

Making the Most of Your Toast: Relax, it's Not About You!

BY LISA BRAITHWAITE

You're the bride's best friend. You've known each other since third grade. You've suffered together through braces and breakups. You've celebrated success and survival. You've kept secrets and given second chances; you've sung, danced, laughed, cried and freaked out together. You would do anything for her except make a toast at her wedding. Thinking about it makes your hands damp and your heart race. Your skin turns cold and your legs go wobbly. But you're the Maid of Honor, and you've been asked to give a toast. Some of your questions might be: "What if I faint?" "What should I say?" "What if I faint?" Never fear—you will be fine. Here are some tips to help you rise to the occasion with grace and confidence.

PREPARING THE WORDS

Keep it short—preferably one to two minutes. A toast is not a speech as much as it is a few kind words and best wishes for the future. Remember: the toast is about the bride, not about you. Say something personal, but don't bring up negative or embarrassing memories. Share positive or touching moments, but most importantly, speak sincerely and from the heart. It's not necessary to be funny. If you're a naturally funny person and you feel comfortable using humor, feel free. Otherwise, sincerity and a light touch is the best bet. A meaningful and relevant quote can be an appropriate opening or closing.

BEFORE THE BIG DAY

Practice as much as possible. Try giving your toast without notes, but don't be obsessed with memorizing. If you don't think you can pull it off, it's okay to use notes, but keep them to one three-by-five card with a few key points, not a word-for-word speech.

Try to practice in the venue where the reception will be held. Get familiar with the space and the location you'll be speaking from. Close your eyes and visualize yourself giving the toast. Imagine the bride, groom and guests smiling and nodding. Picture the whole thing, from standing up, to raising the glass, to sitting down. Imagine feeling calm and confident, and really feel the feeling.

AT THE EVENT

Do some relaxation exercises: stretch your neck, shoulders, back, chest and jaw. Take a few deep breaths and yawn a couple of times. This will loosen up your muscles and prevent tension in your chest and vocal chords, which can cause your voice to come out squeaky or trembly.

Meet some of the guests. The more you talk to people beforehand, the more comfortable you will be making eye contact when it's time for the toast.

GIVING THE TOAST

Stand up, holding your glass of champagne or sparkling nonalcoholic beverage in one hand, partially raised. In some cultures, it is considered offensive or bad luck to toast with an empty glass or glass of water.

Make eye contact with the bride and groom. Focus on them while you're giving the toast. Also, make eye contact with some guests. Look around the room for familiar faces and rest your eyes on each person for a second or two. This helps the audience feel included.

Before you begin to speak, take a breath and center yourself. Feel your feet on the floor, grounding you. Look around the room and wait until you have everyone's attention. It's not necessary to bang on a glass. Smile! It's appropriate to briefly introduce yourself, if not all the guests know who you are.

Speak slowly and clearly, and articulate your words so that everyone can understand you. A natural pause comes at the end of every sentence; use that if necessary to take a breath to calm you down.


End your toast by asking the group to raise their glasses in honor of the couple. If you don't drink alcohol, there is no need to take a sip from the glass, but raise it to your lips in honor of the newlyweds.

Raise your glass, sit down, and you're done!

Just remember: you are there for the bride. Relax, breathe, and focus on them and their future together. A memorable toast is just a few kind words away.




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