

DOS

1. UNDERSTAND THE PERSON, YOU'RE WRITING FOR

Speechwriting is a personal matter – a great speech should be tailored so that no other person could deliver the same speech. You need to know the speaker. His or her background, tone of voice, forming years and personal values.

2. MIX IT UP

Whatever the topic, a speech must be based on a great mix of ingredients. Your content should be well-researched and founded on hard data as well as personal anecdotes. Look into previous examples of the presenter's speaking style and favorite words.

3. START WRITING EARLY

Writing is an iterative process that requires you to reflect, test out different angles and perhaps start all over again. Slowly you will start to get a feeling for “the soul” of the speech. Starting to write early allows you to research and produce in parallel.

4. IDENTIFY THE CORE STORY

In the early phases of the writing process, try to identify the core story of the speech. What is the theme, key message and conflict? The Onion Model or the Core Story Model can be helpful tools when doing this. Once you have defined your core story, use it as a guideline to ensure consistency and clarity.

5. GET FEEDBACK

Ask colleagues to give feedback on your draft. We all need help to “kill our darlings” and consider other perspectives and inquiries.

6. USE A VIRTUAL WHITEBOARD FOR IDEATION AND SHARING

Virtual collaboration tools like Miro or Mural can be of great help for organising and sharing content. Whether you use them as a personal instrument for developing thoughts and concepts or invite stakeholder/collaborators to get feedback it is a valuable tool for your process.

7. GET EMOTIONAL

A good speech creates an emotional connection with the audience. Use a framework like Public Narrative (Story of self, us and now) from Professor Marshall Ganz to create an authentic foundation by uncovering the personal passion, values and commitment of the speaker.

8. MAKE IT VISUAL

Our mind and memory are visual. Paint a picture to help your audience better understand and recall your message. Avoid shallow corporate jargon and instead draw on metaphors and vivid descriptions easy to visualize.

9. TRIM AND CUT

Within each good speech a shorter, even better speech, is often hidden. When you are finalising your content try to wipe out the double-talk and sharpen the key points. Less is more, so don't be afraid to trim and cut generously.

10. DO A DRESS REHEARSAL

When the speech is ready, take it for a test run and present it to a few colleagues. Often you will discover numerous small improvements once the words leave the written form. Have the speaker rehearse before the delivery date, to leave time for refinements and get acquainted with the rhythm.



DON'TS

1. DON'T FORGET WHO YOU ARE TALKING TO

We always write (and speak) to a certain someone. Keep in mind what your audience finds relevant and meaningful. What makes them tick?

2. DON'T BE AFRAID TO BREAK UP YOUR CONTENT

Sometimes you may need to address different topics and target groups in your speech. And while a single cohesive flow may be your preferred style, try creating a speech with several isolated segments. Remember, that some speeches will not be seen in their entirety but rather as smaller highlights on social media.

3. DON'T ASSUME THE PRESENTER WILL WING IT

Many top executives are great presenters. However, preparation is always a good investment when delivering an important speech. Get the speaker involved early and schedule deadlines to ensure feedback and rehearsals. Help your speaker "own" the speech.

4. DON'T SHY AWAY FROM CONFLICTS

A good story always involves conflict – a challenge that the hero must face. Don't hide it. Use it to deliver the main message. Good conflicts drive empathy and engagement.

5. DON'T USE SLIDES

Never support a speech with PowerPoint slides. Especially slides with a lot of text. If needed, you can show single pictures, a key graph or figures, but be careful not to steal the attention from the presenter.

6. DON'T STRIVE FOR PERFECT

Do your best and be ambitious, but don't try to make your speech perfect. It is not a piece of art, it's a communication effort.

7. DON'T TALK IN CODE

Many corporate strategies are phrased in management terms that are hard for people to understand and relate to. At worst, talking in code can distance you from the audience. Try using layman terms and the natural language of the speaker.

8. DON'T USE TELEPROMPTERS

For most executive speakers, using a teleprompter is not recommended. The presentation often comes across as stiff and unauthentic (unless the speaker has a lot of prior experience). Natural presentations have pauses, life and rhythm that a prompter may whittle away.

9. DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE WHY AND HOW

Business presentations tend to focus a lot on the WHAT – from accelerating digitalisation to driving growth. Remember to cover the important WHY and the more actionable HOW. A great speech has a strong connection between WHY, WHAT and HOW.

10. DON'T STOP LEARNING

Writing is an ongoing learning process. Every time you write a speech, there will be room for improvement. Keep in mind that mistakes are not something to fear, they are valuable learnings.

