Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions

First impressions are very important, especially in public speaking. The way you begin a presentation can determine the audience's level of interest and can boost your self-confidence. In general, an introduction should consist of the following:

- An attention getter
- Revealing the topic/creating audience interest
- Establishing credibility/building goodwill with the audience
- Previewing your main points

Get the attention of the audience:

Relate the topic to the audience. Your audience will pay attention to something that relates to them directly. Use vivid language to make the audience feel like they are personally involved with the topic.

Ex: “I want you to imagine that you are in a dark room.”

Another way to do this is by the use of statistics and making your subject personal.
Ex: “Think of the three most important women in your life. According to the Department of Justice, one of them will be sexually assaulted.”

Asking a rhetorical question is a very simple way to get the audience to think about your topic.
Ex: “Have you ever felt so stressed out during finals that you thought you couldn’t make it through that last exam?”

Use quotations or stories. A quotation or story is also an effective and easy way to arouse the interest of the audience.
Ex: “As Abraham Lincoln once said, ‘a house divided against itself cannot stand.’”
Ex: “It is the middle of January, and a man is sleeping on a bench. He is covered only by the day’s newspaper, and he is one of the many homeless people in America.”

Think of other great attention getters that you’ve heard or read. What can you do to really pull the audience into your presentation?

Reveal the topic and create audience interest:

Too frequently we get so caught up in trying to get the audience’s attention that we forget to spell out the actual topic. Make sure that regardless of the method used to get the audience’s attention, you also let them know the topic.
Ex: “Just as President Lincoln said, our House and our Senate should no longer be divided through petty party feuds.”

It is also important to give your audience a personal reason to listen to the presentation. Make it clear what they can gain from listening to you.

Establishing credibility:

Credibility is, according to Stephen Lucas’s book, The Art of Public Speaking, “the audience’s perception of whether a speaker is qualified to speak on a given topic.” This can come from your own experiences, or how you came about knowing about the topic. It is also important to build goodwill with the audience. They need to know why you chose to speak on this topic.
Ex: “Protecting animals from cruelty has always been very personal to me. During my time
as a volunteer with the animal shelter, I saw many animals who were completely neglected."

**Preview the body of the speech:**

Laying out exactly what will be talked about is important because the audience should know what to expect from the presentation. The audience should never have to guess what’s coming next. A preview statement, which is a statement in the introduction that identifies the main points of the presentation, is a safe and sure bet. This will also provide a smooth transition to the body of the speech.

Ex: “In order to understand the importance of tax reform we will first look at the history of taxes, then examine why the current system is failing us and, finally, explore some alternatives.”

**Conclusions**

The way you end the speech is what the audience will be left with. Therefore, the conclusion must be given as much thought as the introduction. A conclusion serves two purposes:

- To give the audience one last opportunity to understand the material.
- To let the audience know that the speech is ending.

Ask yourself this: What do you want the audience to walk out of the room remembering? That should help determine your concluding remarks

**Understanding the material:**

This is best used with a summary statement. Restating the main points gives the audience a reminder of what was spoken on, and also your own argument.

Ex: “As we’ve seen looking at animal cruelty, there may be many reasons an animal is harmed. These reasons include the maturity of the owner, sheer neglect or other circumstances, like the owner’s death. Either way, it is important to give generously to animal shelters, either through monetary donations or donations of your own time.”

**Ending the speech:**

It’s pretty obvious that the conclusion is there to end the speech fluidly, but often it is the most forgotten part. This can be easily remedied by saying something simple, such as “In conclusion,” “In closing,” or “Let me end by saying.” All of these are easy clues.

Another way to conclude is in the way you deliver the speech. You can either create an emotional build up (think Dr. Martin Luther King’s famed “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech) or wind down and leaving the audience with one emotionally driven point.

In either method, don’t forget to link back to the introduction to fluidly tie the entire speech together.

Ex: “In conclusion, Abraham Lincoln’s quote concerning a house divided is especially important in our current time. We can no longer expect to run a country effectively when we are fighting over trivial and meaningless issues. Until politicians realize this, we will never be able to make any changes in the world.”

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