

How Do I Introduce A Speaker?

A Practical Guide to Help You Make Better Introductions.

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A Practical Guide

A popular speaker once said that he does not suffer from the common human fear of speaking in front of a group of people; his fear is "introphobia" – the fear of being introduced. He said that the worst thing about being on the speaking circuit was suffering through poorly prepared or poorly delivered introductions.

Introphobia, a word he coined, can also be interpreted as a fear of introducing. Like or not, at least once in our lives, most of us will find ourselves in the position of having to introduce a speaker. The role of the introducer is essential for a meeting and invaluable for setting an effective stage for a speaker.

Preparation must go into anything that will ultimately be successful. That certainly holds true for introductions. Your role as introducer (whether you are master of ceremonies or not) cannot be overemphasized. First impressions are hard to break, and it is your job to create a good first impression for your audience and speaker. A poor introduction can get the speaker off to a bad start or lose the audience's attention. You don't want to do either. By presenting a poor introduction, you run the risk of doing a disservice to both speaker and audience, not to mention to yourself.

What is A Good Introduction?

A good effective introduction is one that properly identifies the speaker to the audience and creates anticipation for what the speaker will say.



It usually takes three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech – Mark Twain

How Do I Prepare for Making an Introduction?

First, know your audience. You probably will because you are most likely one of its associates.

Find out ahead of time what the speaker's topic will be so you can relate that to your audience. Why would that particular speaker be addressing this group? Is your audience composed of people within a common organization? Do they have a common cause? Are they of various ages and genders, or from various backgrounds? Are you in an informal or formal meeting? Is there a theme for your meeting?

All of these variables can help you determine the wants of the audience and how the speaker can relate to them.

Note, too, that an effective speaker will have pondered these same questions before arriving at the meeting.

If you have the opportunity, talk to the speaker before the meeting or presentation to find out how he or she wants to be introduced. Many speakers will provide you with specific information and sometimes a ready-made introduction.

When talking to the speaker, ask about background, residence, accomplishments and what tone the introduction should take. A serious presenter may prefer a more formal introduction and a humorous speaker may want an introduction that is more casual. The introduction should complement the speaker's message and style.

Always Introduce

There is no speaker alive that does not deserve an introduction. A highly visible and active speaker in North Dakota recalls being introduced by a master of ceremonies who merely said, "And now, here's a man who need no introduction..." That was it, no name, no background given, nothing. As the speaker trudged to the lectern he wondered if he had been introduced or not.

Your function as an introducer is to bridge the gap between the speaker and the audience, even if the

The brain is a marvelous instrument. It starts to work the second we are born and doesn't stop until we speak before a group.

speaker is well-known to the audience. Introductions are important for preparing the audience for the next portion of the program. Besides that, introductions are simply polite. You are the host and that speaker is your guest. You will notice that even on television talk shows, the most famous personalities in the world are still accorded an introduction. It is also your job, in bridging that speaker-audience gap, to explain why the speaker is here. What qualifies the presentation you are about to receive? Why should the audience pay any attention to what is about to be said? It is up to you to explain these points to those who are charged with listening. Your introduction is similar to the title of a book. A title should encourage the reader to read. Your introduction should encourage the audience to listen.

Prepare Ye the Way

Preparation can be accomplished in several different ways. If you understand your audience's needs and the speaker's qualifications to speak to that group, you are halfway finished with your preparation. Announce the speaker's qualifications. Offer information about the speaker's background, present position, accomplishments and how his or her presentation will relate to the audience.

It is best to announce the speaker's name both at the beginning and close of your introduction. Start with something like, "We are delighted to have John Doe with us tonight." You can then end your introduction with, "Please welcome, John Doe." Your introduction, not unlike a good story, has a beginning, middle and end.

Be certain to pronounce the speaker's name correctly – a simple warning but one that many of those who have done introductions have not heeded. Nothing can make you look more foolish to your audience or your guest than mispronouncing the guest's name. If there is a problem, work it out beforehand by asking the speaker how his or her name is pronounced. No speaker should ever be offended by such a simple courtesy and you will rid yourself of anxiety and avoid a social blunder.

Your introduction establishes the credibility for the speaker, your assembled group and yourself. Honest mistakes can happen, but a little bit of preparation can also eliminate mistakes.

