

4.5.6: Introducing a Speaker

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how to introduce a speaker in a courteous and professional manner.

A [speaker introduction](#) involves establishing the person's credibility, motivating audience interest, and saying what the speaker could not say. Not many speakers will jump to the stage and share their list of accomplishments, as this would appear arrogant and could quickly turn off an audience. At the same time, if you are able to share that they have turned two companies around and would like to share lessons learned, your audience may see the value in giving their attention. Being designated to introduce a speaker is an honor and an important duty that requires planning and preparation.

Scot Ober states, "Remarks should be directed at welcoming the speaker and establishing his or her qualifications to speak on the topic" (Ober, S., 1995). You may start with a quote from their work, or a quote from a publication or colleague describing them. You may decide to use humor. All these options are available, but whatever you choose, let respect and dignity be your overriding goal. The function and role of the introduction is to focus the spotlight squarely on the speaker. You should not distract the audience from that task with your dress, gestures, antics, or by talking about yourself.

The person you are introducing may already be well known to the audience, but you can always find some new information to share. You may need to consider the unusual, or the little known, when introducing someone who is famous. You may also consider mentioning their most recent work or activity as it relates to the topic of the presentation. Avoid the "laundry list" approach to a summary of their education and experience, as this may bore the audience. Instead, focus on something specific and relevant. Your range of options is almost limitless, but your time frame and overall function are not. You need to be brief, and you need to establish the speaker's credibility while motivating interest.

According to Bonnie Devet, "Performing the role of introducer also reinforces the rhetorical principles seminal to any business writing course: the need for ethos (credibility of both speakers and introducers), for audience-based discourse, and for accuracy" (Devet, B., 1995). Think of an introduction as a speech in miniature. Your purpose is to inform, your time frame is (typically) one to three minutes, and your specific purpose is to inform the audience about the speaker's qualifications, credibility, and enthusiasm for the topic he or she will cover.

Key Takeaway

To introduce a speaker is an honor and requires preparation and practice.

Exercises

1. Introduce a classmate who is about to present a report, document, or speech to the class. You can draw information from the Web (MySpace, Facebook, Twitter), the person's résumé, or even a personal interview. You will need to prepare your introduction in advance and may want to consider incorporating a quote from the document they will discuss. Keep your remarks to thirty seconds and your written introduction to no more than a hundred words.
2. Watch an introduction of a speaker—televised award ceremonies offer plenty of examples—and note one example that you consider effective, and one that you consider ineffective. Explain why you rated them this way. Report your response and the Web links.
3. List five facts, points, or things about yourself and your career that you would want an audience to know. Post your results and compare with classmates.

References

Devet, B. (1995). Introducing a speaker: An assignment for students in business communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 58, 57–58.

Ober, S. (1995). *Contemporary business communication* (2nd ed., p. 478). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

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