

20 Brilliant Speech Opening Lines

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Build Skills · Be CEO Confident

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Why your opening line is so important?

Your first words set the scene for your audience. In a busy world, you're competing against many distractions, tasks and priorities. People are constantly assessing if what they're doing right now is deserving of their attention. Your opening line sets the tone for your whole speech and determines whether they listen to your message or not. This book will show you brilliant ways of engaging the audience so you can share your message and make the impact you want in the world.



Before you start

A great opening line is a brilliant first step but is only the first step, you've got to deliver an impactful speech that engages the audience right the way through.

A great opening should pique the audiences interest. Then, you must ensure you deliver on the expectation you have set out at the start.

Lots of things will impact the talk that you deliver from what's happening personally to what's happening in the world. You can't control everything only your part within it.

Choose an opening that suits you, not every opening line will be a good fit for everything. By all means experiment but be authentic too.

20 Brilliant Speech Opening Lines

Are you ready for 20 brilliant opening lines to get your audience engaged in what you have to say? Without a great start, you may never get the chance to share your message with those who need it most. That would be tragic.

These opening lines are ones I've used myself, seen used effectively and helped my clients include in their talks.

Here's to your speaking success!

1. Ask a Question

Spark the interest of your audience from the start. Get them engaged and involved right from the beginning. Whether you ask a rhetorical question or a literal one, the audience will be compelled to answer the question. This type of opening works brilliantly for novices and experts alike.

Tip: Choose a question that you think will be interest to your audience and get off to a start with confidence.

Examples of this Opening

What makes a great leader?

Who here wishes they had more hours in day?

What stops you taking your organisation to the next level?

What would it be like to be financially free?

Are you tired of being overlooked?

Why is this project a good use of funds?

2. Set out with Success

Setting out the success you've already shared with your audience is a powerful motivator and way to start. It's a wonderful thank you and if you are asking the audience to continue previous collaboration, pitching for further work or pitching a proposal, you can do it from a position of appreciation and influence. Its a brilliant start for a 'thank you' speech.

Tip: Call out specific individuals and departments to really press home the appreciation. It makes everyone sit up and listen so they can acknowledge the praise if their turn for a mention comes around!

Examples of this Opening

For the 5th year in a row, we are award winners Phenomenal. That's what you are. Together we have delivered a project that has enriched the lives of so many. Every person here /in the organisation played their part. You make a difference. From Sarah in Accounts to Dave in Customer Service this year we've made a difference to 851 of our most vulnerable citizens.

3. Start with a story

Opening with a story is a fun way to bring the audience in. We're wired as humans to enjoy stories and it naturally draws in the audience. They want to know what happens next so they're hooked in a good way! It can take a little practice to feel comfortable but it's a wonderful way to take your audience on a journey with you.

Tip: Make it a cliff hanger for bonus engagement

Examples of this kind of Opening

Sarah was at a crossroads, unsure where to go next!

As I approached the ball to take the penalty shot, I felt my head spin and my body shake. Then I remember nothing.

I was so broken, I couldn't even make a cup of tea with certainty.

Mary joined the family business full of ambition to make it a success and with a sound plan to ensure it happened.

4. Shock with a Statistic

Start as you mean to go on and a shocking statistic is a great start. You've got interest from the get go. It's always beneficial to use numbers to illustrate a point but it will be even more appealing to the people who love numbers.

Tip: Make sure you've the evidence to back it up and check it's up to date too.

Examples of this kind of Opening

70-90% of Mergers and Acquisitions fail (HBR, 2020)

20% of businesses fail within their first year, and 60% in their first three. ICTSCD, U.K

95% of Millennials are saving for retirement (National Institute on Retirement Security, USA)

5. Pose a problem

Spark the interest of your audience from the start. Pose or highlight a problem. Get them engaged and involved right from the beginning on a common issue or challenge. It can also be a problem people are not aware of that you want to raise awareness on.

Tip: once introduced move to the solutions

Examples of this kind of Opening

Knife crime has no solution. Other than the obvious one.

Inflation is putting pressure on all of us but is too much Government support adding to the problem?

Getting suitable staff is a real challenge right now.

Solving productivity issues has been challenging

6. Big statement

Capture your audiences attention right from your first utterance with a big statement. It can be surprising or matter of fact but it must be big and you must get behind it 100%. Positive statements will be more impactful and demonstrate that you are solution focused.

