

special occasion speaking

chapter 17

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introduction

There are moments in our professional lives when we are called to bring people together in community, celebrate proud moments, remember individuals who have left us, and show important others how much we appreciate them. These opportunities call for the development and delivery of ceremonial or special occasion speeches. These speeches allow us to congratulate, toast, celebrate, and say goodbye in creative and eloquent ways. Ceremonial speaking enables us to reinforce our group identities, to show admiration and respect, and to inspire others. The ability to give a special occasion speech is a skill that will prove valuable over the course of your entire professional and personal life.

In the first part of this chapter, you will learn the utility and relevance of ceremonial speaking in a variety of contexts—professional, social, and personal. Next, a description, explanation and example of each of the various types of ceremonial speeches are presented. Finally, you will be introduced to guidelines for developing and delivering effective ceremonial speeches.

The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.

~ Oprah

background of special occasion speaking

epideictic oratory

Many organizational contexts offer opportunities for special occasion and ceremonial speaking. These organizational functions help

chapter objectives:

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define and give an example of epideictic oratory
2. Explain the main purpose of special occasion speaking
3. Identify the eight main types of special occasion speeches and the key components of each of these speeches.
4. Understand the basic guidelines for delivering special occasion speeches
5. Prepare and present the various types of special occasion speeches



establishments mark important occurrences, celebrate successes, remember key figures, and commemorate those who are no longer with the organization. Furthermore,

chapter outline:

- Introduction
- Background of Special Occasion Speaking
 - Epideictic Oratory
 - Purpose of Special Occasion Speaking
- Types of Special Occasion Speeches
 - Speech of Introduction
 - Toast and Roast
 - Speech to Present an Award
 - Acceptance Speech
 - Keynote Address
 - Commencement Speech
 - Commemorative Speeches and Tributes
 - After-Dinner Speech
- General Guidelines for Special Occasion Speeches
 - Keeping the Speech Short
 - Acknowledging the Obvious
 - Staying Positive
 - Using Humor
- Conclusion
- Review Questions and Activities
- Glossary
- References

special events help an organization define itself as well as help establish and maintain a corporate identity—for organizational members, clients and key stakeholders. Special occasion speaking has also been called **epideictic** oratory, which is used to praise or blame, condemn or commend, and celebrate and give thanks (Osborn & Osborn, 1994). For instance, President George W. Bush used epideictic oratory when he addressed the United States after September 11, 2001, condemning the terrorist attacks. Epideictic oratory is also used anytime we are called to mourn the loss of a loved one at a funeral, congratulate a

recipient of an award, or toast a special occasion, such as a wedding or anniversary.

purpose of special occasion speeches

In your personal and professional life, you will likely have the opportunity to give at least one ceremonial speech to celebrate an event or contribute to a company's corporate image. Regardless of the occasion, epideictic or ceremonial speaking calls for language that is arousing, clear, and inspiring. In addition, Osborn and Osborn (1994) suggest that language use and delivery style should serve to magnify and identify. **Magnification** means giving benefit to the audience, amplifying emotion, and exceeding expectations. This technique involves promoting positivity and goodwill among the people gathered for the occasion as well as helping to build the audience's feelings toward the person honored or the reason for the occasion. **Identification** involves creating familiarity and closeness. Special occasion speaking, among other things, helps build community, and a speaker's language and delivery style can serve to enhance feelings of togetherness.

Let us celebrate the occasion with wine and sweet words.

~ Plautus

A **special occasion** or **ceremonial speech**, regardless of the level of formality, should have a purpose that is clear to the speaker and the audience members. A ceremonial speech can do a variety of things, such as celebrate an event, commemorate a person, entertain an audience, or inspire people (O'Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2001). Each type of ceremonial speaking occasion has its unique considerations, and each speech needs to be adapted to the audience, the honored person(s), the social context, and the event. This section covers several types of ceremonial speeches: speech of introduction, toast and roast, award presentation, acceptance speech, keynote address, commencement

address, commemorative speech or tribute, and after-dinner speech.



