

Wedding Speech Survival Guide

The Complete Guide to Writing and Delivering a Wedding Speech That Makes You Proud

By Tony Winyard | Wedding Host & MC | 2,500+ Weddings

The 2 AM Panic

It's 2 AM. You're staring at a blank page.

The wedding is in three weeks. You've been asked to give a speech. And right now, lying in the dark, your brain is running through every worst-case scenario.

What if I forget everything?

What if I tell that story about the stag do and the bride's mum never speaks to me again?

What if I ramble for 20 minutes and watch people's eyes glaze over?

What if I'm just... boring?

You're not alone. This exact spiral hits almost everyone who's asked to speak at a wedding. The groom at 4 AM wondering how to describe his wife without sounding like a greeting card. The father of the bride writing draft after draft, deleting everything. The best man with seventeen stories, all of them inappropriate.

I've heard over 7,500 wedding speeches. The brilliant ones. The awkward ones. The one where the best man made the bride's mother cry—not from laughter.

Here's what separates the speeches people still talk about from the ones everyone forgets by dessert:

Preparation. Structure. Practice.

Not natural talent. Not "being a good speaker." Those things help. But they're not what makes the difference.

This guide gives you everything. The framework that works. The templates you can steal. The delivery techniques that transform nervous shuffling into confident presence.

Let's fix that 2 AM panic.

Part 1: The Timeline That Actually Works

6+ Months Before: Plant the Seed

You've just been asked to speak. Good news: you have time.

One action that changes everything: Join Toastmasters International.

Not the red-jacketed toastmasters at formal events. Toastmasters International is an organisation dedicated to improving public speaking. Clubs meet weekly or fortnightly. Around 60 in central London alone.

I've been a member for over 10 years. I've watched people join specifically for wedding speeches. The transformation? Remarkable. And here's the bonus: the skills transfer to work presentations, meetings, any situation where you need to speak without your voice shaking.

Visit toastmasters.org/find-a-club. Enter your postcode. Visit for free before joining. Membership runs £80-100.

Even if you don't join—just attend three meetings. Watch how others handle nerves. Pick up techniques. It's free research.

3-4 Months Before: Gather, Don't Write

Don't write yet. Gather.

- Note down stories as they come to you
- Text friends and family: "What's your favourite memory of [Bride/Groom]?"
- Look through old photos
- Write down specific details: dates, places, exact quotes

The key word: specificity.

"They met at university" = forgettable.

"They met at the worst student bar in Leeds, bonding over a shared hatred of the DJ's music choices" = memorable.

Specificity is the difference between a speech people remember and one that sounds like a template.

6-8 Weeks Before: Write Your First Draft

Now write. Don't aim for perfect. Aim for complete.

Get everything down. Too long is fine. You'll cut later.

Write more than you need. It's easier to remove than to add when you're panicking at 2 AM.

4-6 Weeks Before: Refine and Practice

Read your speech aloud. Time yourself. Cut ruthlessly.

Ask yourself: *Would I want to sit through this?*

Every story must earn its place. If you can't explain why a story matters, it doesn't belong.

2 Weeks Before: Final Polish

By now, you should know your speech well. Not memorised word-for-word—that sounds robotic. But familiar enough that you only need prompts.

Know your first line by heart. Know your last line by heart. The middle can be prompted.

The Week Before: Light Practice Only

Don't over-rehearse. You'll sound stale.

Run through it once or twice. Stay sharp. Don't peak too early.

Part 2: Who Speaks (Traditional and Modern Options)

The Traditional Order

1. Father of the Bride (or family representative)
2. The Groom
3. The Best Man

This order builds energy. The Father sets a warm tone. The Groom responds with gratitude and love. The Best Man brings celebration and humour.

Modern Variations

Here's something I notice at weddings: speeches don't have to be all male.

The couples who break this pattern? Their guests love it.

