



# 20 Magnetic Opening Lines to HOOK *Your Audience*

By Mai Davies  
Former BBC & Sky News Presenter  
& Public Speaking Coach

## Don't Lose Your Audience in the First 10 Seconds

*“When you stand up to speak the clock is already running while you're audience is deciding whether you are worth listening to, or this is ten minutes of their life they're not getting back.”*

I've just given you an example of a hook. I have hooked you with my first sentence.

If you don't grab your audience in the first ten seconds, you may never get them back.

Whether you're pitching an idea, leading a meeting, delivering a keynote, or creating online content — your audience's first impression of you **is everything**.

Most people open with filler – “Hi everyone,” “Thanks for having me,” or “I'll try to keep this short...”, or “ My is name is so and so ... and today I'm talking about blah, blah, blah.”

And just like that ... the moment is gone.

They want you to get on with it. They know who you are, they know why you're there. And you can thank them at the end.

You know this don't you, you have sat in audiences waiting to hear something that hopefully isn't going to bore you to tears, then speaker starts with ... rambling.

And there you are ... already bored.

I know how important it is to get your first words right. I'm a former BBC and Sky News presenter, so I have spent my professional life writing opening sentences that grab attention, because in television we don't get ten seconds grace, we get about three! Because our audience has a remote control. They can switch over or switch us off. I've stood in front of cameras and crowds – and I've learned one powerful truth – **You have to get the audience onside immediately**.

And you're reading this now because you want to know how. I am going to show you how to use my 20 proven and powerful, opening lines. They will work for you, whatever you want to say, you can **adapt them to your subject**, your audience, in any setting. These are the same strategies professional communicators use to spark curiosity, establish authority, and connect with people **straight away**.

**And how much confidence will you get when you know you have your audience in the palm of your hand the moment you start speaking?**

Each of my openers comes with an explanation of how it works, five different examples, and a tip on how to deliver it – so you can plug it right into your next talk, podcast, pitch, or video.

## So let's dive in!

---

## Hook No 1. “Let me ask you a question...”

### Why It Works:

A question immediately turns a passive audience into an active one. It breaks the “lecture” dynamic and pulls your audience into the conversation.

### Example Scripts:

“Let me ask you a question. If money were no object, what would you do with your next 24 hours?”

“What's scarier – speaking to 100 people, or sending one email that could change your career?”

“How many calories do you think the average person burns while overthinking a decision?”

“What would happen to your business if your website went down for 24 hours?”

“How different would healthcare be if patients designed the system?”

### Pro Tip:

Ask a question they can't help but answer in their heads. Bonus – if it challenges assumptions or taps into emotion.

---

## Hook No 2. “Raise your hand if you've ever...”

### Why It Works:

When you ask people to do this, it gets them involved – mentally and physically. It creates a shared experience and a sense of community, even if only a few people respond. They have to do something, and that means they have joined you in the conversation.

### Example Script:

“Raise your hand if you've ever promised yourself a ‘quick scroll’ and lost an hour of your life.”

“Raise your hand if you've ever completely blanked during a presentation — even after rehearsing for hours.”

“Raise your hand if you've ever bought a product purely because of its packaging.”

“Raise your hand if you've ever changed your travel plans after reading a single negative review.”

“Raise your hand if you've ever diagnosed yourself with something serious after looking up symptoms online.”

### Pro Tip:

Make sure it's a statement you know some people will definitely respond to. And raise your hand as you ask the audience, and keep it raised while you wait for them to do the same. They'll follow your physical lead.

---

### Hook No 3. “What if I told you...”

**Why It Works:**

This line triggers curiosity. It hints at something unexpected, promising a secret, an insight or value your audience *doesn't* have yet – which gets them leaning in.

**Example Script:**

“What if I told you, you can improve your memory with one simple habit before bed?”

“What if I told you that being nervous before a talk means your brain is doing exactly what it's supposed to?”

“What if I told you that the average hospital could reduce life-threatening medication errors by half by changing one overlooked process?”

“What if I told you that the most effective marketing campaigns of the last decade had almost no budget?”

“What if I told you that 90% of startups fail for reasons completely within their control?”

**Pro Tip:**

Make the “what if” something that challenges a common belief or misconception your audience holds.

---

### Hook No 4. “I wasn’t always comfortable talking about this...”

**Why It Works:**

Vulnerability is disarming. Starting with humility creates immediate trust, and positions you as someone who has walked the path your audience is probably on.

**Example Script:**

“I wasn’t always comfortable talking about failure – until I realized it’s where all the good stuff happens.”

“I wasn't always comfortable talking about confidence – because I used to shake before every interview.”

“I wasn't always comfortable talking about financial literacy – I once had so much debt that I avoided checking my bank account.”

“I wasn't always comfortable talking about sustainable farming – my family has been in conventional farming for generations.”

“I wasn't always comfortable talking about mental health – my own journey with anxiety started at a time when nobody discussed it.”

**Pro Tip:**

Pair vulnerability with transformation. Show them the transformation in your talk. You're not just confessing to a vulnerability - you're showing growth.

