

Introductions, Conclusions, and Connective Statements

The two most important moments of any speech are the introduction and conclusion. They represent the only chance to make a first impression and the final opportunity to remind the audience about the key aspects of your speech. This is not to say that the body of the speech is unimportant, but rather to emphasize the importance of starting and finishing a speech strongly. This chapter addresses these two key parts of the speech and provides suggestions for how best to craft effective introductions and conclusions. It also provides some tips for connecting all the parts of the speech so the audience knows when you move between points.

To do this, we first cover the structure of the introduction, followed by the structure of the conclusion. In doing so, we provide some guidelines for developing these two vital speech components. Finally, we discuss the use of connective statements and demonstrate how they can be deployed effectively to move between points within a speech. Keep in mind that the introduction is the first part of the speech the audience will hear, and the conclusion is the last part of the speech the audience will hear.

Structure of the Introduction

Introductions follow a fairly standard approach, but despite the common elements contained in any good introduction, it is important to remember that you can and should be creative in how you choose to style them. This creativity enhances the ability of an introduction to accomplish what it needs to, so do not view the goals of an introduction as a restrictive and boring set of rules. There are six goals that the introduction needs to accomplish within the introduction itself.

1. Get the Audience's Attention

The first thing that you need to do is to get the attention of the audience and make them want to listen to the speech. It is important to engage the audience early so they don't miss important information. Gaining the audience's attention may sound easy, but it involves effort. Simply stating a quotation or statistic is not enough; you need to connect that data to the speech itself so the audience is dialed in to your topic right away.

There are numerous ways to grab the audience's attention, but you must carefully examine which strategy best suits your speech topic and your audience. For instance, providing a startling statistic or personal story might draw in an audience who is predisposed to disagreeing with you and what you plan to say. On the other hand, posing a rhetorical question or quoting someone famous might be a good way to gain the attention of an audience that already might agree with you. These are not hard and fast rules, but rather ideas meant to get you to think about how best to make a first impression with an attention getter that is relevant to the speech topic and the audience.

One way to get an audience's attention is to ask a question. Usually, speakers ask a rhetorical question, or a question that relates to the topic but does not require an answer from the audience. Suppose you were giving a speech about ways to live a healthy lifestyle. One way to start the speech is to ask the audience: "How many of you would like to live a long and healthy life?" Would anyone answer "no" to this? Highly unlikely. Rhetorical questions are not the only form of inquiry that can be used to start a speech and gain the audience's attention.

Another opening strategy is to ask the audience a question that requires a verbal answer. These questions help you gather data from the audience while also orienting them toward you and your topic. This question should be a simple question, and it is best if it's a yes/no type of question. The more detailed the inquiry, the more time it will take for you to speak because you will be busy listening to the audience's comments. The question also should not spark much of a debate because that opens the opportunity for audience members to confront each other directly, which results in your losing control of the speaking situation. Remember that questions are a strategic way to get the audience's attention and not intended to open the floor to dialogue, debate, and discussion.

A third way to get the attention of the audience is with a famous quotation that aligns with your topic. For example, suppose you wanted to speak about community service. You might consider using someone else's words to begin your speech; perhaps President John F. Kennedy's words encapsulate your topic best: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." Most everyone can attribute this statement to the former president. Regardless of whom you quote, whether the speaker is famous or not, the statement should be tied to the topic or the audience may anticipate your speech going in another direction. You can easily focus the quotation by providing an explanation following it, and always be sure to verbally attribute the person who made the statement you quoted.

A fourth way to creatively gain the audience's attention is through the use of startling statistics. Startling statistics surprise an audience and make them curious about what the data would mean to them. Suppose you had done research and found some unique information that provoked your interest. You might begin your speech by sharing that figure with your audience. Obviously, you would need to not

only provide a source for these numbers, but also cite that source. This not only helps get the audience's attention, but enhances your credibility as well.

