How You can Create BRILLIANT OPENINGS And Capture the Full Attention of Your Audience in 30 seconds...
About Akash Karia

Akash Karia is an award-winning speaker, trainer and presentation skills coach. He has conducted presentation skills courses for employees and members of organizations such as HSBC, Polytechnic University, Life Underwriters Association of Hong Kong and many, many more...

Akash is also champion speaker and has won over 40 public speaking championships including the prestigious titles of: JCI 2012 Hong Kong Champion of Public Speaking, Toastmasters International Division K Impromptu Speaking Champion and has been ranked as one of the Top 10 Speakers in Asia Pacific.

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The Primacy Effect

The opening of your speech or presentation is one you should spend time writing and re-writing because it’s one of the two most important parts of your presentation (the other part being the Closing of your presentation/speech).

Primacy Effect: “Given a list of items to remember, we will tend to remember the first few things more than those things in the middle.” – ChangingMinds.org

Because of our tendency to remember the things at the beginning of a list/speech/presentation, the Opening of your speech is the most important part of the presentation.

The opening of your speech is also important for several reasons:

- It gives you a chance to build rapport with the audience members
- Your first impression will determine how receptive/hostile your audience is towards your speech
- It sets the mood for the rest of the speech
- If you don’t grab your audience’s attention within the first 30 seconds, they’ll mentally check-out of your presentation
What *The Dark Night*, *The Goodfellas* and *Twilight* can Teach You About Presentations

Think of the last great film that you watched. Many films begin right slap-bang in the middle of a fight scene, a car chase, a bomb explosion, a bank robbery. The aim is to get you involved, interested and engaged right away. The blockbuster movie, *The Dark Night*, begins in the middle of the bank heist.

Other movies aren’t as dramatic, and instead open with an unexpected or shocking statement that engages you straight away. Consider the opening line of *The Goodfellas*: “As far back as I can remember I always wanted to be a gangster”.

Successful script writers, movie producers and speechwriters know that the key to success is to throw the audience right into the middle of the story. Even fiction writers know that the first few lines of the book are among the most important ones – the audience will mentally tune in or tune out depending on how well you’ve managed to engage their audience right from the very beginning.

Consider the opening line from the phenomenal bestselling book, *Twilight*: “I’d never given much thought to how I would die – though I’d never had reason enough in the last few months – but even if I had, I would not have imagined it like this”. The opening line shocks and leaves you wondering, “Wow, what’s happening? Why is she dying? How is she dying?”
The purpose of the opening few lines of any speech, movie or book is to engage the audience straight away...to grab their attention from the outset.

How many speeches or presentations have you watched where the speaker managed to grab your interest from the first few lines that he spoke?

How many speakers have you heard whose openings made you think, “Wow, this is going to be really good!”

Now, consider, how good are you at creating compelling openings which reel your audience into your speech? If you feel that there’s room for improvement, then this chapter will be very valuable for you. You will pick up valuable tools that you can use to arouse your audiences’ interest and grab their attention right from the beginning.

But first, let’s discover the three opening mistakes that you should avoid.
3 Opening Mistakes You Should Avoid

Mistake #1: Boring “Me-Focused” Opening

Unfortunately, too many speakers begin with boring “me-focused” openings that put their audiences to sleep.

Have you ever heard a speaker begin their presentation with an opening that sounds similar to this?

“Good morning, thank you very much for having me. My name is ABC and I am from Company XYZ. My company has been in existence for 150 years. We focus on providing out-of-the-box, customer-centered strategies that leverage our client’s strengths and empower them to achieve organic growth in this new economy.”

How excited do you think audiences will be in learning the history, mission and values of your organization? Not much.

The key to giving great presentations is to make them not about the speaker, but about the audience! Presentations are about the audience...not the speaker.

