

Emceeing: how to write a script that works!

If you're comfortable with your topic and audience and you enjoy speaking in public, there are just a few bases you must touch to hear a volley of "great job's" later on. If you're not, you may have to tape your script to your glasses and vary nary a whit from its message.

Let's assume you are writing the script. If they hand you the text ready-to-go, read it aloud several times in front of a knowledgeable agent of the sponsor, mostly so you get the names and words right. That's probably the best time to make modest word or paragraph changes, with their full approval.

If you're the writer (and probably speaker), you must know

- * **the date, starting hour, and expected length of your script;**
- * the purpose of the meeting, and any unique slant they expect you to take;
- * what specifically you must mention (names, officers, events, performers, schedule, sponsor names and participation, future meetings, etc.);
- * any taboos you must avoid, and
- * what effect they want from your conclusion.

It varies little whether you are opening a session, coordinating a performance, or drawing group conclusions from the information conveyed (or yet to be heard),

For example, let me share how I wrote (and delivered yesterday) a script on the Fourth of July at the Marin County Fair, in California. The program was given in an open-sided performance tent and was seen by several hundred under or in

sight of the overhead canvas. (Here is the [actual script](#).)

In a second, let's look at each of the five categories.

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Before I forget, if you are interested in **emceeing**, here are three other, related blogs and four speaking products that you should find helpful. (All but one by [Gordon Burgett](#), who has given 2000+ paid speaking/emceeing performances.)

* [“Emceeing or show planning: What to remember when prepping a one-hour presentation”](#) (posted 8/7/12)

* [“Emceeing: a full script for a two-hour show”](#) (posted 11/4/12)

* [“Emceeing: the thinking behind writing the script for the 11/4 two-hour show script”](#) (posted 12/27/12)

* A new \$4.95 ebook including the above blogs plus more how-to information is at [“Emceeing, Show Planning, and Script Writing,”](#) plus an excellent booklet, [“How to Be a Great Emcee”](#) from SpeakerNetNews (\$4.85) is buyable, full of current, applicable “emceeing” information.

* **“Four Special Tools That Get Speakers Booked First!”** ([ebook](#), available through [order form](#) or from Kindle, Nook, and Smashwords)

* **“How to Set Up and Market Your Own Seminar”** (audio seminar with workbook, available through [order form](#))

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Here are the five categories:

* **the date, starting hour, and expected length of your script**

The Fourth of July, starting at 1 p.m. sharp, lasting 45 minutes (but not a second longer)

* **the purpose of the meeting, and any unique slant they expect**

you to take

My role was to introduce the [Marin Golden Gate Barbershop Chorus](#), some 20 fellows, and to provide coordination in the presentation (telling what songs would be sung, welcoming the audience, have some vocal interplay with the singers, focus on patriotism [on America's birthday], to introduce two quartets that gave the chorus two short singing breaks, and to frequently inject humor when appropriate. There was one logistical extra: I also sang in the chorus, so we posted a music stand to the left and a bit in front of the rosters, with a separate microphone. That way I could drop back and slide into the end of the front row, or the reverse, before and after each introduction.

*** what specifically you must mention (names, officers, events, performers, schedule, sponsor names and participation, future meetings, etc.)**

Mostly, I had to honor the day, wishing the crowd a Happy Birthday, speak of uniquely interesting facts related to that date, and tie my jokes into patriotism. I introduced the director and gave the first names of all quartet singers. I also invited all men to join the chorus (and sing with us at the fair again next year!); I also told them where and when we practiced, and I directed their attention to the fact flyer on the table at ground level in front of the stage. But I flat-out forgot to include the date and time of our coming Fall Show in an auditorium that was in sight of our tent. (To prevent that, create a checklist of the musts, then check it again and again. Somewhere in the editing that mention fell out.)

*** any taboos you must avoid**

A holiday Barbershopping crowd doesn't want to hear swearing, religion bad-mouthed, political parties or politicians offended, or any person or thing insulted. They expect me to

bring greetings, order, and perhaps some mirth. Nor are they there to see or hear much of me, so my obligation is to do my job quickly and seamlessly.

*** what effect do they want from your conclusion?**

In fact, since the show ended with the choir and audience singing "The Star Spangled Banner," I really had no oral conclusion at all. The important take-aways were a spirit of fun, patriotic pleasure having heard good music robustly sung, and a sort of all-American sense of pride from being at a fair enjoying something as harmonious and American in origin as Barbershopping.

You must bring some additional tools to the emceeing role as well: vigor, a sense of total involvement, lots of smiles, looking at and speaking directly to your audience, enough movement to assure that rigor mortis has yet to set in, and hitting the pronunciations of people, songs, places, or whatever right on. You must remember to put the punch line after the set-up, and to stand tall and speak out.

That's a reminder check-list of what the boss or sponsor usually expect.

I hope this helps when it's your turn!

Incidentally, dredging up and telling the five funniest patriotic jokes of all time (see the script) also helped.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett