

9 Beginning and Ending the Speech



The Introduction

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On the night of January 26, 1988, a conductor stepped to the podium at the Majestic Theatre in New York City, tapped his baton, raised his arms, and signaled the orchestra to play. Moments later, American theatergoers first heard the dramatic opening chords of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Today, this scene has been repeated more than 8,500 times and *Phantom* has become the longest-running musical in Broadway history.

Like most classic musicals, *Phantom of the Opera* begins with an overture—an orchestral introduction that captures the audience’s attention and gives them a preview of the music they are going to hear. Without such an introduction—if the characters simply walked onstage and began singing or speaking—the beginning of the play would seem too abrupt, and the audience would not be suitably “primed” for the entertainment.

Similarly, most musicals end with a finale, when the whole cast is onstage, elements of the dramatic plot are resolved, portions of the principal songs are recalled, and the music is brought to a dramatic climax. If there were no such conclusion, if the actors merely stopped and walked offstage, the audience would be left unsatisfied.

Just as musical plays need appropriate beginnings and endings, so do speeches. The beginning, or introduction, prepares listeners for what is to come. The conclusion ties up the speech and alerts listeners that the speech is going to end. Ideally, it is a satisfying conclusion.

In this chapter we explore the roles played by an introduction and a conclusion in speechmaking. We also discuss techniques aimed at fulfilling those roles. If you apply these techniques imaginatively, you will take a big step toward elevating your speeches from the ordinary to the splendid.

The Introduction

First impressions are important. A poor beginning may so distract or alienate listeners that the speaker can never fully recover. Moreover, getting off on the right foot is vital to a speaker’s self-confidence. What could be more encouraging than watching your listeners’ faces begin to register interest, attention, and pleasure? A good introduction, you will find, is an excellent confidence booster.

In most speech situations, the introduction has four objectives:

- Get the attention and interest of your audience.
- Reveal the topic of your speech.
- Establish your credibility and goodwill.
- Preview the body of the speech.

We’ll look at each of these objectives in turn.

GET ATTENTION AND INTEREST

“Unless a speaker can interest his audience at once, his effort will be a failure.” So said the great lawyer Clarence Darrow. If your topic is not one of extraordinary interest, your listeners are likely to say to themselves, “So what? Who cares?” A speaker can quickly lose an audience if she or he doesn’t use the introduction to get their attention and quicken their interest.

Getting the initial attention of your audience is usually easy—even before you utter a single word. After you are introduced and step to the lectern, your

audience will normally give you their attention. If they don't, wait patiently. Look directly at the audience without saying a word. In a few moments all talking and physical commotion will stop. Your listeners will be attentive. You will be ready to start speaking.

Keeping the attention of your audience once you start talking is more difficult. Here are the methods used most often. Employed individually or in combination, they will help get the audience caught up in your speech.

Relate the Topic to the Audience

People pay attention to things that affect them directly. If you can relate the topic to your listeners, they are much more likely to be interested in it.

Suppose, for example, one of your classmates begins her speech like this:

Today I am going to talk about collecting postcards—a hobby that is both fascinating and financially rewarding. I would like to explain the basic kinds of collectible postcards, why they are so valuable, and how collectors buy and sell their cards.

This is certainly a clear introduction, but it is not one to get you hooked on the speech. Now what if your classmate were to begin her speech this way—as one student actually did.

It's Saturday morning, and you are helping clean out your grandmother's attic. After working a while, you stumble upon a trunk, open it, and discover hundreds of old postcards. Thinking about getting to the football game on time, you start tossing the cards into the trash can. Congratulations! You have just thrown away a year's tuition.

This time the speaker has used just the right bait. Chances are you will be hooked.

Even when you use other interest-arousing lures, you should *always* relate your topic to the audience. At times this will test your ingenuity, but it pays dividends. Here is an excellent example from a student speech about dreams. The speaker began by saying:

You're being chased by an object of unspeakable horror, yet your legs can only move in slow motion. Each step takes unbearably long, and your frantic struggle to run faster is hopeless. Your pursuer gets closer, and your desperation turns to terror. You're completely helpless—eye to eye with death.

Then you wake up, gasping for air, your heart pounding, your face clammy with sweat. It takes a few minutes for your heart and breathing to slow down. You reassure yourself that it was "just a dream." Soon you drift back to sleep.

By using vivid language to describe something all his classmates had experienced, the speaker made sure of an attentive audience.

State the Importance of Your Topic

Presumably, you think your speech is important. Tell your audience why they should think so too. Here is how Judith Kaye, Chief Judge of the State of New York, used this method to involve her audience in a speech to the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law:

We know that a child is born into poverty in the United States every 36 seconds, and we see 12.8 million children living below the poverty line. . . . We see an estimated



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View the beginning of "In Your Dreams" in the online Media Library for this chapter (Video Clip 9.1).

8.5 million children, nearly 12 percent of all U.S. children, without health insurance programs. . . . A child dies from neglect or abuse every six hours, a child is killed by gunfire almost every three hours, and the number of neglected or abused children each year would fill up the city of Detroit.¹

These are striking statistics. By citing them in her introduction, Kaye emphasized the importance of her topic and captured the attention of her audience.

Clearly this technique is easy to use when discussing social and political issues such as child abuse, endangered species, terrorism, and stem cell research, but it is appropriate for other topics as well. Here is how one student handled it in a speech about starting a home aquarium:

It is very hard to cuddle a fish. Fish won't roll over or fetch the morning paper. You won't find them curling up on your lap, chasing a ball of string, or rescuing a child from a burning building.

Yet despite these shortcomings, 300 million tropical fish have found their way into 15 million American homes. Each year \$60 million of tropical fish are sold in the United States, and they have earned a spot next to the all-American dog and the cuddly kitten in the hearts of millions of people. Today I would like to explain how you can start a home aquarium and discover the pleasures of owning tropical fish.

Whenever you discuss a topic whose importance may not be clear to the audience, you should think about ways to demonstrate its significance in the introduction.

Startle the Audience

One surefire way to arouse interest quickly is to startle your listeners with an arresting or intriguing statement. Everyone in the audience paid close attention after this speaker's introduction:

Take a moment and think of the three women closest to you. Who comes to mind? Your mother? Your sister? Your girlfriend? Your wife? Your best friend? Now guess which one will be sexually assaulted during her lifetime. It's not a pleasant thought, but according to the U.S. Department of Justice, one of every three American women will be sexually assaulted sometime during her life.

Notice the gradual buildup to the speaker's arresting statement, "Now guess which one will be sexually assaulted during her lifetime." This statement startles the audience—especially the men—and drives home at a personal level the problem of sexual assault against women. The effect would have been much less if the speaker had said, "Sexual assault against women is a serious problem."

Sometimes you may want to startle your audience in the very first sentence of your speech. Here is how one student began her speech opposing the use of Native American names for sports teams:

In tonight's games, the San Antonio Spics are playing the New Jersey Japs, while the Los Angeles Jews will take on the Minnesota Polacks.

This technique is highly effective and easy to use. Just be sure the startling introduction relates directly to the subject of your speech. If you choose a strong opening simply for its shock value and then go on to talk about something else, your audience will be confused and possibly annoyed.



A good introduction will get your speech off to a strong start. To be most effective, it should relate the topic to the audience and be delivered from a minimum of notes.

Arouse the Curiosity of the Audience

People are curious. One way to draw them into your speech is with a series of statements that progressively whet their curiosity about the subject of the speech. For example:

It is the most common chronic disease in the United States. Controllable but incurable, it is a symptomless disease. You can have it for years and never know until it kills you. Some 73 million Americans have this disease, and 300,000 will die from it before the year is out. Odds are that five of us in this class have it.

What am I talking about? Not cancer. Not AIDS. Not heart disease. I am talking about hypertension—high blood pressure.

For another example, look at this splendid opening from a student speech entitled “The Gift of Life”:

Each of you has a gift. What kind of gift is it? It’s not a Christmas gift or a birthday gift. It’s not some special talent or skill. It’s a gift that could save a life—maybe more than one. If you decide to give it, you lose nothing.

Some people bury their gift. Others burn it. All but one of you who completed my questionnaire would gladly receive the gift, but only 20 percent of you have decided to give it. This gift is the donation of your vital organs when you die.

Not only does this speaker relate the topic directly to his classmates, he gets them further involved by building suspense about the “gift” that each of us has. Notice how much less effective the introduction would have been if he had simply said, “Today I am going to talk about organ donation.”

Question the Audience

Asking a *rhetorical question* is another way to get your listeners thinking about your speech. Sometimes a single question will do:



Looking for a quotation to use in the introduction or conclusion of your speech? Visit Yahoo Quotations (<http://dir.yahoo.com/Reference/Quotations/>) for a comprehensive roster of links to collected quotations on the Web.

Are you interested in reading introductions and conclusions from famous speeches in world history? You can find them at The History Place: Great Speeches Collection (www.historyplace.com/speeches/previous.htm).

How would you respond if a loved one was the victim of terrorism?

What would you think if you went to the doctor because you were ill and she told you to watch *The Simpsons* as part of your treatment?

rhetorical question
A question that the audience answers mentally rather than out loud.

In other circumstances, you may want to pose a series of questions, each of which draws the audience deeper and deeper into the speech. Here is how one speaker used this method:

Have you ever spent a sleepless night studying for an exam? Can you remember rushing to finish a term paper because you waited too long to start writing it? Do you often feel overwhelmed by all the things you have to get done at school? At work? At home?

