

LESSON-25

Humor

Depending on your purpose for speaking, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to inject humor in your presentation. A short, funny story is often a good way to open a talk or provide “comic relief” during a presentation. If a secondary purpose is to entertain, or when the topic would not be diminished by a touch of humor, consider how you might weave a joke or an anecdote (related to your topic) into your speech. You may find good jokes or stories in books available at your local library or bookstore.

When and if you do decide that humor will help you achieve your purpose, be careful about what type of humor you use. Humor is extremely subjective; what’s funny to one person may not be equally funny to another. In all cases, use no joke or anecdote that could offend someone—not just someone in the audience, but *anyone*. A joke in poor taste or at the expense of someone else is in bad form and will ruin your rapport with the audience. And, of course, make sure the joke is *funny* which often has as much to do with delivery and timing as it does with content.

CASE SCENARIO

Lunch, Anyone?

Clarice Peterschick worked in human resources at a progressive manufacturing company. Her company was implementing an employee suggestion system and Clarice decided to make a presentation to inform employees about the program and encourage them to participate. She knew that in her audience of 500 there were workers who would be *skeptical*. She really wanted to reach the workers who were not yet convinced the company was willing to help them make their jobs easier and more pleasant.

An important idea that Clarice wanted to get across was about employee ownership. She believed the suggestion system was a powerful way for employees to “own” the conditions under which they worked. Somehow, she wanted to stress the idea that “if you don’t like it, don’t grumble change it.” However, she wanted to say it in a way that wouldn’t leave any listeners feeling defensive. She settled on using a humorous anecdote to amuse and inform her audience at the same time. She included the story in her talk right after her introductory remarks:

A friend of mine told me a story about one of his coworkers. It seems that every day this fellow would bring a sack lunch, and every day he would complain to my friend about what was in the sack. “Peanut butter again,” he would groan, or “A lousy apple. I wanted grapes.” My friend usually played along, but one day it got to him. He turned to the guy and said, “If you never like your lunches, why don’t you make them yourself?” “Gosh,” the fellow replied, “I already do.”

Clarice’s audience howled with laughter. She had won them over and kept their attention and interest for the rest of her talk.

What made Clarice’s anecdote successful? Did you find it funny? Do you think it could offend anyone? Why do you think it was more effective than it would have been to lecture

about not grumbling and doing something? What do you think Clarice might say after the anecdote to tie it into her overall message?

Humor and International Communications

Humor is both personal and cultural. In international business, it is treacherous territory indeed. Irony, sarcasm, and innuendo risky in domestic business relations are outright dangerous in the international arena.

Consider, for example, how the foreign recipient might understand this:

I missed my latest deadline, and it's all your fault! Instead of working on the project last weekend, I completely lost track of time reading the excellent report that you sent.

A variation of humor that relies on idiom or local color is also to be avoided. Again, consider the foreign perspective on:

As nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs

A memorable way to make your point? Perhaps, unless your contact has never seen a rocking chair!

For example word pictures Americans paint may be seen by others as a jumble of foreign objects:

Flat as a pancake	Safe as Fort Knox
Old as Methuselah	Flying by the seat of your pants
Keep a low profile	Run it up the flagpole
Dog and pony show	100K (for 100,000)
It will never fly	Don't make waves

Remember, too, that foreign contacts use the telephone. Make it a practice not to tell jokes, play weird music, or be flip in your recorded message.

And a final word about humor: Ethnic jokes are never acceptable.

Adapted from Mary A. De Vries. *Internationally Yours* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994); The Parker Pen Company, *Do's and Taboos Around The World* (Elmsford, NY: Benjamin, 1985); and Letitia Baldrige, *Letitia Baldrige's New Complete Guide To Executive Manners* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

Why humor?

Why should I bother using humor in my presentations? Can't I just deliver my information and sit down? You sure can and that's what most people do. The problem is that most people are not effective presenters. They are nighty nite, snooze inducing, say your prayers, hit the sack, unlicensed hypnotists. They are ZZZZZs presenters. They might be experts in their field and be able to recite hours and hours of information on their topic, but is that effective?

According to Bob Orben, Special Assistant to President Gerald Ford and Former Director of the White House Speech writing Department, "Business executives and political leaders have embraced humor because humor works. Humor has gone from being an admirable part of a leader's character to a mandatory one."

A survey of top executives who earned more than \$250,000 per year was conducted by a large executive search firm. The survey found that these executives believed their communication skills were the number one factor that carried them to the top. Mastering the use of humor and other high-explosion techniques puts a fine polish on your presentation skills which can help propel you to the top of the speaking profession.