Therefore, your opening should be You-focused. It should let audience members know exactly what problems you can solve for them and what benefits you can give them! You’ll learn more about how to do this in the section about “Creating Your Big Promise”.
Mistake #2: **Opening with “Insincere” Gratitude**

A fellow public speaking coach started his seminar in this manner. When he walked into the room, he began with:

“Hi, thank you very much for having me today. I’m very pleased to be here, and I’d like to thank Mr. X for having invited me to conduct this workshop.”

At this point, the coach looked us in the eye and said:

“Okay, so how many of you expected me to say exactly what I just said...almost word for word?”

People began to laugh and everyone in the room raised their hands.

The point is simple: Almost everyone begins their speeches and presentations with a ‘thank you’, almost using the same exact words.

If you’re one of these presenters, then you’re losing out on a great opportunity to differentiate yourself from everyone else. You’re losing out on an opportunity to make a great first impression!

Even worse, many of your audience members might unconsciously label you as boring and uncreative, like every other speaker that they’ve seen, and they’ll mentally tune out of your presentation. Trying to bring these people back will be a challenge, and you’ll be left with an uncomfortable room full of strangers who aren’t really listening to what you’re saying.

As you’re about to discover, there are several techniques that you can use to capture your audiences’
attention and imagination straight away. However, before you come to those, let’s first address a common objection that most people raise during my public speaking workshops:

“Why Shouldn’t I Thank People at the Beginning? It’s the polite thing to do!”

Most speakers, despite knowing the dangers of using a standard “thank you for having me here” opening, continue using it because they are under the false assumption that thanking people must be done at the beginning of their presentation.

There is nothing wrong with thanking your hosts and your audience members for having you, but it should not be done at the beginning. In fact, not only do you lose your audience with a canned ‘thank-you’ opening, your gratitude may also be perceived as insincere. The fact is, because most speakers say ‘thank you’ during their opening few lines, your “thank you” will sound no different…it will be considered as an opening formality rather than a sincere expression of gratitude.

When is the Best Time to Thank Your Audience and Hosts?

The best time to show your gratitude – both to your hosts and your audience – would be sometime after your first minute on stage, after you’ve established rapport with the audience by opening with one of the Opening Gambits which you will soon discover.

After your Opening Gambit, you will have distinguished yourself from most speakers and created enough interest in your topic for people to want to listen to you. After you’ve done this, you can momentarily divert from your topic and tell the audience how glad you are to be there.
For example, a fellow speaker who was given the opportunity to present a training seminar on leadership thanked his during the middle of his speech, when he said: “And by the way, talking about leadership, we can all agree that Jim (the CEO) has done a fantastic job of leading this company!” This unexpected comment during the middle of the speech sounded more sincere and honest than a canned “thank-you” beginning.

Another comedian that I witnessed thanked his audience a couple of minutes into his routine (after he had all of us laughing at his opening story) and said, “By the way, you guys are a great audience and it’s really my privilege to be here today! See, last week I had this other audience who...” and then he dived right into another joke.

The key point here is that you should avoid canned ‘thank-you’ openings because you end up losing an important opportunity to distinguish yourself from most other speakers, you will lose your audience (after all, why should they listen if they already know what you’re going to say?), and your gratitude may be perceived as insincere. Instead, thank your audience after you’ve established a connection with them using one of the Opening Gambits you’ll pick up later in the chapter.

Mistake #3: Opening with a Joke

“Should I open my presentation or speech with a joke?”

Ah, interesting question! Humour is a great way to form a bond with the audience. A humorous speaker immediately gets the goodwill of the audience and is perceived as a more likeable speaker than someone with little or no humour.

However, my personal suggestion would be to avoid opening with a joke, for two reasons:
• **Jokes from a Joke-book don’t impress anyone:** If you use a joke that you’ve read in a joke-book, then there’s the danger that the audience might have heard it before. Immediately, you’ll be labelled as unoriginal and the audience will doubt the authenticity of the rest of your presentation.