---

## Hook No 5. "This may surprise you, but..."

**Why It Works:**

Surprise is attention's best friend. Surprise the audience, they will keep listening. Use this opener to challenge expectations and establish yourself as someone with fresh insight.

**Example Script:**

"This may surprise you, but arguing well can actually strengthen your relationship."

"This may surprise you, but chocolate was once used as currency in several ancient civilizations."

"This may surprise you, but the most sustainable buildings in the world are often the oldest ones."

"This may surprise you, but most security breaches don't come from sophisticated hackers - they come from simple human error."

"This may surprise you, but the countries with the highest education spending don't necessarily have the best outcomes."

**Pro Tip:**

Lead with something that disrupts their assumptions - even better something that sparks curiosity.

---

## Hook No 6. "Imagine this..."

**Why It Works:**

Asking people to imagine something, pulls them into a visual and emotional world. It's storytelling in its simplest, most effective form.

**Example Script:**

"Imagine your phone battery dies, you feel that panic rising, but then you remember your schedule is clear, and the world doesn't need you for the next three hours. What would you do?"

"Imagine discovering a treatment that could prevent the suffering of Alzheimer's - but nobody believes your research."

“Imagine building a supply chain so efficient that nothing goes to waste—not energy, not materials, not time. Nothing.”

“Imagine cooking a perfect mouthwatering meal without measuring a single ingredient or following any recipe.”

“Imagine knowing exactly which investments will outperform the market next year that could make you so rich you could lie on the beach for the rest of your life – what would you do differently today?”

**Pro Tip:**

Use vivid, sensory language. Let your audience *see* and *feel* the moment you’re describing. Put them in that scenario mentally.

---

## Hook No 7. “I’m going to start with a confession...”

**Why It Works:**

Confessions are compelling. It’s a bit like number four ‘*I wasn’t always comfortable talking about this...*’, it creates intimacy and catches people off guard. It humanizes you immediately.

**Example Script:**

“I’m going to start with a confession – I googled ‘how to be an adult’ more times in my thirties than I ever did in my twenties.”

“I’m going to start with a confession – I once forgot my own name during a live interview.”

“Can I make a confession – I once showed up to a client presentation with two completely different shoes on.”

“I have to confess something – I borrowed this next idea, which I now teach top professionals, from my ten-year-old daughter.”

“I’m going to start with a confession – My biggest breakthrough came after my most embarrassing failure.”

**Pro Tip:**

Keep it authentic but relevant to the topic. Your confession should lead naturally into your message.

---

## Hook No 8. “Here’s the bottom line...”

### Why It Works:

This is a technique called a summary prompt. It immediately signals to the audience what they should pay attention to and *why they should care*, which increases buy-in before you deliver the content.

### Example Script:

“Here’s the bottom line – if you don’t control your calendar, someone else will.”

“Here’s the bottom line – if you master this one skill, you’ll speak with more impact in *every* area of your life.”

“Here’s the bottom line – cybersecurity isn’t just an I.T. problem – it’s the biggest business risk you’re facing in your personal life as well as your business.”

“Before we dive in, here’s why this matters (another way to say, ‘*Here’s the bottom line*’) – the first five years of a child’s life will determine how they perform in their entire journey through school.”

“Before we dive in, here’s why this matters: every species that becomes extinct takes with it solutions to problems we haven’t even discovered yet.”

### Pro Tip:

Make the “why” personal or high-stakes, or both. What’s in it for audience to pay attention to the bottom line?

## Hook No 9. “Let’s play a quick game...”

### Why It Works:

Unexpected and playful, this line engages curiosity and breaks the pattern of traditional speeches. It invites interaction and builds anticipation.

### Example Script:

“Let’s play a quick game. I’m going to give you three job titles and I want to guess who earns the *most* money – a lawyer, TikTok influencer or airline pilot. Raise your hand if it’s the lawyer... (then you move on to the Tiktok influencer and airline pilot).

“Let’s play a quick game. I’ll describe a patient’s symptoms, and see if you can spot the diagnosis that 70% of doctors miss.”

“Let’s play a quick game: I’m going to say the name of a profession and then I will go through a list of skills and I want you to clap each time you hear one that matches that profession”

“Let's play a quick game – Look around the room and identify three design flaws that most people wouldn't notice.”

“Let's play a quick game – I'm going to show you two investment portfolios – one created by an expert, one by a novice – can you tell which is which?”

**Pro Tip:**

Keep the “game” simple and short – make it easy, with an answer the audience can perhaps shout out. That really gets them involved. The ‘win’ here is audience engagement.

---

## Hook No 10. “Here’s the truth nobody says out loud...”

**Why It Works:**

People love radical honesty. This line positions you as someone who speaks honestly and isn't afraid to challenge the status quo. The audience feels that you might say out loud what they actually think, or they will learn something totally new.

**Example Script:**

“Here’s the truth nobody says out loud – being ‘busy’ is often just a way to avoid uncomfortable emotions.”

“Here's the truth nobody says out loud – educational innovation has been held back more by traditional attitudes than lack of money.”

“Here’s the truth nobody says out loud – most people are more afraid of sounding foolish than they are of failing.”

