

Selecting Your Topic

The Better Speaker Series



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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL

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The Better Speakers Series

Toastmasters International's **The Better Speakers Series** is a set of presentations offering instruction on basic speaking skills. Designed to be delivered by members to their clubs, presentations in this series provide new speaking techniques and tips that can help all club members develop their communication skills.

Presentations in **The Better Speakers Series** may be offered by any club member and require 10 to 15 minutes to present.

Conducting the Program

"Selecting Your Topic" lays out several different approaches for choosing a subject that will suit the audience, the occasion, and the abilities of the speaker. This product consists of four parts:

- ▶ Definition and explanation of the presentation
- ▶ Guidelines for your introduction to the audience
- ▶ Outline for the development of your speech
- ▶ A PowerPoint presentation for a visual aid



In your own words

The outline is not a script and should not be read word-for-word. Instead, use the document as a guide for presenting the material in your own words and with your own narrative style. The presenter's outline is a structure on which to build your presentation. Use the points of the outline to develop your speech, but be the author of your own oration.

Here are some tips on using this outline to develop and deliver your presentation:

- ▶ **Study the outline in this manual carefully.** Familiarize yourself with the general structure. Preparation is the key to a successful presentation.
- ▶ **Use the outline to build your own speech using your own words.** Prepare a set of notes indicating where you wish to pause, gesture, or add special verbal emphasis. Highlight key words or sentences to help you present the material most effectively. If you are using this outline as a digital PDF, record your thoughts with the built-in notetaking functions.
- ▶ **When delivering your speech, be expressive.** Use all of the presentation skills you have learned as a Toastmaster, including vocal variety and gestures.

Using Visual Aids Effectively

Visual aids add interest to any presentation and help your audience retain information. If you plan to use the PowerPoint slides for this presentation as visual aids, make sure you have the equipment and technology needed to share the slides with your audience. It is recommended that you test your technology and equipment in advance. In the outline, there are indications for placement of the PowerPoint slides. Each is numbered.

◆ V1. For example, V1 refers to the first visual.

Please note that the first slide in the PowerPoint presentation is a title slide and is not included in this numbering system.

If your presentation is taking place in a fully in-person format but you do not have the equipment needed to share the PowerPoint, you could create a flip chart using the visuals from the slides.

Follow these tips when using visual aids in an in-person setting:

- ▶ Set them up and test them before the meeting begins. Place them so they are easily visible to listeners.
- ▶ Bring backup equipment in case your technology fails.
- ▶ Display your visuals only when they are needed. If you are using a flip chart, flip the page back out of view when you are finished with it.
- ▶ Remember not to stand between the screen or flip chart and your audience or you will block their view.
- ▶ Maintain eye contact with your listeners. If you must turn your back to point out something,

pause as you point it out, and then resume speaking only after you are once again facing your audience.

Follow these tips when using visuals in an online or hybrid setting:

- ▶ Share your screen. Be sure your PowerPoint presentation is visible in the room and on the screens of those members participating from another location.
- ▶ Consider having someone else share the visuals so you can maintain eye contact with the camera.
- ▶ Consider an online whiteboard when sharing information, as it will be visible to both members in the room and those participating online.
- ▶ Consider enlisting the assistance of a partner to join the meeting on their computer in the room with you so that they can facilitate the remote attendees and monitor what is happening online. This is a good practice for all hybrid meetings.
- ▶ Test your online platform and technology before the meeting begins. Have an online participant confirm they can see everything as expected.
- ▶ Forgo visual aids altogether if you cannot be sure they will work for everyone in attendance.
- ▶ Share any handouts or other documents you use as part of your presentation with all attendees in advance or via the chat function of your meeting app so that all participants have access to them at the same time.
- ▶ For more information on presenting in an online or hybrid format, refer to the Manage Online Meetings elective in Level 3 of your path.

