

Giving a Speech: The Basics

QVCC Graduation Speaker Committee

Preparing the Speech

Students should select a topic that matches their passion and will create interest in the audience. Plan carefully and thoroughly by outlining the speech or writing it out. (Extemporaneous speeches are not appropriate.) Arrange ideas logically and use transitions to help the audience follow the thoughts.

Allow time for at least three good practice sessions of 30 to 40 minutes each. Use the first session to become comfortable with the speech and the second session to check the timing. Remember, the commencement speech is to be between 5 and 10 minutes in length, with 10 minutes being the absolute maximum. In the third session, refine your delivery. See *Tips* below.

Organizing the Speech

Grab the audience's attention immediately and focus them on the message. Use one of several devices for this:

- Tell an interesting or humorous story.
- Tell a joke.
- Ask a rhetorical question.
- Deliver a remarkable fact or statistic.
- Address some need or interest of the audience.

Be sure the above tactics directly relate to the subject of the speech.

Delivering the Speech

Your speech delivery is as important as your content. If you have a wonderful story to share but you stumble through a presentation, your message can get lost and you will lose the attention of your audience. Reviewing what you are going to say while driving, eating or hanging out, isn't practice, it's just reviewing your content and won't help when you are presenting your speech to an audience. You need to practice your speech out loud, as if you are giving it to your selected audience each time. Practicing your delivery is a vital step in forming a great speech. Repeated practice will help with your nerves too. Everyone gets nervous before speaking publicly but the more you prepare, the better your speech will be. Remember, show your audience who you are and share your story with passion, poise and clarity and you will have a powerful speech.

Tips to help you in your delivery:

- When you practice your speech, say it out loud, each time.
- Stand up when you are speaking. You need to project your voice to your audience.
- Pretend you have an audience. Or better yet, ask friends and family to be your practice audience. If you can't get an audience, stand in front of a mirror or your microwave (the microwave is great because you have a timer on it, which helps with timing).
- Speak clearly and confidently. Enunciate your words.
- Put some emotion in your words. Pretend you are sharing your story with someone you know.
- Use your body. Body language is very important. Using your hands or arms to emphasize points, your facial expression to relay emotion.
- Look up! If you can't look everyone in the eyes (which you often won't be able to in a large audience) you can look out, into the crowd. This really helps engage the audience. If you get too nervous, look between the seats or just over people's heads. It will look like you are making eye contact, without having to meet eyes.
- Try not to fidget, twirl your hair, pull on your pockets, etc. You may be nervous on the inside but keep your body language calm and confident.
- Use your notes. Though you should know your speech very well, having your notes to follow will help you in case you get nervous and lose your place.
- Practice, practice, practice!