

Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 20

Speaker Skills: How Not to Sweat It!

Why are we gifting you this volume? Because the mission statement of our primary publication—*The Parish Paper: New Ideas for Active Congregations*—is to help the largest possible number of congregations achieve maximum effectiveness in their various ministries. *The Parish Paper* is a monthly newsletter whose subscribers receive copyright permission to distribute to their constituents—more than two million readers in 28 denominations. Go to www.TheParishPaper.com for subscription information.

Purpose of this Volume: Provides in-depth answers to questions that readers of *The Parish Paper* ask regarding principles and practical methods for clergy and lay speakers who want to achieve maximum communication impact in speeches and sermons.

© Copyright 2009 by Herb Miller (Fourth Edition). You have permission to download this volume free at www.TheParishPaper.com and/or to distribute copies to people in your congregation.

Volume 20 – Contents

#1: Focus Your Camera

How to Perfect the Objective Sentence – Page 4
Don't Write before You Sight – Page 5

#2: Build Strong Bones

Ten Skeleton Types – Page 6
Unity and Movement – Page 8

#3: Adding Muscles to the Skeleton

Five Dangers – Page 9
Multiply the Micro-Muscles – Page 10
Beyond Dry Logic – Page 12

#4: Fifteen Ways to Begin

Openers – Page 13
Unlock the Door – Page 14

#5: Fifteen Ways to Finish

Pick Your Landing Field – Page 15
Make the Last Line One of Your Best Lines – Page 16

#6: Preparing for a Live Delivery

The Aerodynamics of Word Lift – Page 18
How to Speak Without Notes – Page 20
Faith and Preparation Equal Lift-Off – Page 21

#1: Focus Your Camera

Death is the only thing most people fear more than making a public presentation. Research reveals that Americans are more likely to break into a sweat when they make a speech than when they get married, get divorced, have a first date, go for a job interview, or visit the dentist.¹

Experience is the only sure cure for speech-induced anxiety. Walking a high wire involves the risk of failure. Doing it several times without falling is the only way to reduce the jitters. Making speeches is similar. Experience is the only sure sweat-eliminator. But familiarity with proven speech-making basics moves you toward that destination with greater confidence.

How to Narrow Your Attention-Focus

Selecting a target before you start shooting is as important in speech presentation as in marksmanship. The young pastor who said, “I have trouble getting focused when I begin preparing a sermon,” was stating a frequently expressed concern. Many good speakers spend 25 percent of their total preparation time focusing themselves, *before* they begin writing the speech. While time-consuming and often frustrating, focusing is an essential preparation step: focusing protects the speaker from the tendency to pepper a dozen targets like a shotgun instead of hitting the bull’s-eye like a rifle.

Different people use different procedures in their preparation-focus. One speaker spends several days developing a one-sentence “proposition statement” that sums up the speech in less than twenty words. That sentence becomes the plumb-line by which he decides what to include in and exclude from the speech.

Another speaker focuses by writing out three sentences that answer three questions:

1. Exactly what does my audience *want* to know?
2. Exactly what does my audience *need* to know?
3. After I speak, exactly what do I want my audience to *do* (six words or less)?

Ken Davis, noted speech instructor and author,² suggests that speakers begin their focusing process by selecting a subject that can be expressed in one or two words. This subject must be (a) capable of touching your audience and (b) within the bounds of your knowledge. (In sermons, especially in lectionary preaching, the subject grows out of studying the lectionary text for that Sunday.)

Step two for Davis is choosing a *single aspect* of the subject as the central theme. This theme must be crystal clear and narrow enough to limit the talk’s content to a manageable amount of information. Failing to narrow the subject to a central theme *before* writing a speech is among the most common mistakes of novice speakers.

Step three: Summarize the objective of your speech in one “objective sentence.” Some speakers call this the “proposition.” Example: Every person can learn to pray by following the directions given by Christ. Davis says that this objective sentence contains a *proposition* (“every person can learn how to pray”) and an *interrogative response* (“by following the directions given by Christ”).

In his excellent book, Davis spells out in detail (a) the three kinds of objective sentences, (b) how to choose the one that best fits your purpose, and (c) how to select a “key word.” People who make several speeches each year should read Davis’ book and develop a personalized “Speech-Focusing Worksheet” similar to the one illustrated on the next page.

Speech-Focusing Worksheet

Subject: _____

Central Theme: _____

“Obligatory” Objective Sentence:

Every _____

should _____

because of _____

Why? _____

“Enabling” Objective Sentence:

Every _____

can _____

by _____

How? _____

“Value” Objective Sentence:

is/are better than _____

because of _____

Why? _____

Identify the plural noun in the objective sentence that functions as a key word and circle it.

How to Perfect the Objective Sentence

The Proposition: Davis says you can choose from three kinds of propositions: the *obligatory* proposition, the *enabling* proposition, and the *value* proposition. The one you choose determines the direction of your speech.

- In the *obligatory proposition*, you attempt to persuade people to take a particular point of view. An *obligatory proposition* always uses the word *should*. Example: Every person *should* learn to pray.
- In the *enabling proposition*, you give information or instruction. An *enabling proposition* always uses the word *can*. Example: Every person *can* learn to pray.
- In the *value proposition*, you compare the value of two options by suggesting that one is better than the other. A *value proposition* always says, “_____ is/are better than _____.” Example: Praying in private is *better than* praying in public.

The Interrogative Response: The proposition in the first half of your objective sentence is always followed by an interrogative response.

