EDDIE RICE



toast

SHORT SPEECHES, BIG IMPACT

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INTRODUCTION

Let me tell you a story about bombing at public speaking.

I was part of a Toastmasters group—a group dedicated to improving the communication and leadership skills of its members worldwide. Each year, they had a series of successive contests for different types of speeches. I entered the Humorous Speech contest and their Table Topics contest (the latter where you would get a random question and answer it between one to two minutes).

The first night and level were with my local club. I don't remember the exact topic of the speech, but I do remember making everyone laugh. I killed that night. Each joke landed; each funny story created laughs. Adrenaline and endorphins rushed through me.

The next competition level was in front of a much larger group of people—many of whom I didn't know. I wore my best suit. I started with the first joke. Silence. Followed by the next joke. Tepid laughter. I told more stories and jokes, or what I thought were jokes. Silence. Polite applause ended the speech.

Then the Table Topics competition came. The emcee asked the question—something straightforward and basic—and I blanked. I was still reeling with emotion from bombing my humorous speech that I was now blanking out for this competition. I strung a few sentences together, but it wasn't enough for anything coherent. I sat down, deflated and defeated.

I tell this story for a few reasons.

First, I didn't let that one failure hold me back from continuing to improve at public speaking and doing it again. I wish I could tell you that I returned to the competition the next year to win it all in movie-like fashion. No, instead, I found more opportunities to speak and to write. I went on to teach others how to be public speakers and write great speeches.

Second, I made it my mission to prevent others from going through the same things I had. I don't want you to fail at your next speech; instead, it is my hope that by the time you finish this book you will be fully prepared to give an excellent toast.

Third, simply failing once at something shouldn't be the story or limiting belief that you allow it to be. You may have a time in your life where you failed at giving a speech or wish you had done better. Don't allow the fear associated with that one event to hold you back. Instead, tell yourself a different story, a story that says it was one moment and there will be many more opportunities to succeed.

Fourth, I didn't prepare enough—I practiced alone without feedback—which caused an uneven speech performance. I didn't get consistent laughs because my material wasn't consistent.

Finally, I thought I could wing it, but the best spontaneous messages come from preparation. Comics make it look easy, but that's because we don't get to see all the material they have discarded or withhold for when the situation arises.

I'm now here to help you avoid what I went through. Whether that's through my book *Toast* or by helping you create the speech of your life.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

The shortest speeches in our lives, for our biggest moments, generate the greatest anxiety. We freeze up when asked, "Can you just say a few words?"

I have helped hundreds of people, like you, write speeches on many occasions. From the quick wedding toast to TEDx speeches to conference keynotes, I have shown speakers how to hone their ideas, brainstorm, then structure and craft speeches that move their audiences. This book will take the same approach I have used to help hundreds of regular people become confident speakers, and it will show you how to apply it each step along the way.

Anyone can write a great toast. This book is going to make sure you know how. I will take you through each step of the same speech writing process I do with my clients, giving you the skills to create a memorable toast without the fear and frustration you would face if you tried to go it alone. By the end, you will have made a great short speech fitting for its occasion.

This book is for anyone who needs to write a brief speech for a ceremonial occasion: wedding toasts, retirement toasts, award acceptance toasts, promotion toasts, and commemorative toasts. You can apply the process I outline in this book to any quick speech you give.

MY PROCESS WITH CLIENTS

If you were my client for a speech, we would start with a brainstorming questionnaire followed by a more in-depth conversation over the phone. From there, I would create a first draft for your review, and we would trade drafts back and forth throughout the editing process. I would then give you tips on how to rehearse and memorize your speech at the end of the process.

Since we can't have a conversation through a book, I've attempted to replicate that process as much as possible through prompts, questions, and exercises.

MY SEVEN-DAY TOAST WRITING PROCESS

By spreading it over seven days, you can take the same process I use with my clients and apply it to your own toast. Over the first five days, you will brainstorm, structure, write, and edit your toast. On days six through seven, you'll rehearse and memorize. You can do these days successively or spread them out if you have the time leading up to your toast.

Brainstorming

My process with clients starts with a brainstorming session fueled by a questionnaire of key prompts that get the ideas flowing. These ideas form the basis of the toast. You want a set of ideas to work from that can be sculpted into a toast. This section of the book will use those same prompts I give my clients to help you generate your great ideas.

Building Structure

Once we have a solid set of ideas, the next step is to structure them. Not every idea makes it into the final draft. By choosing to work from a reliable structure, the speaker can better pick and determine which ideas make it into the speech. This approach to creating a structure early on creates the outline of the toast and serves as an early editing tool.

Drafting

The writing process can seem daunting, but it becomes easier to write the draft after creating an initial set of ideas and giving them a structure and outline. Usually, I take on this part for clients, but many have had success writing their toast after just the first two steps. I will give you the tools to craft exciting openings, powerful closings, and what to do between these.

Editing

Audiences want to hear speeches rather than read them, so it's important to make sure your speech sounds good out loud and not just on paper. The editing process relies on techniques that let you listen to your early draft, such as reading your toast aloud or recording it. This step is crucial because it allows you to hear awkward phrases, jokes that don't land well, and your speech as a whole.

Rehearsing

Sometimes the barrier between a great toast and an average one is the time a speaker puts into their preparation. This part of the process uses your final draft to give you opportunities to memorize it or at least prepare it well enough that your notes are just there as backups. Here, you will learn memorization and relaxation techniques to help you excel on your big day.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

General Advice for All Toasts

The first part of this book will cover general advice for any toast that you will give. This section aims to provide you with a set of tools that you can apply immediately to the speech you are writing.