types of special occasion speeches

speech of introduction

A **speech of introduction** introduces the main speaker at an event and inspires the audience to listen to that speaker (O'Hair & Stewart, 1999). Any speech of introduction needs to be brief. After all, the person making the introduction should not be the focus of attention. The introductory speech usually has three components: (a) provide a brief backdrop or background of the main speaker, (b) introduce the speaker's topic, and (c) an invitation from the audience to warmly welcome the speaker. Here is an example of a speech of introduction:

The person giving our keynote address is someone we all know and admire. Not only is Dr. Brian Garcia an alum of our university and department, but he has gone on to make major contributions to our field. As one of our nation's foremost experts in end-of-life care and communication, Dr. Garcia has written over 50 journal articles and book chapters on this field. We are privileged today to hear him speak on hospice care and the Hispanic population. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Brian Garcia.

As the previous example illustrates, the speech of introduction is relatively brief. But the brevity might depend on how familiar the audience is with the speaker's topic (Adler & Elmhorst, 2010). If the topic is not well-known, you might need to take a few minutes toward the end of the speech to elaborate more on the topic. Also, it is important to enhance the speaker's credibility. In the previous example, the person introducing Dr. Garcia reminds the audience that he is an alum of the university (establishes common ground) and that he is a distinguished academic and writer.

If you are introducing a speaker, be sure to do your homework and find out as much as you can about this person; the last thing you want to do is give inaccurate information as you're introducing him or her! See if you can meet the person ahead of time, whether it is in person or over the phone. You'll also want to be culturally sensitive (Adler & Elmhorst, 2010). For instance, many people outside the United States prefer to be called by their titles, such as "Professor." Also, be aware of any gender bias that might influence how you introduce the person, such as calling a man "Dr." or "Mr." while referring to a woman of similar status by her first name.



toast

A **toast** is a brief tribute to a person or event (O'Hair & Stewart, 1999). A toast also allows the speaker to acknowledge accomplishments and express best wishes for the future (Adler & Elmhorst, 2010). Besides being brief (about 30 to 60 seconds), a toast is a speech delivered at a well-chosen time, which is when everyone is present, such as when guests are seated

for a dinner or when everyone has a drink in hand.

Many people are nervous at the thought of giving a toast. Therefore, some preparation and practice can help make the event more enjoyable and memorable. Anyone called upon to give a toast should prepare ahead of time. Having in mind one or two things that set the person or event apart is an effective strategy, as well as keeping a positive tone and staying brief. It is advised that you practice in front of a mirror or in front of a friend to become more comfortable with the toast.

We lift our glasses to Ms. Becky McPherson, who has devoted 20 years to our organization. Not only have we benefited from her tireless hours building this company, but there is no way to measure how much she has touched each of our lives. So, it is Becky McPherson that we humbly toast this evening.

If you are tapped to deliver a toast, take some things into consideration to avoid any awkward or cringe-worthy moments. For instance, be sober when delivering the toast. Alcohol makes one sluggish and less inhibited; you do not want people to remember you for the way you slurred during the speech or for anything inappropriate you might have said. Also, when in doubt, leave it out. In other words, if you are debating about whether to share a humorous story, it is best not to share it at all. There is the chance that some members of your audience might not find it funny or tasteful. Finally, while a toast should be prepared, try your best to come across as spontaneous. A toast should not appear to be memorized; neither should you deliver a toast from a manuscript. Plan your key points, but use your impromptu skills to deliver the words in a conversational, informal manner.

roast

A **roast** is a particular kind of toast that is humorous and pokes fun at the

honored person in a friendly way. A roast might be given for someone who is moving away or has achieved noteworthy success in her or his lifetime. It is generally considered a high honor to be roasted, and in most cases a roast is reserved for individuals who have achieved respect and a noteworthy reputation. One such individual is President George W. Bush, who was roasted by Stephen Colbert during the 2006 White House Correspondents' Dinner. Within this excerpt is Colbert's jab at Vice President Dick Cheney:



Wow! Wow, what an honor! The White House Correspondents' dinner. To actually—to sit here at the same table with my hero, George W. Bush, to be this close to the man. I feel like I'm dreaming. Somebody pinch me. You know what? I'm a pretty sound sleeper; that may not be enough. Somebody shoot me in the face. Is he really not here tonight? Damn it! The one guy who could have helped.
(Kurtzman, 2012).