- In an *obligatory proposition*, the interrogative response should always begin with the words *because of*. Example: Every person should pray *because of* the power it adds to life. Davis warns speakers not to give in to their temptation to substitute the word *for* in place of *because of*. It may sound better, but *because of* keeps you far more focused.
- The interrogative response to an *enabling proposition* should always begin with the word *by*. Example: Everyone can learn to pray *by* setting aside time for it every day.
- The interrogative response to a *value proposition* should always begin with the words *because of*. Example: Private prayer is better than public prayer *because of* its power to connect us with God in a personal way.

The three different types of propositions illustrated above automatically produce different kinds of questions for your speech outline:

- Obligatory propositions always lead to the question *why?*
- Enabling propositions always lead to the question *how?*
- Value propositions, like obligatory propositions, lead to the question *why?*

The Key Word: Always a plural noun, the key word should point beyond itself, opening up the speech’s possibilities. Example: Every person can learn to pray by taking two simple *steps*.

The key word causes the audience to ask, “What steps?” and enables the speaker to see a logical outline. One of the steps is, “Follow the example of Christ.” Another step is, “Pray daily.”

The speaker who wants all of his or her message to come from the Bible might use this objective sentence: Every person can learn to pray by following the Bible’s instructions. The key word *instruction* causes the audience to ask, “What instructions?”

The Logical Rationale: The *rationale*, or outline, is the contents of the bag defined by the key word. Make the rationale’s elements parallel in grammatical form. Since the rationale should logically cement the audience to your objective sentence, state the rationale in an easy-to-remember form. Make each of the outline points logical derivatives of the key word. If your key word is *instructions*, each of your speech’s points is an instruction. Example:

1. Meet with God.
2. Ask for God’s help.
3. Listen carefully.

Novice speakers sometimes become intrigued by a *rationale*—often in the form of a cute, three-point outline—before they spend time narrowing their focus by polishing an objective sentence.

Don't Write Before You Sight

“Well begun is half done” quips an old proverb. In speech preparation, well begun always involves narrowing your focus to a small segment of a much broader subject. Audience impact happens in direct proportion to whether that focus speaks to the needs and interests of this particular group. “Fire, ready, aim!” is as poor a formula for speakers as for sharpshooters. A speech begins well when you select a narrowly focused, specific target before you get ready to fire.

#2: Build Strong Bones

“I never quite figured out what point he was trying to make,” she said to her spouse on the way home from the meeting. “Did you?”

“He said a lot,” the husband replied, “twenty minutes worth. But after circling several airports, he never unloaded any passengers.”

Skeletons accomplish two essential functions in human physiology: they hold things together and facilitate mobility. A speech skeleton serves the same purpose: it provides unity and movement.

Job one in public speaking is selecting a subject focus that helps you resist the temptation to point at several targets simultaneously. Job two in public speaking is building a skeleton that fits your selected subject focus, stays unified, and moves in a specific direction *within* that focus.

Ten Skeleton Types

Why does the skeleton of an armadillo differ from a whale’s bone structure? Both systems provide unity and mobility, but they are designed to achieve these goals in widely different environmental circumstances. In the same way, the following speech skeletons serve different situations. Review these options in the early stages of preparation. Select the one best suited to the goals of your address.

The problem-solving skeleton begins by answering questions such as, “What is wrong? Who gets hurt? What causes this?” The speaker then (a) presents one or more possible solutions, (b) suggests a concrete plan and the steps for implementing it, (c) describes the benefits of the solution, and (d) asks the audience for a decision. Many people in the pragmatic tell-me-how-to-do-it generation born after 1946 find this kind of skeleton especially helpful.

The time skeleton expresses unity and movement by saying (a) in the past, (b) at present, and (c) looking ahead.

The space skeleton moves geographically. General MacArthur often used this kind of outline: (a) the world, (b) Asia, (c) the Pacific Ocean, and (d) Korea.

The illustration skeleton’s most famous proponent was Norman Vincent Peale. His published sermons for fifty years tied together a string of pearls with transitional sentences that conveyed, “Here’s another illustration of this important central point.” The humor and detailed picture stories moved people past their old mindsets across new horizons of thought.

The topical skeleton uses a classification outline, somewhat like the *Yellow Pages* in a telephone book. Example: “Before we make a decision, we need to look at the political, economic, educational, and social aspects of this issue.” Another example: “To manufacture and sell this kind of garment, we need to consider several factors: fabric type, quality of construction, style, market demand, advertising options, and cost.”

The extended-comparison skeleton begins with a new idea—A—which is the central focus of the speech. Then, the speaker tells about an old idea—B. As he or she compares ideas A and B, point by point, the contrast begins to generate emotional power: members of the audience see how idea A is similar to what they already believe or are already trying to achieve with present efforts. Example: “Our church has been trying to develop a strong youth program. This idea moves us more rapidly in that direction.”

The psychological skeleton is especially useful when addressing a hostile audience or one with whose opinions the speaker is unfamiliar. Beginning with the most universally known and acceptable point of the subject, the speaker moves to the next most acceptable point. He or she continues building in this way until arriving at the points with which the audience is most likely to take exception. Example: “We all probably agree on the importance of these five principles in our youth program.” After stating these five points, the speaker presents the controversial idea as a means of building on the ideas to which the group already gave emotional agreement.