The fifth way to garner the attention of the audience is through a narrative or short story that relates to the topic. Humans are story-telling creatures. Stories make things real to us and organize our experiences into something that makes sense. The danger with using a story as an attention-getting device, though, is that stories sometimes take up too much time. Stories can be personal, fictitious, or factual, but they must be relevant to the topic of your speech.

Stories also present an opportunity to connect the introduction and conclusion by starting a story at the beginning of a speech, but leaving its conclusion for the end of the speech. Suppose a student was giving a speech about how an education changed a woman's life for the better. The speech could begin with the story of hardship as a means to focus the audience on a theme. Then, at the conclusion, the speaker could finish the story with a happy ending, illustrating that despite the hardship, getting an education changed her life for the better.

The sixth potential strategy for gaining attention is one of the most common prescribed by people with little training in speech—it is also one of the riskiest ways to open a speech. Beginning a speech with a joke can be either effective or a disaster. Effective jokes, like the other attention getters we have discussed, must be appropriate for the audience and related to the topic of the speech. Just opening with a joke for the sake of a joke does not help the audience prepare for your message. Additionally, jokes should not be offensive or contain inappropriate language because this sets a poor standard of expectations for the audience and damages your credibility. When you choose a joke to tell an audience—particularly an audience of people you do not know—you do so with the expectation that the audience will respond by laughing. But what if they do not? This would create a very awkward situation for you and it is not the way you want to begin your speech. For this reason, jokes should not be the first choice for an attention getter, despite what the general public may say.

2. Clearly State the Relevance of Your Topic

After you gain the audience's attention, the important work of your speech begins. The human attention span is short, and so once you get the audience to focus on your speech, you need to work to keep their attention. The first step in doing so is also the second thing you need do in your introduction: establish the relevance of your topic. Or, to put it another way, tell the audience why they should care about this topic. If you cannot justify the topic, then you must consider why you chose it. Most topics have real-world significance and can be justified with some research and consideration.

This process need not be a long explanation; in fact, it should be no more than a statement or two at the most. These statements, though, explicitly lay out what it is you will be addressing in your remarks and help focus the audience on a particular area of knowledge. Stating the topic also blends into the next task of an introduction: establishing your credibility on the topic.

3. Establish Your Credibility

Now that you have the audience's attention and have established the topic of your speech, you need to explain to them why they should listen to your comments about this topic. This answers the question of: "Why am I qualified to speak on this topic?" There are two easy ways to answer this question. First, the topic may be one with which you have experience or expertise. For example, a mechanic delivering a talk on how to change the oil in a car has experience and expertise on this topic. All he or she needs to do to establish credibility is explain his or her vast experience with oil changes and cars. This type of experience, however, is not always easy to come by—especially when delivering a speech in class for an assignment. Even in these situations, though, you can establish your credibility. Just be careful not to exaggerate your knowledge and experience.

In classroom situations, you can establish credibility by noting the research you conducted on the topic. Let's say you have decided to deliver a speech on human trafficking. You do not have any experience with this activity and no first-hand knowledge, but you did a great deal of research on it for weeks leading up to the assignment. All you need to do is tell the audience about the time spent looking into human trafficking, and you have given them reason to listen to you. Establishing credibility is essential in an introduction because even if an audience gives you their attention and is interested in your topic, they will quickly move on to something else if they do not believe there is a reason to listen to your comments on the issue.

4. State Your Argument

Once you have focused the audience's attention firmly on your topic and convinced them you are qualified to speak on it, it is time to let them know what you intend to say about the topic. This means it is time to state your argument, or thesis, for them. This is the fourth part of an introduction. The **thesis**, or argument, is a carefully worded one-sentence encapsulation of exactly what you will cover in your

speech. You can see your thesis statement as the anchor for your speech because everything that follows it is related to it in some way. The claim you make and the focus you establish with this statement guide the rest of your speech. See Table 11.1 for some examples of thesis statements.

