

Will Your Speech Be a Horror Story? Toastmasters Tips for Accepting an Oscar

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They love you! They really do! And now, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences is honoring you with its top award... an Oscar. This is your moment of glory! You've been allowed all of 40 seconds to soak up the limelight, boost your career, thank the right people -- and perhaps most importantly, let the voters know they've made the right choice. What you say in those few seconds might be your most memorable words, ever!

And so, your speech becomes like a character in a movie. It takes on dimensions and traits all its own. It can be the splendid ruler of the evening, setting you above the rest, or it can be the bad guy with the chainsaw, hacking away at your stardom. Don't worry about jinxing your win or appearing too confident. There's only the Academy, asking, "May we quote you?"

Whether you're accepting an Oscar or any other award, preparation is the key to being quotable. Toastmasters International President Chris Ford says, "Every acceptance speech should demonstrate gratitude, recognition and sincerity -- and good delivery." He offers the following tips for adding rhythm and pacing to your award acceptance speech:

- Write your speech as a script, and memorize it!
- Pause, smile and count to three before saying anything. ("One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand. Pause. Begin.")
- Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves. Remember, the audience is rooting for you.
- Practice, practice, practice! Rehearse with a timer and allow time for the unexpected.
- Control filler words (ums and ahs; "you knows"). To do so, see above points: Practice, pause and breathe.
- Keep names to a minimum and get them right!
- Include a brief but touching anecdote or little-known fact regarding the role or job you are recognized for.
- Mainly, your acceptance speech should represent you -- as a professional and as a person.
- Concentrate on your message. You have important thoughts to convey, so focus on your speech, not on the audience.
- Make your last line expendable, in case you are cut off.

Toastmasters International has spent the last 84 years helping people all over the world become more confident in front of audiences large and small. Headquartered in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, the nonprofit educational association has 220,000 members in 90 countries. For more information and to find a meeting near you, visit www.toastmasters.org.

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