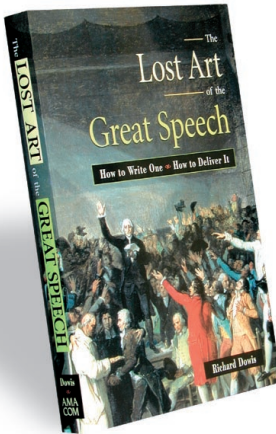


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®

FILE: SUCCESS/CAREER
TECHNIQUES

By Richard Dowis

How To Write One, How To Deliver It

THE LOST ART OF THE GREAT SPEECH

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

You don't have to possess a loud, sonorous voice, a pearly white smile, or a wild, charismatic stage presence to give a great speech; all the pleasant packaging and abundant confidence in the world will be rendered useless if your speech itself is illogical, boring or poorly written.

Richard Dowis, a former journalist and retired senior vice president of Manning, Selvage, and Lee Public Relations, knows that what ultimately counts — what ultimately stays with an audience long after the event is over — is the content of what is said. This summary teaches you how to effectively collect, organize and shape that content into distinctive, potent speeches. In the course of the summary, Dowis provides you with the following:

- ✓ A list of things to consider before you agree to speak, including the speech's format, topic and purpose.
- ✓ A discussion of the integral parts of the writing process.
- ✓ Explanations of the different ways in which you can organize your speech.
- ✓ A list of things your speech's opening should accomplish.
- ✓ Helpful hints on using effective, powerful language in your speech.
- ✓ A multitude of proven techniques that speechwriters use to make their speeches more interesting, meaningful and dramatic.
- ✓ Tips on using statistics effectively.
- ✓ Ways to add impact to your closing.
- ✓ The broad areas to consider when editing your speech.

Whether you have been asked to give a speech or to write one for someone else, your writing habits and style will ultimately determine the success of your endeavor. Turn the page for your first lesson in this lost art.



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THE LOST ART OF THE GREAT SPEECH

by Richard Dowis

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

Before You Speak

If you've been invited to speak at a function (whether as the sole speaker or one of a group of speakers), the function's organizers recognize that you have something to say on the given topic that others cannot or will not say. Your perspective is appreciated and your participation anticipated.

Once the organizers have extended the invitation to speak, keep the following points in mind as you consider the invitation and begin to prepare for your speech:

- **Format.** Will you be the sole speaker or one of a number of speakers on a given topic? Will the event be a panel discussion (with simultaneous participation from other speakers, a moderator and the audience), or will you be given the dais alone? The answers to these questions will guide all your preparation efforts.
- **Topic.** Do not agree to speak on a topic about which you feel uncomfortable or do not know enough. Be certain the event's organizers understand your credentials and do not "oversell" you to an audience, creating a set of expectations you cannot meet. If the event's organizers allow you to choose your own topic, choose one that is appropriate for the audience and event. If you suggest a topic that is different from the one given you by the organizers, stay as close as possible to the original idea; a variation on the theme is better than a different theme altogether. Make certain, also, that the topic is important to you; if it is not, it will sound phony and boring to your audience.
- **Purpose.** Determine what you want the audience to think or feel as a result of your speech — ask this question both of yourself and your sponsor. Write down a brief statement of purpose and keep it on

Choosing the Appropriate Topic

A young minister was invited to speak to a group of elderly men and women. The subject he chose was "The Sin of Lust." After the speech, a sweet little old lady came forward to shake the minister's hand. "That was a nice message," she said, "but with this group, it would be more appropriate to talk about rust."

Six Purposes of a Speech

From his experience in reading and writing speeches, Richard Dowis has identified six basic purposes of a speech:

1. To entertain
2. To inform
3. To inspire
4. To motivate
5. To advocate
6. To convince or persuade

A speech can have more than one purpose, of course. A president's state-of-the-union address, for example, should inform members of Congress about the progress his administration has made, convince them that his policies are good for the country and motivate them to work hard to pass those policies.

A speech is rarely made solely to entertain. Humor, as we shall see later, is mostly used to reinforce the other purposes of the speech.

hand as you write your speech.

