Steps to the Perfect Wedding Speeches

by Wayne Goodman



The Dreaded Wedding Speech!

For a lot of people, the thought of standing up in front of a room full of people and making a speech is enough to bring them out in a cold sweat. As someone who makes a living standing in front of audiences, I completely understand that feeling. It's amazing how someone who can happily sit around a table telling stories and making everyone laugh can suddenly become a nervous wreck simply because they've been handed a microphone!

The good news is that you don't need to be a professional entertainer to deliver a great speech.

Nobody is expecting you to be a stand-up comedian or a polished public speaker, and the chances are that the people in front of you are willing you to do well. With a little preparation, some practice and a few simple techniques, you can make the whole experience a lot less daunting and, dare I say it, actually quite enjoyable!

Who Normally Gives the Speeches?

Traditionally, the wedding speeches are delivered by:

- The Father of the Bride.
- The Groom.
- The Best Man.

usually in that order. However, tradition is not a rule book, and nowadays it's quite common for the Bride, Maid of Honour or other members of the family to say a few words.

It's your wedding, so don't feel that you have to follow a particular format simply because that's how it's always been done.

The Father of the Bride.
Understandably, this can be an incredibly emotional moment for the Bride's Dad. After all, how do you condense a lifetime of memories into a few minutes without reaching for the tissues?

Traditionally, the Father of the Bride would:

- Welcome everyone and thank them for joining the celebrations.
- Share a few fond memories and stories about his daughter growing up.
- Talk about how proud he is of the person she has become.
- Welcome the Groom into the family.
- Offer a few words of wisdom or advice for married life.
- Finish with a toast to the happy couple.

My advice here is to keep it personal. You don't need to be particularly funny or deliver a perfectly polished speech. Just be Dad!

The Groom.
The Groom's speech is traditionally about thanking people, although I would always suggest trying to make it a little more personal than simply reading out a shopping list of names!

The Groom would normally:

- Thank the Father of the Bride for his kind words and for welcoming him into the family.
- Thank everyone for coming, particularly those who have travelled a considerable distance.
- Acknowledge those who have helped organise, contribute towards or make the wedding possible.
- Thank his parents for their love, guidance and support over the years.
- Thank his Best Man for his friendship, support and, hopefully, behaving himself!
- Thank the Bridesmaids, Flower Girls, Page Boys and Ushers for their involvement in the day.
- Talk about his Bride, what she means to him and why he loves her.
- Traditionally, finish with a toast to the Bridesmaids.

One thing I would say to any Groom is don't get so caught up in thanking everybody else that you forget the most important person in the room.

Take a moment, turn towards your Bride and actually speak to her, rather than simply talking about her to everyone else.

Also a simple opening line like “My Wife and I … would like to thank”
Can get a great reaction, leave a short pause where the 3 dots are to allow time for the shrieks and cheers.

The Best Man.
This is quite often the speech that everyone has been waiting for, and probably the one the Groom has been dreading!

Traditionally, the Best Man's speech is a mixture of humour, fond memories, friendship and a little gentle embarrassment. However, being the Best Man does not mean you have been given a licence to publicly destroy the Groom!

The Best Man would normally:

- Thank the Groom for his kind words and his toast to the Bridesmaids.
- Read out any messages from friends or family who couldn't attend.
- Talk about the Groom's strengths and perhaps a few of his more entertaining weaknesses!
- Share funny stories, childhood memories or anecdotes from their friendship.
- Mention the Bride, how the couple met and the positive impact she has had on the Groom's life.
- Finish with a toast to the Bride and Groom.

Remember, there is a huge difference between making people laugh and making someone uncomfortable. You want the Groom laughing along with everybody else, not sitting there wondering why he chose you as his Best Man!

A great Best Man's speech should be funny, entertaining and, above all, affectionate. Somewhere amongst all the jokes, make sure you tell everyone why this person means enough to you that you're standing there as his Best Man.

The Speeches.
The biggest piece of advice I can give you is to be prepared.

You don't need to be a comedian, a professional speaker or the world's greatest storyteller. You just need to be yourself.

Here are a few tips that I hope will help.

- **Don't leave it until the last minute.** Spend some proper time working on your speech. Sitting in the hotel room an hour before the wedding breakfast desperately trying to think of something funny to say is not preparation!
- **Get yourself a notebook.** Jot down memories, funny stories and the important things you want to say. Don't worry about the order initially, just get everything written down and then start putting your speech together.
- **Full speech or bullet points?** Personally, I think this comes down to what you are comfortable with. If you are using bullet points, make sure you write enough to remind yourself what you actually meant. A note that simply says "Spain 2014" might make perfect sense now, but will it when you're standing there with a microphone in your hand?
- **Know your audience.** What might be hilarious down the pub with your mates might not be quite so funny in front of Grandma! By all means, be funny and a little cheeky, but remember where you are and who is listening.
- **Practise OUT LOUD**. There is a massive difference between reading something in your head and actually saying it. Record yourself on your phone and watch it back. You will be amazed at how much you learn from watching your own delivery.
- **Remember to breathe.** It sounds ridiculous, but when people get nervous, they often forget to leave natural pauses. Have a glass of water handy. Taking a sip gives you a perfectly natural reason to stop, gather your thoughts and carry on.
- **What's the rush?** Nobody is timing you with a stopwatch. When we get nervous, we tend to speak much quicker than normal. Slow down, enjoy what you are saying and give people a chance to listen.

- **Use the microphone!** One of my pet hates is hearing someone say, "I don't need a microphone, I've got a loud voice." The microphone isn't there for your benefit, it's there for the benefit of your audience!
- **Don't go wandering**. It's very easy to go off on a tangent, particularly when you start getting laughs. Before you know it, you're telling a completely different story and wondering how on earth you're going to get back to your speech.
- **Never talk over a laugh.** If you say something funny and everyone laughs, STOP TALKING! Let them enjoy the moment. The same applies to applause. Appreciate their appreciation.
- **Don't be afraid to show your emotions.** This is a wedding, not a business presentation. If you get a little emotional, so what? Take a moment and carry on. Sometimes the most memorable part of a speech is the bit that wasn't rehearsed.

One thing I have learnt from years of performing is that the audience doesn't know your script. If you miss a line, forget a joke or say something slightly differently, chances are nobody will ever know unless you tell them!

Remember, you are standing in front of a room full of family and friends who genuinely want you to do well. Nobody is expecting a West End performance, and nobody is handing out marks at the end.

Don't concentrate so much on delivering the perfect speech that you forget to enjoy giving it. Speak from the heart, be yourself and enjoy your moment.

Presenting Gifts.
Traditionally, the Groom will present gifts to the Bridesmaids, Page Boys, Ushers and Best Man during his speech, with flowers often being presented to the Mums as a thank you for their love and support.

A little practical tip from me:
Make sure all the gifts are nearby, clearly labelled and ready to hand out.

I've seen speeches come to a grinding halt whilst somebody disappears to find a bunch of flowers that nobody can remember putting anywhere!

A Final Thought

Having attended and performed at countless weddings, I've heard all sorts of speeches, from beautifully written and rehearsed presentations to a few simple words spoken straight from the heart.

The ones that stand out aren't necessarily the funniest, the longest or the most professionally delivered. They are the ones that feel genuine.

You don't have to be an entertainer to entertain, a comedian to make people laugh or a professional speaker to move an audience. You just have to mean what you say.