

# INSTITUTE WRITING PROGRAM

---

## THE WRITING CENTER

### Speaking - The First 60 Seconds

The beginning of a speech or presentation is both the most important part and the most difficult. The speaker needs a smooth way to focus the audience's attention and move into the subject of discussion, while the audience is hoping for a sign that the presentation will make sense and be interesting. This short document offers a few suggestions on how to make the most of your first sixty seconds.

In your first sixty seconds, you should aim to accomplish ***four tasks***: greeting your audience, introducing the topic, proposing your comment on that topic, and previewing the rest of your speech.

#### GREETING YOUR AUDIENCE

First, greet your audience—"good morning," "hello," "welcome," that sort of thing—and thank them for being here. For some audience members, it is conventional to return the greeting, even in a large public-speaking situation. At this point, you may want to include a brief pause, just so it doesn't throw you off if they do reply.

In your very next sentence, identify yourself by name and explain your background. For instance, you might describe your experience with the topic, establish your credentials, or identify the organization you represent. This sentence should be short, simple, and highly polished, so craft it carefully and memorize it word-for-word.

#### INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

After the first two sentences, it's time to orient your audience to the topic of your presentation. For this purpose, it's best to start with something concrete and vivid.

Consider illustrating the topic with a story, especially if you have personal experience to draw upon. If your topic is complex or unfamiliar, you might use an analogy, comparing it to something simpler and more familiar. If you need to demonstrate significance, it might be effective to give an example of how your audience is likely to encounter the topic in their day-to-day life.

In addition to engaging the audience's attention, starting concrete gives you some momentum for the rest of the speech. Stories, analogies, and examples are easy to remember, and they allow you to set the terms of the discussion in the way that you're most comfortable with.

#### PROPOSING YOUR COMMENT

Now that the audience knows who you are and what you'll be talking about, provide a clear statement of what your presentation will add to the topic. What can your audience hope to learn? What do you intend to prove? Think of this as a promise to your audience. At the end of your speech, you should be able to return to this idea and show that you have made good on what you promised to do at the beginning.



## **PREVIEWING YOUR MAIN POINTS**

Although previewing your main points is advantageous in a written essay, doing so in an oral presentation is downright crucial. Someone reading a written document can flip back a few pages to refresh their memory if they lose their place. In an oral presentation, though, the audience has to follow along with the speaker in real time. Summarizing the overall structure of your presentation can help your listeners remember how the details relate to your central claim. In addition, it provides your audience with a mental map of the speech, so they can keep better track of how much longer they can expect it to take.

At this point, having greeted your audience, introduced the topic, proposed your comment, and previewed the rest of your speech, you'll be able to start discussing the main substance of your presentation in a way that everyone present can easily follow.