



This is “Speaking to Entertain”, chapter 18 from the book [Public Speaking: Practice and Ethics \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

This book is licensed under a [Creative Commons by-nc-sa 3.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/) license. See the license for more details, but that basically means you can share this book as long as you credit the author (but see below), don't make money from it, and do make it available to everyone else under the same terms.

This content was accessible as of December 29, 2012, and it was downloaded then by [Andy Schmitz](#) (<http://lardbucket.org>) in an effort to preserve the availability of this book.

Normally, the author and publisher would be credited here. However, the publisher has asked for the customary Creative Commons attribution to the original publisher, authors, title, and book URI to be removed. Additionally, per the publisher's request, their name has been removed in some passages. More information is available on this project's [attribution page](http://2012books.lardbucket.org/attribution.html?utm_source=header).

For more information on the source of this book, or why it is available for free, please see [the project's home page](#) (<http://2012books.lardbucket.org/>). You can browse or download additional books there.

Chapter 18

Speaking to Entertain

The Nature of Entertainment

Often the speaking opportunities life brings our way have nothing to do specifically with informing or persuading an audience; instead, we are asked to speak to entertain. Whether you are standing up to give an award speech or a toast, knowing how to deliver speeches in a variety of different contexts is the nature of entertaining speaking. In this chapter, we are going to explore what entertaining speeches are; we will also examine two specific types of entertaining speeches: special-occasion speeches and keynote speeches.



© Thinkstock

18.1 Understanding Entertaining Speeches

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the purpose of entertaining speeches.
2. Explain the four ingredients of a good entertaining speech.

In broad terms, an **entertaining speech**¹ is a speech designed to captivate an audience’s attention and regale or amuse them while delivering a message. Like more traditional informative or persuasive speeches, entertaining speeches should communicate a clear message, but the manner of speaking used in an entertaining speech is typically different. Entertaining speeches are often delivered on special occasions (e.g., a toast at a wedding, an acceptance speech at an awards banquet, a motivational speech at a conference), which is why they are sometimes referred to as special-occasion speeches. However, they can also be given on more mundane occasions, where their purpose is primarily to amuse audience members or arouse them emotionally in some way. Remember, when we use the word “entertain,” we are referring not just to humor but also to drama. The goal of an entertaining speech is to stir an audience’s emotions.



© Thinkstock

Of all the types of speeches we come in contact with during our lives, the bulk of them will probably fall into the category of entertainment. If you spend just one evening watching a major awards show (e.g., the Grammys, the Tonys, the Oscars), you’ll see dozens of acceptance speeches. While some of these acceptance speeches are good and others may be terrible, they all belong in the category of speaking to entertain.

Other speeches that fall into the entertaining category are designed to inspire or motivate an audience to do something. These are, however, different from a traditional persuasive speech. While entertaining speeches are often persuasive, we differentiate the two often based on the rhetorical situation itself. Maybe your school has hired a speaker to talk about his or her life story in an attempt to inspire the audience to try harder in school and reach for the best that life has to offer. You can imagine how this speech would be different from a traditional persuasive

1. Speech designed to captivate an audience’s attention and regale or amuse them while delivering a clear message.

speech focusing on, say, the statistics related to scholastic achievement and success later in life.

Entertaining speeches are definitely very common, but that doesn't mean they don't require effort and preparation. A frequent trap is that people often think of entertaining speeches as corny. As a result, they don't prepare seriously but rather stand up to speak with the idea that they can "wing it" by acting silly and telling a few jokes. Instead of being entertaining, the speech falls flat. To help us think through how to be effective in delivering entertaining speeches, let's look at four key ingredients: preparation, adaptation to the occasion, adaptation to the audience, and mindfulness about the time.

Be Prepared

First, and foremost, the biggest mistake you can make when standing to deliver an entertaining speech is to underprepare or simply not prepare at all. We've stressed the need for preparation throughout this text, so just because you're giving a wedding toast or a eulogy doesn't mean you shouldn't think through the speech before you stand up and speak out. If the situation is impromptu, even jotting some basic notes on a napkin is better than not having any plan for what you are going to say. Remember, when you get anxious, as it inevitably happens in front of an audience, your brain doesn't function as well as when you are having a relaxed conversation with friends. You often forget information. By writing down some simple notes, you'll be less likely to deliver a bad speech.

Be Adaptive to the Occasion

Not all content is appropriate for all occasions. If you are asked to deliver a speech commemorating the first anniversary of a school shooting, then obviously using humor and telling jokes wouldn't be appropriate. But some decisions about adapting to the occasion are less obvious. Consider the following examples:

- You are the maid of honor giving a toast at the wedding of your younger sister.
- You are receiving a Most Valuable Player award in your favorite sport.
- You are a sales representative speaking to a group of clients after a mistake has been discovered.
- You are a cancer survivor speaking at a high school student assembly.

How might you adapt your message and speaking style to successfully entertain these various audiences?

