

Wolverhampton Speakers Club

Speaking Notes - How to Use Them and How to Prepare Them

Your speaking notes are what you use to help you deliver your speech and you have them with you when you speak. They are there to give you support and confidence. We should not be afraid to use notes – they are necessary, especially in long speeches, difficult speeches and where specific wording needs to be delivered accurately.

Your speaking notes are your safety net.

First of all we will look at how you use them when delivering a speech and then take a closer look at different sorts of notes you might choose from.



How to use your notes

Remember that notes are not there to be read – they are the scaffolding of your speech and your aide-memoire. It is the delivery that counts.

Whichever sort of notes you use they should not intrude and the audience should not really be aware that you are using them. Don't wave them about!

Take great care if you have to turn over a page or swap cards – cards should be transferred to the back of the 'pack' and not just discarded. If you have a lectern that is big enough, try to place your pages or cards side-by-side to avoid turning.

A mind-map will take up just one page so you'll not have any problems with turning over.

If you're using a tablet computer for your notes make your use of it as inconspicuous as possible, and if you have a lectern, just place the tablet on it so that it's invisible to the audience.

Memorise both the first sentence and last sentence of the speech so that you don't have to refer to your notes at these critical points. We can't emphasise this enough. Try not to read your notes unless you are reading a quotation or some figures.

You should know your speech well beforehand, but you will still refer to your notes. Take your time and look at your notes briefly – but not while you are speaking - then look back up and resume your speaking. When you use a pause is a good time to do this.

It only takes a small amount of time and, done this way, does not disrupt the flow and appears natural.

Don't let your use of notes destroy your eye contact.

A speech is a performance, so you can think of your notes rather like a music score - don't forget you can mark up or colour code things like gestures, pauses and any other vocal effects you are going to use.

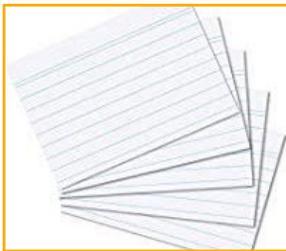


To summarise ...

- Don't read your notes
- Make your notes as inconspicuous as possible
- Take care how you turn over pages or change cards
- Use pauses to scan notes

What sort of notes are best?

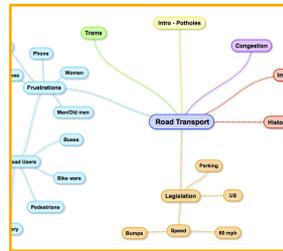
We have seen that there are some general ways in which notes are best used when delivering a speech, and we have assumed that you have your notes ready. **But what sort of notes are best for you?** We will take a look at some common types and examine their features, but don't let anyone tell you that you **MUST** use one particular method.



Cards



Text



Mind Map



Tablet

Cards

This is a traditional recommendation for speech notes, but cards don't suit everyone.

You have just written your speech and are beginning to know it well, so you reach for some cards to take to the lectern with the main points of your speech written on so as to jog your memory while you are speaking.

The cards – filing cards are good to use – just have key words or phrases on them (maybe just the headings and sub-headings from your text but perhaps have important phrases included as well). You can also include 'stage directions'.

You could use one card for the beginning, three (or more depending upon how many main points you have) for the middle of your speech and one for the ending of your speech.

Write in large enough letters for you to read at arm's length and don't put too many words on a card.

Number the cards in case you drop them! Don't fasten the cards together because they are difficult to handle.

You can use cards with or without a lectern, and they are especially good if you have to speak without a lectern (in this case practise handling them beforehand to avoid dropping them or being clumsy when moving from one card to another).

There is less need to look down when speaking, but you need to know your speech well.

Written text

Here you have the text of your speech in front of you as you speak. You can feel confident that you have everything you need in front of you, but there can be a temptation to look down too often and maybe begin to read your notes.