The motivational skeleton connects with a personal need or goal in members of the audience—then moves to a rationale for change that can bring significant personal benefits. Motivational speakers work from the assumption that many in their audience desire heightened self-esteem and self-actualization. The motivational speaker links these needs—usually through one or more powerful success stories of people with whom members of the audience can identify—with the idea or ideal the audience highly regards. As the speech unfolds, members of the audience begin seeing a gap between their basic desires or needs and their beliefs or behavior patterns. As these inconsistencies appear, the audience begins to develop a strong conviction regarding the need to adopt new beliefs or behaviors.

The logical skeleton arrives at conclusions reasonably drawn from events or circumstances. The speaker organizes the body of the speech around a few main ideas, uses them to argue the speech’s basic proposition, and supports each of the points by two or more sub-points. Examples:

- *Cause and effect*—Such as “large numbers of people moving to the suburbs (cause) brought about the decline of American cities (effect).” Make sure, however, that your “assumed cause” is *sufficient* to create the effect you claim. The single-cause, single-effect issue is the best place to apply this kind of speech outline.
- *Deductive logic* works well when you have tons of incontrovertible scientific evidence. The list of logical propositions leads to an inevitable conclusion.
- *Inductive logic* moves from a specific illustration of the central point to its general principle application—rather than from the general principle back to a specific application story. (Deductive logic is specific *at the end*; inductive logic is specific *at the beginning*.) Fred Craddock’s well-known “inductive preaching” style uses this kind of skeleton. As the initial story unfolds, followed by layer after layer of “so what?” observations and “for example” illustrations, the audience arrives at an inescapable conclusion not stated in the speech’s beginning.
- *Analogy*—draws attention to likenesses in relationships between two different ideas or objects—such as comparing something in the animal kingdom to something in human experience. Example: Lyle Schaller’s famous “shepherd to rancher” analogy persuasively describes how the pastor of a small church must change when he or she moves to a midsize or large congregation.
- *Dilemma*—outlines such a severe crisis that the audience rationally arrives at the conclusion the speaker points out at the end of the address (often, before the speaker gets there). Example: a speech about flood damage or tornado damage, appealing for donations.

The universal skeleton uses the EASE formula, which is helpful in developing the momentum and “flow” of a speech:

Exemplify. Give the big idea in a compelling story that involves real people.

Amplify. Enlarge on the big picture.

Specify. Be specific about any changes in thinking or behavior that the big idea advocates.

Electrify. Leave people with a compelling, inspirational close that drives home the big idea.

Unity and Movement

The various points of your speech must communicate one clear, unmistakable, compelling point. That happens when the speech skeleton holds the subject together while moving it forward toward a powerful close. If the skeleton conveying your speech points sounds like a combination of whale and armadillo bones, the audience may decide that the speech's central point is on top of your head.

The excellent examples of sermons that possess unity and movement—available from Rick Warren at www.pastors.com free of charge—also illustrate the principles expressed in this volume of *Nuggets*.

#3: Adding Muscles to the Skeleton

“He is a deep preacher, isn’t he?” the friend asked.

“I’m not sure *deep* is the word for it,” he replied. “When I was a boy, I went swimming with a cousin in a pond where I had not been before. As he swam out toward the middle, I asked whether the pond was deep. He said, ‘No, it’s only muddy.’”

A speech’s clarity begins at the first step of preparation—when the speaker narrows and focuses the subject with a simple “proposition sentence” capable of addressing the felt needs of this particular audience. Clarity increases at step two—when the speaker constructs a skeleton of three to six statements (sometimes called points) that add progressive movement to the propositional sentence. Clarity’s final step involves adding relevant illustrations to each point.

Speech or sermon illustrations come in eight basic forms:

- A biblical example
- A literary example
- A personal experience of the speaker
- A trend or a fact from contemporary life
- A contemporary biographical example
- A historical fact
- A biological analogy from nature

When added to each major point, these illustrative muscles produce several small climaxes as a speaker moves toward the major, concluding climax (closure).

Five Dangers

Novice speakers tend to hit their ball into one or more of five sand traps.

1. Humor for its own sake that has no connection with the speech’s central point. People laugh at jokes. That does not, however, mean that every kind of joke adds power to a speech. If the humor propels the mind in a different direction from the speech’s point, the communication begins to feel like cotton candy—interesting but lacking substance.

Effectively connected humor adds several values to a speech. Humor (a) gives the audience a recess from intensity, allowing people to start over with fresh attention; (b) is healthy—research reveals that people who laugh more often live longer; (c) removes emotional resistance to the speaker’s communication logic; and (d) lets the audience identify with the speaker and his or her central focus.

2. Interesting stories that have little relevance for this subject or audience. These side trips look like part of the highway to a novice speaker, but they divert the persuasive momentum. Like using vinegar as ice cream topping, interesting but unrelated stories add quantity while reducing quality. Add several of these stories, and the speech becomes a string of pearls with no string.

3. An overload of negative illustrations. Too many muscles of this sort—no matter how interesting or dramatically factual—move the audience toward the conviction that this speaker is depressed and/or depressing, rather than enlightening. A deep-sea diver heard this message on his radio: “Come up quick! The ship is sinking!” Too much of that kind of communication overloads an audience with negativism. When listeners begin to think that the speaker sees all reality through smoked glass, they begin to discount his or her words as possible distortions of truth.

