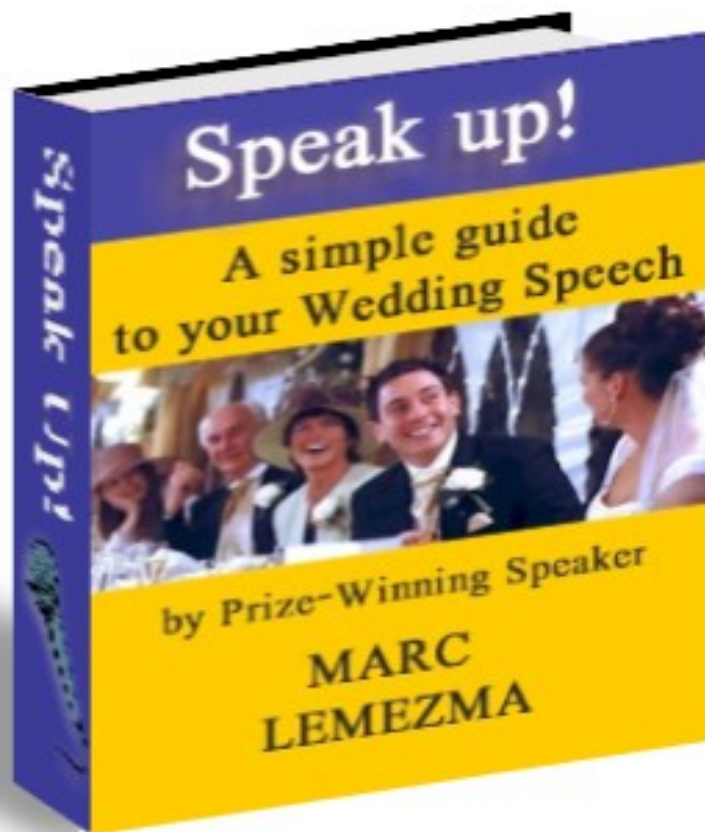


A, W, A, Y,  
W, I, T, H,  
W, O, R, D, S,

*find your inner voice*

## **Speak Up!**



*A quick-start guide to making a wedding speech*

Version 5  
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*find your inner voice*

## Introduction

*Only the unknown frightens men. But once a man has faced the unknown,  
that terror becomes the known*

*Antoine de Saint-Exupry (1900 1944)*

It is said that if you were to ask a hundred people what their greatest fear was, most would not say the dark, pain, or even death. Most would tell you it is speaking in public. Being the focus of an audiences attention means that any mistake you make is exposed to everyone.

### **On the other hand,**

Any success is equally revealed and all will know your wonderfully amazing talent!

I attend over 100 weddings a year and have seen many great speeches and many I would rather forget. Yet even if you are not a good speaker you can make the speeches part of your day at the very least less painful by careful planning and a little thought.

*So here is a brief guide to help you deliver a truly great wedding speech.*

**My especial thanks to Paul Hurst of [www.BarnDance.co.uk](http://www.BarnDance.co.uk) for his help and assistance in putting this document together.**

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## **Order Order Order!**

So when do the speeches happen and who speaks when?

The traditional timings for the speeches are simple:-.

- Grace before the meal starts.
- Grace after the meal (during coffee)
- The speeches themselves (more of which below)

### **A Lost Etiquette**

At so many weddings I see two of the most important pieces of etiquette either lost, misunderstood and in some cases blatantly ignored.

This is not about tradition versus modernity, it is about respect for the couple and all those involved in making a wedding day happen.

What am I taking about?

### **Standing up for grace and the toasts AND being quiet and paying attention!**

So how do you make sure that your guests are aware when to stand and how do you keep control of those chatterers at the back?

You do need a Master of Ceremonies.

It need not be a red-coated toastmaster (although they are more relevant to today's more varied wedding arrangements than they have ever been – in my opinion). It could be the wedding co-ordinator or head waiter at the wedding venue. If you have a friend with a powerful voice and presence he could do it for you. I as a magician am often asked to add this into my package at a wedding – as I certainly can't do any tricks when the speeches are happening!

Whichever approach you decide to take make sure someone knows what is planned and can call everyone to order at the right times which are:-

- Calling the guest to order to receive the happy couple
- Announcing grace (if you choose to have it) at the start and end of the meal
- Making announcements about smoking, mobile phones etc
- Introducing the various speakers

## Who Speaks When?

There is frequently confusion about who speaks when at a modern wedding. There is the traditional etiquette known by many but not all and of course there are modern variations some of which are totally unique to the couple. Civil Partnership celebrations may of course need a different approach.

For whatever reason you choose not to use the traditional etiquette I suggest that consideration is given to making “the speeches” part of your day seem cohesive and well thought out. If both partners wish to speak they should do so together. Likewise if two Fathers wish to speak they should do so one after the other and then jointly propose a toast to the happy couple.