• **Most people can’t tell jokes as well as they think they can.** A joke requires expert timing and great use of facial expressions, both of which most speakers lack. This results in a “bombed joke” and creates an uncomfortable silence in the room. If you’re the victim of an opening joke that falls flat on its face, this may negatively affect your confidence throughout the rest of the speech.

  However, if you insist on opening with a joke, then make sure you first try it out on different audiences during your practice sessions to see if you can elicit some laughter. Walking in with an untested joke during your final performance is a recipe for disaster!

• **Jokes might detract from your main message.** I’ve seen some presenters open with a joke that was completely unrelated to the main point the presenter was trying to make. In an attempt to be funny, most presenters go out of their way to include jokes which take attention away from their main message. After all, it is very difficult to find a joke which is directly related to the point you’re trying to prove. Bottom line: Don’t open with a joke that has nothing to do with your presentation!
5 Brilliant Ways to Start Your Next Presentation

A gambit is an opening remark that is designed to secure an advantage for the speaker. When speaking in public, there are four gambits that you can use to set yourself head and shoulders above the rest of the speakers:

Opening Gambit #1: Start with a Story

The best speakers are master storytellers. They tell touching tales, using compelling stories as a means to solidify their message. A well told story will always be remembered.

A story is a great opening gambit, but it also works just as well as a closer. In fact, according to Bill Gove, the first President of the National Speakers Association, the essence of public speaking is to “tell a story, [and] make a point”. Many of the winning speeches at the Toastmasters International World Championship of Public Speaking follow this format: telling touching stories that wrap the audiences in a sea of emotions, and then concluding with a single, key take-away message.

The reason a story is a superb opening gambit is because:

- **Stories captivate people**: Everyone loves a good story, so starting with a story will capture your audience attention. The moment you begin with a story, your audience will have no choice
but to tune in

- **Stories create connections between the listeners and the speaker**: A personal story will arouse emotions in the listeners. Studies have shown that our brains cannot tell the difference between “real” events and imagination. Therefore, when you tell a story, your audience will imagine it in their head and ‘feel’ the same emotions that you’re describing. Your story will not be forgotten because your audience will “experience” it rather than just hear it.

- **Stories are memorable**: We are hard-wired to learn through stories. Scientific research has shown that we make sense of the world through stories. People even view their lives as a story, with a beginning, middle and an end, and with each new experience being regarded as a “new chapter” in their lives. Because of natural hard-wiring, we may forget statistics and fancy charts, but we will always remember the essential elements of a good story.

Since stories are such an important tool in effective communication, you will discover the essentials of great storytelling in later chapters. These secrets will allow you to become a master storyteller and speaker, entertaining your friends as well as your audiences.

**Opening Gambit #2: Use Questions to Create Knowledge Gaps**

Starting with a question creates a knowledge gap: *a gap between what the listeners knows and what they don’t know*. This gap creates curiosity because people are hardwired with a desire to fill knowledge gaps.

For example, starting with a question such as, “What’s the number one reason that most people fail to advance in their careers, working harder and longer, yet never achieving their dreams?”
This question immediately establishes your theme for the speech. Furthermore, it causes your listeners to start thinking about the question and start formulating their answers. You’ve got them hooked!

However, make sure that you *pause after your question* so that the audience has enough time to reflect on your question. If you don’t pause, you’ll be speaking over their thoughts and they won’t really pay attention.

Finally, opening with a question allows you to create a connection with the audience. For example, in his winning speech at the Toastmasters International World Championship of Public Speaking, Darren LaCroix opened with the following question:

> “Can you remember a moment when a brilliant idea flashed into your head?” – Darren LaCroix, 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking

If you were in this audience, you would naturally think to yourself, “Yes, I can…I know what you’re talking about!”

When the audience can relate to a question that you ask, you successfully create a connection.

