



# THINKING OUT LOUD

## A PSA WHITEPAPER

### AI Will Lead to a Golden Age of Speechwriting. Will You Get There With Us?

*With passion and precision (and humor), the PSA's resident AI guru explains how AI streamlines the most tedious parts of this job, and enables rhetorical genius—for speechwriters who use it.*

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I would have killed to have AI when I began writing speeches.

I was at the Department of Agriculture in the Government of Canada where a team of four speechwriters—*four!*—would receive a speech request via passenger pigeon from the upper floors, we'd wait days for "input" from the policy police—who guarded their esoteric farming information like it was the Epstein files—and then mad-dash a draft through a gauntlet of approvals.

We'd tuck the speeches in a red file folder and physically walk them to the offices of various managers, sub-managers and flunkies. Only after a dozen (minimum) affixed their holy signatures to the folder, we would deliver it to the minister's office where a 20-year-old executive assistant whose last job was selling sweet corn on the side of the road, would carve it up like it was St. Sebastian.

The most stable part of that chain was the writing. Where I needed AI was *every other part of the process*. While I likely couldn't have done much about Sweet-Corn Sal in the Min Office, AI could have helped me get the speech information I needed faster, distill the data and cut through the jargon. What took weeks could have been completed in hours.

Which is why I get confused when I hear speechwriters proclaim that they'll never use AI, nor allow AI to replace them—then huffing off to their AI-assisted cars with their AI-assisted GPS and asking Siri if they can play the latest AI-generated playlist on their AI-based phones.

I'm not buying it—and neither should you.

The argument isn't whether AI will replace speechwriters—it won't. The real question is whether we have the willingness to recognize when the ground beneath our feet has shifted and adapt. Those who do will find that AI is a tool—a very powerful one, but a tool nonetheless—that will make speechwriters and communicators more strategic, more efficient and more indispensable. *In other words, it boosts your value.*

And there is no reason you can't keep using it as you've always used technology: responsibly and ethically. As I have been thinking and saying with increasing conviction over the last year or more, the best days of speechwriting aren't behind us, they're ahead.

Let's look at why, and how—and what speechwriters must do to secure this better future for our discipline.

Here are three reasons why AI boosts your value as a speechwriter.

## **First, AI can never replace great speechwriters.**

Let's address the panic: *"People are using AI to write their speeches!"*

*Let them.*

We've been down this road before.

Remember the fifty-dollar freelancers selling copy-and-paste speeches through home-built websites? The mid-level managers armed with PowerPoint and a disregard for time? Global leaders didn't dump speechwriters because of them. Leaders continued hiring good speechwriters and paying them well. Yet dangle generative-AI in front of us, and we're again reduced to a collective, quivering mess of insecurity.

Often it's because somebody told us that they'd considered hiring a speechwriter but simply used AI to produce their speech and "it was okay."

*Of course* it was okay. Give AI a few details, and it will give you *okay*.

A century of speeches have been *okay*.

Consider this as you plunk in "write me a eulogy for my mom" into Claude or Perplexity.

Good old mom—eight decades of waking up before the roosters to make you breakfast and plough the back forty with nothing but garden spade and gout so that she could put you through college ... *and you're fine with a eulogy that's "okay"?* For shame!

But don't blame the AI—take a wild guess at what those models were trained on?

Centuries of *okay*!

But when have speechwriters been paid to deliver *okay*?

If we're hired to write a speech, it's because *okay* isn't cutting it. Speakers worthy of our work don't want to sound like a template; they want to stand out. They want exceptional. They want it fast and they want it *right*.

Someone who can hear the insight between the lines, catch the anecdote buried in a casual aside, notice the contradiction between a leader's public posture and private fear, extract great ideas from a mess of information, know when to push, when to prune, and when to shut the hell up—and still be the

shoulder to cry on, the sounding board, and the steady hand offering tough but always fair feedback.

AI can sift information until it's red in the qubits, but it will never catch those things.

What all this new technology really shows is what our job has been all along: strategic, analytical and shaped by human judgement no machine can replicate.

### **Second, it makes you more efficient.**

When I gave the first AI for Speechwriting and Executive Communication webinar in September, none of the participants argued that AI was useless. What many struggled with was how to make it work for them. Some had tried an AI model once or twice and abandoned it because it didn't magically produce a finished speech.

But AI isn't a search engine and it's certainly not a speechwriter. It's an accelerator—one that speeds up the parts of our job that have always taken the longest.

