

Tips to write something for speech HKS Communications Program Workshop

Adapted from *The Political Speechwriter's Companion* by Robert Lehrman. CQ Press, 2010. This book has many more great lessons about all areas of speechwriting.

Effective writers use language that people can **understand, feel, and remember**.

1) People **understand** language with...

- Simple, appropriate words (“now” versus “currently”)
- Short, active sentences
- Concrete language
- Transitions (Previews, Internal Summaries and Sign Posts)
- Good Flesch-Kincaid readability

2) People often **feel** language through anecdotes. Anecdotes...

- Can fit many moods
- Involve a character, a challenge and a change
- Need room to breathe
- Benefit from concrete language
- Benefit from punch lines
- Set up your takeaway point

3) People often **remember** language that employs a literary device. Here are some of the most popular:

- **Simile**: Comparing two unlike things. (“As sharp as a razor.”)
- **Litany**: Repetition that builds as it also presents evidence. (“We must do X. We must do Y. We must do Z!”)
- **Antimetabole**: A phrase is repeated, but in reverse order (“Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.” - John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, 1961)
- **Antithesis**: Using parallel structure to present contrast. (“That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” - Neil Armstrong, Moon landing.)
- **Polyptoton**: Repeating a word with different meanings. (“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” - Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, 1933).

One final tip: Read your script out loud. Even better, read it to someone else. It helps you check the clarity, pace and impact of your words.