

Ceremonial Speeches

You will hear a great many informative and persuasive speeches in your lifetime, but some of the more memorable presentations you encounter will be of neither type. Instead, you will be more likely to remember creative and colorful commemorative speeches than the informative speech about the state of your company's finances, or the persuasive speech designed to get you to vote for a candidate. These commemorative speeches are the third general category of presentations, and they contain characteristics that make them quite distinct from informative and persuasive remarks.

In this chapter, we will first explain the different types of commemorative speeches, paying particular attention to the contexts in which they occur. We will then detail how these speeches differ from informative and persuasive speeches before concluding the chapter with some helpful suggestions for creating and delivering a good commemorative address. As you will see, these speeches contain room for creativity and can be some of the most enjoyable speeches to write and deliver.

Types of Commemorative Speeches

Many different occasions call for a celebratory speech. These speeches are called commemorative because they commemorate, or celebrate, a person, event, object, or even an idea. In this section, we will identify and discuss five different forms of commemorative address with which you might be familiar. The first, and saddest, is a eulogy, which occurs when someone passes away. The second form of commemorative address is a toast, which is reserved for happier occasions. The next two take place when someone presents, or receives, an award. Finally, we will detail a specific form of commemorative address you will hear in the not-too-distant future: a graduation address.

Eulogies

The first type of commemorative address we will discuss is a **eulogy**. Eulogies are emotional speeches; however, that emotion need not be one of sadness. As we indicated in the definition above, commemorative speeches are celebratory, not depressing, and so eulogies should be a celebration of a person's life, not a moment to focus on his or her death.

If you are called upon to deliver a eulogy, you will most likely have a few days to prepare your remarks. These types of speeches should focus on major events and accomplishments in the life of the deceased. Since these speeches are to be celebratory and happy, you might also consider telling a humorous story about the deceased person. It is imperative, however, that you do not appear to be mocking the person, but rather emphasizing a positive quality he or she exemplified during life. This story helps to establish a common bond between you, the audience, and the dearly departed person.

Although eulogies are intensely personal and emotional speeches, you should take care to talk about the person in such a way that the audience feels involved. You should refrain from telling "inside jokes" that people in the audience would not understand or appreciate. The speech is as much a moment of emotional release for you as it is for them. In fact, eulogies are best understood as communal celebrations of a life, and not personal retrospectives about another individual. They should emphasize the qualities of the person by telling specific stories from his or her life that illustrate those aspects. You are, in essence, creating a way to remember another person.

Toasts

In contrast to eulogies, one of the more entertaining and enjoyable commemorative speech events involves giving a toast. The most common occasion when toasts are used is at a wedding. If you are the maid of honor or best man at a wedding, you will likely give a toast for the bride and groom. Like eulogies, wedding toasts are personal in nature and are celebrations about the union of two people. Of course, toasts occur at other times than just weddings, such as at holidays and dinner parties, but the same general expectations apply. Usually you will know you will be delivering a toast well in advance, so you will have plenty of time to prepare your remarks for the occasion.