

B COM (PROG) SEM IV
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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TOPIC: Speech Writing

Speaking skills are one of the essential skills we acquire through our lifetime, along with reading and writing. Speech writing involves a working knowledge of skills required for writing, speaking as well as listening. A speech is a form of public speaking. A speech could be given in a social, political or a cultural platform. It could be formal as well as informal. However, even when it is an informal speech, because of its very nature, it retains a certain formality. Giving a speech is an art, and like with any art, requires practice.

Now watch this video. This is one of the finest speeches given by Barack Obama, former President of the United States of America.

<https://youtu.be/Fe751kMBwms>

Now, what are some of the things you notice? Maybe some of them are as follows:

1. Content
2. Delivery style
3. Body Language
4. Tone
5. Voice modulation

So how does one go about writing, and then delivering a good speech?

It requires planning. You have to decide on the topic first. At times the topic might be pre-decided and you may be told to give a speech on a certain topic. But if the choice is left with you, how does one decide? The decision should be made based on a few things - the occasion for the speech, the audience for the speech, the location of where the speech will be delivered from.

Some common occasions when one is asked to give a speech are as a welcome address, a farewell speech, a speech to commemorate a special occasion such as a wedding, a speech for a political purpose, such as to garner votes, a speech by an activist to make one aware about certain injustices prevalent in society, and so on.

An audience for a speech is largely determined by the occasion. Sometimes it is a diverse one, and at times it could be a uniform, homogeneous one. The diversity could be in terms of age, gender, class, rural/urban, literacy and so on.

The location of where your speech is to be delivered is also important to know because, for example, if one wants to use a power-point presentation, while delivering a speech, a certain kind of infrastructure needs to be available.

Once you have the basic details, it is time to write the speech. But there is a small but critical step that one should always follow before one sits down to write. One needs to research the topic of the speech. The topic for research is guided by the occasion itself in most cases. For example, if the occasion is that of the centenary celebrations of a celebrated writer, or freedom fighter, one should read up enough about the person. If the occasion is a relatively informal one, for example the 60th birthday celebration of a beloved uncle, one should find out more about the person, maybe engage with those who knew him in his younger days, or somebody who was a colleague.

While writing, remember that a speech is meant to be spoken. This is very important. A speech should never sound like you are reading out from a manuscript. In order to achieve that, a speech

should be written in a conversational style - like you are speaking to another person, or people. It could be anecdotal, even personal to some extent. It is a great idea to make it personal with the audience too, maybe ask a question, even if it is a rhetorical one. It implicates the audience. Using humour is always a good idea to enliven one's speech. But one has to be careful. There is a thin line between something being funny and something being offensive. Humour should never be too personal, gender, religion, region or caste based. Keep the language simple, something that everybody can understand. Keep your sentences short. Remember, it's a speech, people are listening to you and a long, convoluted sentence may impede understanding.

Tone, voice modulation is extremely important. In a speech, a lot can be conveyed through your tone, a range of expression can be added to your written words through the tone in which you speak. Voice modulation is something to keep in mind as it keeps the interest alive in the audience. If one speaks in a monotone, it may put your audience to sleep! The speed at which you deliver your speech should be moderate, neither too fast, nor too slow. Pronunciation needs to be clear. It is always a good idea to read aloud your speech a couple of times prior to its actual delivery to perfect the areas mentioned above. It is also a good idea to practice your speech in front of a mirror. This is because body language plays an important role in the success of your speech. It is essential to maintain eye-contact, you should absolutely not fidget, you can move your hands a bit, to show one is animated means to show you are excited and involved, but if it gets out of hand, then it will become a source of distraction for the audience. Your speech can be read out from a prepared manuscript, but do read it a couple of times prior to the occasion so that the delivery is not stilted, or you don't get stuck. You can memorise the speech too but sometimes, memory can fail, one can get nervous, so keep your manuscript handy, just in case. The best speeches are of course the ones you give impromptu, because then you speak from the heart. But one does not become a Barack Obama or a Shashi Tharoor overnight. Practise, and then, practise some more.

