**Four Tasks of the Speech Introduction**

According to William Lampton, there are four important tasks that must be accomplished during the first few minutes of a speech (86). You must:

Capture the audience’s attention

Establish your credibility/ethos

Reveal the topic of the speech and relate it to the audience

Preview the body of the speech

1. **Capture the Audience’s Attention**

Audience members do not attend a presentation with the intention of losing their interest or being bored to tears. Truth be told, audience members do not give a speaker a terribly long time to win them over either. You may only have several sentences and, possibly, a chance to actually introduce the topic of the speech before the audience mentally votes “Yes, I want to listen frther ” or “No, I’m tuning out and thinking about lunch. ”

Depending on the overall time limit of a presentation, an ideal introduction should last no more than around one or two minutes -and this includes your thesis and preview of your main points. This seems like a long time, but in truth, it is not. Hence, you have a short, yet precious window, to lure your audience and hope to keep them there.

**2. Relate topic to your audience**

In Chapter 7 we presented six criteria for determining the effectiveness of your supporting material. One of those criteria is proximity, the degree to which the information affects your listeners directly. Just as proximity is important to supporting materials, it is also important to speech introductions. “This concerns me” is a powerful reason to listen. Notice how Lauren involved her listeners firsthand with abhorrent labor conditions in Florida tomato fields:

[If] you’ve eaten a tomato from a fast-food restaurant, grocery store, or food services business in the last year, you’ve eaten a tomato picked by the hand of a slave. [She shows two tomatoes to audience.] Can you tell which one? Now I know I’m taking a chance here offering tomatoes to an audience at the beginning of a speech. But the difference between these two is the difference between a fair market and slavery. It does not matter so much how or when you demonstrate proximity. But it is essential that, like Lauren, you do at some point establish that your topic is of vital personal concern to your listeners.

1. **Establish credibility**

As you begin your speech, you should be mindful of your listeners’ attitudes toward you. Ask yourself, “Why should they listen to me? What is my background with respect to the topic? Am I personally committed to the issues I am going to speak about?” If you can establish your credibility early in a speech, it will help motivate your audience to listen.

One way to build credibility in the introduction is to be well prepared and to appear confident. Thorough research and good organization help give the audience confidence that you know what you are talking about. Speaking fluently while maintaining eye contact does much to convey a sense of confidence. If you seem to have confidence in yourself, your audience will have confidence in you.

A second way to establish credibility is to tell the audience about your personal experience with your topic. Instead of thinking you boastful, most audience members will listen to you with respect. Twitter CEO Dick Costolo opened a University of Michigan commencement speech by photographing the graduates, then telling them as he tweeted the photo,I’m a professional, so this will only take a second.

**Top attention-gaining strategies**

1. **Ask a question**

Ask insightful, meaningful questions. Better yet, ask a series of questions designed to draw the audience further and further into your speech.

When you ask your audience a question, they have to think. In the process of thinking, they are paying attention. Even if your question does not call for an oral reply, they will be thinking what they would answer if called upon.

“How many of you would categorize yourselves as ‘givers’? How many of you search for the perfect Christmas or birthday gift each year for your best friend or perhaps your Mom? You go all out, right? Then, how many of you have signed up to be an organ donor? Isn’t that the ultimate gift? The gift of life?

“How many of you have ever had a couple of glasses of wine while dining with friends, then driven yourself home? Did you ever consider that you might not be “okay ” to make it home? ” Is it possible that you were over the legal limit?

1. **Find a quotation**

It could be a historical quote, a humorous one, even a song lyric. Ensure you credit the originator of the quote. Ensure the quote is relevant to your topic.

“Make sure you have finished speaking before your audience has finished listening. “– Dnorothy Sarnoff“Courage is being scared to death- but saddling up anyway. “– John Wayne

**3. Shock the audience**

Use a startling statistic or a shocking statement. Share a personal revelation.

“During the five minutes of my speech, seven individuals will die of AIDS or HIV-related complications in the world. “

“Statistics show that one in every four women will be assaulted in her lifetime. “

“Today, I want to talk to you about a recent loss I’ve had. I lost my best friend, my consoler, my buddy who could always be counted on to party all night. I lost all of that when I finally accepted that I am an alcoholic. Six months ago, I gave up alcohol. “

**4.Find a direct connection to the audience:**

Reference a local event, place, or activity. Use a recent news story, tragedy, or occurrence that your audience would be sure to recall.

“I’m sure all of you will recall the news story a few months back in which a car went over the Buckman Bridge, sideswiped by a drunk driver. Today, I want to discuss how you can be a defensive driver -and hopefully -save yourself from becoming the next headline. “

**5.Tell a story**

Engage us, draw us in, and make the details of the story vivid and real to us.

“When I was four years old, I became separated from my parents while visiting the zoo. One minute they were there; the next, they were gone. While you might imagine that I was frightened, I wasn’t. I continued to look at the snakes in each display, fascinated. I tagged along with other visitors following the same path, staring in awe at each new exhibit. I certainly didn’t realize then what we all know now. How dangerous the world can be for a child alone. “

If you ever listened to a scary story told by a camp counselor at night when all were sitting near a camp fire, you know the power of a good story. Religious leaders know the power of a good story also. That is why they often include Bible stories in their sermons. Plan to tell your audience a story, and you will have them listening as attentively to you as campers listen to a counselor’s scary story. Use vivid details; paint a mental picture in the minds of your listeners. You want them to relate -to smell the cookies baking, to see the tears in your Grandmother’s eyes, to feel the softness of a baby in your arms.