If so, you may be the victim of poor time management. Fortunately, there are proven strategies you can follow to use your time more effectively and to keep control of your life.

Like beginning with a startling statement, opening with a question works best when the question is meaningful to the audience and firmly related to the content of the speech. It also works most effectively when you pause for just a moment after each question. This adds dramatic impact and gives the question time to sink in. The audience, of course, will answer mentally—not out loud.

Begin with a Quotation

Another way to arouse the interest of your audience is to start with an attention-getting quotation. You might choose your quotation from Shakespeare or Confucius, from the Bible or Talmud, from a poem, song, or film. Here is how one student used a quotation to begin a speech about scientist Jonas Salk, who developed the first polio vaccine:

"If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities." These words from poet and writer Maya Angelou could apply easily to the dedicated researcher Jonas Salk, who created a vaccine for polio. A half century ago this crippling disease struck indiscriminately, but today widespread use of the vaccine has virtually wiped out polio. In my talk I would like to describe how Salk persevered and triumphed in his quest despite doubts and major setbacks.

A humorous quotation can afford double impact, as in this speech about the need for political reform in the U.S. Congress:

Mark Twain once said, "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly American criminal class except Congress."



As you research your speeches, keep an eye out for quotations, stories, and other materials you can use to craft an introduction that will capture the attention of your listeners.

By opening with Twain's words, the speaker not only got the audience's attention but also foreshadowed a central theme of her speech. Notice, too, that both of the quotations used here as examples are relatively short. Opening your speech with a lengthy quotation is a sure way to set your audience yawning.

Tell a Story

We all enjoy stories—especially if they are provocative, amusing, dramatic, or suspenseful. To work well as introductions, they should also be clearly relevant to the main point of the speech. Used in this way, stories are perhaps the most effective way to begin a speech.

Consider, for example, the story one student told to open his speech about America's crumbling bridges:

Gary Babineau thought he was dead. It was August 1, 2007, and he had just driven his blue Chevy truck onto the I-35 West bridge in Minneapolis when the 30-year-old structure began collapsing. "I heard a rumbling, like a jackhammer," he said later, "and then it completely gave way." His pickup plummeted 35 feet, landing upside down, the bed severed from the cab. Miraculously, Babineau, who was wearing his seat belt, survived, but others were not so lucky. Thirteen people died that day; more than a hundred were injured.

The collapse of the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis was a tragedy, but it will not be the last one. There are 79,000 bridges across the country rated as "structurally deficient" by the Federal Highway Administration. These bridges carry 300 million vehicles a day, and one can only wonder which will be the next to go.

Like many good introductions, this one does a double job—it arouses the interest of the audience and gets listeners emotionally involved in the speech.

You can also use stories based on your personal experience. Here is how one pre-med student used such a story. She began by recounting the first time she observed doctors performing surgery in the operating room:

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View the beginning of "Hoping to Heal" in the online Media Library for this chapter (Video Clip 9.2).

There I stood, wearing a surgical mask, in the middle of a large, brightly lit room. In the center of the room were five figures huddled over a table. I found it difficult to see since everything was draped in blue sheets, yet I didn't dare take a step toward the table.

Then one of the figures called to me, "Angela, get over here and take a closer look." My knees buckled as I walked through the sterile environment. But eventually I was there, standing over an unconscious body in the operating room.

The effectiveness of any story—especially a personal one—hinges on the speaker's delivery as well as on the content. As you can see from the excerpt of this speech on Video Clip 9.2 in the online Media Library for this chapter, the speaker uses pauses, eye contact, and changes in her tone of voice to help draw her audience into the speech. See if you can do the same in your introduction.

The seven methods discussed above are the ones used most often by student speakers to gain attention and interest. Other methods include referring to the occasion, inviting audience participation, using audio equipment or visual aids, relating to a previous speaker, and beginning with humor. For any given speech, try to choose the method that is most suitable for the topic, the audience, and the occasion.

REVEAL THE TOPIC

In the process of gaining attention, be sure to state clearly the topic of your speech. If you do not, your listeners will be confused. And once they are confused, your chances of getting them absorbed in the speech are almost nil.

This is a basic point—so basic that it may hardly seem worth mentioning. Yet you would be surprised how many students need to be reminded of it. You may hear speeches in your own class in which the topic is not clear by the end of the introduction. So you will know what to avoid, here is such an introduction, presented in a public speaking class:

Imagine taking a leisurely boat ride along a peaceful waterway. The sun is high in the sky, reflecting brightly off the ripples around you. The banks are lush with mangrove and cypress trees. You see a stately pelican resting on a low-lying branch. You grab your camera, snap a shot, and check the result. The picture is perfect. But will it be perfect in the future? That is the question I want to explore today.

