the territory. You probably already have a solid understanding of your organization, its key functions, who the 'movers and shakers' are, and what's current and why. Know where the resources are. Who in the organization knows the policy? Remember that you are just a part of the big picture, the Air Force, the Department of Defense, and the Governement. Make sure you know what all of the leaders are saying. Working with others, experience and familiarity breed comfort and confidence.

Rule 2: Know the conversational style of the speaker. You don't have to know everything regarding his or her speaking pattern, but getting the language "in the ball park" will make things easier. Does he, or she, prefer bullet speeches or full text? Will the speaker "read" the speech, or just refer to it? The speaker should personalize the words.

Try if you can, to "hear" the speaker's voice in your "mind's ear**."** Keep pacing, phrasing, tone and word choice in mind as you write and revise.

Rule 3: There must be a meaningful central message. Call it a commercial, or a key theme but keep in mind that it is content, not form, that is crucial. Ideas can come from the key issues and themes that are appropriate for the audience and crucial to the understanding of what the Air Force is all about. Remember Air Force senior leadership speak all the time about where the Air Force is and where it is going. By using their key messages, your speaker gains a "heads-up" advantage in delivering current and important details to the audience. All words and phrasing must assist in conveying this message. If the writer holds more concern for format than content, the heart of the matter will be missed.

Rule 4: There must be absolutely no errors in fact. All data, quotes, example, and citations must be accurate and unclassified. There should also be no contradictions in policy. All Air Force leaders should speak with one voice. Be able to guarantee it.

Rule 5: The "KISS" rule applies. Keep it short and simple. This applies to sentence structure as well as time. Today, most experts say the optimum speech length is 12-14 minutes and 20 minutes is tops. In some settings, an additional 10 minutes for questions and answers may also be acceptable.

Remember, the more you tell an audience, the more they forget. According to psychologists, about 70 percent of spoken material is forgotten one hour after it is heard.

To write a good speech, do two things: Make it simple, and make it short. And if you want to write a truly great speech, make it simpler, and make it shorter.

Rule 6: Producing speeches is a cooperative effort. Coordination can ensure accuracy, as well as make certain it passes a policy and security check. Don't let pride of authorship or a time crunch tempt you to "go it alone." Get many players involved; you be the coach.

Rule 7: Use technology to the fullest. The Air Force world-wide website, Air Force Link (http://www.af.mil) and commanders' .mil restricted access sites such as the "Issues Page" (http://www.issues.af.mil) are great assets when searching for topics or looking for material to support your speaker's ideas. The Defense Department's Defense Link (http://www.defenselink.mil) provides a vast amount of DOD and JCS information that can be used to "flesh-out" your speaker's ideas.

Accept the fact that rewrites will <u>improve</u> your speech. And remember that the process -- from getting the assignment to the delivery -- may take weeks to accomplish. Some experts suggest it takes 30 to 60 hours to research and write a good 20 minute speech. Plan accordingly, and avoid last minute frustrations.

THE SPEECHWRITING PROCESS

While there are many functions involving the speaker and speechwriter, 10 steps are essential:

1. Select and limit the topic.

2. Establish objectives for the presentation.

3. Analyze the audience and the occasion.

4. Do research.

5. Outline the material.

6. Write the speech.

7. Consider visual aids.

8. Get the speech approved.
9. Obtain formal clearance

10. Prepare final text.

11. Get feedback and critique both speaker
     and speech.

SELECT AND LIMIT THE TOPIC

Selecting a topic may sound easy. It's not. It is a vital step that requires more than a passing thought. Picking the right subject is based on a host of factors: the speaker's area of expertise, the information needs of the audience, the desired outcome, and the time allotted the speech. It is imperative that all of these mesh. Your first objective when writing the speech: Get the topic right.

It is impossible to include everything in one speech.   lf you try to cover it all, the audience will come away with nothing. The most common, and fatal, speechwriting mistake is trying to say too much. It is far better to have one theme (the "message" you want the audience to remember), stated powerfully and memorably (and often), than to ramble around six or seven points. Ideally, you should try to relate your local message or theme to the over-arching Air Force found on the Air Force world-wide-web sites. This technique adds depth to your selected topic rather than building broad speeches using several topics/issues. This approach also communicates more effectively by delivering related messages throughout the speech.

"Each year some five million formal speeches are
given in the United States. Most are boring."

The one topic/one theme approach will help the listener follow the progression of the speech. At the conclusion, the audience should be thinking, "Oh, I see the speaker's point. "If your topic is too big, too complex or too long, you will likely fail. Focus and hit the bull's-eye!

ESTABLISH OBJECTIVES FOR THE PRESENTATION

As part of the selection process, determine the purpose of the speech. Clear objectives give firm direction to your speech.

