

HOOKING YOUR AUDIENCE

1. Speak forcefully. Use a clear, strong tone without sounding artificial or overbearing. Practice modulating your voice and balance verbal rhythms to get a feel for the sentences you plan to share with the audience. A speaker must adopt some of the characteristics of an actor. Your goal, like that of an entertainer, is to grab and keep your listener's attention.
2. Begin with a sharp, clear statement. One or two sentences, or even a rhetorical question, offers listeners a specific focus. Don't overwhelm them with a word bath. Start strong by limiting your opening comments to a main idea that will be the backbone of the overall talk.
3. Quote statistics and facts - hard evidence that cannot be debated because it is proven by logic and science. Audiences are apt to believe a speaker who uses credible facts as evidence. They tend to listen to a speaker who opens with this type of information.
4. Start with a quote. Cite famous or inspirational words by a well-known historical figure or celebrity. Popular song or poem lyrics intrigue audiences who have never heard them used in conjunction with a topic like the one you will speak on. Keep it short but powerful. Pause afterward for a few seconds to let the effect set in.
5. Offer a proverb. Folk sayings, old wives' tales, or words of wisdom that people can relate to provide a meaningful bridge to your speech. Try adding a new twist by converting statements into questions or vice versa, or tweaking a word or two:
 - "Does a stitch in time save nine?"
 - "Why can't you teach an old dog new tricks? Maybe it's the trainer's fault."
6. Ask a question. Give the audience a moment to discuss possible answers with those around them, then ask for volunteers to share a response. This is a great ice breaker and helps to promote communication between speaker and participants.
7. Issue a challenge. Riddles, puzzles, case studies, and other problem solving activities grab hold of listeners' minds and stir their competitive spirits. Allow them a few minutes to brainstorm solutions or promise to deliver suggested options by the end of your presentation.
8. Create a word picture. Using sensory imagery, describe a heart-tugging or mind-teasing scenario that immediately engages the audience. Bringing real or imaginary characters to life in a verbal sketch that takes just a minute or so can have a powerful effect on drawing in your listeners.

A creative speaker can find a variety of ways to open a presentation. Don't begin with the same old "Thanks for inviting me to be here today." Instead, go for an innovative approach to buttonholing your audience before they get away from you.

Here are some hooks you may be familiar with:

- "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." — John F. Kennedy
- "Give me liberty or give me death!" — Patrick Henry
- "I have a dream!" — Martin Luther King Jr.
- "Read my lips: no new taxes!" — George Bush
- "If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit." — Johnny Cochrane