Think about your own workflow. How much time on any one speech do you spend actually *writing*? Twenty percent? Fifty? The rest is spent waiting: waiting for input, waiting for data, waiting for the subject-matter expert who has been "in back-to-back meetings" since the Churchill administration.

AI doesn't replace the one-on-one conversation with your speaker or the expert who *really* knows their stuff; that's irreplaceable. What it does is slash the time between "I need to understand this" and "I now know enough to ask smarter questions."

Instead of waiting for information, AI models can help you:

**Synthesize scandalously long reports and PPT decks**, pulling out what you actually need without wading through the bureaucrat equivalent of a David Foster Wallace novel.

**Bypass information hoarders** who guard their expertise like Gollum, making you beg for every scrap.

**Translate jargon into English** before it makes your draft a cry for help.

**Spot blind spots and biases** you missed on your 52nd read-through at 1 a.m.

**Develop a clearer picture** of who you're talking to.

None of these tasks involve the words "write me" and/or "a speech." Instead, they get us to our information faster, allowing us to get to the drafting.

### **But what about the mistakes?**

Yes, AI models make mistakes. They misquote. They imply information—just as my kids imply that I will buy them a pony because we drove past a horse farm. AI models also love to create "hypothetical situations."

But let's not pretend speechwriters have ever lived in a world of perfect data and flawless drafts.

The difference between human error and machine error is that AI doesn't get worse the longer it works. It doesn't confuse "million" and "trillion" because it's pumping out speeches like a hummingbird on crack while juggling four deadlines and a family crisis.

I once wrote forty to fifty speeches in two weeks for a climate conference; the challenge wasn't the volume, it was the fatigue—that creeping fear that exhaustion would let something slip through at a moment when stakes were high and cameras were everywhere.

### **And plagiarism?**

It's been around since Cicero was in short togas. Speakers and their speechwriters have done just fine plagiarizing without the help of machines. A quick Google search (now powered by AI—you're *already* using it) reveals countless historical examples.

The question, therefore, isn't whether AI makes mistakes or whether humans do. It's "when has it stopped being our job to conduct rigorous and relentless fact checking?" AI doesn't negate that responsibility; it heightens it.

We must fact-check the AI model, we must fact-check ourselves, and we must equally fact-check the subject-matter experts who increasingly copy and paste from AI themselves because they are busy, rushed or simply lazy.

If you receive input you can't verify, ask for primary sources: **human or machine**. Ask who said what, when they said it, and whether they actually said it at all. Confirm every quote, every number, every anecdote. Then confirm again. As the old Chicago journalism mantra went, "If your mother says she loves you, check it out."

A reminder of how easily errors slip past? In my opening, I mentioned St. Sebastian being “carved.” Yet he wasn’t carved at all. He was shot with arrows—repeatedly—and still never died.

Kind of like a bad speech: full of holes, wounded, and somehow still lurching forward.

### **Third, your speechwriting expertise gives you every tool you’ll need for AI.**

To steal a line back from the AI models—here’s the *best* part.

You do not need to be a computer whiz or tech expert to be AI proficient.

You already have everything you need—*using AI well requires the same skills that make you a good speechwriter and communications expert*. Because well-written prompts are the key to getting the most out of AI.

Think about what happens when someone walks into your office and says, “I need a speech about innovation.”

Do you nod and start typing?

No.

You ask questions. *What kind* of innovation? Who’s the audience? What do you want them to think, feel, or do afterward? What’s the *message*? What are we really trying to say here? Talk to me about the benefits. What’s the story? Dig deeper and give me a *better* story.

You clarify, structure and anticipate. You ask until it means something.

### **That’s all that good prompting is.**

When someone types “write me a speech about innovation” into ChatGPT and receives banal garbage, it’s not because AI is useless—it’s because *the prompt was useless*.

When *you* write a prompt, it sounds different. Because you understand what information you need, why you need it, and how to extract it.

A good prompt has four things—and if you’ve written speeches, you already know them:

1. **Role.** Who is the AI supposed to be? (A researcher? A senior communications advisor? A policy analyst? A speechwriting coach?).

2. **Task.** What exactly do you need done? (Not “write a speech”. More like “identify the three rhetorical patterns this speaker uses most often after reviewing these 50 speeches” or “help me decipher this jargon-filled horror show”.
3. **Context.** What’s the situation? What constraints matter? What’s the audience and setting? Where are my blind spots?
4. **Format.** How do you want the output structured so it’s actually useful?

### What This Looks Like in Practice

Here are two examples from my course.

