

POWERFUL WAYS TO BEGIN A PRESENTATION

Academic Speaking – Beginning a Presentation

As students, teachers, or researchers, we all have to speak in public, both in or out of university. How we begin a presentation can make it a success or failure, the difference between a bored audience and an interested and engaged one who want to hear the rest of what you have to say. Below are 8 effective ways to make that strong start. Experiment with some different ones, with a friend or colleague as your ‘audience’ and see what works. Also a combination of two or three can be effective.

1. Use Silence

This is a difficult strategy, but if you are feeling confident during your next presentation, then try using silence. Say a few words then be quiet. Say a few more words then be quiet. President Obama of the U.S. uses this strategy to give emphasis during his speeches.

2. Point to the Future or Past

I have two simple statements for you:

-Looking to the future): *“30 Years from now, your job won’t exist.”*

-Looking to the past: *“In 1970, Japan owned 9% of the market. Today, they own 37%.”*

The reality is that looking into the future or past always sparks engagement since that’s where our hearts live.

3. Quote Someone

Find a quote from a famous or important person that is relevant to your topic. This can help your presentation’s credibility.

4. Tell a Story

Adapted from

“12 Ways to Hook an Audience in 30 seconds: <https://www.openforum.com/articles/hook-presentation-audience-30-seconds/>

“5 Powerful Ways to Open an Presentation: <http://blog.slideshare.net/2013/07/22/5-powerful-ways-to-open-a-presentation/>

Here’s the amazing thing about stories: If your presentation is based solely on facts and figures then your audience is going to react in one of two ways: 1) agree or 2) disagree. However, if you tell a story, your audience will participate with you.

5. Make a startling assertion.

A good way to gain people's attention is by starting with a startling or amazing fact. Take the time to research startling statistics that illustrate the seriousness of what you're going to talk about. For example, a presentation about environmental conservancy can start with: "Every second, a slice of rainforest the size of a football field is mowed down. That's over 31 million football fields of rainforest each year."

6. Introduce a "what if" scenario.

A compelling way to start your presentation is with a "what if" scenario. For example, ask "What if you had a million dollars?" at the start of a money management presentation might grab your listeners' attention as it asks them to look forward to a positive future. It can intensify their desire to listen to your presentation. Using a "what if" scenario as an opening is easily adaptable to almost any presentation.

7. Arouse curiosity.

You can start with a statement that is designed to arouse curiosity and make the audience look up and listen to you attentively. Dan Pink, an author, does this in [one](#) of his presentations. He says: *"I need to make a confession. 20 years ago, I did something that I regret. Something that I am not particularly proud of, something I wish no one would ever know, but that here I have to tell you. In the late 1980s, in a moment of youthful indiscretion, I went to law school."* Curiosity here leads to some self-deprecating humor, which makes it even more effective.

8. Use the word *imagine*.

The word *imagine* invites the audience to create a mental image of something. A particularly skillful use of the word occurs in Jane Chen's TED [talk](#). She speaks about a low-cost incubator that can save many lives in underdeveloped countries. Chen opens by saying: "Please close your eyes and open your hands. Now imagine what you could place in your hands, an apple, maybe your wallet. Now open your eyes. What about a life?" As she says this, she displays a slide with an [Anne Geddes](#)' image of a tiny baby held in an adult's hands. There is power in asking the audience to imagine. This tactic can easily be adapted to any topic where you want the audience to imagine a positive outcome, or a vision of a better tomorrow. It can be used, as well, to ask them to imagine being in someone else's place.