A roast can contain tributes, admiration, comedic insults, and outlandish stories that are true or untrue. There is usually a roastmaster—someone who serves as master of ceremonies—and other individuals can take part in the roasting. It is often the case that those involved in the roasting

might expect to bear the brunt of a few of the jokes.

The recipient or person being honored deserves careful consideration. While a roast is intended to honor a person, the speaker should know for certain that the roastee is someone who can take a joke and show good humor when receiving humorous criticism. Regardless of the jokes and comedic insults used, the ultimate goal is to pay tribute to the person being honored, and a roaster should never lose sight of that objective. One also should be aware of effective and appropriate uses of humor in such a context, and more about humor will be discussed later in this chapter.

I like to praise and reward loudly, to blame quietly.
~ Catherine the Great

speech to present an award

Presenting an award warrants a **presentational speech**, during which a speaker presents a person with an award or prize. The primary purpose of this speech is to give recognition to the recipient and his or her accomplishments pertaining to that specific award. While presentational speeches might vary in length and content, they all should contain a few key elements. First, the person presenting the award should not only highlight the merits of the award recipient, but also point out the purpose and significance of the award being given (O'Hair & Stewart, 1999). Another element of the presentation is to personalize the speech to make the award and event more meaningful for the recipient and the audience. Here is an example of a presentational speech:

Our next award is the Outstanding Graduate Research Award, which goes to the graduate student who has made the most significant contribution to our department. The recipient of this award certainly deserves this honor because he does today

what others do not in order to achieve tomorrow what others will not. Therefore, I proudly present this year's Outstanding Graduate Research Award to Jeremiah Polk.

Adler and Elmhorst (2010) provide some additional guidelines for the best presentational speeches. First, make sure the recipient's name comes at the appropriate time. If the recipient is known to everyone, then the name should be mentioned right away. If the announcement is a surprise, then it is better to hold off mentioning the recipient's name until the end, which you saw in the previous example. Also, let the audience know how the recipient met—and even surpassed—the criteria for the award. You should also make sure the focus of attention is on the recipient, not on the one presenting the award. Finally, to facilitate a smooth transfer of the award to the recipient, the presenter might want to hold the award in his or her left hand while using the right to shake the recipient's hand.



acceptance speech

The presentation of an award is usually followed by an **acceptance speech**, which the recipient delivers upon immediate receipt of the award. This speech gives the recipient an opportunity to show appreciation for the award as well as humility and grace (O'Hair & Stewart, 1999). Such a speech should be prepared ahead of

time, if possible. In the preparation process, the recipient will have a general idea of who to thank, which should not be overlooked during such an event. Here is Jeremiah Polk's acceptance speech:

Thank you very much for presenting me with the Outstanding Graduate Research Award. I want to thank the professors on the award committee for selecting me, and the other faculty for their encouragement and support. I especially thank Dr. Jane Griffin for her mentorship and belief in my abilities as a graduate student and an aspiring researcher. I will remember this honor and strive to be deserving of it as I complete my doctoral program. Again, thank you all for this incredible honor.

The previous example has a particular organizational structure (Adler & Elmhorst, 2010). First, the recipient expresses his sincere appreciation. If the award was unexpected, then he might also express a sincere level of surprise. Second, he acknowledges those who contributed to or made the award possible. He also thanks other people who have had an impact on his success. Third, he indicates how the award will make a difference in the future (i.e., it will make him work harder as he continues with his academic program). Finally, the recipient closes his speech by expressing thanks again.

Each day offers us the gift of being a special occasion if we can simply learn that as well as giving, it is blessed to receive with grace and a grateful heart.