There are many benefits you can derive from using humor in your presentations. Keep in mind that these benefits only help you reach your ultimate purpose for making the presentation. They are not purposes themselves unless, of course, you are only interested in entertaining.

Using humor does the following for you:

1. Helps you connect with the audience.

2. Makes you more likeable.
3. Arouses interest.
4. Keeps attention.
5. Helps emphasize points and ideas.
6. Disarms hostility.
7. Overcomes overly flattering introductions.
8. Gets your point across without creating hostility.
9. Helps relate facts and figures.
10. Makes a positive impression.
11. Shows that you don't take yourself too seriously.
12. Helps paint pictures in the audience's mind.
13. Makes information more memorable.
14. Lightens up heavy material.
15. You will be asked back.
16. You will get higher evaluations or more sales.
17. You will make more money.
18. You will make people happy.

I had an executive come up to me after one of my humor seminars and say, "You opened up a whole new world for me." I almost cried right on the spot. I'll never forget it. Next issue learn techniques to deliver your talk without notes. "Wake em Up teaches you to be irresistible as a presenter." Also, Foreword by: Mark Victor Hansen, Co-Author of the #1 New York Times Best- selling series, Chicken Soup for the Soul

Sigmund Freud wrote:

"The most favorable condition for comic pleasure is a generally happy disposition in which one is in the mood for laughter. In happy toxic states almost everything seems comic. We laugh at the expectation of laughing, at the appearance of one who is presenting the comic material (sometimes even before he [she] attempts to make us laugh), and finally, we laugh at the recollection of having laughed."

This concept has been termed "in fun" by people that study humor. If you want your audience to laugh, they must be in fun. You, the speaker, must be in fun. The emcee or program coordinator must be in fun. The whole program should be designed in fun. Don't do anything to take them out of in fun. Don't discuss controversial subjects like religion or politics and don't make unfriendly comments to audience members. If a problem occurs which must be dealt with, find an in fun way of doing so. For

instance, if I'm at a presentation and someone asks me who I voted for I say, "I voted for the USA." That's a cute way to say that I really don't want to talk about it.

Retired NSA member and one of the greatest humorists of all time Dr. Charles Jarvis, told me about a friend of his who was an excellent speaker, but lost his audience when he forced someone to turn off a tape recorder. He was so nasty about the way he said it that the in fun audience totally turned against him.

An in fun audience is more critical for the speaker who is there to entertain, but the concept should be in the back of every presenter's mind. Your material may be controversial by nature, but that doesn't mean that you should go out of your way to do or say things that will take the audience further out of in fun.

Also, pay close attention to the total program. One friend of mine had to present comical material just after a passionate plea went out to the audience to collect funds for starving babies. He came on stage just after the teary eyed audience had seen slides of emaciated children. If you ever get caught in this situation, DON'T start right in with your humorous material. Start out gently with a sincere reference to what the audience has just seen. Cut most of your early humor and get to your subject to ease the audience's transition to your more lighthearted topic.

How do you put in fun into practice? One time I had a ventriloquist introduce me at an early morning meeting to wake up everyone and get them in fun. You could pass out fun snacks to the audience or put balloons on their chairs. Meeting announcements and agendas can be decorated with cartoon characters. Funny props are great for putting people in fun. Do anything you can to be sure your audience knows that it's OK to laugh.

Timing

Timing is one of the most important aspects of humor and NO ZZZZZs presenting. Not only is timing involved in an individual piece of humor, it is also involved in the placement of that piece of humor in the overall presentation. Timing is also involved in spontaneous reactions to "expected" unexpected developments during the presentation.

Jack Benny said, "Timing is not so much knowing when to speak, but knowing when to pause." He should know, because he delivered one of the funniest and most famous lines in the history of comedy after an extremely long pause. He was being held up by a robber at gunpoint. The robber said, "Your money or your life!" Jack didn't say a word for an extended period of time. The robber became impatient and said, "YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE!!" Jack finally replied, "I'm thinking." His persona as a cheapskate, coupled with a long pause indicating he was having trouble deciding whether to give up his money, or die was hilarious. A pause lets the audience catch up and draw pictures in their mind. It is the audience's signal to imagine.

In joke telling, a pause just before and just after your punch line gives the audience a chance to laugh. Absolutely do not continue to talk when laughter is expected. Laughter is hard to get and easy to discourage. Hold eye contact a little bit longer than you think you should when delivering punch lines because time is hard to judge when you are pumped-up for a presentation.

The size of your audience will affect your timing. Your presentation will take less time to deliver to smaller audiences. Smaller audiences should mean quicker laughter. Conversely, presentations will take longer for extremely large crowds. Your pauses

will be longer to compensate for the wave effect created because of the physical distance between you and the back row of the audience.

