



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

## MONTHLY LETTER

Vol. 39, No. 7

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, JULY 1958

### *On Preparing a Speech*

**T**ALKING in public is not the out-of-the-way event it used to be for the average man. Even if a person is not asked to mount a platform, he can hardly expect in these days to avoid being called upon to speak from the floor.

Business people are in demand to speak for their industries and to lead campaigns for this and that good purpose. They need to be able to address shareholders and employees, trade associations, community chest campaigners, groups of men and women in church and school activities, and luncheon clubs. It is a sign of a person's growing stature when the number of his invitations to speak in public increases.

Because of the number of occasions given a person to address the public it is important that he should realize the significance of the spoken word.

In all democracies history is not only written with words: it is made with words. Most of the mighty movements affecting the destiny of mankind have gathered strength in obscure places from the talk of nameless men, and have been thrown into final form and given momentum by leaders who could state in common words the needs and hopes of men and women.

This is not an essay about deportment on the platform, the use of gestures, and suchlike. It is concerned with the vitally fundamental element in speech making: preparation of something to say.

#### *Private practice*

Public speaking requires private practice: practice in vocabulary building, practice in managing the voice, and practice in talking on one's feet. Before all these comes practice in orderly thinking. Whatever forcefulness or persuasiveness you put into your speech must have behind it a charge of matter prepared in advance.

This is not counsel for amateurs only. The greatest orators in history made careful preparation. Demosthenes, revered as a model of the eloquent speaker, would not rise in the assembly, even though importuned

by the people, unless he had previously considered the subject under debate, and had come prepared to speak.

The worthless speaker is the man with nothing ready to say who nevertheless can painfully consume a half hour of an audience's time without profit.

A speech has to be built. You need a foundation, a framework, and the edifice they support. If you put these together well, if what you say tells the facts relating to a problem or a situation in such a way that the audience can follow your build up without effort, and if the audience feels at the end of your address the way you wish it to feel, then you have done a good job.

Preparation of a public talk of whatever sort requires that you procure authentic, up to date and interesting information on your subject; put this information into logical order so as to build toward the purpose you have in mind, and fill in the outline with facts, figures and illustrations.

Preparation means that you will cover all aspects of your topic. Don't concentrate only on facts that are favourable to your argument. Even if you don't express them, you must know what the opposition thoughts are. Are there, perhaps, considerations which you have left out, which tend to destroy the power of your argument? A good speech, with a half dozen strong points, may be demolished by an opponent who attacks the one weak point around which the speaker was not forehanded enough to erect defences. You may find "On Straight Thinking" (*Monthly Letter*, September 1951) of use at this stage of your planning.

#### *Obligation to audience*

You have an obligation to your audience. These people have come to hear you give your best. They expect something to justify their attending the meeting. They are not passively waiting, but are reaching out eagerly for your thoughts and judgments.

The kind of speech you make must be fitting to the occasion. Establish the fact that your subject is im-

portant to you and to your audience, and never get below that level of interest. Slovenliness is the most contemptible of aesthetic sins.

What is the present general feeling of your audience toward the proposition you intend to lay before them? Plan your speech so as to cover everyone's interest, but lay special emphasis on the points that will appeal to those who can be swayed to your way of thinking.

Don't depend too greatly upon the inspiration you will draw from your audience when you rise to give your address. Write the inspiration into your speech so as to animate your audience.

The positive approach to avoiding danger is to come to the audience in terms of the audience's interest vividly expressed. The rule applies in speech-making as in all other activities involving public relations: think, speak and act in terms of the people's interests.

We must try to imagine what questions the audience would ask if we were seated across a desk or table from them, and to answer those questions in the course of our address. This weaving of answers into the speech as we write it is what makes the difference between talking "with" and not "to" our audience.

When you come to this task of preparing a speech in terms of the experience of the audience, reconcile yourself to the fact that you may have to leave out some of your more brilliant passages. They may seem colourful to you, but they do not belong in the speech unless you can truthfully say they are important to the audience.

### *Have a purpose*

The first requirement of speech-making is, of course, to have something to say. This does not mean merely something that may be said; it means something that must be said, something that presses uncomfortably on the mind until it is uttered. Says Ethel Cotton in *Keeping Mentally Alive*, a book still readable after 27 years in print: "The great need in public speech is not more elaborate technique, but more consideration as to the value of the thoughts to be presented."

The speaker must know the task that has been set him and how far it is his duty to carry the audience. The question he needs to answer is not primarily "what am I to say?" but "why?" Why have I been invited to speak? What special knowledge or experience have I to pass along to these people?

You may not want to sell an article, or win a vote, or organize a society, but unless you have set a target for yourself, established some way in which you want your audience to react, your speech will lack vitality.

Just as soon as you give your promissory note to the organizer of a meeting, you place yourself under obligation to consider all these points.