- **Time.** Can your topic be managed in the time allotted to you? Consult with your sponsor; if you're given 15 minutes to speak on a topic that requires 30 minutes, you'll have to negotiate for more time, choose a different topic or decline the invitation altogether.
- **Details.** Assume nothing. Make sure you and your sponsor are on the same page regarding every detail of the event — from date, time and place to the pronunciation of any pertinent names (if you introduce or address specific individuals).
- **Know the organization.** Find out everything you can about the sponsoring organization and its membership before you accept the invitation to speak, then let those factors guide you in your writing efforts. ■

The author: Richard Dowis is a former journalist and a retired senior vice president of Manning, Selvage & Lee Public Relations. He has won numerous awards for editing, speech writing and financial writing.

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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Publisher, George Y. Clement. Publications Director, Maureen L. Solon. Editor-in-Chief, Christopher G. Murray. Published monthly. Subscription, \$89.50 per year in the United States and Canada; and, by airmail, \$95 in Mexico, \$139 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **Soundview, 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331**. Copyright © 2000 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

Preparing to Write

A well-written speech is a disciplined speech — it doesn't ramble; it fits the time allotted; it contains no superfluous detail but doesn't leave out anything important. Writing a speech forces you to think in specific terms, to apply discipline and creativity to the explanation of an idea or topic. Having a written, polished script in hand allows you to relay your work with confidence and a necessary grasp of the subject.

Integral parts of the writing process include:

- **Research.** Before you begin to write, you must have a solid working knowledge of your subject from experience, interviews and reading. Reading is important — consult current books and articles on the topic of your speech to make sure your information is up-to-date. The Internet is helpful, too; online resources on just about any topic are plentiful on the Web. You will also want to include quotations, anecdotes, statistics and other useful information in your research effort.
- **Brainstorming.** Get together with a small group of people (organizers, experts, friends) in an informal setting and talk about the subject, throwing around ideas and sharing insights.
- **Purpose.** Don't even think about writing until you have a clear, focused impression of what the speech should accomplish. Take your statement of purpose and expound on it in detail — include specific topics you will cover and state explicitly what you want your audience to do, think and feel in reaction to those topics.
- **Outlining.** Create a road map — a list of points you want to make in the speech based on the topic and the time allotted. Read through that list. Analyze it, evaluating each point then pare down the list to three to five essential topics. Discarded points are not necessarily extraneous; they may crop up again to support, explain or reinforce your main points.
- **Identifying a thesis.** A single, strong, unifying idea should evolve from the paring process. This is the thesis of your speech, its core idea or statement.

Organizing Your Speech

Once you have completed your research, laid out your goals in a statement of purpose, created an outline and honed it down to a cogent thesis, you must set yourself to the task of organizing the speech. A well-organized speech is the product of an orderly mind; regardless of how strong your arguments or how interesting your

Thought Modules

Another interesting way of organizing your material when writing the speech is to break your facts and ideas down into small manageable units. These units — which could be termed “thought modules” — each consist of a single idea and all of its supporting material. For example, for one point of your outline you may have an interesting statistic, a pertinent quotation and an anecdote; those materials (the point and its supporting matter) comprise one thought module.

Once you have your material logically sorted into thought modules, you can organize those modules into whatever order best suits the needs of your speech.

material, the speech will not succeed unless it is logically organized.

That said, there is no right or wrong way to organize a speech. The best method of organization depends on the material, the audience and your input and approach as speaker. Some of the most common methods of speech organization include the following:

- **Chronological order.** If you're telling a story, consider organizing the speech in chronological order, particularly if there is an element of suspense you can use to build to a climax.
- **The “Big Bang.”** Some speakers start with a bang by stating their thesis in the first minute or so. This can be useful if the thesis is startling or unexpected. If you're not careful, however, the speech can go downhill quickly when your follow-up points are not as exciting as your opening.
- **The simple “Tell ‘em” approach.** One time-honored approach goes something like this: “Tell ‘em what you're gonna tell ‘em (in your opening); tell ‘em what you have to tell ‘em (in the body of the speech); then tell ‘em what you just told ‘em (in your conclusion).” This approach has some merit, but may be too simplistic (even insulting), depending on the audience and the topic.
- **Cause-and-effect.** In this approach, state some problem that is pertinent to the speech thesis, give the cause of the problem, describe its effect, then suggest a solution. This works fine when the topic and supporting material are in sync; if you don't have the support, however, this approach will not satisfy your need. ■

*Regardless of how strong
your arguments or how interest-
ing your material,
the speech will not succeed
unless it is logically organized.*

