How to Make Your Conclusion Memorable

Brief: While the introduction is important for grabbing the audience's attention, the conclusion is even more significant because it leaves the audience with a lasting impression.

Learning Objective: Demonstrate how to write an effective conclusion.

Key Terms:
- Primacy effect: The tendency to have the best recall for the first items in a list.
- Recency effect: The tendency to have the best recall for the final items in a list.
- Serial-position effect: The tendency to have the best recall for the first and last items in a list.

Leave a Lasting Impression

As important as your introduction is for grabbing the audience's attention, the conclusion is perhaps even more important because it leaves the audience with a lasting impression of your speech.

Recency Effect

The serial-position effect is the tendency to have the best recall for the first and last items in a list. Studies show that when people are asked to recall a list of items in any order, people tend to begin and have the best recall for those things that are at end of the list, also known as the recency effect. Among earlier list items, the first few items are recalled more frequently than the middle items, a phenomenon known as the primacy effect.
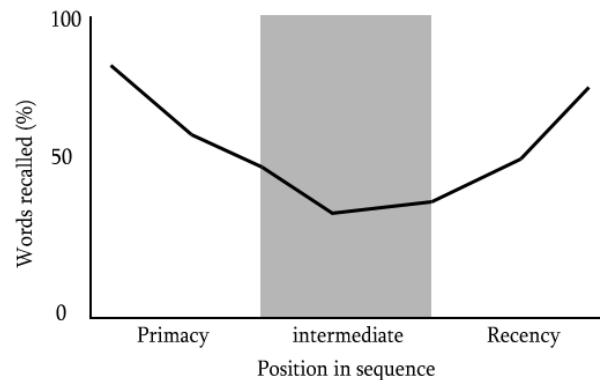
A graph showing the U-shaped serial-position curve

Because it is delivered at the end of the speech, the recency effect suggests that your conclusion will be what most people recall after your speech has ended.

Make it Memorable

Thanks to the recency effect, whether your audience remembers what you've shared during your speech will rely heavily on whether you've been able to make your conclusion memorable. The conclusion is where you'll insert your take-away message: what do you want the audience to remember after you've finished speaking? What do you want them to recall in the days or weeks after your speech?

Just as a strong attention getter in your introduction can make or break a speech, you always want to end your speech on a high note. To create a memorable ending, you may want to share a notable quotation, an inspirational personal anecdote, or an exceptional example.

Conclusions with strong emotional connection for the audience are more easily remembered. Try painting a vivid picture with words; you might describe something that is extremely beautiful or unusual to embed an image in the minds of your audience.

At the same time, it's important to remain relatable and credible to the audience up until your final word, so don't over-reach. Be sure to craft your conclusion in a way that is still appropriate to the topic, audience, and venue.

Managing Q&A

While your formal conclusion will be your audience's final impression of your prepared speech, your Q&A session (if you conduct one) will be the freshest experience of your ideas in their minds. Therefore, you'll want to do your best to be helpful and informative.

Hopefully, your audience members will be asking questions because they are genuinely interested in your topic. It will be your responsibility to engage them and do your best to help them attain the knowledge and answers they seek.

Remember, the Q&A is still part of your presentation, so continue to present yourself as you did while you were speaking. As the speaker, it's expected that you will be in charge of facilitating this interactive portion of your presentation.

From Concept to Action

One way to make your conclusion more memorable is to heighten its emotional appeal. Try this experiment: Recall a personal anecdote related to your current speech topic. Tell yourself this story, either out loud or in writing. Next, review your story and expand on the number and intensity of descriptive words you use. If your story takes place on a rainy day, don't just say, "It was raining." Instead, say something like, "The day started with a drizzle, but by the time I was on the highway the rain was coming down in sheets that flooded my windshield making it impossible to see." Next, add some language about your emotional experience: "When I realized that I couldn't see the cars in front of me or to either side, that I had zero visibility, I felt a terror like none I've felt before." When it comes time to actually choose the words you'll use, you might find you want to scale the emotion down a bit. However, by experimenting first you'll likely find that you've got lots of room to expand your emotional appeal before you go over the top!

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