4. Adding strong illustrations to weak skeletal points. The greatest of illustrations can look weak when hung on insignificant truths. An Arnold Schwarzenegger body looks good in jeans and a sweatshirt, but putting an expensive suit on a state fair show pig does little to improve his appearance. “If you strip off the rice-husk, the rice-grain will not grow,” says an old Hindu proverb. Doing the opposite produces the same result: planting only the husk grows a slim crop of audience impact.

5. Leaning too much on abstract logic. Occasional “mental drift” happens to every listener, both in private conversations and during speeches. Unless speakers frequently drag their audiences back to familiar mental images, many of the minds that drift away into imagination byways keep moving toward miscellaneous destinations. Jesus understood this and used the picture power of parables to communicate profound truth. Abe Lincoln did the same thing: The point in many of his political speeches leaped to life when he added muscle that began with, “There was an old farmer down in Sangamon County.”

Logic is important, but logic alone builds a boredom barrier. Illustrations—especially those laced with the great emotions of love, fear, hate, courage, and hope—storm the ramparts of both rational and emotional resistance. All effective speakers walk the borders of mysticism, occasionally stepping across into that vast land of human knowledge where story, symbolism, picture language, and allegory can convey truth in overpowering ways. Television producers build their communication effectiveness on the ancient principle that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Good speakers do the same things with word pictures.

Multiply the Micro-Muscles

As speakers grow in experience and skill, they become effective in using the classic rhetorical devices. Much of the power in these tools lies in their ability to deliver a thimble-sized illustration or word-picture. Skillful use of these devices significantly increases both clarity and listener interest.

Alliteration—repeating the same first sound or the same first letter: “The hallowed halls of Harvard.”

Anaphora—repeating the same word or words at the beginning of two or more successive clauses or sentences: “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight on the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills.” (Winston Churchill, speech in the House of Commons, June 4, 1940)

Anastrophe—inverting the usual order of words or clauses: “The tables, so far as the immediate moment was concerned, turned in her favor.”

Anticlimax—transitioning from a significant idea to a trivial or ludicrous idea (as at the end of a series): “I’ve got a headache, my heart beats fast, my nerves are shot, my ulcer is acting up—and I don’t feel well.”

Antimetabole—making a statement with two grammatical constructions, each yielding a different sense: “The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Antithesis—expressing opposite ideas in the same grammatical form: “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” (Neil Armstrong, as he stepped on the moon, July 20, 1969)

Apposition—placing a noun or pronoun in apposition to another noun- or pronoun-equivalent as an explanation or identification: “John Henry, the hero of railroading’s westward conquest of America in the 1800s, has become the far less glamorous union worker today.”

Assonance—repeating the same vowel sound: “Four and Score.”

Asyndeton—omitting conjunctions for emphasis or brevity: “I came, I saw, I conquered.”

Climax—arranging ideas in a rising scale of force and interest: “Let us fulfill our obligations, not just to our family and our country, but to our God.”

Ellipsis—omitting a word or words needed to complete the grammatical construction of a sentence, without losing the meaning: “So singularly clear was the water that when it was only twenty or thirty feet deep the bottom seemed floating in the air! Yes, where it even *eighty* feet deep.” (Mark Twain, *Roughing It*)

Epistrophe—ending successive clauses or sentences with the same word: “In a cake, nothing tastes like real butter, nothing moistens like real butter, nothing enriches like real butter, nothing satisfies like real butter.” (Caption from a Pillsbury ad during the decades before real butter became a villain)

Hyperbole—intentionally overstating: “The whole world is watching.”

Irony—expressing something other than the literal meaning, as when describing an incongruity between an expected result and what really happened: “It’s very easy to give up smoking. I’ve done it a thousand times.”

Litotes—using a figure of speech to assert a truth by denying its opposite: “It was no big deal. He just had to go without sleep for three days and do the work of two doctors in a seventy-two-hour emergency room stint.”

Metaphor—using a figure of speech that denotes a likeness between one kind of object or idea and another completely different object or idea: “Sarah is *drowning in money* these days.”

Metonymy—using a figure of speech to substitute a colorful picture-word or words for the actual idea, action, or emotion: “In Europe, we gave the *cold shoulder* to De Gaulle, and now he gives the *warm hand* to Mao Tse-tung.” (Richard M. Nixon, 1960 campaign speech)

Onomatopoeia—using a word that sounds like what it means: “The crash, boom of cymbals punctuated the colorful parade.”

Parallelism—using words in a pattern or rhythm, like music: “We are fully prepared; we are fully committed; we await the signal to begin.”

Parenthesis—inserting a word, phrase, or sentence within a sentence to explain or qualify something: “When someone provoked the bulldog (and the tiniest unexpected movement from a stranger could irritate him), his lightening bite wracked havoc on innocent ankles.”

Personification—assigning human qualities to an object or idea: “Drug use is a cancer on society.”

Polysyndeton—using several conjunctions in close succession: “And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:24-25).

Sarcasm—using a sharp statement, which is often satirical or ironic, to make a cutting point: “I have a right to resent, to object to, libelous statements about my dog.” (Franklin D. Roosevelt)

Simile—using a figure of speech, usually designed for dramatic effect, which says one thing is *like* another: “Silence settled over the audience like a block of granite.”

Synecdoche—using a figure of speech to signify the whole of an idea, action, or feeling by stating only one of its obvious elements:

- “Brandish your steel, men.”
- “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Understatement—representing something as less than is the case (the opposite of hyperbole): “When the prodigal son found that all he could afford for lunch was eating bean pods with the pigs, he realized he had a financial-management problem.”