Next issue learn how the time of day effects your audience response. “In *Wake em Up*, teaches us how to get our message across, do it with humor, and keep the audience awake all at the same time. That’s great, although I’ve learned through experience that when I’m not doing 1 and 2, I prefer that the audience doze off. It makes my getaway easier.” Gene Perrett, Author and head comedy writer for Bob Hope

Time of day and Humor

The first speaker of the day for an early morning (7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.) program should not expect hearty laughter. People are not conditioned to laugh a great deal in the early morning. Many won’t even be awake yet. Use more information and less humor. I was asked by a sales speaker to open up an early morning seminar. He said, “I just want you to get them laughing before I go on.” I told him that it was not a good idea, but he insisted. I opened up the seminar with some sure-fire humor to test their responsiveness and got little response. I cut my material and brought the speaker on stage. He couldn’t get them laughing either. I sat in the audience and watched. By 10:15 a.m. they were laughing at just about anything. It’s important for you to know when NOT to expect hearty laughter. It would be a waste of time to use your best material at a time when laughter normally wouldn’t be expected. If you didn’t know that early morning programs aren’t the best for laughter, you could have your confidence shaken so badly that the rest of your presentation might suffer. Also, keep in mind that I am giving you general principles. You might run into a lively group sometime just don’t expect it.

Many consider brunch to be the best time of day to expect a responsive audience. It is late enough that the folks who sleep late are now awake, but not so late in the day that early risers are starting to get tired. Lunch is generally a time for good response for the same reasons as brunch.

In the afternoon people are starting to get tired. Audience members will retain less because they are not listening as closely as they did in the morning. You can use more humor and less hard information, but don’t expect laughter to be as intense.

The last speaker of a long afternoon or evening program should not expect a great response, again because folks are too worn out. Keep your presentation short and crisp and acknowledge the lateness so that the audience knows you care about them. One time I was the last speaker on a long program in Baltimore, Maryland, for a food service management company. I was being introduced at 8:35 p.m. on a Monday night in the fall. What do you think the mostly male audience was thinking at 8:35 p.m. on a Monday night in the Fall? Of course! MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL! I got up and said:

There are three things I would never want to be: 1. a javelin catcher; 2. the scoop man at a Donkey Basketball game; and 3. the last speaker on a long program. (I looked at my watch.) It’s now 8:40 p.m. I’m going to limit my remarks to 15 minutes. I guarantee you will be in the hospitality suite in time for the kickoff. I kept my promise. Do you think I had more of their attention than if I had not made the comment? You bet I did! Even though it had been a long day, they all had a good laugh during my talk. A little care for your audience will go a long way. Next issue learn about serious and funny closings.

“ has mastered the art of communicating in an interesting and humorous fashion. His book *Wake em Up* is a “how to” and what “not to do” for speakers. It’s a great read for presenters who have been in front of audiences for years as well as those folks just starting out. Hat’s off to Tom for a job well done!”

David Kliman, President Meeting Professionals International

Closings

One of the worst mistakes you can make as a presenter is talking too long. Not only will you send some folks to never, never land, you will make some of them downright mad. It doesn’t matter if your entire talk was brilliant and the audience came away with information that will change their lives. If you talk too long, they will leave saying, “That speaker just wouldn’t quit.” Don’t let this happen to you! Say what you have to say and sit down. Before you do, give them a well thought out closing. The last thing you say may be the most remembered. You must put as much time into selecting and practicing your closing as you put into any other part of your presentation. Just like your opening, your closing does not have to be humorous. It could be motivational, challenging, thoughtful, respectful of the length of the presentation, or it could restate your point in a different way. This ending segment will have a strong influence on what the audience takes home with them when you are done. Please, at sometime during your talk ask the audience to do something. Many a great NO ZZZZZs talk went no further than the walls of the meeting room because the audience wasn’t moved to action. If you haven’t ask them to do something by now, the closing is your last chance.

If the subject is appropriate, I happen to be fond of humorous closings for several reasons. If you leave them laughing and applauding, you will exit, but an extremely positive impression about you will remain. Another good reason to leave them laughing is that the room will not be deadly silent as you are walking back to your seat. I hate when that happens. I do love laughter and feeling good; finishing a talk humorously gives me and the audience an opportunity to feel great. Talks that are for entertainment purposes only should generally leave the audience laughing.

Finally, if the subject is not appropriate to end with laughter,. you could end with a touching story or quotation that leaves the audience thoughtful and quiet. Even the most serious subjects can benefit from humor, but the humor should be sprinkled throughout the body of the presentation. Don’t put it at the end because closings are powerful and the audience will think your overall attitude toward the subject is flippant.