Options that work brilliantly:

- The Bride speaks (alongside the groom or separately)
- Bridesmaid or Maid of Honour gives a speech (just as the Best Man does)

- Mother of the Bride or Groom speaks
- Both partners speak together (particularly powerful at LGBTQ+ weddings)

No right answer. Choose what's true to your relationships.

Part 3: What to Include (By Speaker)

Father of the Bride

Your purpose: Welcome everyone. Set the emotional tone.

Include:

- Welcome to the groom's family, relatives, friends
- Express pride in your daughter—be specific, not generic
- Welcome your new son/daughter-in-law to the family
- A few words of wisdom
- Toast the couple

Avoid:

- Speaking longer than 7-8 minutes
- Making it about yourself
- Focusing entirely on the past (acknowledge the future too)

Sample opening: "For those who don't know me, I'm [Name], and I've had the privilege of being [Bride's] father for [X] years. Today, I gain a son/daughter. I couldn't be happier about who she chose."

The Groom

Your purpose: Thank everyone. Express your love.

Include:

- Thank the Father of the Bride for his words
- Thank your own parents
- Express gratitude to all guests
- Share briefly how you met (optional but always lands well)
- Mention anyone who couldn't be present
- Thank and compliment the bridesmaids

- Toast your new spouse

Avoid:

- Rushing through thank-yous like a shopping list
- Forgetting to look at your partner when talking about them
- Going longer than 8 minutes

Sample closing: "I've spent years wondering how I got so lucky. Standing here today, looking at you, I still don't have an answer. I just know I'm grateful. To my wife: here's to us."

The Bride

Your purpose: Add your voice and perspective.

More brides speak now. It's always a highlight.

Include:

- Thank guests for being there
- Share your perspective on the relationship
- Thank those who helped plan the day
- A heartfelt moment about your new spouse

Can be combined with the groom's speech or standalone. Your call.

The Best Man

Your purpose: Celebrate the groom. Entertain the guests.

Include:

- Thank the groom on behalf of the bridesmaids
- Congratulate the couple
- Share stories about the groom (tasteful ones)
- Highlight how lucky your friend is
- Toast the couple

Critical warning: Keep it Disney-friendly.

What's funny to your mates at the pub? May horrify Grandma.

Avoid:

- Stag do stories
- Ex-girlfriends/boyfriends

- Anything you'd be embarrassed to say in a job interview
- Inside jokes only three people understand

Sample opening: "For those who don't know me, I'm [Name], and I've been [Groom's] best friend for [X] years. Which means I know all his secrets. Don't worry, [Bride], I'm only sharing the good ones."

Bridesmaid or Maid of Honour

Your purpose: Celebrate the bride. Welcome the groom.

Include:

- Stories about your friendship with the bride
- Welcome the groom to your circle
- Observations about what makes them perfect together
- Toast to the couple

Part 4: Writing Your Speech

The Structure That Works

Every great speech follows this pattern:

1. **Opening Hook** (30 seconds) Grab attention. Don't start with "Hello, I'm..." Start with something that makes people want to listen.
2. **Your Relationship** (1 minute) Who are you? Why are you speaking?
3. **The Stories** (3-4 minutes) Two or three specific, detailed stories. Not lists of qualities. Actual moments.
4. **The Sentiment** (1-2 minutes) What does this person mean to you? What do you wish for their future?
5. **The Toast** (30 seconds) Clear ending. Raise your glass.

What Makes a Story Work

Strong story:

"I knew they were perfect for each other when we were at that terrible restaurant in Brighton—the one with the dodgy fish—and [Groom] spent the entire evening making [Bride] laugh so hard she couldn't eat. That's when I thought: *he's the one.*"

Weak story:

"They're really happy together and always have fun."

The difference? The first is a moment. The second is a summary.

Moments stick. Summaries vanish.

Openings That Work (Steal These)

Instead of "Hi, I'm [Name], the best man..."