### *From beginning to end*

There are, as a wise man said centuries ago, three parts to a speech: beginning, middle and end. This may seem obvious, but really it is a principle sadly neglected.

You use the introduction to warm up your audience to the purpose of your address. In the body of your speech you present and develop the facts upon which your thesis rests. The conclusion is the place and time to lead the audience to accept your viewpoint and, perhaps, to act on your proposals.

What you say in your opening sentences should attract favourable attention, arouse interest, and lead without interruption into the main part of your speech.

Don't use the introduction to excuse or apologize. You've heard speakers apologize for everything — for being there, for presuming to talk on the subject, for not being prepared properly. If you have nothing to say that is worth listening to, don't speak. If you have something to say, get right into it.

Be modest, by all means, but don't belittle your audience. If you start by saying that you were pushed into speaking, or were called upon because someone else didn't come, or were shanghaied in spite of your obvious lack of competence, what you are doing is saying that the chairman or president didn't think the audience important enough to get a good speaker.

### *Body of the speech*

It is not enough to make a faultless start. You are not like royalty, to lay a corner stone and go home to lunch, leaving others to complete the edifice.

Having caught the attention of the audience you must hold, impress, convince and direct. Here, in the body of your speech, is its meat.

If you are making an annual address to shareholders, a safety talk to Boy Scouts, a booster talk at a service club, or any other speech to any body of people, there is a principle to guide you. You are not called upon to stampede your audience by use of brilliant rhetoric, but to increase the understanding and comprehension of your hearers so that they will move along with you in the way you wish to go.

The sequence of your material should have a forward movement. Your speech should have vivacity. You cannot secure that by forgetting yourself and thinking only of your subject, or by applying lessons in imitative elocution. You can do it by building it into your address as you write it, and staying awake every second of your appearance before your audience. Show intense interest in your subject and what you say about it. From this will follow animation and physical earnestness.

Vary your pace. If your style is inclined to be slow or, as authors say of a certain manner of composition, pedestrian, try writing an occasional paragraph made

up of short sentences and sharp words. If you tend to speak too fast for easy audience comprehension, inject some sentences of more resonant sort to slow you down.

Stick to the point. Any digression or needless detail will weaken your power of conviction, besides making your talk tiresome. The shorter the time allowed for your address, the more ruthless you must be in cutting out attractive but unnecessary particulars.

### *Conclusion of the speech*

The conclusion is your great moment. Here you and your audience reach the point for which you set out together.

Don't leave your audience in mid air; come in for a graceful landing; make an effective stop.

The danger at this point is that a speaker will undo all the good wrought in his address by dragging in new or irrelevant material, or by indulging in a witless anticlimax. So often one hears a fine speech well delivered, followed by an inane expression of thanks for attention or a drivelling apology for lengthiness.

If you reject these temptations that lure you into a lingering death, you may sit down triumphant, leaving the audience to surmise that you could have continued on the same high plane for another half hour, but refrained out of modesty.

### *Elements of speech*

In writing a speech to conform with these necessities, there are perhaps a half dozen desirable qualities to have in mind: simplicity, good language, brightness, accuracy and honesty.

Don't write your speech to display your scholarship. If your audience doesn't understand what you seek to convey, your effort is futile and you look rather foolish. Ask yourself many times during your writing: what does that mean?

It is not the outer sparkle that is the sign of a good speech, but the inner heat that kindles the sympathy of hearers.

Use the King's English. Dr. W. E. McNeill of Queen's University described it as "English at its best, such as one would expect a king to use, clear and dignified, pure and undefiled, graceful, powerful."

Not all the tricks of oratory or flamboyancies of staging can do as much to present a truth as can simple statement.

Brightness cannot be given a talk by dipping into a rag-bag of clichés and threadbare thoughts and passing them out to an audience. Your address needs to contain clear-cut ideas that you will impress on people's memory by your use of appropriate language and well-timed illustration.

Plan to have at least one good fact and one good illustration under each head of your speech. The fact

may be from your own experience or from a book: but it must be brief, clear and pertinent. The illustration may be grave or gay, from poetry or the daily paper, but it must be fitting.

Accuracy should not be sacrificed to figure of speech or any other desirable accessory of your speech. Be sure that you know all you should know about your subject. When you analyze your subject in a competent manner you set up a safeguard against vagueness and ambiguity, the great enemies of the communication of ideas.

It is a good plan to be continually taking your soundings during the writing of your speech. Test what you have written: does it correspond with the facts?

Check what you have written against your sources. You can make it easier to do this if you jot down in the margin of your manuscript a note telling where you found quotations, ideas and facts. Abbreviations are handy: for example, "CYB 126" means "I found this in *Canada Year Book* at page 126"; "ML Jun '58 3" means "I saw this in the *Monthly Letter* of June 1958 at page 3."

### *On being persuasive*

Persuasiveness must be built into the speech when you are writing it. Unless the *matter* is there to win people's support, the *manner* of presentation will largely fail. You are attempting to reach the mind of your audience, not only its ear.

