

Make the Most of Your Speech Introduction

Brief: A speech introduction should convince the audience that the speech they are about to hear will be relevant and useful by providing a general overview of what's to come.

Learning Objective: Identify the purpose and elements of an effective speech introduction.

Key Terms:

- **Introduction:** A written or oral explanation of what constitutes the basis of an issue or presentation.

Role of the Introduction

The introduction is your best opportunity to convince your audience that you have something worthwhile to say. By the end of your introduction, your audience should have a road map that will help them understand the main points you'll be sharing in the context of your larger purpose.



Without a good map to follow, your audience is likely to get lost along the way. A good introduction is the best way to make sure that you will hold their attention throughout your speech, that they will be able to decode your message as you share it, and—ultimately—that your most important ideas will get through.

The Elements of an Effective Introduction

An effective introduction will include all of the following elements:

- A hook to grab the audience's attention
- An introductory statement about your topic
- An explanation of how your topic is relevant to your audience
- An explanation of why your topic matters to your audience
- An explanation of why you have the authority to discuss this topic
- If applicable, a statement about what is new or special about how you're presenting this topic
- An overview of your main points
- A declaration of your thesis or purpose

Introducing the Topic, Thesis, and Main Points

After your initial hook, the attention-grabbing part of your opening, you'll have a small window of time to introduce your topic, state your thesis, and—hopefully—to convince your audience that you have something useful to say.

Introducing the Main Points

Before your introduction is finished, you'll want to give your audience an overview of your main points. If you've taken the time to create a thorough outline, you should already have a concise list of your main points in an order that makes sense for your topic. To create your overview, all you'll need to do is translate that list into complete sentences.

Below is an example of an effective introduction, drawn from a well-researched topic and thoroughly developed outline. You'll notice that the opening of this speech names the topic (vitamin D deficiency), explains its importance, explains its relevance to the audience, and then states the purpose of the presentation (to investigate the improbably wide range of deficiency-rate estimates from different studies), and concludes with a road map overview of the main points.

Vitamin D deficiency may be the hottest topic in nutrition today. Scientists are flooding academic journals, fashion magazines, and talk shows with arguments about all things D, ranging from sunscreen to supplements.

No one is disputing its importance: vitamin D helps with calcium absorption, promotes bone health, boosts immunity, and reduces inflammation. That's why recent studies estimating that 10 to 75 percent of Americans are deficient in vitamin D are so concerning.

Hold on—10 to 75? That range is huge!

In order to discover the extent of the problem, we need to take a closer look at those numbers—and that is exactly what we will do in this presentation. I have prepared a chronological overview and analysis of methodologies for measuring vitamin D levels in the U.S. population, beginning with a study conducted at this university.

From Concept to Action

A road map is a 2D representation of 3D space. Obviously, lines that represent roads on a piece of paper do not have the same width, height, and length as real roads. In much the same way, when you're preparing the outline of your speech, you're creating a flat representation of a multi-dimensional event. When thinking about how you're going to craft your introduction, remember

to consider the all-important dimension of time. Ask yourself these questions: How long is the total speech time allotted to me? How much of that speech time should be allocated to my introduction? How much of that introduction time should be allocated to my attention getter? How much time will I need to give an overview of my topic, thesis, and purpose? Finally, after considering all of those questions, consider whether you have allotted enough time to fulfill all of the elements of your introduction. Do you need to make adjustments? Recraft your introduction until you get it right!

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