Turney's Tips
Speech Scripting

Underlying assumptions:

As your SPE 101 teacher probably told you, the most effective public speakers who write their own speeches generally speak from notes or an outline rather than a full script. A speech script is called for when the speaker who will deliver the speech is not the person who wrote it.

A speech script is a working paper or a guideline for presenting a speech, not a finished product since the speech isn't complete until it's been delivered. Thus, speech writers need to make the script as clear and complete as possible but realize that it may not be followed exactly. The speaker may ad-lib additional comments, intentionally skip some parts, or accidentally omit others.

Speeches—and, by extension, speech scripts—are meant to be heard, not to be read silently. They should be conversational and "written for the ear." How the words sound and how they flow are more important than formal sentence structure, literary quality, or strict grammar. Sentence fragments, colloquialisms, figures of speech, and some repetition are not only acceptable; they usually improve a speech. However, the style, language and degree of formality must be suitable for the setting and the intended audience as well as comfortable and appropriate for the person delivering the speech.

A speaking script must be clearly visible, easy to read (legible), and spaced in ways that help the speaker maintain an appropriate pace, put emphasis where it's needed, and not lose his/her place.

Working tips:

✦	The basic organization and structure taught in Speech 101—attention-getter, overview of what will be covered, body of the speech, recap of key points, and memory-setting close—is hard to beat.

✦	A speech is meant to be spoken and heard, so it should be "written out loud." Speak your thoughts as you write and frequently pause to re-read the entire script out loud. If it doesn't sound right or doesn't flow smoothly, re-work it. If you run out of breath or find yourself pausing in inappropriate places as you're reading it out loud, your sentences are probably too long and/or too complex. Break them up and inject occasional, short, punchy sentences or phrases to vary the pace.

✦	Try to find and emphasize a natural rhythm in what you're writing. Consider repeating key phrases, using parallel sentence structure, and/or switching the order of phrases to enhance the rhythm.

✦	A catchy quote from a source like ***Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*** or a reminder of what happened on this day in history from a source like ***Chase's Book of Days*** can be a good starting point even if you later edit them out of the finished speech.

For additional information:

Peggy Noonan's ***What I Saw at the Revolution***. Random House: New York; 1990, especially the chapters "Speech! Speech!" and "A Thousand Points of Light."

Writing Effective Speeches by Henry Ehrlich. Paragon House: New York, 1992.

Format and organization:

- Use wider than usual margins so the lines of text are shortened and don't require excessive eye movement to read across them. Many speakers like 1½ to 2-inch margins on each side.

- Use triple-spacing to make it easier to keep track of where you are as you frequently look up to make eye contact with the audience and then quickly look back at the script.

- Select a clear, easy-reading typeface in a reasonably large size. The ideal type size is 14-18 points, and most readers prefer a serif style typeface with a relatively large x-height.

  •• Many speaking scripts are written in all capital letters because it's supposed to make it easier to keep your place and find it again if you momentarily lose it. It is, however, purely a matter of personal preference, and the script preparer should use whichever style—all caps or upper and lower case— is preferred by the speaker who will use the script.

- Spell out words and phrases exactly the you want them spoken. Write "*a million and a half dollars*" if that's how you want it to be said, or "*one point five million*" if that's your preference. Simply putting "*$1.5 million*" on the page leaves it up to the speaker to interpret.

  •• It's particularly critical to include the phonetic spelling of unusual words— especially names—with unusual pronunciations in parentheses immediately following the word, e.g., Mr. Thomas Beyr *(bare)* from Versailles *(ver-sales)*.

- Place and space the words on the page in ways that help the speaker read and deliver the message most effectively and as it was intended to be spoken. For instance, inserting extra spaces between lines or even between words can be used to indicate pauses. So can ending a line in the middle of the page, even if it breaks up a sentence. Dashes (—), slashes (/ / /), and ellipsis (**. . .**) are other ways.

  •• Bullets (●, •, or ○) or asterisks (*) indicate items that are to be emphasized. You can also underline, circle, or highlight words or phrases that need extra verbal punch.

  •• Block-indenting can be used to indicate material that should be presented in an "*Oh, by the way*" manner. It can also denote material that can be omitted if time is running short.

  •• Stage directions—e.g., gestures, changes in pacing, tone, etc.—and reminders of when to show which visual should be placed in brackets [squared parentheses] and, if possible, a smaller or fainter type style. The can be melded into the text at the exact point they should be employed or set into one of the margins where they appear more obvious.

- Sentences or paragraphs should not be broken at the bottom of one page and continued onto the next page if it can be avoided. Even if it appears to waste space or paper, it's better to move the whole sentence or paragraph to the new page because the simple act of turning a page can be enough to interrupt a speaker's continuity and make the delivery seem choppy.

- Number each page. The upper right corner is the best place. Adding a one or two word "slug" to the page number can further help to avoid confusion, especially for someone working with several scripts or if several speakers will are using the same lectern.

- Do not staple the pages together; it makes page changes much more clumsy and noticeable.