

FLY-SWATTER TECHNIQUES

Try to use one of the following rhetorical techniques every 30 seconds or so to “swat” your audience back to attention. What else can you add to the list?

- Ask a probing or surprising question
- Give a striking fact or statistic or contrast
- Express a thought or emotion in real time
- Tell a brief story by starting with the words “One day (morning, night)...”
- Express an emotional reaction to your story
- Use a concrete, colorful visual image
- Suggest an unexpected metaphor or analogy
- Mention an audience member by name
- Refer to something that was said earlier in the program
- Say something funny when they least expect it
- Guess how the audience is responding to you and verbalize it
- Say “Here is the one (two, three) thing(s) I want you to remember”
- Lean forward and give a really concise, dramatic statement of your bottom line
- Interject a dramatic repetition of a key phrase, perhaps with a slight but significant variation
- Move suddenly from the dance floor to the balcony by commenting on your own performance
- Pause significantly and then say something important
- Describe a major change in your way of thinking over time
- Admit to ambivalence or uncertainty or internal struggle about a complex issue—but make sure you’ve been firm about other key issues
- Refer to someone the audience knows, loves, and respects
- Acknowledge some negative emotion like fear, hostility, envy
- Admit you’re aware of a difference or conflict between you and your audience
- Tell them you’ve just decided to say, share, admit something you weren’t planning to talk about, or that you’ve never said in public before
- Ask a question and then answer it with a resounding “NO!”
- Take a few steps and start with a new burst of energy
- Make a sudden change in your volume or intonation
- Announce something that you absolutely refuse to do, say, or think
- After making a persuasive point, pause and then say “Now here’s what I want you to do about it.”
- Tell them about the one thing your mother, father, grandmother told you that you’ll never forget
- Hold up an object that illustrates something you’re talking about
- Interrupt your talk with a thought, illustration, or anecdote that just occurred to you as you were speaking
- Refer to an article, photo, tv show, movie that you saw recently to illustrate your point
- Write something on the blackboard when it’s least expected
- Interject personal experience as concrete examples of abstract concepts
- Admit to some failing or weakness on your part that you have not yet overcome—but keep it light
- Stop what you’re saying and ask the audience if they are still with you

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