How to Start a Speech

You're going to learn how to start a speech. We'll look at five ways to start with a bang. We're talking about the first 30 seconds or so.

Some people call this the attention grabber, your hook, or simply your opening. Before we get into the five strategies, here's some big picture prerequisite advice to make sure your opening is effective. **The goal is to start with a bang (1)** rather than to stumble through your opening.

**That means you have to start clean. That means double check all of your technology ahead of time so you don't stall while you try to figure that out during the opening of your speech. Also, stick to your plan (2).**

Don't do anything off script or put in nervous chatter before your opening. Don't get distracted by a passing thought or something somebody said to you just a minute ago. **Resist all of those last minute temptations to add something to your opening that you didn't prepare and practice (3).**

These common missteps will cost you momentum and impact. Ideally, you avoid all of those pitfalls so it looks something like this**. Somebody introduces you, people might clap a little bit to welcome you, and the moment those applause stop, you take a deep breath and you open with your hook exactly the way you planned it (4).**

Be sure to download your free PDF of the seven instant tips to make you a more confident speaker. That's in the description below the video with other relevant links. We'll look at five of the best ways to open with a bang.

You can use these as standalone openings, and I'll give you some pro tips at the end to combine them. First, my favorite way to open is by telling a concise story. **A story is a high risk way to open, but it also has the highest potential rewards (5).**

So let's maximize those rewards and minimize the risks. One way to contain the risks is to make sure your story relates directly to the rest of your presentation. Now, it could be a great story, but if it doesn't relate to the heart of your message, then people will wonder why you told the story.

So find a story that fits the rest of your message. Another risk is telling a long-winded story. Make sure you're concise.

**Aim for 30 seconds (6)** or maybe a minute for an opening story. Inexperienced storytellers tend to go on and on and weave all over the place. If you open with a long-winded story, it will kill the energy in the room.

Practice until your story is concise. A good story also has a clear structure or logic. Story should have a **beginning, middle, and end**, **and then a lesson learned (7)**.

The beginning can be one sentence and explain the people, time, and place. mentThe middle of the story is where the action takes place.

I had a goal, but what I didn't have was any experience making videos. Up till then, I didn't even own a camera. I knew nothing.

But I started making videos every week and I learned as I went along. And six years later, I've posted over 200 videos, and the channel now has over 400,000 subscribers. The middle of the story is usually where people overcome some struggle.

The endings to stories are usually pretty concise as well. The success of the channel has truly changed my entire life and led to opportunities I would have never been able to enjoy otherwise. The last part is called the lesson learned.

You could also call this the moral to the story. This is the key insight you want your listeners to remember. This long journey taught me what John Maxwell always says, everything worthwhile in life is uphill.

If we put that whole story together, it would last about 30 seconds or so. That simple structure will also keep you on track so you land on the right spot at the end and can give the rest of your speech introduction. **The best stories show some transformation or growth (8).**

That's why stories have the highest potential reward as an opening. People love stories that have that before and after quality. The second way to open a speech is by asking your audience some key questions.

This is a really common way to start a speech. Some people say it's overdone, but I'll give you some tips to enhance this a bit. On the plus side, asking relevant questions can create instant engagement because it helps listeners see themselves in your presentation.

**I don't recommend you ask listeners to answer your questions out loud right at the beginning (9)**. That could take your presentation in the wrong direction. But ask questions that engage our minds because that will draw us into the world of your presentation in a mental conversation.

Questions pique our curiosity. Now here's some tips to enhance your questions. First, make sure your questions set up the main message of your presentation.

You wanna ask questions that your speech will respond to in some satisfying way. So

let's say I was doing a presentation on financial planning for retirement. I might ask, if you could retire to a dream location, where would that be? That question can easily lead right to my main message about retirement planning.

Second, enhance it more by asking **two or three connected questions (10)** rather than a single question. Questions usually go by a little too quickly. So ask two or three and pause briefly in between.

That will build momentum. So I'll go back and redo the first sample question and add two more questions with pauses. If you could retire to a dream location, where would that be? And who would be with you? And what would you be doing there together? Each question is really concise, but when you add them together, they create more engagement.

Third, open by sharing a powerful quotation. Quotations are great openings because we can always find somebody who said what we're trying to say with even more impact. And the great thing about quotations is that they've already stood the test of time.

If it's the kind of passage that people quote, then it will likely have a positive impact on your listeners as well. So let's say I was doing a speech about the importance of creating a big, ambitious vision for our lives and chasing our dreams, a topic that I am very fond of, by the way. I might open with a quotation like this, a quotation I mentioned a moment ago.

The famous writer, John Maxwell, has often said, everything worthwhile in life is uphill. A couple of tips on using quotations. Make sure the person you are quoting actually said or wrote those words.

I saw this quotation come out of John Maxwell's mouth myself and I looked up later to double check it. You don't want to get a quote wrong or attribute it to the wrong person. The key though is to find a quotation that makes an impact and relates directly to the heart of your message.

Just like all the other ways to open a speech, the quotation should be a natural jumping off place for whatever comes next in your introduction. Fourth, open with an interesting fact or statistic. This works really well if you have any concrete data that's a little bit surprising.

As you're preparing, you might come across a bit of information and you say to yourself, whoa, I didn't know that. If a statistic or fact grabs your attention like that, it will likely have a similar impact on your listeners. For example, the other day I was looking up information about getting struck by lightning because people are always using the chances of getting struck by lightning as a point of comparison.

And the first statistic I found wasn't all that interesting. The chances of getting struck by

lightning in any given year is about one in a million. So struck by lightning equals one in a million, makes sense.

But then I noticed another statistic that did surprise me. And here's how I might share that in a speech opening. Would it shock you to learn that according to the Centers for Disease Control, adult males account for 80% of all fatal lightning strikes? To me, that was an unexpected statistic and I wanted to learn more.

