

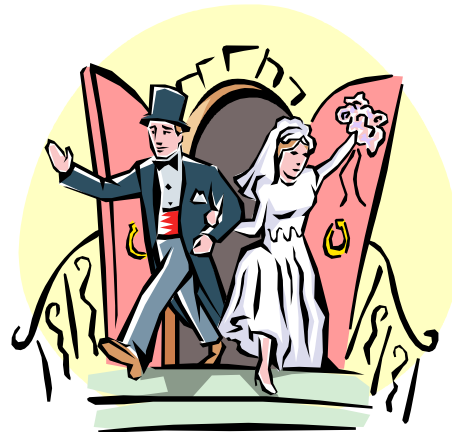
So..... You've been asked to Speak at a Wedding

Many people go through life never needing to speak in public. It's not surprising therefore that, when they are suddenly confronted with having to address a large audience, they become almost paranoid at the thought. This does not make them abnormal. Far from it - it is an extremely normal reaction.

A recent American study of the things people fear most, showed that death came in at number 4. Believe it or not fear of speaking in public was rated number 1. This in a country of people renowned for their communication skills!

The main speeches given at weddings are by the groom, best man, father of the bride, and possibly a friend of the family proposing a toast to the bride and groom. If you find yourself in any of these roles, here are a few things you might like to consider to make the job a little easier.

- *Knowing your audience*
- *Being prepared*
- *Overcoming your nervousness*
- *Delivering your speech*
- *Enjoying yourself*



Knowing your audience

When giving any speech, it is important to know something about your audience, what interests them and, for that matter, what may offend them.

Weddings are family affairs and invariably there will be people of all ages and backgrounds present.

Bearing this in mind, the language you use should be kept simple. The bride and groom wish to remember this day as a special occasion. They do not want to be embarrassed or worried about what the speaker is going to say next. It should be a happy occasion so your speech should be light hearted. Jokes are acceptable but keep them clean.

Being prepared

If you are an inexperienced speaker it is especially important you do some preparation. You may wish to write your speech out in full first and read it over and over until you become extremely familiar with it. Don't learn it by heart as your delivery may appear artificial or you may forget it. Reading your speech at the reception should be avoided if possible. It is acceptable however to have notes. Preferably your notes should be merely headings that you can refer to as you move from one point to the next. With comprehensive notes it is far too easy to lose your place.

Eye contact with your audience is important and comprehensive notes may hamper it. Do some research on the happy couple. Make sure you have the facts right and make it lighthearted and interesting. Avoid "in jokes" or stories that only a few people in your

audience may appreciate. Remember the groom's guests may know very little about the bride's family and vice versa.

In any speech it's important to have a good opening, something to grab your audience's attention and make them want to listen, perhaps a joke, short anecdote or telling quotation.

Having got their attention, stick to a few major points rather than ramble on without direction. **Finally leave them with a message, something they will remember!**

Overcoming your nervousness

Being a little nervous is not a bad thing. We need that adrenalin to give our best performance. Here are a few tips to overcome any major attack of nerves.

- Remember the audience is on your side. They want to see you succeed.
- Your audience is there to enjoy themselves. They are not hostile.
- Take a couple of deep breaths before you begin to talk.
- Smile - it's infectious. Your audience will smile back and you will feel better.
- Don't speak too quickly.
- Don't drink too much before your speech. Alcohol is more likely to confuse you than relax you.
- If you are well-prepared and rehearsed, you will be less nervous.

Delivering your speech.

Don't try to be a Winston Churchill or Martin Luther King. Be yourself, but remember the following:-

- Be sure to use a strong enough voice to be heard by all present.
- Don't speak too quickly. This will ensure your audience doesn't miss anything you have to say.
- Make your voice interesting. Vary the pace, pitch and volume.
- Keep smiling.
- Beware of mannerisms which may distract such as moving from side to side.
- Keep eye contact with your audience.
- Act confidently even if you don't feel it.



Enjoying yourself

Although you may not think so at the time, being asked to give a speech at a wedding is an honour. You have been selected because of your close relationship with the family, because of the high regard you are held in or because they believe you are capable of doing a good job. (*Then again perhaps you are the groom and don't have any choice!*)

You will find that once you have uttered those first few sentences and realised that the audience is empathetic, you will begin to enjoy the wedding and even enjoy making the speech.

If you haven't spoken in public before you may well surprise yourself at the sense of achievement you will derive from the experience. Then chances are, when you and others present realise what you are capable of, you will be asked to speak on many future occasions.

Good Luck! You've done the work. Now enjoy yourself.

Reproduced from the Rostrum publication "Tips on Public Speaking and Meeting Procedures. Vol. 1" - a collection of 30 handouts.

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