~ Sarah Ban Breathnach

keynote address

The **keynote address** is a speech that represents the essential or common

theme of a convention, conference, or other large gathering. Most conferences, expositions, or conventions are usually organized around a central idea, and the keynote address is what summarizes the central message revolving around the general theme. For example, organizers of a conference with the theme "Looking Forward—Looking Back" might want the keynote speaker to celebrate the history of that organization, recount its past accomplishments, predict future directions of the organization, and invite audience members to embrace the future mission and vision. Similar to this sample structure, most keynote speeches contain common elements.



The person giving the keynote address is usually a person who has earned a national or international reputation within his or her professional field. Such a person would likely be invited to speak because of her or his expertise or particular claim to fame, which would be alluded to in the speech. In addition, the keynote speaker is wise to be mindful of the conference theme and to incorporate that theme into the speech. Regardless of the conference theme, the typical speech might allude to such topics as organizational growth, team building, goals and aspirations, leadership, change, or achievements (Speech Topics Helps, Advice & Ideas, 2005). Some of these themes are evident in Dr. Neal Lane's (1996) keynote address during the 50th anniversary celebration of Cornell University's School of Applied and Engineering Physics:

When we look across science and engineering, we can see . . .

stories and subplots developing, both in terms of the excitement they generate and in terms of their potential impact on society. These don't always generate banner headlines about little green men or microbes. But they nevertheless hold the potential to revolutionize how we remedy social ills and spark economic growth. In fact, there is wide agreement that we are entering an era where science, engineering, and technology will exert greater influence on daily life than at any time in human history.



commencement speech

The **commencement speech**—which is a type of keynote speech—is given to mark the occasion of a school's graduation ceremony during which diplomas are awarded to graduating students. The commencement speech is celebratory in nature in that it marks an important milestone in the graduates' lives. At the same time it can be a call to action for its audience (Fly Little Bird, 2007). Many commencement audiences may appreciate a speech that is relatively brief and to the point, and many speakers provide practical, yet memorable, advice. For instance, Billie Jean King once said, "Find a mentor and be a mentor. Give back. And when people tell you not to believe in your dreams, and they say, "Why?" say, "Why not?" (Wisdom Engine, 2006).

This type of speech is usually given by a person who is well-known in the

community or by someone who has achieved national or international recognition for her or his contributions to society. The speaker might be a politician, an alumnus from the institution, a famous speaker, or other noteworthy figure. The speaker might be chosen by the school administration or by the graduating students themselves.

On one level, a commencement speech can bring attention to certain social or political issues of the day, such as HIV/AIDS, economic inequality, or education. Additionally, such speeches typically lay out paths the audience can take beyond their educational years (e.g., giving one's time, taking on important causes), as well as what specific tools for change are needed for an individual to make an impact (e.g., use of the Internet, acquiring and disseminating information). Finally, commencement speeches often touch on aspects that contribute to a good life; such examples might include finding one's passion, showing compassion to others, and appreciating diversity. In general, the commencement speech emphasizes celebration and looking ahead toward the future. Lisa Kudrow, in her 2010 address to the graduating class at Vassar College, encourages her audience to look to the future with a purpose of finding oneself:



I did actually hear from a little more than two of you that, because I went here, you wanted

to know about my experiences after graduating and I understand that because the twenties are that time in your life when (this is not a joke) you're really getting acquainted with your own adult self and seeing how you respond to self-doubt when there's so much seemingly at stake. So, let me reassure you. It's not supposed to be easy, but it doesn't have to be torture. You're supposed to have moments of uncertainty about which path to take because the 20's are full of crossroads.

commemorative speech and tribute

Commemorative speeches and tributes are speeches that pay special accolades to an occasion, extraordinary person, event, idea, or monument. The purpose or scope of this speech is to reflect the emotions felt by the audience as well as underscore the reasons for the speaking event. Delivering a tribute and commemorative speech involves careful attention to language. These speeches are intended to inspire the audience, and the use of the richness of language should serve to evoke the appropriate emotions within the audience as well as the honored person(s).

One way to evaluate your own reputation is to think about what would be said of you at your eulogy.

