

Guide to Hooks/Attention-Getters

Beyond Resolved

Introduction

Hooks, or attention-getting devices, are an important tool for introducing your speech and what you'll be discussing. If you aren't quite sure where a hook should go in your speech, make sure to check out our previous guide to an impromptu speech's typical structure. In today's resource, we'll go through what a hook is, why it's important, and give two examples.

What is a hook and why is it important?

As the title suggests, the point of a hook is to grab the attention of your audience. For impromptu, we're taking the same principle of a hook that has been drilled into us in English classes for as long as we can remember and putting it into speech form. Hooks are important because you don't just want an audience that's passively listening; you want a room full of engaged participants. The first step in completing this goal and captivating a room is to grab their attention with a hook; for other strategies, check out our previous resources.

Without an attention-getter in your piece, whether it be an essay or speech, things will start off on the wrong foot. This sets the tone of a boring speech and will often cause your audience to quickly tune out and think of their grocery lists instead. The introduction is one of the most important parts of an impromptu speech, for that's not only where your quote is being presented in its entirety for the first time, but also where your thesis/organization is set up. Some judges might lose interest and only take general notes on your introduction if you don't have an engaging hook, rather than taking detailed and understandable commentary as they would with a speech that caught their attention. Similarly, some judges might just listen to the introduction and tune out for the rest of the speech, a fate that will doom any hopes of winning in a room. This makes it critical to have such an engaging segue into your speech. Although it seems small, you as a speaker must do anything in your power to win over your judge's attention, so make sure to start off on a good foot with an engaging hook.

Anecdotes & Jokes

There are two main types of attention-getters: anecdotes and jokes. Which device you choose to use depends on how you're feeling in the critical moments between when you receive your topic and when you stand up (or these days, unmute) to give your speech.

Anecdotes are a great way to add a personal touch to your speech. Whether a funny, over-dramaticized rendition of a childhood memory or a touching story about your family or friends, these stories provide the judges and audience not only a glimpse into your character, but a memorable tie into the topic at hand. When choosing an anecdote, you want to make sure that it's actually relevant to what you're discussing and that it relates to the topic you've chosen. For example, I wouldn't tell a story about trick-or-treating on Halloween for a topic about, say, the novel *Pride and Prejudice*; those two just don't go together. You could save that funny quip about your adventures trick-or-treating for a topic about American holidays, childhood memories, or something else more topical.

One quick thing to note: if you're struggling to find an anecdote that relates directly to your topic, you could instead choose to relate it to one of your points. Here's a quick example: say you get a topic about war, and you've decided one of your points will be about how many wars are fought over natural resources and oil. Now, if you have an anecdote about your passion for environmentalism, you could give that and tie it in with something like "while my childhood self had a passion for saving the environment through renewable resources, it seems that the world as a whole is much more passionate about oil, leading to many conflicts". Now you have a great link to read your topic and go into your speech. Finding the perfect anecdote for your speech can sometimes be a struggle, but if you're truly stuck and scrambling for ideas, this is one approach that may help you.

One final thing to add: you want to make every anecdote seem consequential, even if it isn't. Take that trick-or-treating story we mentioned earlier; maybe a kid pushed you over and stole your candy. While this is by no means the end of the world now, you want to really hammer in on the importance of your anecdote. Especially with childhood memories, even if something seems consequential, dramatize it and add some flair. For the trick-or-treating story, I might say "I was DEVASTATED. I thought I would never recover." This will make your audience laugh, make your hook more engaging, and make it seem less like the semi-pointless story it really is.

The second approach to a hook is telling a joke. If you've ever competed in extemp, the concept is kind of similar: find a joke that relates to your topic without being offensive, rude, or anything else that may upset your judge or audience. When telling a joke, it's important to read the room: before you start your prep time, take note of your judge and audience's demeanors and try to determine what they would find funny. If your judge is closer to you in age, you could make a pop culture joke. If they're a bit older, a pop culture joke may go over their heads, so you'd need to find a different joke. Your joke should tie into your speech and not just be something funny you've read/heard somewhere; you don't want your audience to be jarred if you tell a joke about dogs and then start a speech that doesn't discuss dogs once. If you don't think you're good at telling jokes, don't worry: try looking up some jokes in your spare time and practicing your delivery. You can try looking up old extemp or impromptu speeches on YouTube and seeing if they use jokes to see how they deliver them and

link them into the rest of their speech. One last thing: when in doubt, dad-joke it out (but please, try to make it at least loosely related to something in your speech!).

Conclusion

Hopefully after reading through this guide you've begun to not only understand the importance of hooks, but also how they work. A speech with and without a hook are two entirely separate entities that result in very different outcomes. As previously mentioned, a hook serves to capture your judge's attention and sets the stage for an engaging speech to be given. We've provided two examples of hooks, anecdotes and jokes, but that doesn't mean that's all there is to offer. Whether it be onomatopoeia or a metaphor, there's a world of different hooks to explore and use in your own speeches. Don't ever feel restricted in the structure of your speech, but rather learn what works for you and explore different ways of capturing the attention of your judges. Creativity is the foundation of impromptu, so don't forget to have fun!