I told that to a couple of friends and they both said, really? The takeaway for you is that as you're doing your preparation research, you may find yourself surprised or wanting to know more about what you're reading. That's when you know you've come across a fact or a statistic that could be a very good hook that will make the audience want to pay attention to the rest of your message. The trouble with facts and statistics as an opening is that they're quite short.

So **I recommend using a question or a concise story that leads to that interesting statistic (11).** In fact, you may notice that I did exactly that a moment ago. I told a concise story about how I was looking into lightning strikes.

And then I also did it with a question. Would it surprise you to know? And then I gave this statistic. Using a story or questions will enhance the statistic and make it stand out even more.

And by the way, a word of warning about using facts and stats, do your homework, **cite your sources and verify all research and use the information fairly (12).** The fifth way to open is by using a visual illustration. This is a catch-all strategy.

This could be a visual image you show on a screen. It could be a short dramatization, skit or dialogue where you act something out. You could **do a physical demonstration or handle a prop that illustrates a piece of your message (13)**.

You could ask your audience members to participate with you by taking some small action like reaching in their pocket to take out an object or giving them a task to do on their phones. On the surface, it might not seem like most speech topics lend themselves naturally to visual illustrations. But if you use a little creativity, you can make it work.

**I recently did a talk where I held up a king from a chess set and I was making a point about leadership (14).** And that enhanced the message a little bit for that moment. I've seen speakers dress up in costumes, do backflips, do a magic trick.

If you have any creative streak inside you, think about how you might do something interesting or unique that visually illustrates your message. And now for some pro tips to enhance the rest of these. **Pro tip number one is** **develop your opening after you've created a draft of the rest of the presentation (15).**

One reason I wait to create the introduction is that the research and preparation process usually provides me some great potential hooks. So as you prepare your materials, take note of any item that jumps out to you. Whenever I notice a great piece of content, I put a star next to it and label it as a potential opening .

Pro tip number two, combine openings, meaning use more than one of the five openings we've talked about. Combine them. In fact, I've already done that a couple of times in this video.

I combined a question with a statistic. Would it shock you to learn that adult males account for **80% of all fatal lightning strikes (16)**? That combines a stat and a question. I told a story and I capped it off with a quotation from John Maxwell, which is why I quoted him twice in this video.

All five of these openings can work in various combinations. Just make sure you're still communicating concisely. Aim for 30 seconds, maybe a minute attention grabber total.

Remember to download the free PDF of the seven instant tips to make you a more confident speaker. There's a link to that in the expandable description below. I also have another video on how to end a speech with impact.

There's a link to that below as well. And I'd love to hear your ideas about great ways to start a speech. Tell me about that in the comment section below.

Until next time, thanks, God bless, and I will see you soon.

# Multiple Choice Questions: How to Start a Speech

1. What is the primary goal mentioned for starting a speech?

a) To introduce yourself formally

**b) To start with a bang**

c) To explain your credentials

d) To thank the organizers

2. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a prerequisite advice for an effective opening?

a) Double-checking all technology

b) Sticking to your plan

**c) Memorizing the entire speech**

d) Avoiding nervous chatter

3. How should you handle potential distractions during your opening?

a) Incorporate them into your speech

**b) Resist adding last-minute changes**

c) Ask the audience about them

d) Take time to address each one

4. What should you do immediately after the applause stops when beginning your speech?

a) Start speaking immediately

**b) Take a deep breath and begin your hook**

c) Thank the audience

d) Adjust your microphone

5. According to the text, what is described as having both "highest risk" and "highest potential rewards"?

a) Using visual aids

**b) Telling a story**

c) Asking questions

d) Sharing statistics

6). What is the recommended duration for an opening story in a speech?

a) 2-3 minutes

b) 5 minutes

**c) 30 seconds to 1 minute**

d) 10-15 minutes

7. What is the recommended structure for a story in a speech opening?

a) Beginning, conflict, resolution

b) Introduction, body, conclusion

**c) Beginning, middle, end, lesson learned**

d) Setup, conflict, twist, ending

8. What element should a good story demonstrate?

a) Multiple characters

b) Humor

**c) Transformation or growth**

d) Complex plot twists

9. Regarding audience questions at the beginning of a speech, what is NOT recommended?

a) Asking connected questions

**b) Having listeners answer out loud**

c) Using mental engagement

d) Pausing between questions

10. How many connected questions are recommended when using the question-opening strategy?

a) One

**b) Two to three**

c) Four to five

d) As many as possible

11. What is suggested regarding combining opening strategies?

a) Never combine strategies

b) Only combine two strategies maximum

**c) Combine while maintaining conciseness**

d) Always use all five strategies together

12. What is crucial when using quotations to open a speech?

a) Using multiple quotes

**b) Verifying the source and accuracy**

c) Creating your own quotes

d) Using only ancient quotes

13. Which of the following is included under "visual illustration" openings?

a) PowerPoint presentations only

**b) Props and demonstrations**

c) Video clips only

d) Written handouts

14. What type of visual illustration was mentioned in relation to leadership?

a) A PowerPoint presentation

**b) A chess king piece**

c) A crown

d) A photograph

15. When should you develop your speech opening, according to the pro tips?

a) Before writing anything else

**b) After creating a draft of the presentation**

c) During the presentation

d) One day before the speech

16. According to the lightning strike statistic mentioned, what percentage of fatal strikes affect adult males?

a) 50%

b) 65%

c) 75%

**d) 80%**

Answer Key:

1. b

2. c

3. b

4. b

5. b

6. c

7. c

8. c

9. b

10. b

11. c

12. b

13. b

14. b

15. b

16. d

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