In your next presentation, open with a question that the audience can relate to or with a question that creates a knowledge gap and creates curiosity in your listeners. Once you do this, your listeners will be hooked onto your every word!
The Perfect Opening: Question + Story

You can deliver the perfect opening by first starting with a question that builds curiosity, and then filling that knowledge gap by telling a story that illustrates the main point of your speech.

For example, let us say that you opened with the following question:

"What’s the number one reason that most people fail to advance in their careers, working harder and longer, yet never achieving their dreams?"

At this point, you could immediately reveal your answer and tell the audience, “The number one reason most people fail is because they do not set goals for themselves”.

However, as a reader of this book, you can let the listeners discover the answer rather than simply handing it to them. You can prolong their curiosity by diving into a story that illustrates your point. For example, after asking your opening question, you could go on to tell the story of your friend Jerry, who worked long hours each night at the office but never achieved any success. You can then reveal how Jerry discovered the power of goal-setting and went on to become Vice-President of his company.

In this way, instead of simply handing your answer to your audience, you’ve let them discover it for themselves through Jerry’s story. You’ve successfully captured your audiences’ interest, and you’ve made an impact because they’ll remember Jerry’s story.

So, create a knowledge-gap using a question and then fill the gap using a compelling story.
Opening Gambit #3: Quotable Quotes

Would you like to add credibility to your speech?

Would you build the credibility of your message by borrowing credibility from a third-party source?

Then open with a quote.

A short quote which illustrates your main point will create support for your speech. For example, if you are giving a speech about the need to keep things simple, then you could borrow Einstein’s credibility by starting like this:

Einstein said, "Imagination is more important...than knowledge!"

However, here are a few pointers to keep in mind when choosing your quotes:

- **Shorter is Sweeter**: The shorter your quote, the greater the impact. A long quote will end up boring your audience.

- **Make Sure It’s Relevant**: Make sure the quote is relevant to your main point, and it’s relevant for the atmosphere. A playful quotation by Homer Simpson may not be during a tear-filled funeral.

- **Check the Source!**: Check the source’s credibility. Don’t quote Hitler if you’re delivering a speech about the importance of ethics!
• **Quote a well-known authority:** Quoting your high school friend may please your friend, but it’s not going to earn you extra points from the audience. Quote someone whom everyone in the audience is familiar with.

**Opening Gambit #4: Interesting/ Startling Statement**


You can immediately differentiate yourself and your topic from most other speakers by shocking your listeners with a startling statement. For example, if you’re talking about the importance of avoiding fast food, you could start with the following statement:

“If you eat a McDonald’s quarter pounder with cheese, you’ll instantly gain almost half a pound of weight!”

For a statement to be shocking, it has to be something that is not common knowledge. When you provide a fact which most people are unaware of, you’ve instantly added value to their lives and made a positive impression on them.

You don’t necessarily have to use shocking statements to get people to listen. An intriguing statement can do an equally good job. For example:

“In 1989, when graduating from college, my Professor told me something which changed my life…and it could change yours too”

The above statement intrigues the listeners into wanting to know more. It causes them to wonder, “What did your Professor say? How did it change your life? And how can it change my life?”
Intriguing statements create a mystery. They create knowledge gaps that the audience feels compelled to fill.

If you can find an interesting or startling statement which backs up your speech’s core message, be sure to open with it and you’ll have your listeners wrapped up in your presentation.

**Bonus Speaking Tip: Add Humor with a Witty Quotation**

If you would like to add humor to your speech, then you can use a witty quotation (provided that it doesn’t detract from your message). By quoting the witty one-liner, you earn a laugh (which lightens the atmosphere) and the audience will appreciate you giving credit where it’s due.

Finally, even though you’re quoting someone else’s one liner, your audience will come to see you as humorous simply because you were the one who used the quotation!

**Caution:** If you’re unsure about your ability to pull off a joke or a witty quotation (and if you haven’t tested it out before) “err” on the side of caution and avoid it. Use one of the four proven Opening Gambits (or a combination of them) to grab your audience’s attention and keep them on the edge of their seats.