Remember that being a competent speaker is about being both personally effective and socially appropriate. Different occasions will call for different levels of social appropriateness. One of the biggest mistakes entertaining speakers can make is to deliver one generic speech to different groups without adapting the speech to the specific occasion. In fact, professional speakers always make sure that their speeches are tailored for different occasions by getting information about the occasion from their hosts. When we tailor speeches for special occasions, people are more likely to remember those speeches than if we give a generic speech.

Be Adaptive to Your Audience

Once again, we cannot stress the importance of audience adaptation enough in this text. Different audiences will respond differently to speech material, so the more you know about your audience the more likely you'll succeed in your speech. One of our coauthors was once at a conference for teachers of public speaking. The keynote speaker stood and delivered a speech on the importance of public speaking. While the speaker was good and funny, the speech really fell flat. The keynote speaker basically told the public speaking teachers that they should take public speaking courses because public speaking is important. Right speech, wrong audience!

Be Mindful of the Time

The last major consideration for delivering entertaining speeches successfully is to be mindful of your time. Different entertaining speech situations have their own conventions and rules with regard to time. Acceptance speeches and toasts, for example, should be relatively short (typically under five minutes). A speech of introduction should be extremely brief—just long enough to tell the audience what they need to know about the person being introduced in a style that prepares them to appreciate that person's remarks. In contrast, commencement speeches and speeches to commemorate events can run ten to twenty minutes in length.

It's also important to recognize that audiences on different occasions will expect speeches of various lengths. For example, although it's true that graduation commencement speakers generally speak for ten to twenty minutes, the closer that speaker heads toward twenty minutes the more fidgety the audience becomes. To hold the audience's attention and fulfill the goal of entertaining, a commencement speaker would do well to make the closing minutes of the speech the most engaging and inspiring portion of the speech. If you're not sure about the expected time frame for a speech, either ask the person who has invited you to speak or do some quick research to see what the average speech times in the given context tend to be.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Entertaining speeches are speeches designed to captivate an audience’s attention and regale or amuse them while delivering a clear message. Speakers engage in entertaining speeches generally at special occasions (e.g., weddings, funerals) or are asked to deliver a keynote address.
- Entertaining speeches should include four key considerations: preparation, adaptation to the occasion, adaptation to the audience, and mindfulness of the time. As with all speeches, speakers need to prepare the speech. Second, speakers need to think about the specific occasion. Third, speakers need to adapt their speeches to the specific audience. Lastly, speakers need to think about how long they should speak.

EXERCISES

1. Type in the word “roast” into YouTube and watch a few minutes of a roast. Did the speaker clearly exhibit the four clear ingredients of an entertaining speech?
2. Watch several toasts and acceptance speeches on YouTube. Can you identify specific ways in which each speaker adapts the speech to the occasion and the audience?

18.2 Special-Occasion Speeches

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the different types of ceremonial speaking.
2. Describe the different types of inspirational speaking.

Many entertaining speeches fall under the category of special-occasion speeches. All the speeches in this category are given to mark the significance of particular events. Common events include weddings, bar mitzvahs, awards ceremonies, funerals, and political events. In each of these different occasions, speakers are asked to deliver speeches relating to the event. For purposes of simplicity, we've broken special-occasion speeches into two groups: ceremonial speaking and inspirational speaking.



© Thinkstock

Ceremonial Speaking

Ceremonial speeches² are speeches given during a ceremony or a ritual marked by observance of formality or etiquette. These ceremonies tend to be very special for people, so it shouldn't be surprising that they are opportunities for speech making. Let's examine each of the eight types of ceremonial speaking: introductions, presentations, acceptances, dedications, toasts, roasts, eulogies, and farewells.

Speeches of Introduction

The first type of speech is called the **speech of introduction**³, which is a minispeech given by the host of a ceremony that introduces another speaker and his or her speech. Few things are worse than when the introducer or a speaker stands up and says, "This is Joe Smith, he's going to talk about stress." While we did learn the speaker's name and the topic, the introduction falls flat. Audiences won't be the least bit excited about listening to Joe's speech.

Just like any other speech, a speech of introduction should be a complete speech and have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion—and you should do it all in under two minutes. This brings up another "few things are worse" scenario: an

2. Speeches given during a ceremony or a ritual marked by observance of formality or etiquette.
3. Speech given by the host of a ceremony that introduces another speaker and his or her speech.

introductory speaker who rambles on for too long or who talks about himself or herself instead of focusing on the person being introduced.

For an introduction, think of a hook that will make your audience interested in the upcoming speaker. Did you read a news article related to the speaker's topic? Have you been impressed by a presentation you've heard the speaker give in the past? You need to find something that can grab the audience's attention and make them excited about hearing the main speaker.

The body of your introductory speech should be devoted to telling the audience about the speaker's topic, why the speaker is qualified, and why the audience should listen (notice we now have our three body points). First, tell your audience in general terms about the overarching topic of the speech. Most of the time as an introducer, you'll only have a speech title and maybe a paragraph of information to help guide this part of your speech. That's all right. You don't need to know all the ins and outs of the main speaker's speech; you just need to know enough to whet the audience's appetite. Next, you need to tell the audience why the speaker is a credible speaker on the topic. Has the speaker written books or articles on the subject? Has the speaker had special life events that make him or her qualified? Lastly, you need to briefly explain to the audience why they should care about the upcoming speech.

