

DWAYNE SMITH

CHAMPIONSHIP SPEECH BREAKDOWN

Speech Transcript:

I wanna put a song in **your** heart. Some glide in **your** stride. And some hump “mmp” in **your** bump. [H][R3][SM]

I want to do as the musical group *Sly And The Family Stone* said in 1969, “*I want to take you higher, ba-da-duh...*” [SM]

Mr. Contest Master, **Fellow Toastmasters** and **Guests**. [R3]

I want to take **you** to a higher understanding of **music in the key of life**. [CB]

I’ll share how music is related to **our** everyday lives, the influence of musical styles like Bebop and the Blues, and I’ll share how music can sometimes be the key to life. [R3][SM]

The music of **our** lives and the life of **our** music are woven into the fabric of **our** being. Life is music and music is life and surely **you** cannot have one without the other.

You see it’s **my** humble opinion that without music **you** aren’t living, **you** are merely existing. Like a shark in shallow water, like a bear cub who has lost its mother, like the ex-chief accountant at Enron. Merely existing...[H]x2[R3][SM]x2

Many of **us** don’t even realize that **we** go through life with musical accompaniment. [SM]

As babies **we** are rocked to sleep to the sound of a lullaby. Children learn about the world around them musically. “*I’m a little teapot short and stout, here is my handle, here is my spout. Well, thank you, thank you very much...*” [H][SM]

And have **you** ever been driving home after a bad day at work, heard **your** favorite song on the radio, and **your** spirits were lifted? [R3][Q]

Only music has that effect. And it doesn't matter what type of music **you** like.

Now, **my** favorite, one of **my** favorite styles of music is called bebop. It's a genre of modern Jazz that has severely revamped chord structures, unusually accented rhythmic phrasing, and lots of improvisation. [R3][PD][SM]x2

Many of **us** live **our** lives in a bebop kind of way, in that **we** tend to do things differently from others. **We** take **our** life as it comes and **we** make up stuff as **we** go along. [H][SM]

Now **you** may have figured out that beboppers don't like to plan. In fact, they like to do as the great Jazz singer, Ella Fitzgerald, once said, and I quote, "*a-skeeda-a-la-wee-deet-beet-beet weeee-dee-dil-doo bop bop ba-doo-wee-eeeeee.*" They just wanna live baby. They don't wanna plan. [H]x2[SM]x2

Another musical style that I like is called the Blues. Now the Blues is based on a simple twelve-bar musical pattern, and it talks about the hardships and sadness of life.

With subjects like, the dog died, the man cheated, the heart is broken, lost my job, can't pay the rent, the woman left me, took the kids and the **pink Cadillac with the diamond in the back**. Now that's sad. [H]x2

But the beauty of the blues is that it shows **us we** can take **our** hardest of hard times, the saddest of sad times, add a little waa-waaa, and some ca-ching **ca-ching**, and create a tune that'll make **your** heart sing. That's the blues. [SM]

A friend of **mine once went through** some hard times. Some sad times. Times that were so hard and so sad that he almost committed suicide. [SM]

His name is Benny, and his mother had passed away a few months earlier, and he just completed a nasty divorce.

Benny couldn't stand the idea that his wife no longer wanted him, or that one day his two young sons would be raised by another man. Benny felt that these and many other things were all coming down on him at the same time and the only way out of this mess was to end it all.

He rented a cheap hotel room. As he was sitting there on the bed listening to the little radio, trying to work up the nerve to pull that trigger, a commercial came on that played to the tune of the little teapot song. [CB][PD]

Benny thought back to the time that his youngest son was struggling to learn that tune, and he almost smiled.

When the commercial ended, the next song was one that reminded him of the time that he and his ex-wife were so in love. And as he began to reminisce about the good old days, he began to feel good inside.

But he quickly turned the radio off, click. Because as he told **me** later on, “*When you’re about to commit suicide, the last thing you wanna do is feel good. Ruins the whole moment.*” **[H]x2[SM]**

But wouldn’t **you** know it, as soon as he turned that radio off, he began to hear music from one of the other rooms. And they were playing his mother’s favorite song, *Amazing Grace*. **[R3](heard 3 songs)**

“How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found. Was blind, but now I see.”

And Benny could clearly see because he was convinced that God was telling him through music to stop feeling sorry for himself, to appreciate the things that he had, and to live. **[R3]**

And to this very day, Benny has never reconsidered suicide. **[ST]**

Ladies and Gentlemen, music is an important part of **our** lives. It is with **us** every day, in every way. **[CB]**

So, whether **you’re** in a bebop kind of mood, or in a bluesy mood. Whether **your** life is up, or whether **your** life is down. Remember this...**[CB][SM]**

Music might not save the world, but it might save **you**. Music might not save the world, but it gives **ya** something to dance to.

