

II. WRAPPING UP INTROS AND ENDINGS:

As we said earlier, these are brief ad-ons to the main body of your speech -- we don't consider either as part of the main discussion (as you learned in high school). We are dealing here not so much with argument as with art -- the polishing of your already finely crafted plan for maximum impact by adding a couple of graceful yet useful bookends.

A. Importance:

1. First and last impressions register most strongly on most listeners.
2. Artfully phrased beginnings and endings strengthen your overall image of coherence -- think of this formal or artistic unity as one of the most exquisite satisfactions of a good speech. This is theater. Act not just as a technician but as an artist: begin and end your play with point and style.

B. Timing:

1. Start and finish should last just long enough to achieve the "Bikini effect": covering the essentials but revealing enough to stir curiosity or leave a slight tingle.
2. As a rule-of-thumb, keep intros and endings to no longer than about five percent each of your entire speech-time. Beware of rambling intros and ragged endings.

C. Common Functions:

Intros and endings should do two jobs for you:

1. Highlight your theme (i.e. your core-theme or your central message): thus offering a striking "picture";
2. Smooth your plan's flow: making your picture into a "moving picture."

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D. Speech cons:

1. Introductions:

The first two of the following rules must be followed religiously for strong effect; if you do these well, the third usually takes care of itself:

- a) define your topic (i.e. your core-theme):
Hit your audience straight between the eyes in the very first sentence (after any courtesies of protocol). Never, never begin with long, shuffling shaggy dog stories or contrived jokes -- these mark the nervous amateur. A good pilot tells passengers their destination, not stories about fuel leaks.
- b) announce your plan: just the main three-part (or sometimes four-part) outline, not the internal plumbing or subsections. Here the "pilot," having already announced his destination, is telling passengers the route they will take -- that's interesting, sparks curiosity, and helps them follow the trip easily and "vividly."
- c) telegraph your conclusion: this is optional, and will likely be apparent from the way you announce your topic and plan. Only deliberately skip this if you wish to create artificial suspense.

2. Endings:

This is your last chance to hammer home your mastery of topic, yourself and audience. Bring to this some point, grace and panache -- in short, ham it up, though elegantly! Three rules:

- a) recall your three-part plan: just a quick flashback to tie another string around your package -- or think of this, if you prefer, as hammering the nail all the way in.
- b) focus on a photo: the best, most memorable picture which sums up your speech-"movie" in "freeze-frame" (e.g. "The Way We Were" final shot).
- c) "leave 'em laughin'": this is show-biz, after all. If you're going to emote, here's the time to do it. After a subtle crescendo growing from part 3 of your speech, you can fuel your ideas a final time with the juice of honest caring or conviction. Just bring a good supply of handkerchiefs...

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