**Bottom Line:**
Do the first 30 seconds of your presentation make your audience think, “Wow, this will be worth listening to”?
Make a Big Promise

What can the world’s biggest Ponzi scheme that lost investors over US$50 billion teach you about creating persuasive messages?

What communication tool can the ‘Worst Fitness Gimmick of All Time’ provide you with that will enable you to grab your listeners’ attentions’ and keep them hooked onto your every word?

By the end of this chapter, you will have the answers to these questions and learn one tool that you can immediately use in your personal life and your business to fire up enthusiasm among your friends, family, colleagues and customers. You will discover the one universal principle that motivates people, and you will be able to use it to daily conversations, emails, text messages and speeches to win people’s time and attention.

But, before you discover that universal principle, we first need to start with the story of Bernie Madoff scam:

In March 2009, Bernie Madoff, a former stock-broker, investment advisor and non-executive chairman of the NASDAQ stock exchange, admitted that he had been using his wealth business to run, in his words, “one big lie” that cheated thousands of investors out of their money. Major banks such as HSBC and Fortis Bank lost billions of dollars with Madoff. Charities such as the ‘Los Angeles Jewish Community Foundation’ and the ‘Wolosoff Foundation’ had their money stolen by Madoff. No doubt that Bernie Madoff caused unbelievable anguish and pain to individuals who had trusted him: Take Hollywood screenwriter Eric Roth who found out he’d lost all his retirement money to Madoff’s Ponzi scheme. However, not only did banks, charities and celebrities lose their money to Madoff, but ordinary people who could easily have been your neighbours or friends found their life-savings had vanished overnight.
So, what was it that caused all these people to invest with Madoff? Certainly, the mechanics of the Ponzi scheme are beyond the scope of this book. I cannot claim to know or even understand Madoff’s twisted scheme. I don’t know what to conclude about the scam, and I could just as easily have been one of his victims.

However, the main reason why the celebrities, banks and charities invested with Madoff is because he made them a **Big Promise**: Madoff’s fund promised investors consistently high returns which ranged from 15% - 22%. To take an example, Robert Chew, who was a Madoff investor, says “[We had] no idea how he achieved such fantastic returns over the past 40 years. All we knew was that my wife’s entire family had been in the fund for decades and lived well on the returns.”

Tom Tugend, another investor, was also lured into Madoff’s scam by Madoff’s Big Promise of high returns on investment. According to the story on MSN Money, “his [Tom’s] annual returns of 10% - 14% were all he needed to know about a $25,000 investment he [Tom] made”.

Tom Tugend and Robert Chew were both attracted to invest their life-savings with Madoff because of Madoff’s Big Promise of high returns. However, as we’ll see in the next example, the Big Promise doesn’t necessarily have to be a financial reward.

Now, let’s look at how the “World’s Biggest Fitness Gimmick of All Time” used the Big Promise to attract loyal customers and sell thousands of products. If you’ve ever stayed up late at night watching infomercials that are selling Electronic Ab Belts, you’ve probably heard some of these phrases:

- Now you can get rock-hard abs...with no sweat!
- Lose 4 inches in 30 days – Guaranteed!
- 30% More Effective than Normal Exercise

The above phrases are the Big Promises of the Electronic Ab Belts. The electronic ab belts work on the basis that the electronic signals from the belt provide muscle stimulation...hence, you can sit around and...
just “watch the fat melt away” – without breaking a sweat! As a result of these Big Promises, the electronic ab belts became a “must-have” (I will admit that after hearing these Big Promises, I wanted one too!). However, in 2002, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission charged the three best-selling electronic ab belts with making false claims¹ such as the ones listed above.

So, if you’re ever in-front of the TV late at night and one of those electronic ab belt commercials come on, be sure to enjoy watching the fitness models – but do yourself a favour and don’t whip out your credit card.

