

How to Deliver a Manuscript Speech

Brief: During a manuscript speech, the speaker essentially reads that complete text to an audience from either a paper script or a teleprompter.

Learning Objective: Demonstrate how to deliver a speech directly from a manuscript.

Key Terms:

- Manuscript: A written text or composition.
- Manuscript speech: A written text read to an audience from a paper script or a teleprompter.
- Proclamation: A formal public announcement.
- Verbatim: Word by word exactly.

What is a Manuscript Speech?

The word manuscript is derived from two Latin words, “manu scriptus,” that mean “to write by hand.” Before the invention of the printing press, all documents were written by hand. In today’s digital age, the word manuscript has come to mean the original version of any complete text.

During a manuscript speech, the speaker essentially reads that complete text to an audience from either a paper script or teleprompter. Manuscript speeches are typically used when time is limited or when the speech will be livestreamed.

Delivering a Manuscript Speech

Your manuscript delivery method will vary depending on whether the manuscript is your own or someone else’s. If you’re given a manuscript written by someone else, you’ll need to deliver it verbatim, without adding your own thoughts or comments.

However, there may be other situations when you’re presenting your own thoughts and you want to present them exactly as you originally wrote them. In those cases, you’ll need to prepare your own manuscript.

Delivering Someone Else’s Manuscript

If you’re provided with a manuscript written by someone else, you will need to delivery it exactly as written. Keep in mind, you’re sharing the original author's ideas and not your own. This type of manuscript may take many different forms, such as a short story, a poem, or an article. In some cases, you may be provided with a special type of document called a proclamation.

With a proclamation, the wording is exact and must be read exactly as written, as it is a distinct speech act that causes specific consequences. If the proclamation you're reading says, "I now declare..." then by reading those words out loud you are actually decreeing that declaration to be true.

If you've been assigned to deliver someone else's manuscript, you usually have time to prepare. Once you understand the author's meaning, then you can practice reading the manuscript in a way that creates a conversational delivery by emphasizing important words, create vocal phrases with the right words together, and vary the pace and emphasis to convey the meaning of the original.

Delivering Your Own Manuscript

If you are preparing your own manuscript for delivery, first consider your audience. Who are they? Then, write for them as if you were speaking directly to them. Remember, you're not writing a book. Instead, you're writing a speech that will be orally delivered. When you deliver the speech from manuscript, you are challenged to make a connection with the audience.

Preparing your own manuscript will assure that you will say everything you want to say. However, this will make it challenging to maintain eye contact and a warm, conversational style.

Working with a Teleprompter

One way to increase eye contact and presence with the audience while delivering a manuscript speech is to use a teleprompter, which is a display device that prompts the person speaking with an electronic visual text of a speech or script.

Using a teleprompter is similar to the practice of using cue cards. With professional teleprompters, you can see the words on the screen in front of and usually below the camera lens of a professional video camera. Since you do not need to look down to consult written notes, you appear to be speaking spontaneously and can look directly into the camera lens or the audience. Less expensive software versions of teleprompters are now available to closely replicate an experience similar to the professional versions.



President George W. Bush delivers the 2007 State of the Union address. Note the glass teleprompters to his left and right.

From Concept to Action

You may think that being able to read your speech, word by word, makes public speaking easy. The truth is that delivering a manuscript speech, while maintaining eye contact and speaking in a conversational style, is actually extremely difficult. Not convinced? Try it yourself. Select a long piece of expository writing, such as an article from a magazine or a passage from one of your textbooks. Read it to yourself a couple of times until you feel you have a good sense of what the author intended to say. Then, stand in front of a mirror and read the piece out loud in a conversational tone of voice, at the same time that you attempt to maintain eye contact. How'd you do? What's your ratio of looking down to read to looking ahead to make eye contact? Were you able to make enough eye contact to convince your audience that you're speaking directly to them?

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