

Speeches at formal occasions

(Weddings, commitment ceremonies, christenings)

This is often the first public speech a person has to make, so they get a bit paranoid.

Don't forget that you have been honoured to be asked, even if you don't think so at the time.

Golden Rule: Everybody is on your side!! So if you make a bit of a mistake, they'll forgive you... provided you don't insult or really embarrass anyone.

It should be a happy occasion, and the 'bride and groom' want to remember it as a special occasion. They don't want to be worried about what the speaker is going to say next.

Rule 1. Know your audience.

You must know what is likely to interest the majority, and also what may offend them. This is particularly important at family affairs where there will be people of all ages ranging from 5 years old to 85 years old, and these days, often from different cultures. Consult the guest list and ask the bride and groom questions about their relatives. Jokes are acceptable, BUT keep them clean.

The 'best man' (or female equivalent) is expected to trot out amusing anecdotes about the groom (or bride), but be sure that they are light-hearted and interesting to everybody, not just to his/ her mates. Remember that there will be two groups of people who may not know the others very well.

Rule 2. Be Prepared.

Write your speech. Do some research on the happy couple. If feasible, check the basic facts with the bride/ groom for accuracy and acceptability. This will reassure them.

Begin with something, eg. an anecdote or a telling quotation, to grab the audience's attention, then a few major points in order, then end with a message, one that the happy couple and most of the audience will remember

Read it over and over again until you are familiar with it, but do not learn it word for word... if you do, you'll probably forget important parts in the tension of the moment.

However, do write down headings only in note form to keep you on track.

Rule 3. Be heard.

Speak loudly, slowly and clearly, so that even the 85 year old grannie can understand you. Vary your voice to keep it interesting.

Rule 4. Engage with the audience

Smile at them, it's infectious. Look at them, talk to one person at a time, then another, then another...they are all friends.

Keep smiling. Keep looking at people around the audience, not the ceiling, or even your notes. Don't play with the cutlery... look at everybody.

Rule 5. Keep sober till it's over.

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Rule 6. Enjoy.

Your audience is there to enjoy themselves, so you can too.