So far in this chapter, you’ve seen how powerful the Big Promise can be in getting consumers to invest and buy from you. Madoff’s Big Promise of high returns had thousands of investors lined up to hand over their life-savings to him. The Electronic Ab Belts Big Promises of ‘Abs Without Effort’ had thousands of consumers whipping out their credit cards. However, in both cases, the Big Promises were Empty Promises. I hope that through these two examples, you’ve seen how effective a Big Promise can be. I also hope that I’ve showed you how easy it is to abuse the Big Promise, and that you’ll make sure your Big Promises are never Empty Promises.

In the business world, there are lots of examples of companies that are using the Big Promise ethically and honestly. Here are a few:

**BURGER KING**: Have It Your Way²

**FACEBOOK**: Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your lives³

**RYANAIR**: Ryanair’s Lowest Fare Guarantee – Or We Pay You Double The Difference⁴

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¹ [http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2002/05/projectabsurd.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2002/05/projectabsurd.shtm)
³ [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
⁴ [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
**WALMART:** Save money. Live better⁵.

So, what does all this have to do with creative powerfully persuasive presentations?

Simply, make sure that your presentation offers your audience members a Big Promise.

- What is the Big Promise of your presentation?
- What benefit does your presentation offer your audience?
- Why should they listen to you?
- What’s in it for them?

Give your audience members such a compelling reason to listen to your speech that they have no choice but to be curious and excited about what you have to offer them.

Create the most compelling Big Promise that you possibly can and put it somewhere near the beginning of your presentation.

For example, during my workshops on public speaking skills, I offer the participants the following Big Promise:

"By the end of this half-day workshop, you will have the tools and techniques to become a powerfully persuasive speaker. If you apply the techniques you learn today, I almost guarantee you that you’ll walk away twice as good as when you first came in. The five tools you’re going to pick up


⁵ [http://www.walmart.com/]
today will shave years off your learning curve. Plus, you’ll become the kind of confident speaker who keeps their audiences engaged, excited and entertained! The first tool…”

The Big Promise always has audience members leaning in closer, wanting to hear more. When you use the Big Promise in your presentations, your audience won’t be able to wait to hear what you have to say!

Now, your Big Promise doesn’t need to be as long and as elaborate as mine. It could be just a sentence or two. For example, if you’re pitching a new idea to your boss, you could say:

“Over the next 15 minutes, we’re going to discuss ways our business can tap into an untapped market that’s worth $400 million!”

Here’s another example. If you’re a sales trainer, you could start your seminar with:

“Over the next 20 minutes, you’re going to pick up tools on how to double your sales and triple your revenue”

When creating your Big Promise, there are several things to keep in mind:

- **Answer the WIIFM Question:** At the beginning of every presentation or speech, audience members are asking themselves, “WIIFM: What’s in it for me?” Make sure your Big Promise gives your audience members a compelling reason to listen to the rest of your presentation.

- **Include Your Biggest Benefits in the Big Promise:** What are the biggest benefits your audience members will gain from listening to you? Include the top three biggest benefits in your Big Promise.

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6 Credit to Craig Valentine, the 1999 World Champion of Public Speaking from whom I learned the Big Promise technique. Craig is an awesome speaker and coach. You can find out more about him on: [www.CraigValentine.com](http://www.CraigValentine.com)
• **Cover the EDGE Benefits:** Audience members are motivated by different things. Some are motivated by the prospect of making more money. Others are motivated by having more time. Others want more enjoyment.

In his book, *World Class Speaking*, Craig Valentine talks about the EDGE Benefits. He classes the different type of benefits audience members are motivated by into the acronym EDGE, which stands for:

- **Esteem:** More confidence,
- **Do More:** Doing more in less time, achieving more
- **Gain More:** Gaining more money, gaining more time
- **Enjoy More:** Having more pleasure, more fun, more enjoyment, more happiness.

