



ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE WITH HUMOR

LEVEL 3 PROJECT



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INTRODUCTION



For most speakers, searching their lives for a story is a straightforward activity. There are stories from anyone's past that can move, entertain, or frighten a listener. There are stories that can make someone laugh. There are even stories that can bring all three feelings to an audience at the same time, depending on how they are told.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Purpose: The purpose of this project is for you to determine your style of humor and apply it to a speech that centers around a central message.

Overview: Give a 5- to 7-minute speech on your point of view and what makes things funny to you. Your speech should include at least one anecdote or story intended to entertain or bring humor into your presentation.

For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 13.

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



Video: Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



Interactive Activity: Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



Resource: Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.



ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

5
EXEMPLARY

4
EXCEL

3
ACCOMPLISHED

2
EMERGING

1
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I can write a well-organized speech.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I understand the importance of pace and timing in a well-designed speech.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I can confidently develop a message and support my message with humorous stories.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I understand the importance of organizing a speech in a way that works for my presentation style.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am prepared with strategies to make adjustments when the audience does not respond in the way I anticipate.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

COMPETENCIES



The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Write a well-organized speech.
- Develop a clear message and support with humorous stories.
- Understand your preferences for speech development and delivery.
- Identify strategies for managing an unexpected audience response.
- Create a personal framework for the successful delivery of a humorous speech.

IDENTIFYING YOUR MESSAGE

Why deliver a message?

Most successful speeches have a message. Think back to your Ice Breaker. Each person who delivers this speech can pull stories from any part of their life or choose to focus on a single point in time. Whatever you selected, you chose the message you wanted to share. It may have been a message about your interest in learning to be a better speaker, the reason you joined Toastmasters, or something else entirely. Your choice may not have been conscious, but it was still a choice of message.

What can you add?

As you think about your speech and the stories you have added to your collection, consider the message you want to share in this speech. It will be easier to create your speech around a message than to decide that you just want to make people laugh.

How do you choose?

You may have a story you want to tell because it always makes people laugh when you tell it or it always makes you laugh when you think of it. Add it to your collection and make note of the theme. It might be about a time when you made a mistake or when something unexpected happened. Consider what message that funny story could support.

It might be the idea that life is short and to not take mistakes too seriously. It might be that wonderful things can happen from the unexpected. Once you decide what message the story supports, determine whether you have others that support the same theme. If you haven't added them, add them to your library and work them into your humorous speech.

DELIVERING A SPEECH

Once you have written a speech that includes a collection of stories and a message, your next step is to consider your presentation style. Delivering a speech with the goal of bringing humor to an audience can be a daunting task.

Humor is one of the most important ways people share an experience. The funny story, clever joke, or word play is a gift a speaker gives to their audience. Laughter is the gift returned. The way you deliver your humorous speech can enhance the experience or detract from it.

- The first step in strengthening your delivery is to know what you do well.
- Speakers who are very secure in front of an audience are generally able to identify and articulate their strengths.
- Speakers who tend to be less secure in their skills may need to spend time with mentors or Toastmasters club members to identify their assets as public speakers.
- Your greatest public speaking strength may be that you are able to keep a moderate delivery pace and rarely speak too fast or too slow.
- You might have a great sense of timing—pausing or speeding up at exactly the right time to keep the audience fully engaged.
- Regardless of your strength, start with that ability when you think about your delivery.

FOCUS ON PACING AND TIMING

Two of the most important delivery techniques for the humorous speech are pacing and timing. Your pace is the speed of your speech. Your pace can change to show excitement or boredom, depending on your story and the feeling you want to create. The pauses, silences, and breaths you take as you speak are also important. This is comedic timing and combined with pace will help you successfully deliver a humorous speech.

Create Success

Successful stand-up comics are adept at using pacing and timing to their advantage. They pause to allow the audience to catch up, realize what was said or not said in a story, or let a comment or story element settle before adding to it. They will pause to give audience members time to laugh. The ability to be silent, even for a beat during your speech, can make the difference between your humor coming through to an audience or not.