Among these classic rhetorical devices, the speaker’s most important tools are simile, metaphor, and personification. On the third draft of a speech, try to add several of these three rhetorical devices. The mind thinks in pictures more than in words or concepts. Metaphor, simile, and personification transform dead words into moving pictures on the mind screen. In the same way that a movie draws people along and involves them emotionally and rationally, frequent use of these three devices prevents the audience from (a) changing mental channels or (b) going to sleep.

Beyond Dry Logic

A Pratt, Kansas, speaker told about a young man who became ill and arrived home from work early. Thinking he had a fever his wife excitedly reached for a thermometer but picked up a small barometer by mistake. After leaving it under his tongue a couple of minutes, she read in amazement, “Dry & Windy.”

Devoid of appropriate illustrative muscle, audiences tend to diagnose the best of skeletal structures as dry bones.

#4: Fifteen Ways to Begin

People who turn on a TV give each program a seven-second opportunity to capture their attention before shifting to another channel. Audiences watching a speaker in person are slightly more charitable. They use that same “remote control mentality” at the beginning of speeches and sermons, but they give speakers an average of fourteen seconds to capture their attention. If that attempt fails, their imaginations click to another channel and they mentally leave the room.

Openers

Effective speakers use a variety of techniques to gain audience attention. The best of speakers, instead of using one kind of opener on every speech, vary their introductions. After (a) carefully crafting the “proposition sentence” that defines your speech’s subject focus, (b) building a strong skeletal outline of major points that provides progressive movement, and (c) adding illustrative muscles to your outline skeleton, review the fifteen classic introduction techniques outlined below. Select the one that best fits this particular audience and address.

1. Quote. Use a great line from a famous figure or a dramatic statement from someone the audience knows personally. Then move into your subject by saying that this quote applies to the issue we are here to discuss. Example: “Teddy Roosevelt said the Grand Canyon was the most impressive piece of scenery he ever looked at. I’ll be talking about one of the most unimpressive pieces of scenery I’ve ever looked at—the vacant lot beside our church that needs cleaning up.”

2. Rhetorical question. “How many people here have tried scuba diving? The challenge ahead of us is like that. It takes special equipment and special training. First, let’s look at the equipment we will need.”

3. Unusual fact. “Research indicates that 70 percent of the clergy have lower self-images than when they started their ministries. What would you put on a list of possible causes for that disturbing fact?”

4. Significant event. “One year ago this week, our church sanctuary burned. The restoration process has brought us to a point where we must make some major decisions. We have several options. Let’s look at each one and weigh the pros and cons.”

5. Humor. Novice speakers use old jokes that several in the audience have heard many times. This convinces listeners that the rest of the speech may also be a rerun. A brief, witty remark about something mutually known (to both speaker and audience), or a remark the speaker invented on the spot, grabs attention far better. Example: “A woman in her eighties praised her pastor’s sermons by saying, ‘He begins well. He ends well. And he keeps the two fairly close together.’ Knowing the pressure of your busy schedules, brevity is one of my prime objectives.”

6. Current news event. “We have heard a lot about comets hitting Jupiter lately. I want to talk about a collision much closer to home—tax revenue shortfalls that are splattering red ink as they hit our school system; thus, endangering our classroom student-teacher ratios.”

7. A physical activity. “I want to begin with an opinion poll. Please raise your hand if you think the room is too cold. How many think the room is too warm? How many of you think the room is just about right? How many would prefer to hear the benediction within five minutes?”

8. A story. If you use this beginning, the story must sum up in a dramatic way the *exact point* of your speech. Avoid telling a story because you heard it last week or because you enjoy telling that particular story. Few mistakes identify an amateur speaker more instantly and accurately than a lengthy, moldy, introductory story.

9. Reference to the audience. Establish common ground by paying the audience a compliment or by identifying yourself with one of their special interests.

10. Reference to the occasion. Remind the audience of why this day is so special.

11. Reference to yourself. This kind of introduction must connect you in some way with the history of this institution or the special interests of people in this group. A high-school class-reunion speaker, for example, can tell a humorous, self-deprecating anecdote from school days that identifies him or her with everyone in this room. Warning: Speakers who talk about themselves in a manner that sounds even mildly boastful lower their credibility several notches. Many listeners start thinking that they should not believe everything they hear on this podium channel.

12. Reference to your speech title. “Many of you may wonder why the committee invited me to speak on this topic. One plausible explanation is my vast experience. I have failed several times at the endeavor we are here to discuss. This makes me an expert. I know how *not to do it*. That may, in fact, be a good place to begin—talking about how *not* to tackle this challenge.”

13. Reference to the subject. “With September coming in one month, few topics are more important to pastors than getting the church year started in the best possible manner. We can do that in five ways.”

14. A “Let’s talk it over” approach. This works especially well with a hostile audience. The speaker must quickly make emotional contact in ways that sweep people past their rational reservations. Example: “I recognize that many of you feel strongly opposed to some of my views on this subject. I deeply appreciate your willingness to listen for a few minutes to some of my reasons for arriving at my present viewpoint. In the question-and-answer session, I want to hear your concerns. As we share with each another, perhaps we can develop some new ways for dealing with an issue that is extremely important to all of us.”

15. A “universal” statement that fits virtually all audiences. A short-stature pastor who delivered a plethora of national speeches often said in the opening lines as he peered over the pulpit, “I appreciate the Coke box some thoughtful person placed here for me to stand on. It is quite discouraging when people keep shouting for you to stand up when you are already standing up.”