Full script

This is the complete text of your speech that you use as your notes. The intention is NOT to read from the script but to use it as a prompt when needed and as a 'safety net' that you have in front of you. The script can be hand-written or typed, but is best word-processed - using headings and sub-headings. Use a text size large enough for your eyesight.

Full script is probably best reserved for when you are speaking from a lectern and the paper can be hidden from the audience – but there's nothing to stop you holding them in the open provided you use them properly.

A4 paper is a good size for notes but you might also consider A5, especially if your lectern is restricted in size. Make sure that you know how big the lectern is as this should determine the size of paper you use.

Before the speech you can highlight headings and important words or phrases in different colours to make them stand out on the page. You can also add 'stage directions' for yourself: for example to show where you pause, make a gesture or vary your voice. When you rehearse your speech you can put in timing markers so that you know whether you are keeping to schedule - this is a very useful tip.

How you lay out your text on the page for ease of scanning is very important – large blocks of text can be difficult to scan in the brief time you pause and look down. To get over this:

- You will almost certainly need headings and sub-headings (in bold type, to make them stand out)
- Break up your paragraphs into smaller chunks so that you don't get lost in a mass of text
- Use a text size suitable for your eyes (only you can decide what that is)
- You could set it out using a two-column format on your word processor – this layout allows you to easily focus upon smaller blocks of text (*we illustrate this method overleaf for you to see the difference*)
- You might also write in groups of phrases rather than grammatical paragraphs.

Partial script

A partial script is similar to full script except that it is mainly headings and sub-headings but with important sections of the text written out in full.

Headings or outline

You could simply have just the headings and sub-headings printed on one sheet without any other text. This is similar to having cards but you don't have to handle them.

If you have an outlining function on your word processor you could produce an outline from your full text.

Laying out written text

To illustrate the effect of columns on your script you will see the top of the same speech laid out in both one and two columns - which is best for you?

One column

M Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

'The train goes running along the line, Jicketty-can, jicketty can, I wish it were mine, I wish it were mine Jicketty-can, jicketty can ...'

I used to recite that poem to my sons at bedtime, and it always takes me back to my own childhood in those far off sunlit days of the Fifties when every year we took the train to visit my Grandparents way up there in Yorkshire.

What did I feel? What did I do? Where did I go? Well, let me tell you.

Princes End & Coseley to Low Level

It was a very exotic place - you know ... Wolverhampton! To a small boy growing up in Tipton in the early Fifties Wolverhampton was a rarely visited treat just beyond the bounds of the 'everyday'.

But the journey really started at our local station - Princes End and Coseley - a typical small Great Western station decked out with trees and flower beds, even in those austere times. With a jaunty 'toot' on its whistle the local train would chug us along the familiar route through Daisy Bank, Bilston, Priestfield and into Wolverhampton.

Two columns

M Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

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But not for me today ...

Up to High Level

No, today was special – up to High Level Station up a long, enclosed reverberating white-tiled passageway that led us to the entrance to the most wonderful station - long, curved platforms and enclosed with a magnificent glass roof.

While today's station occupies the same site as High Level station it is but a shadow of its former self of 60 years ago.

Now my Father had taken two heavy suitcases to work that Friday morning, and every year I remember him puffing and panting and struggling to carry them both up to the station as he rushed to meet us after work, hoping desperately to be on time for the train.

