Attention-getters

Having trouble developing your attention-getter? A good introduction will generally perform three tasks: (1) capture the attention of the audience and motivate them to listen, (2) establish the credibility of the speaker, and (3) lead into the body of the speech. Unless you accomplish the first quickly, you will not have an opportunity to achieve the second or third.

Most importantly, choose a specific method of introduction appropriate to your topic.

1. Relate an incident or anecdote. Often, the easiest way to begin a speech is to explain what led you to your topic. What interests you is likely to interest your audience, and your audience not only becomes motivated to listen but also becomes convinced of the seriousness of your purpose.

2. Refer to a previous speaker or to some event in the speaking situation. Sometimes, the best speeches seem to be spontaneous outgrowths of the immediate circumstances. One of the easiest ways to make your speech seem to spring from its surroundings is to relate your subject to a person or incident already occupying your audience’s field of attention.

3. Begin with a startling statement. This method of introducing a topic is directly contrary to the method just discussed. Sometimes an abrupt statement completely unrelated to anything in its immediate context can capture attention precisely because it is distinct.

4. Pose a question. When someone poses a question, it is difficult not to think about the issue they have raised. Dialectical questions are designed to engage the audience and exact a response. Rhetorical questions elicit interest but is generally self-answering, and does not require a specific response from the audience. It’s often used to secure not only the attention of the audience but also their agreement.

5. Pose a challenge. Bringing a controversial idea directly before your audience will not necessarily endear you to them but if you can back it up, you may earn their respect as well as their attention.

6. Explore an analogy. Sometimes an indirect approach will better server your purpose. An analogy can be an excellent means of gaining immediate audience interest while allowing you to lead more gradually to the point of your talk.

7. Introduce a quotation. Quotations in the introduction of a speech are useful if they are relevant, and if they can lend prestige to the position one proposes. (Avoid using dictionary definitions – they are trite and overused.)

8. Interject some humor. If you have something to say that is appropriate to your occasion and genuinely funny then by all means say it. Unfortunately, humor is easy to overdo. Make sure that it is relevant, related, and appropriate to your speech.