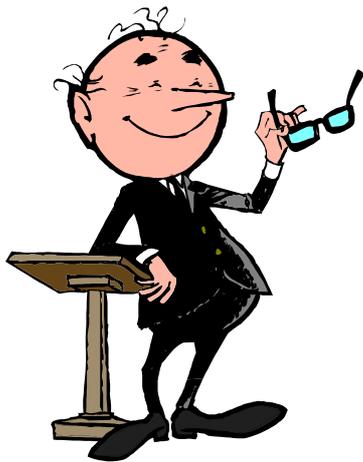


# Humour in Public Speaking

**A**ll speeches have a purpose. One such purpose is to entertain your audience. Entertainment can come in many forms. To be entertaining a speech does not have to be amusing, but an entertaining speech will usually incorporate some use of humour.



Many brilliant speakers still have difficulty in handling the humorous speech. To be amusing throughout an entire five or ten-minute prepared speech is almost impossible. Unless you are exceptionally gifted in this area you should not attempt to deliver a speech that relies entirely on humour. Whilst it is true that being funny or using humour well comes naturally to some speakers, it doesn't to everyone. Even if you are not a born comedian, you can still learn to use humour effectively, and it can be a powerful weapon in a speaker's armoury.

**Think about the points listed below when wishing to incorporate humour into your speech.**

- You don't have to reinvent the wheel. There are many books on humour containing jokes and amusing stories for every occasion. Build up your library.
- Observe how the professionals handle humour. Television shows such as "Yes, Minister", "Absolutely Fabulous", "The Vicar of Dibley", "Full Frontal" and "Hale and Pace" can be helpful. Apart from being a source of material that can be adapted for your own speeches, many of the actors make excellent role models. Their delivery and timing is impeccable - two of the most important aspects of using humour effectively.
- Remember, even the most serious speech can benefit from the occasional use of humour, but it is important not to overdo it.
- The humour you inject into your speech must be relevant to the subject matter.
- As in all other aspects of public speaking, it is important when introducing humour to know your audience. Care should be taken not to offend members of your audience or to target individuals without their prior knowledge and consent. Blue jokes are out.
- Rehearsal is a vital element of humour. Humorous passages need to appear spontaneous. If you have to refer to your notes for the punch line, your delivery is likely to suffer and your audience may miss the point altogether.
- Involving your audience by engaging in repartee can be extremely amusing but should only be attempted by the experienced speaker.
- Poking fun at the Establishment is a form of humour often used. e.g. Gilbert and Sullivan and "Yes Minister". It needs to be done skilfully and be current. It also needs to be aimed at an area with which your audience is familiar.

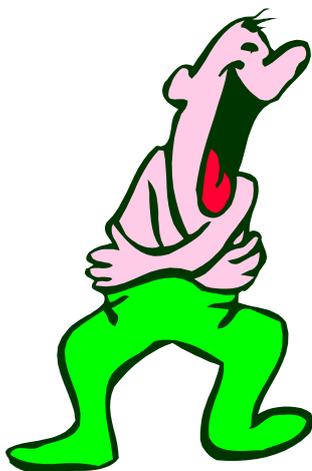
- Leading your audience "up the garden path" can be very effective. Often laughter is generated by the sudden introduction of the unexpected. It may be a series of very logical arguments followed by a totally unexpected and illogical conclusion.
- Beware of becoming type-cast. Humour should be only one of the abilities you strive to develop as a public speaker. If you only give humorous speeches your audience may have trouble relating to you when you tackle a serious subject.

**There are many pitfalls in trying to be humorous.**

- Recycled jokes and stories - tried and proven isn't necessarily good. Stories that have been heard many times before become monotonous and boring. They are more likely to elicit a groan than a laugh from your audience.
- Shaggy dog stories can fall extremely flat. Wasting the audience's time to deliver a weak pun at the end of your speech is rarely appreciated.
- Laughing throughout your story and especially just prior to delivering the punch line can put your audience off-side.
- Not giving your audience time to savour your punch line is unforgivable. If you are delivering a series of humorous anecdotes, your audience will miss the second and subsequent stories if you don't give them time to settle down after the first.
- Slipping out of character when delivering a story requiring accents or characterisation is a failing of many humorous speakers.
- Delivering your story too quickly, or not loudly enough, will destroy your opportunities to entertain.

Many efforts have been made to analyse what makes people laugh. If anyone comes up with the definitive answer they will make a fortune. There is no doubt that laughter is the best medicine. People who are able to use humour well are held in high regard.

**Humour can make a speech unforgettable. Often your audience may only remember your use of humour or funny stories rather than the content of your speech. However, better they remember that, than nothing you have said. The challenge is to use humour in such a way that, if your audience remembers your humour, they will also remember your message.**



**It's not necessary to leave your audience rolling in the aisles. Leave that to the stand up comics. Do however, use humour to enhance your speeches and presentations.**