

Work Out Your Stump Speech

In 1998, after ending *Seinfeld*, Jerry Seinfeld decided to start over. He threw out all his old jokes and started to create a new stand-up routine from scratch. You can see it all in the documentary *Comedian*. Even with Seinfeld's years of experience, what's fascinating is how often his jokes bomb.

At one point, he forgets the punchline to a joke. He's fumbling through his notes. An audience member even heckles, "Is this your first gig?"

But Seinfeld keeps working out the comedy act in what he calls the "smelly gym" of comedy clubs. Eventually, he creates a great stand-up act that showcases all fresh material.

So, if one of the best comedians has to work out his material in smelly comedy clubs, what makes us think we can jump up on stage, and get it right on the first try? We can't.

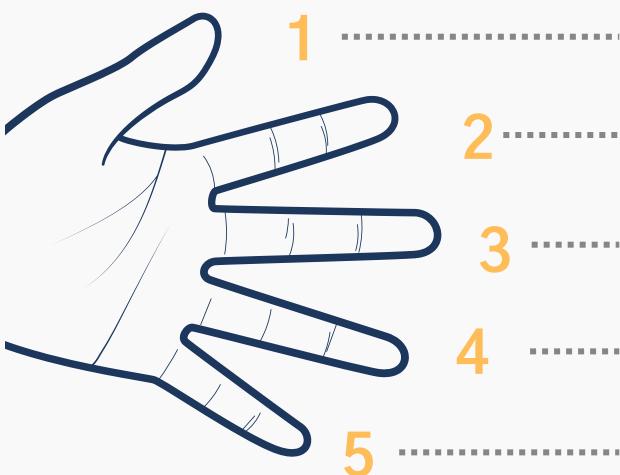


Jerry Seinfeld testing new jokes in the documentary *Comedian*

The good news is you have your own gyms to work out your stump speech.

Over the next few months, you will be working out your material at events ranging from low-stakes to high-stakes: Lincoln Day dinners, Rotary clubs, small talk at community events, luncheons, and so on. Each time you speak, you are testing out material to find what lands—and what doesn't.

Back in [Winning Edge #48](#), we talked about the Hand Framework for creating a speech:



The Goal	What do you want the audience to do and why aren't they doing it already?
The Hook	Grab their attention with a story, question, or statistic.
The Hold	Keep their attention with 3 things, 2 points or contrast, or 1 big idea
The Hurdle	Address the objection people won't say out loud.
The Handoff	End with a clear call to action of what you want them to do.

How to Test Your Stump Speech

Just like Seinfeld with a joke, you'll have an idea of what works, but you won't know what really works until you try it live. The audience is the only real judge.

This winter is the time to find out which stories land and which ones make listeners so bored they reach for their phones to check Instagram or X. Use the next two months to practice.

Hook: Test your opening

Test each of these different openings to find what works best for you.

- A story about why you're running
- A story that reveals your character
- A question that makes people think
- A surprising statistic

Hold: Test your structure

Find the structure that keeps people engaged.

- Three** things you'll do if elected
- Two** reasons you're running
- One** most important thing the state or your district needs

Hurdle: Test how you overcome objections

Address the elephant in the room

- Answer that big question or concern that the audience has about you.
- Say out loud what's already in their head.

Handoff: Test your close

The best speeches get people to take action.

- What's the action you want them to take?
- What closing strategy compels them to sign up, give, or volunteer?

The Bottom Line

For the next two months, treat every speaking opportunity as an experiment. Keep the material that lands and revise (or delete) the stuff that doesn't. Each repetition will make you better, so by spring you'll have a great stump speech.