Try:

- **A question:** "Has anyone here ever tried to explain cricket to someone who doesn't care? That's what being [Groom's] best friend is like."
- **A surprising fact:** "When [Bride] first told me about [Groom], her exact words were 'He's a bit weird.' Clearly, she was sold."
- **A contrast:** "Ten years ago, if you'd told me [Groom] would be standing here, married, I'd have assumed you meant married to his PlayStation."

The first 30 seconds earn—or lose—the room's attention.

The 5-7 Minute Rule

The ideal speech length.

Shorter = you haven't said enough. Longer = you're testing patience.

At normal speaking pace, that's roughly 750-1,000 words.

Time yourself. If you're over 8 minutes, cut.

Part 5: Delivery Tips

Notes: Index Cards vs A4 Paper

This matters more than you think.

A4 paper problems:

- Takes a moment to find your place each time you look up
- Holding paper up hides your face (photographers hate this)
- A4 sheets shake visibly if you're nervous

Better approach: Index cards

- Better eye contact
- Easier handling (less visible shaking)
- More natural, conversational delivery

If you prefer full text, that's fine. Leave space between lines. Write on one side only. Number each card in case you drop them.

Microphone Technique

Hold it directly in front of your mouth.

Not at your belly button. Not at your chest. Not at your chin.

Directly in front of your mouth.

When you turn your head, keep the microphone in front of your mouth. Sound follows direction.

If you hear feedback, don't panic. Pause. Hold the mic directly in front of your mouth. It will subside.

Eye Contact

Find the friendly faces. Your partner. Your best friends. Parents.

Make eye contact with them.

Don't look at the floor. Don't look at your notes the whole time. Don't look at the back wall.

Look at real people who want you to succeed.

Pace

Most nervous speakers go too fast.

Consciously slow down.

Pause before important lines. Let the moment land.

A pause feels twice as long to you as it does to the audience.

Managing Nerves

Before the day:

- Practice out loud at least three times
- Record yourself and listen back (painful but useful)

- Perform in front of one trusted person for feedback

On the day:

- Limit alcohol before your speech. The myth that you're funnier after a few drinks? It's a myth.
- Take slow, deep breaths—expanding your stomach, not your chest
- Remember: everyone in that room wants you to succeed

During your speech: If you forget your lines, smile. Say "What I meant to say was..." and continue. Show you're human. They'll warm to you.

Part 6: Final Checklist

Two Weeks Before

- Speech written and timed (5-7 minutes)
- Practised out loud at least three times
- Someone you trust has heard it and given feedback
- Index cards or notes prepared
- Opening line memorised
- Closing line memorised

One Week Before

- Light practice only (don't over-rehearse)
- Speech order confirmed with the couple
- Know whether you're introducing the next speaker or being introduced

On the Day

- Notes in your pocket
- Toasting glass nearby (check it's full before you start)
- Alcohol limited until after your speech
- Find the MC/DJ before speeches start (they can help calm nerves)

Speech Templates

Father of the Bride

[OPENING - 30 seconds]

Welcome everyone to this celebration. For those who don't know me, I'm [Name], [Bride's] father.

[YOUR RELATIONSHIP - 1 minute]

I've had the privilege of watching [Bride] grow from [specific childhood detail] into the remarkable person standing here today.

[STORY 1 - 1.5 minutes]

I'll never forget when [specific story that shows her character]. That's when I knew...

[STORY 2 - 1 minute]

And then there was [Partner]. I remember when [Bride] first told me about them. She said [specific quote or observation].

[WELCOME TO THE FAMILY - 1 minute]

[Partner], you're not just gaining a spouse today. You're gaining [specific family traits/traditions]. Welcome to the chaos.

[SENTIMENT - 1 minute]

[Bride], watching you today, I'm so proud of [specific quality]. Your mother and I love you more than words can say.

[TOAST - 30 seconds]

Please raise your glasses. To [Bride] and [Partner]. May your love grow stronger with each passing year.

