

The speech template

This is a shape, not a rule. Move the sections around if you have a reason to.

1. Take the room, about 30 seconds

Open with something that acknowledges you're doing this, without asking permission for it.

"I was told the bride doesn't usually give a speech. I was told this by three separate people, which is roughly how you guarantee I'll give one."

Note what that does: it's warm, it's a joke, and it establishes you're speaking by choice rather than by obligation. What you're avoiding is the apologetic opening: "I know this isn't traditional, but I just wanted to say a few words." That hands the room permission to think of you as an interruption.

2. The people who got you here, about 90 seconds

You don't have to do the full thank-you list. The groom's speech usually covers the logistics, and if it has, don't repeat it. Coordinate this beforehand.

What you should do is thank the two or three people who genuinely carried you. Specifically, and with a real detail each.

"Mum, you have answered the phone forty times this year and pretended each time that you weren't in the middle of something."

"[Name], you have been my maid of honour, my project manager, and on one occasion in March, my hostage negotiator."

Two or three people. Not eleven.

3. The turn, about 15 seconds

From the people who got you here to the person you're with now. Let the sentence do it:

"All of which is how I ended up standing here next to him, which, given the state of my judgement at twenty-three, none of you should have seen coming."

4. Your partner, about two minutes

The centre of the speech.

Specific beats adjectival, always. "He's kind and funny and my best friend" could be about anyone in the room. One thing he actually did is worth all of it:

"Last winter my car died on the motorway at eleven at night, ninety minutes away. He didn't ask a single question. He just said 'send me the location' and hung up, which I think is the most romantic thing anyone has ever done to me."

Then one true thing you'd normally not say out loud. Not a declaration, a small honest observation. That's the line people remember.

On humour: you can be the funniest speaker of the day and many brides are, precisely because nobody's braced for it. But keep the ratio around two-thirds warm to one-third funny, and aim the jokes at yourself or at the situation rather than at him. A bride roasting her new husband on the day reads differently than a best man doing it, fairly or not.

5. The toast, about 20 seconds

Toast whoever you like: your partner, both families, the people who travelled, everyone in the room.

"Please stand." Pause. Wait for them. Then the names.