The final part of a good introduction is the conclusion, which is generally designed to welcome the speaker to the lectern. Many introducers will conclude by saying something like, "I am looking forward to hearing how Joe Smith's advice and wisdom can help all of us today, so please join me in welcoming Mr. Joe Smith." We've known some presenters who will even add a notation to their notes to "start clapping" and "shake speakers hand" or "give speaker a hug" depending on the circumstances of the speech.

Now that we've walked through the basic parts of an introductory speech, let's see one outlined:

Specific Purpose: To entertain the audience while preparing them for Janice Wright's speech on rituals.

Introduction: Mention some common rituals people in the United States engage in (Christmas, sporting events, legal proceedings).

Main Points:

1. Explain that the topic was selected because understanding how cultures use ritual is an important part of understanding what it means to be human.
2. Janice Wright is a cultural anthropologist who studies the impact that everyday rituals have on communities.
3. All of us engage in rituals, and we often don't take the time to determine how these rituals were started and how they impact our daily routines.

Conclusion: I had the opportunity to listen to Dr. Wright at the regional conference in Springfield last month, and I am excited that I get to share her with all of you tonight. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Wright (start clapping, shake speaker's hand, exit stage).

Speeches of Presentation

The second type of common ceremonial speech is the **speech of presentation**⁴. A speech of presentation is a brief speech given to accompany a prize or honor. Speeches of presentation can be as simple as saying, "This year's recipient of the Schuman Public Speaking prize is Wilhelmina Jeffers," or could last up to five minutes as the speaker explains why the honoree was chosen for the award.

When preparing a speech of presentation, it's always important to ask how long the speech should be. Once you know the time limit, then you can set out to create the speech itself. First, you should explain what the award or honor is and why the presentation is important. Second, you can explain what the recipient has accomplished in order for the award to be bestowed. Did the person win a race? Did the person write an important piece of literature? Did the person mediate conflict? Whatever the recipient has done, you need to clearly highlight his or her work. Lastly, if the race or competition was conducted in a public forum and numerous people didn't win, you may want to recognize those people for their efforts as well. While you don't want to steal the show away from winner (as Kanye West did to Taylor Swift during the 2009 MTV Music Video Awards, for example <http://www.mtv.com/videos/misc/435995/taylor-swift-wins-best-female-video.jhtml#id=1620605>), you may want to highlight the work of the other competitors or nominees.

Speeches of Acceptance

The complement to a speech of presentation is the **speech of acceptance**⁵. The speech of acceptance is a speech given by the recipient of a prize or honor. For example, in the above video clip from the 2009 MTV Music Video Awards, Taylor

4. Speech given by the awarder of a prize or honor.

5. Speech given by the recipient of a prize or honor.

Swift starts by expressing her appreciation, gets interrupted by Kanye West, and ends by saying, “I would like to thank the fans and MTV, thank you.” While obviously not a traditional acceptance speech because of the interruption, she did manage to get in the important parts.

There are three typical components of a speech of acceptance: thank the givers of the award or honor, thank those who helped you achieve your goal, and put the award or honor into perspective. First, you want to thank the people who have given you the award or honor and possibly those who voted for you. We see this done every year during the Oscars, “First, I’d like to thank the academy and all the academy voters.” Second, you want to give credit to those who helped you achieve the award or honor. No person accomplishes things in life on his or her own. We all have families and friends and colleagues who support us and help us achieve what we do in life, and a speech of acceptance is a great time to graciously recognize those individuals. Lastly, put the award in perspective. Tell the people listening to your speech why the award is meaningful to you.

Speeches of Dedication

The fourth ceremonial speech is the **speech of dedication**⁶. A speech of dedication is delivered when a new store opens, a building is named after someone, a plaque is placed on a wall, a new library is completed, and so on. These speeches are designed to highlight the importance of the project and possibly those to whom the project has been dedicated. Maybe your great-uncle has died and left your college tons of money, so the college has decided to rename one of the dorms after your great-uncle. In this case, you may be asked to speak at the dedication.

When preparing the speech of dedication, start by explaining how you are involved in the dedication. If the person to whom the dedication is being made is a relative, tell the audience that the building is being named after your great-uncle who bestowed a gift to his alma mater. Second, you want to explain what is being dedicated. If the dedication is a new building or a preexisting building, you want to explain what is being dedicated and the importance of the structure. You should then explain who was involved in the project. If the project is a new structure, talk about the people who built the structure or designed it. If the project is a preexisting structure, talk about the people who put together and decided on the dedication. Lastly, explain why the structure is important for the community where it’s located. If the dedication is for a new store, talk about how the store will bring in new jobs and new shopping opportunities. If the dedication is for a new wing of a hospital, talk about how patients will be served and the advances in medicine the new wing will provide the community.

6. Speech delivered when a new store opens, a building is named after someone, a plaque is placed on a wall, when a new library is completed, and so on.