6. **Find a compelling visual aid**

Poignant, shocking, funny. A picture IS worth a thousand words. A photo of a homeless child

A picture of a crystal clear lake and mountain rangeA cartoon depicting a political news story

**Establish Your Credibility**

An audience may or may not have a preconceived notion about you when you stand before them, but you can bet that your audience will make up its mind about you quickly. Humans are notoriously quick to judge and often form a first impression about a date, a stranger, or a speaker within the first 30 seconds. It becomes imperative, then, for you to establish your credibility within the first few lines of your introduction. While some in your audience will form a first impression of you based upon your outfit or your smile, most will judge your credibility based upon two crucial factors: **your perceived competence and character .**

Competence ensures your audience that you know your subject well. You have a strong knowledge base, and you are well prepared to share the topic with your listeners. Reveal your expertise in the introduction, so your audience knows from the beginning that you can be trusted. **If you have a special relationship to the topic, either personal or professional or by association, the beginning of your presentation is the time to share that**. If you do not have in-depth knowledge of the topic, it’s time to hit the books, access the Internet, or talk with the experts. You have the ability to become a minor expert on most any topic by doing some research. Then ensure that your audience knows of your research; they want to know that your information is valid.

A second component of credibility comes from the audience’s assessment of your character . Can you be trusted? Do you have their best interests at heart? Will the information you provide be useful and relevant to their lives or do you have your own agenda? This aspect of credibility is often referred to as “e**thos ” -simply the Greek word for character**. A great example is the stereotype of a used car salesman. You need a car, but you are not sure which one is right for you and which one you can really afford. The salesman knows all the necessary information -gas consumption, mileage, and accessories. But you just do not trust that s/he has your best interest at heart. Is s/he trying to get rid of a particular car or make more commission? Is the car you are being shown best for you or best for the salesman? While you feel confident of the salesperson’s competence, you are doubtful of his/her character. It is important that you show your audience that you are credible in both areas (Banks).

**Reveal the Topic of the Speech/Preview the Body of the Speech**

After you grab your audience’s attention and before you reach the actual body of the speech, you will reveal your thesis statement. **Remember, a thesis statement is a singular thought that tells the audience what the speech is about.** It should include the main points of the speech that you will include in the body. **The thesis statement previews for the audience what you intend to cover in your speech**. **This preview is like giving your audience a map for a car trip**: They will have an overview of where you will be taking them. It will be easier for them to pay attention as you present your information.

If you have ever seen Law and Order or a similar courtroom show, you have viewed the way the attorneys present the outline of their case in the opening statement. A presentation might be spoken like this:

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I am going to show how the defendant surprised Mr. Jones in a dark alley and took the knife that he bought that day and stabbed him in the ribs. The evidence will prove that…. “

Or perhaps it will be spoken this way:

“Ladies and gentlemen, this lawsuit was filed because the defendant’s car was following too closely behind the car of Mary Jane Fox, the plaintiff. The defendant, Mr. Hare, was not paying attention to the traffic ahead of him. As a result, Mary Jane was hit from behind by Mr. Hare. She suffered a broken and separated leg, and she will have this injury for the rest of her life. “

Notice that in each case, the attorney laid out the roadmap for what was going to be presented during the trial. The jurors had a framework to fill in when the evidence was presented.

To prepare yourself, review the main points you intend to cover and write one sentence that previews each of those points, separated by commas. You can also write three shorter sentences and use periods. Beware of going into the details reserved for the main body of the speech while previewing your topic. This will confuse the audience, and they will wonder what else you plan to discuss.

**End** **a speech**

You have riveted your audience with an engaging introduction. Your introduction led to a compellingly written and logically organized speech. Now, it is time to wrap up the entire experience, but how? Do not make the mistake of thinking, “Well, my speech is just about over at this point, so it doesn’t matter how I end it. ” You need a conclusion just as dynamic and memorable as your speech opener.

How do you feel when a movie has a disappointing ending that does not wrap up the story or, worse, simply leaves you hanging? You feel frustrated, quite possibly like you wasted your money and time. Your audience will feel the same way if your closing remarks do not provide effective closure for your speech. Too many speakers do not realize that when a speech fizzles out, the audience is left with a negative impression.

Your speech introduction and body may have included the most profound words known to man, but it could be said that a speaker is only as strong as her/his last sentence. You want your final sentences to be ones that are remembered and valued.What a Speech Conclusion Is Meant to Do

The speech conclusion has three basic missions:

1. It tells the audience, “This speech does have an ending. “

Hopefully, your audience will want you to speak for an hour, rather than just five or eight minutes. However, when you transition into your conclusion and use appropriate signposting, your audience realizes that the speech will come full-circle.

2)It tells the audience, “Here’s what I told you. “

Just as you used a mapping statement to preview your main points, now you will summarize your points within your conclusion. Often simply rewording -or even restating -your original thesis statement in the past tense will effectively summarize your speech.

3)It says, “Remember this speech! “

If you have ever left a presentation and were given a handout upon your exit, you have been handed a “takeaway. ” Your speech conclusion is a mental takeaway for the audience. Your conclusion should contain enough memorable words and phrases that will help the audience positively recall the experience – and even recollect certain points that you made. Do not forget to include that “ta-da ” moment.