Unlock the Door

Joel Decker says that a good speech moves people through three stages—from curious, to convinced, to committed.³ Effective opening lines get people to the curious stage. An effective speech body moves them to the convinced stage. An effective conclusion clinches their commitment to adopt a new belief and/or take action.

Without an effective beginning, expecting to move the audience to the stages of convinced and committed is like expecting them to enter a building through a locked door.

#5: Fifteen Ways to Finish

As the speech passed the one-hour mark, the crowd lost patience and began leaving. Not deterred, the speaker droned on. Finally, only one person remained in the audience. In appreciation, the speaker leaned over and said, “I would like to say in conclusion, sir, that you are a gentleman.”

“You are wrong, mister,” the man replied. “I’m the next speaker.”

Knowing when to stop is among the most crucial of speaker skills. In addition to mastering self-restraint, effective speakers know *how to stop*. Like flying a plane, takeoffs and landings are dangerous times in speeches. Some authorities therefore say that starting and stopped are the two points at which speakers—even if they do not prepare a manuscript—should carefully write out and memorize the phrases.

Pick Your Landing Field

Airplanes and speeches should not bounce ten feet off the runway when they touch down. To ensure a smooth termination of words in flight, select one of the fifteen classic ways to finish.

1. Visualize the results. Leave audience members with a picture of how much better things will look if they choose your suggested course of action. Example: “Five years from today, all of us will be five years older. If we continue down the present road, we will also be three million dollars deeper in debt. If, on the other hand, we choose a new road, we will be sitting in these kinds of meetings facing tough decisions regarding how to invest our profits.”

2. Summarize your major points. If you use this age-old method, keep it light, bright, and tight. Example: “In summary, I am asking for your help in three ways. First, we need to increase our hourly production rate. Second, we need to shrink our inventory by speeding up our shipping. Third, we need to broaden our sales into new markets. Each of these three actions is critical to our profit margin. If we fail at any one of them, success in the other two won’t matter. Succeeding at all three will spell success for our company and reflect positively on every person in this room.”

3. Ask a question. Look at the example in number two above. You can increase its power by adding these two sentences to the end of it: “What do you think? Shall we?”

4. Appeal for action. “We could continue to drift aimlessly into the future, or we could decide today to build a new future for our church on the foundation of this new plan. God does not call us to drift and die but to dare and do. I have asked you to join me in that conviction. Now, I ask you to move that conviction to the action stage by voting yes on this proposal.”

5. Emotionalize. This fits at the end of an appeal for offerings to feed starving children. If overdone in other kinds of less emotionally grounded addresses, it feels saccharine and silly.

6. Commit yourself personally to what you are advocating. “This morning, my wife and I signed a building-fund commitment card for \$75,000, to be given over the next three years. I’m asking you to strengthen our church’s future by joining us in this effort.”

7. Quote. Direct quotes from respected persons, either from history or the present, can powerfully clinch a speech’s argument. Example: “Sam Walton advised retailers to Sam was not talking about our company, but his wisdom surely applies to our present circumstances.”

8. A twisted quote. “An old saying reminds us that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We could add, of course, that the road to hell is sometimes paved with bad intentions. However we see the various viewpoints that people bring to our present dilemma, the road to a disastrous future is definitely *paved*. We can go down it without a four-wheel-drive vehicle. That makes prudent decisions imperative.”

9. A dramatic story. Make sure, however, that your story or anecdote summarizes your speech’s major thrust. A disconnected illustration takes the mind to a new subject, causing people to forget your central point. All good speeches appeal to the rational, emotional, and volitional (the will). By doing all three, effective closing illustrations nail the point of your message to the door of the audiences’ minds, so that the listeners see your point every time they think of this subject.

10. Poetry. Less effective than fifty years ago, it still works if it (a) summarizes the central point of the speech and (b) is not longer than four to six lines.

11. Humor. “Leave them laughing” is seldom bad advice, except when the situation you are addressing is too grave for levity. Make sure, however, that the humor makes the same point as your speech. Otherwise, your audience decides that you are a clown who they should not take seriously.

12. Refer to a historical or current event. “Four generations ago, twenty families took the risk of building our first building. Their objective was to offer Christ to more people in this community. Our new building will cost far more than the \$2,000 those church leaders viewed as an astronomical risk. But the 400 families in our church today want to risk borrowing \$1.5 million dollars for exactly the same reason—so we can offer Christ to more people in this and coming generations.”

13. Refer to yourself. “When we arrived here twenty years ago, we wanted to join a church with a strong youth program. This is still my conviction. Churches without youth attract very few young families. A church without youth is therefore a church whose future is mostly in the past.”

14. Compliment your audience. Fake this kind of conclusion and the audience sees you as transparently manipulative. Be genuine and you become effective. Example: “I was told before I arrived here that the people in this church believe in planning for the future. From what I have heard in our discussions during the last few weeks, I know that forecast was accurate. Thanks for your willingness to consider a courageous vision.”

15. Go out the same door you came in. Circling back to connect with your opening remarks creates a sense of unity and completion difficult to equal. Example from a workshop leader: “An eleven-year-old boy wrote this note following his pastor’s appeal for letters from children in the congregation: ‘Dear Pastor, I liked your sermon Sunday. Especially when it was finished. Ralph.’ Since the subject of this workshop is effective speeches, I hope to avoid that kind of appreciation. So let’s conclude with a brief question-and-answer session. Who has the first question?”

