Public Speaking

Ceremonial Speeches

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Wedding receptions, graduation ceremonies, award acceptance ceremonies and get-togethers at work when someone is joining or leaving the team are occasions where toasts and other ceremonial speeches are commonly delivered.

There is **no mandated structure** for this type of speech; however, speakers must know the background facts of the event and assess their audience to determine what information is most appropriate to share for the occasion.

Type of ceremonial speeches

Award acceptance

Give this type of speech when you have won an **award**, a diploma, or something similar. A typical example are the Oscar and Grammy speeches you see on TV.

Dedications and commemorations

A speech that focuses on opening a building, a company's achievements or some other event that is **not directly related to a person**. The typical example here are speeches at anniversaries, ribbon-cutting, unveiling and similar events.

Introductions, tributes and testimonials

A speech that **focuses on a person**. Typical examples are introductions (for example of a new employee), someone leaving the company, tributes, funerals and so on.

Ceremonial speech writing

Come right to the point

- Your ceremonial speech should leave no doubt as to why you and your audience have gathered.
- It should tell the listeners what thoughts and feelings are appropriate to such a meeting.
- It should leave them with an understanding of the larger meaning of the ceremony.

Award acceptance speech

The most likely type of ceremonial speech you will have to give is an acceptance speech.

Observe the following principles:

- **Be confident**, but show modesty.
- **Be yourself** and take the audience seriously. The more you look like a real person, the better your audience can connect with you.
- **Talk about the event or cause**, using interesting stories, anecdotes and so on.
- **Thank the awarding organisation**, and anyone who contributed to you getting the award, especially the audience, public and so on if appropriate.
  Note: Refrain from mentioning a long list of names; it is better to speak in general terms because the audience may not know all these people. Say "our make-up artist", "my fans", and things like that. Exception: if the person is really famous of course you should use their name: "our director, Steven Spielberg, …"
- **Praise** the values of the awarding organisation.
- **Look back at the past** and connect it to the present.

Exercise:
Analyse acceptance speeches

Watch some movie award acceptance speeches delivered by very famous actors and actresses. Which ones are (really) good, and which ones are (really) bad. Why?

Introduction: **Jack Nicholson**.

Award: Academy Award (ak.a. Oscar) for best actress in a leading role, **Gwyneth Paltrow**.

Comments about the acceptance speeches

Jack Nicholson - Well-loved and respected, and he knows it (which is fine). Confident and in control.

Gwyneth Paltrow - Very obviously faked emotions, the audience thinks she takes them for fools. Way, way, way over the top, it's so embarrassing you just want it to end. (Interesting detail: she is "crying" for Harvey Weinstein, but a few years later she accused him of raping her, which supposedly happened before this speech mind you.) She makes an apology about forgetting some people in the past, which is negative. She makes a sweeping derogatory statement about agents, this is very nasty and condescending.

Exercise:
Analyse acceptance speeches

Watch some movie award acceptance speeches delivered by very famous actors and actresses. Which ones are (really) good, and which ones are (really) bad. Why?

Introduction: **Jennifer Lawrence**.

Award: Golden Globe for best comedy actor

Leonardo DiCaprio.

Comments about the acceptance speeches

Jennifer Lawrence - Confident but modest. Praise.

Leonardo DiCaprio - Praises DeNiro and Scorsese and some others, and he very obviously really means it. Exudes confidence. He is really genuinely pleased as well. His praise for Martin Scorsese is partially based on his own experience, which makes it quite intimate, and easy to relate to. Puts the award in perspective against the history of American movie culture.

Introduction speeches

Another thing you might have to do is to introduce a person or an event on stage to an audience.

Observe the following principles:

- The **last words** of your speech are the **name** of the person or event you are introducing.
- When introducing a person, **don't steal their thunder**. They will give their speech after you are done so leave the content of their message to them.
- **Look back at the past and connect it to the present**. If you have little knowledge about what you are introducing, a good trick is to talk about your personal experiences or memories of when the same event was held in the past. Use interesting stories, anecdotes and so on.
- **Praise** the values of whomever or whatever you are introducing, and if you can the event organisation.
- **Be witty, but don't mock anyone or anything**, especially not the organisers, the audience, or the event or person you are introducing. You can make fun of yourself, this humbles you to the honour of the subject. Use appropriate language and jokes, **consider your audience**!
- **Do not misuse the platform to deliver a political message**. This always goes down badly and often backfires, whether your cause is noble or not.

Exercise: Analyse introduction speeches by famous people

Watch some introduction speeches delivered by very famous actors and actresses. Which ones are (really) good, and which ones are (really) bad. Why?

Introduction: **Billy Crystal**

Occasion: Lifetime accomplishment award for **Robert DeNiro.**

Comments about the introduction speeches

Billy Crystal - Respectful, praises. Uses links to the past, and his own experience and friendship with Robert DeNiro. Sincere. Makes jokes, but mostly at his own expense, except for the joke at the beginning about Robert DeNiro not speaking, which actually the audience didn't like very much.

Exercise: Analyse introduction speeches by famous people

Watch some introduction speeches delivered by very famous actors and actresses. Which ones are (really) good, and which ones are (really) bad. Why?

Introduction: **Ricky Gervais**

Occasion: Movie awards event (I'm not sure which one).

Comments about the introduction speeches

Ricky Gervais - Disrespectful, makes jokes at the expense of individuals, some of which are there but some aren't, and even of whole population groups based on their religion (Catholics and Jews). It's even worse that some of the 'jokes' are based on real events that actually hurt or killed millions of people. The audience is clearly not liking it, but are just suffering through it because they have to be there to get the award. Ricky's delivery is great by the way.

Summary

Ceremonial speeches are delivered when someone or something is celebrated.

- There is **no mandatory structure** to be observed.
- **Don’t speak too long**
- **Look back** at the past and connect to the present.
- Make sure your **details are correct**.
- Be **positive**.