

TEASE ‘em: 5 Ways to Start Your Speech



Ban the banalities that bog down most speech openings.

Defer the customary “nice-to-be-here” platitudes.

Direct your audience more into fawning than yawning over your speech opening. How?

Start your speech better by diving in! Instead of gingerly dipping your toes into the proverbial speaking pool, open with a splash! Pattern your platform performance after the TEASE opening which [Saturday Night Live](#) has made famous for more than 25 years.

Learning from *Saturday Night Live* to Start Your Speech

The opening of *Saturday Night Live* is much anticipated and always engaging. Consider the formula they use:

1. **First**, a “cold” open. There’s no warm up. No toes in the water. They just jump in with the opening skit (usually one of the most memorable of the night).
2. **Then**, following the catchy “Live from New York, it’s Saturday night!”, the host introduces herself and the musical guest, and sets the agenda for the show.

Can you apply this formula to start your speech?

First, TEASE your audience from the second you open your mouth. And open their eyes to something new, different, and even entertaining. Pique their interest. Immerse your audience into the action from the opening second with a verbal splash of cold water. With a powerful 30- to 60-second opening, your audience will be engaged to stay tuned for more.

Then, you can then formally introduce yourself, and give your audience an overview of your speech. It's important they know up front why your speech is important to them.

Let's examine those first thirty to sixty seconds. What's a TEASE?

What is a TEASE Speech Opening?

“Immerse your audience into the action from the opening second with a verbal splash of cold water.”

-- Peter Jeff

TEASE is an acronym for five ways to gain and retain your audience's attention:

- **T**estimonial
- **E**vidence
- **A**ncedote
- **S**tatement
- **E**xample

Example: How to Start a Speech About Speaking

Let's say you wanted to design, develop, and deliver a speech on the importance of public speaking. Here are five TEASE techniques you might use:

1. **Testimonial**
Cite the behavior of a celebrity and/or quote an influential person the audience will know of or respect.
2. **Evidence**
On the impact of public speaking in your career success.
3. **Anecdote**
Of someone benefiting directly from their public speaking expertise.
4. **Statement**
On the significance of public speaking to the quality of life.
5. **Example**
Of a person whose career really took off because of public speaking.

Let's look at examples of each of these TEASE techniques for a great speech opening.

1. Start Your Speech With... a Testimonial

Cite the behavior of a celebrity and/or quote an influential person the audience will know of or respect.

“If all my possessions were taken away from me with one exception, I would choose the power of speech. For by it, I would regain all the rest of my possessions.” That’s what former Senator and Secretary of State Daniel Webster once observed of the significance of effective public speaking. Likewise, Pericles, the Greek orator, also understood the significance of public speaking when he said: “The person who can think and does not know how to express what he thinks is at a level of him who cannot think.”

2. Start Your Speech With... Evidence

Present statistics or other data on the importance of public speaking.

The University of Michigan conducted a survey of 1,290 business school alumni who were recently promoted. They were asked what specific subject area prepared them the most for their business success. *More than 70 percent* cited effective communications as the top business skill — ahead of financial and business acumen!

3. Start Your Speech With... an Anecdote

Tell a story of someone directly affected by the benefits of public speaking.

Isabelle lived alone for the first six years of her life. Very alone in her silent world. She lived only with her reclusive mother who also could not speak. She was a deaf mute. Isabelle was so isolated from other people she had no chance to learn or practice speaking.

When authorities finally rescued her from her silent and isolated world, she seemed ineducable. But after being around people who could speak, Isabelle broke out of her silent world. In one week, she vocalized sounds. In two months, she spoke in full sentences. In 16 months she learned 2,000 words. And in 56 months her IQ tripled, in part due to the power of being around people who could speak.

4. Start Your Speech With... a Statement

Make a bold observation on the importance of public speaking.

Public speaking is the *sine qua non** of leadership. Without it, you cannot lead. With it, you can “lead nations, raise armies, inspire victories and blow fresh courage into the hearts of men” as Adlai Stevenson eulogized Sir Winston Churchill.

[* Ed. *sine qua non*: Latin for "essential element".]

5. Start Your Speech With... an Example

Cite a person whose career really took off because of public speaking.

After graduating from college with degrees in chemistry and microbiology, Wilma Subra figured she’d spend more time with a microscope than a microphone. But that was before she found out how many families were being exposed to high levels of chemicals and other toxins as part of her field work for a company in Louisiana. Her employer did not want to release the

polluting information. So Wilma decided to start her own company, conducting environmental tests and reporting her results to government authorities and the media.

Wilma soon found herself in a variety of public speaking platforms. Her work directly cleaned up dozens of toxic sites across the country and saved thousands of lives in more than 800 communities over the last 20 years. Wilma credits her public speaking ability for much of her environmental campaign success. She says public speaking is the best way to “engage people and get them involved.”

Your Assignment to Start Your Next Speech

TEASE ‘em to please ‘em. Think Testimonial, Example, Anecdote, Statement, and Evidence for the next speech you write. And dive in!

Note: You may also be interested in Peter Jeff's companion article: [10 Ways to End Your Speech with a Bang](#).