Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions
First impressions are very important, especially in public speaking. The way you begin a presentation can determine the audience’s level of interest and can boost your self-confidence. According to J. Dan Rothwell in Practically Speaking, introductions should consist of the following: an attention getter, general and specific purpose statements that reveal your central idea, establishing the topic’s relevance, establishing your credibility as a speaker, and previewing your main points.

Get the attention of the audience:
Relate the topic to the audience. Your audience will pay attention to something that relates to them directly.

- Use vivid language to make the audience feel like they are personally involved with the topic
- Another way to do this is by the use of statistics and making your subject personal.
- Asking a rhetorical question is a very simple way to get the audience to think about your topic.
- Use quotations or stories. A quotation or story is also an effective and easy way to arouse the interest of the audience.

- Quotations work well if you are giving a speech about a famous person or event. They can also work well if your topic has been discussed by notable people.
- Stories can be real or hypothetical. If your story is hypothetical let your audience know, you don’t want them to think that you are misleading or lying to them.

Think of other great attention getters that you’ve heard or read. What can you do to really pull the audience into your presentation?

General and Specific Purpose Statements:
These statements give the audience an idea of what your overall argument or idea is for your speech.

- A general statement is usually given in the assignment description, some common ones are “to persuade,” “to inform,” or “to commemorate.”
- A specific purpose statement combines the general statement and your specific topic. An example of a specific purpose statement is “To inform my audience why tuition is so expensive.” This statement will be said in the speech.
- Central ideas identify the main concept, point, issue, or conclusion that you want the audience to get from your speech. This can also be thought of as a thesis statement. If you summarize your speech into one sentence, this is your central idea or thesis.

Establishing Topic’s Relevance:
You should let your audience know why they should listen to your speech. Let the audience know how this affects them.

- Does this affect them currently right now?
- Will it affect them in the future?
- Does this affect them via a family member, friend, etc.?
- Is this a global issue that appeals to our humanity?
Some topics are easier than others to come up with a relevancy statement, but it is important to let your audience know why your topic matters.

**Establishing credibility:**
Credibility can come from your own experiences, or how you came about knowing about the topic. It is also important to build goodwill with the audience. They need to know why you chose to speak on this topic.
- Discussing your personal experience with the topic
- Telling the audience about your research with this topic (Note: a few days of research does not make a good credibility statement)

**Preview the body of the speech:**
Laying out exactly what will be talked about is important because the audience should know what to expect from the presentation. The audience should never have to guess what’s coming next.
- Previews are typically one sentence and include signposts like “first,” “then,” and “finally.”
- You should try to condense your main points into a few words.

**Conclusions**
The way you end the speech is what the audience will be left with. Therefore, the conclusion must be given as much thought as the introduction. Rothwell suggests three objectives for competent conclusions:
- Summarize the main points
- Refer to the introduction
- Make a memorable finish

**Summarize the Main Points:**
This is best done with a summary statement.
- This will reflect your preview statement, but you should give each main point 1-2 sentences.
- Be sure to summarize main points with your argument in mind, you want to leave the audience with your take on the topic.

**Refer to the Introduction:**
If you use a quote, story, or question to open your speech refer to it in the final statement within your speech. This will signal to the audience that the speech is ending, as well as answer any questions or finish any ideas the audience has.

**Make a Memorable Finish:**
Your speech needs to be ended by you, rather than your PowerPoint ending or you walking away from the podium). The audience should have no question that they need to clap because your speech is over.
- End with a clincher statement that reflect on your central idea or thesis statement as your ending line, this is a way to show your creativity!