

Speech Introductions

Do Your Introductions Arouse and Capture Audience Attention ?

Speech introductions need to meet four criteria to be effective.

They need to be...

- appropriate in length
- appropriate to the audience.
- appropriate to the theme
- arouse and capture the attention of the audience

Appropriate Length

How can appropriate length be determined for a speech introduction?

Factors to consider would be the time allowed for the speech, the reason for the speech, the makeup of the audience.

Consider

- Is the speech 5 minutes or 50 minutes?
- Is the introduction the first of a program with several speakers?
- Are other speakers using the same general theme?
- Are you the only speaker or is your part unique if one of several?
- Who are your audience and what is their interest level?

As a general guideline, a speech introduction for a five minute speech should be no more than 30-50 seconds. An hour speech should be between 4 and 6 minutes if you're the only speaker.

If part of the whole and you are the first of a series of speakers, your speech introduction will set the tone for everyone. It will need to be a bit longer. If one of the follow up speakers talking on the same subject but perhaps a different angle, the introduction need only be one to a few minutes in length.

More importantly, the speech introduction should blend into the talk so smoothly that it is hard to determine when the introduction stops and the body begins. If long, rambling or too detailed you will kill any chance of arousing and capturing attention.

A speech introduction could be illustrated by a door. You take your audience to the door. This door is open or closed depending on their knowledge of the subject. You proceed to tell them what is on the other side you want to show them. Then you step aside and escort them into the room that is the body of your speech.

As you advance in skill, you will have them inside the room and they will not realize they even walked through the door. It will be as though you teleported them there.

Appropriate to the Audience

- **Appropriate to their understanding and knowledge**

Questions to ask, is the audience knowledgeable on the subject? Is it a new concept? Is it an issue they agree with or are they opposed? Are you trying to persuade, motivate, or inform?

All of these will determine how you frame your speech introduction. To arouse interest requires meeting the audience on their level of interest. A group of college students will have different interests than a group of seasoned veterans in a particular career field.

If you do not know the interest level and how to get leverage to arouse that interest then you need to do two things.

- You need to get to know your audience.
- You need to learn how to craft headlines.

One best site to learn about this is Bencivenga Bullets. It will help you get started in this arena. It's free. I suggest you subscribe and put them in your favorites. It will enhance your ability to write speech introductions.

- **Appropriate to their needs and jobs to be done.**

Ask the question "What Are We Really Selling?"

In preparing any speech where you want to persuade, motivate or just give information, the underlying motivation of what you're doing is selling. The definition includes "to convince of" and "to be approved of." So a very basic question that begs to be asked, what are you really selling.

Let me explain.

A man goes out to buy a saw. Why? For the sake of having a saw? No, he bought it because he wanted to cut something with it. He bought a drill not for the sake of having the drill but rather the hole it will make for him.

He buys grass seed because he wants a lush green lawn.

He doesn't buy a cake to have a cake. Thus the old adage, you can't have your cake and eat it too. Ask the question regarding any thing you're trying to sell to your audience, what are they really buying if they buy this. They are buying their "Jobs to be done."

Take a milk shake. Why do people buy them? It is not as simple as you think. If in the early morning for a long commute to work it could be for the job of nourishment and passing the time. If in the afternoon it could be refreshment.

Would you want to market a nourishing drink in the afternoon and a refreshing drink in the morning?

In the speech introduction it is necessary recognize what you're really selling, the job to be done, and then to presell the audience on your subject. You are in effect, pre-selling the body of your speech.

So in the speech introduction, make sure you are pre-selling what the audience wants. You need to know your audience to do this.

- **appropriate to the theme**

You may have a great story or an emotional anecdote, but if it is not on point and appropriate to the theme, consider saving it for another day.

If it is in any way remote from the theme or even requires a stretch to apply you may never get the audience into the body of the talk with you. It may capture the attention of some in the audience but that attention will be focused on solving the problem of how it applies.

It needs to move toward the body in an orderly, coherent, and continuous sequence of thought. It also needs to capture the attention of the minds of your audience. It needs to do these without deviating from the point and purpose of the speech.

