

Speech Making for Life

Dr. Lynn Meade

Take Offs: Getting the Speech Started Right

It has been said that a speech is like an airplane. Both require a good take off and a good landing. A good introduction makes for a smooth take-off and may even be considered the most important part of the speech. After all, if you fail to capture the audience's attention, then your whole speech is a waste because no one is "tuned in."

You must grab the audience right away.—that's why the beginning of the speech is called the "grabber." The speaker must "grab" the audience and make them hungry to hear more.

Here are a few ways to draw the audience in and create information hunger.

- Tell a story
- Tell a joke

- Give a startling statistic
- Offer a surprising fact
- Tease your audience with only part of the information
- Ask questions

The phrase, "you never get a second chance to make a first impression" is especially true for presentations. Audiences decide to listen in the first few seconds, so you must convince them that you have something good to say.

There are a few speech killers, you should NEVER do these.

- Never tell the audience your full biography up front. This will likely lull them into sleep. If you must give biographical information, do it as a handout or a story.
- Never apologize. Ex-

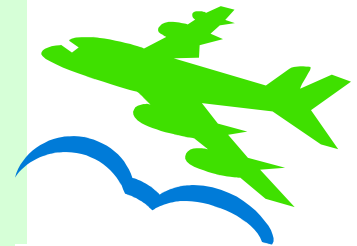
plaining to the audience why you are unprepared, why you are not a good speaker, or any other negative thing that will set the wrong pace.

The bottom line is this....

A good take off sets the pace for the rest of the speech. It should be well thought out and it should be intentional—that means that you really took the time to consider the impact of your words. It should never be something thrown on at the last minute.

It is a good idea to memorize the first two lines of your speech. Since you are most nervous when you first start to speak, it is a good idea to have a firm idea of exactly what you want to say and how you want to say it.

When you deliver the first few words of your speech, do



*A speech is like an airplane.
It needs a good take off.*

so with confidence! If you are a little nervous, it is normal. Most speakers share that after the first few words of the speech, they begin to relax.

Make sure you know those first few sentences, make sure you have purposefully chosen them for maximum impact and make sure you deliver them with confidence. Take-off strong and give your "passengers" the ride of their lives!



A preview is a map of your speech. It lets the audience know where they are headed.

Give Them a Map: Let Them Know Where They are Going

People become frustrated and restless when they don't know where they are going. Audiences want to know where all this talk is headed. Listeners decide early on if your speech is presentation is worth listening to.

After you engage the audi-

ence with your grabber, you should offer a brief overview of what will be in the speech. In technical terms, this is called a "preview."

A preview is like a map that tells the audience where they are headed. By being very specific, it helps the au-

dience members to organize the information in their minds in a way that they can better remember it.

Audiences tend to get lost unless you give them a map. A good speaker lays out the route and lets the audience just where they are going.

It's A Visual Thing – Using Visual Aids

Many speeches will require you to visually demonstrate or visually illustrate speaking points. When using physical objects, there are several important things to remember.

Timing is everything with visual aids. You need to consider beforehand if you want to keep your visual hidden until just the right moment or if you want the item sitting out the entire time.

The most important thing to remember about a visual aid is that it should enhance the message that you are giving. For that reason, it must be large enough for the audience to see. If it is a small item, consider taking a picture of it and putting the picture on the projector for everyone to see. Do not pass items around the room, it is very dis-

tracting. Instead, project a picture of the item and then allow audience members to come to a table later to view the original artifact.

Be considerate of your audience and what might offend them. I was surprised, for example, that several students took offense when a student showed a poster of a mother nursing an infant. An offended audience is rarely a listening audience. Also, consider that perfume, incense, candles, and other scents may cause problems for allergies.

Take the time to explain your visual aid. Leaving an item to sit on the table without ever mentioning it tends to frustrate the audience. They want to know what it is there for.

Overall, consider how to best help the

*Most people learn visually.
A well used visual aid will help
the audience members
understand and remember your
speech.*

audience understand using your visual aid. Let your visual aid be an anchor to help them remember your speech.

