



Speechwriter Savvy: How to Make Your Ideas Remembered, Repeated, Reported and Retweeted

By Pete Weissman

How to Write a Sound Bite

Definition: A short, catchy phrase that someone takes from your presentation.

- Should be the core idea or a main point
- Longer than a bumper sticker or book title
- Only need one or two sound bites per speech

The Weissman Wordsmith Formula (4 Steps)

1. _____

Share your main point or what happened.

2. _____

Share your take on it.

- What does it mean?
- Is it good or bad in your view?
- What's the impact (on people, institutions, an industry/company, society)?
- What happens next?

3. _____

Capture a sense of conflict, drama or emotion.

Example: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" - President Ronald Reagan



4.

**Use rhetorical devices to make your phrase catchy, melodic, and/or visual.
Of the 8 devices below, you only need to use one or two in a sound bite.**

1. Rhyme

Examples:

“If the gloves don’t fit, you must acquit.” – Johnnie Cochran

“Specificity builds credibility.” – Patricia Fripp

“Turning tragedy into destiny.” – Ken Futch

Tip: Use a rhyming dictionary or website.

2. Alliteration – Repeating the initial sound in a series of adjacent words.

Example: “Write a sound bite to be remembered, repeated, reported and retweeted.” – Pete Weissman

3. Parallelism – A series of lines or phrases that follow the same pattern.

Example: “... we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” – President Kennedy, Inaugural Address

4. Anaphora – Repeating the same word or phrase at the start of a series of lines.

Example: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right ...” - President Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address

5. Epistrophe – Repeating the same word or phrase at the end of a series of lines.

Example: “... and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” - President Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

6. Metaphor (or simile) - Comparing two unlike things

Example: “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.” – Winston Churchill



7. **Opposites/Contrast**

Example: “Desmond Tutu walks into darkness and always finds the light. He sees the best in people as he confronts the worst in people.” - CEO presenting an award

8. **Echo** (Chiasmus) - Two similar phrases that are connected by a reversal in order.

Example: “Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.” – President Kennedy

Example of a finished sound bite:

“That’s one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.” – Neil Armstrong

Rhyme
Alliteration
Parallelism
Anaphora

Epistrophe
Metaphor
Opposites/Contrast
Echo

Tips to get started writing your sound bite:

- What is the main idea you want people to remember?
- What is the biggest change in your field about which you have a strong opinion?
- Enlist a friend to brainstorm.
- Once you have a first draft, try to cut out words.
- If it sounds awkward or overdone, make it more conversational.

Bonus Tip: The Sound Bite Spectrum

Stump
Speech



News
Story

**If you are sharing your idea in a stump speech,
emphasize: _____ and _____.**

**If you are responding to a news event and trying to get quoted by the media,
emphasize: _____ and _____.**



How to Create a Powerful Speech

Ask and answer these four questions before you begin drafting your speech.

Question 1: _____ ?

Why it's vital: Captures the audience's attention by showing that your remarks are relevant and valuable.

Tips: Interview the event organizer and likely audience members. Think about past clients. Ask:

What frustrates them? What keeps them up at night?

What concern brings them together? What would they love help solving?

What language do they use to describe what's wrong and how it makes them feel?

Use their specific language.

Question 2: _____ ?

Why it's vital: Differentiates you and your message from other speakers on the topic. It also allows you to make a personal connection with listeners and to speak with authenticity.

Tips: Look at your background, upbringing, education, career path, obstacles, lessons learned and biggest surprises.

Also, think about how your "weaknesses" could be strengths?

Ask: How did you get involved in this field?

Was there a moment of insight or discovery?

Did you make a big mistake and learn from it?

Question 3: _____ ?

Why it's vital: Helps ensure your message is clear. Helps you chose what to keep -- and what to cut -- from your draft.

Once you've decided on this, make sure every example and point supports it.



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Question 4: _____?

Why it's vital: It can help make your remarks worthy of media attention (i.e. - if you localize a national news story or provide a new angle on a hot topic).

Listener Questions and Discussion

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