

How to use this

These are not finished jokes. Finished jokes are the problem: a fully written gag about a groom you've never met is exactly what makes a speech sound downloaded.

Every line here has a **slot in it**, marked [like this]. The line supplies the shape. You supply the detail that makes it true. A joke with a real detail in it gets a laugh from people who know you; the same joke without one gets a polite noise.

Three rules that matter more than the lines themselves.

One: a joke lands better at the end of a section than the start. An opening joke has to carry what follows. A closing joke only has to land, and if it doesn't, you're already moving.

Two: aim down at yourself, sideways at the situation, and only gently at other people. The rule most speeches break is punching at the couple. You're allowed one, and it should be affectionate.

Three: two to four across a whole speech. Not more. A wedding speech with eight jokes in it is a set, and the room will start grading you.

What's not in here. The ring joke. The stag-do-photos joke. The one about him being whipped already. The "I've known him since we were four and he hasn't changed" joke. The ball-and-chain, the last-night-of-freedom, the mother-in-law. They are excluded on purpose. Everyone has heard them and they cost you more than they earn.

Openers (all roles)

Twelve lines for the first thirty seconds. Pick one. Never two.

1. For those who don't know me, I'm [name], and I've been [relationship] for [number] years, which I'm told is long enough to be trusted with a microphone. I remain unconvinced.
2. I was asked to keep this short, funny and clean. I've managed one of those, and you'll work out which.
3. I've been writing this for [number] weeks. You'll be able to tell exactly which parts I wrote at two in the morning.
4. [Name] asked me to do this back in [month], when [month] felt very far away.
5. I've never done one of these before, so I've been researching. It turns out the main advice is "don't do what you're about to do".
6. There are [number] people in this room and I know roughly nine of you, so the rest of you will have to take my word for a lot of this.
7. Before I start, [name] has asked me to remind you all that [genuine housekeeping detail]. That's the last useful thing I'll say.
8. Some of you have travelled a long way today. [Name] came from [place], which involved [specific journey detail], and I want that on the record.
9. I promised [name] I wouldn't mention [thing]. I'd like everyone to note that I'm keeping that promise, at some personal cost.
10. I'm going to be about five minutes. [Name] timed me at eleven yesterday, so we've all had a narrow escape.
11. I've been told the trick is to speak slowly and look at the back of the room. So if I appear to be avoiding eye contact with [name], that's technique.
12. Right, everyone got a drink? Good. That'll help.