If you can include at least one benefit from each of the EDGE elements, you’re likely to have covered the needs of all your audience members.

• **Make Your Benefits Specific:** Make your benefits as specific as possible. Instead of saying, “You’ll sell more”, say “You’ll double your sales”. Instead of saying, “You’ll be a better speaker”, say “You’ll become twice as good as when you first came in”. Instead of saying, “You’ll lose weight and look great”, say “You’ll melt away all the fat and have washboard abs”. Specific benefits create excitement because they paint a clear picture of the benefits in your audience’s minds.

• **Make Sure You Can Deliver on Your Big Promise:** Make sure you don’t make any Empty Promises, otherwise your audience will feel cheated and manipulated. I once saw a speaker who, at the beginning of his presentation, promised that he would reveal to us a formula that would guarantee that we would win more than 95% of the time when playing poker against our friends. As a poker player, I was tremendously excited to hear about this formula. Maybe it was a new mathematical strategy that would help me win more money? Unfortunately, later on during the
presentation, the speaker went on to say: “There is no formula that will win 95% of the time”. It was a huge disappointment and I felt cheated. Although the speaker did make some other very good points about how to calculate poker odds, I walked away from the speech feeling manipulated and disappointed.

Include a Pain Statement

People are motivated by two things:

1. **Gaining Pleasure** (i.e. Benefits): People take action because they gain some benefit out of the action. They gain happiness, confidence, wealth, etc. In your presentation, the Big Promise provides your audience members with compelling benefits that motivate your audience members to listen to you.

2. **Avoiding Pain and Loss**: People are motivated by avoiding pain and loss. In fact, research shows that people are more motivated to avoid loss than they are to gain benefit of an equal amount.

Thus, apart from the Big Promise, your presentation opening also needs to highlight the pain your audience members are currently suffering from. You need to insert a short Pain Statement after your Big Promise to motivate your audience to listen to you by pointing out what they are currently losing out on.

For example, let’s take some Big Promises and attach a short Pain Statements (*in italics*) to each one to see how they would look:
“Over the next 15 minutes, we’re going to discuss ways our business can tap into an untapped market that’s worth $400 million! By ignoring this untapped market, we’re losing out on $400 million worth of annual revenue!”

Here’s another example:

“Over the next 20 minutes, you’re going to pick up tools on how to double your sales and triple your revenue. Every day that you’re not using these techniques, you’re losing out on thousands of dollars in income.”

In my communication skills workshops and seminars, I magnify the pain by asking audience members to think about the opportunities that they’ve missed out on:

“Great communication skills are essential to your success in business. Think about it: How many times has your big idea been shot down because you lacked the tools to persuade the key decision makers? How often have you seen other colleagues get promoted up the corporate ladder faster than you – not because they were better businesspeople – but because they were more confident and eloquent speakers? How much potential income have you lost out on because you lacked the skills to close the sale?”

By using these Pain Questions and Pain Statements, you cause your audiences to be temporarily uncomfortable with the situation they’re currently in…and when they get uncomfortable, they start looking for solutions to get alleviate the pain. All you have to do in your presentation is to package your solution/idea as that will help your audience remove that pain while moving them closer to their goals and dreams.
The Roadmap

Your presentation needs to provide your audience members with a Roadmap that shows audience members exactly where they will be going and how they will be getting there. For example, during my public speaking seminars, I say:

“During the workshop, you will first pick up three ways on how to create great content that keeps your audience wanting more. Next, you will discover three very specific formulas you can use to logically structure your speech for maximum impact. Finally, you will learn three delivery techniques you can use to bring your presentation alive for your audience!”

The above Roadmap lets my audience know that the workshop is split into three parts: Content, Structure and Delivery. What this does is that it creates three mental folders in my audience’s minds, one for each section of the seminar. Thus, all the points for each section get mentally filed under the appropriate mental folders. This makes the presentation easier for audience members to follow and remember.