What is the topic of this speech? Nature photography? No. Birding? No. Tourism in the tropics? No. The student was talking about efforts to restore the natural beauty of the Florida Everglades. But she did not make that clear to her audience. Suppose, instead, she had begun her speech differently:

Alligators, panthers, otters, brown pelicans—these and other creatures have lost 50 percent of their habitat in south Florida over the past few decades. Now, however, there is an \$8 billion program to preserve their home in the Florida Everglades. The largest restoration effort in the history of the world, it will rejuvenate one of America's most diverse ecosystems and protect it for future generations.

This opening would have provided a way to get the audience's attention, but it also would have related directly to the speech topic. If you beat around the bush in your introduction, you may lose your listeners. Even if they already know your topic, you should restate it clearly and concisely at some point in the introduction.



Telling a story is an excellent way to gain attention in a speech introduction. The story should be clearly relevant to the topic and should be delivered expressively with strong eye contact.

ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY AND GOODWILL

Besides getting attention and revealing the topic, there is a third objective you may need to accomplish in your introduction—establishing your credibility and goodwill.

Credibility is mostly a matter of being qualified to speak on a given topic—and of being *perceived* as qualified by your listeners. Here is how one student established her credibility on the subject of weight lifting without sounding like a braggart:

What is the fastest-growing sport today among American women? If you answered weight lifting, you are absolutely correct. Once seen as an exclusively male activity, weight lifting has crossed the gender barrier—and with good reason. Regardless of whether you are male or female, weight lifting can give you a sense of strength and power, enhance your self-esteem, and make you look and feel better.

I started lifting weights when I was in high school, and I have kept at it for the past eight years. I have also taught weight lifting in several health clubs, and I am a certified instructor through the Aerobics and Fitness Association of America.

Using some of my experience, I would like to explain the basic kinds of weights and how to use them properly.

Whether or not you lift weights, you will probably be more interested in the speech when you realize the speaker knows what she is talking about.

Your credibility need not be based on firsthand knowledge and experience. It can come from reading, from classes, from interviews, from friends—as in these cases:

I have been interested in the history of the civil rights movement for several years, and I have read a number of books and articles about it.

The information I am going to share with you today comes mostly from my biology class and an interview with Reyna Vasquez of the local Audubon Society.

Whatever the source of your expertise, be sure to let the audience know.

credibility
The audience's perception of whether a speaker is qualified to speak on a given topic.

Checklist

Speech Introduction

YES



NO

- | YES | NO | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Do I gain the attention and interest of my audience by using one or more of the methods discussed in this chapter? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Do I relate the speech topic to my audience? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Do I clearly reveal the topic of my speech? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Do I establish my credibility to speak on this topic? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. If my topic is controversial, do I take steps to establish my goodwill toward the audience? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Do I define any key terms that will be necessary for the audience to understand the rest of my speech? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Do I provide a preview statement of the main points to be covered in the body of the speech? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Is the introduction limited to 10–20 percent of my entire speech? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Have I worked out the language of my introduction in detail? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Have I practiced the delivery of my introduction so I can present it fluently, confidently, and with strong eye contact? |



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This checklist is also available in the online Speech Tools for this chapter.

goodwill

The audience's perception of whether the speaker has the best interests of the audience in mind.

Establishing your *goodwill* is a slightly different challenge. It is often crucial outside the classroom, where speakers have well-established reputations and may be identified with causes that arouse hostility among listeners. In such a situation, the speaker must try to defuse that hostility right at the start of the speech.

Occasionally you may have to do the same thing in your classroom speeches. Suppose you advocate a highly unpopular position. You will need to make a special effort to ensure that your classmates will consider your point of view. This is how one student tried to minimize his classmates' opposition at the start of a speech in favor of building more nuclear power plants:

The development of new nuclear power plants in the United States came to a standstill during the 1980s. Yet, as *Discover* magazine stated just last month, the time has come to look again at the benefits of nuclear power. Unlike fossil fuels, it does not contribute to global warming; it does not leave America at the mercy of foreign oil; and, with advances in technology, it is much safer than before.

That's why I'm speaking in favor of building more nuclear power plants to meet our future energy needs. I know most of you oppose nuclear power—I did, too, until I started researching this speech. Today I'd like to share with you some of the facts I have found. I know I can't persuade all of you. But I do ask you to listen with an open mind and to consider the merit of my arguments.

What reasonable listener could ignore such a sincere, forthright plea?

PREVIEW THE BODY OF THE SPEECH

As we saw in Chapter 3, most people are poor listeners. Even good listeners need all the help they can get in sorting out a speaker's ideas. One way to help your listeners is to tell them in the introduction what they should listen for in the rest of the speech. Here is an excellent example, from a speech by FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III at the Department of Justice Project Safe Childhood Conference in Washington, D.C.:

Today I want to talk about what we in the FBI are doing to attack child exploitation on the Internet. I want to touch on what we must do to meet your needs in terms of evidence collection and prosecution. Lastly, I want to talk about the role of both parents and the private sector in addressing this scourge.²

After this introduction, there was no doubt about Mueller's topic or the main points he would cover in his speech.