Ultimately it is your own choice; but I have laid out for your benefit the traditional wisdom along with a few tips on using variations.

*The order of speeches is traditionally:-*

**The Father of the Bride**, who thanks everyone for coming, welcomes the groom into his family and then goes on to talk about his daughter. As in any speech, a balanced mix of affectionate anecdotes and gentle humour is the order of the day. He concludes his speech by proposing a toast to the bride and groom or the happy couple.

**The Groom** replies on behalf of himself and his wife or partner. He then thanks those people involved in helping them in the planning of the wedding and distributes gifts to those who deserve a special “thank you”.

*Special note: So many times the intended recipient is not in the room (perhaps hiding in the bar) or is situated at the other end of the room. So try and plan your table lay-out so that those receiving gifts are close at hand and have an usher or your toastmaster round everybody up before you start!*

Finally the groom may comment about his wife or partner, including how wonderful they look, and concludes with a toast to the bridesmaids.

**The Best Man's** speech is typically the longest. He has several tasks. First he must thank the groom on behalf of the Bridesmaids. Next he must read out the messages from those not present (more of which below) and then the humorous part! Here trust in your Best Man is paramount. You must be confident that he will not embarrass either you or your elderly aunts. Often nowadays a little game might be played, a slide show presented or a surprise revealed. These are all fine as long as some important rules are followed.

- Don't be too crude for the audience – you have to guide him on this
- Make it concise – give him a time limit
- Make it make sense – make sure whatever he plans is cohesive

## **On To The Speech Itself**

### **Preparation Before The Day**

It is clearly advantageous to write your speech out before the big day. Whether you choose to read the script verbatim, use bullet points or key cards or even if you choose to wing it on the day, getting what you want to say down on paper will help order your thoughts.

I recommend a speech of 5 to 7 minutes for a Best Man and slightly less for any others. More than 10 can be extremely tedious (unless you are a very experienced and polished speaker).

I would certainly aim for 20 to 30 minutes in total for all the speeches encompassing any introductions and the giving of gifts etc.

The key skill is knowing is how much to write. Just remember a good speaker can deliver around 130 to 150 words a minute with clarity, pauses and passion.

Most word processor packages have a word count facility, use it to your advantage!

### **The Structure Of The Speech**

Most people assume that a speech should contain a beginning, middle and an end; just like a story.

Whilst that logic cannot be argued against, many speeches are less than effective because the writer has taken this far too literally. There needs to be an understanding of what each section needs to contain to make it truly effective.

Of course each speaker at the wedding has his particular responsibilities, but these often seem to be more flexible these days. Nonetheless they all need a mixture of “thank yous”, stories, humour, poignancy, reflection and usually a toast at the end.

It is not for me to tell you what to say, but the following template covers the structure effectively.

Please note that it largely follows a full Best Man’s speech, but feel free to use what you think will work for you.

#### **NB**

*Any jokes or one- liners are there for example only – but if you like them feel free to use them with my compliments!*

## **1 The Beginning**

**The Salutation** - “good afternoon ladies & gentlemen....”

*This gives everyone a time to come to order before you launch into the speech proper. It also gives you a chance to pause and smile, and for them to smile back at you!*

**The Introduction** “My name is Jim” or “As you know I’m Jim...”  
*If you are the Bridegroom this may seem not essential, but I recommend it thoroughly.*

*You will have now uttered two sentences, you may still be nervous. This gives you a further chance to pause for breath.*

## **2 Reading Of Messages**

This can be one of the most tortuous parts of the best man’s (or whoever does it) speech. Reading dozens of messages from cards, emails, letters that fall all over the table, does not keep peoples attention.

My suggestion is that you read out no more than 6 or perhaps 8 messages.

Try to get hold of the cards etc as soon as possible, well before you have to make your speech and make your selection, prioritising by the following criteria: -

1. Those unable to attend due to sickness, accident or calamity
2. Close family members
3. Distant family/friends
4. Those with humorous or apposite messages
5. Those with cute or nice pictures
6. Others

Don’t try and read out the whole message. If possible read through beforehand and make notes, summarising the message. For example: -

“This one from Aunt Betty in Melbourne – G’day to you all – may you have a million more G’days”

**Finish off by saying.**

“Some lovely messages there, we had so many I couldn’t possibly read them all, but I will be leaving them on the gifts table for you to look at later, if you wish.”

### 3 The Opener

For example “And if it wasn’t for Nescafe and Aspirin – I wouldn’t be here now”

*A light-hearted joke relaxes everyone. If you can’t think of your own gag, feel free to use the one above.*

Lead-up “This has been an amazing day and there are so many people to thank...”

