

A woman with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a blue suit, is speaking into a microphone on a stage. She is holding a small black object in her left hand. The background is dark blue.

# Everything You Need to Know About Preparing a Speech

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Congratulations! You've been chosen (or drafted) to deliver a speech. Don't panic. Fripp is here!

## What Do I Talk About?

Begin by asking yourself three questions:

1. Who is my audience? (What do I know about the corporate culture or collective personality of the group?)
2. What do they want or need to know from me?
3. How long can or should I talk?

## Where Do I Find Content?

If you're going to address a particular group a few weeks from now, keep a small notebook handy to jot down ideas and situations related to your topic and audience. Make a list of what you know that can benefit them, all the experiences and situations that could serve as good (or bad) examples for others, high points and low points, failures and successes.

Keep adding those sudden and stunning bits of insight that come to you in the shower or car. Or maybe you said something on the subject to a friend that was particularly funny or memorable. Some of these experiences may become the original stories you use to illustrate a key point in your speech. When you actually sit down to write, you'll have plenty of material.

## How Do I Outline My Talk?

There are two basic outlines that work well for both beginning and advanced speakers.

### 1. The Past-Present Journey Formula

Tell your audience a three-part story:

- This is where I was.
- This is where I am.
- This is how I got here.

It's a simple format that helps you tell the audience who you are and why you are qualified to speak on the topic you've chosen.

Here's an example of how effective the outline can be. A successful realtor was asked to deliver a 25-minute presentation for the local Board of Realtors. I coached her to open like this: "Twelve years ago, before I went into the real estate business, I had never sold anything but Girl Scout cookies, and I hadn't done that well. Last year, I sold \$28 million in a slow market, selling homes that averaged \$200,000 each. Today, I'll tell you how I built my business." Right away the audience knew exactly what she was going to talk about, and they were eager to hear her story!

### 2. The Q&A Outline

Members of your audience probably want to know the answers to the same kinds of business questions you're asked at parties or professional functions. You can start with, "The five questions I'm most frequently asked about investments (or whatever your product or service is) are . . ."

Pose the first question to the audience and answer it for them in a conversational manner, just as you would with a potential customer or at a party. Even though you've never made a speech before, you've certainly had a lot of experience answering questions in your field.

## How Do I Write My Speech?

That's easy. To begin with, don't. Gather and organize your ideas, plan and polish, but don't write it down word for word. For now, just jot an outline with key points and ideas on a notepad.

## The Presentation Model

### 1. Open with a Bang.

The first and last thirty seconds of your speech have the most impact, so give them extra thought, time, and effort. If you haven't hooked your audience's interest, their minds are going to wander off. Whatever you do, don't waste precious seconds with, "Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here tonight." Open with an intriguing or startling statement: "Half the people in this room are going to . . ." "As a young man, my father gave me this valuable advice . . ." "Of all the questions I am most frequently asked . . ."

I helped a neighbor, Mike Powell, with a speech he was putting together for the Continental Breakfast Club in San Francisco. Mike was a senior scientist with Genentech at the time. I suggested that since most of us don't know what scientists are like or what they do, he should tell the audience. Mike captured everyone's attention by saying, "Being a scientist is like doing a jigsaw puzzle in a snowstorm at night...you don't have all the pieces, and you don't have the picture you are trying to create."

### 2. Develop Strong Supporting Stories.

If you're using the Past-Present outline format, the middle of your talk is where you expand on your key points and develop personal stories that support where you were and where you are now. In the Q&A format, develop one or two strong anecdotes to support each answer. Personal anecdotes are best, but you can also insert some of the ideas and examples you've been gathering in your journal or computer.

### 3. Close on a High Point.

Ideally, your close will be the high point of your speech. First, summarize the key elements of the investment process (or whatever your topic is). If you're planning to take questions from the

audience, say, "Before my closing remarks, are there any questions?" Answer them.

The last thirty seconds of your speech must send people out energized and fulfilled. Finish your talk with something inspirational that supports your theme. My scientist friend Mike talked of the frustrations of being a scientist. He closed by saying, "People often ask, 'Why should anyone want to be a scientist?'" Then Mike told them about a particularly information-intensive medical conference he had attended. The final speaker rose and said, "I am a 32-year-old wife and mother of two. I have AIDS. Please work fast."

Mike got a standing ovation for his speech. He was telling his audience what they needed to know.



## How Do I Polish My Speech?

Your next step is to make a written draft of your speech. You can assemble your notes, or what I recommend is record your ideas and transcribe the words. The written word is for the eye. The spoken word is for the rhythm. Read your draft to confirm that it has the following qualities:

- Interest: After every point you make, ask yourself, “Who cares?” If no one does, edit it out.
- Conciseness: Delete redundancies and clichés.
- Effectiveness: Are your supporting examples strong and on target? If not, replace them.
- Personal Connection: Does it have a high I-You Factor? Be sure you’ve connected yourself with your audience by putting them into your speech.
- Political Correctness: PC is sometimes regarded as unnecessary or overdone, but it is essential. You lose listeners if you unintentionally offend them.

Vigorous polishing makes your talk tighter, more powerful, and less likely to bore or irritate your audience.

## How Do I Rehearse?

You’ve edited and fine-tuned a written version of your talk. Now you’re going to practice it. (You may think this is too much trouble, but you’ll be glad you did.)