Tip: Be sure to align your energy when using a big statement by showing emotion, using supportive body language and speaking with conviction.

Examples of this kind of Opening

Women's rights are human rights.

It ends here. Today.

The future is now.

Alone, Lost, Exposed!

7. Quality Quotes

Imbue your topic with gravitas by calling on a well know person or well known quote. Meaningful quotes align you with the original person and elevate your position. You can follow it with logic or humour to enhance it further.

Tip: Check the source of the quote using a reliable source before using it

Examples of this kind of Opening

“One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”
N Armstrong

“My best successes came on the heels of failures.” *B Corcoran*

“Why do they call it rush hour when nothing moves?”
(Robin Williams)

8. Grand Gesture

A theatrical gesture, song or movement makes a huge impact. People will wonder what's going to happen next and love the fun of it too. Think grand entrance when you do this one.

Tip: Choose carefully as it can position you in comedic fashion which will impact on your core message.

Examples of this kind of Opening

I want to break free (sang)...only joking it's been a pleasure working with you and I'll miss you loads

My dancing is infamous but you can see why I'm not employed in that field. (after dancing entrance)

As a kid, I dreamed of being on stage (big bow start) but I thought it would be for acting

I have been saying I wanted to go on a trip but that wasn't what I meant after (tripping)

9. Prop

Opening your talk with a feature prop invites the audience to wonder what you and what you're going to say even before you speak. The purpose of the prop is to get engagement and make you and your message memorable.

Tip: Props generally benefit from being big and bold for impact. Use a prop that is linked to the story for added symbolism.

Examples of this Opening

Wear a giant hat!

Hold an oversize object

Wear sun glasses

Turn off the lights

This is granny's walking stick. She doesn't use it anymore as she was killed by a bull on her family farm.

10. Fun Fact

It's always useful to open with humour. Jokes don't work for everyone and can come across as fake or inauthentic. Be aware that a sense of humour varies by individual – the bald man in the front row will have limited appreciation for jokes about bald men. However, if you want add in some humour right from the start adding in a fun fact is a great way to do it.

Tip: Check the source to make sure its accurate or be clear that it's something that previously was believed.

Examples of this Opening

The Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu, who lived in the 1700s, reportedly invented the sandwich so he wouldn't have to leave his gambling table to eat.

The red and white Coca-Cola logo is recognized by 94% of the world's population.

The most productive day of the workweek is Tuesday or Monday, surveys disagree about which one is best.

11. What if?

What if is a wonderful way to share a vision and invite your audience to come on a journey with you. It's about possibilities and a great way to challenging the status quo.

Tip: Choose something that is taken for granted or a certainty to really grab the audiences' attention.

Examples of this Opening

What if you didn't work 5 days a week?

What if you...

What if there was another way

What if you never tried

What if water was bad for you?

12. Imagine

Open by tapping into our imagination allows creativity. In your imagination, anything is possible and that is what you are tapping into here with this opening. You have carte blanche to take your audience any place in this world or beyond. The possibilities are endless.

Tip: Use this when you're inviting your audience to be creative and innovative in their thinking or get out of a fixed way of thinking.

Examples of this Opening

Imagine no loneliness in the world

Imagine a work place with no boss

Imagine you could go back/forward in time

Imagine no lives were lost in farm/swimming/building site accidents this year

13. Be Negative

Open by agreeing with a negative or with a contrary viewpoint. It will pique the audience's interest and then you can Then, switch it around once you've got the audience's attention.

Tip: Remember it's very difficult to inspire from a negative place, you need to uplift in order to influence.

Examples of this Opening

Middle managers are the best

Breakfast is not the most important meal of the day.

Money IS everything

Recycling is a waste of time.

14. Joint Axe to grind

Connecting over common foes isn't talked about very much but the concept of joining forces against a competitor is not a new phenomenon. Connecting with a group who have an 'axe to grind' with a common adversary is so powerful. Consider how you can rally the troops to your joint cause.

Tip: Be mindful that this may be temporary and not to go overboard but to focus on the common ground you both have.

Examples of this Opening

You are have integrity and right on your side. Like us, you are well respected. Together, we can...

They think, It's divide and conquer time. I say it's time for us to unite in our common goal.

15. Haters gonna hate

If you've got a challenging audience, you're up against it from the start. You may have audience members who are vocal about their opposition to you or your viewpoint. You can choose to face it head on as you offer a forum for mutual respect.

