

# Tips from the Experts on How to Open

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The hardest part of any presentation is the opening. Obviously, gaining people's attention is critical. If you don't captivate them as you begin, it's not likely you will get them to listen as you move forward. Plus, seeing people looking at their phones, instead of being fully engaged, is highly discombobulating. Here are four surefire suggestions on winning from the start.

**Speak up.** Louder voices are taken more seriously. When you speak loudly, people assume that what you have to say is important and that you are an authority. Think about it. When we want our toddler in danger of falling or hurting himself to listen, we raise our volume and say, "No, No." Even with a louder voice, our tone can sound friendly and not abrasive.

**Slow it down.** A mistake that many people make is to rush through an opening. When a person does that, articulation often becomes a problem. Non-words or filler words, like "um" and "ah" materialize. Speaking quickly also sends a message that you just want to be done or that you are hoping no one will really understand. Notice that newscasters speak slowly. They want people to understand and you should also.

**Net it out.** Give an overview of your presentation or proposal in the fewest words possible. Short, powerful sentences pack a punch. For example, opening with a statement such as, "We are bleeding customers," is definitely going to grab attention instantly. Any overview or opening should be said in two minutes or less. It should briefly provide some context or background by defining the issue or problem. It should briefly state your recommendation or view. Because people always assess what's in it for them, your opening should also reveal the benefits to people for listening carefully. Maybe your topic will solve a problem or increase sales. When people feel your topic is important to them or their business priorities, they pay attention. Finally, your opening should state what you want people to consider or do with the information you are about to share. Maybe they should begin to follow the new process or order the product. When you directly state the action you need from them, listeners can no longer be passive.

**Look them in the eye.** When we mean business, we look people in the eye. When we want our employee to understand that a machine is very dangerous and one must be very careful, we look that person in the eye when we talk. Obviously, if you have something important to say, you need to look at people one at a time for a full sentence or thought. There is a big difference between looking at someone intently and scanning the room. People will take you seriously when they know you are speaking just to them.

As a presenter, undoubtedly you want to change how your audience thinks and feels. In order to change your listener's heart and mind, you need to adjust your pacing, tone, and content for maximum impact. The four above mentioned suggestions will help others appreciate what you have to say.

**Question:** *How do you usually open? We're interested in your opinions. [Click here](#) – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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