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## THE PORRO PASSAROUND TIPS FOR COMMUNICATORS

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### KEEPING THAT SPEECH GOING

After sweating bullets, you've finally found a great way to start that speech you're working on, but now what? How do you move that speech from the opening through points A, B, and C to the end. In this issue we suggest some ways to pump up the critical elements in the body of a speech.

- [1] Speeches: Pairing opposites
- [2] Speeches: Those pesky transitions
- [3] Speeches: Don't forget the kryptonite

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#### 1. Speeches: Pairing opposites

Every Speechwriting 101 seminar will advise you (correctly) to liven up your speeches by using quotes and telling stories. One way to boost the impact of quotes or stories is by pairing opposites. That is, illustrate a message point by pairing quotes from two very different kinds of people, or by pairing stories that describe people in two very different situations.

For example, in a speech about the need to keep hope alive in the battle against disease and world poverty I quoted two women: one white, famous, and Republican (Clair Booth Luce); the other poor, little known, and African (an HIV-positive mother whose children also had the virus.) In a speech about corporate citizenship, I included the story of a company that did all it could to right a wrong (Johnson & Johnson), and contrasted it to a company that did all it could to cover up wrongdoing (Enron).

Pairing opposites can not only grab your listeners' attention, but also fix a quote or story in an audience's mind.

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Porro Associates LLC helps corporations and nonprofits improve the written and spoken materials they use to reach key audiences. <http://www.porrolc.com/results.html>

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## [2] Speeches: Those pesky transitions

They are some of the least exciting, but most challenging parts of a speechwriter's job: writing transitions from one part of the speech to the next. It's easy to get excited about preparing an attention-grabbing opening, or a powerful conclusion. Even the individual elements in the body of a speech – anecdotes, arguments, jokes, etc – can be fun.

But figuring ways to let a speaker move smoothly through his or her speech can be drudgery. Nevertheless, those transitions are critical. You want the audience to experience the speech as a seamless whole, and not be jarred into thinking “Where did that come from?” So what is a writer to do?

A little humor can help. I read a speech the other day during which the executive handled a transition by saying, “In conclusion, now I'm sure those words got your attention.”

You can also show that you identify with the audience: “At this point you may well be wondering, how can we solve the problems he has just described?”

I also find that questions can work well: “But none of this will make any difference unless we can answer the question, What comes next?”

“That's why I'm involved, but why should you get involved?”

Or you can give your audience a preview of what is on deck: “To this point, we've been talking about this issue in the abstract. Let's turn to why it affects every person in this room, right here, right now.”

Transitions take practice, but they are worth the effort.

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## [3] Speeches: Don't forget the kryptonite.

“Superman is boring without kryptonite.” Those are the words of Brian Lanahan, one of the founding partners of a company called Character, LLC. He works with advertisers to boost the impact of the characters companies use to sell stuff -- Mr. Clean, Finn the Goldfish, etc. (Check out the article about characters in the always-interesting newsletter, FREE-RANGE THINKING. You'll find it at [http://www.agoodmanonline.com/pdf/free\\_range\\_2006\\_04.pdf](http://www.agoodmanonline.com/pdf/free_range_2006_04.pdf))

While Lanahan was talking about advertising, what he said is very useful for speech writers, too. The PASSAROUND has often sung the praises of using stories in speeches, and we've highly recommended making those stories about people.

It turns out the most compelling people stories tend to be about men and women who have flaws. Those flaws – mistakes in judgment, insensitivity, missed opportunities, etc. – make it easier for the audience to identify. They also add drama to your story, making it more compelling.

One of the best speeches I ever heard was by a powerful PR executive who told about the time she had accidentally betrayed a confidence, creating a huge mess and angering her superiors. She had the audience of cynical PR pros in the palm of her hand as she told what happened, and how she managed to recover.