In his brilliant Commencement Address at Stanford University, Steve Jobs gave a brief roadmap of his speech:

“I will be sharing with you three stories. That’s all. Just three stories”

The lesson here is that you should include a short Roadmap as part of your Opening to let audience members know how your presentation is structured.
Putting it All Together

So far, here’s how your opening should look:

**PRESENTATION OPENING:**

*Start with an Opening Gambit (or a combination)*

+ *Big Promise*

+ *Pain Statement*

+ *Roadmap*

**My Favorite Opening Structure**

Personally, my favorite opening structure (and the one I’ve found most effective) is to:

1. **Start with a Question.**
   
   Starting with a question immediately engages the audience into my speech and gets them to mentally tune into my presentation. For example, I might say “Have you ever seen a great speaker? Have you ever seen a boring one? Have you ever been one?”

2. **Dive into a Story.**
   
   Next, I immediately dive into a personal story of how I used to be a boring speaker and then
transformed into becoming a national public speaking champion. The story is humorous and keeps audience members engaged. It also gets audiences curious about how I went from “boring to brilliant”. It teases audience members to want to know the process of becoming a great speaker.

(3) **Make a Big Promise.**  
After my story, I make a big promise that gets the audience excited about listening to the rest of my presentation.

(4) **Include a Short Pain Statement**  
I include a short pain statement to get audience members slightly uncomfortable about their current situation. People won’t act unless they’re first uncomfortable with where they currently are. I also use Questions to get the audience to think about the missed opportunities and losses they’ve had because they lacked public speaking skills. This gets them mentally begging for a solution to their problem, which I later go on to present in the body of the speech.

(5) **Give a Roadmap**  
I give the audiences a roadmap so they know what to expect. If they know the presentation structure, it becomes easier for them to follow along with you.
Presentation Opening Toolbox

Obviously, you don’t have to use the same structure that I use. You can experiment around with different presentation openings to see what works best for your type of presentation. However, the following eight are the basic tools in your Presentation Opening Toolbox:

1. Questions
2. Stories
3. Quotes
4. Interesting/Startling Statements
5. Big Promise
6. Pain Statements and Questions
7. Roadmap

**Key Takeaway Message:**
Spend plenty of time writing and re-writing your Opening. Rehearse your Opening. Get feedback regarding the start and ending of your speech from friends and colleagues. All the time you invest in perfecting the opening of your presentation will be worth it.
In A Nutshell

If you want to set yourself up for success, then it’s vital that the first 30 seconds of your speech catches your audiences’ attention, arouses their curiosity and makes them feel that your speech is worth their time. Use these principles to get your audience hooked onto your every word right from the beginning:

1. Do **NOT** open with:
   - A boring Me-focused Opening
   - A standard ‘Thank-you’ introduction. You can thank your hosts and audiences later, after you’ve built a connection with them.
   - A joke from the Internet

2. Use one of the four proven Opening Gambits to open with a bang:
   - Start with a Story
   - Use Questions to Create a Knowledge Gap
   - Use Quotable Quotes to gain extra Credibility
   - Open with an Intriguing/ Startling Statement

3. Answer the audience’s “What’s In It for Me” question by including a Big Promise
4. Include a short “Pain Statement” to create pain before you offer the solution
5. Include a Roadmap to show your audience where you’re going
About Akash Karia

Akash Karia is an award-winning speaker, trainer and presentation skills coach. He has conducted presentation skills courses for employees and members of organizations such as HSBC, Polytechnic University, Life Underwriters Association of Hong Kong and many, many more...

Akash is also champion speaker and has won over 40 public speaking championships including the prestigious titles of: JCI 2012 Hong Kong Champion of Public Speaking, Toastmasters International Division K Impromptu Speaking Champion and has been ranked as one of the Top 10 Speakers in Asia Pacific.

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