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# speakup



**Wishing you**



*A Merry Christmas*



*& Happy New Year...*



**from all at GPB Consulting**



## **Contents**

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### **A SPEECH, A SPEECH, MY KINGDOM FOR A SPEECH**

Following the article in our last newsletter about preparing for a conference, Alastair Grant looks at the art of speech writing. The key point about speeches is that you are writing for the ear, not the eye. Guiding you through the use of English language: clarity, tense, imagery, similes, metaphors, personification, climatics and anti-climatics. This article has it all!

### **FIGURES OF SPEECH – THE DEBATE CONTINUES**

The debate is in full swing and we would love to hear some more of your views. We are keeping this running for another edition and have come up with some Christmas figures of speech to keep you going over the holiday period.



# A Speech, a Speech,

In our last newsletter, we outlined steps for a conference. Now, you will want to define your key speech points and have thought about the audience. You decide to write a speech in full, as the words are important. You also decide that you want to praise the audience, be light-hearted yet establish some serious points. On occasion, we write client speeches, but it is not our core activity. Writing a speech isn't so difficult if you follow our checklist.

## Start.

Begin with pleasantries. Lay out an agenda. This sounds logical but more important is to persuade the audience quickly that you have something worth listening to. This is the attention-grabber. One way is to use the bait technique.

For example, make a strong statement that makes people sit up and listen:

*Did you know that on any one day some 2,000 of our employees are off sick? That's twice the national*

*average. My job is to reduce that figure,...but I need your help...*

Having attracted attention, give the audience a route map.

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## More General Advice

The key point about speeches is that you are writing for the ear, not the eye.

Use short sentences. Most people's brains find 50-word sentences with lots of sub-clauses, baffling.

Ration the word *and* as an idea link. It's used in conversation, sometimes as a filler word, but in a presentation greater clarity is usually achieved by replacing *and* with a full stop. Of course, we are not talking about 'Marks *and* Spencer'!

Remember to repeat original subjects and objects. Use pronoun reference carefully! *My cheetah would not eat raw meat, so I cooked it.* Poor cheetah. Or: *ICI believe that the sale of one of their subsidiaries to Johnson Matthey has been well received by the City. Johnson Matthey have also expressed warm*

*satisfaction at the outcome. They think that they will*

*see an increased EBITDA and ROCE in the next FY. But who is they? Is it ICI, Johnson Matthey, the City or even the subsidiary? And how many of us outside the financial community are familiar with EBITA, FY and ROCE?*

### Clarity.

*Fred only takes classes in French.* This looks straightforward but actually has five different meanings. It is so easy to be blind to this sort of thing.

Advice: *Get someone else to proof read text out loud.*

Active voice. *The waiter kicked the dog* is better than the passive *dog was kicked by the waiter.*

### Imagery

GPB makes much of developing people's ability to increase verbal imagery. A good start is the use of analogy. Compare an abstraction with something everybody is familiar with. Jeremy Clarkson, the motoring journalist, scores well here.

Imagery is helped by understanding a few basic tools. For example, what about simile, metaphor, personification, climax and anti climax?

Here's a quiz: Match the phrases below to the preceding list.

- The M25 is often saturated with traffic, we have the same problem with our copper wire telephone systems, but if we introduce fibre optics it's as though the M25 suddenly got 100 traffic lanes each way instead of three.
- The table groaned under the weight
- I came, I saw, I conquered
- The train flashed by
- The ball went like a rocket into the back of the net
- I came, I saw, I went away



# my Kingdom for a Speech...



A **simile** is a direct comparison between two unlike things, which have only one relevant thing in common. *The ball went like a rocket.*

A **metaphor** is an implied simile. The comparison is not direct, but implied. *The train flashed by.*

**Personification** makes a lifeless thing seem alive. *The table groaned.* Clarkson likes this sort of personification.

**Climatic** is a series of points building to one important event. This is a favourite tactic of the speech writer, but used sparingly - repeat a key word or idea. *I came I saw I conquered, I have a dream...* Below is part of a talk where under pricing is an issue:

- *Seriously, do we want to see the £99 premium again?*
- *Are the £99 premium customers really what you want?*
- *The answer surely is no. Neither you nor we want the £99 premium*

The **anti climatic**. *I came, I saw, I went away* is more difficult but can play on our penchant, sometimes, for understatement or self deprecation.