#### The Strategic Inquiry Prompt

I love this prompt. Use it when you’re starting a specific project and need to map what you know, what you don’t know, and where the gaps are. It’s particularly helpful for new hires or consultants who have to learn a lot in a hurry.

**Role:** *You are a world-class communications strategist who specializes in diagnosing knowledge gaps and identifying research pathways.*

**Task:** *Interview me one question at a time to help me understand what I already know about [TOPIC], what critical information I’m missing, and what concrete next steps I should take to fill those gaps.*

**Context:** *I’m preparing [TYPE OF COMMUNICATION] for [AUDIENCE] and need to map my blind spots before I begin writing.*

**Format:** *Ask one focused question at a time. After I answer, probe deeper if needed, then move to the next area. At the end, provide a concise summary of: (1) my current knowledge, (2) my gaps, and (3) three specific, actionable research steps.*

**Instructions:** *Keep questions practical and answerable from my direct experience. Don’t invent information or make assumptions. If I don’t know something, note it as a gap rather than speculating.*

*Let’s begin. What’s your first question?*

Then you have a dialogue. It asks questions, you answer and it probes further. It helps refine your understanding of what you actually need to know to begin a task. More importantly, you’re identifying *exactly* where you need to focus

your human intelligence—the conversations you need to have, the more precise information you’re now able to target.

### **The Executive Style Analysis Prompt**

Here’s another prompt I’ve developed that helps speechwriters and communicators understand and better capture the “voice” of a new speaker, and to maintain it across multiple communications products. Instead of reading through ten speeches sequentially and hoping you catch the patterns, you let AI do the pattern recognition—then you interpret what matters. Try this:

**Role:** *You are a world-class communications analyst and narrative strategist who specializes in executive speech analysis.*

**Your task:** *Analyze the attached speeches and identify this speaker’s distinct rhetorical patterns, recurring themes, signature phrases, preferred structural approaches, and storytelling techniques.*

**Context:** *I’m preparing new remarks for this speaker and need to ensure authentic voice consistency.*

#### **What to identify:**

*Tone and persona (for example: authoritative, conversational, technical, inspirational).*

*Structural tendencies (for example: three-part arguments, personal story openings, data-driven closings).*

*Rhetorical devices frequently used (for example: metaphors, triads, rhetorical questions, contrasts).*

*Signature phrases or language patterns (specific word choices, transitions, memorable lines).*

*Recurring themes and how they’re typically framed.*

*Favorite numbers or statistics and how they’re presented.*

**Format:** *Provide analysis in clear, actionable sections with direct quotes as evidence. Flag any inconsistencies or stylistic shifts between speeches.*

*Instructions: Work only from provided speeches that I have included as file attachments or from the following links [INSERT]. Don’t invent patterns. If something appears once, note it as occasional rather than characteristic. Keep*



*tone analytical and practical, not academic.*

*Let's begin with the analysis.*

AI then processes these multiple speeches simultaneously, identifies patterns you might miss reading them one at a time, and gives you a strategic foundation for maintaining voice.

But notice what you still control: which speeches to analyze, what patterns matter, how to interpret the results, and most importantly; how to apply those insights to create something new that sounds unmistakably like your speaker.

Compare that to the typical approach: “*write me a speech about {insert topic about to be butchered} for {leader about to be underwhelmed}.*”

Do I need to point out that you should also *listen* to the speeches? Again, the idea *isn't* that you just give everything up to the AI. It's about maximizing the tools you have.

### **It's time to articulate our value**

AI is doing more than changing speechwriting; it's revealing its value.

For years, we've been strategic advisors who happen to write beautifully. We've managed egos and stakeholders, navigated a Pan's Labyrinth of approvals and fact-checking (ahem), extracted insights nobody else thought to ask about and provided “thought leadership” before it became a banal LinkedIn job description. The writing was always the final expression of all that invisible work.

We are now, with AI, able to do our jobs better, more rapidly, with better information, allowing us to ultimately write better speeches and provide the strategic support and advice that we're paid to do. This is what separates charlatans with a template to sell from a speechwriter at the top of their game.

### **What's next?**

Smart speechwriters aren't abandoning their craft—they're repositioning and articulating their full value. Which title commands higher fees: “comms advisor”? Or “communications professional who leverages advanced AI tools while applying decades of judgment to high-stakes decisions”?

Speechwriting's best days are ahead—for those bold enough to price what they've always been worth.

The craft thrives. The speechwriters who articulate their amplified value will too.

The ones who don't? There's always someone with a ChatGPT account and a budget to cut.

Don't be their excuse.

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