HUMOROUS SPEECH

FIND THE FUNNY. SHARE A STORY. CONNECT.

01 What is a Humorous Speech?

A Humorous Speech is a prepared speech with a clear theme, an opening, a body and a conclusion. Your aim is to entertain through a connected story or message—not deliver an unrelated string of jokes. The best humour feels natural, recognisable and true to your voice.

02 Find humour in everyday life

You do not need an extraordinary event. A misunderstanding, family routine, school experience or small mistake can become a memorable speech when you notice what makes it surprising.

- Write down three moments when something did not go as planned.
- Ask: What did I expect? What actually happened? Why is the difference amusing?
- Choose a situation your audience can understand without a long explanation.

TRY THIS: THE FUNNY-MOMENT JOURNAL

Describe a real incident in four lines: the situation, your expectation, the surprise and what you learned. Look for the funny contrast.

03 Give your humour a purpose

Build around one main idea. Open with a situation that creates curiosity, develop the problem through two or three connected moments, and end with a satisfying payoff or insight.

- Opening: introduce a person, place or problem quickly.
- Middle: let complications build naturally instead of adding random jokes.
- Ending: return to the central situation with a memorable twist or callback.

CRAFT YOUR COMEDY

MAKE THE STORY FUNNIER, NOT LOUDER

04 Use the setup and payoff

A setup gives listeners the information they need; the payoff changes their expectation. Keep the setup short and clear so the surprise has room to land.

- Contrast: show the gap between what you planned and what happened.
- Specific detail: a precise image is often funnier than a vague statement.
- Callback: repeat an earlier funny detail near the end in a new way.

05 Build laughter through storytelling

Give your audience a scene they can picture. Use characters, dialogue, a challenge and an escalating sequence of events. Let the humour emerge from the situation rather than explaining why it is funny.

- Write dialogue the way people really speak; keep exchanges brief.
- Use an expressive pause before a surprise, then allow space for laughter.
- Test whether each funny moment supports the story and central message.

MINI WRITING WORKSHOP

My story is about _____. The audience expects _____. The unexpected turn is _____. My final callback will be _____.

06 Keep humour respectful

Toastmasters Humorous Speech rules require contestants to avoid potentially objectionable language, anecdotes and material. Choose humour that includes your audience rather than embarrassing, stereotyping or insulting others.

07 Keep it original

Write substantially your own material. Under Toastmasters contest rules, quoted, paraphrased or referenced content must be identified during the speech, and no more than 25% may come from others. Confirm the applicable OGCPS rules.

REHEARSE FOR LAUGHTER

TIMING, DELIVERY AND AUDIENCE CONNECTION

08 Let your delivery help the humour

Use a conversational voice, purposeful facial expression and natural movement. Vary pace to build anticipation. A small pause before a payoff can be more effective than speaking faster or louder.

- Speak clearly enough for listeners to catch the important detail.
- Avoid laughing at your own joke before the audience has heard it.
- If a laugh arrives, pause briefly; do not speak over it.

09 Practise with real listeners

What seems funny on paper may not work aloud. Test the speech with a mentor or fellow Gaveliers. Ask where they smiled, where they were confused and whether the ending felt satisfying.

TIME YOUR FULL PERFORMANCE

Toastmasters standard Humorous Speech timing is 5–7 minutes, with signals at 5:00 (green), 6:00 (yellow) and 7:00 (red). Disqualification applies below 4:30 or above 7:30. Allow time for audience laughter and check OGCPS procedures.

10 Your seven-session practice plan

- 1. Tell the story informally; identify the central funny moment.
- 2. Draft the opening, turning point and final payoff.
- 3. Cut long explanations; sharpen setups and transitions.
- 4. Practise dialogue, facial expression and purposeful pauses.
- 5. Perform for a small audience; collect specific feedback.
- 6. Rehearse with a timer and realistic laughter pauses.
- 7. Polish the opening and ending, then rest and recharge.

11 If a joke does not land

Stay calm, keep your expression natural and move to the next idea. Never stop to explain a joke or apologise for the audience not laughing. Your story should still make sense without every laugh.

YOUR CONTEST-DAY TOOLKIT

STEP UP, SHARE JOY AND TRUST YOUR PRACTICE

12 Before the contest

- Check your reporting time, speaking order and the organiser’s briefing.
- Review the current OGCPS contest rules and any originality declaration.
- Confirm permitted notes, props and technical arrangements if relevant.
- Warm up your voice; rehearse your first lines and final callback.

13 When you step on stage

Stand comfortably, look at your audience and begin at a steady pace. Speak to people rather than performing at them. Let your personality come through and allow each funny moment to unfold.

14 What makes an effective humorous speech?

Look for a coherent story, relevant humour, a clear message, expressive but controlled delivery, audience connection and an ending that feels complete. Judging follows the official contest criteria—not simply the number of laughs.

YOUR FINAL SELF-CHECK

☐ One clear theme ☐ Original material ☐ Respectful humour ☐ Strong story arc ☐ Clear setups and payoffs ☐ Natural pauses ☐ Timed rehearsal ☐ Memorable ending

15 After the contest

Thank those who supported your preparation. Note which moments connected, where your timing changed and what you would improve next time. Your progress as a speaker matters beyond the result.

Official reference and guidance

Toastmasters International, Speech Contest Rulebook (July 1, 2026–June 30, 2027), Item 1171: General Rules and Humorous Speech Contest Rules. Refer to the applicable OGCPS contest rulebook and briefing for event-specific requirements.