Toasts

At one time or another, almost everyone is going to be asked to deliver a **toast**⁷. A toast is a speech designed to congratulate, appreciate, or remember. First, toasts can be delivered for the purpose of congratulating someone for an honor, a new job, or getting married. You can also toast someone to show your appreciation for something they've done. Lastly, we toast people to remember them and what they have accomplished.

When preparing a toast, the first goal is always to keep your remarks brief. Toasts are generally given during the middle of some kind of festivities (e.g., wedding, retirement party, farewell party), and you don't want your toast to take away from those festivities for too long. Second, the goal of a toast is to focus attention on the person or persons being toasted—not on the speaker. As such, while you are speaking you need to focus your attention to the people being toasted, both by physically looking at them and by keeping your message about them. You should also avoid any inside jokes between you and the people being toasted because toasts are public and should be accessible for everyone who hears them. To conclude a toast, simply say something like, "Please join me in recognizing Joan for her achievement" and lift your glass. When you lift your glass, this will signal to others to do the same and then you can all take a drink, which is the end of your speech.

Roasts

The **roast**⁸ speech is a very interesting and peculiar speech because it is designed to both praise and good-naturedly insult a person being honored. Generally, roasts are given at the conclusion of a banquet in honor of someone's life achievements. The television station Comedy Central has been conducting roasts of various celebrities for a few years.

In this clip, watch as Stephen Colbert, television host of *The Colbert Report*, roasts President George W. Bush.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSE_saVX_2A

Let's pick this short clip apart. You'll notice that the humor doesn't pull any punches. The goal of the roast is to both praise and insult in a good-natured manner. You'll also see that the roaster, in this case Stephen Colbert, is standing behind a lectern while the roastee, President George W. Bush, is clearly on display for the audience to see, and periodically you'll see the camera pan to President Bush to take in his reactions. Half the fun of a good roast is watching the roastee's

7. Speech designed to congratulate, appreciate, or remember.

8. Speech designed to both praise and good-naturedly insult a person being honored.

reactions during the roast, so it's important to have the roastee clearly visible by the audience.

How does one prepare for a roast? First, you want to really think about the person who is being roasted. Do they have any strange habits or amusing stories in their past that you can discuss? When you think through these things you want to make sure that you cross anything off your list that is truly private information or will really hurt the person. The goal of a roast is to poke at them, not massacre them. Second, when selecting which aspects to poke fun at, you need to make sure that the items you choose are widely known by your audience. Roasts work when the majority of people in the audience can relate to the jokes being made. If you have an inside joke with the roastee, bringing it up during roast may be great fun for the two of you, but it will leave your audience unimpressed. Lastly, end on a positive note. While the jokes are definitely the fun part of a roast, you should leave the roastee knowing that you truly do care about and appreciate the person.

Eulogies

A **eulogy**⁹ is a speech given in honor of someone who has died. (Don't confuse "eulogy" with "elegy," a poem or song of mourning.) Unless you are a minister, priest, rabbi, imam, or other form of religious leader, you'll probably not deliver too many eulogies in your lifetime. However, when the time comes to deliver a eulogy, it's good to know what you're doing and to adequately prepare your remarks. Watch the following clip of then-Senator Barack Obama delivering a eulogy at the funeral of civil rights activist Rosa Parks in November of 2005.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRsH92sJCr4>

In this eulogy, Senator Obama delivers the eulogy by recalling Rosa Parks importance and her legacy in American history.

When preparing a eulogy, first you need to know as much information about the deceased as possible. The more information you have about the person, the more personal you can make the eulogy. While you can rely on your own information if you were close to the deceased, it is always a good idea to ask friends and relatives of the deceased for their memories, as these may add important facets that may not have occurred to you. Of course, if you were not very close to the deceased, you will need to ask friends and family for information. Second, although eulogies are delivered on the serious and sad occasion of a funeral or memorial service for the deceased, it is very helpful to look for at least one point to be lighter or humorous. In some cultures, in fact, the friends and family attending the funeral will expect the eulogy to be highly entertaining and amusing. While eulogies are not roasts, one

9. Speech given in honor of someone who has died.

goal of the humor or lighter aspects of a eulogy is to relieve the tension that is created by the serious nature of the occasion. Lastly, remember to tell the deceased's story. Tell the audience about who this person was and what the person stood for in life. The more personal you can make a eulogy, the more touching it will be for the deceased's friends and families. The eulogy should remind the audience to celebrate the person's life as well as mourn their death.

Speeches of Farewell

A **speech of farewell**¹⁰ allows someone to say good-bye to one part of his or her life as he or she is moving on to the next part of life. Maybe you've accepted a new job and are leaving your current job, or you're graduating from college and entering the work force. Whatever the case may be, periods of transition are often marked by speeches of farewell. Watch the following clip of Derek Jeter's 2008 speech saying farewell to Yankee Stadium, built in 1923, before the New York Yankees moved to the new stadium that opened in 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJrITpQm0to>

In this speech, Derek Jeter is not only saying good-bye to Yankee Stadium but also thanking the fans for their continued support.