Seek Advice

If you are not fully comfortable with the idea of adjusting your pace or timing when delivering your speech, seek out speakers who use timing and pace to their advantage. Any number of stand-up comics, humorists, and professional speakers have videos available online. You can even refer to situation comedies on television or through a streaming service that will help you understand the powerful impact of pace and timing.

DEVELOPING MORE THAN YOU NEED

An effective step you can take is to prepare more than one version of your entire speech or several versions of your stories.

- Consider what it would be like to deliver your speech to your grandmother, your best friend, and a stranger.
- It might be the same, but it is likely you would tell some parts differently, depending on the person.
- When you take that idea a step further, you can imagine how you would adjust a story to work well with a particular demographic represented in your audience.
- For more information on demographics and audience awareness, you may want to read and complete the “Connect with Your Audience” project available as an elective at Level 3.



Use the Story Collection tool available in your transcript on Base Camp to organize your stories, jokes, and transitions.

Once you have completed the activity and outlined a few different versions of your anecdotes, you are ready to organize your speech. When preparing a speech that relies heavily on a story or stories, you may want to write the entire speech instead of outlining or creating bullet points. How you organize your thoughts for a speech is always at your discretion. However, for most people working to develop the skills needed to deliver a humorous speech, writing the entire speech is the most effective method, especially if you are presenting to an unfamiliar audience.



Create Alternative Endings

Another exercise you might want to consider as you write your speech is to develop an alternative ending to one or more of your anecdotes, stories, or even your speech.

Change the Focus

The benefit of creating alternative endings is to give you a direction to shift if you need to change focus during your speech.

Prepare for Challenges

Toastmasters clubs are wonderful places to build confidence and learn. There is an important expectation that everyone in attendance will be polite and supportive of every speaker. It is not necessarily the reality for many speakers outside of the Toastmasters club meeting.

Be Flexible

There are times when speakers need to adjust their content while they speak. Preparing adjustments ahead of your speech will help you succeed.

Write it Down

You can prepare to substitute one story for another, adjust the telling of your favorite humorous anecdote, or alter the ending of a story. This type of preparation will make every speech, regardless of the audience, more likely to succeed. This is especially true when your goal is to deliver a humorous speech.

PREPARE AND PRACTICE

Whatever method you choose for organizing your speech, practicing is key to a successful presentation.

As with any speech, recording yourself or presenting in front of friends, family, or a mentor will help build your confidence and adjust anything that is not working the way you planned. Try delivering your speech in more than one way and take notes on the audience response.

If something works well, think through why it is successful and consider whether or not your future audience will have a similar reaction. Try different pacing. Adjust your timing. Practicing the delivery of a humorous speech in different ways will help you adjust to get the best response from your audience.

SAVE THE BEST FOR LAST

As you prepare, listen to the stories you are telling and consider the order you have placed them in your speech. The value of sharing your speech with a mentor or trusted person is you can assess their reactions. Pay attention and make note of the best response and level of engagement. Make sure your beginning or first story is strong enough story to grab audience members' attention and that you are closing your speech with strength.

There are several methods you can use to organize your speech. You can begin and end with a compelling story or point of humor. You can also build to a big finish with your strongest story. As a best practice, avoid starting with your strongest, most humorous story or anecdote and ending with a less powerful point.



The best humorous speeches are engaging throughout with a compelling beginning and a strong ending. The time you take to practice will help to make your speech memorable for your audience.

AUDIENCE RESPONSE

There are times, no matter how well you prepare and rehearse, when your humorous story or joke fails to entertain or amuse an audience. You pause, giving the audience time to respond, and no one even smiles.

It is never fun to present a speech that does not resonate with an audience. That is especially true with humor. There are steps you can take during a moment of unexpected silence to help you and the audience move beyond it.

