

MODULE

# 06

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## Speech Font

No more than five words per line — the technique that changes everything

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## WHAT THIS MODULE COVERS

Steve tells audiences not to read a speech but to read the audience. This module is the exception: a way to read every single word and have nobody notice.

Speech font has been around a long time, and it does two things at once. First, it **slows you down**, because there are only a few words per line — your eye drops, collects them, delivers them, and needs a small pause before the next. That pause is exactly what the ear wants.

Second, and more powerfully, each four or five word segment becomes a container you can load with a technique. Mark one segment "happiness" and you deliver it with a smile. Mark the next "indignation." Put repetition in the third. Accentuate a word in the fourth. Bold might mean the voice rises, italics that it falls. Build whatever cheat sheet works for you.

The format: **no more than four or five words per line**. About half a dozen lines per page. Only the top two-thirds of the page — you do not want the audience watching you look all the way down and come back up. **26-point font**, because at the eighteen inches to two feet a speech usually sits from your eyes, that is what the human eye can reliably collect at a glance.

Words on one side of the page only. If they are front and back, the words land in a different place each time you look down and the rhythm breaks. Steve recommends a three-ring binder; for outdoor speeches, plastic sleeves so pages do not stick.

People he trained twenty years ago still use speech font and are considered terrific speakers. He has watched someone deliver a twenty-minute speech this way and had audience members tell him afterwards it was clearly off the top of the speaker's head. Every word was read.

**4-5**

maximum words per line

**26 pt**the font size that  
works at speech**2/3**of the page — never to  
the bottom**1**

side of the paper only

## KEY CONCEPTS

### Why eight words fails

People arrive at training having "used speech font" with eight words a line. It does not work: you deliver four, come up, then have to find where you left off in the middle of a line. That split second wrecks the rhythm.

### The segment cheat sheet

In the margin beside each segment, note what you want it to do — an emotion, repetition, an accentuated word, a pause. The goal is that every segment sounds different from the one before it.

### Teleprompters are speech font

Leaders using teleprompters are running the same principle with better technology: a few words per line, with emotional variation mixed in.

#### FROM THE VIDEO

### Lyndon Johnson's first State of the Union

Johnson had to address a nation still reeling from Kennedy's assassination, knowing he was not a great speaker and that many Americans were unsure about him. There were no communication trainers then.

A surviving copy of that speech shows his own cheat marks in the margins. In several places he had written: pause, pause, pause. He knew he had to stop and let the words land.

## REMEMBER

- Four or five words per line. Not eight. Not six.
- 26-point type, top two-thirds of the page, one side only.
- Every segment should sound different from the one before it.
- Done well, nobody in the room knows you are reading.

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**PRACTICE**

# Exercises

Type directly into the shaded boxes below and save the file. Come back to your answers after you have practised — this is your record of what changed.

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**EXERCISE 1**

## Convert a real speech into speech font

Take something you actually have to deliver. Retype it at 26 point with no more than five words per line, filling only the top two-thirds of each page.

**Type your opening eight segments here, one per line, five words maximum.**

**Beside each segment above, what technique will you use? Emotion, repetition, accentuation, or a pause?**

Tick each one once you have done it:

☐ Converted at least one page to speech font

- ☐ Checked no line exceeds five words
- ☐ Printed at 26 point, one side only
- ☐ Put it in a binder or sleeves

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## EXERCISE 2

### Read it and film it

Deliver your speech-font page to camera. Watch it back. Can you see yourself reading?

Compare it to your baseline recording. What changed in your pace?

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## BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

One thing from this module I will use the next time I speak:

When and where I will use it: