

Presentations: From commitment to call to action

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Making a connection between your opening and closing engages the audience and enhances learning.

AS A NURSE, teaching includes sharing your expertise. Typically, you're teaching to small audiences—an individual patient and a family member, which may make professional presentations to a larger audience more intimidating. Successful content delivery requires setting the right tone and ending with recommendations.

Presentation openings consist of four elements: commitment, experience, rules, and summary. Likewise, presentation closings have four elements: questions, referrals, summary, and call to action. In this article, I'll share ways to start your opening with a commitment to your audience and end with a call to action.

Opening elements

The opening sets the stage for the meat of your presentation. You want to get audience members' attention, let them know who you are, and set their expectation.

Commitment

Start your presentation with a commitment to your audience members by defining your purpose and offering a conclusion. Then draw a road map to the presentation conclusion. Provide stops and detours by carefully explaining how you'll present the content and reach your goal. Keep your goals or objectives concise, specific, and measurable; use action verbs to engage the audience.

Experience

Nursing changes rapidly, so state your topic's broader professional impact to underscore the importance of the presentation's purpose.

Next, your audience should understand why you were chosen as the presenter on this topic. Ask yourself the following questions when designing this section:

- Why were you asked to present on this topic?
- Are you an expert in this field?



- What was the latest research that you reviewed?
 - How else can you build trust with your audience?
- Share personal anecdotes to help connect you with audience members, and provide visual aids, such as handouts, charts, posters, or slides with images, tables, and videos, to help them retain information. Refer to your anecdotes during the presentation to tie the discussion into a real-world setting. Some presenters use humor, quotes, and pictures as adjuncts to their anecdotes.
- After presenting the global and personal perspective, you must tie them together. In many cases, offering a brief history lesson of the past and what's coming in the future can help. Then conclude with a statement tying together how your personal perspective meets your professional obligations or standards of practice.
- To keep the audience members engaged, ask for their perspectives on the topic. If it's a newer topic, share a video, image, or a list, give them time to process, and then ask them to share their reactions with one another in pairs or small groups. Collect reactions and responses to show the audience members that you value their feedback, and refer to this list during the presentation. A poll is another way to share experiences, especially with an audience with whom you're unfamiliar.

Rules

Lay out the rules of your presentation in the opening:

- presentation length
- audience participation requirements

Presentation skills in action

Here's an example of how to apply principles for great openings and closings.

Carolyn Thomas, a nurse with expertise using an electronic health record (EHR) to design effective care plans, is developing her presentation to her colleagues who recently started using a new EHR. Her opening begins with a **commitment** to the audience: "By the end of this presentation, you'll know how to adopt a care plan for your patient using technology."

Carolyn then creates a **road map** that includes a list of the steps for selecting a care plan in the EHR. Her specific and measurable objectives concisely state what she expects the audience to learn: "Select the most appropriate care plan for a patient with

asthma using the EHR."

Next, Carolyn develops the **experience** section of her presentation, which includes placing the topic into a broader historical context ("Nurses used to document on individual paper patient charts. Now, they document on computers, tablets, and mobile devices.") and professional nursing context ("Technology has improved patient safety and care related to asthma. Care plans are designed to effectively manage patients in the acute care setting and can be customized to meet individual patient needs.") Carolyn decides she'll engage the audience members using a poll to gather information about their EHR experiences.

Carolyn's **opening summary** restates

the problem and the solution: "Selecting the best care plan for a patient with respiratory issues can be difficult. I'll serve as a guide to help you understand how to choose and individualize the correct care plan using an EHR."

In Carolyn's **closing**, after answering **questions**, she'll **refer** back to her opening: "In the beginning of this presentation, we talked about selecting the best care plan for your patient. We walked through five steps for creating an individualized patient care plan."

Carolyn will finish the presentation with audience **action items**: "Here's a list of the items to remember when selecting a care plan. Next time you're using the EHR, view other care plans that you can use for your patients."

- how you'll handle questions (throughout or at the end).
Maintain eye contact with your audience throughout the presentation. This also is a good time check that all audience members can hear you, especially those in the back of the room.

Summary

Conclude your presentation opening by restating the problem and solution. Show an image or even a blank slide so the focus is on you. Remind the audience members about the purpose of the presentation and how you'll help facilitate their growth and development in this content area.

Closing elements

The closing of your presentation should take your audience full circle, reminding them of the problem and the road map to the solution. In addition, you want to send audience members away with action items that will place what they learned in the real world of nursing.

Questions

Start your closing with audience member questions. However, be mindful of the time you'll need to summarize your presentation and draw your audience's attention to their action items.

Referrals

Refer to the beginning of your presentation, restating your goals and the steps for achieving them. Repetition helps with memory and content recall.

Summary

In the preceding step, you referred to the opening.

Now is the time for a formal summary of the road map. A bulleted list or a one-sentence summary will do. You also should offer recommendations for further resources and learning opportunities.

Call to action

The last and most important part of your closing is the list of action items for participants. Give them a specific call to action and assign them "homework." You might consider offering audience members a final "hands-on" task or assignment before they leave the presentation that gives them the opportunity to use the skills they learned. You want them to use cognitive and motor skills to help them better remember the information you presented.

Tying it all together

Your presentation should tie the opening and closing together. Carefully planning the content and using appropriate teaching strategies—such as slides, images, videos, lists, polls, and other interactive tools—will give your audience a meaningful learning experience. At the end of your presentation, gather feedback from your audience using a brief evaluation instrument that includes a question about the effectiveness of your opening and closing that you can use to help you improve your skills. ★

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Selected references

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