Ask what the remarks will accomplish? What response do you want from the audience? What action should result from the speech? Do you expect the listener to be entertained, informed, or persuaded?

Purpose	Intended Response
to entertain	enjoyment, boost morale
to inform	understanding
to persuade	agreement, action

It is important to keep in mind the specific results expected from the presentation. Be realistic in terms of scope, audience's knowledge, audience's ability to act, and what the speech can reasonably accomplish.

Some suggest that you write the specific purpose in one sentence on a "3x5" card. Everything - ideas, support material, visual aids - should support the purpose and desired response. "The purpose of this speech is to ..."

ANALYZE AUDIENCE AND OCCASION

Knowing the speech environment -- the audience and occasion -- is crucial to the speech. You must perform some basic research to determine:

1. The characteristics of the audience including size, age, educational level, amount of knowledge on the subject, major interests or concerns, invited guests, degree of open mindedness on the topic, other speakers they've heard, political orientation, and basic interest in the subject.

Be particularly sensitive to styling the remarks specifically to the listeners: There's a vast difference in speaking to a pro-Air Force audience ("the choir"), versus a room packed with "non-military" civilians.

Often information on the audience can be gathered from the letter extending the speaking invitation or from the person in charge of the event. Contacting this person directly can help clarify details or even suggest a specific message or presentation style that's naturally suited to the event. You may also get information from a previous speaker, someone who will be in the audience, your Air Force Public Affairs Office or the public relations officer for the organization.

2. The nature of the event.   Is the occasion a dining-in, an after-breakfast talk, a formal speech to a professional society with media present, a commencement? The substance and tone should be tailored to the event.

3. The program**.**   A keynote speech presents requirements and opportunities that are quite different from those of a panel discussion.

4. The time of day. Experience dictates that a speech delivered in late afternoon should be markedly shorter and livelier than one scheduled at 9 a.m. If the speech is scheduled just before lunch, the mood and restlessness of the audience may also require a short and lively speech.

DO RESEARCH

After you have determined the topic, purpose, audience and the occasion, you are ready to gather data. Begin your research with live sources; talk with the experts in your division. Gather unclassified material they may have on the subject.

Share your preliminary work with the person who' s giving the speech. Tell him or her about the audience, event, and what's expected. Suggest an approach and agree on the key message. Make certain you're going in the right direction.

Bounce ideas back and forth. Get anecdotes and examples that will add life to the speaker's remarks. This discussion could lead to a half-written speech or, at the least, a clear indication of the speaker's ideas and desires.

Gather outside resources. Visit the library. Read reports, newspaper articles, magazines and journals.

As previously stated, the world-wide-web and its military (.mil), government (.gov), and other reference sites will be helpful in developing the speech. Use the Web to examine previous speeches in the subject area given by senior defense officials including SECDEF, SECAF, and Chief of Staff. The Web also can be used to reference congressional testimony by military senior leaders, which may have helpful information.

Keep in mind that it's appropriate and encouraged to repeat senior officers' themes. It's a good method of adding credibility to your message. In this case, plagiarism is **OK**.

Whether gathering internal or external reference material, collect statistics, quotes, definitions, comparisons**,** contrasts or examples that will add spice to the speech and give it support. Gather numerous references. Remember that the world-wide-web has some of the latest material available. Air Force Link (http://www.af.mil) and the Issues Page (http://www.issues.af.mil) have been designed to provide users with current, relevant, and releasable information. Some suggest you should have five to 10 times more material than needed to write the speech. But avoid spending too much time researching. The job at hand is writing the speech and you need to allow plenty of time for that purpose.

OUTLINE THE MATERIAL

Expert speechwriters say that two elements are absolutely essential to every good speech: solid research and a tight outline. When the outline is prepared, two-thirds of the work of speech writing is done.

The outline's main points must explain, prove or support the specific purpose of the speech. A good outline ensures that everything is aimed toward one central idea or purpose: unity. The outline also ensures the correct approach to the audience.

Any speech has three major divisions: introduction, body and conclusion. These three parts are used to (1) state the idea, (2) develop the idea, and (3) restate the idea. You've heard it said: Tell them what you're going to tell them; tell them; then tell them what you told them.

INTRODUCTION - State the Idea

Here you must sell the audience on listening to your presentation and introduce the subject of the speech.

Explain the importance of the topic in brisk**,** factual terms that go directly to the main point.   Examples of introductory approaches include:

- A direct statement of the subject and its importance to the audience

- Vivid examples or comparisons leading directly to the subject

- Strong quotes or startling facts that will be meaningful to audience and establish some rapport

- Important statistic(s)

- A story illustrating the subject, provided it has a direct application

- Humorous anecdote, given it's in good taste and at least remotely related to your topic or purpose

The importance of the introduction is underscored by the belief that if you don't get the listeners' attention in the first 30 seconds, the cause may be lost.