Benefits and Opportunities

The Better Speaker Series has valuable guidance for you and your club. The content will help you master core skills for speech writing and delivery through effective and easy-to-follow tips. This will benefit Toastmasters members at any level of experience or skill.

Presenting from the Better Speaker Series is required in Level 4 of all six standard paths: Dynamic Leadership, Engaging Humor, Motivational Strategies, Persuasive Influence, Presentation Mastery, and Visionary Communication. This is both a great way to support your club members and an excellent chance to practice speaking and presenting.

Selecting Your Topic

Introducing the Presenter

Tips for the Presenter: Write Your Introduction

- ▶ All prepared speeches in Toastmasters require an introduction. A proper introduction of you and your speech is important to the success of your presentation. Use the following as a guide in writing your introduction:
- ▶ Include the purpose of **The Better Speakers Series**.
- ▶ Explain why “Selecting Your Topic” is important for a Toastmasters club, stating the purpose and one or more objectives of your presentation.
- ▶ Provide some background information about yourself.
- ▶ Read *When You’re the Introducer* in **A Toastmaster Wears Many Hats** for further details on giving a proper introduction.
- ▶ Give your finished introduction to the person who will be introducing you.

Tips For The Introducer

- ▶ Ask the presenter any clarifying questions.
- ▶ Rehearse the introduction.

Outline

Introduction:

As a Toastmaster, you are encouraged to give project speeches that follow specific guidelines. However, there will be times outside of your Toastmasters experience when speaking opportunities may not be so well defined. Even within the organization, you may occasionally find it difficult to select a topic for a project speech. Do not be discouraged—there are techniques you can apply to help you select a great topic with minimum effort.

◆ V1

Two Sources

When selecting a topic becomes difficult, consult two general sources of information:

- ▶ **Personal Experience:** The more personal involvement, interest, and enthusiasm you bring to a speech, the more likely your audience will respond positively. Personal experiences help the speaker deliver the speech with conviction, because the subject matter is not separated from the speaker's daily life or history. There is a surplus of subject matter related to your personal experience. Here are a few examples of personal topics that will generate ideas:
 - **Interests:** Sports, hobbies, travel, entertainment, values, and goals.
 - **Career:** Business processes, interesting events, ethics, investments, or retirement.
 - **Family:** Ancestors, parenting stories or advice, marriage, or traditions.
 - **Education:** Study habits, achievements, memorable teachers, and subjects.

◆ V2

- ▶ **Reference Material:** An unlimited amount of ideas is at your fingertips on the internet. You also can visit your local public library, either in person or online. You'll discover a great deal of inspiration in:
 - **Websites:** News sites, scientific research, medical sites, social media, and more.
 - **Books:** Reviews of various genres, possible re-writes, literary analysis, and theory.
 - **Magazines:** Economic trends, human-interest stories, discoveries in science, and entertainment.



Remember...

If you make use of resources in your speech that are helpful to selecting your topic, make sure the resources are notable and legitimate sources.

◆ V3

Get Inspired

You already know from experience that inspiration can be sudden and elusive. Sometimes, all it takes is a TV show, a conversation with a friend, or a quiet early morning walk. Suddenly, an idea will flash into your mind. Even the most mundane of activities can set the stage for an inspired thought or concept. Remember to write it down on paper. Creative speech concepts are often fleeting, so keep a notepad or a note-taking app at hand. Even if you do not end up using a particular idea, keep your notes and resources organized so they can be referenced for future speeches.

◆ V4

Narrow Your Selection

Typically, your main challenge is to narrow your selection of speech topics. Use the following criteria to evaluate each potential topic:

- ▶ **Your Audience:** Before you speak, research your audience. To maximize your success, consider what content would best match the needs of your listeners.
 - How many people will attend?
 - What is their age range?
 - Will they already be familiar with the subject or will you need to carefully define basic terms and concepts?
 - Does your audience have similar education levels, interests, backgrounds, and experiences?