Appropriate to theme can refer to being contextually in line with the theme of the speech. You can stretch and make anything analogous to anything else. Choosing to do so could be hazardous to your goal.

Appropriate will also refer to what is socially and culturally acceptable within the audience. If you are going to talk to a group of parents about children, a group more mature in age or high school students, the subject content of the introduction needs to be socially acceptable to the age and group.

Appropriate in subject matter is also important. If the theme is on death and dieing, a lively and up beat introduction would not necessarily be respectful or fitting to the purpose or point of the speech.

Arouse and capture the attention of the audience

The speech introduction needs to arouse and capture the interest of the audience in the subject.

This goal can be attained by showing the audience what's in it for them. Why is the subject of value to your audience? Why should they listen?

Sometimes the benefit is obvious by subject or title. It is still necessary to arouse interest. We have our minds so occupied by so many things, why should we give valuable mind time to you the speaker?

The solution was well stated by Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, said, "The only way to influence someone is to find out what they want, and show them how to get it."

Did you notice that success lies in what others want? Success in persuasion lies in helping them with their 'job to be done.' Holes, cuts headaches, problems, desires—human wants—these are the jobs to be done by your audience.

On the average, the short term memory is about 20 seconds. That means you have 20 seconds to capture their attention in your speech introduction.

The reality: If you have a long rambling and run on sentence for an introduction, you **WILL** lose them. Short, sweet, and mind capturing words need to be used. You only have 20 seconds. You get their attention in the first 20 seconds, you have 20 seconds more to keep it going.

So, get them involved on their level of thinking. Look at your speech introduction statements and break each section down to 20-30 second segments. Does each segment capture attention? Does it draw the audience into the next segment? And on and on.

One word of caution here. Be careful that what you say is not mental spam. First review the power words. Avoid making big benefit claims. Over a generation ago, when things were new and improved, it made sense to promote things that way. We have heard the words so often we turn on our spam filters and don't listen.

If this was sent as an e-mail and had the word free, new or improved to many times it would get kicked out by your computer spam filter. Should our minds be any different?

Beyond What's In it for Them

So the key to connecting to the audience, surround the benefit with the proof and make the claim bigger than the proof and always have them joined at the hips. This means for many speech introductions, the grand claims may need to wait till the body of the speech. Otherwise the spam filters will shut you out.

One of the biggest challenges audiences face is application of the information. By putting the benefit / proof duo in the body rather than the speech introduction will give it added power. Used in the body where you have their attention it will have better retention. Now you can increase the chance of acceptance and the use of the information.

Keep it simple

Simply put, keep the speech introduction within the general understanding of the audience. There are a number of devices that could be used.

- Allegories and illustrations
- Comparisons
- Posing a problem
- A series of questions

What ever is used, it should be on the level of the audience and familiar to them. In the best instances, you will draw them into the discussion with out them even realizing.

Overcoming Objections and Prejudice

Some subjects will have an audience on one side or the other of an issue. This may be because of a lack of empirical evidence. The prejudice results from the issues being moral, scientific, religious, or too deep to be answered by scientific method alone.

To address this in your speech, please see Argumentation.

To overcome prejudice, address it head on. When addressing the prejudice, do not make it an attack. Appeal for understanding so that there can be a better understanding of why there are differing viewpoints.

One technique that works well is **using 'I' statements**. It will appeal to those in the audience who are reasonable. . Speak with confidence, but avoid any impression of being dogmatic. If you feel nervous, slow down and speak in a low-pitched voice.

Two of the three speaking pillars Speechmastery.com is built on, what you say and how you say it, are most critical in your speech introduction. This part of the speech and the conclusion need to really shine.

To start, make your speech introduction up of short simple sentences. Make the speech with the same words you would use in every day speech.

Even though simple words are used, the choice of words is critical. Make each word count. Simple word choice and well thought out use can result in your words having impact and power.

The entire introduction need not be talking. Pausing is most effective when making poignant statements and asking probing questions. Make each pause count.

Consider writing out your speech introduction word for word so as to make it precise. Then memorize it. It is there if you get into difficulty but that is not likely to happen if you're well prepared.

Applying these principles to your speech introductions will improve your chances of capturing and holding your audiences attention.