BODY - Develop the Idea

The idea, once stated, needs a clear, easy-to-follow explanation to accomplish the speech objective. However, you must concentrate on the one central idea. That way, the audience will stand a much better chance of following and understanding your thoughts.

Methods that you can use to develop the idea include:

- Examples to illustrate

- Reiteration of the main idea

- Statistics

- Comparisons

- Testimonies of experts

- Interim summaries as transitions

CONCLUSION - Restate the Idea

The conclusion should sum up and stress the main ideas and suggest appropriate actions. The close should be given in a dramatic, encouraging, and enthusiastic manner -- perhaps containing a memorable quote -- leaving the audience, with a positive image of the speaker and the topic.

Methods employed for an effective conclusion include a quote, a reference to the opening, or urging action. Remember to be realistic, candid and sincere. Close with optimism whenever possible.

Make it prescriptive or make it descriptive, but make it memorable. This is, perhaps, the most important portion of the speech. Don't waste this valuable moment -- drive that message home.

No matter what the speech is about, you should employ the three component sequence of introduction, body and conclusion to help you limit, focus and organize your material. There are various methods to use in organizing and developing the speech. Some of' the ways are: chronological order, cause and effect, numerical order, problem-solution, geographical, alphabetical, psychological or topical order. Regardless of the method used, keep things moving smoothly.

WRITE THE SPEECH

Speechwriting requires a loose, conversational style, or it will sound stiffly formal when it's delivered. The speech should be written to match the speaker's personal style.

Because the speech is meant to be heard and not read, you have to write for the ear, not the eye. To do this successfully, use short, not long, words. Don't use a word or phrase you or the speaker don't understand. And don't use words the audience won't understand either. Sentences should also be short and tight. Try to keep them eight to 14 words long, or even use an occasional two- to four-word sentence to add variety. They'll be much easier for the audience to follow. Additionally, if the sentences are short, the speaker will find more breathing space, thus making delivery smoother and more natural.

Other suggestions for a better written speech

- Use short paragraphs. Try to keep them to two or three sentences. Don't be afraid of a one-sentence paragraph.

- Keep the language simple. Avoid acronyms, jargon, multi-syllable words, clichés or hackneyed phrases, large numbers or statistics, euphemisms, and long "hut-two-three-four phrases."

- Use the personal pronoun. The speech should be personal. The occasional use of "I know," "I believe," or "I support" adds to the rapport with the audience. Like any spice, it shouldn't be overdone.

- Don't be passive. Use active verbs -- they're more direct and personal.

- Be vivid. Appeal to the audience's senses. Vivid language adds excitement to a speech.

- Use contractions. Again, it's better on the ear

- Know delivery time. People speak at different paces, but the average is about 130 words per minute. That means an average 20-minute speech would be about eight to 10 pages long, double-spaced. That's 2 and 1/2 minutes to deliver one page of text.

- Watch your language. Avoid gender-specific words. Do not use offensive jokes. Avoid sexist or racist language.

- Use rhetorical devices. To make the speech more exciting to hear, more persuasive and give it balance, consider using:

    - alliteration ("Build better bombers, but don't bypass budget blueprints.")
    - antithesis ("I'm no expert in that, but I am familiar with this.")

    - a rhetorical question ("What's going on here?")

    - use of "three's" ("Give me life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.")

- Don't waste time. Opening pleasantries should be very brief'- no more than one half' page (one minute) at most. Bring the speech quickly to the point.

At this juncture, the first draft is complete. The next step is to put on your editing hat and be merciless. Polish and tighten the language. Read the speech out loud. See if the words flow. Ensure appropriate use of grammar and punctuation. Eliminate "nothing sentences." Justify adjectives and adverbs. Check for overall length; remember the mind will only absorb what the seat can endure.

CONSIDER VISUAL AIDS

Sometimes visual aids will greatly assist a speech, but not always. What the audience sees, along with what it hears, can clarify or emphasize a point. Remember though most audiences are there for a speech, not a briefing.

There are numerous kinds of visual aids, probably the most popular are slides. Other aids include movies, videotapes, diagrams, maps and overhead transparencies. Regardless type, here are some basic recommendations:

- Use only relevant materials. The purpose of any non-vocal aid is to graphically portray or support a main point, not overpower the speech.

- Aids must be large enough to be seen by the entire audience. This is critical when speaking in a large hall or setting.

- Use the aid at the right point in the speech.

- Keep the material as simple and clear as possible - do not clutter the slide with numerous numbers or small print.

- Remind the speaker to address the audience, not the aid. "Eyes front" applies.

- Audiences can read, so there is usually no need to repeat words on the screen.

Again, visual aids are not mandatory. However, if used, the aids, in addition to the text, must also be cleared through security review.

