

Capturing Your Audience in Five Seconds!

By Tim W. Hrastar



The attention span of an adult is about 8 to 10 seconds, before their mind travels elsewhere. Therefore, speaking to any audience, whether it's in the courtroom, a client's office, or to a group of lawyers attending a CLE event, you have less than five to ten seconds to get their attention and get them hooked on what you are going to say.

You need to establish rapport with the audience, and hit them with what you want to accomplish as quickly as possible, so they say, "yeah, this sounds interesting, tell me more."

You can begin with a startling statement, a brief story, a quote, or even ask them a question to create an immediate dialogue. Let's take a look at each of these techniques.

Use a Startling Statement

Using a startling or bold statement, for example a statistic to which they can immediately relate, helps orient the audience as to what you are going to talk about and how you are going to approach the subject. "New York City hospitals treat more people for people bites than rat bites!" Now that's an interesting statistic, and it's true. The audiences' curiosity is raised by this statement. You immediately want to know where the speaker is going with this. Isn't it more interesting than, "I am really glad to be here today.?"

Tell a Brief Story

Everyone likes to hear stories—kids, adults, clients, colleagues, judges, and juries. Stories are the traditional way we pass on information. When you say, "Let me tell you a story." People's ears perk right up, they settle in and get themselves ready to be entertained and informed. We tell stories to create interest, and to remember things. If you want your audience to cling to every word you say and remember it, begin with a story. By telling stories you are able to communicate complex issues and concepts more easily. If you don't use a story, in the case of a jury, they'll make their own up, and it might

not be the one you want them to latch on to and remember.

You can open with a story and continue to refer to it throughout your presentation including the closing. At your closing you can wrap up the story—solve the problem so to speak. It ties everything into a nice neat memorable package. Remember the laws of primacy and recency. People will remember best the first and the last things you say. So if you use a story, real or hypothetical, at the beginning and at the end of your presentation, chances of persuading the audience to act are pretty high. Practice telling a story, hone it down and make it work for your subject. It has to be relevant to the topic and help carry your theme.

Use a Quote

Quotes are an interesting way to begin a presentation because they create thought provoking ideas and images in the audiences' mind. They can be by famous people, or not so famous people. The criteria is; do they create interest and give the audience something to think and get emotional about, and does it help launch you into your presentation? Quotes, similar to startling statistics, provide a lot of information with a short punchy line or two. They can be visceral, filled with emotions as well as facts, but most of all they need to be memorable.

There are quotes for all occasions. Try [Bartlett's Familiar Quotations](#), or other reference books, or as you read, jot down quotes that you find of interest so you can use them sometime down the road.

Here are some samples:

"When you're honest, you don't have to remember anything." [Mark Twain]

"Progress is impossible without change; those who can't change their minds cannot change anything." [George Bernard Shaw]

"Results are obtained by exploiting opportunity,



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not by solving problems. All one can hope to get by solving a problem is to restore normalcy." [Peter Drucker]

"Find a niche. Be the best at what you do. Love your work. Be ready to fail and start over. And don't focus on getting rich; instead be passionate about your enterprise, and the money will likely come." [Jim Rogers, Venture Capitalist]

Ask a Question

A presentation is different than a speech. A speech is read, or delivered without verbal interaction with the audience. A presentation requires verbal and non-verbal audience interaction. You want to get the audience as involved as possible, that's one way to gauge their interest and attention. A good way to start is to ask the audience a broad question or two to get them physically, mentally, and emotionally involved with the presentation. It gets them to think and contribute to the occasion. Based on their responses you can continue to tailor your presentation to fit their interests.

Once you get their attention you need to be creative, enthusiastic and passionate to maintain interest throughout your presentation. Try a couple of these techniques for your next presentation—they'll put your audience where you want them—on the edge of their seats, eagerly wanting more. Good luck delivering your next presentation.

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