

## Carefully Conceived, Deftly Delivered

Mrs Anson Chan on Speech Writing

When Mrs Anson Chan retired in April 2001, she took home as 'souvenir' copies of all the speeches she had made as Chief Secretary for Administration — a total of 14 volumes. Since retirement, she has been invited from time to time to address different gatherings. It was really a great honour to have Mrs Chan share with members of the Official Languages Officer grade her valuable experience and expertise in speech writing on 17 February 2004. The talk was most interesting and inspiring, captivating the audience until the very end.



Speaking with admirable grace and eloquence, Mrs Chan took us through the art of speech writing and delivery. The following summary of her talk clearly reflects her mastery of the skill.

### Carefully conceived

*Speech writing, like a lot of things, improves with practice.*

Speeches, meant for oral delivery, have three cardinal objectives: to instruct, to inspire and stimulate, and to advocate.

To instruct, or to get the message across, one must believe in what one is saying. Most importantly, one should speak from the heart. When writing a substantive speech, one must address the subject squarely in a convincing manner. The content should be substantial in addressing the main concerns of the audience. Substance and style of a speech are equally important as the speaker cannot hope to get the message across fully and vividly or make a deep impression on the people without using the right language and style.

To inspire and stimulate the audience, the speaker should use language, such as sensory words and images,

that will appeal to the audience. Two outstanding masters of the use of sensory language are General Douglas MacArthur and Winston Churchill.

For the audience to understand and hopefully be convinced of what one advocates, simple language, short sentences, and a natural and conversational style should invariably be used. Moreover, one should not use a dozen words when a few words will do the job. A good speech should be kept short, pungent and concise. Grammar is also very important. When in doubt, one should not hesitate to consult

others or read up.

One way to capture the audience's attention is by using wit and humour. However, jokes must be relevant and short to be effective. A long-winded joke will result in the punch line missing its mark with the audience.

In terms of structure, the beginning of a speech is certainly important, but the end is even more important. The beginning is the first opportunity for the speaker to capture the interest of the audience, yet when the audience leave, usually they remember the last words said rather than the first words, particularly for a long speech.

The ending of a speech can simply be a summary of the main points. However, short and relevant quotations can also be very effective endings. In her valedictory speech to the Asia Society as Chief Secretary in April 2001, Mrs Chan chose a quotation from Tennyson's *Ulysses* to conclude. In a few lines, she succeeded in summarising her 40 years of service in the Hong Kong Government and gave a very pithy account of what she had learnt and how her character had been moulded. In fact, to conclude with an apt quotation is likely to make people remember one's speech, at least the conclusion, if not its entirety. So, one should gather