In addition to visual aids, the occasion may be appropriate for handouts or other printed material such as brochures, fact sheets, pictures or other materials. Here again, the security review requirement applies.

GET THE SPEECH APPROVED

As a matter of courtesy, and to do some double-checking, you should have the in-house experts you consulted look at the speech for content. They will appreciate the opportunity to see that the information they provided is accurately used. Besides, it will protect your credibility, as well as the speaker's.

A note of caution: Avoid incorporating too many suggestions. You are not attempting to write everything that's known about the subject. You simply want to make one or two major points. Also, avoid "writing by committee." It generally wrecks the speech. Encourage reviewers to concentrate on content. And remember to "speak with a single voice" as you incorporate the ideas of others; including research of senior leadership comments.

Approval from the speaker is next. Be prepared for changes. These are the speaker's remarks, and he or she has to feel comfortable with them. These alterations should be limited, depending on the time and attention the speaker put into the speech during the planning phase. (Remember that meeting earlier?)

CLEARANCE

Now the speech must officially be cleared. Why? First, a cleared speech ensures there are no security or policy violations. Second, you and the speaker will be more comfortable knowing the speech has a 'stamp of approval.' Third, it allows others to see the material. Finally, a cleared speech can be used for a host of other purposes.

Air Force Instruction 35-205 gives details of the review process, but the key points are: Deliver or mail 10 copies of the speech to Room 5D227, SAF/PAS; depending on which AF offices or DOD agencies need to review the speech, it normally takes five to seven working days for the speech to be cleared; written approval or rejection will be given to the submitting office; and while policy or security corrections may be appealed, that process could take considerably longer.

To quickly review and clear, include the following information along with copies of the speech:

- Name, title, and organization of originating unit, author and speaker

- Title of presentation
- Information on where and when the speech will be given, along with the sponsoring organization

- Clearance date required, if earlier than presentation date

- Statement that the information has been reviewed by the originating division and is recommended for public release, along with the author or speaker's signature of approval.

A hint: Submit the speech at least two weeks before the event to avoid "glitches." You, and the speaker, will feel in control if you are not fighting "last minute dragons."

PREPARE FINAL TEXT

With an approved speech in hand, the next step is to produce a speaking copy, plus copies for the media or others requesting written text.

Use of "orator" type font is recommended. To help the speaker with delivery, use underlining, capitalization, punctuation, boldface, indentation or a highlighting marker.

To further assist the speaker, break long paragraphs into shorter ones. Never carry sentences, or paragraphs, from one page to the next. Clearly mark the conclusion of the speech so the speaker can deliver it with the appropriate emphasis.

Most often it is advisable to prepare two different copies of the speech, an orator" version for the speaker, and a distribution or record copy in a standard format. This is easily done with word processing.

A cleared written speech can be left behind for the group to use in its newsletter or send to other people. If the news media covers the speech, it helps ensure accurate reporting on what was said.

Don't run the text any further than three-quarters of the way down the page, your speaker's eyes will move too far down, away from the audience.

GET FEEDBACK AND CRITIQUE BOTH SPEAKER AND SPEECH

The best way to assess your efforts is to hear the speaker give the speech. As part of the audience you can get feedback on how the speech was received, gain a sense of the speaker's

mannerisms and discover mistakes. Your feedback to the speaker is invaluable. Don't be afraid to critique his or her delivery - good or bad.

If you cannot attend, arrange to have the speech taped, either by the host group or by the speaker using a small dictation machine or tape recorder. Audio tape is good; videotape is better.

Another way to gather feedback is to talk with someone who was in the audience. Ask for candid opinions and recommendations. You can also ask the speaker about the speech. What went well? What didn't work? How did the audience respond?

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ...

This guide should help you write an effective speech. But, of course, the <u>presentation</u> of the material has much to do with the success of the talk ... a speech is only as effective as its delivery.

While guidelines on presentation techniques are gist for a separate paper, several pertinent points need to be mentioned:

- Rehearsing the speech is mandatory. Practicing helps clear up rough spots, enhances timing and gives familiarity that decreases chances of the jitters.

- Until the speaker is extremely familiar with the speech, it should be read. While this may go against recommendations from professional speech coaches, it assures that no ad-lib comments will be misconstrued.

- The best speakers incorporate directness, sincerity, a strong but pleasant voice, gestures and warmth.

- Always maintain eye contact with the audience. A good rule is "50-50." Keep your eyes on the audience at least half the time. It's only an illusion of competence, sincerity and professionalism that comes with eye contact, but without it, perceived credibility suffers.

A final suggestion: Use your public affairs office. The experts there can help arrange media coverage of the speech and perhaps suggest valuable opportunities such as talk shows, interviews or editorial board visits while in the community. The PA can also help stretch the life of the speech. With a small amount of additional work, the presentation may be a good "op-ed" column or an article for publication.

GOOD LUCK!!!