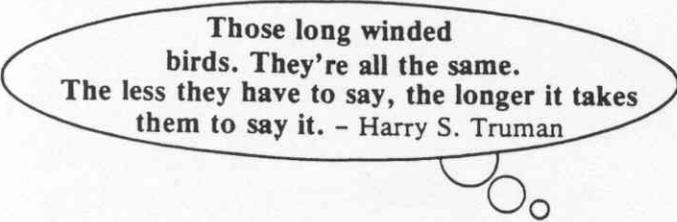
Comedy is a serious business. – Morrey Amsterdam

Do I Have to Make a Humorous Introduction?

The answer to that is no. But to find out, ask the speaker. Humor is a serious business, said one comic. Not everyone can handle it. How often have you heard an M.C. say, "I'm not too good at telling jokes..." and then proceed to prove it? Humor that is well-handled and in

good taste for your audience and your guest can certainly help an introduction, but it is not necessary.

There is no law that says you must be funny in front of a group. Your role as an introducer is to be a link between speaker and audience – not necessarily to be a comedian for the evening. If you can't handle humor well, don't use it. Humor is timing as well as material, and it is best to know your limitations. You must decide what is appropriate for the group and the speaker – and for yourself.



Those long winded birds. They're all the same. The less they have to say, the longer it takes them to say it. – Harry S. Truman

How Can I Improve My Introductions?

Listen to other introductions and be your own judge. What did you like or dislike about what you just heard? Chances are you can pick up effective techniques to use in your next job as an introducer.

Either jot down a few notes about the speaker or write out a full-fledged script, so you don't have to hem and haw during your part of the presentation. Practice your introduction. Practice may not make perfect, but it will certainly help. Establish good eye contact with your audience and be sure of yourself. Rehearsal will help you do both.

Be warm and friendly. Even if you don't like the speaker, remember that you are host.

Keep in mind that very few audiences are hostile. There is probably nobody out there that hopes for your failure as a presenter.

Be Brief

You must keep this portion of the meeting going smoothly and at a relaxed but flowing pace. Introductions that are too long-winded are going to bore your audience. It is up to you to stimulate interest; to set the stage for the act that is to follow. It is your mission to invite the speaker to come forward and at the same time to stimulate the audience into an attitude of active listening. Your introduction should incline the audience to react favorably toward the speaker before the speech begins.

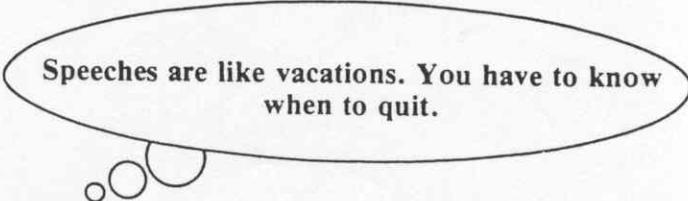
Strive for simplicity. Introductions may be infinitely various, but all should include the proper pronunciation of the speaker's name and an explanation of why the speaker is here and how the speaker will relate to the common concern shared by the audience.

Example A.

All of us are aware of the current campaign for safe driving in our state. Tonight's guest, Jim Moran, is an associate professor in the business department of the University of North Dakota. Jim has just completed a study on the effect of seat belts and how they relate to safety. He is a native of Ray, North Dakota, and received a B.A. in ag engineering from North Dakota State University and an M.A. in statistical business practices from the University of Minnesota. He lives in Grand Forks where he and his wife have two daughters. With his sneak peek at the soon to be released study, please welcome, Jim Moran.

Example B.

Cathy Humphrey is currently a graphic artist in her own Bismarck firm, Graphics Plus. Born in Excelsior, Minnesota, Cathy has been a newspaper editor, part-time art instructor and has had artwork published in many national publications. She has agreed to speak to us tonight, saying she sees a real link between her work as a commercial artist and our work as architects. She was recently honored with the prestigious Barry Kenward International Design Competition Award and was a speaker last year at the Los Angeles-based Creative Design Center. I have known Cathy for many years and I trust some of you have heard her at other functions. Let's give a warm Architect's Association welcome to Cathy Humphrey.



Speeches are like vacations. You have to know when to quit.

Example C.

