INTERNATIONAL SPEECH

YOUR MESSAGE. YOUR VOICE. YOUR MOMENT.

01 What makes an International Speech?

Your task is to communicate one clear, worthwhile idea in a substantially original prepared speech. You might inspire, inform, challenge a belief or share a personal lesson. A powerful speech does not need a dramatic life story; it needs a message your audience can understand and remember.

02 Find a message worth sharing

Start with a real experience, observation or question. Then decide what you want listeners to think, feel or do when you finish.

- List three moments that changed how you think: a mistake, a small victory, or an unexpected lesson.
- Ask: Why does this matter to people beyond me? What is the one sentence I want them to remember?
- Choose a topic you can speak about honestly, with enough detail to make it vivid.

TRY THIS: THE ONE-SENTENCE TEST

Complete: “After hearing my speech, I hope my audience will _____.” Keep this sentence visible while drafting.

03 Shape your speech

Use a simple journey: opening → development → conclusion. Open with a moment or question; develop two or three connected ideas; finish by returning to the central message with a fresh insight or call to action.

- Opening: earn attention in the first few sentences, without a long greeting.
- Middle: use a specific story, example or contrast to make the message believable.
- Ending: leave listeners with a line that feels earned, not a repeated slogan.

WRITE FOR LISTENERS

TURN AN IDEA INTO A MEMORABLE SPEECH

04 Build a story that serves your message

Good storytelling makes the audience see and feel what happened. Use a setting, a person, a challenge, a turning point and a lesson—but include only details that move the message forward.

- Show the scene: “The classroom fell silent” is stronger than “I was nervous.”
- Include what changed: the decision, discovery or action that moved the story.
- Connect the story to your audience: why should this experience matter to them?

05 Make your language speakable

Write for the ear, not the page. Short sentences, concrete words and natural transitions are easier to follow. Read every paragraph aloud; if you run out of breath or stumble, revise it.

- Use repetition sparingly to emphasise an important idea.
- Replace abstract claims with a specific example or image.
- Avoid excessive quotations, statistics, borrowed jokes or language that does not sound like you.

SPEECH BLUEPRINT

My central message: _____ | My opening image: _____ | My two key ideas: _____ | My final takeaway: _____

06 Respect originality

The speech should be substantially your own. Acknowledge any quoted or paraphrased material appropriately. Toastmasters contest rules include originality requirements; confirm the current OGCPS requirements and any required contestant declaration before competing.

07 A useful editing routine

First edit for meaning: remove anything that does not support your message. Next edit for flow: make each part lead naturally to the next. Finally edit for sound: test the rhythm, pauses and transitions aloud.

PRACTISE WITH PURPOSE

DELIVERY, TIMING AND FEEDBACK

08 Bring your words to life

Your delivery should help listeners understand your message, not distract from it. Practise varying your pace, pitch and volume; pause where an idea needs space; and use natural gestures that fit your story.

- Eye contact: connect with different parts of the audience rather than scanning mechanically.
- Movement: change position for a reason, not simply to fill the stage.
- Expression: let your face and tone reflect the meaning of your words.

09 Know your time window

For International Speech, the Toastmasters 2026–2027 standard is 5–7 minutes. Timing signals are typically green at 5:00, yellow at 6:00 and red at 7:00; the 30-second grace period applies at the lower and upper limits. Check the published OGCPS rules and briefing for the applicable procedure.

PRACTISE FOR CONTROL, NOT SPEED

Aim to finish comfortably within the allowed window. Time the full speech with real pauses, gestures and audience reaction—not just a quick reading.

10 A seven-session rehearsal plan

- Session 1: explain your central message in 30 seconds; revise the outline.
- Session 2: rehearse the opening and ending until both feel natural.
- Session 3: speak through the story and check that every detail has a purpose.
- Session 4: record one complete delivery; listen for clarity and pace.
- Session 5: ask a mentor or fellow Gavelier for two strengths and one improvement.
- Session 6: rehearse under contest-like conditions, with a timer and audience.
- Session 7: practise lightly, confirm the rules and rest your voice.

11 Turn feedback into improvement

Ask specific questions: “Where did you lose interest?” “What message stayed with you?” “Which transition felt unclear?” Make one or two changes at a time, then rehearse again.

YOUR CONTEST-DAY COMPANION

STEP ON STAGE READY TO SHARE

12 Before you leave home

- Confirm reporting time, venue, contest order and the organiser’s instructions.
- Review the current OGCPS contest rules, originality requirements and permitted materials.
- Check your opening, closing and key transitions; avoid last-minute major rewrites.
- Bring what is permitted, dress comfortably and allow time to settle in.

13 In the moments before speaking

Nerves are normal. Breathe slowly, relax your shoulders, plant your feet and focus on the message you want to give. You do not need to sound like another speaker; your audience wants to hear you.

14 During your speech

Begin deliberately, allow your first sentence to land and trust the preparation you have done. If you lose a phrase, pause, find your next idea and continue. Maintain a clear connection with the audience rather than chasing perfect memorisation.

A GAVELIER’S FINAL CHECK

☐ One clear message ☐ Strong opening ☐ Original content ☐ Logical flow ☐ Natural delivery ☐ Timed rehearsal ☐ Memorable ending

15 After the contest

Celebrate the courage it took to participate. Write down one thing that worked, one thing you learned and one thing you will practise next. Winning is one outcome; becoming a stronger communicator is the lasting reward.

Official reference and guidance

Toastmasters International, Speech Contest Rulebook (July 1, 2026–June 30, 2027), Item 1171, especially the general contest rules and International Speech Contest section. Consult the published OGCPS 2027 contest rules and organisers for championship-specific procedures.