

Taking the speech day opportunity

If your school has an annual speech day or prize giving, it is a big opportunity for you, as the head teacher, to communicate with parents, teachers and children. At this event you have around 10-15 minutes to share something poignant, something that will stay in the minds of your audience and inspire them to talk positively about your school and its leadership.

So what should you say and how best can you say it to communicate meaningfully, delivering results for your school?

Here are some steps to help you to make the most of this precious opportunity.

1. Listen

- **The best speakers know their audiences inside out.**
They research them, they put themselves in their shoes and they think about what information they already know. Who are your audience and what do they currently think, feel and do about your school?
- **Listen to what parents are saying.**
What do they love about the school? Have they talked about changes or new approaches that have made a difference to their children?
- **Reflect on what is being said in the media.**
Listen into social and traditional media channels about your school and about education. Are there any good news stories you'd like to talk about? Do you want to correct any misinformation or 'piggy back' on recent news stories?
- **Have you heard funny stories?**
We all hear those entertaining stories from children and teachers. Could you use them to bring out the human side of the points you'd like to make?

Write all of these down.



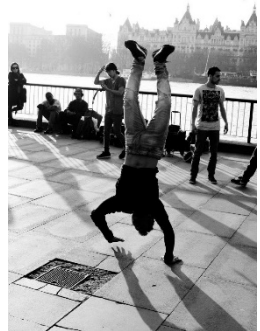
2. Identify

- **Be clear on your vision**
What do you want people to think, feel and do about your school after you've spoken.
- **What is the one thing you want people to take away and tell others?**
Think about something that will inspire others to want to send their children to your school.
- **How can you bring your vision to life?**
Can you share stories that will have meaning for everyone (young and older), referring to what you heard in step 1?

- **Keep your language simple and engaging.**
You have a range of audiences so don't dumb things down but do talk in words that people get immediately and avoid academic 'speak'.
- **Can you make it into a conversation?**
Find ways to ask people to contribute or put up their hands to engage them in large scale conversation. You can then use this feedback to support what you say next.
- **Start with something that will make people sit up and think.**
An unusual fact or a surprising statement work well.

3. Share

- **Share some of your thoughts around what you will say with your colleagues.**
See how they react and if what you are saying is resonating. Does it have meaning for them and would it have meaning for the rest of your audience?
- **Build the content and then start thinking about how you would say it.**
We know that only 7% of communication is the words so your tone, body language and volume are critical.
- **Think about your body language and breathing.**
Stand so you allow yourself to breathe and project your voice. Make eye contact with people rather than just scan and use your hands to express yourself even better.
- **Another important factor is your rate of ideas.**
None of us can take on information when someone is talking at us non-stop. We all appreciate hearing an idea and then having a slight pause so we can absorb it before moving onto the next point. This is the rate of ideas so pause slightly after you make a point and think about how your audience are receiving the information.
- **Rehearse, rehearse and rehearse again**
Keep practicing and eventually share your entire speech in front of a couple of people who you trust to share honest feedback and ideas.



4. Action

- **Now you are ready for the big day.**
Avoid milk products and bananas (mucus forming), ensure you have lots of sleep the night before and be ready to give a great performance.
- **Remember you don't have nerves.**
You have adrenalin pumping through your body ready to keep you sharp and ensure you do a great job. You need that adrenalin so welcome it and move forward.

- **Take a moment.**

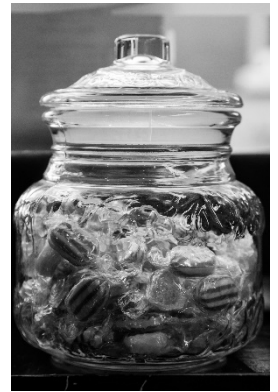
Take some deep breaths, breathe out before you begin (the out breath looks after itself) and take your time.

- **Read your audience.**

Be ready to flex what you say slightly to meet their needs while still achieving your outcome.

- **How did it go?**

Finally, after you have spoken, find out what people took away. You can do that yourself by asking people subtly or you can ask some trusted colleagues to ask around and tell you what people are saying.



Good luck and we hope you have a very successful speech day!

For more communication ideas and resources visit our Headteachers' site:

<http://commsessentials4teachers.com/>