West Wing Writers' guide to speech formatting

In the deleted first scene of "The Graduate," Dustin Hoffman is getting ready to deliver his graduation speech when a gust of wind blows his papers from the podium. Had he only skimmed this guide, the whole situation could have been avoided.

- Put your speech in a binder, making sure not to three-hole punch through any text. Pages printed on heavier paper are easier to turn.

- Avoid widow or orphan paragraphs. That means no starting a paragraph on one page and ending it on the next.

- Text should only reach about 2/3 of the way down the page. That way, you'll spend more time looking up at the audience and less time looking down at the page. We recommend .5-inch margins on the top and right sides, a 1-inch margin on the left side to account for hole punching, and a 2.5-inch margin on the bottom.

  Make sure your text is large enough to read and spaced out enough to follow. A good starting point is an 18-point font and 1.3 line spacing—and adjust as you need.

  Break up the text so that it's easily readable (usually no more than two lines), without breaking up paragraphs or (to the greatest extent possible) ideas.

  Add page numbers. You never know when a strong gust of wind will force you to reorganize your papers. Just ask Dustin Hoffman.

In today's era of corruption and Comic Sans, tyranny and too-tiny-typeface, we cannot afford to be bystanders.

We all have a part to play in creating a world with proper speech formatting.

This doesn't require widescale social upheaval or hefty financial commitments.

Rather, this is about small, easy changes to normal routine.

Breaking up paragraphs into one- to two-sentence chunks. Using a font that is big enough to see without squinting.

Imagine a world where this kind of formatting isn't just a welcome exception, but the norm.

Smooth, stumble-free commencement addresses. Well-articulated, worry-free wedding toasts.

Our task is simple, and our time is now. Join us in our mission to bring readable speeches to all!

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