TABLE 11.1

Thesis Statement Examples
Informative Speech Thesis Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropbox is a great tool that will back up your files online and make them available from any Internet-connected device. • Becoming a vegetarian has benefits for your health and for the environment.
Persuasive Speech Thesis Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to growing enrollment and limited space, the university should build a central parking deck for student use. • Congress should work to develop a more equitable tax code.
Special Occasion Speech Thesis Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Smith was a loving father and a loyal friend who will be greatly missed. • The winner of this year’s Community Betterment Award has worked tirelessly to make sure that children have a safe place to do homework and play after school.

Connecting the rest of your speech to your argument helps ensure that your speech is sharply focused and does not go off on tangents. In short, it provides the destination of your speech—where you want the audience to be at the end of the presentation. Just like any journey, knowing where you are going is nice, but knowing how you will get there is equally important, and so we will now turn to the next task of an introduction.

5. Preview Main Points

Once you tell the audience where you are headed, you need to explain how you plan to get there, and so the fifth element of an introduction is providing a preview of your main points. A preview can be one statement or a few, depending on how you wish to explain the roadmap of your speech to the audience. In either case, it must contain all the main points you will cover in your speech in the order in which you plan to cover them (see Table 11.2). With a one-sentence preview, your main points appear as several different clauses within the sentence. For example, a student is going to give a speech about the historic Battle of the Bulge in World War II. The student could break down the speech into four points and have the following preview statement: “The Battle of the Bulge occurred in four primary segments, the German attack that created the bulge, the courageous stand of the 101st Airborne at Bastogne, General Patton’s historical march to lend support at the bulge, and the clearing weather that made possible the allied air campaign.” This lets the audience know there are four parts, or four main points, that will be covered in the speech. This roadmap makes it easier for the audience to comprehend and follow the speaker throughout the speech and also keeps the speaker sharply focused.

For novice speakers, the one-sentence approach to a preview may be a bit challenging. In that case, a slower, but just as effective, method is using several statements. These statements usually begin with “First, I will explain....Second, I will cover....Next, I will detail....Finally, we will explore. . .” These numeric indicators specifically indicate the order of main points and are helpful for both the speaker and the audience. Obviously, this method takes longer than a one-sentence approach, but it achieves the same end result. At this point, the introduction is almost complete, save for one small but important task.

TABLE 11.2

Preview Statement Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First, I will explain why public transportation is better for the environment. Second, I will tell you why using public transportation improves your community. Finally, I will describe how taking public transportation will help to improve your health.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You should do three things to make sure you're ready next time an emergency strikes. First, build an emergency preparedness kit. Second, create a family emergency communication plan. Third, make sure your legal documents and insurance plans are up to date.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can take charge of your health by doing three simple things more often: move more, sleep more, and eat more nutritious foods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To save a life with CPR, remember to check your ABCs: airway, breathing, and circulation.

6. Transition to the Body

When you have established the topic and explained how you plan to approach it, all that remains is getting on with your speech. To do so, however, requires a subtle move to let the audience know you have finished introducing the topic and will now get into the details of your speech. This move is a transitional statement at the end of the introduction. A **transition** is a connecting statement that lets the audience know you are leaving one point and moving to another. If your preview statement and the transition are constructed properly, this should be apparent to the audience. See Table 11.3 for examples of transitional statements.

TABLE 11.3

Transitional Statement Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand why a border collie is a great dog to have if you want a furry running partner, we need to begin by exploring the history of border collies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you begin a new exercise regimen, it is important to start slowly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First, we need to understand the factors that led to the housing crisis.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let's start by learning about the need for organ donors in the United States.

One last thing to note about introductions: even though they are the first thing the audience hears, they are the last thing you write. The reason for this is that when constructing the body you may want to change the order of main points, thus impacting the preview and the transition. You also might want to use what you planned as an attention getter as data for a main point, especially if it is a statistic or quotation. So, it is always best to prepare the body of the speech and conclusion before constructing the introduction.

Transitions between Main Points

Throughout your speech you will need to ensure the audience follows your argument and understands when you are changing topics. Similar to travelers who use road signs to know when to change course and billboards to find places to eat and stay the night, speakers supply connective statements throughout their speech so that their audience knows they are shifting topics. Some of the most important connective statements in a speech are transitions between main points. Transitions between main points are easy for speakers to forget, but they are necessary for a successful presentation because they keep the speaker on track and aid the audience

in understanding the direction the speech is going. A transition between main points could be accomplished in three ways: internal summaries, signposts, and internal previews.

