

Writing an Effective Graduation Speech

As with any speech, you need to begin by considering your situation, purpose, audience, and message.

Situation: You are speaking in a large indoor arena using a microphone to speak to a very large audience. Ideally you would like to speak from as few notes as possible so that you can direct your comments to the audience. Your speech needs to be 3-4 minutes long.

Purpose: Your goal is to celebrate the accomplishments of the graduates and recognize those who have helped the graduates. You should inspire the graduates to meet the challenges and responsibilities that they face.

Audience: You are speaking to both the graduates and their families as well as faculty and staff of Nicolet High School.

Message: Your speech should use advice sparingly and instead focus on a specific theme that creatively imparts your message. You need to use language effectively both to enhance your message and to meet the time limit of the speech.

Choosing a Theme:

Graduation speeches tend to focus on a theme around which the speech is built. Here are some examples from previous years.

1. The three L's to live by (instead of the three R's) live, learn, love
2. Be true to yourself ("You are to bear in mind who you are and seek to know yourself." Don Quixote)
3. Learn the past, watch the present, and create the future. ~ Jesse Conrad.
4. Don't Stand Still - "Restlessness is discontent and discontent is the first necessity of progress." (Thomas Edison)
5. Facing and conquering fears - "Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood." (Marie Curie)

When choosing a theme, you want to keep in mind that you are speaking at a high school graduation, not an 8th grade graduation. Stay away from Dr. Seuss and Disney.

Writing the body of the speech:

As you develop your theme, you have two main areas of thought to consider.

1. Remembering and celebrating the past.
2. Acknowledging the possibilities of the future.

You can include both areas evenly or focus on one more than the other.

- **Avoid focusing on yourself.** You should not have too many "I's" in the speech. Write a speech that everyone in the audience can relate to. Don't just focus on the groups that you belonged to or the memories that you have. Think about your class as a whole. What achievements, events, projects, or memorable moments did you experience as a group? How do those relate to the theme you have chosen?

- **Avoid giving too much advice.** After all, you do not have the wisdom of experience, so too much advice coming from you would seem arrogant or overbearing.

- **Avoid insulting or offending the audience.** Do not be critical of the school, your class, or your families. This speech is not an occasion for you to vent your own opinions.

Writing the introduction and conclusion of the speech:

As with any speech, the beginning and ending should create impact and provide closure. You want the speech to sizzle, not fizzle. Remember that you are speaking to a very large audience, so you do not have the benefit of an intimate and personal connection with the audience. The words you utter and how you utter them need to grab your audience's attention and resonate with them.

Here are some suggestions for starting the speech:

- Begin with a question (rhetorical)
- Begin with a quotation
- Begin with a short story
- Begin with a short poem
- Begin by referencing something important about the speaking situation/context.

The same devices that you use to begin the speech can be used at the end to provide closure.

Whatever you do at the end, you should make sure to refer back to your theme and tie everything together at the end.

Delivering the speech:

To do justice to the words you have written, you should know them well so that you can speak them to your audience and not read them to the audience. Look at your audience as much as possible especially at the beginning and end of the speech. Use pauses at appropriate moments to emphasize a point or allow the audience to think about something you have said. Remember that you control your volume and rate and can adjust them to create different effects. Do not forget to smile. A smile can not only be seen, but it can also be heard in the tone of your voice. Be confident and above all else, have fun.

Sample speeches

College graduation speeches

<http://www.graduationwisdom.com/speeches/topten.htm>



Graduation Speaker Evaluation

Name of Candidate _____

Introduction (Gained attention, subject introduced clearly)	
Organization (main ideas easily followed)	
Development (topic dealt with creatively, speech adapted to audience)	
Delivery (sufficient eye contact, voice used effectively, effective gestures)	
Language (Language clear, language vivid)	
Presence (Overall impression of speaker)	
Theme/Message (Appropriate, creative, relevant)	
Comments:	