~ Brian Koslow

Tributes and commemorative speeches have certain characteristics. First, they are short and eloquent (Letteri, 1997). In most cases, this speech should be one to five minutes long, which means the words should be chosen carefully and efficiently for impact. Second, these speeches are written to anticipate the emotional needs of the audience. There is a

difference between the need to be festive and the need to grieve, and the speech should contain language that conveys the appropriate feelings. Rather than focus on a great deal of information about the person, event, or thing being honored, the speech should make reference to the emotions of the audience and respect those emotions—whether directly or indirectly. When the speaking occasion is honoring a person, the speech’s content should contain a balance between the professional and personal accomplishments of the honoree. While the speech should emphasize the person’s professional work, his or her personal activities (e.g., family life, community involvement) also warrant attention. Russell Crowe demonstrates this balance as he commemorates the late Steven Irwin, the television personality famously known as the Crocodile Hunter:

Good morning everybody. Firstly, to Terri and all of Steve's family, from my family to yours, our deepest sympathies and condolences. I think this memorial should be a joyful one, and not mournful one. We, after all, have to keep in mind who we are here to celebrate, and what he would have preferred. I hope somebody will speak today of the specifics of what Steve achieved as a conservationist, but all I can do today is talk directly to my friend, my mate, Steven. Your passing has suspended reality for all of us. It was way too soon, and completely unfair on all accounts. I know as humble as you always were, that you would still be pleased to know that the world sends its love and that people all over this planet have been grieving. We've all lost a friend, we've lost a champion, and we're gonna take some time adjust to that. I'm in New York, mate - the big city - and you have

been headline news on CNN for a week. There are not many zookeepers who would command that attention, mate. And all that means is that you got your message across. You got the word out there. And you were heard. And you will be remembered (Famous Speeches and Speech Topics, 2008).



after-dinner speech

The **after-dinner speech** is a unique kind of special occasion speech. An after-dinner speech has as its general purpose to entertain, and yet informs an audience about one or more particular issues. These dual roles can make the after-dinner speech a challenge, but with skill and practice, a well-received speech. Mark Twain made this type of speech very popular in his day, speaking at many dinner events. These dinners were very lengthy, and were followed by several hours of humorous speeches (Patout, 1978). Such events still occur today, and are often scheduled before, during, or after a professional or civic meeting (O’Hair et al., 2001) where a meal might be served.

Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.

~ Mark Twain

A well-prepared, rehearsed, and delivered after-dinner speech can make a significant mark on the audience and occasion, all the while using humor to make a serious point. The best speeches are usually tailored to the audience and occasion, have a thesis statement or idea, include claims that have support, and of course, incorporate humor. When used well in an after-dinner speech, humor can teach, entertain, and perhaps change the way people look at an issue. Used poorly, however, humor can hurt your message beyond repair and diminish your credibility. Due to the nature of humor in public speaking, there are several issues to keep in mind. First, the topic or theme of the speech should relate to the occasion of the event. Relevant speeches include references to the event’s purpose or cause and perhaps some key people involved:

I am grateful for the opportunity to address you all this evening. When I asked your conference planner how long my speech should be, she said, “You can speak as long as you want, but the rest of us will be leaving around nine.” . . . Before I say anything more, I have been asked by the facilities manager to remind you that the sign in the men’s restroom saying “Wet Floor” should serve as a warning, not an instruction . . .

Indeed, after-dinner speeches are intended to be funny, but avoid turning the event into a stand-up comedy routine. A stand-up routine is merely a string of jokes that are more speaker-centered rather than audience-centered (Hamilton, 2002). On the contrary, an after-dinner speech has clear organization, a polished delivery, and a clearly articulated theme. Without a clear organizational pattern, the audience will have difficulty understanding the serious point made with the speech.

A common mistake some after-dinner speakers make is to come across as a comedian, taking on styles and mannerisms that are not natural. After-dinner speakers should avoid styles and forms of delivery that are not their own and with which they do not feel comfortable. In other words, the speech and humor used should be consistent with the speaker's persona.