*This leads you nicely to the body of the speech.*

### 4 The Body

**The Thank Yous** “Thank you on behalf of the Bridesmaids.....Fred and Mary for being... John for his help with” ETC

*It’s a great idea to factor in pauses after each thank you. If you leave space applause follows instinctively. This also helps you feel good about your speech!*

**The History** “I first met David at...”

*Give a quick description of how things started, or how you met.*

**The Stories** “I remember once being so drunk... actually I don’t remember!”

*One, two or (at a pinch) three humorous tales. Remember you will have a mix of people in your audience with varying degrees of tolerance to innuendo or tales of drunken debauchery!*

**The Niceties** “And despite that he has always been a helpful and loyal...”

**\*\*\*\*\*IMPORTANT NOTE\*\*\*\*\***

*For every lewd tale you tell, you need to have a nice story to balance the speech.*

*For every cheap gag at someone’s expense you need to mention their virtues.*

*For the sake of balance you need to give a shot at redemption for the victims of your humorous anecdotes.*

## **The End**

## **The Build up**

A line to build up towards the toast...

“They truly are great friends and make a wonderful couple...  
“She has really changed my life – I am the happiest man alive!”

*This is the time to be really cheesy.*

## **The Toast**

“So please be upstanding to drink to...”

*Lead the toast, take your seat and your applause!*

## Preparation On The Day

### Overcoming The Fear

Most people will experience a combination of the following symptoms when speaking in public. With each one I have given strategies you can employ to help manage them.

- Dry mouth?** Have a glass of water ready at hand
- Need the loo?** Go before you start (just like mum told you!)
- Memory Loss?** Practice your speech first and have script, cue cards etc at hand
- Sweats & Shakes?** Have a hanky to hand – take deep breaths and long pauses
- Fidgeting Etc?** Have something to hold (your script??) and try to make meaningful gestures

*and the worst of all!*

- Rushing!!** Practice your speech well. **You can only deliver 150 words a minute effectively.** Use plenty of pauses – PAUSE is THE most powerful word in any language.

### Be Prepared

As you will have gathered by now I am a firm believer that practice really does make perfect and I suggest you read the speech aloud to yourself several times.

Go through the speech and make a list of the things that on a second reading don't make sense or you would like to change.

List any words or phrases you find it hard to pronounce clearly or easily and either practice them or change them.

You may find it useful to annotate the script to indicate passages which require emphasis or would benefit from pauses. A coloured high-lighter pen is very useful.

Time yourself while practicing and see how fast you are speaking and edit your speech to fit the time you have allotted.

After any necessary changes practice a few more times before the big day, BUT NEVER on the day itself. You have a lot of other responsibilities so cramming it all in certainly won't help you feel calm and in control.

**On the day – have your script safely in your pocket, a glass of water and a hanky to hand, and get ready to wow your audience and enjoy yourself!**

## **The Delivery**

### **Stance**

Stand up straight. Take a sip of water and then a deep breath. Pause, smile and begin.

### **Who are you talking to?**

Two points that are critical in public speaking

- People need to hear you
- People like to be talked to NOT talked at

As you speak – try and talk to the person who is farthest from you. You might want to imagine speaking to a person in the next room. This will help you project your voice and make you clearly audible to all.

Use your eyes to make contact with people around the room. Stop a moment and look at everyone in turn – directly in the eye! This helps keep your audience engaged and makes the speech personal to them.

### **Emphasising The Voice**

Try and get some variety in the tone, pace and volume of your voice.

Remember, there is a difference between emphasis and a raised voice.

Emphasis could mean slowing and pausing more, intensifying or modifying the tone of your voice.

Raising your voice rarely works well – better to mimic shouting by intensifying the tone or even gesturing as if you were shouting (hand to mouth).

### **The Pause...**

...is perhaps the most powerful “word” we can use. It allows our point to sink home, a joke to take effect, an audience to laugh, our face to express emotion and (most importantly) gives you a chance to think and glance at your script!

Wherever there is a new paragraph there will be a natural pause. You should add pause points to your script. Where? Only you can determine that to suit your character and style.

### **Gestures**

Really help to emphasise key points. They can give our idle hands some work to do and help us avoid fidgeting. Gestures are very personal to you. Do try and use a variety and not repeat the same ones, for example waving your right hand like a conductor marking the rhythm of the speech.

## AND FINALLY

The most important thing you can do is relax and TRY and enjoy the experience.

Yes it can be very nerve-wracking to give a speech. If this were a business presentation or a talk at a job interview, for example, you really can feel under pressure. In that situation you are, after all, trying to impress someone and prove you are better than the next person.

### ***BUT A WEDDING IS DIFFERENT!***

Everyone is there to enjoy themselves and be part of your special day. They are not looking for you to prove yourself.

They actually **want** you to succeed and if you stumble or fluff your lines...

### ***THEY WON'T MIND***

It will last but a moment and will fade into the back of their memories as your speech and the day moves on.

**I hope the hints and tips in this brief guide will help you make a great speech on the big day. I am always happy to hear your success stories and to learn of your tips so that I can share them with my future readers.**

## GOOD LUCK

**Marc Lemezma**

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