UNIT-14: REPORTING PUBLIC SPEECH

UNIT STRUCTURE

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- learn how to cover public speeches
- understand the basic methods of writing news stories from public speeches.

14.2 PREPARING TO REPORT A SPEECH

An important part of a journalist or a reporter's job is to attend public events, cover the speeches delivered by important guests, celebrities, politicians or government authorities and the discussions carried out among people of importance and then write a news story out of those speeches and discussions. This includes covering government events like parliamentary sessions or local council meetings; political party meetings promoting electoral candidates; meetings organised by special interest bodies like chambers of commerce, parents and teachers associations, environmentalists, trade unions and women's groups; or those by educational, cultural, social or religious groups. In this unit, we shall discuss about how to report such public events.

Speeches and meetings are both unlike interviews, where the journalist is an active participant, putting questions and able to ask for more details. At speeches or meetings, a reporter usually has no control over where and when they take place, or the subjects under discussion. In an interview, reporters guide their interviewees through questioning. At speeches and meetings the speakers themselves decide what they want to say. The journalist has to listen to what is being said and select which parts to make notes on before writing the news story.

It may seem that journalists have no control over collecting news at speeches and meetings. This is not so. There are several things you can do to help you get the information you need to write your story.

Many organisations will inform the press about dates, times and venues of their meetings, so that the events get coverage in the news. Lots of organisations have regular weekly, fortnightly or monthly meetings. But you will get some of your best leads on meetings by regular and careful reading of the public notices columns of the newspapers, or from posters stuck on walls, trees or lamp-posts. If the organisers think that a meeting is important or interesting enough to advertise in the newspaper or on posters, it may be interesting enough to report.

You must make sure that you have the correct date, time and venue of the speech or meeting by double checking with the organisers. One way to prepare to cover a public speech is to request the organizers for the speaker's profile or look him up on the internet ahead of time. Try to get some background information on the topic and look at articles previously written on it. Also, see if you can either get a copy of the speech beforehand or at least talk to the speaker in advance to get a feel for what the speech will cover. This way you can write a skeleton outline in advance and fill in the details during the speech. Of course, you may learn of the speech so close to deadline that this may not be possible.

You must make sure that you reach on time, perhaps a little ahead of time so that you get a good seat from where you can see and hear the event well. Also, it is advisable to be on time so that you don't miss the beginning or any part of it. You must also be equipped with a pen, notebook,

camera and a recorder to take notes and photographs and to record the speech so that you can listen to it later to extract accurate quotes for your report.

14.3 COVERING THE SPEECH

When covering a speech you must try to figure out its purpose. The four possibilities are:

1. The speech is aimed to inform the audience
2. The speech is meant to persuade the audience
3. The speech is meant to move the audience into action
4. The speech is meant to entertain the audience.

You should then try to listen to the points being made by the speaker. Normally, a speech will be divided in three parts: the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

The introduction itself gives an idea of the purpose of the speech. You then need to listen to the points the speaker is making to give substance to the purpose. Finally, the conclusion will inform the audience of how the speaker proposes to achieve the objective.

It is not necessary to summarise the whole speech or include every single detail. But you must be able to identify the key points and note them down accurately. Many speeches have a pivotal moment that defines them. Maybe speaker says something controversial or suggests an unusual plan of action. If audience has a strong reaction to something said, chances are that's the takeaway moment. The take away moment is what you should lead with, and go into more detail later in your story.

If you are given a copy of a prepared speech, make sure you follow it as it is presented, just in case the speaker adds anything or leaves something out. In your notes, mark in the margin or underline those parts which are most interesting and which might produce your story line.

Once the meeting is over, do not hurry to get out of there, unless you

have another event to cover. You should try and talk to members of the audience and get their reactions. If you had difficulty in understanding any part of the speech, it is always better to reconfirm and clarify your doubts rather than presenting a story with half truths and misplaced information. Often speakers get misquoted and their words placed out of context leading to their portrayal in the wrong light.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. What is the difference between conducting an interview and covering a speech?

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Q. 2. How should one prepare to report a public speech?

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Q. 3. What are the things to focus on while listening to a speech being delivered?

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14.4 WRITING THE SPEECH STORY FOR PRINT

Now that you have got all your notes, it is time to transform it into a news story. It is important to keep in mind that you have a message to deliver to the readers and not simply summarise what happened at the event.

