

## [Speaking in Public? How to Write the Perfect Speech](#)

Don't! Bill Gove, known around the world as the father of professional speaking, says you should never set out to write a speech.

Doing this is like writing an article. Articles are meant for reading; speeches are meant for saying. Therefore, material written to be heard should be written differently than material to be read.

You want to engage your audience with a friendly, conversational tone and your material should be written with this in mind and not as though it were created to be read from a thick wad of A4 sheets while you stand behind a lectern.

So how do you go about writing the perfect speech? Think about your speech as being made up of small units or modules, each capable of standing on its own. These modules are called vignettes and they are really individual stories as short as three to four minutes or longer depending upon the context of the speech. In this way you can combine eight to ten short vignettes to create a speech.

There are several advantages to constructing speeches in this way. When you build your catalogue of vignettes you can easily shorten or lengthen a presentation at a moment's notice and if you're in the speaking business, then at some time you will be placed in this position. Instead of sweating buckets or resorting to speaking like an automatic rifle you'll be able to say, "No problem."

Similarly, if you are asked to deliver an entire speech at short notice you will have the means to do so because you will simply need to decide on the points you wish to cover in your speech, select the appropriate vignettes and then combine them in a point then story fashion. This level of flexibility will mean that you will not have to lose out on gaining valuable exposure and or a lucrative fee.

The vignette system makes a speech easy to remember, as you just have to remember several short stories. When you write an article it may seem to flow but try memorising it and it's another matter!

It also lends itself to a much easier cuing system for those times when your mind goes blank. You can just have a series of small cards each with the salient points on it. You can also just have one card that simply outlines the order of your speech to help keep you on track for those occasions when you go off on a tangent.

These stories will also be easy to remember because, in general, they will be personal to you. In other words, you will know these stories because they are your stories. When you go on stage you will be letting the audience into your world. This is what helps to build the connection between you and the audience.

Actually, your vignettes will be hard to forget because of the length of time you will spend preparing them. Wayne Burgraff said,

"It takes one hour of preparation for each minute of presentation time."

However, some may consider that to be a conservative estimate. You may think that it a long time but it will be time well spent because your vignettes will become part of your repertoire and you will have the opportunity to use them again and again even with audiences who may have heard you speak before. The greater the emotional impact the more often people will want to hear your stories. It's all about the way your stories make people feel.

"They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel."

Carl W Buechner

Vignettes are lessons in story-form and so need to have a structure. They should all contain the following:

1. Premise
2. Problem
3. Pay-off

Your pay-offs are the number of laughs you can invoke per minute or the number of times per minute you can invoke an emotional response in your audience. Generally, you want a positive emotional response. You can allow your audience to feel low for a moment but you shouldn't leave them there for too long and you certainly want to end with your audience on an emotional high. As a rule, a good keynote speech, for example, should have at least one payoff per minute.

Hence, you can see why your vignettes have to be carefully crafted and while you allow your words to weave a story, every word you use should either add to your story or be eliminated. In other words aim to say more with less.

It's advisable to write a draft of your story, leave it and then hone it. Expect to do at least five re-writes. Then, when it's just about perfect add a few imperfections. Why? Because that's how we speak and so the imperfections make your speech sound more natural. And by imperfections I'm not talking about 'ums' and 'ahs' - these are not allowed.

For instance, you can indicate where you will pause as though searching for a word. If the audience is right there with you they will be searching for that word too, perhaps even making suggestions because they want you to continue. They want to hear the rest of your story.

So the next time you have to prepare a speech don't sit down and write an article:

1. Decide what lessons you wish to communicate;
2. Select a series of vignettes or short stories to convey this story; and
3. Organise your material so that it flows in a lesson then vignette or point then story format.

Finally, remember when it comes to delivering your speech talk to the audience rather than read to them. Leave reading to an audience for bedtime stories and you know what that leads to.

### About the Author

Nickolove Lovemore is a Life Coach and presenter. For other public speaking resources visit [Mastering Presentations](#). Also, for a FREE REPORT on public speaking send an email with your name to [Mastering Public Speaking](#).

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