This same technique can be very effective in ending a mostly humorous presentation. Have them laughing all along while you make your points. Then finish seriously. This contrast will create a great impact. It will convey the fact that you believe in a lighthearted approach to the subject, but the results are very serious to you.

Next issue learn how to make a point with humor.

“When I recruited to play for the West Virginia University Mountaineers in the early 70’s, he was an exciting high school football player. It doesn’t surprise me that he’s turned into such an exciting professional speaker. His Book *Wake em Up* will teach

you how to create excitement when you speak to any size group. I use some of his tips in my own speaking engagements.”

Bobby Bowden, Head Football Coach Florida State University

How to Make a Point with Humor

One of the old saws of public speaking says that you should “Tell em what you’re gonna tell em. Tell em. Then tell em what you told em.” When you want to make a point during your presentation, you can use a similar formula. You tell em the point, illustrate the point, then tell em the point again. This formula, however, can seem boring and redundant if you don’t spice it up a little. One way to do it is to use humor. Here’s the formula:

1. Make your point.
2. Illustrate your point (in our case with a humorous two-liner, but you could use props, humorous props, funny stories, serious stories, case studies, etc.)
3. Restate your point.

Here’s an example where your point is “The Importance of Communication.”

1. First make your point by saying, Accurate and clear communication is an important part of our everyday lives.
2. Then illustrate your point. In this case use a humorous two-liner. It’s like the student pilot who was asked over the radio to state his altitude and location. He said, “I’m five feet nine and I’m in the left seat.”
3. Then restate your point in a slightly different manner by saying, You can see how what we may think is clear communication could be interpreted incorrectly especially when people are under pressure.

Next issue learn about the importance of a sound, sound system.

“This book gives you advanced presentations skills and humor training that would otherwise take you years to learn. It’s an absolute must-read for anyone who wants to be a fantastic presenter.”

Patricia Fripp, Past president & first woman president of the National Speakers Association

A Sound, Sound System

If it is hard to hear, people won’t listen. As a humorous presenter you must have an excellent sound system because some of the time you will be talking while your audience is laughing. Stand-up comics need good sound too, but they are a little different because they tell a joke, then people laugh (they hope). They tell another joke, then people laugh. A humorous presenter will be rolling right along making points, showing product features, telling stories, and dropping one-liners and must be heard all the while.

A humorous presentation demands a better sound system than a serious talk. In a serious talk, words can be missed and the main message can still be very clear. In humor it doesn't work that way. If key words are missed in a joke or story, it will ruin the humor. No one will laugh and you will look like a giant goober.

The need for a thorough sound check is another good reason to be in the room early. You need to check the microphone to make sure it works. You need to check to see how far your mouth should be from the microphone. You need to know how loudly you should talk. Realize that during your check the audio level should be very loud. People will absorb the sound once they get into the room.

Make sure the sound system is carrying to all parts of the room. If someone speaks prior to you, try to go to the back of the room to see how he or she is coming across. If you have someone at the presentation with you, have them signal from the back of the room if changes are needed after you have started.

If the amplifier controls aren't handy after you have started, you can adjust the sound by changing the distance between your mouth and the microphone and/or increasing or decreasing the loudness of your voice. Try not to use the latter method too often so you don't strain your vocal mechanism.

Next issue: To Laugh or Not to Laugh—That is the Question. “We live in a world of entertainment. If you have hard hitting business content and need a way to inject appropriate humor to keep people with you, this is the book that will teach you how to do it.”

Bob Pike, CSP “The Trainer’s Trainer” Editor Creative Training Techniques Newsletter
President Creative Training Techniques Companies

To Laugh or Not to Laugh That is the Question

Some humor “experts” say that you should not laugh at your own jokes and stories. This may work for some, but it is definitely not my style. When I’m in front of an audience, I’m having a great time. I’m there because I love humor and laughter and I love sharing it with the audience. I can’t help laughing sometimes. I laugh at what I say. I laugh at what they say. I laugh at unexpected occurrences during the presentation. That’s my style. I believe that to fully connect with an audience, you must be accepted as one of them. If I expect them to laugh, then I should laugh too.

Sometimes you can laugh to tell the audience it’s time to laugh. Within a matter of minutes your stage persona will be evident to the audience. As soon as they catch onto your style and rhythm, they will pick up on the cues you give them. When you laugh they know it is time for them to laugh. It’s almost like holding up an applause sign. Some presenters use facial expressions or gestures or a combination of many cues that tell the audience it’s OK to laugh.

