

Toastmasters Speech 1: The Ice Breaker

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Ice breaker (or *Icebreaker*) is a term which describes an activity which **reduces tension and anxiety** in a group. Thus, it is fitting that the **first Toastmaster speech project** is titled *The Ice Breaker*.

This article of the **Toastmasters Speech Series** examines the primary goals of this project, provides tips and techniques, and links to numerous sample speeches.

Why is This Speech Important?

The Ice Breaker speech has three aims:

1. **Introduce yourself.**

Your ice breaker speech topic is you – something about your life, your job, your hobbies, your unique interests, your family, or any combination of these. You are an absolute authority on this topic, and everyone in the audience will learn something about you.

2. **Begin to conquer the fear of speaking in front of a group.**

It is nervewracking when speaking in front of a new group. If you feel this nervousness, remember that a Toastmaster audience is always supportive and understanding. Nobody is grading you, and nobody will mind if you stumble

through 99 “Um”s and “Ah”s. If you get up, say something, and sit down, **you have succeeded** in this project.

3. **Provide a “base line” of your current strengths and weaknesses.**

Some new members have no public speaking experience, while others have years of presentations behind them. No matter where you fit into this spectrum, your goal is to improve from your starting point. This first speech helps club members gauge your current strengths so that they can make specific recommendations to help you improve.

Tips and Techniques

The *Competent Communicator* manual has a wealth of helpful advice. You can **download** a PDF version here: [Toastmasters Speech 1 – Ice Breaker \(PDF\)](#).

Here are a few other things which may help you:

“Nobody expects you to be a world-class orator. Just do your best.”

▪ **Ask for Help**

If you have a mentor, don’t hesitate to ask them for help. If you don’t, feel free to ask any other club member. Perhaps they can share what they spoke about for their Icebreaker. Perhaps they can help you select a topic. Perhaps you can practice it privately before the meeting. All other members have gone through the Ice Breaker before, and can provide **words of encouragement**.

▪ **Practice Helps**

You don’t need to practice the speech 35 times, and you don’t need to have it memorized. However, your nervousness will be reduced considerably if you give it a couple of practice runs **out loud** (even if your only audience is you).

▪ **Timing**

The recommended time for the Ice Breaker speech is four to six minutes. It may seem like a long time, but in later projects, you’ll start wishing you had much more time to deliver your message. Don’t worry too much about going under or over time. Just aim for somewhere in that range.

▪ **Notes**

There are no rules on the use of notes. If you need notes, use them. If you don’t need notes, don’t. Either way, don’t worry about it. It’s okay if you read

your ice breaker from a script (just try to look up once in a while), if you refer to cue cards, or if you talk without notes.

- **Don't Expect to be Winston Churchill**

This is your first challenge. Nobody expects you to be a world-class orator. Just do your best. Once you have established your "base line", then you can aim to raise your skill level in future projects.

- **Speak Up and Slow Down**

Two common effects of nervousness are mumbling words and racing through the speech. Try to avoid these, but don't worry if you can't help it.

- **Humour Reduces Your Nervousness**

If you are comfortable incorporating humour into your ice breaker, go for it. The laughs from the audience will reduce your nervousness. An easy way to do this is to make a self-deprecating joke at the start. (If nobody laughs, don't worry about that either... it's something to work on later.)

- **Apologizing**

You may feel an urge to **apologize to your audience** (e.g. for uttering too many "Um"s, for losing your place, etc.). There is no need to do so! Often, the audience doesn't notice the little glitches, and it is much better for you to ignore them too.

Topic Ideas for Your Ice Breaker Speech

Although your broad topic is yourself, there are numerous angles to take, and several ways to organize your speech.

Don't worry too much about the organization of the speech; later speech projects (especially #2 and #3) encourage you to focus more on that. However, having said that, one of these ideas may help you overcome writer's block.

Idea #1: Chronological

For many people, a series of chronological snapshots of their life is the easiest to write and deliver.

Example: Ravi Singal takes this approach with his Ice Breaker: *Why Me? Try Me!*

Example: Oleg Kagan starts at birth in his **Ice Breaker speech**.

Idea #2: Topical

Discuss a series of elements of your life to provide a “sampling” of your life. For example, you could open up by talking about your family, then discuss your career, and conclude with your hobbies.

Example: Bob Cain addresses his love of travel, then photography, and then his career/education in his *Ice Breaker speech*. (video)

Idea #3: Common Thread

Select a common thread that runs through your life, and share brief stories where this common element appears. It might be a signature phrase, a philosophy that guides you, or even something obscure like peanut butter. (i.e. imagine stories through your life where peanut butter played a role)

My own Ice Breaker speech followed this general structure. It was titled “*Andrew of All Trades – Master of None*” and touched on several examples where I have breadth, but not depth of knowledge.

Example: Steph Corwin provides a great example with her Ice Breaker titled *Swimming Through Life*.

Idea #4: One Key Event

Focus on one critical event which took your life in a completely different direction.

Example: Tanya Huang talks about moving continents in *Made in Taiwan, Calibrated in Canada*.

Idea #5: How I Got Here...

A combination of #1 and #4, explain the **series of decisions or events** that brought you “here”, where “here” might be the place you currently live, the job you currently have, the life you lead, or the decision to join Toastmasters.

Example: Tracy Buxton does this wonderfully in her Ice Breaker titled *I used to be June Cleaver, but I’m not sure who I am now*.

Example: Jill Williamson also demonstrates this approach in the aptly titled *How I Came To Be Here*. (video)