Music is not written in the key of “give up.” Music is not written in the key of “let go.” Music is not written in those keys, oh no!

Music might, music might, music might not save the world, but it eases the toils and strife, because **music is written in the key of life**. **[R3][CB]**

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 968

Speech Length: 7:24

Title: Music in the Key of Life

Click [here](#) to watch the speech.

COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 13**

This includes only parts that received genuine laughter from the audience. Laughter varies in intensity.

This speech averaged **1.76 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute) and **74.46 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

First laugh came at **0:10** of the speech.

He maximized his humorous lines by using an [element of humor](#) called a “Tag line” or a “Tag”. A tag is a funny line that comes after the main punch line and is usually directly related, or better yet, only funny when viewed in context to the original punch line.

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 2**

Foundational Phrase for this speech: **“Music in the Key of Life”**

“Music in the Key of Life” also happened to be the title of the speech, so the audience heard it 2 times before Dwayne said a word.

Not including the speech’s title, the actual Foundational Phrase was used only 2 times during the speech, which is relatively low for championship speeches. However, he spoke often of the connection between music and life and although it wasn’t the Foundational Phrase, it kept the theme alive and active in the minds of the audience. Not a bad strategy. Perhaps it could have been used one more time during Benny’s story, or right after it was resolved. Something like, *“In the hotel room that night, Benny encountered Music in the Key of Life.”*—I dunno, *something* like that.

Other notable and related phrases:

- *“...how music can sometimes be the key to life”*
- No including the Foundational Phrases, he had 9 sentences in his speech where mentioned the word (or a *variation* of the word) “music” and “life” together in the same sentence.

- **“You”; “Your”; “We”; “Us”; “Our” - x 39**

I included these words that were directly aimed at the audience, dialogue excluded (character and internal). Talking *to* the audience will be more “you/your” focused. This

could mean abstract ideas, “imagine this…” hypotheticals, concepts that describe how something works, etc. Those will naturally use more “you/your” words.

- **“I” or “Me” or “My” or “Myself” - x 12**

The original reason for tracking this stat was the thought that it might be useful to compare with the amount of “You” focused words. Turns out, it is. Just not in the way I originally thought.

The theory was, if this number was much greater than “You” focused words, it would show that the speaker was more “*me, me, me*” focused and not tailoring the message to the audience.

While that is a possibility, what I’ve found thus far is that it tells more about the content of the speech. More specifically, it tells us that there are personal stories being told.

**The total number counted does not include in-story character dialogue.

- **“Ladies and Gentlemen” or “My Friends” [MF] - x 3**

The speaker used “*Fellow Toastmasters*,” “*Guests*” and “*Ladies and Gentlemen*” to address the audience.

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 3**

Descriptive physical characteristics of people and locations. The ones I included were any overt words that described the setting for where the speaker was at during the story, where the speaker wanted to take the audience, or descriptions of people in the scene.

Describing complex processes may also be included since they are intended to make it easier for the audience to imagine.

Physical in this case is what was heard, smelled, and what was seen. It also means that “*We were at my house*” is not enough—this requires specifics that are intended to paint a picture in the minds of the audience. I intentionally left out what was felt emotionally or metaphorically.

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 5**

Humorous and other. It’s common for speakers to derive humor from callbacks to *something* or *someone* from the speech journey. Foundational Phrases after the first one are essentially [callbacks](#) as well.

The idea of a callback is to move on from “it” (the eventual callback) so the audience is no longer thinking about it, and then call it back later so it’s an “A HA!” moment of familiarity. For that reason, only *some* of the Foundational Phrases may be included, and some may not. If we exclude the Foundational Phrases that *were* included from the Callback total,

there were 4 callbacks.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 9**

The [rule of three](#) is all inclusive. Whether used for [comedic](#) effect or not.

It's common to see the Rule of Three used all at once in a single sentence such as, "*He was tall, strong, and mean.*" In this speech Dwayne used this technique often. He used it in humor, he used it when listing what he was going to tell the audience, and he used it when listing examples. It worked well with his singing and his use of rhyming.

- **Questions [Q] - x 1**

Questions directly aimed at the audience (rhetorical or not).

The original intent of the Questions category was to include only thoughtful questions—things that made the audience reflect on their lives. However, even benign or rhetorical questions aimed at the audience can help build a connection to the speaker, just as addressing the audience as "My Friends" or "Ladies and Gentlemen" does.

