

**Stuck for speech ideas?  
Stimulate your imagination.**

## Get Ideas for Speeches

"Can you do a presentation on next year's forecasts?" asks your manager. "Can you talk about the society's aims?" asks a charity colleague. Sure you can. Your Toastmasters training has taught you to develop a good structure and make an impression with your delivery. "Can you fill a speaking slot at the next Toastmasters meeting?" You can – but you just can't think of a good idea for a speech subject.

Sound familiar? No matter how experienced you are as a speaker, finding good subject material poses a challenge. Like most challenges, it also creates an opportunity to develop creative thinking skills. Yet another benefit of Toastmasters!

Outside the Toastmasters environment, the audience for any speech is the starting point. You would consider your listeners' level of knowledge and understanding – and what might interest them.

At Toastmasters, because you know the audience, your starting point has to be your speech objectives. However, your fellow Toastmasters still want to be entertained and possibly taken a little outside their comfort zones, but they don't want to feel uneasy. Choice of subject material is crucial.

So what do you talk about? How do you get ideas for award-winning speech material?

### Stimulate Thoughts and Ideas

Staring at a blank piece of paper, or a blank screen, won't bring ideas to mind! Do something. Get your brain working:

#### ■ Pick up a magazine.

Randomly choose any article and read it.

Try to develop the idea content and see if it could form the basis of a speech.

#### ■ Choose a random word.

Open a dictionary and choose a word with your finger. Or write down a page number and word number, then see what you get. If one word doesn't work, find two words. Write one at the top of the page and one at the bottom and develop an association between them.

#### ■ Keep an "idea box."

Mine is a box file with tear sheets from magazines: cartoons, photos,

words, film reviews, names of books, inspirational quotes – anything that might spark my imagination. Shake it up. Choose one and make it the basis of a speech.

#### ■ Think of a famous person.

Choose a famous person from history – either at random or by looking to see who was born on the current day or during the current month. Research that person; explore possible links with an interest of your own.



*"Anyone who waits to be struck with a good idea has a long wait coming. If I have a deadline for a column or television script, I sit down at the typewriter and just decide to have an idea."*

—ANDY ROONEY

- **Get ideas from other people.** Use every opportunity to sharpen your listening skills. You'll be amazed at how many ideas you'll get from your conversations with others. Or simply ask people for ideas – almost everyone will give you at least one suggestion.
- **Pick a quote.** Use a good quote from a book, or try the Internet to find a quote to spark an idea.
- **Listen to the radio.** In the car, or in a spare moment, tune into different programs. I recently got an idea for my No. 9 speech when I heard a radio interview with a woman who specialized in helping people to "declutter." I opened my speech with a pile of odd socks to catch people's attention!
- **Read widely.** Once you start an idea, develop it as you discover relevant points in related articles.
- **Explore the Internet.** It's a great source of material, but be wary of believing everything in cyberspace! Also be sure not to violate copyright laws.

#### Don't Let an Idea Go

- **Keep a notebook or file on your computer.** Write down ideas as they come, so that you won't forget them.
- **Every idea is good.** As with brainstorming, don't reject ideas or nip them in the bud, particularly if they don't fit with the objectives of your next speech. Make a note, nurture the idea, and it may blossom as material for a later speech.
- **Live and breathe ideas.** Start thinking of ideas as soon as you wake up in the morning and throughout the day.

- **Find thinking time.** Get away from the computer. Go for a walk; enjoy a bath or do anything that stimulates your thoughts. Try silence – some people believe that angels whisper ideas!

#### Make the Idea Your Own

- **Not new, but you.** The biggest problem, fellow Toastmasters tell me, is that they struggle to find totally new subjects. The reality is that nothing is new. Once you accept that every speech doesn't have to be on an original subject, many possibilities open. What the speech has to be is personal, human – and this is especially important – you! At our club we've had speeches on subjects ranging from donating blood to the classic English-cooked breakfast. These are not new subjects, but the speaker's personal interpretation and anecdotes made them interesting.

Remember, the most important thing is to choose a subject you are comfortable with – and one you will enjoy delivering. That way you are sure to be yourself and more confident in the delivery. **T**

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