In some types of persuasive speeches, you may not want to reveal your central idea until later in the speech. But even in such a situation you must be sure your audience is not left guessing about the main points they should listen for as the speech unfolds. Nearly always, you should include a *preview statement* like the following:

Today I will share part of what I have learned by explaining what happens when you receive an acupuncture treatment, how acupuncture works, the kinds of medical conditions that can be treated with acupuncture, and the growing use of acupuncture in combination with Western medical techniques.

I'm here to tell you that, try as we might, we cannot build a bubble between ourselves and germs with antibacterial products and that these products actually create more problems than they solve. After looking at the problems created by antibacterial products, we'll explore some solutions.

Preview statements such as these serve another purpose as well. Because they usually come at the very end of the introduction, they provide a smooth lead-in to the body of the speech. They signal that the body of the speech is about to begin.

There is one other aspect you may want to cover in previewing your speech. You can use your introduction to give specialized information—definitions or background—that your listeners will need if they are to understand the rest of the speech. Often you can do this very quickly, as in the following example:

A triathlon is a race made up of three different events completed in succession. The events are usually swimming, biking, and running, though canoeing is sometimes substituted for one of these.

In other circumstances, you may have to explain an important term in more detail. Here is how one student handled the problem in a speech about the Underground Railroad used by slaves to escape from the South before the Civil War:

The term "Underground Railroad" was first used about 1830. But in fact, the Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad. It was an informal network that provided runaway slaves food, clothing, directions, and places to hide on their escape routes to the North and to Canada.

preview statement

A statement in the introduction of a speech that identifies the main points to be discussed in the body.



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View these preview statements from students speeches in the online Media Library for this chapter (Video Clip 9.3).

Why was it called the Underground Railroad? Because of its secrecy and because many of the people involved used railroad terms as code words. Hiding places, for example, were called “stations,” and people who helped the slaves were called “conductors.” Over the years, the Underground Railroad helped thousands of slaves make their way from bondage to freedom.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION WITH COMMENTARY

So far we have seen many excerpts showing how to fulfill the various objectives of an introduction. Now here is a complete introduction from a student speech. The side comments indicate the principles used in developing the introduction.

The Miracle of Bone Marrow Transplants	
COMMENTARY	INTRODUCTION
<p>The speaker uses a story to gain attention. This story works particularly well because it is richly detailed and is high in human interest.</p>	<p>Katy Hubbell was four years old when she was diagnosed with a severe case of aplastic anemia, a disease in which the bone marrow stops producing new blood cells. After several types of treatment failed, Katy underwent a bone marrow transplant. Her donor was a 40-year-old airline manager who lived thousands of miles away. His generosity saved the life of a little girl he had never met. Today Katy is an active preteen girl who loves Harry Potter books and wants to be a cheerleader.</p>
<p>Now the speaker reveals her topic. Calling bone marrow transplants a “medical miracle” reinforces the importance of the subject, while explaining her personal involvement shows the speaker’s goodwill and helps establish her credibility.</p>	<p>Bone marrow transplants have been called a medical miracle because of their lifesaving capability. I first became interested in the subject when a 12-year-old member of my church was diagnosed with leukemia. I joined a committee to publicize Greg’s case and to seek potential donors. Eventually a suitable donor was found and Greg is now a healthy high-school sophomore.</p>
<p>Here the speaker relates the topic directly to her audience and shows why they should care about it. The combination of statistics with the quotation from the Food and Drug Administration reinforces the importance of the topic.</p>	<p>Because of Greg’s illness, I learned that anyone can get sick and need a bone marrow donation. It could be any of us in this room, a close friend, or even a family member. An estimated 15,000 bone marrow transplants are performed in the U.S. each year. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, these transplants give patients “a chance to beat diseases once believed to have no cure.”</p>
<p>By mentioning her research, the speaker further bolsters her credibility. She then ends the introduction by previewing the main points to be discussed in the body of the speech.</p>	<p>Through my research for this speech, I have learned much more about this remarkable procedure. Today I would like to talk with you about bone marrow donation—how simple a process it is for the donor, how absolutely vital it is for the recipient, and how donors and recipients find one another.</p>



Establishing goodwill in the introduction is especially important for speakers who confront controversial issues—as with Canadian official John Gerretsen, speaking here on negotiations about land use.

