

Opening Your Speech

Getting off to a good start

The first 30 to 60 seconds of your speech are often the most critical. It is often in that time frame that members of your audience decide whether or not they should continue to listen!

Speakers may have many interesting and informative points to make in their presentation. They may be entertaining and well worth listening to but, unless they have made an impact in their first minute, they may lose a significant portion of their audience.

Listed below are some suggestions you may find helpful when preparing the opening to your next speech.

Guideposts Consider summarising the main points of your speech in your opening to get the audience's interest. (This technique is often used to reinforce important parts of your message.)

Definitions Definitions from dictionaries or other authoritative sources can be used to open speeches. If you use this technique make sure you find an interesting definition and deliver it with impact.

Amusing story There is nothing like a funny story to get your audience on side, but you need to be sure it is funny and relevant to your topic.

Dramatisation This may be based on a section of a novel or from real life. It is important that the speaker knows it verbatim and delivers it with conviction.

e.g. "Mrs Thompson ? I am Detective Sergeant Jones. I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

or "Suddenly a fin appeared about 10 metres away. I splashed frantically and called to the driver of the ski boat..."

Quotation Start your speech with a well known or striking quotation. Many good books are available to assist you. Make sure you always acknowledge the source.

e.g. As the Duchess said in Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland",
"If everybody minded their own business, the world would go round a lot faster than it does. "

Visuals Be silent until all eyes are on you, then produce something to gain the audience's attention, such as a startling poster. Then commence speaking. Obviously such an aid must be relevant to the topic.

Imagination is essential when looking for a speech opening that will gain your audience's attention and make them stay tuned in for the entire speech. Be daring - don't be afraid to experiment.