The opposite of a laughter cue is a deadpan expression. This is a serious expression that is contrasted with funny lines. The contrast evokes a larger laugh than the line could get by itself. I use this to set the audience up for some fun questions. I look completely earnest when I say, I’m the foremost expert in the world [pause] on dumb questions. It always gets a good laugh.

Next issue learn about bumper car transitions.

“Anyone who has ever been in one of ’s audiences would attest that Tom clearly “practices what he preaches!” In this informative and enjoyable book, you’ll find

dozens of practical tips, tools, and techniques that will show you that “learning can be fun!” Enjoy Wake em Up. I know you will.”

Transitions

Most presentation skills books will tell you to be a polished presenter you have to tie all your information together so it flows smoothly. You must lead your audience and alert them that slightly different, but related information is coming. This is called transition or segue (pronounced seg-way).

LET ME STATE RIGHT NOW THAT I FULLY BELIEVE SMOOTH TRANSITIONS ARE A NECESSITY IF YOU WANT TO HAVE YOUR AUDIENCE MEMBERS SO BORED THEY FALL RIGHT OUT OF THEIR SEATS AND SMASH THEIR HEADS ON THE FLOOR. Come with me to the amusement park. Look around a little bit and tell me where the excitement is. Of course, it’s over on the roller coaster where transitions are sharp. They are sharp and exciting even though you can see them coming. The excitement isn’t over at the kiddie choo choo train (notwithstanding, the excitement you might feel watching your little munchkin on there for the very first time) where turns and motion are mild so the little ones don’t get too upset. The excitement is also at the bumper cars where you can get blind-sided because cars are coming at you from all directions. The excitement isn’t at the baby boat ride where a 2cm wave would flip your little bundle of joy out of the boat.

OK. I’ll admit, some thought should be given to transition, especially with older, more traditional audiences, and when you have a very high content presentation. But you don’t have to be a trite, snoozer by saying things like, . . . speaking of bananas. I’m now going to talk about bananas. You could, however, do a segue like that and then make fun of yourself for doing it by saying something like, Don’t you think that transition was really smooth? Transitions are one of the places where you could plan to use some humor. This works well with technical audiences because they won’t feel you are wasting their time. Since, in their minds, you are REQUIRED to do a transition anyway, it’s OK if it’s funny.

Segues aren’t important at all for 85 percent or higher humor content presenters or stand-up comics. You can just bang away and as long as they are laughing, no one much cares about transitions. If you are not in this category, then you can begin paying a little attention to bridging the gaps between your points and topics. Just don’t be trite and don’t think you have to say something to make the transition.

You can make transitions by changing stage position, pausing, using visual aids, giving out a handout, or picking up a prop. Do anything that breaks the pattern of what you were doing in the previous segment and introduces what you plan to do.

For verbal transitions, one-liners, anecdotes, and questions work well. Also, people seem to like and need recaps, so I am in favor of saying things like, To recap this section . . .

Whatever you do, think in terms of roller coasters and bumper cars so you keep your audience excited and alert all the time.

“Wake em Up is a great book for the novice and old pro alike. I’ve been on the circuit for over 20 years and gleaned a number of valuable tips. More importantly, the book leaves “nothing to chance” for a presenter or speaker wishing to enhance their skills and deliver humor like it should be done. This book is a must.”

INTRODUCING YOUR MESSAGE

The introduction to your speech is an invitation to listen. Consequently, the audience should be foremost in your mind as you plan your opening words. When you first begin to speak, the audience will have two basic concerns in mind: why should I listen to this speech? And why should I listen to this speaker? These questions relate to two of the three basic functions of an introduction. First, it should capture attention and excite interest so that your ethos as a competent, trustworthy, and likable person with whom the audience can identify. Finally, your introduction should help focus and preview your message to make it easier for the audience to follow.

A successful introduction also helps prepare you to present the rest of your speech. Such an introduction gets you off to a good start and helps allay any performance anxiety you might feel. Therefore, prepare your introduction carefully to assure a smooth entry into your speech. Practice it until you are confident and comfortable with it. If the context of your presentation requires it, you may vary it during the actual speaking situation (see chapter 4). Establish good eye contact with listeners. Do not read your introduction.

Capturing Attention

All too often beginning speakers open their presentations with something like “Good evening. The topic of my speech is . . .” and then jump right into their message. Needless to say, this is not an effective way to begin a speech. It does not invite your audience to listen. Nor does it make them *want* to. There are several good ways to attract, build, and hold the interest of your audience. You may:

- Involve the audience
- Relate your subject to personal experience
- Ask rhetorical questions
- Create suspense
- Tell a story
- Use humor
- Begin with a quotation, or
- Startle listeners.

