

How to Survive Your Ice Breaker



Come in from the cold

You've attended a few Toastmasters meetings and you've seen others give their speeches. Perhaps you've noticed that some speakers are smooth, polished and experienced, while others struggle at a beginner's level. Now it's time for you to stand up and give your Ice Breaker speech. Just thinking about it gives you nightmares. Rest assured, you're not alone!

No matter what skills you possess as a speaker, you're probably going to find it a little stressful to speak for the first time in front of all these relative strangers. And because you know you'll be evaluated as a part of the experience, it can be a frightening few moments of your life. What can you do to conquer your fear and sail through your first speech with fun and focus? Here are some quick tips:

- **Write out your speech in advance.** At least, write down some notes so you can check your organization and make sure all important facts are included.
- **Don't try to memorize the entire speech.** Though you'll only speak for less than six minutes, once you stand in front of the crowd, it may seem much longer. Trying to remember everything while under that kind of stress is asking too much of any first timer.
- **Use notes, but avoid too many note cards.** Cards can slip from your fingers or fall out of order at the wrong moment. They're not easy to handle when you're nervous. One long sheet with large print, or one large card with brightly-colored bullet points to jog your memory, will serve you better.
- **Remember that all your listeners have stood where you stand now.** They can all relate to any nervousness you may be experiencing. Try to think of your audience as your new friends. See their smiles and pause once in a while during your speech to make eye contact with them.
- **Remember that this speech is merely a way for you to introduce yourself.** Pick three or four important things you'd like your fellow Toastmasters to learn about you and make those your speech. If you speak on something that you're passionate about, you won't run out of words. So, talk about an exciting adventure from your past, your hopes, your dreams and maybe your favorite hobby. What defines you? Talk about it.

Your evaluator is required to find some advice to offer, so try to take it in the spirit in which it's being offered. Everyone in a Toastmasters meeting is there to help everyone else. So, each person gives and gets advice from time to time. It's your choice whether or not to follow any advice you're given, but if the evaluator is a much more experienced speaker, you should probably at least consider it. See the "Additional Resources" section, below, for more tips on reducing nervousness and perfecting a speech.

Don't forget to take a breath when you stand up at the lectern. Say hello to everyone...and begin!