

The Icebreaker

Objectives

- To begin speaking before an audience
- To help you understand what areas require particular emphasis in your speaking development
- To introduce yourself to your fellow club members

TIME: Four to six minutes

By now you've heard speeches by Club members and have probably participated in table topics. Here is your opportunity to give your first prepared talk and "break the ice."

The best way to begin your speaking experience is to talk about the subject closest to you -- yourself. You will introduce yourself to your fellow Club members and give them some information about your background, interests, and ambitions. As you prepare and deliver your talk, you will become aware of speaking skills you already have and areas that require some work. Your fellow members will help you understand these needs, as they see them.

As you read this project, make notes in the margin. Underline the key phrases to help you quickly review what is expected of you. Read the entire project before preparing your talk.

Narrow the Subject

The general subject of this talk is you, but that subject is too broad for a short four to six minute talk. You must narrow the subject by selecting three of four interesting aspects of your life that will give your fellow members insight and understanding of you as an individual. These might include your birthplace, education, or family. You could explain how you came to be in your present occupation and tell the audience something about your ambitions. Should you prefer to avoid autobiography, you might talk about your business, your hobbies, or anything relating to you as an individual.

Once you have the highlights of your talk in mind, weave them into a story, just as if you were telling it to a friend around the dinner table. Share significant personal experiences. The more personal you make your talk; the warmer will be the relationship between you and your audience.

Opening, Body, Conclusion

Like any good story, your talk needs a clear beginning and an ending. Create an interesting opening sentence that captures the audience's attention. Memorize it, if necessary and use it even if a better idea occurs to you just before you speak. Then devise a good closing and memorize it, too.

Giving your audience too much information will only overwhelm them. A memorized beginning and ending enable you to start and finish your talk with confidence and ease. In any speech, it's best to select a few main points (three or four at the most) and emphasize them by using examples, stories, and anecdotes. If you merely state a fact and continue, most of your audience will miss the point. You should make a point, say it again, in different words, illustrate the point, and then state it once more in order to be clearly understood. This is a good skill to learn.

If you think you will need notes, write a brief speech outline on 3x5 cards, which you can place on the lectern. Refer to them only when you need them. Remember, you're speaking, not reading. Many speakers begin by writing out an entire speech, then breaking it down into parts, with a key word for each part and finally writing just the key words on one note card.

Preparing Yourself

Now the talk is ready, but are you ready to present it? You will need to rehearse. Practice the talk until you are comfortable with it. You won't need to memorize the body of the talk, since you already know all about the subject. As mentioned earlier, you should memorize your opening and close.

Present the talk to a family member, a friend, or your Toastmasters mentor. Ask for comments. They may give you some helpful suggestions. If you have a tape recorder, record the talk and listen to it carefully, making any necessary improvements. Using a tape recorder is one of the best ways to improve your speaking ability.

Rather than thinking of this presentation as "making a speech", think of it as a talk before a group of friends, sharing information of interest. Don't be afraid of the audience. They have already experienced the same feelings you are having. They want you to succeed and they're eager to help you.

Appearance is important. Be well groomed and appropriately dressed for your presentation. When you look right, you feel good about yourself. You will then forget

about your appearance and concentrate on presenting your talk. You will have increased confidence because you know you have made a good first impression on you audience.

Presenting Your Talk

Once you've completed your speech preparation...relax. Nervousness is common to every speaker, no matter how experienced. In fact, you can put this nervous energy to work for you by using it to add excitement to your delivery. No one is going to notice a little quavering in your voice, and it will soon disappear anyway as you become involved with what you are saying.

While being introduced, take a deep breath and slowly exhale. This will help your voice sound resonant and natural. Begin by facing the Toastmaster and saying, "Mr. (or Madam) Toastmaster"; then face the audience and say "Ladies and Gentleman..." or "Fellow Toastmasters and welcome guests..." Pause, then plunge in with your prepared opening sentences.

While speaking, make "eye contact" with various members of the audience, first looking directly at one person for a few seconds, then looking at another, so no one feels left out of your talk. As you're doing this, glance periodically at the timer. If the red light comes on while you're talking, move smoothly to your conclusion and finish quickly. Observe time limits whenever you speak.

Don't worry about what to do with your hands. Leave them at your sides if you wish. You'll have opportunities to practice "body language" later.

One final comment: Don't end by saying "Thank you." The audience should thank you for the information you've shared. Instead, just close with your prepared ending, nod at the Toastmaster of the meeting, and say, "Mr. (or Madam) Toastmaster" -- then enjoy the applause!

Your Evaluation

After you finish, you will probably begin evaluating yourself even before you sit down. You may think you left out some of the best parts. Everybody thinks that. Just congratulate yourself on having delivered your first speech, then write down the things you did well and the things you want to improve. Try to avoid making the same mistakes in your next speech.

To supplement your own evaluation, an experienced Club member has been assigned to evaluate your efforts. Before the meeting begins, give this manual to your evaluator so he or she may make notes on the evaluation page fore this project. This will give you a permanent record of your progress. If you want the evaluator to observe something in particular, be sure to inform the evaluator in advance.

Ask other members for additional comments after the meeting. All of these comments may not be useful to you, but you should consider them carefully. Remember the evaluations are representations of how the audience perceived you and your talk. They are usually -- but not always -- helpful to your self-development.

Icebreaker — Evaluation Guide:

Note to the Evaluator: The purpose of this speech was for a new member to "break the ice" -- to introduce himself/herself to the Club and begin speaking before an audience. The speech should have a clear beginning, body, and ending. The speaker has been advised to use notes if necessary and to forget body language. Point the speaker towards methods of improvement, but don't pour it own. Strive to have the speaker look forward to his/her next speech. Above all, be encouraging. Your evaluation should help the speaker feel glad about joining Toastmasters and presenting this speech. In addition to your oral evaluation, please write answers to the questions below:

- What strong points does the speaker already have?
- How well did the audience get to know the speaker?
- Did the speech reflect adequate preparation?
- Did the speaker talk clearly and audibly?
- Did the speech have a definite opening, body, and conclusion?
- Please comment on the speaker's use of notes.
- What one or two specific suggestions can you give to help the speaker improve? (Focus on showing the speaker how he/she can make the greatest amount of improvement in his/her next speech.)
- What did the speaker do especially well?