Involve the Audience. You involve listeners when you connect them with your message. One of the most frequently used involvement techniques is to offer sincere, well deserved compliments. Does the group, the location, or an audience member merit praise? People like to hear good things about themselves and their community. This technique is often used in formal speeches when custom requires a speaker to make such acknowledgements before moving into the actual presentation. These introductory remarks can be very brief, as illustrated by the opening words of President John F. Kennedy in a speech given at a White House dinner honoring Nobel Prize winners:

I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.¹³

With this elegant tribute Kennedy was able to honor his guests without embarrassing them or going overboard with praise. His witty reference to the genius of Thomas Jefferson also paid tribute to the past.

A less formal way to involve listeners is to relate your topic directly to their lives. when you can demonstrate that what you are talking *about* matters to them, your speech will be more effective.¹⁴ This is especially important if your topic seems distant from the audience's immediate concerns or experiences. Beth Duncan wanted to speak to her classroom audience on Alzheimer's disease. She helped listeners relate to her topic with the following opening in which she read a letter directly *from* a piece of folded stationery:

I'd like to share with you a letter my roommate got from -her grand ,mother, undedicated and cultured woman. I watched her weep as she read it, and after she showed it to me, I understood why. "Dear Sally," she read. "I am finally around to answer your last. You have to look over me. ha. I am so sorry to when you called Sunday why didn't you remind me. Steph had us all so upset leaving and not telling no she was going back but we have a good snow ha and Kathy can't drive on ice so 'I never get a pretty card but they have a thing to see though an envelope of haven't got any in the bank until I get my homestead check so I never get a pretty card but they have a thing to see through an envelope. I haven't got any in the bank until talking on the phone Cathy had Ben and got my groceries and I had to unlock the door. I forgot to say hold and I don't have Claudette's number so forgive me for being so silly. Ha. Nara said to tell you she isn't doing no good well one is doing pretty good and my eyes. Love, nanny."

Sally's grandmother has Alzheimer's disease. Over 2.5 million older people in the united states are afflicted with it. It could strike someone in our families—a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, or even our mother or father.

When Beth finished this introduction, her classmates felt moved and deeply involved. Realizing that this disease could affect their own families, made them want to hear, the rest of Beth's speech. YDU also can involve your listeners by relating your topic to their motivations or attitudes and by using inclusive pronouns such as *we* and *our*. We discuss the use of inclusive pronouns in more detail in Chapter 10.

Relate Your Subject ,to 'Personal Experience. An old adage suggests that people are interestedly first in themselves, next in _other people, then in things, and finally in ideas. This may explain why relating a topic to personal experience heightens" audience interest. when speakers have been personally involved with a 'topic, they also gain credibility. We are more willing to listen to others and take their advice if we know they have traveled the road themselves',

Relating your subject to personal experience also an establish common ground between yourself and listeners. This can be very important when you face a wary or unfriendly

audience. Brock Evans, vice president of the Audubon Society, recently addressed the Seattle Rotary Club on the Endangered Species 'Act. Because this speech was presented amid a controversy concerning logging restrictions in that area, his introduction before this skeptical group was especially" critical. Adams combined the techniques of involving the audience and relating the topic to personal experience in this introduction:

It is always a distinct honor to be invited _to speak before a prestigious group like the Rotary Club of Sea use thank you for inviting me to be here today, and=not just because of the opportunity to share a few thoughts about this very important subject. Those of you who know me know that my roots here run very deep. It was 30 years ago that I moved here from the Midwest, because I wanted to live in what I thought then - and still do now - was the most beautiful part of the country.

And those of you who know me know that my passion for this special Northwest land, its unique blend of mountain and forest and sea, goes even deeper. . . for it caused me to leave a law practice here, in order to devote my life to fight to help keep our way of life, to keep the Northwest the special place it is. It has now become a life's work that has taken me many places, first all across the Northwest, and .finally into "exile" as I now believe - in the nation's capital - that other Washington, where for better or worse, so many of the great issues of our time are finally resolved.¹⁵

In this example, the love of the area and its beauty unites the speaker and listeners. The fact that the speaker "adopted" the area lends special credence to his passion for it.