Beginning Well — What Your Opening Should Accomplish

Even the most accomplished speechwriters face the challenge of creating effective openings. In a very short time, these openings may need to accomplish as many as a half-dozen things:

- **Establish rapport between the speaker and the audience.** It is important to identify common ground between you and those who are listening to you. Who can forget John F. Kennedy's memorable opening in his speech in the divided city of Berlin at the height of the cold war — "*Ich bin ein Berliner*," or "I am a Berliner" — which expressed solidarity (however symbolic) with his audience. The quick establishment of rapport is a key element in any speech opening.
- **Set the tone for the speech.** Is the occasion formal or informal? Serious or relaxed? Friendly or expressing opposition? Sometimes the tone you set does several things at once; if you open with a joke, for instance, you're telling your audience to relax a bit, even though the topic might be a serious one.
- **Establish or reinforce your credibility.** How detailed you make this opening depends largely on how much the audience knows about you in advance, from publicity, prior engagements and/or how you are introduced. While it is a good thing to play up your reputation and experience, you should do so in a way that does not appear boastful.
- **Arouse interest in a subject.** This, too, depends on the audience's knowledge of the topic and of your reputation, that is, on how much groundwork for discussion has already been laid in advance.
- **Take advantage of your "grace period" with the audience.** You will typically have several minutes at the beginning of the speech during which the audience is most attentive. A weak opening might squander that precious time.
- **Segue smoothly into the topic.** Be sure your opening — whether you use a joke, an anecdote or some other device — is relevant to your topic. It should segue cleanly and logically into the body of the speech, carrying your audience with it.

Five Types of Openings

Although there are many ways to begin a speech, most seem to fall into five major categories:

- **Novelty.** This opening grabs the audience's attention through the use of a novel or outrageous act or point.
- **Dramatic.** This opening uses suspense or a startling

The Novel Opening: An Illustration

Jeff White, of the credit-reporting and information services company Equifax, gave a speech in 1980 in which he predicted a time when his relatively narrow field would broaden to include all financial transaction services. He began the speech by thanking the audience for inviting him to speak "on this beautiful September morning in 1990," and with that he began "reminiscing" about the old days before his field had broadened. He continued the ruse for a minute or two before turning back to the present day, by which time he had roped his audience in with his novel opening.

statement to pique the audience's curiosity.

- **Question.** In this opening, the speaker asks a question that may either be a rhetorical one (for which no answer is expected) or a real question that he or she will answer in the course of the speech.
- **Humorous.** Starting the speech with a joke or funny anecdote can be a great icebreaker; it can also set the tone for the speech and make, support or illustrate a pertinent point. The humor must be in good taste and delivered with the right timing in order to be most effective.
- **Reference.** This is the most common opening, in which the speaker makes a reference of some sort, then uses that reference as a launching pad for the speech. ■

Watch Your Language

The greater our skill with language, the more clearly we think and the better we express our thoughts. Good speakers and writers have many words at their command; simply having them and using them with discretion, however, are two very different matters. Using language well in a speech often means using the strong, simple words that compose our everyday language. Contrary to what some people believe, the ability to use language is not comprised entirely of using words like cognizant, incumbent or instrumentality. Good writers and speakers know the grace, elegance and power of simplicity.

In other words, good speakers have confidence in their ideas, and do not need to couch them in floury or pretentious language. Here are some suggestions for making language work for you when you write or deliver a speech:

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Watch Your Language

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Be yourself. Use language that is natural to you. If you're not a folksy person, do not try to sound like one of the guys down at the barbershop. If you're an adult speaking to a teen audience, do not try to show your mastery of teen slang. If you rarely tell jokes, don't open your speech with one just because you think the audience will expect it. If you try to use language that does not reflect your natural tendencies, you will sound phony and will, consequently, lose your audience's attention quickly.

Talk with the audience, not at them. Speak as if you're carrying on a conversation with your audience, not lecturing them. Use personal pronouns (I, you, we, us), contractions, and other conversational speech. Address the audience directly and avoid abstraction at all costs.

Use appropriate personal references. When you have a personal experience that can be used in your speech to emphasize a point, do not hesitate to use it. Keep in mind the fact that the reference must be appropriate for both the subject and the audience.

Use active verbs and vivid nouns. Verbs such as represent, indicate, postulate, cogitate and ascertain seem lifeless and colorless next to verbs such as run, cry, spring, jump, roar and burst — strong verbs that evoke images of flesh-and-blood creatures doing things. These words can be termed “gut words,” because they seem to come from the gut rather than the brain. They are perfect for pulling the audience into an anecdote, or punctuating a point in simple, direct terms everyone can understand.