When preparing a speech of farewell, the goal should be to thank the people in your current position and let them know how much you appreciate them as you make the move to your next position in life. In Derek Jeter's speech, he starts by talking about the history of the 1923 Yankee Stadium and then thanks the fans for their support. Second, you want to express to your audience how much the experience has meant to you. A farewell speech is a time to commemorate and think about the good times you've had. As such, you should avoid negativity during this speech. Lastly, you want to make sure that you end on a high note. Derek Jeter concludes his speech by saying, "On behalf of this entire organization, we just want to take this moment to salute you, the greatest fans in the world!" at which point Jeter and the other players take off their ball caps and hold them up toward the audience.

Inspirational Speaking

The goal of an **inspirational speech**¹¹ is to elicit or arouse an emotional state within an audience. In [Section 18.2.1 "Ceremonial Speaking"](#), we looked at ceremonial speeches. Although some inspirational speeches are sometimes tied to ceremonial occasions, there are also other speaking contexts that call for inspirational speeches. For our purposes, we are going to look at two types of inspirational speeches: goodwill and speeches of commencement.

10. Speech designed to allow someone to say good-bye to one part of his or her life as he or she is moving on to the next part of life.
11. Speech designed to elicit or arouse an emotional state within an audience.

Speeches to Ensure Goodwill

Goodwill¹² is an intangible asset that is made up of the favor or reputation of an individual or organization. **Speeches of goodwill**¹³ are often given in an attempt to get audience members to view the person or organization more favorably. Although speeches of goodwill are clearly persuasive, they try not to be obvious about the persuasive intent and are often delivered as information-giving speeches that focus on an individual or organization's positive attributes. There are three basic types of speeches of goodwill: public relations, justification, and apology.

Speeches for Public Relations

In a public relations speech, the speaker is speaking to enhance one's own image or the image of his or her organization. You can almost think of these speeches as cheerleading speeches because the ultimate goal is to get people to like the speaker and what he or she represents. In the following brief speech, the CEO of British Petroleum is speaking to reporters about what his organization is doing during the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCfa6AxmUHw>

Notice that he keeps emphasizing what his company is doing to fix the problem. Every part of this speech is orchestrated to make BP look caring and attempts to get some amount of goodwill from the viewing public.

Speeches of Justification

The second common speech of goodwill is the speech of justification, which is given when someone attempts to defend why certain actions were taken or will be taken. In these speeches, speakers have already enacted (or decided to enact) some kind of behavior, and are now attempting to justify why the behavior is or was appropriate. In the following clip, President Bill Clinton discusses his decision to bomb key Iraqi targets after uncovering a plot to assassinate former President George H. W. Bush.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mpWa7wNr5M>

12. An intangible asset that is made up of the favor or reputation of an individual or organization.
13. Speech given in an attempt to get audience members to view the person or organization more favorably.

In this speech, President Clinton outlines his reasons for bombing Iraq to the American people and the globe. Again, the goal of this speech is to secure goodwill for President Clinton's decisions both in the United States and on the world stage.

Speeches of Apology

The final speech of goodwill is the speech of apology. Frankly, these speeches have become more and more commonplace. Every time we turn around, a politician, professional athlete, musician, or actor/actress is doing something reprehensible and getting caught. In fact, the speech of apology has quickly become a fodder for humor as well. Let's take a look at a real apology speech delivered by professional golfer Tiger Woods.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs8nseNP4s0>

When you need to make an apology speech, there are three elements that you need to include: be honest and take responsibility, say you're sorry, and offer restitution. First, a speaker needs to be honest and admit to doing something wrong. The worst apology speeches are those in which the individual tries to sidestep the wrongdoing. Even if you didn't do anything wrong, it is often best to take responsibility from a public perception perspective. Second, say that you are sorry. People need to know that you are remorseful for what you've done. One of the problems many experts saw with Tiger Woods's speech is that he doesn't look remorseful at all. While the words coming out of his mouth are appropriate, he looks like a robot forced to read from a manuscript written by his press agent. Lastly, you need to offer restitution. Restitution can come in the form of fixing something broken or a promise not to engage in such behavior in the future. People in society are very willing to forgive and forget when they are asked.

Speeches for Commencements

The second type of inspirational speech is the **speech of commencement**¹⁴, which is designed to recognize and celebrate the achievements of a graduating class or other group of people. The most typical form of commencement speech happens when someone graduates from school. Nearly all of us have sat through commencement speeches at some point in our lives. And if you're like us, you've heard good ones and bad ones. Numerous celebrities and politicians have been asked to deliver commencement speeches at colleges and universities. One famous and well-thought-out commencement speech was given by famed *Harry Potter* author J. K. Rowling at Harvard University in 2008.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkREt4ZB-ck>

14. Speech designed to recognize and celebrate the achievements of a group of people.

J. K. Rowling's speech has the perfect balance of humor and inspiration, which are two of the main ingredients of a great commencement speech.

If you're ever asked to deliver a commencement speech, there are some key points to think through when deciding on your speech's content.