If you have several visual aids be sure to make a list of everything you need to bring. You wouldn't want to forget anything!

The Speaking Occasion –Get the Facts



When you are invited to speak, it is important to gather information about the audience and occasion.

Questions to Ask:

- How many people will be attending?
- How much knowledge do they have of my topic?
- What else will they be doing? Eating? Other speakers?
- What type of room will I be speaking in?
- How long would you like me to speak?

Do you have a podium?

A microphone?

A projector?

A table to set visuals on?

Can I come early and look at the room?

Can you make copies of the handout or should I bring them? How many do I need to make?

Handouts help the audience analyze, remember, or reflect on the content of your speech. Make sure handouts have a purpose and you are not giving a handout just for the sake of having something to hand audience members. You might want to include your name, phone number, and email so people can contact you later.

It looks more professional to create a custom handout and not just give your audience a copy of your Power Point slides. (The exception is in educational settings and training seminars).

Always, make sure the copies are clean and neat. Make more copies than

Handouts

**When it comes to
handouts,
Timing is everything**

you think you will need and find out beforehand if you should make your own copies or if the speech organizer will make copies for you.

Handout timing is important. If your handout contains lots of supplemental reading material, it may be best to give it at the end. You don't want the audi-

ence reading extra material when they should be listening to you. Take the time to think about when the handouts will most benefit the audience.

Have an assistant ready to help distribute handouts especially in a large setting. Communicate clearly how and when you want the material distributed.

It is very important to remember that your handout will live on long after your speech; it forms a lasting impression of you. Look at your handout carefully—does it send the right message? Is it a document that you want to be remembered for?

Making The Perfect Power Point

To make the most of Power Point, construct your slides with these rules in mind.

1. Pick one background color and stick with it. Never have one slide of one color and the next slide with a different color.
2. If you use the Power Point templates, make sure that the décor of the template does not overpower the text or graphics of your slide. If you have photos in your presentation, it is best to use a plain template.
3. Either have a very dark background with white or yellow letters or have a very light background with black or navy letters. Remember, it may look good on your screen but it changes when it is projected so it is best to stick to the dark/light combination. As a general rule, red, orange, purple, and green tend not to project well as backgrounds.
4. Use a plain font for text. Research demonstrates that it is easier to read when projected. Plain font means letters without fancy tails. Best to use as Ariel, Verdana, Trebuchet, and Tahoma.
5. Make sure the text size is AT LEAST 28 point. Smaller font sizes are difficult to read. If you are speaking in a large auditorium, you should use a larger size.
6. You should never have more than seven words across on a slide and never have more than seven words down. Too many words on a slide make it difficult to read. Too many words cause the audience to have to choose to read your slide or to listen to you speak.
7. Rarely should you write a full sentence on a slide. Instead, write only brief bullet points. Remember the point of Power Point is to provide visual cues not to provide the content of your speech. A short bullet point helps the audience remember the complete sentence that you speaking.

Power Point provides visual cues to accent your speech. Power Point should never be used as your speech or your speech notes.

8. At the end of your presentation, always add a couple of blank slides. It looks very unprofessional for the last slide to say “end of show.”
9. Realize that you do not have to have a slide for every point in you speech. Power Point should enhance your speech, where no slide is needed, insert a black slide.
10. Just because Power Point makes sounds, fancy slide changes, and makes graphics spin doesn’t mean that you should use them. Avoid these unprofessional add-ons.

Give a Speech— Not a Slideshow

Here are tips for delivering a speech with Power Point:

Never let your speech become a slide show with a few words from you for aesthetic purposes.

Print off your Power Point Slides as a handout and keep a copy with you so that you know what is coming next.

Read briefly from your speech notes and NOT from your Power Point.

Do not stand in front of the projector. Test this beforehand. You cannot always tell if you are in front of your slides. Put tapelines on the floor if necessary to keep you out of the way.

