

How to use this

These aren't finished jokes. A complete gag about someone nobody has met is exactly what makes a speech sound downloaded.

Every line has a **slot**, marked [like this]. The line gives you the shape; you supply the detail. A birthday joke with a real detail gets a laugh from people who've known them twenty years. Without one it gets a polite noise.

Four rules that matter more than the lines.

One: mock the pattern, not the person. A joke about a thing they reliably do is affectionate. A joke about who they are is a criticism with a laugh attached. The difference is invisible on paper and obvious in the room.

Two: always-does beats once-did. Everyone present has witnessed the pattern, so the laugh is collective. A one-off story only lands for the people who were there.

Three: one ageing joke maximum, aimed at a behaviour. "He now owns a coat specifically for the garden" beats "he's ancient". At a 70th or 80th, cut ageing material altogether.

Four: never mortality. Not "still with us", not "long may it continue", not "at his age". It changes the temperature of a room instantly and you cannot get it back.

What's not in here. Over the hill. Vintage, antique, classic model. Anything about them needing a nap, a stairlift, or reading glasses. The "not old, just retro" construction. Anything about hair loss, weight, or what the doctor said. Excluded on purpose: they're the lines every birthday speech already has, and half of them cost you the room.

Openers

Fifteen lines for the first thirty seconds.

1. For those who don't know me, I'm [name], and I've known [name] for [number] years, long enough to have been warned about tonight.
2. [Name] is [age] today, which [he/she/they] has been describing as "just a number" to anyone who'll listen, and several people who won't.
3. I've been given four minutes and a list of things I'm not allowed to say. The list is longer than the speech.
4. I asked [name] what [he/she/they] wanted me to say tonight. The answer was [quote], so I've ignored it completely.
5. I want to reassure the back of the room that I've been timed, warned, and edited by [name].
6. Right, can we get the music off? Thank you. This will be over faster than you think.
7. I've been writing this for [number] weeks, and you'll be able to tell which bits I did at two in the morning.
8. There are people here who've known [name] longer than I have, and I'd ask them to stay quiet for four minutes.
9. I'm told I'm the first of [number] speeches, which means I get the good material and you get the good mood.
10. Thank you all for coming, especially [name], who's come from [place], which involved [journey detail].
11. I did consider getting AI to write this. It offered me [generic cliché], so we're doing it by hand.
12. [Name] and I met in [year], at [place], under circumstances that [he/she/they] has asked me not to describe. I'll be describing them.
13. I've been asked to keep it clean. I've been asked by several people, independently, which I've chosen to find insulting.
14. I've got three jokes and one nice bit. We're currently at nought for three.
15. I'll be brief, largely because I've noticed how many of you are still standing.