Follow the path of the unsafe, independent thinker. Expose your ideas to the danger of controversy. Speak your mind and fear less the label of "crackpot" than the stigma of conformity.

~ Thomas John Watson, Sr.

There is the possibility that the speech will touch on serious or controversial issues. After all, the after-dinner speech sets a social agenda (O'Hair et al., 2001), often conveying a speaker's stance on an issue. Skilled after-dinner speakers understand this, and they are observant of the audience's comfort levels. If the theme or occasion is a very somber one, such as commemorating the lost lives of the Civil Rights movement, the speaker should keep her or his humorous remarks modest so as not to seriously offend (Hamilton, 2002). Even when the purpose of the speech is more heavily weighted on agenda setting rather than entertainment, it should still be a celebration of the occasion.

In keeping with an audience's comfort level, an after-dinner speech should fit their mood and expectations. If the audience is in the mood to have fun or to be entertained, then the after-dinner speech might be well received. The mood or attitude of the audience will influence how they receive or respond to your jokes. If the speech isn't well-matched to the audience, even your best-told and most clever jokes will fall flat.

Brevity is the soul of wit.

~ William Shakespeare



general guidelines to special occasion speeches

keep it short

With careful planning and a certain amount of practice, you can certainly deliver a ceremonial speech that will make a memorable impact. These guidelines might help make the planning and rehearsal process a little easier for you. First, if it's possible, keep the speech short (Perlman, 1997). More important than your speech is the occasion that you're commemorating; you don't want to overshadow the event that others have gathered to celebrate. For instance, if you are introducing a keynote speaker or presenting an award, avoid going into a "shopping list" of all the honoree's accomplishments. In some cases they might be too numerous to list. Also consider how familiar your audience is with the honoree or recipient; he or she might be so well known that it might not be the best use of the audience's time to recite a litany of the recipient's accomplishments. Even longer speeches (e.g., commencement or keynote) shouldn't be too long as audience members will not appreciate having to hear an address that seems to go on for a long time. In general, keep the current occasion in mind and focus primarily on the award or recognition that motivated the occasion.

acknowledge the obvious

Another thing to keep in mind is to "finesse the obvious" (Perlman, 1997). One might take this advice to mean to not to insult the intelligence of the audience. In some cases, the audience will be very familiar with the main speaker or recipient—who might be a well-known alumnus, actor, or politician; however, it would be insulting not to acknowledge what makes such a person noteworthy. Therefore, you might say something like, "As we all know . . ." or "It goes without saying that . . ." in order to point out the apparent when acknowledging well-known achievements that shouldn't go unnoticed.

stay positive

Regardless of the occasion or speech, stay positive, even if it is to commemorate a sad occasion or remember the loss of an individual. Perlman (1997) suggests taking every opportunity to compliment the speaker. Humorous anecdotes are generally okay if they're positive. This guideline also applies to roasts. Even if you are able to insert a few embarrassing anecdotes, the best roasts start and end on a positive note.

Table 17.1
Common Types of Verbal Humor

Anecdote:	▪ Interesting stories told to help the speaker make a point
Aside:	▪ A statement added as an after-thought, appearing as though the speaker said something that reminded him or her of the aside
Banter:	▪ Good-natured teasing done back-and-forth with another person, sometimes with an audience member
Blendword	▪ The combination of two words to make a new word; e.g. “murse” for “man” and “purse”
Blunder	▪ Witty way of making a mistake or verbal faux pas
Conundrum	▪ A word puzzle that has a pun for an answer; e.g. cows wearing bells because their horns do not work
Freudian Slip	▪ A humorous statement that appears to come spontaneously, but really reflects the speaker’s subconscious
Hyperbole	▪ Excessive exaggeration
Irony	▪ Words or statements used to reflect the complete opposite of their original meaning
Joke	▪ A short anecdote that has a funny twist at the end
Parody	▪ A humorous version of another writing or speech
Recovery	▪ The appearance of a blunder that the speaker quickly corrects, in an attempt to save himself or herself
Repartee	▪ Clever or witty retorts, often in the form of insults
Satire	▪ Humor that is critical, or makes fun of something
Situational Humor	▪ Humor that comes from the speaker’s own personal experiences
Understatement	▪ Intentionally down-sizing something to make it appear smaller or less severe

A well-developed sense of humor is the pole that adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life.