- If there is a specific theme for the graduation, make sure that your commencement speech addresses that theme. If there is no specific theme, come up with one for your speech. Some common commencement speech themes are commitment, competitiveness, competence, confidence, decision making, discipline, ethics, failure (and overcoming failure), faith, generosity, integrity, involvement, leadership, learning, persistence, personal improvement, professionalism, reality, responsibility, and self-respect.
- Talk about your life and how graduates can learn from your experiences to avoid pitfalls or take advantages of life. How can your life inspire the graduates in their future endeavors?
- Make the speech humorous. Commencement speeches should be entertaining and make an audience laugh.
- Be brief! Nothing is more painful than a commencement speaker who drones on and on. Remember, the graduates are there to get their diplomas; their families are there to watch the graduates walk across the stage.
- Remember, while you may be the speaker, you've been asked to impart wisdom and advice for the people graduating and moving on with their lives, so keep it focused on them.
- Place the commencement speech into the broader context of the graduates' lives. Show the graduates how the advice and wisdom you are offering can be utilized to make their own lives better.

Overall, it's important to make sure that you have fun when delivering a commencement speech. Remember, it's a huge honor and responsibility to be asked to deliver a commencement speech, so take the time to really think through and prepare your speech.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There are eight common forms of ceremonial speaking: introduction, presentation, acceptance, dedication, toast, roast, eulogy, and farewell. Speeches of introduction are designed to introduce a speaker. Speeches of presentation are given when an individual is presenting an award of some kind. Speeches of acceptance are delivered by the person receiving an award or honor. Speeches of dedication are given when a new building or other place is being opened for the first time. Toasts are given to acknowledge and honor someone on a special occasion (e.g., wedding, birthday, retirement). Roasts are speeches designed to both praise and good-naturedly insult a person being honored. Eulogies are given during funerals and memorial services. Lastly, speeches of farewell are delivered by an individual who is leaving a job, community, or organization, and wants to acknowledge how much the group has meant.
- Inspirational speeches fall into two categories: goodwill (e.g., public relations, justification, and apology) and speeches of commencement. Speeches of goodwill attempt to get audience members to view the person or organization more favorably. On the other hand, speeches of commencement are delivered to recognize the achievements of a group of people.

EXERCISES

1. Imagine you've been asked to speak before a local civic organization such as the Kiwanis or Rotary Club. Develop a sample speech of introduction that you would like someone to give to introduce you.
2. You've been asked to roast your favorite celebrity. Develop a two-minute roast.
3. Develop a speech of commencement for your public speaking class.

18.3 Keynote Speaking

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the purpose of keynote speeches in society.
2. Explain the basic objective of an after-dinner speech.
3. Describe the purpose and types of motivational speeches.

The last type of entertaining speech we will examine is the keynote speech. A **keynote speech**¹⁵ is delivered to set the underlying tone and summarize the core message of an event. Keynotes are often given at the end of an event; there can also be a number of keynote speeches delivered throughout a longer event that lasts for several days. People who deliver keynote speeches are typically experts in a given area who are invited to speak at a conference, convention, banquet, meeting, or other kind of event for the purpose of setting a specific tone for the occasion. Some keynote speakers will actually work for a **speakers bureau**¹⁶, an agency that represents celebrity and professional speakers. One very important organization for all aspiring keynote speakers is the National Speaker's Association (NSA, <http://www.nsaspeaker.org>). NSA also publishes a widely respected magazine for professional speakers called *Speaker* magazine, which can be accessed for free from their website (<http://www.nsaspeaker-magazine.org>).



© Thinkstock

In the world of professional public speaking, there are two common types of keynotes: after-dinner speeches and motivational speeches. Let's look at each of these unique speeches.

15. Speech delivered to set the underlying tone and summarize the core message of an event.
16. Agency that represents celebrity and professional speakers.
17. Speech that is informative or persuasive but also designed to elicit laughter from one's audience.

After-Dinner Speaking

After-dinner speaking¹⁷ gets its name from the idea that these speeches historically followed a meal of some kind. After-dinner speakers are generally asked to speak (or hired to speak) because they have the ability both to speak effectively and to make people laugh. First and foremost, after-dinner speeches are speeches and not stand-up comedy routines. All the basic conventions of public speaking previously discussed in this text apply to after-dinner speeches, but the

overarching goal of these speeches is to be entertaining and to create an atmosphere of amusement.

After-dinner speaking is probably the hardest type of speaking to do well because it is an entertaining speech that depends on the successful delivery of humor. People train for years to develop **comic timing**¹⁸, or the verbal and nonverbal delivery used to enhance the comedic value of a message. But after-dinner speaking is difficult, not impossible. Here is the method we recommend for developing a successful after-dinner speech.

First, use all that you have learned about informative or persuasive speeches to prepare a real informative or persuasive speech roughly two-thirds the length of what the final speech will become. That is, if you’re going to be giving a ten-minute speech, then your “real” informative or persuasive speech should be six or seven minutes in length.

Next, go back through the speech and look for opportunities to insert humorous remarks. [Table 18.1 "Forms of Verbal Humor"](#) lists various forms of verbal humor that are often used in the textual portion of a speech.