- **Time Transitions [TT] - x 2**

Transition words that indicated that there was a time change from the speaker's point of view. The idea is to show progression from one point in the speaker's life to another. So, if there are multiple time transitions within the same story, they may or may not be counted. These help to prepare the audience for a change in the story in order to prevent confusion.

- **Stories [ST] - x 1**

This includes all stories told throughout the entire speech. Some stories may be slightly exaggerated, but the idea is that the speaker is telling the audience a story that happened, either in their life or somebody else's. This does not include metaphorical stories, intentionally exaggerated tales or things like "Imagine you are..."

In this speech there was 1 story.

- **Stage Movement [SM] - x 16**

This section covers how many times the speaker moved to a different place on the stage during the speech. Minor movements for in-story character changes (for dialogue) or for small side steps for illustrating points or addressing different parts of the audience will not be counted. I'll also keep track of anything else that's notable about the speaker's stage movements.

***Initials were put at end of sentence if multiple Color Key elements were in the same sentence.

Observations:

- **Strong Opening:** Dwayne had a strong opening. He opened using the Rule of Three and he coupled it with rhyming and a musical vibe. The first sentence also gave a glimpse into what the speech was going to be about: *"I want to put a song in your heart."* On top of that, it was the first humorous moment of the speech.
- **Road Map:** This is rare to see in this speech contest, but he gave the audience a specific roadmap to where he was going to take them during the speech. He *"told them what he was going to tell them."*

This was the line that he used: *"I want to take you to a higher understanding of music in the key of life. I'll share how music is related to our everyday lives, the influence of musical styles like Bebop and the Blues, and I'll share how music can sometimes be the key to life."*

- **Humor Technique:** In the humor Color Code section above I mentioned Dwayne's use of "Tag Lines." Below are examples from the speech:

He added a tag to the Enron joke. The initial joke received a big laugh and then he followed it up with a tag to ride the laughter just a little longer. The tag was when he followed up with *"Merely existing."*

Another example of a tag is when he said, *"They just wanna live baby. They don't wanna plan."* Those came after his joke "quoting" Ella Fitzgerald.

And another: *"...took the kids and the pink Cadillac with the diamond in the back. Now that's sad."* The second sentence *"now that's sad"* is the tag.

Yet another one: *"Because as he told me later on, "When you're about to commit suicide, the last thing you wanna do is feel good. Ruins the whole moment." "Ruins the whole moment" is a tag.*

He maximized his humor and he did it with tags.

- **Props:** He didn't have a physical item. But, since he had a unique aspect of singing, I'd argue his voice played the role of a prop.
- **Inviting:** Dwayne came off as friendly and inviting. Both his laughter and his smile came off as authentic and it didn't take long for the audience to open up to him which is evident since his first humorous line came 10 seconds in.
- **Gestures:** Dwayne used big and descriptive gestures. I thought these were well done and not OVER done. This line is a good example: *"As babies we are rocked to sleep to the sound of a lullaby."*

When he talked about Benny trying to work up the courage to pull the trigger, he made a stop

gesture (palm forward) to indicate that a commercial came on the radio which caught Benny's attention and stopped him.

Another example is when Dwayne described the song that got Benny thinking about a time when he and his wife were so in love. As he said that, he interlinked his fingers to show their connection.

Throughout the speech Dwayne's descriptive gestures were done with purpose and they matched his words.

- **Facial Expressions:** Dwayne's facial expressions were deliberate, as in, he didn't hold back. He committed. Right from the start when he said "*Some glide in your stride. And some hump "mmmpp" in your bump*" he had a playful smile and went wide-eyed when he said, "*your bump.*"

Another example is when he was singing *Amazing Grace*. For the final line he matched the words perfectly with his facial expressions "*...was blind, but now I see.*" He closed his eyes when he said, "*was blind*" and opened them after he sang "*but now I see.*"

- **Vocal Variety:**

He had a **musical manner of speaking**. Sure, he had actual musical parts in his speech where he deliberately sang, but at times even his normal manner of speaking felt rhythmic like music. This made it easy to listen to and perhaps kept the audience under a spell, or, kept them guessing as to what would come next.

Power: This line was probably the most powerful in terms of how he used his voice: "*And Benny could clearly see because he was convinced that God was telling him through music to stop feeling sorry for himself, to appreciate the things that he had, and to live.*" Matched the feeling of the moment as well as the power of the words.