Be Calm

Getting upset will not help you and it will make your audience uncomfortable. Continue your speech and save your concerns for after the presentation when you can talk to your evaluator and/or mentor about what went wrong and how to avoid it in the future.

Say it Once

Even if you suspect your audience did not hear you, avoid the temptation to repeat a story or joke. If they did hear you, a second period of silence is likely to be worse.

Trust Your Audience

Even though it is tempting, avoid explaining your humor. An explanation will only call out the fact that your story failed to get the response you hoped. An explanation is more likely to make the confusion and lack of a reaction worse for both you and the audience.

Take Ownership

Remember that the only part you can control is what and how you present. Blaming an audience will not help you over time because you cannot change the audience. You can adjust what you present or choose not to present to certain types of audiences in the future. Recognize what you can control and what you cannot and then move forward from any negative experiences.

Review Later

There are times when even the best speakers are unable to connect with an audience. Your sense of humor may not work with the collective sense of humor of the audience or, for other reasons beyond your control, your speech doesn't resonate. Once your speech is complete and you have time to review, you can revise the stories you used or determine if they may not work for some or all audiences.

Keep Your Perspective

Understand that an unexpected audience response to one joke or story does not mean your entire presentation failed. Silence may be attributed to many things, not just a story that didn't resonate. Keep going and tell the stories you planned to tell. Re-evaluate material after your speech when you have time and space to think about the presentation as a whole.

When you are designing a speech intended to make people smile or laugh, preparation gives you your best opportunity for success. Preparing your stories, practicing your delivery, and building more content than you need will help you achieve your goals.

REVIEW AND APPLY

- How can you adjust a story or anecdote to support a message you want to deliver in your speech?
- What steps can you take if a story or joke fails to get a laugh from an audience?
- What is the value of practice for a humorous speech?
- How does it benefit you to have a wide collection of stories and anecdotes when you are creating a humorous speech?

COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.



Review: Return to page 3 to review your assignment.

Organize: Use the Project Checklist on page 13 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.

Schedule: Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.



Prepare: Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 15–17 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.

PROJECT CHECKLIST

Engage Your Audience with Humor

Purpose: The purpose of this project is for you to determine your style of humor and apply it to a speech that centers around a central message.

Overview: Give a 5- to 7-minute speech on your point of view and what makes things funny to you. Your speech should include at least one anecdote or story intended to entertain or bring humor into your presentation.

This project includes:

- A 5- to 7-minute speech

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Select a topic for your speech.

Select stories and anecdotes to use in your speech to add humor.

Schedule your speech with the vice president education.

Add your stories, jokes, and anecdotes to the Story Collection tool to begin developing a library for use in future speeches.

Write your speech.

Rehearse your speech.

After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

Additional Notes

EVALUATION FORM

Engage Your Audience with Humor

Member Name _____ Date _____

Evaluator _____ Speech Length: 5 – 7 minutes

Speech Title _____

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is for the member to determine their style of humor and apply it to a speech that centers around a central message.

Notes for the Evaluator

The member completing this project is working to develop their ability as a humorous speaker and to better understand their own sense of humor. The member will deliver a well-organized speech. The speech should not be a report on the content of the “Engage Your Audience with Humor” project.

General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

EVALUATION FORM – Engage Your Audience with Humor

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING	
Clarity: Spoken language is clear and is easily understood					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Vocal Variety: Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Eye Contact: Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Gestures: Uses physical gestures effectively					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Audience Awareness: Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Comfort Level: Appears comfortable with the audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Interest: Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Humor: Humor resonates with most audience members					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Engage Your Audience with Humor

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
 - 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
 - 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
 - 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
 - 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively
 - 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
 - 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
 - 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs

Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

Humor

- 5 – Humor resonates with audience members as if it had been written specifically for them
- 4 – Humor resonates well with audience members
- 3 – Humor resonates with most audience members
- 2 – Humor does not resonate well with most audience members though some responded positively
- 1 – Humor does not resonate with any members of the audience



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