

## Effective Attention Getters

**Brief:** The opening of a speech is the most important time to gain an audience’s attention and generate interest.

**Learning Objective:** Demonstrate how to write an effective attention-getting introduction.

**Key Terms:**

- **Rhetorical question:** A question used merely to make a point, with no response expected.

### Getting Attention and Interest

Public speaking is essentially the art of convincing an audience to choose to listen to you — directing their thoughts away from their day-to-day concerns and other distractions. Your challenge is to grab their attention with something that is more compelling. In essence, you are competing with the content of their own minds—thoughts that are invisible to you and beyond your control.

From your first words, you’ll need to create a strong first impression because the opening of your speech will largely determine your audience’s willingness to listen. Knowing how to deliver a dynamic and compelling opening can help tilt the odds in your favor.

### Attention-Getting Strategies

The following attention-getting strategies have been proven to be effective ways to open a speech:

1. State a surprising or little-known fact.

*Example: Did you know that eating blueberries can actually make you smarter by boosting neurotransmitters in your brain?*

2. Open with a quotation from a notable figure who speaks directly about your topic.

*Example: Oscar Wilde once said, “Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much.”*

3. Open with a brief personal anecdote.

*Example: I was driving home from work on a cold, rainy day when I saw a scrawny cat by the side of the road. Her ribs were sticking out under her filthy, matted fur; she was clearly starving. I made the split-second decision to find a home for this cat, pulled over, lifted her up into the passenger seat, and began a journey that would change my life in ways I never could have imagined.*



4. Open with a moving story about someone else.

*Example: Jamie's family had no idea what her diagnosis of Type 1 Diabetes would mean for all of their lives. They altered their diets. And every member of the family was involved in monitoring Jamie's blood sugar and health. In an instant everything changed, in ways that they could not have imagined.*

5. Make a strong case for your topic's relevance to the audience.

*Example: Do you know that you've likely already eaten something genetically modified today? Genetically modified foods are found in leading grocery store chains all over the country and are unavoidable at this point.*

6. Take a stand. Don't attack a vague, made-up antagonist—be specific.

*Example: The hazing rituals of this university's fraternities and sororities are getting worse, not better.*

7. Ask a rhetorical question that will prompt your audience to think about your topic.

*Example: When was the last time you donated money to charity?*

## Choosing an Anchor for Repetition

Repetition is boring, right? Who wants to hear the same thing more than once?

Actually, experienced public speakers learn that repetition doesn't have to be redundant—there's more to it than saying the same thing twice. In this culture of distraction, choosing an anchoring word, phrase, or idea and returning to it periodically throughout your speech can help the audience find the connection between different points.

Still not sure if using an anchor in your introduction to be repeated later in your speech would work for you? Think about how it feels to listen to a good song: each verse builds the story with new lyrics, and then the chorus comes back to ground the song and bring it back home. In much

the same way, audiences find comfort in hearing something that's familiar—even if they only first heard it from you a few minutes before.

## From Concept to Action

For a speech you're developing, choose three of the seven attention-getting strategies. Next, write three different versions of your speech introduction—one for each of the attention getting strategies you chose. Then, read each one out loud. To your ear, which one sounds the most compelling? Finally, share your three versions with a classmate or friend and ask them to choose the one that grabs their attention. After they've chosen, ask them why they made that choice. Consider their feedback as you further develop your speech introduction.

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