As mentioned earlier, it is your responsibility to identify the important parts and filter out irrelevant parts of the speech, keeping in mind what the audience is looking for and what the audience deserves to know. You must maintain a balanced approach as you write the story, making sure to confirm sources and not to misconstrue any part of the actual event. Here is a commonly followed speech report structure:

1. The lead: the most newsworthy point the speaker made. If the speaker is not well-known, such as a famous person, it's probably best to use a delayed identification lead.
2. Second paragraph: powerful quote from speech to reinforce the lead.
3. Third paragraph: where, when, why the speech was given.
4. The rest of the story: combines quotes, descriptions, background information and audience reactions.

Having done your pre-speech reporting, you can write out a background copy for your story even before the speech begins. This is especially helpful if you'll be writing on a tight deadline. Background material, which typically goes at the bottom of your story, includes the kind of information you gathered in your initial reporting – the background of the speaker, the reason for the speech, etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- 2

Q. 4. Fill in the blanks.

(i)The _____ is the most newsworthy point the speaker makes, which is included in a speech story.

(ii) A speech report must be written from a _____ approach



14.5 LET US SUM UP

- An important part of a journalist or a reporter's job is to attend public events, cover the speeches delivered by important guests, celebrities, politicians or government authorities and the discussions carried out among people of importance and then write a news story out of those speeches and discussions.
- Speeches and meetings are both unlike interviews, where the journalist is an active participant, putting questions and able to ask for more details. At speeches or meetings, a reporter usually has no control over where and when they take place, or the subjects under discussion
- Many organisations will inform the press about dates, times and venues of their meetings, so that the events get coverage in the news. Lots of organisations have regular weekly, fortnightly or monthly meetings.
- Normally, a speech will be divided in three parts: the introduction, the body and the conclusion.
- It is important to keep in mind that you have a message to deliver to the readers and not simply summarise what happened at the event.
- It is the reporter's responsibility to identify the important parts and filter out irrelevant parts of the speech, keeping in mind what the audience is looking for and what the audience deserves to know.



14.6 FURTHER READING

1. Dowerah, Sawpon, A Students' Grammar of English, Guwahati : Students' Stores,
2. Sarkar, P. K. De, Higher English Grammar and Composition, Kolkata : Book Syndicate.
3. Taid, T. and U. Dutta, English for School (A Practical Approach to English

Grammer and Composition), Guwahati : Students Stores.

4 Wren and Martin, High School English Grammar and Composition, New Delhi : S. Chand & Company.



14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No 1 : Speeches and meetings are both unlike interviews, where the journalist is an active participant, putting questions and able to ask for more details. At speeches or meetings, a reporter usually has no control over where and when they take place, or the subjects under discussion. In an interview, reporters guide their interviewees through questioning. At speeches and meetings the speakers themselves decide what they want to say. The journalist has to listen to what is being said and select which parts to make notes on before writing the news story.

Ans. to Q. No 2 : You must make sure that you have the correct date, time and venue of the speech or meeting by double checking with the organisers. One way to prepare to cover a public speech is to request the organizers for the speaker's profile or look him up on the internet ahead of time. We must try to get some background information on the topic and look at articles previously written on it. Getting a copy of the speech beforehand or at least talk to the speaker in advance to get a feel for what the speech will cover will enable us to write a skeleton outline in advance and fill in the details during the speech.

It is also important to reach on time, perhaps a little ahead of time so that we could get a good seat from where we can see and hear the event well. We must reach on time also so that one doesn't miss the beginning or any part of it. We must also be equipped with a pen, notebook, camera and a recorder to take notes and photographs and to record the speech so that you can listen to it later to extract accurate quotes for your report.

Ans. to Q. No 3 : It is not necessary to summarise the whole speech or include every single detail. But we must be able to identify the key

points and note them down accurately. Many speeches have a pivotal moment that defines them. Maybe speaker says something controversial or suggests an unusual plan of action. If audience has a strong reaction to something said, chances are that's the takeaway moment. The take away moment is what we should lead with, and go into more detail later in our story.

Ans. to Q. No 4 :

(i) Lead

(ii) Balanced



14.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q.1 : What are the different parts of a speech?

Q.2 : Why is it important to find out the purpose before covering a speech?

B. Short questions (Answer each question in about 150 words):

Q.1. How does reaching the event venue on time help in reporting a speech?

Q. 2. How should one prepare before going to attend a meeting to cover?

C. Long questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words):

Q. 1. What are the basic methods of writing news stories from public speeches?