

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES

- Try to limit yourself to developing one main theme, argument, contrast, analogy, or story
- Focus on specific aspects of your own Harvard experience and then explore the broader significance for all graduates
- Or refer to some aspect of your past and contrast it with this special occasion
- Inject some element of your particular culture, ethnicity, background
- If you choose to be mainly serious, be sure to include some element of joy or humor on this happy occasion.
- Find ways to acknowledge the various groups represented in the audience
- Consider avoiding any content that would upset parents, administrators, potential donors, etc. (i.e. those present)
- Definitely avoid the usual clichés, Harvard hubris, too much focus on yourself
- Consider including some mention of Harvard history, geography, culture, etc. (The judges seem to love this!)
- Be altruistic, insightful, international, grateful, etc.
- Consider picking up the rug to find something unexpected underneath
- Alternate “macro” (abstract ideas) with lists of “micro” (concrete illustrations)
- Consider dramatic repetition of key statements
- Try to end by referring to something you said at the beginning
- Be very strict about the 5-minute limit