Ask Rhetorical Questions. Most of the time you ask a question in order to get information. However a rhetorical question has a different purpose, especially when asked in the introduction of a speech. The speaker does not expect a spoken answer from the audience to a question such as, "Have you ever thought about what your life would be like if you were a different color?" Such a question focuses the audience on a vital issue. Its purposes are to arouse curiosity and to get listeners thinking. When speakers do solicit direct answers to such questions, they plan carefully so that the answers they receive set up the remainder of their speech. Their intention is to involve listeners with their message. James H. Carr, a vice president with a federal government mortgage funding group, opened a speech on the problems in American cities with the following rhetorical questions:

How many of you saw the chase of O.J. Simpson. . . down an LA. freeway. . . on June 17? Did you watch any of the pretrial hearings that took place over the three weeks following that event? Who can tell me how many other people were murdered in America on June 12, the same night as Nicole Brown Simpson? Based on average national crime statistics, 63 other people lost their lives due to violent crime on the night of June 12. And during the next three weeks, while the major networks broadcast O.J. Simpson's pretrial hearings, more than 1,200 people were murdered. This tragedy did not attract the attention of the nation. But it should have.¹⁶

Rhetorical questions often tie in to recent dramatic events, as this example shows. However, they can be just as effective when they relate to everyday experiences. Annette Barrington opened her classroom speech on safety belts by asking the audience:

How many of you buckled up your seat belts on your way to school this morning? How many of you didn't? How many of you almost never use your seat belts on short trips a roll and town? How many of you don't buckle up because it's uncomfortable? Or because it will "mess up" your clothes? Or because you simply just don't think about it?

Most people now-do use their seatbelts on a regular basis. But even though Tennessee has a law requiring us to buckle up, too many of us just ignore it. We risk injury and death on a daily basis. Last week I called Nashville and talked to Ben Dailey at the State Department of Safety.- What he told me really blew my mind. Of the 997 people killed in automobile accidents in our state in 1994, 772 were not using a seat belt at the time of the crash! How do you like those odds? You have a much greater chance of being killed in an auto accident if you don't buckle up.

These rhetorical questions provided a provocative opening. Several audience members lowered their eyes or looked away. They had been caught and_ they knew it. Needless to say, Annette had captured her audience's attention.

Develop Suspense. We can trace the human fascination with suspense and mystery far back into antiquity. You can attract and hold your listeners' attention by arousing their curiosity, then -making them wait before you satisfy it. The following introduction creates curiosity and anticipation:

Getting knocked down is no disgrace. -Champions are made by getting up just one more time- than the opponent! The results are a matter of record about a man who suffered many defeats: Lost his job in 1832, defeated for legislature in 1832, failed in business in 1833, defeated for legislature in 1834, sweetheart died in 1835, bad nervous breakdown in 1836, defeated for nomination for Congress in 1843, elected to Congress in 1846, lost nomination in 1848, rejected for land officer in 1849, defeated-for Senate in 1854, defeated for nomination for Vice President in 1856, defeated for Senate in 1858. In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. Lincoln proved that a big shot is just a little shot who keeps shooting. The greatest failures in the world are those who fail by not doing anything.¹⁸

The list of failures aroused the audience's curiosity. Who was this loser? Many were surprised when they discovered it was Abraham Lincoln. This effective introduction set the stage for the speaker's message that perseverance is "the key to success."

Tell a Story. We humans began our love affair with stories around the campfires -of ancient times. It is through stories- that we remember the past and pass on our heritage to future generations. Stories also entertain and educate us - they depict abstract problems in human terms. In introductions, stories help capture audience attention and involve listeners in creating the meaning of the message. In a speech on domestic violence Donna E. Shalala, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, began with the following narrative:

The day after Christmas last year, Marsha Brewer-Stewart was found with a knife in her chest. Police say she was murdered by her husband, Gregory. Just seven months earlier, Marsha had stood by her husband's side in a suburban Chicago courtroom to try to clear him of attempting to kill her. She had dismissed the episode as a drunken fit of rage. Po-

lice and prosecutors begged her not to post his bond, nor to move back with him, but like many women before her, she forgave him.

Then, on December 26, Marsha called the police, desperate for help. The police called back, and the man who answered said nothing was wrong. By the time a squad car arrived to check on her, Marsha was dead. Hours later, her husband was charged with murder. It's a common story. Studies show us just how common. In this country, domestic violence is just about as common as giving birth - about four million instances of each. Think about that - hopelessness and hope, equally weighted in our society - and all too often, intermingled in the same woman's life.¹⁹

Narratives are also good at establishing a mood for your message. Sandra Baltz, a premed major, opened a speech on the dilemma of setting priorities for organ transplants with the following narrative:

On a cold and stormy night in 1841 the ship William Brown struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic. Passengers and crew members frantically scrambled into the lifeboats. To make a bad disaster even worse, one of the lifeboats began to sink because it was overcrowded. Fourteen men were thrown overboard that horrible night. After the survivors were rescued, a crew member was tried for the murders of those thrown overboard.