Never tell the audience “you can read this slide” while you talk about some-

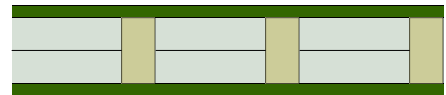
thing else. If it is important, read it for them or talk to them about it. If you read the slide, read from your notes not from the projection.

Never let your Power Point be your speech. You are the speech and the Power Point only helps the audience focus on the speech. Don’t lose sight of its purpose.

Don’t turn your back to the audience to read your projected slide.

Don’t stand in front of the slide to point out a chart or detail. Use a laser pointer instead.

Be able to give your speech without your slides—you never know when the technology will fail completely.



Blank Slides

You do not always have to have a Power Point slide on the screen. Sometimes your slides distract from what you are saying.

Consider This:

Insert black slides in between or use the “blank” button for those times when you want the audience to look at you directly without the distraction of a slide.

Do Not Think About the Pink Elephant!

Whatever you do, do not think about the pink elephant. Stop! Don't think about the pink elephant with its cute pink ears and hot pink tail. How are you doing? If you are like most people, not too well.

Now, try this. Think about a green monkey. Go ahead. Picture its green curly tail and its fluffy green fur. So here's the question, when you were thinking of the green monkey, did your image of the pink elephant go away? For most people, it did.

What's the point? The point is that before a speech, most people tell themselves, "I won't be nervous, I won't be nervous, I won't think of the pink elephant." Do you see where I'm headed

with all of this? Telling yourself not to be nervous rarely helps.

Instead of saying, "I won't be nervous." Say things like, "This speech is going to be great! I can do this." or "My audience will love the part where I..."

The most important thing about conquering your fear is to put your self talk into perspective. If you tell yourself positive things, you will feel positive. If you tell yourself negative things, you will feel negative.

Think about the locker room before the big football game. The players get

all worked up because they know that adrenaline is good. When you speak, adrenaline is good. When your heart races and you feel your heart beat, it means that your "all pumped up." For football players it means your ready for the game, for speakers it means your ready for the speech.

The goal is not to get rid of the butterflies but to make them to fly in formation. —It's all a matter of perspective.

Think about the green monkey. Think about how great your speech is going to be.

We don't want to get rid of the butterflies
We only want them to fly in formation

Research

Facts, data, and statistics are all important parts of speech making. When done well, they can enhance credibility and lead to greater understanding. When done poorly, they can lull the audience into boredom.

Better to use 1 or 2 great facts and explain than to overwhelm the audience with too many research items.

Help the audience visualize big numbers by explaining them. How much is a trillion?

Use simple charts and graphs to explain trends. Keep it simple and clean rather than cluttered and overbearing.

Challenge yourself to present facts, data, and statistics in interesting terms. Boring research is almost as bad as no research at all.

Ending the Speech— The Landing

It is very important that you end a speech well. The "landing" should recap the main thoughts of your speech and provide one lasting thought.

A good ending gives a sense of closure and lets the audience know when to clap. Good closures should be well thought out and not tacked on at the last minute.

There are several ways NOT to end a speech. Saying, "that's all" or "the

end" are weak ways to end the speech.

Some challenging endings might include:

- A question the audience can carry with them.
- A closing story.
- A challenge for the audience to do.
- A quote that makes them think.
- A well constructed sentence that ties the main ideas together.

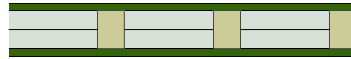


Speeches, like airplanes, need to have good landings.

Don't Make Your Audience Read Your Lips... So Speak Up

If the audience can't hear you, your speech is worthless. It sounds overdramatic but it is true. If your content is interesting, your Power Point is perfect, and your confidence is superb, but your speech is inaudible ...your speech is worthless. It becomes an exercise in lip reading and most people will not trouble with trying to read your lips. At that point, your speech becomes a waste of their time and yours.

Very few speakers give their voice projection enough practice. Practice speaking from your diaphragm so you can project your voice. Two great ways to practice are number one, sing to the radio and number two, sing in the shower. When you practice your speech at home, use your diaphragm and project your voice rather than practicing in a whisper. On the day that you speak,



Important Presentation Rules:

Speak loud and clear

Look at audience
members directly

have a friend in the room who will give you the speak up sign or let you know if your microphone needs adjusting.