Help Editing Your Speech, Rehearsing It, and Facing Demanding Situations

This portion of the book will guide you through the writing and editing processes while also providing critical tips on rehearsing and memorizing your speech. I will also cover challenging situations that many of my past clients have run

into, such as what to do when toasting someone you barely know (or maybe do not like).

Your Seven-Day Plan

I will share my seven-day plan to take everything from the book and put it into action. You can take this opportunity to chart out on a calendar each step of the way.

Specific Toast Advice

The end of the book provides specific speech examples with accompanying advice on crafting a particular toast. All the preceding sections will build up to this point; however, if you need immediate advice (for instance, your speech is in less than a week), I suggest you jump ahead and read the section specific to your toast.

Free Download

Go to ricespeechwriting.com/toast to get the following free downloads:

- A swipe file of toasts found on the internet that you can use for reference
- Brainstorming questions in Word format for easy drafting
- Speech outline documents—you just have to fill in the words
- The editing checklist in PDF format for easy printing
- A calendar to lay out your practice schedule

Here's to your continued success at writing a toast—Cheers!

PART I

THE TOAST WRITING PROCESS



CHAPTER 1

CONFRONTING YOUR FEARS

You may have a preconceived idea about the toast you have to give. These thoughts may hold you back from giving a toast that the audience will remember and love. By confronting these limiting beliefs up front, you can assuage your fears and give the toast you are meant to give.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE HOLLYWOOD FUNNY.

Watch any movie with a wedding scene or emotional moment, and you will find actors giving speeches with well-timed jokes and perfectly summed up sentiments of emotion. Often, we believe that this is the standard for any toast we have to give. Here's the secret: you do not have a team of Hollywood script-writers at your disposal—ones whose lines go through endless rewrites and screen tests to hit the right mark. Don't judge yourself by what you see on TV and in the movies. We'll discuss later how to add humor and find it in the stories you tell, but you should not force humor into your toast to conform to this standard.

TRY THIS: Read through the speeches in the book found in Part II—look at how frequently and in which style they inject humor. The stories told in the speeches will dictate the type

of humor you need; at times, you'll find that the occasion does not call for humor at all. Remember, you want to give a toast that feels unique and authentic to you rather than one full of forced humor.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT—JUST AUTHENTIC.

You might think that your speech must be perfect—that every joke should land and that the delivery must match that of a polished stand-up comedian. But, we give the best speeches from the heart. If you are introverted, do not force yourself to be overly outgoing.

Heartfelt toasts matter: give your toast from a place of love and appreciation. The goal is to get your message across in a way that is uniquely yours. You do not have to be the funniest or most sentimental person in the room—just the most authentic. The process outlined here focuses on the stories and ideas inside, which we will structure into an original, heartfelt, memorable toast.

TRY THIS: Make the goals of your toast twofold: honor the person, and honor the event. If you can achieve both goals with your toast, you will have an authentic speech worth remembering. Through the process in this book, we will find the best stories and insights within you.

YOU CAN TALK ABOUT YOURSELF WITHOUT BRAGGING.

This issue crops up when people give toasts about themselves, such as retirement speeches or award acceptance speeches. If you want to avoid feeling like you are bragging, there are ways to humbly give a toast about yourself without it coming off like a long list of accomplishments. I'll show you how to impart lessons and wisdom from your life so that your

accomplishments can help the audience members in their own lives.

> **TRY THIS:** For speeches where you must talk about yourself or your accomplishments, choose stories with great lessons that the audience can take away. You will sound as though you are imparting wisdom rather than bragging. Your audience will thank you for the lessons learned.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE IN YOUR FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING. Many people have a fear of public speaking. This fear can come from various places, such as inadequate preparation, lack of confidence in your speech, insufficient rehearsal time, or events from your past. The process outlined here has removed that fear for many people. By the time you have finished this book, your confidence in your abilities will transcend what you thought was possible. You will have a complete toast and the tools to rehearse it well. That combination will put you above the average person who allows fear to keep them from creating their toast.

> **TRY THIS:** Preparation—both in terms of a great written text and practice—will take much of the anxiety out of public speaking. I also recommend joining a group called Toastmasters International. It's a community of people working to improve their public speaking skills, often meeting once per week. You can find your local chapter by visiting toastmasters.org/find-a-club. The benefit of getting practice in front of people before the day of your toast is that you will start to erase your limiting self-belief of the fear of public speaking. You might have failed once in the past and allowed it to hold you back afterward—give yourself a greater chance to succeed

by finding opportunities to speak in front of more groups of people ahead of your big day.

► DO NOW

◊ Take a moment to write down thoughts about your fears in a document or journal. Write out what you think the source of the fear is or where the hesitance is coming from.

◊ Read through the speeches in Part II. I collected these speeches from non-famous sources. Each speaker is just like you—someone who wants to honor another person through a toast. As you read through each speech, know that the process outlined here will allow you to produce a similar toast.

► KEY TAKEAWAYS

◊ Your toast has two goals: honor the person, and honor the event. Achieve those, and you'll have a memorable toast.

◊ Our fear of public speaking and writing comes from different sources for each person. Only by identifying and confronting those fears can we write.

◊ Take the pressure off yourself and create a speech that's 90 percent of the way there rather than 100 percent. Authenticity, not perfection, is the goal.

◊ Cast off the notion that you need to be Adam Sandler in *The Wedding Singer*. Let the humor of the toast come from the stories you tell rather than forcing one-liners that get groans instead of laughs.

◊ Aim to create a heartfelt and authentic toast, one unique to you. No toast is perfect—ask anyone who has given an impressive speech, and they'll tell you that there are things they wish they had said (or left out). The audience won't know.

◊ The audience will care that you took the time to create something unique to you and your perspective. Give that toast.