

Making the Speech Your Own

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Developing Introductions:

The introduction sets the stage for the entire presentation as well as the audience's initial perception of you as a speaker. The purpose of the introduction is not only to introduce the topic, but to mentally prepare the audience for the material that you'll be covering. Since your goal as a speaker is to make sure that the audience is understanding the message you have to tell them, you'll want to make sure that your introduction is engaging and unique to set a positive tone and get the audience involved. The following is an acronym that will help you lay a firm foundation for your speech:

Credibility and Goodwill

Attention getter

Relating to the audience

Revealing the topic

Preview

Here is a general order you will want to develop:

Step 1 *Attention getter*: An audience's attention is at its highest in the first 30 seconds of the speech so you'll want to make sure you use something really dynamic to grab them right away. The Iowa State Center for Food Security and Public Health has provided several examples or scenarios you may use to gain the attention of your listeners. On the other hand, you may be able to share a story, a startling statistic from your region or county, a great quote or a bit of *tasteful* humor arising from your own professional experience or previous interaction with the particular audience. As long as you relate the opening directly to the topic you are well on your way toward focusing the audience's attention on your message.

Step 2 *Revealing the topic*: It seems like commonsense, but you want to make sure the audience understands the topic of the speech (just in case they weren't completely paying attention right away). That doesn't mean you need to say, "Today I'm going to talk about..." You want to be creative, but you also want to be clear so there's no confusion.

Step 3 *Relating to the audience*: Once you have the audience focused on the topic, you'll want to tell them how the topic specifically relates to them. It's important not to assume that the audience will understand the relevancy of the topic. To make the topic relevant you might want to tell the audience why you feel the topic is important, how the audience could use the information, or how the information may affect them.

Step 4 *Credibility and Goodwill*: With the audience understanding their connection to the topic, it's just as important that you share yours. In most cases, your credentials making you a qualified speaker on the topic will be established by the individual introducing you. However, you still

want to make sure that the audience trusts your ability to present the information accurately and sincerely. Be sure to share with the audience your personal investment in the topic—what particularly interests you about the topic? What kind of research have you done on the topic? What concerns might you share with the audience? Letting the audience know that you're speaking because this is important to *you* will encourage them to find the topic important as well. Using an example from your own practice is one way to help accomplish this goal.

Step 5 Preview: At this point your audience is very focused and ready for information. The preview is the road map you give your audience to navigate that information. You'll want to choose key words to express the main points of the speech clearly, concisely and in the correct order. Using the same key words throughout the speech provides road signs that help the audience keep track of where you are in the speech. Saving the preview until the end of the introduction keeps the key words fresh in your audience's mind.

In a sense, the presentations you will be giving cover the three major points as indicated in the following brief outline.

- I. There are legitimate threats to our animals and our food supply.
- II. These threats are being prepared for through various governmental policies and agencies.
- III. These threats mean that each of us must take responsibility for action.

You will want to develop your own way of introducing the audience to these main ideas, but one sample way to begin would be: “During this presentation we will look first at the serious threats of diseases affecting animal populations as a way to infect or have an economic impact on human populations. We'll then review the government policies and agencies that are already mobilizing to counteract these threats. But before we leave today, each of us will need to become aware of our own role in responding to these potential threats.”

Step 6 Delivering the Introduction. The introduction prepares the audience not only for your message, but also for your style as a presenter. To help them respond positively to the introduction, be sure that your opening words are delivered with strong eye contact and vocal energy. Aim to help the audience believe that you believe the topic is important, you are prepared to speak with them, and that you value their attention.

Developing Conclusions:

The conclusion is the last impression the audience has of the speech and you as a speaker, so you want to think carefully about how you end the speech. Like the introduction, there are specific steps you'll want to follow to make sure you close confidently and leave the audience thinking about your message.

Successful conclusions fulfill three major tasks:

- Signal the end

- Summarize main points
- Strong closing line

Step 1 *Signal the end*: The conclusion should never sneak up on an audience. Using a verbal signal like “In closing;” “Let me wrap this up;” “Now that we have discussed;” “Let me close by...” is a clear indication to the audience that the end is near. You can strengthen the verbal signal with skillful delivery. End the last sentence of the last point with a clear declarative tone, you can then pause while you look down a moment, perhaps take a step or two and begin your conclusion.

Step 2 *Summarize main points*: Bring back the key words you've been using throughout the speech to signal the specific points and remind the audience of the key concepts you'd like them to *really* remember. Linking the points back to something in the introduction, such as your opening scenario, is not only a good way to reconnect with the audience, it also gives the speech psychological unity.

Step 3 *Strong closing line*: You want to make sure the audience knows when you're done and a clear closing line is the best way to do that. Deliver this with emphasis and with no upward lilt of the voice—there should be no question that this is your last statement. The kind of closing line should be chosen based on the final tone you'd like to leave with the audience. If you are speaking in a formal situation—one where there is likely to be applause at the end of the presentation—be sure to end with a nice declarative sentence. Avoid ending your speech with “Any questions?” Audience's are confused by this informal closing, when they're waiting to applaud, and you can lose the magic of the closing moment, taking away the audience's opportunity to reward your efforts.

Closing tips: In addition to the steps noted above there are two additional things to remember when creating your conclusion: keep it short and don't bring up any new information. A drawn out conclusion can be disastrous. Focus on your audience—they'll let you know if you're being long-winded. You also want to make sure you don't bring up any new information since this can confuse listeners.