Tip: If you choose call out the differences, do so from a place of genuine respect. Otherwise you'll really damage your personal credibility

Examples of this Opening

Today, you may not agree with what I share. You're absolutely entitled to your viewpoint. I'm not here to persuade you, I respect you too much for that. I do invite you listen to the experiences I'm sharing because they represent another perspective.

I love that we live in a world we can disagree and still work together on our commonalities.

16. Tongue in cheek

Everyone enjoys a bit of humour so creating an opening that's fun is always a winner. If jokes aren't your thing, a tongue in cheek comment is a great alternative to get them grinning from the start.

Tip: You can select something before but you may be inspired by events immediately prior for a tongue in cheek comment.

Examples of this Opening

The weather warning was unexpected

Then we saw the light

I said I wanted to make an entrance but that was a bit much even for me.

Aren't we all supposed to be flying around in our cars by now?

How embarrassing that it was my car causing the obstruction in the car park!

17. Paint a picture

Using descriptive language is a powerful way to paint a picture with words using all your senses. Describe how it looks, sounds, smells, tastes or feels like to be there. Use detail to flesh it out. Mention a mother, father, teacher, doctor, people we can all relate to. These common experiences deepen the picture. Useful to use this opening for poignant stories or messages.

Tip: If you want to offer a story twist early on this a great way to introduce contrast or humour after this kind of opening.

Examples of this Opening

It felt like heaven. The warm glow of the sun in late afternoon. A welcome breeze on your skin. The smell of the earth cooling down after a warm day.

Soaking wet, cold and tired. I shivered til morning...

The world felt silent and far away.

Sitting in the lumpy chair in the doctor's waiting room I thought how great it would be if everyone ahead of me only had a 5 minute slot.

18. Use Big and Small

It is beneficial to appeal to different types of audience members. Some may enjoy 'headline' figures, others may like the 'fine detail' and appealing to both within your speech is best. Incorporating this concept into your opening line enables you to share your key message from the outset and get right into your speech topic.

Tip: Use this opening to demonstrate your intention to deliver concrete value without any 'fluff' and to get to the heart of any objections (said or unsaid) that need to be addressed.

Examples of this Opening

Earn a million pounds in 7 easy steps is why you're here.

Scaling your business in 90 days is simple but not easy.

Selling your 1 million+ start-up and staying working in the business seems like having your cake and eating it.

19. Joke around

Nothing beats having your audience in stitches at the start but that can be a challenge. A well chosen and delivered joke can deliver that for you. It is a wonderful way to relax the audience and allow them to settle in to hear what you have to say.

Consider if it's appropriate for the context? Are you pitching for a new project or part of a presentation where you need to be seen as the safe pair of hands, for example.

Tip: Use with caution and only use this style of opening if it aligns with your personality. If you don't normally tell jokes, this can fall flat.

Examples of this Opening

A CEO walks into a bar

Worrying works, most of the things never happen!

Why did the biscuit go to the doctor? *Because he was feeling crumby!*

Hi lovers. Oh sorry wrong speech

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20. Impossible Choice

Offer the audience an impossible choice to demonstrate a stark situation or to trick the audience into an undesirable position.. It'll grab their attention and get them engaged right from the start. Make this fun and not too difficult or you run the risk of embarrassing your audience.

Tip: Including multiple assumptions that may be wrong can be very provocative so keep it as playful as possible.

Examples of this Opening

Fat cats and slim pickings – which are you?

Do you want your Mum to go into a home or your kids to go to Uni?

How many times do you hit your partner?

Let's play a game. Eat or Heat? A reality for many?

About the author

Fiona Kearns is a Business Psychologist, author and professional speaker who specialises in helping individuals and organisations grow through leadership development.



Fiona Kearns guides driven and caring Directors, Professionals, Senior Leaders globally how to capably step into C-Suite roles by unlocking the hang-ups that stop you projecting Confident & Powerful Leadership Presence. She is experienced in the IT/Telecom and non-profit worlds and has expertise in the competencies required for private sector and public service roles

Fiona Kearns helps leaders feel quietly confident, deserving of success and able to enjoy being treated with respect while allowing huge success into their life. Fiona directs leaders to career success.

How can I help you?

I work with numerous individuals and organisations globally helping them improve their leaderships skills so they can performance better at work and create a worthwhile sustainable life. I offer clarity coaching, C-suite mentoring and leadership training. I provide expertise on competency based interviews which leads to success in private sector and public service competitions.

Get in contact with me today to find out how I can help
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