

# Graduation Speech Contest Guidelines

April, 2015

Utica High School has a tradition of open try-outs for graduation speeches from members of the senior class. Any senior may try-out. Speeches must be entirely written and delivered by the student. One speech is selected by the judges to be given at the graduation ceremony.

## **What is the purpose of a graduation speech?**

Since graduation marks the end of thirteen years of formal education and a beginning of decades of learning, this speech is a “crossroads” speech. The purpose of the speech is to remind people of the past and encourage them to consider the future having great expectations.

Because this is the last time this class will assemble, it is the final opportunity to speak about common experiences and future dreams. Just think, if you are selected, you will be representing your entire class. Your family will be proud, and this will be a memorable experience that you will share throughout your lifetime.

## **Why have a competition?**

We hope that three things will happen as a result of the speech competition. First, all seniors will have an equal opportunity to participate for this honor. Second, the competition will spur more student interest in both the speech and the graduation ceremony. Finally, the quality of the speech selected will be of high caliber due to offering seniors an opportunity to compete.

## **What shall I speak about?**

This is a commencement speech. Commencement is defined as a beginning or start. The occasion marks the start of something new, which, in turn, marks the conclusion of your shared experience in high school. Your task is to bridge that gap, reminding people of the past and imploring them to consider the future. The speech should represent you, but should do so in a way that those in your audience (students, parents, relatives, teachers, admins, etc.) can relate to themselves. Your talk should be poignant but should do so relative and complimentary to the occasion, not to steal its thunder. The lesson should be important, powerful, and one that you can connect to your classmates’ lives as they move from high school to the future.

You may choose to select a quote or metaphor that is particularly meaningful and use that as a focal point in the speech. Though not a bad idea, remember that there have been a lot of graduation speeches, so be careful of quotes/metaphors that may lead you down a predictable or overplayed path. Again, you can use personal experiences to support the quote you chose and work to connect the quote to your audience.

### **Who are the judges?**

Utica High School staff members volunteer to serve as judges. We generally get a cross-section of teachers from different departments, along with administrative personnel. Some judges will be English teachers, but the majority will be from other disciplines. If a particular staff member has assisted you with your speech and he or she is also judging, this person will abstain from judging your speech in order to maintain the integrity of the adjudication process.

### **What are the requirements?**

Length of speech: 2 – 3 minutes – the speech cannot extend beyond 3 minutes. The average speaking rate is 150-165 words per minute. So, if you've written over 450 – 500 words, you've gone too long!

All speeches must have the following:

- An introduction, body and conclusion
- Clear, appropriate, organized content
- Correct grammar usage
- A creative/inspirational/encouraging message

**IN ADDITION TO YOUR COPY, PLEASE BRING ONE ADDITIONAL COPY OF YOUR SPEECH FOR THE JUDGES TO KEEP. TOTAL COPIES – 8.**  
**THE OFFICE SECRETARY CAN ASSIST YOU IN MAKING ADDITIONAL COPIES PRIOR TO THE CONTEST DATE.**

### **Can I get help writing my speech?**

Yes, of course, you can get help writing your speech. In fact, we encourage you to seek help. Teachers, parents, family and friends may have helpful ideas. If you do not have a strong public speaking background, there are faculty members who are particularly helpful in guiding students with the public speaking process - see Mrs. Bronski in room 240, or Ms. Kevonian in room 235 for support and guidance.

We strongly suggest you have an English teacher critique your speech for English usage, grammar, and continuity of ideas.

Another suggestion is to ask the Media Center Clerk, Mrs. Driscoll, to assist you with videotaping yourself as a rehearsal. Seeing and hearing yourself will be very valuable to you.

### **How many speeches are selected?**

Again, only one speech is selected by the judges to be given at the graduation ceremony.

## **What do I do now?**

Before you start writing –

- Consider your purpose: What are you there to say? What do you want to communicate and why?
- Consider your audience: Who will be present that day?  
Fellow students, parents, other relatives, school staff, family and friends.
- What do they expect to hear?  
It should have some connection to everyone.
- Communicate: Talk about your experiences with friends, parents, and teachers. See if they have any ideas, examples, stories, or quotes that would support your experiences.
- Brainstorm: Using a sheet of paper, give yourself 5 minutes and write down your ideas. Don't censor your ideas! After you are done brainstorming, review your list and line out ideas that you don't like. Add ideas that come to you as you review what you have written on your paper.
- Outline: Make an outline of the main points you would like to cover. An outline helps you see what the speech will look like later and helps when you write it by keeping you on track.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Draft: Write a *first draft* of the speech. Just getting something on paper is important. Review the rough draft a day or so later. Decide what looks good to you, what you want to delete, what you want to write more about, and the order of your ideas. As you work through the first draft, read the material aloud so you can hear how it sounds.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft: Upon completion, share your *second draft* with some people who will give you objective comments. Get some ideas on what needs work. Write your final draft of the speech.

Practice your speech in front of a mirror and time the speech.