

So you want to be our graduation speaker? Congratulations on NOT having glossophobia, i.e. a fear of public speaking. According to most studies, speaking in public is the #1 fear of most Americans. Death is #2. So your willingness to serve as speaker puts you above and beyond your average graduate. Note, however, that willingness alone does not a Commencement Speaker make. From here, you will need to turn your willingness into **W.O.W.**

## What is W.O.W.?

**Woo Us with Persuasion**—Your first challenge is to Woo the committee. The best way to Woo and the proper path to persuasion include the following recommendations:

1. **Dress Appropriately**—You have one opportunity to make a first impression to the committee.
2. **Keep it Short** — You are allotted 3-5 minutes to deliver your address. Students who go over 5 minutes are at risk of being disqualified.
3. **Choose a Theme**—Choose a central theme/thread and see it through from start to finish. This is a good way to ensure the audience will still remember your speech long after the ceremony is over.

**Overwhelm Us with Story**—Stories connect with the parts of our brain that are responsible for memory and emotion. If you want to “win” your audition AND evoke an emotional and memorable response on graduation day, your only choice is to Tell Stories! Here are some storytelling suggestions:

1. **Show, Don't Tell**—Instead of telling us about your CBU experience, show us your experience by sharing a story (or two) that illustrate(s) your central theme.
2. **Humor Us**—Most people associate graduations in general, and graduation speakers specifically, with being boring. You can quickly overcome this association by employing an appropriate amount of humor. Don't go out of your way to be funny. But don't be afraid to make us laugh, either.
3. **Be Universal**—Your stories need to be your stories and come from your heart. Nonetheless, they also need to be stories that EVERYONE in the audience can relate to and understand. Yes, your friends and family will be there to celebrate you, but your speech needs to be “appropriate and interesting” for ANYONE who might be in the audience.
4. **Make it Personal to CBU**—This is a “CBU” Commencement ceremony and your speech should help the audience identify with the culture, purpose and/or vision of this University

**Win Us Over with Poise & Polish**—Graduation is CBU’s opportunity to showcase our finest product, i.e. graduating students. If selected, you will represent the best that CBU has to offer. Here are three tips for ensuring excellence in your audition:

1. **Grammar Matters**—Find someone who is willing to edit your speech and eliminate all obvious errors. Verb agreement, split infinitives and dangling participles have, hopefully, mattered during your CBU sojourn. They will matter on your last day, too.
2. **Practice**—Ed Arke, Communication Professor at Messiah College suggests the following: “Read the speech aloud ahead of time to get a sense of how the words flow. You’d be surprised how many speakers don’t do that. On the other hand, when speeches are over-rehearsed, the timing is no longer there. Good speakers also are able to edit on the fly.”
3. **Use Active Voice**—Passive voice (the stage was crossed by the graduate vs. the graduate crossed the stage) makes you sound “weak, indirect and under-informed.” Needless to say, CBU is looking for a strong, direct and well-informed student speaker.