Use active voice. Voice refers to the relationship of a

Avoid Jargon

Jargon is vocabulary that is indigenous to a particular trade, profession or group. Lawyers and doctors, for instance, have a particular way of speaking to one another, a kind of shorthand that sounds confusing to others. While you may use jargon when it is appropriate for both your audience and topic, it must be used properly and at the proper time. When jargon escapes those boundaries and seeps into general usage, however, your audience may be confused.

A good rule of thumb is this: If you're speaking to members of your own profession, use the language you use in everyday conversation with your colleagues. Do not, however, use professional jargon with a lay audience.

Small Words, Big Ideas

The following speech by Winston Churchill is one of the most recognized speeches in the world:

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France. We shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.

There are 81 words in this famous excerpt. Only nine of those words have more than one syllable. Only four words have more than two syllables.

Simple words are usually the best to convey powerful ideas.

subject to its verb. If a subject is acting, the sentence is in active voice; if a subject is acted upon, the sentence is in passive voice. For example, “She threw the pie at him” is active because the subject (she) is acting (throwing the pie). “The pie was thrown at him by her” is passive, because the subject (pie) is acted upon (was thrown). Although passive voice is sometimes appropriate and necessary, most good writers and speakers tend to use active voice.

Be aware of meaning. Sometimes words have connotations that go beyond their dictionary definitions. Even words that are closely related in meaning (thin, slender and skinny, for instance) evoke different images and send different messages. When you choose your words, consider what images they conjure in people's minds.

Get to the point. Say what you want to say, then stop. If you follow this basic rule of thumb, your words will have power and your ideas will be well received. ■

“Secrets” of the Pros

So often, we are bombarded by offers of “secrets” guaranteed to provide us with some miraculous benefit — a longer life, an improved golf game, a winning lottery number, etc. There are no such “secrets” in writing speeches, only proven techniques that speechwriters use to make their speeches more interesting, meaningful and dramatic. Some of these techniques are as follows:

The Rule of Three. Writers, particularly speechwriters, have long recognized the almost mystical qualities of the number three, and have fashioned a rhetorical device called a triad, or “the rule of three.” This device, quite simply, is the expression of related thoughts or ideas in a group of three, often with the initial words or

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“Secrets” of the Pros

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sounds the same for all three, and almost always with each element of the triad using the same grammatical form. Some famous examples are as follows:

- Abraham Lincoln: “[T]hat a government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish ...”
- Julius Caesar: “*Veni, vidi, vici*” (“I came, I saw, I conquered”).
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt: “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.”

Ideas grouped in threes are more memorable; when correctly constructed, they add drama, interest and rhythm to a speech. They also emphasize important points and make them stick in the minds of listeners.

Anaphora. Another often-used device in speechwriting is anaphora, or the repetition of a word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or sentences. Although speechwriters often combine triads with anaphora, the latter is also used when more than three elements are needed. One excellent example of anaphora is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s most famous speech, in which he began eight sentences with “I have a dream.” Not only did the phrase echo and re-echo throughout the speech, it has continued to echo throughout history, even to this day.

Alliteration. Repetition in various forms can be effective, when used with reasonable restraint. Special care must be given when using alliteration — the repetition of several similar sounds in a sequence, with sometimes tongue-twisting results. Alliteration is difficult to read and may cause even the most seasoned speaker to stumble. While occasional intentional alliteration is fine, you must re-read your speech carefully, to avoid accidental alliteration in your speechwriting. In other words (and here we’ll use alliteration), remember this: Always avoid any accidental alliteration.

Hyperbole and understatement. The exaggeration for the sake of emphasis, known as hyperbole, is another effective device when used properly. Hyperbole used for dramatic effect should be an obvious exaggeration, such as “He was big as a grizzly bear and twice as mean.” At the opposite end of the spectrum, understatement can likewise be used to great effect to make a point, such as when the late Senator Everett Dirksen said, when considering a spending bill, “A billion here, a billion there. Pretty soon it adds up to real money.”

