

Crafting Your Message

The voice is the second face.

—GERALD BAUER

That first thirty seconds with your audience are critical. How do you start? Great persuaders craft and design their message. There is no room to wing it. Your opening is where your audience formulates and settles into their impressions of you. Think of your opening or introduction as comprising no more than 10 percent of your full presentation. Budgeting your speech in this manner forces you to organize your time so that you know exactly what you're going to say and how you're going to say it.

Scrap the old fillers such as "Today's topic is . . ." or "I'm going to speak on . . .," or worse, "I was assigned to talk about. . . ." When preparing your opener, think of ways in which you can grab your audience's attention and perk up their ears. Several of the most effective attention-grabbing approaches include:

- Using humor.
- Telling a personal story.
- Posing a thought provoking question.
- Sharing a quote.
- Presenting a startling fact or statistic.
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As you move from the opening of your presentation to the main body, it is helpful to remember the acronym TESS, which stands for testimonials, examples, statistics, and stories. Top persuaders tend to incorporate each of these elements into their presentations. Our research shows that when speaking to an audience, each point of TESS will resonate with different audience members. On average, TESS resonates as follows:

Testimonials	12%
<i>Examples</i>	23%
Statistics	18%
Stories	47%

Testimonials. A testimonial is a person's statement or declaration of what they believe and assert to be true. In your presentation, it can be your own, or it can come from a third party. Testimonials are a source of social validation—people assume that if others believe in it, then they should too. Great persuaders know how to use testimonials when their credibility is low. Make sure your testimonials are believable and unbiased and that they are qualified for your audience.

Examples. An example is an explanation or model that demonstrates or illustrates your point. Instead of just spouting off facts, examples make your points come alive. Examples reinforce your ideas and make them vivid and real in the mind of your audience. Examples can be taken from research studies, from articles you've read—and they can be personal anecdotes.

Metaphors are another great way to more vividly express certain points. As a subset of examples, they are effective because they use pictorial language to connect objects and ideas. On average, we use almost six metaphors per minute during spoken language.² Here are some common and likely familiar, metaphors:

- I struck out.
- Money burns a hole in his pocket.
- Keys to the piano of persuasion.
- Emotional bank account.
- Tree of financial independence.
- Life is a journey.
- Seasons of life.
- Time is a thief.
- Eyes are windows to the soul.
- The bread of life.
- Your love is like an ocean.
- Your brother is a pig.

- Like a rock.

Statistics. In a consumer climate that is increasingly skeptical, I recommend using statistics sparingly. Everyone knows that you can “cook the books” and find statistics to prove almost anything; your audience wants *credible* statistics. Statistics resonate with the logical mind, and when convincing, they are very persuasive. In particular, the analytical minds in your audience will love you and want to know the source. Most statistics need to be explained and often work best with visual aids.

Stories. The most powerful of the four elements of TESS are stories. They draw your audience in while helping them understand and appreciate your message. I’m sure you can think of a time when you were in an audience, not paying much attention to the speaker. You were probably off in your own world, when all of a sudden, you perked up and started to listen because the speaker started telling a story. When we hear a story, we automatically tune in and want to know what happens next.

Great persuaders have mastered storytelling. When you understand what essential storytelling components are and how to use them, you will be able to touch people’s hearts. Since you won’t always have an opportunity to build rapport and trust with every individual in your audience on a one-on-one basis, stories can answer their questions about who you are and what you represent. Do you want them to view you as funny, honest, or down to earth? Identify the main points you want to get across and select your stories accordingly. When an individual’s emotions are engaged, he will be more inclined to accept you and your message. The more common ground you can establish with your audience, the more attentive and receptive they will be.

People value their own conclusions more highly than yours, so if you can make your story *their* story, you will be that much more persuasive. As human beings, we are drawn to anything that gives us answers. Use stories to help your audience members answer some of their own questions. If you are successful in doing this, your message

will grow and develop in their minds and hearts. If they remember nothing else about your presentation, at the very least, your story and its underlying message will get played over and over again in your listeners' minds.

Now, what about your conclusion? Your goal as a persuader is to make your conclusion memorable. Whereas your opening comprised about 10 percent of your presentation, prepare your conclusion to take up only 5 percent. Since you have been persuading the entire time, you should need only 5 percent to wrap things up. Your conclusion should basically be a brief, clear, and concise repackaging of your main points.

As you move through your conclusion, get right down to your "call to action." Make it short, to the point, and energetic. Think of your conclusion and call to action as the final punch, the thing you want your audience to remember most. Because you've spent so much time setting it up, you want the conclusion to be really powerful.

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