

Center for Speaking and Presentation

The Speech Introduction (Rothwell, 2017)

How do I start my speech or presentation?

At times, one of the most difficult things to prepare in a speech is the introduction. We know the presentation's requirements, the topic, and what we need to discuss, but the introduction of the speech can be one of the most confusing, anxiety-evoking portions of the writing and delivery process. In organizing a speech or presentation, speakers generally follow a formula of five objectives, including:

- An Attention-Catching Statement.
- A Listener Relevance Statement.
- A Credibility-Building Statement.
- The Thesis.
- The Preview.

Get Their Attention

- **Tell a story.** Using an anecdote that relates to your presentation topic is shown to motivate your audience to listen.
- **Use a shocking statistic** as a way to point out a remarkable situation or problem to your audience.
- **Ask a rhetorical question.** Asking a question can be an effective way of gathering audience attention. If you ask a question the audience can answer either mentally or by a show of hands, it reduces the risk of verbal responses that can derail your concentration.

Listener Relevance

- **Make your presentation audience-centered.** Make it clear why your presentation applies to them or why they should care.

Build Your Credibility

- **Dynamism.** Be enthusiastic about your topic, but not over the top. Both too little and too much dynamism can be dangerous to your credibility.
- **Composure.** Manage your public speaking anxiety to appear confident and emotionally stable. It helps you influence your audience, if necessary.
- **Competence.** Show you know what you're talking about. Identify your background, experience, or connection to the topic.

Thesis and Preview Statements

- **Tell them what you're going to tell them.** Speeches are different from written forms of communication. If we don't understand something written, we can read it again. Our audiences do not have that opportunity with a presentation, so we need to make our main points as clear as possible. That begins with a good thesis and preview. The thesis is your main point, while your preview highlights your supporting internal points.