Transitions. Good speechwriters can move smoothly from one subject to another — making transitions that

The Power of Antithesis: Three Examples

Another common and useful device is placing an idea next to one to which it is sharply contrasted — a figure called antithesis. “Ask not what your country can do for you,” John F. Kennedy said in his inaugural. “Ask what you can do for your country.” That call to service, powerful and appropriate though it was, was made even more so by virtue of the juxtaposition of contrasting phrases in the sentence — an effective use of antithesis.

An antithesis is a conflict, and as with any conflict, it should be resolved whenever possible. This reconciliation will often emphasize the point of the antithesis. For example, at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta in 1988, the Rev. Jesse Jackson compared his background to the background of Democratic presidential nominee Michael Dukakis in the following way: “His parents came to America on immigrant ships; my parents came to America on slave ships.”

He then reconciled this antithesis with the following phrase: “But whatever the original ships, we’re in the same boat tonight.”

One of the greatest examples of antithesis is in a speech from the 1800s by *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry W. Grady. Grady’s purpose, to dramatize the plight of southern farmers, is powerfully achieved by a series of antithesis and a closing reconciliation:

They buried him in the midst of a marble quarry . . . and yet the little tombstone they put above his head was from Vermont. They buried him in a pine forest, and yet the pine coffin was imported from Cincinnati . . . The nails in his coffin and the iron in the shovel that dug his grave were imported from Pittsburgh . . . The wool in the coffin bands and the bands themselves were brought from the North. The South didn’t furnish a thing on earth for that funeral but the corpse and the hole in the ground.

don’t jar or lose the audience. Transitions help ensure clarity by helping the listener shift gears mentally, from the opening to the body, the body to the closing. They also indicate that a change of position or a contradiction is on the way.

When writing articles or books, transitions can be created by using headings or subheadings; in speeches, you must find other ways of making transitions. Sometimes a slightly exaggerated pause or emphasis of a word or phrase serves as a transition. These are the verbal punctuation marks you can use to keep your speech from sounding choppy or jarring. ■

Using Statistics

When we think of statistics, we tend to think of dry, tedious recitations of facts and figures, not devices to enliven a speech. Yet, when used properly, statistics can dramatize or reinforce a point, bringing home a concept that might have otherwise drifted right past the audience.

Keep the following points in mind when using statistics:

1 Statistics do not have to be dull, dry figures; they can be interesting and dramatic, depending on how and where they are used in a speech. For example, if you are discussing junk food consumption, you can spice up your delivery by mentioning that Americans consume 75 acres of pizza every day and that seven percent of Americans eat at McDonald's every day. If you are discussing everyday hazards in the home, your audience may be amazed to learn that one American drowns in a bathtub every day.

Use Visuals When Necessary

Some material simply cannot be explained without graphic illustrations, although visuals are not appropriate for every subject or audience. When you do have material that requires you to use visuals, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- **Don't use visuals as a crutch.** Make sure you have prepared a solid, well-written and thoughtful speech.
- **Don't let visuals take over a speech.** Use them to support or reinforce points, not to dominate your message.
- **Get your timing down.** Don't allow a visual to be seen unless you're ready to discuss it, and be sure to take it down after you've finished talking about it.
- **Avoid using handouts.** They distract attention from you and usually lead people to jump ahead and miss what you're saying.
- **Be sure everyone can see the visual clearly.** Be sure the layout of the room is conducive to showing visuals. Also, make sure you do not stand directly in front of the visual during your speech.
- **Stay in control.** Maintain good eye contact with the audience as you discuss the material on the visuals.
- **Avoid referring to the visuals as visuals.** Don't say things like "The next slide illustrates ..." Match your words to the slide and the audience will make the connection.

2 You should try to express statistics in terms to which your audience can relate. A trillion, for instance, is an incomprehensible number for most people; amounts in the trillions of dollars often go over people's heads. It would be useful, then, for you to provide some illustration that casts such an amount in a way that audiences can better conceptualize.

For example, telling an audience that the United States has spent \$5.4 trillion on programs for the poor since 1965 is just fine, but a bit humdrum — people know that's a lot of money. Your point is better served by following that statistic with the fact that, with \$5.4 trillion, you could buy every farm in the United States, as well as every factory, office building, radio station, TV station, telephone company, retail and wholesale business, hotel, airline and so forth. This expression illustrates the statistic in such a way that the audience can now picture a previously incomprehensible figure.

