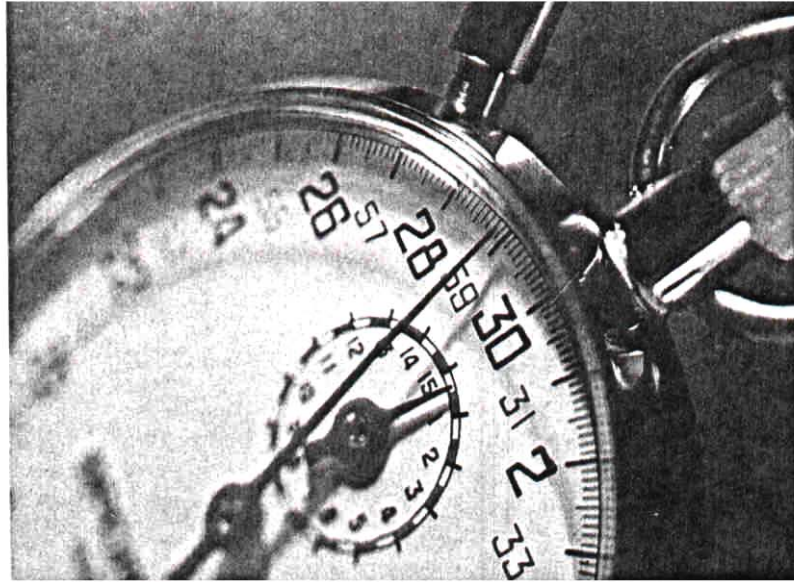


Speedy Delivery

How to chop a speech by minutes at the last second

BY JEFF DAVIDSON



You're ready to give your 45-minute, post-lunch presentation, but you're told that someone is going to make some unscheduled comments before you go on. The person's remarks are supposed to last six to eight minutes, but you soon realize that six to eight minutes is quickly becoming 15 or 20. As you're about to be introduced, you realize you now have only 27 minutes to give your speech. Here's how you should prepare to handle the situation.

Don't make excuses.

Avoid saying things like, "If I had more time," or "Well, I had prepared for 45 minutes." This doesn't help you, the audience, or your host. Simply use

the time you've been given in the best manner you can.

Be flexible.

Well-prepared and seasoned speakers have already timed the different segments of their presentations, using an approach that enables them to customize speeches for various groups. With this approach, they also know that if the "a-b-c" story is eliminated, they can save five minutes, and if the "d-e-f" suggestions are pulled, they'll save another three.

Time yourself.

The situation can be tougher if your speech is sequential in nature; in other words, the listener has to hear "a" and "b" stories in order to reach "c" and "d" conclusions, and if a powerful climax is based on everything preceding it.

In this case, carry a display timer with you (not a bad idea at any time), preferably one you can attach to the lectern in front of you. A wristwatch just doesn't do the trick. It is hard to see—and you don't look good sneaking a peek at it during your speech. You can set a timer for any length of time and it will count down, showing how much time remains, then beep. To avoid the beep, I set my timer for five minutes more than I have, knowing that I need to finish by the five-minute mark.

Bring handouts.

If it's within your desire and resources, during your presentation, tactfully offer to make additional handouts available

to cover the points you no longer have time to address or detail.

Finish on time.

Strive to be the one speaker at the meeting or convention who gets the meeting back on schedule. Few speakers are penalized for speaking too little. Many lose the respect of their listeners for rambling on too long. You can become a hero to the host or meeting planner, and possibly the larger group, by getting things back on track.

Keep it a secret.

After the speech, don't mention the time truncation to anyone. Chances are your ability to make do with less time will be the subject of praise you receive from others. Give your best, even if it's for 27 minutes. Often the audience doesn't realize the time difference.

Focus on audience needs.

Maybe the president's 18 minutes bored people. People may need to use the restroom. Perhaps the morning activities were draining. Your 27 minutes—and the fact you finished on time—could be the bright spot in a person's day.

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