Make the Last Line One of Your Best Lines

Clinton Lacy of West Richland, Washington, achieved the world record for sermon length in 1955. He preached forty-eight hours and eighteen minutes, using texts from every book of the Bible. Eight people stayed for the end.

Not knowing how to stop is not as destructive as not knowing when to stop. But pilots who end their flights by shutting off the engines instead of making a smooth connection with the ground tend to carry fewer passengers on their next trip.

#6: Preparing for a Live Delivery

Someone asked Spencer Tracy what advice he had for young actors. Everyone expected something deep and profound. Tracy replied, “Learn your lines.”

Speeches on paper are like planes parked at the airport: they do not become *air*-planes until they leave the ground. A well-delivered speech becomes essentially different from words standing on paper. The phrases ascend into the kind of spontaneous heart-to-heart communication that happens in conversations between friends.

How does an effective speaker prepare for that magic moment? Faith is one essential: he or she must believe that the carefully prepared words will lift off the paper runway. But preparation helps too. Speakers whose manuscripts fail to leave the ground often wish they had not neglected their preflight checklist.

The Aerodynamics of Word Lift

Preparing a speech is like building an airplane. Flying it requires a different set of skills. Five invisible ingredients play a crucial role in the live delivery of speeches. Remove any one of them and the speech may not fly.

1. Believe in the power of words. Eric Hoffer said, “We know that words cannot move mountains, but they can move the multitude; and men are more ready to fight and die for a word than for anything else.”⁴ Someone asked Clement Attlee how Winston Churchill won World War II. Attlee said, “He talked about it.”⁵ The old cliché “actions speak louder than words” is only partially true. Actions rarely happen *prior to words*. Church historian Martin Marty says he hung on the wall above his desk Elie Wiesel’s assertion that “Words can sometimes, in moments of grace attain the quality of deeds.”

2. Believe in this message for this audience. How can actors effectively deliver their lines in the fiftieth performance of a Broadway play? The secret is an emotionally charged determination to connect with the people *in this particular audience*. Effective actors go far beyond delivering memorized lines: they feel the importance of communicating this particular message to this particular audience. Effective speakers do the same. They are less conscious of delivering *this message* than of talking to *these people*. The audience is the target, not the words on the paper.

In the moments before delivery, a great speaker says he repeats these sentences over and over in his mind: “I know this subject. These people need to hear what I have come to tell them. I must tell them in the most forceful possible manner.” He says that this “emotional implant” helps the address to become a live birth, even though he has given the same speech several times in other parts of the country.

3. Be yourself. Studying role models such as Winston Churchill strengthens a novice speaker’s ability. However, the best speakers convey—not just a well-turned phrase or a zingy outline—but what they in their deepest beings are and feel. Effective delivery involves a language of the whole body, not just the mouth. If your thoughts and feelings emerge from (a) a complete understanding of your subject, (b) a real conviction about this subject, and (c) a keen desire to give this message to this audience, then your delivery looks and sounds spontaneous, because it reflects your personal sincerity. If you *pretend* enthusiasm or try to copy someone else’s style, your delivery appears artificial.

Roger Ailes, one of America’s premier speech teachers, says in a book title that *You Are the Message*. Absorbing the content of that volume, subtitled *Secrets of Master Communicators*, helps a speaker apply advice such as the following: “The principle here is not to change yourself because the environment changes, but rather to become totally comfortable with yourself

wherever you are. Once you realize that *you* are the message, you can transmit that message to anyone any time and be pretty successful at it.”⁶

4. Monitor your emotional package. Daniel Durken said, “Preachers are called to bring tidings that are not sad, mad, or bad, but glad.”⁷ Underlying emotions can dramatically destruct delivery. Describing a speaker at a national event, someone from the audience later said, “I never could figure out why he was mad at me.” His delivery package—anger—blocked the speaker’s central message. In similar ways, other kinds of emotion can influence delivery. Sadness (a depressed facial expression and/or body language), for example, can deflect the best of communication arrows from their target.

Effective speakers prepare their frame of mind as carefully as their messages. They know that just as a spouse does not long hide his or her basic mood from a mate, a speaker’s emotional package becomes transparent to the audience. Mood is a principal part of the preparation. Plan to bring a far higher level of positive emotional energy to your subject than the audience possesses. You will find the listeners far more receptive to ideas in that kind of wrapping paper.

5. Prepare to speak from the heart instead of from the manuscript. A speaker who was reading his manuscript to an audience lost his place and reread the same page without realizing it. The audience noticed. If you take a manuscript to the podium, the following preparation formula has proven itself with thousands of people. Follow it to the letter and you can count on a live delivery. Even inexperienced speakers will hear their friends say afterward, “I had no idea you could do that!”