Contrast: To top it off he used brilliant contrast with his voice when he said this line: "*Whether your life is up, or whether your life is down...*" He had an earnest tone when it warranted, soft and sincere when it called for it, and powerful when it made sense. He had some of the best vocal variety I have seen amongst the champions.

- **Posture:** His posture was relaxed throughout. Almost groovy like. It fit his style of speaking and it felt "right" for this speech since music is fluid.
- **Word Choice:** When he talked about his friend's story, he introduced it with these words: "*...almost committed suicide.*" He didn't use a euphemism or a cliché. He used the most powerful words to say exactly what he wanted to say.

He also used a word I had honestly never heard before: Accompaniment
Looks a lot like the word "accompany" so it wasn't hard to determine its meaning, but here's the definitions just in case: **1.** *A musical part that supports or partners a solo instrument, voice, or group.* "*she sang to a guitar accompaniment*" **2.** *Something that is supplementary to or complements something else, typically food.*

- **Sculptured Speech:** The words he used in this speech, both for musical lyrics and normal speaking, were surgically chosen. The word choice was fantastic. It felt like there were zero wasted words,

almost like a poem or a song lyric.

On a side note, the earlier champions (90's & early 2000's) I've analyzed seemed to put a greater emphasis on the word selection as well. The more recent winners certainly put time into word choice as well, but it seems to me there is greater focus on other aspects such as delivery, stage movement, more emphasis on being funny, theatrics, etc.

- **Credibility:** He used famous support elements in this speech which helped with familiarity for the audience. He referenced *Sly and The Family Stone*, Ella Fitzgerald, impersonated Elvis, and he sang *Amazing Grace*. And let's not forget the teapot song. This helped make his content more relatable to the audience.
- **Interesting:** Of the champions that I've critiqued, this is one of the most interesting speeches I've heard. Dwayne spent a significant amount of time explaining *music*. On the surface it doesn't seem like it would be very engaging, almost as if it were data/information-driven, which is usually seen as dry or boring, but I found it fascinating. You could tell he was very passionate and knowledgeable about music and looking back, I don't recall ever being bored.
- **Personalizing a Story:** I haven't seen any research data to confirm, but based on my experience, I believe that stories involving the actual speaker, that is, either as the main character, or at least present in the story in some capacity, are more effective/relatable than telling somebody else's story.

That doesn't mean they can't nor shouldn't be used. In fact, there are many exceptional stories that can be effective, but there are ways to make third-party stories more personal.

First off, Dwayne transitioned into the story by telling the audience that a *friend* of his once fell on hard times. Right away they knew the story was going to be about someone that Dwayne knew personally—that makes it more relevant.

Then, he gave his friend a name, Benny, and with that he became an actual person. One other thing that made this story more connected to Dwayne is that he mentioned an exchange between him and Benny when he said this, "*Because as he told me later on, "When you're about to commit suicide, the last thing you wanna do is feel good. Ruins the whole moment."*

- **Benny:** The conflicts that were coming down on Benny were introduced in this order: Mother passed away, nasty divorce, his kids being raised by another man. They were in a sense resolved in the hotel room, but in the reverse order. The Teapot song that reminded him of his kids, the song that reminded him of the good times with his wife, and finally his mother's favorite song, *Amazing Grace*.
- **Context of the Conflict:** He gave brief but powerful examples to help the audience feel what Benny was going through in order to consider suicide. He mentioned that Benny's mother had passed away a few months earlier and that he just went through a divorce.

Those are terrible enough but then he followed that up with these: "*Benny couldn't stand the idea that his wife no longer wanted him, or that one day his two young sons would be raised by another man.*" I've never been divorced but those examples give me an emotional perspective as to what it would be like. I think it helped us connect more with what Benny was going through.

- **Emotional Threshold:** During the suicide story, he gave the audience a break in the form of laughter with this: *“Because as he told me later on, “When you’re about to commit suicide, the last thing you wanna do is feel good.”* The 2014 Champion of Public Speaking, Dananjaya Hettiarachchi, has a good [video](#) about not leaving the audience at a low point, and what Dwayne did in this speech was a good way of balancing the audience’s emotions.
- **Gurus and Side Characters:**
 - **Gurus:** At first, I had Music and Benny as the Gurus of this speech. But after examining it more, I believe Music was just a tool. It was Benny and his experience that were the true Guru of this speech. And if we take it further, Benny’s Guru would have to be God since he believed God was telling him *through* Music that he needed to live.
 - **Side Characters:** Dwayne, Benny’s mom, his ex-wife, and his two sons were all side characters. Side characters are part of the stories but don’t directly contribute to a learning moment. This isn’t a problem, just an observation. Side characters help give depth to a story. Additional note about this speech: Although they weren’t part of a story, I could also argue that the band *Sly and The Family Stone*, Ella Fitzgerald, and heck, even Elvis since Dwayne did a good impersonation of him, were side characters as well.
 - A Guru is someone or something in the speech that teaches the speaker (and ultimately the audience) something meaningful. As a speaker, you don’t want to be the wise Guru. You want to be the dolt who learns from the guru(s), and that’s who ends up teaching the audience as well. **Tip:** Self-deprecation can be an important element in allowing the guru to shine.
- **Unique Guru/Teaching Moment:** The speech really wasn’t about Dwayne at all, nor did he personally overcome any obstacle or challenge in his life (in *this* speech, anyway).