3 You should avoid using too many raw figures, particularly when they are close together. Use anecdotes or a pertinent reference in order to space out statistical information. This will help the audience relate an illustration to the statistic, increasing the likelihood of understanding and retention. ■

Closing the Speech

Just as you have a "grace period" in the opening minutes of your speech during which the audience is at full attention, the period in which you close your speech is a similarly crucial time. A solid closing adds impact to your message — in all cases, you want to end with a bang, not a whimper.

You must first decide what you want your closing to accomplish, over and above leaving your audience satisfied by the speech. Do you want your audience to do something? To believe something? To feel a particular way about your subject? These things all relate back to the purpose and thesis of the speech (discussed earlier), both of which can be reinforced by a forceful closing — a parting shot, if you will.

Most closings fall into one of seven categories:

- **Summary.** The speaker briefly summarizes the high points of the speech.
- **Wrap-up.** The speaker closes the circle, so to speak, bringing together various points covered in the speech.
- **Direct appeal.** The speaker asks audience members to take a specific action.
- **Thesis.** The speaker reiterates the main point (or thesis) of the speech.

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Closing The Speech

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- **Reference.** The speaker ties some reference to the subject of the speech — the date, location, event, etc.
- **Inspirational.** The speaker closes with a moving anecdote, poem or quote.
- **Humorous or anecdotal.** The speaker uses a joke or funny anecdote that makes a strong closing point.

In considering these closings, remember that closings, like openings, are rarely so neatly packaged; indeed, the best closing features a combination of two or more kinds. When thinking about your closing, think logically and

Anaphoric Closings

Many of the rhetorical tools explained in the article “Secrets of the Pros” can be used effectively in the different types of closings.

In the following example, the speaker uses anaphora in the direct appeal that closes his speech:

Let's monitor performance, let's complain when promises are broken, let's use our electoral muscle to get the sort of government we deserve. Let's work to get more women elected to public office. Let's humanize government to make it not only accountable, but responsive to the people who elected it. After all, who deserves it more than we?

President George Bush used three anaphoric triads in the two-paragraph closing to his speech at the United Nations at the time of the Gulf War. The result is a particularly effective inspirational message of support.

The world must know and understand, from this hour, from this day, from this hall, we step forth with a new sense of purpose, a new sense of possibilities. We stand together, prepared to swim upstream, to march uphill, to tackle the tough challenges as they come, not only as the United Nations but as the nations of the world united.

And so let it be said of this final decade of the 20th century, this was a time when humankind came into its own, when we emerged from the grit and smoke of the industrial age to bring about a revolution of the spirit and mind, and began a journey to a new age and a new partnership of nations. The U.N. is now fulfilled its promise as the world's parliament of speech. And I congratulate you. I support you. And I wish you godspeed in the challenge ahead.

creatively about how to best close a speech, and craft a closing that makes your speech most effective. ■

The Final Stages — Editing Your Speech

Even after you have researched, outlined and written a speech, there is still more to do — you must give your speech a thorough editing. Keep in mind that this function may not always be your duty alone. Depending on your role — if you are writing for another speaker, for example — there may be others who have a hand in this important task. As Peggy Noonan, former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, once noted, “A speech is a fondue pot, and everyone has a fork.”

There are five broad areas to consider when editing your speech:

Edit for content. Question everything — check every statement, statistic and quotation for accuracy. Examine every simile, metaphor, analogy and illustration for suitability. Be critical of your use of humor, considering the audience at every use. Look at the overall content of the speech and ensure that it fulfills the purpose you set out to fulfill.

Edit for organization. Be sure your speech is a coherent, logical and unified presentation, not a random collection of ideas and information.

Edit for style. Editing for style will probably produce the most changes — if you rearrange word combinations, sentences and other structural and stylistic aspects of the speech, you will likely create new meanings and impressions, which you must address. Keep in mind that short sentences are easier to read than longer ones; simple sentences are better than complex ones; and all alliteration, rhyme and unusual combinations of words must always be intentional.

Edit for language. Do not overuse jargon or words of excessive length. Consider whether the language you use preserves natural speech patterns and rhythms — does it, in other words, sound like it was meant to be spoken, or read silently? Avoid use of passive voice, clichés, obscenity and generalities; focus instead on delivering an even-toned, interest and colorful speech.

Edit for grammar. Perfect grammar does not produce a perfect speech; too many instances of bad grammar, however, can damage an otherwise good speech. You must strike a balance between bending certain grammar rules to facilitate a conversational tone and adhering too closely to those same rules, sounding stilted or stiff in the process. ■