Table 18.1 Forms of Verbal Humor

Type of Humor	Example
Acronym/ Abbreviation	CIA—Certified Idiots Anonymous
	LAPD—Lunatics And Punishment Dispensers
Humorous Advertisement or News Headline	“Tiger Woods Plays with Own Balls, Nike Says”
	“A-Rod Goes Deep, Wang Hurt”
	“Federal Agents Raid Gun Shop, Find Weapons”
Aside	They are otherwise known as oxymorons, which are not people who don’t know how to use acne medication.
	Colostomy, wasn’t he one of the Greek Gods?
Definition	“A banker is a fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining and wants it back the minute it begins to rain.” Mark Twain
	Spoiled rotten, or what happens to kids after spending just ten minutes with their grandparents.
Oxymoron	Scheduled emergency

18. The verbal and nonverbal delivery that someone uses to enhance the comedic value of a message.

Type of Humor	Example
	Gourmet spam
	Recreational hospital
Pleonasm	Frozen ice
	Sharp point
	Killed dead
Malapropism	He's a vast suppository of information (<i>suppository</i> should be <i>repository</i>).
	This is bound to create dysentery in the ranks (<i>dysentery</i> should be <i>dissent</i>).
One-Liner or Quotation	Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt. —Abraham Lincoln
	A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kick boxing. —Emo Philips
	Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened. —Winston Churchill
	In the first place God made idiots; this was for practice. Then he made school boards. —Mark Twain
Self-Effacing Humor	I looked over at my clock and it said 7:30, and I had to be at work by 8:00. I got up, got dressed, and sped to the office. Only then did I realize that it was 7:30 p.m. and not 7:30 a.m.
	“Thomas Jefferson once said, ‘One should not worry about chronological age compared to the ability to perform the task.’...Ever since Thomas Jefferson told me that I stopped worrying about my age.” —Ronald Reagan
Word Combination with Unusual Visual Effects	That kid was about as useful as a football bat.
	He was finer than frog hair.

Each of these is a possible humor device that could be implemented in a speech. Read the following speech delivered by Mark Twain on his seventieth birthday for a good example of an after-dinner speech (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/onstage/70bday.html>).

Once you've looked through your speech, examining places for verbal humor, think about any physical humor or props that would enhance your speech. Physical humor is great if you can pull it off without being self-conscious. One of the biggest

mistakes any humorist makes is to become too aware of what his or her body is doing because it's then harder to be free and funny. As for props, after-dinner speakers have been known to use everything from oversize inflatable baseball bats to rubber clown noses. The goal for a funny prop is that it adds to the humor of the speech without distracting from its message.

Last, and probably most important, try the humor out on real, live people. This is important for three reasons.

First, the success of humor depends heavily on delivery, and especially timing in delivery. You will need practice to polish your delivery so that your humor comes across. If you can't make it through one of your jokes without cracking up, you will need to either incorporate the self-crackup into your delivery or forgo using that joke.

Second, just because you find something unbelievably funny in your head doesn't mean that it will make anyone else laugh. Often, humor that we have written down on paper just doesn't translate when orally presented. You may have a humorous story that you love reading on paper, but find that it just seems to drone on once you start telling it out loud. Furthermore, remember there is a difference between written and verbal language, and this also translates to how humor is interpreted.

Third, you need to make sure the humor you choose will be appropriate for a specific audience. What one audience finds funny another may find offensive. Humor is the double-edged sword of public speaking. On one side, it is an amazing and powerful speaking tool, but on the other side, few things will alienate an audience more than offensive humor. If you're ever uncertain about whether a piece of humor will offend your audience, don't use it.

The following are some other tips for using humor from people who have professionally given after-dinner speeches and learned the hard way what to do and what to avoid:

- Personalize or localize humor when possible.
- Be clear about which words need emphasis with verbal humor.
- Be sure the punch line is at the end. Don't let on where the joke is going.
- Don't announce, "This is funny." or "I'm not very good at telling jokes, but..."
- Don't try to use humor that you don't know well.
- Don't use humor that you personally don't find funny.

- Don't apologize if others don't laugh.
- Don't try to explain the humor if it fails—just move on.
- Don't drag it out! Remember, brevity is the soul of wit.
- Know when to stop joking and be serious.
- Be natural and have fun!

Motivational Speaking

The second common form of keynote speaking is motivational speaking. A **motivational speech**¹⁹ is designed not only to make an audience experience emotional arousal (fear, sadness, joy, excitement) but also to motivate the audience to do something with that emotional arousal. Whereas a traditional persuasive speech may want listeners to purchase product X or agree with ideology Y, a motivational speech helps to inspire people in a broader fashion, often without a clearly articulated end result in mind. As such, motivational speaking is a highly specialized form of persuasive speaking commonly delivered in schools, businesses, religious, and club or group contexts. *The Toastmasters International Guide to Successful Speaking* lists four types of motivational speeches: hero, survivor, religious, and success. Slutsky, J., & Aun, M. (1997). *The Toastmasters International® guide to successful speaking: Overcoming your fears, winning over your audience, building your business & career*. Chicago, IL: Dearborn Financial Publishing.