These ideas can enrich the imagery of a speech, but watch out. A colourful metaphor or well crafted analogy must be relevant to the key business point. Otherwise, the audience is confused and their esteem takes a hit.

## Jokes

Jokes are unwise. Wit ideally comes wrapped in an anecdote suited to the theme. No ethnic, religious, political or cultural shots are instant death.

## Quotes

Quotes enable you to be inspirational without being trite.

They also allow a point in an oblique, non-confrontational way. Well used, they make a presentation memorable. This one usually raises a smile for those undergoing change:

***We trained hard...but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation.***

*Petronius Arbiter 210 BC*

We have books of quotations. Among our favourites is *The Wiley Book of Quotations* (ISBN 0-471 - 18207-9).

## Summaries

People listen to good summary because it's a second chance to understand key points - much like reading the last paragraph in an editorial. Ending on an inspirational note can be important. Get it wrong and you sound laboured or stale. *We've got to provide a standard of service better than the customer expects* is a worthy sentiment, but hollow and generalized. Link the final few words with something concrete, said earlier.

## Finally.

Once committed to paper, read the words aloud. Flow -- or otherwise -- quickly shows.

Next, we will write about tone, expression and pace.

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# Figures of Speech – The Debate continues...

In our last newsletter, we started a debate on the use of figures of speech. We have received some varied responses and thought that we would keep this going until the next issue to give all of those who have not contributed an opportunity to voice their opinions.

“I think that figures of speech are fine for audiences who you know. Some are funny, others are so puzzling that I spend the next few minutes trying to work them out, and I’m no longer listening to the presentation. So they do have their problems.”

*Lawyer at Allen & Overy*

“Be honest with yourself. When are you at your most engaging? When using the formal ‘business speak’ we all lapse in to when pitching or in a formal meeting, or when discussing with friends or family those things that really matter to you? I suspect that we all know the answer and yet many of us still fall into that classic communications trap - we speak like the stereotypical police constable giving evidence in court. You know the sort of thing...” “I was proceeding in a Westerly direction when I encountered the accused...” Accurate maybe, but totally lacking in the colour which brings communication to life.

I believe that good communication is not what you say but how well you are understood. Talk to your business audiences in the language you would use if you were chatting with a good friend and you’re on the right track. It will take time - Rome wasn’t built in a day! Being forced to be imaginative in your use of language - and almost certainly more interesting to listen to as a consequence - will mark an important first step on the road to better communications.”

*Andy Berry, Flagship Group*

“It might be alright for people to use Figures of Speech among audiences who know what they mean, but in my experience here, hardly anyone understands what they mean, and in addition the speaker often gets it wrong, either by misquoting it or using it in the wrong context. I’m completely against them.”

*Brussels-based Intellectual Property specialist*

In the Christmas spirit, we came up with a few festive examples to get you thinking!

- **Don’t be a scrooge**
- **Trussed up like a turkey**
- **Lit up like a Christmas tree**

Keep the debate going by emailing your responses to [debate@gpbuk.com](mailto:debate@gpbuk.com)

**GPB Consulting** is a respected advisor in effective communication to enhance business performance. We help clients excel in their use of the spoken word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Often over the longer term our work affects the way a firm does business. Our aim is to coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including; Presentations, New Business Pitches, Selling, Negotiating, Media Interviews and Telephone Skills. Our clients needs are the only focus of our work; we listen to them and closely tailor our advice to deliver first class coaching. Through our own innovative culture we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create new tools such as Voice Analysis, PRM and the GPB Virtual Classroom.



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