Your speech should go beyond merely describing the course of action you advocate: it should arouse desire to follow that course. You can achieve this by expressing the purpose positively, creatively, and with enthusiasm.

Here is a skeleton upon which you may erect an address: (1) show that a problem exists or that a situation needs correction; (2) explain the essential elements of the problem or the various aspects of the situation; (3) tell about the failure of previous attempts; (4) show why your solution is the best one; (5) picture your solution in operation, including the benefits it will give to others and the satisfaction it will give to those who join in reaching it.

Don't forget to include a specific suggestion in your conclusion. Tell in definite terms the nature, place, time and method of the response you desire from the audience.

It goes without saying that persuasiveness should be honest. In whatever area of business and society communication of ideas takes place there always arises the question of truth and validity.

From earliest times the eloquence of persuasion has tended to turn men toward striving for victory at any price; it often falsifies directly or by innuendo or by omission; it often operates without reference to principles. We shall find it worth while in the interest of wide understanding among people to attack any speech-making that plays fast and loose with men's minds.

## *And now, to work*

Some persons can dictate or write a speech without effort, but most of us are not so fortunate: we have to work at it.

The easiest way to start is by blocking out roughly what your thoughts are on your topic. Make notes of ideas as you come across them. Don't wait till the subject is ripe before you pluck it: pluck it and then ripen it.

Get something down in black and white at once. Make an outline, if you wish, around the main headings: problem, cause, extent, cure. You may be assisted by the three suggested outlines you will find in "Writing a Report" (*Monthly Letter* of February 1952).

From that point you will find these six steps useful:

(1) Think about the subject selected. Consider the audience and its previous knowledge. Make a list of all the qualities that will tend to touch upon the vital interests of your audience: profit, parental love, ambition, comfort, self-preservation, and other motives. How can you relate these to the topic so as to illustrate your viewpoint and strengthen your arguments?

(2) Consider what you should cover in your introduction, in which you pinpoint your purpose; in your discussion, in which you make your points in an orderly and progressive way; and in your conclusion, in which you focus and re-emphasize the important points you made and appeal for the desired action.

(3) Read widely to amplify your ideas. Read all sides of a question: only by doing so can you be qualified to answer in your address any objections that may arise in the minds of your audience.

(4) Write your speech.

(5) Revise your script. Is it complete, clear and convincing? Has it character?

(6) Practise your speech on your feet against time, and make the necessary cuts.

## *About building material*

Step three is most important. It is an essential condition of a good and fine speech that the mind of the speaker be acquainted with the truths of the matter he is discussing.

By what standards should building materials be judged, and where are the materials to be found?

One point of judgment is accuracy. Is your material correct technically? Is it up to date? Is it true not only in itself but in this application of it? Is it understandable by this audience?

When you come to the point of consulting books, pick a few of the most promising authoritative texts, skim through them until you find the best for your purpose, and concentrate on that. If there are gaps between what you have at hand and what your outline

calls for, fill them in from other books without allowing yourself to be lured into bypaths. If the subject is a progressing one, check the latest periodicals for developments more recent than those recorded in your books.

## *Writing the speech*

You must put your notes into order so that as you talk your way through them the audience will be able to follow easily. Your speech needs composition as well as substance.

If you have jotted down facts, points and illustrations on separate pieces of paper, all you need do is arrange these slips in an intelligible sequence.

Then start writing. Use a free manner: get your thoughts down on paper and leave the spit and polish until later. Write as you would talk, for after all your written speech is merely an advance report of the real talk.

How much you should write depends upon the speaking time allowed you, what you have to say, the nature of your subject, and your accustomed speed of talking. A generally accepted good rate for platform speaking is 125 words a minute. If you are allowed 25 minutes, and have enough pertinent material, you can use 3,125 words — about the length of this *Monthly Letter*.

You don't need to feel ashamed of having a script in front of you when you are speaking. Your audience will not object, because your thoughtfulness in preparation makes it easier for them to follow your address.

Even Cicero, the great Roman orator, made it his custom to prepare his speeches with care, and to deliver the important ones from manuscript. Those who watched the political leaders on television during this spring's election campaign saw men thoroughly practised in public speaking using written speeches, even though they said the same things night after night. They know the virtue of staying on the beam, and of making sure the right words are used to carry their meaning to their audiences.

If you are to be an effective public speaker you must prepare your speech with the rules of speech delivery in mind. Some of these rules are: don't speak in a monotone; never make the audience feel inferior; give an effect of rhythmic movement to your words; let your speech march.

How are you going to do these things unless you have built them into your written speech as an integral part of the way you put your words and sentences together?

The preparation of a speech is simple, when it is done in this orderly way. Compared with the elaborate counsels of the books on rhetoric, how trivial these hints are! But for most men and women, not seeking to be orators but to communicate their ideas, they are enough.