1. Record yourself delivering your talk out loud to check on timing and emphasis.
2. Prepare outline notes. Even though you’ve just gone to a great deal of trouble to prepare a written speech, you’re NOT going to read it! Nothing puts an audience to sleep faster. Instead, you’re going to speak directly and spontaneously to the audience, maintaining essential eye contact. The secret is to prepare

easy-to-read notes. Write your key points on a pad or card that you’ll keep on the lectern or table. Use a bold felt-tip pen or a large typeface on your printer. As you speak, you’ll follow your road map with quick glances. An easy-to-read wristwatch or small clock on the lectern lets you keep track of the time so you can speed up or slow down, cut or add material, in order to finish on time.

3. Record your impromptu talk. Again, check for timing. As you play it back, notice repetitive phrases and non-words like “er” and “ah.” Try again, minus these distracting irritants, until you are speaking smoothly and confidently.
4. Practice in front of a safe and friendly audience. Ask one or two perceptive people for their feedback. Make it clear that you want specific suggestions, not just praise. Did they understand the points you were making? Was there a lack of logic or continuity? Did they think you spoke too quickly or slowly? Use their feedback to polish your presentation.
5. Write your own introduction, and bring a printed copy! Even if you’re speaking gratis, you want the emcee to pronounce your name right, mention your company’s name, and tell people how to get in touch with you.

## The Big Day

If you’re speaking from a stage, explain to the person introducing you that you’ll come on stage from the wings before they leave the lectern after introducing you. They need to get off the stage before the audience stops applauding. This way, the audience looks at you instead of at the emcee.

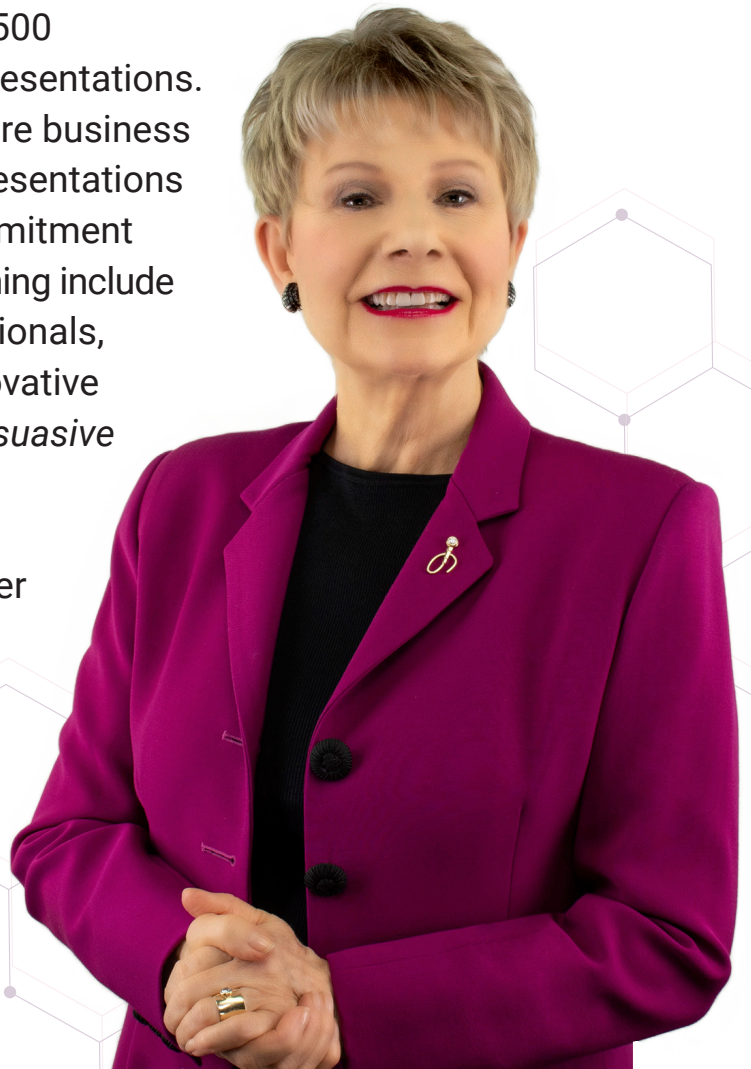
You’ve taken center stage. Now, take it away!



**Patricia Fripp** is a Hall of Fame keynote speaker, executive speech coach, sales presentation skills consultant, and online learning expert.

In Ms. Fripp's career, she has delivered over 3,500 presentations as well as hundreds of virtual presentations. Companies hire Patricia to help them drive more business by perfecting their sales conversations and presentations and by helping leaders inspire action and commitment through their words. Clients of her speech coaching include corporate leaders, technical and sales professionals, and seasoned professional speakers. Her innovative online learning platform *FrippVT Powerful, Persuasive Presentations* has users worldwide.

*Meetings and Conventions* magazine named her "One of the 10 most electrifying speakers in North America." *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* wrote that learning presentation skills from Patricia Fripp is one of the best ways to invest in you. She is the author of two books and co-author of another three. In 2019 she was named "One of the Top 30 Women in Sales" and "One of the Top 30 Global Gurus."



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# Patricia FRIPP

*Memorable Messages • Powerful Presentations • Successful Sales*

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