

Ceremonial Speaking

Unless public speaking is a central part of our professional role (such a teacher, litigator, political figure, etc.), a ceremonial speech may be one of the most common types of speaking we might be called upon to do. This guide is designed to help you in preparing a speech of introduction (e.g., of a speaker), a speech to present or accept an award, a speech to honor or appreciate a person, organization, or event (e.g., a eulogy, dedication, or tribute).

In ancient Greece, Aristotle categorized speeches as falling into three main types: **forensic rhetoric** (for the law courts, focused on justice or injustice), **deliberative rhetoric** (for the legislature, focused on persuading in favor or against a particular course of action), or **epideictic rhetoric** (for ceremonies, focused on praise or blame). In contemporary society, we may too often think that “a few ceremonial remarks” need not have much substance, but ceremonial rhetoric can be both very important and quite powerful. The values communicated in ceremonial speeches can set the foundations for grounding future attitudes, behaviors, and courses of action.

For example, think about how a speech of tribute for a new student leader can highlight what could be a few key leadership qualities that will benefit their term of office. Or, consider how a eulogy recognizes the great sadness and loss of a human passing *and* moves the audience to honor – and even seek to emulate – significant characteristics or contributions of the person’s life. An effective eulogy moves listeners from past and present toward the future.

Suggestions

1. Brevity is a virtue. Unless you are the main speaker for the event, two to four minutes is sufficient. (Don’t give a speaker’s talk in your introduction! That’s their job!)
2. Do your homework to gain a sensitive understanding of the person, subject, and occasion. In the case of a speaker introduction, the speaker, agent, or sponsoring organization may provide a biography.
3. As you consider what qualities or virtues to praise (honestly, we have few ceremonies in which “blame” is the focus), do not extend beyond the facts . . . overblown praise can detract from the occasion’s (and your) credibility.
4. Ceremonial occasions often require a style of language and a delivery that is more formal (perhaps more “elevated”) than the everyday informative or persuasive speech. As a result, speakers may choose to deliver from a prepared text rather than an outline or notes. (Note: a page of standard, double-spaced printed text generally takes two minutes to deliver effectively to an audience.)

Prepared by Kristine Bartanen, Professor of Communication Studies

If you duplicate this document, please credit Center for Speech and Effective Advocacy, University of Puget Sound.