~ William Arthur Ward

use humor carefully

The topic of humor itself warrants careful discussion. Humor can find its way into almost any special occasion speech, and it’s a good way to keep the audience interested in your speech—when used effectively (Hamilton, 2002). Humor is more than just telling jokes—it is really about supplementing your message as well as really driving your point home, so to speak. Humor can be appealing to both speaker and audience because it creates a sense of immediacy and psychological closeness. It also facilitates a common bond between speaker and audience, which helps the audience identify even more with the topic and content of the speech.

If you decide to use humor, you should make this decision carefully. While everyone has the potential to be funny and to use humor in an effective way, some occasions lend themselves to humor more than others. Furthermore, some speakers may doubt their abilities to pull off humor in certain situations or with specific audiences. If you’re asking yourself, “Should I use humor?” you should consider whether the situation lends itself to some humor or laughter, if you might undermine your own credibility, or if you even have the comfort level of the timing to pull off the humor attempt (Audrieth, 1998). People who naturally see the humor in situations and can look at life in a humorous light will likely be able to use humor effectively in a public speech. This ability can prove to be a tremendous asset to a public speaker. However, it takes a good deal more than just some natural ability to be effective. As Audrieth advises, “If deep, deep down, you know that you are a klutz when it comes to delivering the punch line, if you can’t seem to get jokes right, then

consider carefully your decision to use humor.”

The face is the mirror of the mind, and eyes without speaking confess the secrets of the heart.

~ St. Jerome

When learning to use humor, speakers should understand the importance of nonverbal delivery (Hamilton, 2002). For one thing, do not give off the impression that you expect laughter or smiling in response to any particular remark. If you deliver a clever line and stand there with an expectant smile, you are going to feel and look foolish if no one responds. Furthermore, some audience members may find it less arrogant or more endearing if you can deliver a punch line *without* looking like you expect a response. Nonverbal delivery also involves a sense of comic timing. Being able to deliver funny lines without having to adjust your overall delivery is a skill that is highly valued. Timing also means not having to step in and out of a humorous line. In other words, try not to show a difference in tone between the funny and not-so-funny segments of your speech. When incorporating these strategies, remember that you will get better with *practice*. Even the best humorists practice their speeches to polish their

delivery.

Of course, nonverbal humor should not stand alone. An after-dinner speaker should have a good understanding and command of various verbal humor forms (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 2007) and plays on words. The idea here is that the verbal and nonverbal cues supplement each other to convey the most appropriate humor, and using humor as a verbal strategy can convey what visual humor usually cannot. For instance, it may be difficult or impossible to convey irony or contradiction through nonverbal cues alone. Using language to point out ironies and contradictory situations in life can remind listeners of what makes us human (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Tretheway, 2007), as well as make a serious point in a subtle way. Additional forms of verbal strategies include puns, hyperboles, anecdotes, and others that can tell a story or use language to convey humor images. Some of the more popular forms can be found in Table 17.1.

I'm not funny. What I am is brave.
~ Lucille Ball



conclusion

Special occasion speaking encompasses a number of different speeches that require particular attention to an occasion, event, or person. Such speeches are intended to inspire audiences, celebrate an event, commemorate a person, and/or entertain. Special occasion speeches should reflect the mood of the audience and the occasion that brings people together. This chapter discussed speeches of introduction, toasts and roasts, presentational speeches, keynote addresses, commencement speeches, commemorative speeches and tributes, and after-dinner speeches. After-dinner speeches in particular are arguably the most challenging because they require planning, organization, and timing on the part of the speaker. But with some general guidelines—keeping it short, finessing the obvious, staying positive, and using appropriate forms of humor, the special occasion speech will have a lasting impact on the audience and the occasion



There are two things that are more difficult than making an after-dinner speech: climbing a wall which is leaning toward you and kissing a girl who is leaning away from you.