However, in a way, his love of music was his way of expressing how life made him feel depending on the moment, almost like it was his way to stay balanced through life’s ups and downs. But I digress.

Imagine for a second, though, that the story Dwayne told us about Benny was about himself instead. In that case I wouldn’t consider Dwayne the Guru, but because Benny is a third-party who has overcome a suicide attempt and had provided his advice after the fact, he himself can be considered a Guru. Benny’s story can also serve that purpose as well.

- **Concrete Resolution:** When he said, *“And to this very day, Benny has never reconsidered suicide”* he gave closure and a full resolution to Benny’s story. I believe it was a good addition even though the previous line could have technically been the line that resolved the conflict.
- **Teapot Song:** He brought this song up earlier in the speech when he talked about how children learn about life through music. And while it made sense on its own, I wondered *why* that song was used to describe how children “learned about the world.” When he circled back to it during Benny’s story, I understood why he used it beforehand. A creative use of a callback and in a sense, tied up a loose end.
- **Tie Up Loose Ends:** A common theme I’ve noticed in championship speeches is to open with something and then later close by circling back to it, or to “tie up the loose end.” In this speech Dwayne had a couple of parts that fit this description.

One of them is when he said, *“The music of our lives and the life of our music are woven into the fabric of our being. Life is music and music is life, and surely you cannot have one without the other.”* And then toward the end of the speech he says this: *“Ladies and Gentlemen, music is an important part of our lives. It is with us every day, in every way.”*

Similarly, and more importantly since it deals with his Foundational Phrase, is early in the opening of his speech he told the audience *“I want to take you to a higher understanding of music in the key of life.”* Then, the very final sentence of his speech he said this: *“Music might, music might, music might not save the world, but it eases the toils and strife, because music is written in the key of life.”*

- **Ending:** When the audience begins to clap BEFORE you signal to the Contest Chair that your speech is officially over, you have executed a flawless ending. If Dwayne still had more content after his final line, that would have been a failure on his part. Perfectly executed.

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Humor Suggestion:** When he said, *“I want to do as the musical group Sly And The Family Stone said in 1969, “I want to take you higher, ba-da-duh...”* he stepped on the audience’s laughter in order to greet the Contest Chair and the audience.
- **Contemporary Events:** Using references to contemporary events in your speech makes them difficult to stand the test of time. The joke about the ex-accountant at Enron was risky in this regard. I recall being a freshman in high school when that scandal took place, so I understood the joke, but just *barely*. Since this is an inspirational speech, I feel the speech should stand on its own no matter when or who listens to it, whether in the present or future. However, this is a speech contest and being able to use something that resonates with the audience (and judges) was probably the right choice for Dwayne. He did win after all...
- **Stage Movement:** I didn’t feel that there was any structure or purpose to his stage movements. However, it was by no means distracting. I liked it since it felt both comfortable and organic. Almost improvised, and that would fit the theme for the type of music he described (bebop), which consists of musical improvisations.
- **Weak Word?** For this line: *“...and I’ll share how music can sometimes be the key to life.”* Was there a better choice than *“sometimes”* in this sentence? I think he could have left that word out entirely and it would have made the sentence stronger. In a small way it works against his core message and Foundational Phrase by making it an *occasional* thing.
- **Pause:** After his final word, I would have paused a second or two longer. He was getting close to the time limit so I can understand why he quickly signaled the Contest Chair, but it would have been a little more powerful by holding that moment just a little longer. It was the finale after all.
- **Perfection:** He had a “restart” with this sentence: *“Now, my favorite, one of my favorite styles of music is called bebop.”* And, when he said, *“he’s began to feel good inside”* he said “he’s” instead of “he.” I only point these out to show that even the champions make mistakes.