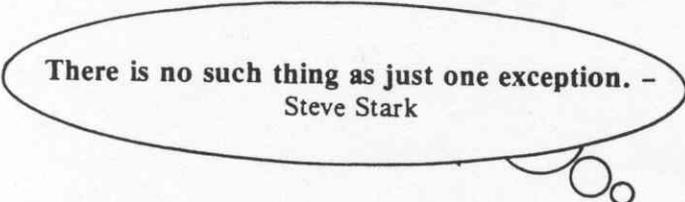
Thank you all for coming tonight, for I think that all of us in North Dakota, and I hope the world, are sharing a common concern about the future of the family farm. Dr. J.J. Carr has been traveling throughout the state with a newly organized farm financial crisis team he organized at NDSU. He has worked extensively with the governor in preparation of the next farm bill and continues to keep a hand in the farming operation his parents still run in Tioga, North Dakota.

He received his B.A. and M.A. in agricultural economics at NDSU and completed his Ph.D. in the same area at the University of Nebraska. He is a member of various service organizations in Fargo and is chairman of the extension agricultural economics department at NDSU. He says that the current crisis across the farmlands of the country has created a concern as well as a challenge. With his outlook for the future of the family farm, please welcome J.J. Carr.

Example D.

Our speaker tonight, Gary Berg, is a well known radio personality in the Williston area, with station WXYZ. Gary just barely made it in to Fargo tonight. He said he just flew in from Williston, and boy, are his arms tired. He said the blizzard at the airport held him up but the worst thing was the amazing cold. He said it was so cold he saw a 32nd degree Mason down to 14 below.

Gary's talk for tonight is, **So, You Want To Be A Star?** Gary is the proud father of two boys but says there is a third he is not too crazy about. So, settle back and please help me welcome Gary Berg.



There is no such thing as just one exception. - Steve Stark

A different tone is set by each of these introductions. The last is obviously comic and should be delivered only with the consent of the speaker. We can assume from this type of introduction that the speech we are about to hear is going to be humorous.

The first three examples are more serious. All three involve giving the speaker's credentials. You must determine for yourself how much of a speaker's background and education needs to be identified to give credibility to the speaker as an "expert." Some detail is required, but too much detail about a speaker's accomplishments can actually alienate the audience. Determining how much is enough can be tricky.

Don't be afraid to humanize the introduction by mentioning briefly your possible acquaintance with the speaker. But don't dwell so much in your relationship that you transfer attention from the speaker to yourself.

As a society, we are being confronted with better presentations of all types. Television, newspapers, magazines, motion pictures and video all compete with each other to get our attention. Nothing, however, can replace person-to-person communication.

As long as we are human beings, we will have opportunities to listen to others. Your job, when given the task of making an introduction, is not to compete

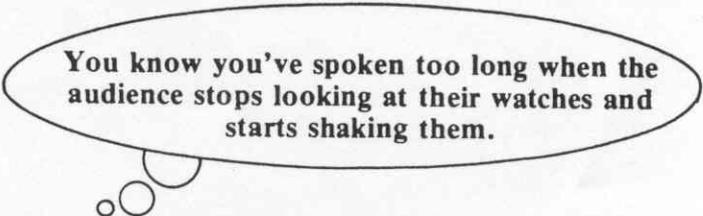
with the speaker. It is simply to be clear, direct and honest as you bridge the gap between speaker and audience. With just a little preparation and alertness, you can do it, and do it well.

Quick Tips Before You Introduce

1. Check with the speaker as to how he/she would prefer to be introduced.
2. Suit the structure of your introduction to the tone of the meeting or the theme of the group.
3. Introduce correctly the name of the speaker and the subject of the talk.
4. Only use humor if it is in good taste, appropriate to the situation, and acceptable to the speaker.
5. Be positive, upbeat, sincere. Speak clearly and with enough volume.
6. Be brief. You are not to compete with the speaker's time but rather to enhance the speaker's pending message.

Nevers

1. Never give an introduction without carefully planning its beginning, middle and end.
2. Never allow a speaker to come before your group without an introduction.
3. Never apologize for yourself or for the speaker (don't apologize, for instance, because the speaker is a substitute).
4. Never use humor that could offend the speaker or the audience.
5. Never wander from the introduction into other reports or announcements.
6. Never try to steal the speaker's thunder with humor or by giving your own opinion about the subject of the speech.



You know you've spoken too long when the audience stops looking at their watches and starts shaking them.