~ Winston Churchill

chapter review questions and activities

review questions

1. What is the purpose of a special occasion speech?
2. Discuss the influence of epideictic speaking on what we know about special occasion speaking today.
3. Generate a definition and purpose for each type of special occasion speech.
4. Compare and contrast presenting an award with receiving an award.
5. What do you think are the most important guidelines for an effective after-dinner speech?
6. Why is it a good idea to keep a special occasion speech short (whenever possible)?
7. What does it mean to “finesse the obvious” in a special occasion speech?
8. What should be the main purpose of humor in a special occasion speech? What steps can you take to use humor effectively?

activities

1. Find a partner and construct a role play of an awards event. One partner will prepare a speech presentation for a fictitious award, and the other partner will prepare a speech accepting the fictitious award. Give the two speeches back-to-back for the class.
2. Find a sample commencement address online (You can consult the list of web resources listed on the chapter home page). Bring a copy of the address to class and determine which of the following components below are contained in the sample.
 - A. Is celebratory in nature
 - B. It marks a milestone on graduates' lives
 - C. Provides a call to action for its audience
 - D. Gives practical and/or memorable advice
 - E. Draws attention to social or political issues of the day
 - F. Lays out paths the audience can take beyond graduation
 - G. Addresses tools for change needed to make an individual impact
 - H. Illustrates factors that contribute to a good life
3. In class, get into small groups (about 3 to 5 people) and brainstorm a list of famous people—alive or dead—who can be the subject of a commemorative or tribute speech. For each individual listed, generate at least two characteristics that should be acknowledged in the speech.
4. Suppose you are called upon to give a toast or tribute speech to someone you believe is not deserving. You can think of a fictitious or real person. Discuss how you would go about preparing and delivering this speech. Also discuss how you would still be true to your own principles as well as conduct yourself in an ethical and professional manner.
5. Suppose you have a guest coming to speak to your class. Prepare a speech of introduction for this person. What are this person's attributes? What would be the topic of this person's guest lecture, and how would you incorporate that into your speech?

glossary

Acceptance Speech

Also called the speech to accept an award, the acceptance speech gives the recipient an opportunity to express appreciation for the award as well as humility and grace.

After-dinner Speech

During the after-dinner speech, audiences expect to be entertained by a speech that informs them about a particular issue. This speech sometimes uses humor to make a serious point.

Ceremonial Speech

A ceremonial speech includes one of several kinds that celebrate an occasion. More specifically, a ceremonial speech may introduce a speaker, entertain an audience, or inspire people. Another term for ceremonial speech is special occasion speech.

Commemorative or Tribute Speech

A commemorative or tribute speech is one that pays special accolades to an occasion, extraordinary person, event, idea, or monument. Such a speech is intended to reflect the emotions of the audience.

Commencement Speech

The commencement speech is given by a well-known person of local, national, or international acclaim to mark a university or secondary school graduation ceremony.

Epidictic Speech

This is a ceremonial speech intended to praise or blame.

Identification

A technique used in ceremonial speaking to enhance feelings of familiarity and closeness.

Keynote Address

The keynote address represents the keynote of a larger idea taking place at a conference or exposition usually organized around a central theme.

Magnification

A technique in ceremonial speaking used to give benefit to the audience, amplify emotion, and exceed audience expectations.

Presentational Speech

Also called a speech to present an award, the presentational speech serves to highlight the merits of the award recipient and to point out the purpose and significance of the award being given.

Roast

A roast is a variation of the toast in which the speaker pays tribute to a person by poking fun at her or him in a friendly way.

Special Occasion Speech

A special occasion speech includes one of several kinds that celebrate an occasion. More specifically, it might introduce a speaker, entertain an audience, or inspire people. Another term for special occasion speech is ceremonial speech.

Speech of Introduction

A speech of introduction is a brief presentation used to introduce the main speaker of an event and to inspire the audience to listen to that speaker.

Toast

A toast is a brief tribute to a person or event.

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