Fortunately, situations like this have been few in history but today we face a similar problem in the medical establishment: deciding who will live as we allocate scarce medical resources for transplants. Someday, your fate - or the fate of someone you love - could depend on how we resolve this dilemma.

In the preceding examples, the stories set a somber mood for the serious messages that follow. Stories can also be used to establish a lighter mood through the use of humor.

Use Humor. Humor can enliven an introduction and, when used appropriately, can put your audience in a receptive mood for your message. But humor may also be the most frequently misused technique of introducing

speeches. Thinking that amusing listeners will assure success, beginning speakers often search through joke books to find something to make people laugh. Unless carefully adapted, such material often sounds canned, inappropriate, or only remotely relevant to the topic or occasion. If you wish to use humor in your introduction, be certain the material is fresh and pertinent.

Humor can sometimes help to thaw an audience, especially when speakers make themselves the object of the humor. Takakazu Kuriyama, Japanese ambassador to the United States, opened a speech at George Washington University with the following anecdote:

Thank you. I'm delighted to be part of your Ambassador lecture Series. I think it's very brave of you to invite ambassadors to speak. We are not especially known for our oratory or clarity. Someone once noted that a diplomat is a person who thinks twice before

*saying nothing. Someone else said that if a diplomat says yes, he means perhaps; if he says perhaps he means no and if he says no, he's no diplomat.*²⁰

Be especially careful when using humor to open a speech. It can be grossly inappropriate for some topics and occasions. Also, don't let a humorous introduction "upstage" the rest of your speech. We once heard a student open a speech with a rather risqué quotation from Mae West, "that a gun in your pocket, or are you happy to see me?" It drew an invite. gasp followed by some hearty laughter. Unfortunately, as the speech continued, one student would chuckle over the remembered joke, then the audience would start laughing all over again even when nothing funny have been said. After the speaker finished, we questioned the audience about their "inappropriate" responses. Their reply? "We kept remembering third Mae West line. We just couldn't help it." And to this day, neither of your authors can remember the topic of the speech, just the opening humor.

Begin with a Quotation. With the possible exception of quoting West, starting your speech with a striking quotation or paraphrase from well-known person or respected authority can both arouse interest and give you borrowed ethos. The person you cite should be someone the audience knows, respects, or can identify with.

The most effective opening quotations are brief and to the point. One of our students used the following quotation, attributed to the moves William Faulkner, to introduce her classroom speech on job satisfaction:

You can't eat for eight hours a day, nor drink for eight hours a day, nor make love for eight hours a day all you can do for eight hours is work. Which is the reason why man makes himself and everybody else so miserable and unhappy.

She used this quotation to highlight the theme of her message, that we can be *the* great source of happiness or unhappiness in our lives, and education should empower us to select our work rather than having it imposed upon us by accident or necessity.

Most books of quotations (see Chapter 5) are indexed by key words and subjects as well as by authors. Collections of quotations are also available on CD-ROMS. They are an excellent source of statements you might use to introduce your topic.

Startle the Audience.. Anything truly unusual draws attention to itself and arouses curiosity. Consider the headlines from the sensationalist tabloids: "BIGFOOT SPOTTED IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS!" "WOMAN PREDICTS EARTHQUAKES WITH HER TOES!" Evita Moreno startled her audience into attention with the opening of her informative speech. Note how she combines startling the audience with the use of rhetorical questions:

If the statistics hold true, more than half of us in this room have risked our lives in the past year. Indeed, millions of college students have willingly exposed themselves to a life-threatening disease in the past year. That disease is cancer. Do you think these numbers exaggerate? Do you believe you're not at risk? let's see.

How many of you smoke or use some form of tobacco? Raise your hands. Okay, that's six. Now, how many of you eat a lot of fatty fast food - hamburgers, French fries, pizza. Come on, raise your hands. Well, that's fourteen. Now, in the past year, how many of you took a sunbath - or went to a tanning parlor - or worked outside without using a sunscreen oil or lotion? That's seventeen! I guess my numbers were a little bit off, but I actually understated the probability. Today I want to tell you how you can lower your risk and avoid becoming a statistic in someone else's speech.

Capturing attention

Show listeners how the topic involves them. Call on personal experience with the topic.

Ask rhetorical questions to make the audience think. Create suspense and anticipation. Open with a story that relates to your topic. Engage your listeners with humor. Begin with a quotation from a well known person. Startle the audience with unusual information.

USE YOUR JUDGMENT

Do one of the following:

- a. Use a fact or statistic to create an ***analogy*** that would help a listening audience understand an idea.
- b. Identify a cartoon, joke, or anecdote that could be applied to a business situation.

In either case, explain the idea or situation that applies.