Groom

[OPENING - 30 seconds]

Thank you, [Father's name], for those kind words. And thank you for trusting me with your daughter/son.

[THANKS - 2 minutes]

To my parents: thank you for everything. [Specific example].

To everyone here: thank you for travelling from [mention far locations] to be with us.

To the bridesmaids: you've been incredible. [Partner], you look beautiful today.

[YOUR STORY - 2 minutes]

I want to tell you about the moment I knew.

We were [specific scene]. [Partner] was [specific action/quote].

And I thought: this is the person I want to spend my life with.

[ABSENT FRIENDS - 30 seconds]

I wish [Name] could be here today. They would have loved this.

[TO YOUR PARTNER - 1.5 minutes]

[Partner], I've spent years wondering how I got so lucky.

You make me [specific way they make you better].

I promise to [specific, meaningful vow].

[TOAST - 30 seconds]

Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses.

To my husband/wife/partner. To us. To love.

Best Man

[OPENING - 30 seconds]

For those who don't know me, I'm [Name], and I've been [Groom's] best friend for [X] years. Which means I know too much. Don't worry, [Partner], I'll behave. Mostly.

[YOUR RELATIONSHIP - 1 minute]

I first met [Groom] [where/when]. He was [funny observation].

I thought: this person is going to be trouble.

[STORY 1 - 1.5 minutes]

The thing about [Groom] is [character trait]. Let me give you an example. [Specific story - keep it appropriate].

[STORY 2 - 1 minute]

But here's what you might not know. Behind the [exterior trait],

[Groom] is [deeper quality]. When [serious example].

[ABOUT THE COUPLE - 1.5 minutes]

When [Groom] met [Partner], something changed. He became [positive change]. [Specific example of how partner brings out the best].

[SENTIMENT - 1 minute]

[Groom], you're not just my best friend. You're [what they mean to you]. And [Partner], thank you for making him so happy.

[TOAST - 30 seconds]

Please raise your glasses. To [Groom] and [Partner].
May your love be modern enough to survive Wi-Fi outages and old-fashioned enough to never need to.

Bridesmaid/Maid of Honour

[OPENING - 30 seconds]

Hi everyone. I'm [Name], and I've had the honour of being [Bride's] friend for [X] years.

[YOUR RELATIONSHIP - 1 minute]

We met [where/when]. From the first moment, I knew [Bride] was special. She [specific quality shown through example].

[STORY 1 - 1.5 minutes]

One of my favourite memories is [specific story about your friendship].

[ABOUT THE COUPLE - 1.5 minutes]

When [Bride] first told me about [Partner], she said [specific quote]. I could hear it in her voice. This was different.

The first time I met [Partner], I knew [observation about why they work].

[WELCOME TO THE GROOM - 30 seconds]

[Partner], welcome to the chaos. You've passed the friendship test. Mostly.

[SENTIMENT - 1 minute]

[Bride], you deserve all this happiness. Watching you today,
I'm so proud to call you my friend.

[TOAST - 30 seconds]

Please raise your glasses. To [Bride] and [Partner]. May your
marriage be filled with the same laughter that fills your
friendship.

Quick Reference Card

Print this. Keep it in your pocket.

Before you start:

- Glass is full
- Notes are ready
- You know your opening line

As you speak:

- Hold mic in front of mouth
- Find friendly faces
- Slow down
- Pause for impact

If something goes wrong:

- Smile
- "What I meant to say was..."
- The audience wants you to succeed

Your toast: "Please raise your glasses to [Couple]. To love, laughter, and a lifetime of happiness."

About Tony Winyard

2,500+ weddings. Over 7,500 speeches heard.

The difference between the ones that land and the ones that fall flat? Rarely natural talent.

Preparation. Structure. Delivery.

I offer speech coaching for anyone who wants personal guidance—from structure and writing to managing nerves on the day.

Book a free 15-minute consultation: <https://www.winyard.com/contact>

Your speech doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be you.

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