TIPS FOR PREPARING THE INTRODUCTION

1. Keep the introduction relatively brief. Under normal circumstances it should not constitute more than 10 to 20 percent of your speech.
2. Be on the lookout for possible introductory materials as you do your research. File them with your notes so they will be handy when you are ready for them.
3. Be creative in devising your introduction. Experiment with two or three different openings and choose the one that seems most likely to get the audience interested in your speech.
4. Don't worry about the exact wording of your introduction until you have finished preparing the body of the speech. After you have determined your main points, it will be much easier to make final decisions about how to begin the speech.
5. Work out your introduction in detail. Some teachers recommend that you write it out word for word; others prefer that you outline it. Whichever method you use, practice the introduction over and over until you can deliver it smoothly from a minimum of notes and with strong eye contact. This will get your speech off to a good start and give you a big boost of confidence.

The Conclusion

“Great is the art of beginning,” said Longfellow, “but greater the art is of ending.” Longfellow was thinking of poetry, but his insight is equally applicable to public speaking. Many a speaker has marred an otherwise fine speech by a long-winded, silly, or antagonistic conclusion. Your closing remarks are your

last chance to drive home your ideas. Moreover, your final impression will probably linger in your listeners' minds. Thus you need to craft your conclusion with as much care as your introduction.

No matter what kind of speech you are giving, the conclusion has two major functions:

- To let the audience know you are ending the speech.
- To reinforce the audience's understanding of, or commitment to, the central idea.

Let us look at each.

SIGNAL THE END OF THE SPEECH

It may seem obvious that you should let your audience know you are going to stop soon. However, you will almost certainly hear speeches in your class in which the speaker concludes so abruptly that you are taken by surprise. Too sudden an ending leaves the audience puzzled and unfulfilled.

How do you let an audience know your speech is ending? One way is through what you say. "In conclusion," "My purpose has been," "Let me end by saying"—these are all brief cues that you are getting ready to stop.

You can also let your audience know the end is in sight by your manner of delivery. The conclusion is the climax of a speech. A speaker who has carefully built to a peak of interest and involvement will not need to say anything like "in conclusion." By use of the voice—its tone, pacing, intonation, and rhythm—a speaker can build the momentum of a speech so there is no doubt when it is over.

One method of doing this has been likened to a musical crescendo. As in a symphony in which one instrument after another joins in until the entire orchestra is playing, the speech builds in force until it reaches a zenith of power and intensity.³ (This does *not* mean simply getting louder and louder. It is a combination of many things, including vocal pitch, choice of words, dramatic content, gestures, pauses—and possibly loudness.)

A superb example of this method is the memorable conclusion to Martin Luther King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop," the speech he delivered the night before he was assassinated in April 1968. Speaking to an audience of 2,000 people in Memphis, Tennessee, he ended his speech with a stirring declaration that the civil rights movement would succeed despite the many threats on his life:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place, but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will, and he's allowed me to go up to the mountain, and I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything; I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Another effective method might be compared to the dissolve ending of a concert song that evokes deep emotions: "The song seems to fade away while the light on the singer shrinks gradually to a smaller and smaller circle until it lights only the face, then the eyes. Finally, it is a pinpoint, and disappears with the last note of the song."⁴ Here is a speech ending that does much the same thing. It is from General Douglas MacArthur's moving farewell to the cadets at the U.S. Military Academy:

crescendo ending
A conclusion in which the speech builds to a zenith of power and intensity.



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View the ending of Martin Luther King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" in the online Media Library for this chapter (Video Clip 9.4).



The conclusion is your last chance to drive home your ideas. Successful speakers such as South African statesman Nelson Mandela craft their endings with great care to leave a strong final impression.

In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield. But in the evening of my memory always I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes: duty, honor, country.

Today marks my final roll call with you. But I want you to know that when I cross the river, my last conscious thoughts will be of the Corps, and the Corps, and the Corps.

I bid you farewell.

The final words fade like the spotlight, bringing the speech to an emotional close.

You may think that you couldn't possibly end a speech with that much pathos—and you'd be right. MacArthur was an eloquent speaker discussing a grave issue with extraordinary poignance. This combination rarely occurs. But that doesn't mean you can't use the dissolve ending effectively. One student used it with great effect in a speech about the immigrant experience in the United States. During the body of the speech, the student spoke about the numbers of immigrants and the challenges they faced. Then, in her conclusion, she created a moving dissolve ending by evoking the emotional images of her grandfather's arrival in the United States:

On a recent trip to Ellis Island, where my grandfather first stepped on American soil, I saw his name etched into the wall along with the names of tens of thousands of other immigrants. I saw the entry hall where he lined up to process his forms. I saw the room where he underwent a physical examination. I sensed the fear and the insecurity he must have felt. But I could also sense his excitement as he looked forward to life in a land of opportunity—a land he came to think of as home.

Both the crescendo and the dissolve endings must be worked out with great care. Practice until you get the words and the timing just right. The benefits will be well worth your time.



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To read these speeches by King and MacArthur, log on to the Top 100 American Speeches of the 20th Century in the online Research Library.

dissolve ending

A conclusion that generates emotional appeal by fading step by step to a dramatic final statement.

