

storytelling
communication lessons
from rebels, innovators and the ocean

great beginnings

5 ways to start a story

5 ways not to start a story



and why

skip the boring bits

in a podcast interview, Philip Hoare is asked why, in a book about William Blake, Blake isn't mentioned until page sixty — and even then, not with a neat introduction. why not start at the beginning of Blake's life? Hoare's answer?

because that's boring!

whether we are preparing a presentation for school, work or a big keynote, the first goal is

don't be boring!

but how? science has answers and so do innovators, rebels and even the ocean. start strong.

5 ways to start and why

when sharing an idea in person or online, the first 30 seconds are crucial — that's how long it takes for most of us to decide whether it's worth our time and attention to listen to a speaker. how do you capture and keep people's attention?

1. ask a question
2. use a quote
3. reveal a surprising fact
4. start in the middle of the story
5. tell a joke

why

assume that people are bored of having another meeting, expecting to sit through another busy presentation. instead, you start with a question, break their expectations, and gain their attention. but once you have it, immediately tell them what you want them to know — and how it's going to impact them

like the calm before the storm
a smooth beginning before the story

5 ways not to start and why

1. introduce yourself

people care most about what matters to them - start there, not with your bio

2. thank people for being there

it's polite, but it uses up valuable time - thank them later

3. jump into facts and figures

data alone doesn't connect - give them a reason to care first

4. start without giving context

don't confuse people with the details without giving context

5. tell a bad / inappropriate joke

make sure it's funny, otherwise it's weird or awkward. test it first

make the most of those first 30 seconds. notice what you find interesting or boring, these are great clues for you to follow

3 great starts

1. lean in

in his famous TED talk, Sir Ken Robinson didn't start with credentials or slides. he walked on stage and said:

"good morning. how are you? it's been great, hasn't it? i've been blown away by the whole thing. in fact, i'm leaving."

everyone laughed, relaxed, leaned in. only then did he start talking about creativity.

watch on TED

2. ask a question

Haaziq Kazi starts his TEDx talk with a question and a fact that intrigue us: we can't live a day without plastic

"I have a question for you. Anybody in the audience who doesn't have a plastic ID? Anybody? Well, think about it. Plastic is everywhere. The buttons on your shirt, your mobile cover, the water from the plastic bottle you just had, plastic money in the wallet, maybe. It is interesting how plastic has become an integral part of our lives and how we cannot go one single day without it. Do you know what that makes me think? How my generation is inheriting not just this legacy but also the problem that comes with it: the problem of what we throw in our oceans."

Kazi was 12 years old when he did his TED talk.

watch on TED

3 great starts

3. tell a story

Adam Grant is a famous organizational psychologist and author. he starts his TED talk with a story...

Seven years ago, a student came to me and asked me to invest in his company. He said, "I'm working with three friends, and we're going to try to disrupt an industry by selling stuff online."

Grant didn't invest in the company - huge mistake. the company became Warby Parker. we want to know more.

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one more thing...

if you want a great start,
be clear about the end of your story
the beginning and the end
should be like coral and algae
- they need each other to thrive



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