◆ V5

- ▶ **The Occasion:** Consider the event itself. Your speech might serve a specific purpose and several questions should be asked:
 - Does the event have a theme?
 - When are you scheduled to speak during the program?
 - What will happen before and after your speech?

◆ V6

- ▶ **Your Own Abilities:** Now that you are close to a final decision, review your knowledge of and interest in the subject again. Think about your subject and ask yourself:
 - Do you have enough enthusiasm and interest in your topic to capture the audience's attention?
 - Do you have the knowledge required to present this topic?
 - Will they accept you as an authority on this subject?

◆ V7

- ▶ **Be Specific:** Whether you're delivering a five- to seven-minute speech to your club or a 30-minute speech to business associates, it is important to be specific. Avoid a broad speech topic. You should ask:
 - Is the topic specific enough for the time allotted?
 - Do the sub-points support the topic and add to the speech?
 - What can be cut from the body of the speech without changing its quality?

◆ V8

Conclusion

Speech topics are all around us. There is no need to feel overwhelmed when faced with selecting a topic, but it does take some careful decision-making. With a little determination and persistence, selecting your next speech topic will be no problem. Once you have chosen a subject of personal interest that fits your audience, the occasion, and your own speaking abilities, you will find yourself coming closer to that ideal of every speaker: a finely crafted speech.

Evaluation Guide

Member Name _____ Date _____

Evaluator _____ Speech Length 10–15 minutes

Speech Title _____

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this speech is to deliver a presentation from the Toastmasters Education Series to learn and educate club members about ways to improve speaking and leadership skills and contribute to the club experience. The speaker will follow the outline while adding their own knowledge, examples, and style.

Notes for the Evaluator

The speaker will be delivering a presentation from one of the three Education Series: the Better Speaker Series, the Leadership Excellence Series, or the Successful Club Series.

About this speech:

- ▶ The speaker will present a well-organized presentation based on the topic's outline.
- ▶ The speech may be in any style the member chooses, as long as it supports the presentation topic. The speaker must successfully share the information and advice with their club.
- ▶ This presentation should not be a direct reading of the presentation outline.
- ▶ Use of visual aids should support and not distract from the presentation topic.

General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

Clarity: Spoken language is clear and is easily understood

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Vocal Variety: Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Eye Contact: Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Gestures: Uses physical gestures effectively

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Audience Awareness: Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Comfort Level: Appears comfortable with the audience

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Interest: Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Well Supported: Speech content is well-supported and sources are available if requested

Developing	Emerging	Accomplished	Excels	Exemplary	Not Applicable
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Comments:

Evaluation Criteria

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

Clarity

Developing – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

Emerging – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand

Accomplished – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood

Excels – Excels at communicating using the spoken word

Exemplary – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood

Vocal Variety

Developing – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

Emerging – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice

Accomplished – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools

Excels – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools

Exemplary – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection

Eye Contact

Developing – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

Emerging – Eye contact with audience needs improvement

Accomplished – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience

Excels – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response

Exemplary – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response

Gestures

Developing – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

Emerging – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures

Accomplished – Uses physical gestures effectively

Excels – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech

Exemplary – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech

Audience Awareness

Developing – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

Emerging – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice

Accomplished – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs

Excels – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively

Exemplary – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs

Comfort Level

Developing – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

Emerging – Appears uncomfortable with the audience

Accomplished – Appears comfortable with the audience

Excels – Appears fully at ease with the audience

Exemplary – Appears completely self-assured with the audience

Interest

Developing – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

Emerging – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting

Accomplished – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content

Excels – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content

Exemplary – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content

Well Supported

Developing – Speech content is unrelated to the topic of the speech

Emerging – Speech contains content that supports the topic though some content may seem disconnected

Accomplished – Speech topic is well-supported by content of speech

Excels – Speech is excellent with a topic that is well-supported by content of the speech

Exemplary – Delivers exemplary speech with a topic that is well-supported by content of the speech

Notes



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