



Introducing the Speaker

The introductory remarks by which speakers are presented to their audience are an important part of public speaking. Introductions typically are so bad that one of America's greatest lecturers, Mark Twain, refused to let anyone introduce him; he simply walked out on the stage alone and introduced himself. There are, however, important reasons why a speaker should be introduced and guidelines that should be followed by both the speaker and the introducer.

Why an Introduction?

Why should a speaker be introduced to an audience, especially if the audience already knows the speaker? There are several reasons:

1. No matter how familiar a speaker is with the audience, the speaker needs to separate himself from the listeners. An introduction aids in the separation; it's a brief ceremony marking the significance of the speaker's transition from being *in* the group to stepping forth in front to lead its thinking.

2. The listeners will be more perceptive and appreciative if they understand what the speaker is undertaking. If the speaker's goal is to clarify an idea or persuade the group, the introduction will help to establish the group's "mental set."

3. Even when a speaker is well known, the audience may not know what special reason the speaker has for speaking about the chosen topic or any experience or expertise the speaker has in the subject area. A good introduction makes it clear that the speaker speaks from special knowledge, experience or authority.

4. An introduction "builds a bridge" from where the thoughts of the group are at the moment to where the speaker wants them to be.

Thus, the introducer might say, "We have been discussing the details of our club's annual Officer Installation; now we'll be focusing on something more dramatic and different. Henry Jones will speak to us about..."

When you have the opportunity to present an introduction, take the job seriously. It's your opportunity for another speaking experience, even though you are not the featured speaker.

When You're the Speaker

As a speaker, you should help to prepare a good introduction for yourself. Don't be modest and tell your introducer that you don't care how you're introduced — you could be sabotaging your own speech. Instead, help your introducer by doing the following:

1. Take it for granted that the introduction will be properly prepared. Contribute toward the introducer's attitude toward the job by offering your assistance and by showing your appreciation. Your introducer is working to help you; work with him or her and express your thanks.

2. Tell your introducer what you think ought to be said in introducing you. You don't want claims that you are especially brilliant, successful or intelligent, or that you are a "good speaker." These things will be evident in your speech. Say to your introducer, "I am going to talk about government bonds as a personal investment, and I intend to analyze them from an accountant's point of view. It will be helpful if you explain to the group when you introduce me that I have had such-and-such experience as an accountant."

Make sure your listeners are told that you can speak as an accountant with reasonable authority.

3. Answer all questions your introducer asks about your general background, but be careful that your introduction doesn't include a lot of data that sounds impressive but has no relevance to your speech.

When You're the Introducer

Introductions need not be flat, dull or stereotyped. They can be graceful, witty, fun to give and fun to hear, if you do the following:

1. Give star billing to the speaker. Don't be a scene stealer and try to impress listeners with how clever or wise you are. Every sentence you say should be directed to fulfilling one of the functions of an introduction. Direct the group's attention to the speaker, not to yourself.

2. Know what the speaker will be talking about. Plan your introduction around the speaker's topic. Don't make a preliminary talk of your own on the subject.

For example, if your speaker is presenting an accountant's viewpoint on the new tax laws and you happen to be a better tax accountant than the speaker, use this fact to help, not to undermine the speaker. You could say, "As an accountant myself, I realize how important Alice's subject is, and I'm eager to learn more about it..." Then let the speaker give the speech.

3. Make it clear to listeners the speaker's expertise and experience in the topic.

4. Set the mood for the speaker and the speech. If Jim Clayton has just given a hilarious speech about his fishing vacation, and the speaker you are about to introduce will be talking about the need to support cancer research, your audience must be mentally prepared for the subject transition. Your introduction should change the atmosphere.

You could say, "Jim's account of the fish that got away was the funniest story I've heard for a long time, and I know that you enjoyed it, too. We know that some aspects of Jim's experience were probably more serious than he indicated.

"Fortunately, they turned out well. However, there are some experiences in life that don't turn out well. Life has its tragedies to match its comedies. Our next speaker is a woman who experienced one of life's tragedies. She recently has spent more time in the hospital than any of us would like to contemplate, and her life has dramatically changed as a result of her experience. Two years ago, Judy Smith discovered that she had cancer. After extensive treatment, it is now in remission. Judy now counsels other cancer patients in coping with their illness. She will speak today about what we can do to help prevent and cure cancer.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Judy Smith."

5. Be brief! If you tell a joke, make it swift and to the point. An introduction should never be longer than one minute; thirty seconds would be adequate. Prepare your introduction carefully, and make every word count.

By following these guidelines, your introductions will be effective and beneficial, whether you are the speaker or the introducer.

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