I can't overemphasize enough the importance of voice projection. Practice, practice, practice and on the day of the speech, don't hold back!

Look Them in the Eyes... You Are Talking to People Not to Walls

If You really want to communicate with your audience, you must look at them. Speeches are for people and the way that we connect with people is by eye contact.

Some well meaning folks have taught people to "look at the back wall," "stare at people's foreheads," or "look through people, not at them." Don't listen to this advice. People can tell when you are avoiding eye contact and the result is that they feel like you are not trustworthy, you are evasive, or you are not confident. These are not the things that you want to communicate.

Look at people directly. Look at people at different places in the room. Know your speech well enough that you spend more time looking up than looking at your speech notes.

Look at your audience—this speech is for them so let 'em have it!

To Gesture or Not to Gesture, That is the Question

WHAT NOT

TO DO WITH YOUR HANDS

- Do NOT put both hands in your pockets, you look insecure
- Do NOT jingle keys or change in your pocket
- Do NOT hold hands clasped behind your back
- Do NOT fidget with a pen, necklace, or slide clicker
- Do NOT tap or pound on podium
- Do NOT wring hands
- Do NOT fiddle with note cards

One of the questions that people frequently ask is, "What do I do with my hands?"

Research demonstrates that speakers who gesture are seen as more credible, more persuasive, and more likable. For those reasons alone, it is a good idea to gesture.

But wait, there's more...

Other studies show that gestures help people to think and communicate more clearly. In other words, gestures actually help the speaker to think of the next point easier and to speak it more clearly.

With all that, what's not to love about gestures? Practice your speech using gestures and let them flow naturally rather than force them.

The bottom line is that gestures work! Try them and see for yourself.



Did You Know ?

Touching your thumb to your pointer finger lightly can release stress. Try this during a speech when you are at a loss for what to do with your hands.

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Dr. Lynn Meade is an instructor in the Department of Communication at the University of Arkansas. She loves to speak, she loves to teach, and she loves to coach others to reach their maximum potential.

Lynn has a doctoral degree in higher education college teaching and leadership and a master's degree in communication. She has taught communication skills for over twelve years and considers teaching her "hobby that pays." But teaching others to improve their communication skills is not just her hobby, it is her passion.

Lynn also shares her passion as a motivational speaker. She offers stories, advice, and encouragement that inspires others to reach within themselves and reach their maximum potential.

Lynn also conducts executive board retreats, hosts teachers and speakers workshops, and offers personal speech coaching. She brings her experience as a fundraiser, salesperson, and not-for-profit director to the communication table. Whatever the venue, she believes that communication is transformational because words change people.

Lynn's scholarly pursuits include editing a communication textbook, writing articles on the challenges of parenting a child with ADD, and writing an academic book chapter on students with disabilities. She also enjoys writing for fun and is published in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and several local publications.

Speech Transforms Both You and Your Listeners

The most important thing to remember about speechmaking is that it transforms both the one who speaks and the one who listens.

As a speaker, you should always consider your audience. What is it that **THEY** need that I have to offer. How can I meet their needs. How can I choose words that will help them to understand and how can I show them the things that they need to know.

When speakers consider how their words transform the audience, they will take more responsibility for their speech choices. They will realize that their words do matter. They will realize that their words change people.

As a speaker, you should always realize that your words will transform you. As you try to find the right way to express an idea, you will develop a new clarity on your topic. As you speak with conviction about a subject, you will believe in it even more than before.

Find something you believe in and share it with others. What makes a good or bad speaker is a person's ability to take the thought and feelings they have for a topic and share those thoughts and feelings with others.

The Greeks would say that a good speaker had *dunamis*. A speaker with *dunamis* spoke with great power.



The power came from the belief in the topic and the presentation of that topic. In English, we transformed the word *dunamis* to dynamism and dynamite.

Your goal as a speaker should be to have *dunamis*!

Go ahead, unleash your power!