REINFORCE THE CENTRAL IDEA

The second major function of a conclusion is to reinforce the audience's understanding of, or commitment to, the central idea. There are many ways to do this. Here are the ones you are most likely to use.

Summarize Your Speech

Restating the main points is the easiest way to end a speech. One student used this technique effectively in his persuasive speech about the AIDS epidemic in Africa:

In conclusion, we have seen that the AIDS epidemic is having a devastating effect on African society. An entire adult generation is slowly being wiped out. An entirely new generation of AIDS orphans is being created. Governments in the nations most afflicted have neither the resources nor the expertise to counter the epidemic. Many African economies are being crippled by the loss of people in the workplace.

Before it's too late, the United Nations and developed countries need to increase their efforts to halt the epidemic and bring it under control. The lives and well-being of tens of millions of people hang in the balance.

The value of a summary is that it explicitly restates the central idea and main points one last time. But as we shall see, there are more imaginative and compelling ways to end a speech. They can be used in combination with a summary or, at times, in place of it.

End with a Quotation

A quotation is one of the most common and effective devices to conclude a speech. Here is a fine example, from a speech on the misuse of television advertisements in political campaigns:

We cannot ignore the evils of television commercials in which candidates for the highest offices are sold to the voters in 30-second spots. These ads cheapen the elective process and degrade our political institutions. In the words of historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "You cannot merchandise candidates like soap and hope to preserve a rational democracy."

The closing quotation is particularly good because its urgency is exactly suited to the speech. When you run across a *brief* quotation that so perfectly captures your central idea, keep it in mind as a possible conclusion.

Make a Dramatic Statement

Rather than using a quotation to give your conclusion force and vitality, you may want to devise your own dramatic statement. Some speeches have become famous because of their powerful closing lines. One is Patrick Henry's legendary "Liberty or Death" oration. It takes its name from the final sentences Henry uttered on March 23, 1775, as he exhorted his audience to resist British tyranny:

Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death.



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View the conclusion of "AIDS in Africa: A World Crisis" in the online Media Library for this chapter (Video Clip 9.5).

Although your classroom speeches are not likely to become famous, you can still rivet your listeners—as Henry did—with a dramatic concluding statement. What follows is a particularly striking example, from a speech on suicide prevention. Throughout the speech, the student referred to a friend who had tried to commit suicide the previous year. Then, in the conclusion, she said:

My friend is back in school, participating in activities she never did before—and enjoying it. I'm happy and proud to say that she's still fighting for her life and even happier that she failed to kill herself. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here today trying to help you. You see, I am my "friend," and I'm more than glad to say I've made it.

As you can imagine, the audience was stunned. The closing lines brought the speech to a dramatic conclusion. The speaker made it even more effective by pausing just a moment before the last words and by using her voice to give them just the right inflection.

Refer to the Introduction

An excellent way to give your speech psychological unity is to conclude by referring to ideas in the introduction. Here is how one student used the method in her speech about the Special Olympics:

Introduction: In Seattle, nine young athletes assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they all started off—not exactly in a dash, but with a desire to run the race to the finish and win. All except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other runners heard the boy cry. They stopped; they looked back. Then they all went back to the boy's side—every single one of them. One girl with Down syndrome kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked to the finish line—together.

These athletes were not competing on national television; they were not sponsored or idolized. But they were given an opportunity to flourish under the glow of their own spotlights, to feel the brush of the ribbon cross their chests as they ran through their own finish line in their own Olympics—the Special Olympics.

In the body of her speech, the student explained the Special Olympics and called on members of the audience to become volunteers. Then, in her closing words, she tied the whole speech together by returning to the story described in her introduction:

Conclusion: Remember the nine children I mentioned at the beginning of this speech. Think of their happiness and their support for one another. Think of how much they gained from running in that race. And think how you can help others experience the same benefits as they strive to fulfill the motto of the Special Olympics: "Let me win. But if I can't win, let me be brave in the attempt."

Summarizing the speech, ending with a quotation, making a dramatic statement, referring to the introduction—all these techniques can be used separately. But you have probably noticed that speakers often combine two or more in their conclusions. Actually, all four techniques can be fused into one—for example, a dramatic quotation that summarizes the central idea while referring to the introduction.



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View the beginning and ending of "Making a Difference Through the Special Olympics" in the online Media Library for this chapter (Video Clip 9.6).



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This checklist is also available in the online Speech Tools for this chapter.

Checklist Speech Conclusion

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Do I signal that my speech is coming to an end?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Do I reinforce my central idea by (check all that apply):
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Summarizing the main points of my speech
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ending with a quotation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Making a dramatic statement
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referring to the introduction
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Is the conclusion limited to 5–10 percent of my entire speech?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Have I worked out the language of my conclusion in detail?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Have I practiced the delivery of my conclusion so I can present it fluently, confidently, and with strong eye contact?

