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# Write Your Own Introduction

**T**he purpose of an introduction is to get listeners excited about your speech before you even get to the lectern. By writing your own introduction for the Toastmaster to read, you eliminate any surprises and ensure immediate audience involvement. In addition, your club atmosphere will be energized with a new sense of anticipation.

It's easy to overlook the importance of this brief introduction. Many club members feel that because they have spent time and energy writing and rehearsing a dynamite speech, it's up to the Toastmaster to come up with an introduction.

But how can the Toastmaster provide an effective introduction if he or she doesn't know what your speech is really about? Or why you selected your topic? Or even to what extent you are qualified to speak about the subject?

You are the only one who is fully qualified to write your introduction. All it takes on your part is a little bit of

By Jonathan Wright, ATM-S

**Wow your listeners – before you even start to speak.**

thought, which can be written on an index card that you hand to the Toastmaster before the meeting. On that card you answer the question of "why?" Why would your audience want to listen to your speech?

What about writing down the speech objectives from the manual for the Toastmaster to read? This is better than no written introduction at all. It will describe the speech's features, but it won't describe its benefits to listeners. Whenever we try to sell something, we must remember that a feature listed without an attached benefit does nothing to persuade prospective buyers and may even turn them off. It's the same way with a speech. It's essential that you sell your speech to audience members by letting them know the benefits they'll receive from listening.

Consider the following introduction: *"Our next speaker is Frank. He will speak from the basic manual, chapter two, titled 'Speaking in Earnest.' His objectives are to find a subject he feels strongly about and to deliver his speech in a convincing manner. He will speak for five to seven minutes. His speech title is, 'Rice Cakes Are Amazing.'"*

I don't know about you, but as a listener, I would not be excited about the next five to seven minutes. Frank



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needs a very strong introduction because without knowing more, I wouldn't believe that rice cakes are amazing. He has already lost me and he hasn't even started his speech yet!

But consider this scenario: Frank has just read this article in *The Toastmaster* magazine, and now he has a great idea! He quickly scrawls a few choice sentences. Frank puts us literally on the edge of our seats with just a few answers to the question "Why?" (Why should I listen to this speech? What benefits will I walk away with? What's in it for me?)

The Toastmaster reads Frank's new introduction: *"Our next speaker is going to share with you a profound experience he had – one that may revolutionize your life, too! He will speak from chapter two of the basic manual – and, as you will discover, he really will be speaking in earnest. In the next five to seven minutes, Frank will share his convictions about the dramatic health benefits you can reap from a very simple, very satisfying snack. This startling presentation is titled, 'Rice Cakes Are Amazing!' Please join me in welcoming Frank and 'Rice Cakes Are Amazing!'"*

After hearing this type of intro, I would be on my feet, whistling and pounding the table! I'd be ready to go to the store and buy rice cakes right now! (And Frank hasn't even started speaking yet!)

Think about what has happened here. It took just a few moments and a few thoughts written on a small piece of paper. The paper was given to the Toastmaster right before the meeting:

- The Toastmaster suddenly appears polished, well-informed and enthusiastic.

- The audience views the speaker as an expert, an authority. And the speaker feels less pressure than he would have otherwise, because he's a winner before he even starts his presentation.
- Audience members are excited; they want to know about the health benefits, and they can't wait for Frank to start speaking.
- The meeting suddenly seems so much more worthwhile! Listeners are not just analyzing a speech; they're learning dietary benefits that can revolutionize their lives!

At a time when Toastmasters are trying to increase club membership, when existing members sometimes seem simply too busy to attend meetings, in a world where life is too short to spend time doing anything less than one's best, I ask you to take the challenge:

- Write out your own introductions for the Toastmaster to read about you and your speech.
- Be sure to answer the question, "Why?" Don't just write your speech objectives.
- If you are the Toastmaster, call your speakers ahead of time. Share this concept with them. Ask them for their written introductions.

Beginning today, don't stop at writing a great speech. Write a great introduction to go with it. Wow your listeners – before you even start to speak! **T**

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