Internal Summaries

An **internal summary** reviews the point that you just covered and indicates to the audience that you are preparing to move to another point. Internal summaries serve to keep ideas well organized in the minds of both the audience and the speaker. They remind audiences about the important connections you made within a main point, and also help push your argument along at the same time. For example, the blue, boldfaced portion of this statement is an internal summary a speaker might say: "I just discussed the second stage of wine-making, **which was testing with a hydrometer, adding chemicals and stirring, then allowing the wine to set for a period.**"

Signposts

Signposts are key words that signal to the audience that you are moving from one part of the speech to another. Signposts catch the audience's attention and, like traffic signs, help show the audience what is ahead and keep them on track while listening to your speech.

Signposts can help divide the speech into obvious parts for you and your audience. Some of the more common signposts are words such as "next," "additionally," "secondly," "third," and "finally."

Internal Previews

Like the preview of main points at the end of the introduction, an internal preview provides a roadmap of what is ahead for the audience. An **internal preview** informs the audience of the elements of the next main point. For example, the blue, boldfaced portion of this statement is an internal preview: "Now that we have seen the initial stage of making wine, let's move into the second stage, **which includes taking tests with a hydrometer, adding some chemicals and stirring, then letting the wine sit for an extended period of time.**" These are especially helpful when moving to a more complicated point because they foreshadow information for the audience.

Structuring the Conclusion

Once you have gone over everything in the speech body that you said you would do in the introduction, it is time to finish your speech. In finishing your speech, remember it is the last thing the audience will hear from you, thus increasing the likelihood they will remember it. Much like introductions, conclusions also have some essential elements: a signpost, a summary, and a clincher. In this section, we will discuss these three parts of a good conclusion.

Signal the Conclusion

After explaining your main points in detail, and connecting them to your overall argument, you need to indicate to the audience that the conclusion is approaching. Just as you use a signpost to signal to the audience that you are moving from one point to another in a transition between main points, you should use another signpost to signal to your audience you are beginning the conclusion. Signposts that signal you are about to conclude your speech include phrases such as "To summarize," "Finally," "To conclude," and "Let's wrap up." These simple statements clearly indicate to audiences that the conclusion is here and the speech is almost at an end. The signpost, however, is not the indicator that the speech is over, just that it is almost finished. There is still some work to do.

Provide a Summary

After the signpost, you need to revisit the main ideas and central argument of your presentation. There are two parts to this task: restating your main points and restating your thesis, or argument. In restating the main points, you want to remind the audience of the evidence and information you provided in the body of the speech. It is important that you do not include new information or cite new evidence at this point. The summary should recap the highlights of the speech and be as brief as possible. This summary should just recap the highlights of the body of the speech. The summary also should be brief. It does not need to detail everything you just told the audience, but rather generally summarize what you spent time talking about.

After summarizing the main points it is also important to remind your audience about the central argument or thesis of your speech. This is accomplished by briefly explaining how the main points substantiate the overall position you articulated in the presentation. In other words, explain how the roadmap got you and the audience to the destination. This restatement should not be the exact words as the initial statement of your argument from the introduction, but should be similar to it. You also should create it so that if the audience remembers any one thing from your speech, it's the main argument.

Clinch the Speech

Obviously, even though your argument is the most important part of your speech—it is, after all, why you spoke—you need more than that to end the presentation. The **clincher**, or the final statement of your speech, is an additional statement that follows the summary of your main points and argument. There are numerous forms of clinchers, and many are the same devices we shared as a means of getting the audience's attention. If you began the speech with a short story, you can finish the story at the end of the speech, giving a nice sense of fit and closure. You also may end with a famous quotation, personal reflection, or even a call to action for the audience. You do not have to revisit the same form of attention getter used in the introduction, but you might want to. No matter which route you choose to follow, it is important that you remind the audience why they listened in the first place.