One other concluding technique is making a direct appeal to your audience for action. This technique applies only to a particular type of persuasive speech, however, and will be discussed in Chapter 15. The four methods covered in this chapter are appropriate for all kinds of speeches and occasions.

SAMPLE CONCLUSION WITH COMMENTARY

How do you fit these methods together to make a conclusion? Here is an example, from the speech about bone marrow transplants whose introduction we looked at earlier (page 196).

TIPS FOR PREPARING THE CONCLUSION

1. As with the introduction, keep an eye out for possible concluding materials as you research and develop the speech.
2. Conclude with a bang, not a whimper. Be creative in devising a conclusion that hits the hearts and minds of your audience. Work on several possible endings, and select the one that seems likely to have the greatest impact.
3. Don't be long-winded. The conclusion will normally make up no more than 5 to 10 percent of your speech.
4. Don't leave anything in your conclusion to chance. Work it out in detail, and give yourself plenty of time to practice delivering it. Many students like to write out the conclusion word for word to guarantee it is just right. If you do this, make sure you can present it smoothly, confidently, and with feeling—without relying on your notes or sounding wooden. Make your last impression as forceful and as favorable as you can.

SUMMARY

First impressions are important. So are final impressions. This is why speeches need strong introductions and conclusions.

In most speech situations you need to accomplish four objectives with your introduction—get the attention and interest of the audience, reveal the topic of your speech, establish your credibility and goodwill, and preview the body of the speech. Gaining attention and interest can be done in several ways. You can show the importance of your topic, especially as it relates to your audience. You can startle or question your audience or arouse their curiosity. You can begin with a quotation or a story.

Be sure to state the topic of your speech clearly in your introduction so the audience knows where the speech is going. Establishing credibility means that you tell the audience why you are qualified to speak on the topic at hand. Establishing goodwill may be necessary if your point of view is unpopular. Previewing the body of the speech helps the audience listen effectively and provides a smooth lead-in to the body of the speech.

The first objective of a speech conclusion is to let the audience know you are ending, which you can do by your words or by your manner of delivery. The second objective of a conclusion is to reinforce your central idea. You can accomplish this by summarizing the speech, ending with a quotation, making a dramatic statement, or referring to the introduction. Sometimes you may want to combine two or more of these techniques. Be creative in devising a vivid, forceful conclusion.



KEY TERMS

rhetorical question (189)
credibility (193)
goodwill (194)

preview statement (195)
crescendo ending (198)
dissolve ending (198)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

After reading this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What are four objectives of a speech introduction?
2. What are seven methods you can use in the introduction to get the attention and interest of your audience?
3. Why is it important to establish your credibility at the beginning of your speech?
4. What is a preview statement? Why should you nearly always include a preview statement in the introduction of your speech?
5. What are five tips for preparing your introduction?
6. What are the major functions of a speech conclusion?
7. What are two ways you can signal the end of your speech?
8. What are four ways to reinforce the central idea when concluding your speech?
9. What are four tips for preparing your conclusion?



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For further review, go to the Study Questions in the online Study Aids for this chapter.

EXERCISES FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. Here are six speech topics. Explain how you might relate each to your classmates in the introduction of a speech.

Social Security	laughter
illiteracy	steroids
soap operas	blood donation
2. Think of a speech topic (preferably one for your next speech in class). Create an introduction for a speech dealing with any aspect of the topic you wish. In your introduction be sure to gain the attention of the audience, to reveal the topic and relate it to the audience, to establish your credibility, and to preview the body of the speech.
3. Using the same topic as in Exercise 2, create a speech conclusion. Be sure to let your audience know the speech is ending, to reinforce the central idea, and to make the conclusion vivid and memorable.

Applying *the Power of Public Speaking*

Your degree in civil engineering has served you well and you are now the chief city planner for a major metropolis. After studying the issue for more than a year, you and the planning commission have decided that the best way to relieve the city's growing traffic congestion is to build a new downtown freeway. Unfortunately, there is no way to build the freeway without knocking down a number of houses and businesses. You are not happy about this, and you know it will create difficulty for the people affected, but your research and computer simulations show that it is by far the most effective long-range option for improving the city's traffic flow.

Not surprisingly, the neighborhood association that represents the area through which you plan to build the freeway has expressed a number of concerns

about the proposal. Because of your excellent public speaking skills, you have been chosen to represent the city at a meeting of the neighborhood association. Your job at the meeting will be to address the audience's concerns and provide a convincing explanation of the city's decision to build the freeway. You know that if your speech is to be persuasive, you must use the introduction to establish your credibility and goodwill so your listeners will be willing to listen receptively to what you say in the body.

Write a draft of your introduction. In it be sure to address all four functions of a speech introduction discussed in this chapter.