- Begin three days in advance.
- Get by yourself and read the manuscript *aloud*. Do not try to put expression into it. Just read for an understanding of the content.
- A day later get by yourself and read the manuscript *aloud*. Underline a few of the nouns and verbs that sound like strong emphasis points. This tends to fix them in your mind, especially the ones on which you seem to stumble when reading.
- The next day, get by yourself and read the manuscript *aloud* for a third time. This trip through, work hard at *visualizing* every picture-word or sentence on your “brain screen.” Do not concentrate on individual words. Try to *see* what is happening with the movie projector of your mind’s eye. This is how your mind works when you converse with a friend. When you use the technique in a speech you sound conversational.
- In the practice readings, raise your voice slightly higher than you would in normal conversation. This helps release nervous tension so you sound more natural. Read slightly faster than normal. You sound slower to others than you sound to yourself. Speaking too slowly and deliberately distracts listeners. In the practice reading, keep your eyes several words ahead of where your voice is working; otherwise, you find yourself stumbling on hard-to-pronounce words that you failed to see coming.
- Warning! Do not read your manuscript more than three times or you will over-prepare. This causes you to work too hard at emphasizing specific words and reduces your ability to sound conversational.
- Go early to the place where you will speak. Relax. Especially concentrate on relaxing your hands and fingers and facial features. While you are being introduced, take two deep breaths and smile. On the inside, this feeds the brain needed oxygen. On the outside, it makes you look relaxed even though you may not feel totally relaxed. Make a strong effort to *smile* before and during your delivery. Do not concentrate too much on reading the words with feeling. This produces a “pulpit inflection” that sounds preachy. Instead, just as you did in the practice sessions, try to visualize every picture-

and action-sentence in your mind as you say it. This brings you close to a conversational style and makes you sound like the professional you are becoming.

How to Speak without Notes

Anyone can learn how to speak without notes by using Clyde Fant's "Oral Manuscript Preparation" procedure. His formula originated as a sermon preparation process but applies equally well to any kind of address. A denominational executive says, "It's like magic. I can now speak to any kind of group on any subject for twenty or thirty minutes without a shred of notes."

Fant summarizes his "Oral Manuscript Preparation Process" with ten suggestions:⁸

1. Do personal study by reading the text you have selected, using several translations. Pray that God will give you the meaning of this text for these people at this time.
2. Read five or six commentaries on this text. Make notes on the issues that grab you regarding what this text is saying.
3. List all of the truths from this passage that occur to you. List truths, not facts; a fact is what the Bible tells us happened; a truth is what difference that fact makes.
4. Attempt to find one *big idea* that should form the central theme of this sermon. If you follow the three steps outlined above, the central sermon idea will probably find you rather than you having to look for it. Out of all the truths you have listed, what is the truth that cries out to be declared? That becomes the central idea for the sermon.
5. Organize the points (the truths you found in your study). Herd into a group the truths that are related to the *big idea* and into another group the truths that seem unrelated to the *big idea*. Find the courage to *delete* the unrelated truths; usually, you see at least one of these, sometimes several. Put a number beside each of the related truths; give the same number to each of the truths that seem to speak to the same subject-subsection of your big idea. (Thus, fourteen statements may end up as a list of four clusters of truths.) The *big idea* becomes the central point, with the unrelated truths forming a circle around it.
6. Add illustrative material to the points.
7. Find a place where you can be alone and undisturbed. Preach out each of the three or four points. Simply take your list of points and start talking aloud, based on your study and reflection. This oral production substitutes for writing out a manuscript. (Manuscript writing was not the predominant method of preparing sermons until the nineteenth century in England.) Since you will deliver the sermon in an oral medium, why not prepare it orally?
8. Write notes on the good ideas that come to you as you preach the points aloud. Under each point, list six-to-twelve *directional sentences* that elaborate the point. Some of your *directional sentences* talk about the Bible (narrate the text). Other *directional sentences* are life-application gems. Illustrations help to connect both the Bible narratives and the life applications with the hearers' minds.
9. Add the introduction and conclusion. Do not prepare the introduction before you prepare the body of the sermon. How can you know how to introduce something that does not yet exist?
10. At least one day later, find a secluded spot and preach your sermon aloud again in finished form. (This means preaching it aloud twice before you preach it on Sunday.) Leave a space of one day between the two times you "practice preach" it. As you preach it the second time, reorganize any out-of-place points.

Someone said, "If you want to be an effective preacher, get out of the pulpit, into the message, and connect with the people." For pastors who prefer to stand away from the pulpit, Fant's formula lets that happen with a minimum of emotional strain and preparation time. His approach

gets the same result when applied to any kind of public address. It lets the speaker come across live instead of sounding like a paper tape recording.

Faith and Preparation Equal Lift-Off

For my first trial sermon, I used the David and Goliath text. As I went to the pulpit, no one could have felt more like David; I was much, much younger than 95 percent of my listeners. Across the next forty years, I never recovered from the feeling of being too small for this job of going into the pulpit to speak for God. Few preachers ever do, and that is in some respects an asset. It reminds them that effective sermons do not come from their preparation alone. Preachers must be carried by the Holy Spirit as they speak God's message (2 Peter 1:21).

The same principle is in some ways true of all effective public speaking. Good speakers depend on God, not just their own skill. But if they purposefully prepare for a live delivery, the plane becomes an *air*-plane at the end of the runway. The words far more often fly off the page into minds, hearts, and lives.

¹ *Marketing Power*, Summer 1994, supplement to *American Demographics Magazine*.

² Ken Davis, *Secrets of Dynamic Communication* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), pp. 18-54,

³ *Decker Communications Report*, May 1986, p. 1.

⁴ Eric Hoffer, *The Ordeal of Change* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

⁵ Anthony Sampson, *The New Anatomy of Britain* (New York: Stein and Day).

⁶ Roger Ailes, *You Are the Message* (Homewood, Illinois: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1988), p. 28.

⁷ Daniel Durken, OSB, *Preaching Today*, July 8, 1972.

⁸ Clyde Fant, address during an Indiana clergy conference in the early 1980s.