The **hero speech**²⁰ is a motivational speech given by someone who is considered a hero in society (e.g., military speakers, political figures, and professional athletes). Just type “motivational speech” into YouTube and you’ll find many motivational speeches given by individuals who can be considered heroes or role models. The following clip presents a speech by Steve Sax, a former major league baseball player.

19. Speech designed not only to make an audience experience an emotional arousal (fear, sadness, joy, excitement) but also to motivate the audience to do something with that arousal.

20. Type of motivational speech given by someone who is considered a hero in society (e.g., military leader, political figure, professional athlete).

21. Type of motivational speech given by someone who has survived a personal tragedy or has faced and overcome serious adversity.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4ITFlbcu8g>

In this speech, Sax talks about his life as a baseball player, along with issues related to leadership, overcoming obstacles, and motivation.

The **survivor speech**²¹ is a speech given by someone who has survived a personal tragedy or who has faced and overcome serious adversity. In the following clip, cancer survivor Becky M. Olsen discusses her life as a cancer survivor.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuo1u_C9_3g

Becky Olsen goes all over the country talking with and motivating cancer survivors to beat the odds.

The **religious speech**²² is fairly self-explanatory; it is designed to incorporate religious ideals into a motivational package to inspire an audience into thinking about or changing aspects of their religious lives. One highly sought-after religious speaker in the United States is Joel Osteen, head minister at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. In this clip, Joel is talking about finding and retaining joy in life.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp8KixxAk60>

The crux of Osteen's speech is learning how to take responsibility of one's own life and let others take responsibility for their lives.

The final type of motivational speech is the **success speech**²³, which is given by someone who has succeeded in some aspect of life and is giving back by telling others how they too can be successful. In the following clip the then CEO of Xerox, Anne Mulcahy, speaks before a group of students at Dartmouth College discussing the spirit of entrepreneurship.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlnLfkWAPnw>

In this speech, Mulcahy shares the leadership lessons she had learned as the CEO of Xerox.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Keynote speeches are delivered to set the underlying tone and summarize the core message of an event.
- After-dinner speeches are real informative or persuasive speeches with a secondary objective of making the audience laugh. Effective after-dinner speakers must first know how to effectively write a speech and then find appropriate humor to add to the presentation.
- Motivational speeches are designed not only to make an audience experience emotional arousal (fear, sadness, joy, excitement) but also to ask the audience to do something with that emotional arousal. There are four types of motivational speeches: the hero, the survivor, the religious, and the success.

22. Type of motivational speech designed to incorporate religious ideals into a motivational package to inspire an audience into thinking about or changing aspects of their religious lives.

23. Type of motivational speech given by someone who has succeeded in some aspect of life and is giving back by telling others how they can be successful too.

EXERCISES

1. Take one of the speeches you've delivered in class and think of ways to add humor to it. Ultimately, you'll turn your original speech in to an after-dinner speech.
2. Think about your own life. If you were asked to give a motivational speech, which type of motivational speaker would you be: hero, survivor, religious, or success? What would the specific purpose of your speech be?

18.4 Chapter Exercises

SPEAKING ETHICALLY

Virginia is asked to roast one of her bosses at the annual company meeting. Virginia collects a range of stories from people about her boss and a few of them are definitely quite embarrassing. She finds out about her boss's ex-husband and some of the marital difficulties they had that are quite funny. She also finds out that when her boss broke her leg, it actually happened while sliding down a slide and not on a ski trip as she had told her office. As Virginia prepares her speech, she starts questioning what information she should use and what information is going too far.

1. How should a roaster ethically go about collecting funny stories for his or her roast?
2. What type of information would be ethical for a roaster to use? What type of information would be unethical for a roaster to use?
3. At what point does a roast go from being good-natured to being meanspirited?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

1. Which type of speech is designed to captivate an audience's attention and regale or amuse them while delivering a clear message?
 - a. informative
 - b. actuation
 - c. persuasive
 - d. indoctrination
 - e. entertaining

2. "Darla has been a great asset to our community. She has worked on numerous projects including the housing beautification project, the community advancement project, and the community action league. As such, it is with great honor that I present Darla with the Citizen of the Year award." This is an example of what type of speech?
 - a. presentation
 - b. introduction
 - c. acceptance
 - d. goodwill
 - e. dedication

3. Sarah, a representative to a state legislature, has been forced to explain her reasoning behind voting for a new law. While she realizes the law isn't perfect, she really believes that the benefits of the law truly outweigh the problems. Sarah is going to deliver what type of goodwill speech?
 - a. speech of public relations
 - b. speech of justification
 - c. speech of apology
 - d. speech of trusting
 - e. speech of competence

4. "That guy was an inept expert" is an example of which type of humorous language?

- a. pleonasm
 - b. malapropism
 - c. oxymoron
 - d. eulogy
 - e. simile
5. When presidents finish their presidency, they are often hired by a speakers bureau to speak for various groups. What type of motivational speeches would ex-presidents most likely give?
- a. hero
 - b. survivor
 - c. religious
 - d. success
 - e. inspirational

ANSWER KEY

- 1. e
- 2. a
- 3. b
- 4. c
- 5. a