

CHEAT SHEET

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25 Words or Phrases to Avoid in Speeches and Presentations

You're really ready for your speech or presentation. You have great content, you know it cold, and you're sure listeners will benefit. So the last thing you want to do is dilute your message through weak or unhelpful language. In the spirit of combining your great message with effective delivery, here are 25 words or phrases you should avoid and why.

1. **"I" or "me".** The presentation is not about you, period. Replace every "I" or "me" with "you," "we," or "us." Keep the focus on your audience!
2. **"A little bit."** This phrase waters down your content. "I'd like to talk a little bit about" pales next to "Let's discuss the important issues."
3. **"Just."** Similar to #2. Compare these two: a) "I just want to say that I think we face some problems"; and b) "Listen—our backs are to the wall."
4. **"So . . ."** Often uttered as the first word out of a speaker's mouth. But "so" is a continuation of a previous thought. At the *start*, nothing has come before.
5. **"Talk about."** Used repetitively and monotonously: "First, I'll talk about the competition. Then I'll talk about why we have to be different. Then, I'll talk about our new product." Then, I'll talk about why you're all going to shoot yourselves!
6. **"My topic is . . ."** You need to grab listeners immediately. So don't just announce your topic. What's engaging about telling people something they already know?
7. **"I've been asked to speak about."** A variation of #6, and usually an attempt by the speaker to seem important.
8. **"Sorry if" or "Sorry for."** Uh-oh. The speaker is *apologizing* for the presentation? Don't be sorry, just give your audiences good stuff.
9. **"Excuse the eye chart."** (Variation: **"I know this slide is really busy."**) If you can't speak to *everything* on a slide in the time you're showing it, that slide doesn't work. Boil it down to the essentials.
10. **"I'd like to start out with a story."** A story is a great way to open a speech. But you weaken it considerably if you *alert* us that you're about to tell a story! I call this "introducing the Introduction."
11. **"There's a funny joke . . ."** It had better be! Just start with the joke, not an announcement. Better yet: use humor. It's usually a lot easier to relate to your topic.
12. **"Excuse me if I seem nervous."** Announcing your nerves is a bad idea. Most nervousness isn't visible, so why show your hand?

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13. **"I'm not good at public speaking."** Then go away.
14. **"I'm not a speaker."** Yes, you are. Aren't you giving a presentation? Just share what you have. We'll appreciate it.
15. **"I've never done this before."** You guessed it: this is instant death to your credibility. Again, do a good job and we'll L-O-V-E you!
16. **"Here are our key differentiators."** This language is so overused that your "key differentiators" probably aren't any such thing.
17. **"I've divided them here into three buckets."** Unless you work on a farm or are planning to kick one, leave the *cliché*d buckets out of the mix.
18. **"Bear with me."** Instead of being caught flat-footed, why not have a back-up plan for keeping your audience engaged if technology doesn't cooperate? Be prepared to give your talk if your laptop goes back to the airport in the taxi.
19. **"The next slide shows . . ."** Transitions are vital elements of your presentation. Think about how to organically link your previous talking point with the next one. Don't appear to discover yourself what the next point is when the slide pops onto the screen.
20. **"Moving right along . . ."** Truly the worst example of throwing your hands up in the air because you don't know how to lead into your next point.
21. **"Obstacles!"** Or **"Goals,"** or any single word that indicates what you're about to discuss next. Find that organic transition, per #19 above.
22. **"I think I've bored you enough."** Let's hope you haven't bored your audience at all! And if you have, do you have to twist the knife this way?
23. **"I didn't have enough time . . ."** Whether what you say next is "to prepare fully," or "to do the necessary research," you shouldn't be revealing this ugly reality.
24. **"I'm running out of time, so I'll go through this quickly."** Do not announce to your audience like this your lack of time management skills.
25. **"That's all I have."** "And so I didn't give any thought to considering carefully how to conclude my remarks. I'll therefore jump off this cliff, and take you all with me!"

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