He always was and so we waited with

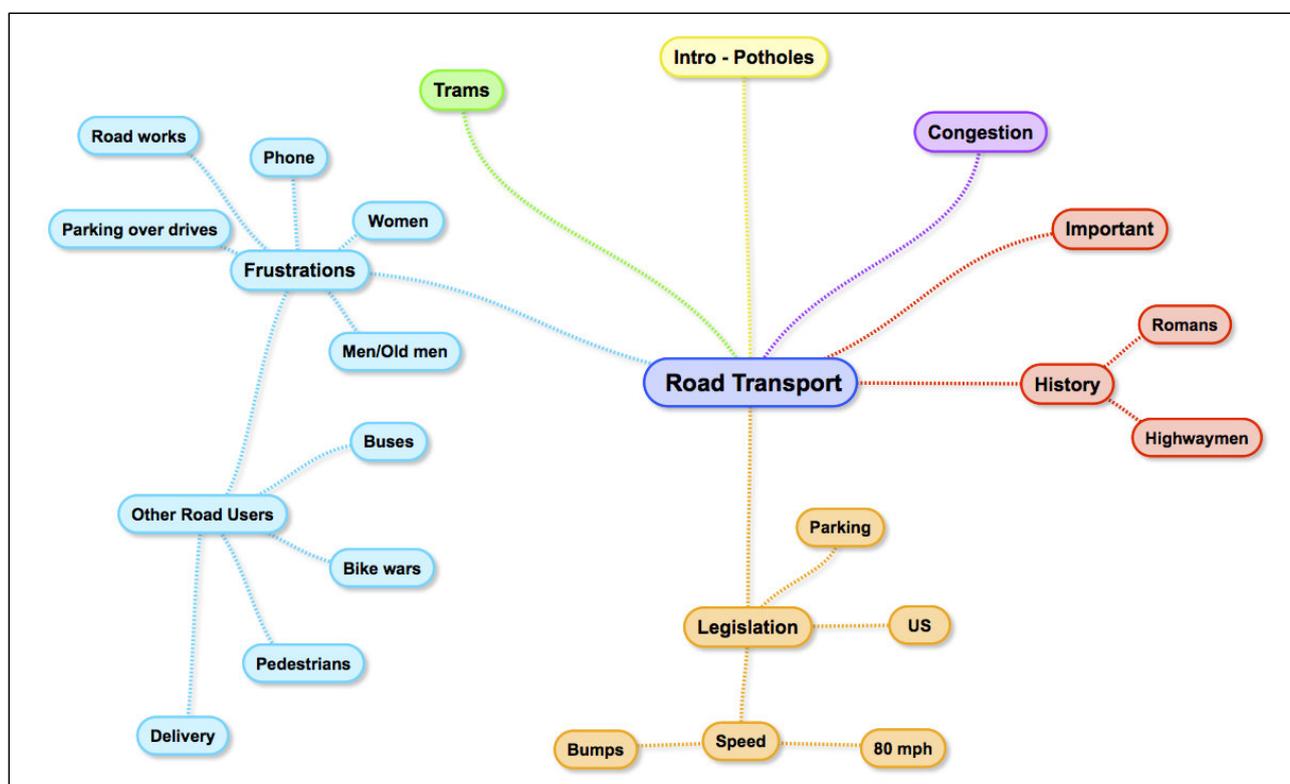
Mind maps

An increasingly popular type of speaking note is to use a mind map, either drawn by hand or using one of the mind-mapping programs available for your computer.

A mind map (sometimes called a 'spider diagram') is a diagram in which information is represented visually, usually with a central idea placed in the middle and associated ideas arranged around it - it allows you to 'map out' your ideas. Mind maps are useful both for planning your speech and for delivering it, so they are a multi-purpose method.

An advantage when used as speaking notes is that you have a picture of the whole of your speech in front of you in one picture on your lectern.

As with other types of note, it can be useful to colour-code some of the main points (some software allows you to do this automatically) and you can include 'stage directions' and timing markers. Here is a mind map for an actual speech:



iPads and tablets

If you have an iPad or other type of tablet computer you could use it for your notes instead of paper or card. They have the advantage that you can easily hold them (like a card) or place them on the lectern out of sight.

You could simply have your text written in a word processor or text editor, at a suitable size for you to read, and simply swipe up or down to move around your notes.

There are, however, a number of specialist programs available cheaply (or free) that allow you to have your notes presented in special ways, such as like an autocue.

Whatever you use - know your speech and practise, practise, practise