“Here's the truth nobody says out loud – most diets fail not because of willpower, but because of biology.”

“Here's the truth nobody says out loud – the best technological solutions are often the simplest ones.”

**Pro Tip:**

It's a bold opener, so deliver it with empathy – not arrogance. You are there to give your audience value and make them think, not to show off.

---

## Hook No 11. “You probably think [X] ... but actually it’s [Y]”

**Why It Works:**

This format taps into contrast and surprise. It breaks your audience's expectations and immediately positions your insight as valuable.

**Example Script:**

“You probably think being productive means doing more – it actually means doing less, better.”



“You probably think electric cars are always better for the environment – but actually, it depends on where your electricity comes from.”

“You probably think healthy soil is just about what you can grow – but actually, it's about whether we have enough food to eat for next 50 years.”

“You probably think your memory works like a video camera recording everything as it happens, but every time you recall a memory, you're rewriting it – which means your most confident recollections may be your least reliable.”

“You probably think you give to charity because it's the right thing to do, when actually neuroscience shows that when you donate money it activates the same pleasure centres in your brains as food and sex.”

**Pro Tip:**

Pick a belief your audience holds strongly. Flip it. Again with empathy not arrogance.

## Hook No 12. “When I first started, I had no idea...”

**Why It Works:**

Relatable and humble, this line shows your journey. It helps your audience see what's possible for them.

**Example Script:**

“When I first started cooking, I had no idea the smoke alarm would become my kitchen timer.”

“When I first started designing medical devices, I had no idea that solving one problem often creates three new ones.”

“When I first started in this industry, I had no idea that the 'expert advice' everyone was following was actually holding us all back.”

“When I first started in my profession, I had no idea that the one skill that would matter most wasn't on my CV, or any of my colleagues' CVs.”

“When I first started researching this topic, I had no idea I that what I found would challenge then up-end everything I thought I knew.”

**Pro Tip:**

When you go on to explain your growth, make sure it feels attainable – not superheroic.

## Hook No 13. “Let me tell you a story...”

**Why It Works:**

We all love stories. *‘Once upon a time’*... we're all in. Stories build emotional connection and create a powerful lead-in to your message. When we listen to stories we turn off the part of our brain that questions what the speaker is saying, we just fall into their story.

**Example Script:**

“Let me tell you a story about the worst date I ever went on – and the best lesson it taught me.”

“I want to start with a story about the morning routine I accidentally discovered in the middle of a power cut, that’s now my secret weapon for having a really productive day.”

“I want to tell you a story about my 10-year-old son’s soccer team – that taught me more about leadership than any books or gurus ever have.”

“I want to start with a story about the private conversation I accidentally overheard between two CEOs in a coffee shop that shocked me, but how their brutal honesty completely changed my understanding of success.”

“I want to start with a story about the time I missed a flight by two minutes, and how that taught me everything about the margins we need to build into our every-day lives.”

**Pro Tip:**

Use a short, vivid story. Don’t ramble and make sure you land the emotional point.

---

## Hook No 14. “Here’s a statistic that blew my mind...”

**Why It Works:**

People respect data – but on its own is boring. But if it's surprising, your audience will pay attention. It also signals that your talk is well-researched.

**Example Script:**

“Here’s a statistic that blew my mind when I heard it – 80% of success in most industries is directly tied to emotional intelligence – not talent.”

“Here’s a statistic that blew my mind – over 75% of people would rather face a killer spider than speak in public.”

“Here's a fact that blew my mind – If you use a smartphone, you will probably touch it 2,617 times a day.”

“This will blow your mind – Studies show we're interrupted every 8 minutes at work, but it takes 23 minutes to fully focus again – which means most of are never really concentrating.”

“Here's a fact that blew my mind – Your brain processes rejection in the same region of the brain that processes physical pain, that’s why criticism can feel like a physical attack.’

**Pro Tip:**

Follow the statistic with, “Why does that matter?” and transition into your key message.

## Hook No 15. “There are 3 things I wish I’d known...”

### Why It Works:

This works because people love lists and we love the rule of three. *Blood sweat and tears, Ready, steady go.* Lists of three are structured and satisfying. This opener also promises immediate value.

### Example Script:

“There are 3 things I wish I’d known before I adopted a dog – it will wreck your couch, most of your shoes and probably your sanity.”

“There are 3 things I wish I’d known before I ever stepped on stage – and the third one is the most important. ”

“There are 3 things I wish I'd known about success before I started and lost three businesses – failure is feedback, mentors matter more than courses, and consistency beats talent.”

“There are 3 things I wish I'd known about confidence – it comes from practice and it’s not a personality trait, nobody remembers your mistakes, and you only grow from discomfort.”

“There are 3 things I wish I'd known about negotiation before my first leadership role – especially number two, which contradicts every training manual I’ve read.”

### Pro Tip:

Tease the list up front, then deliver each point clearly with transitions.

## Hook No 16. “Let’s rewind to...”

### Why It Works:

Starting with a moment in time is cinematic. It draws people into a story and gives emotional context to your talk.

### Example Script:

“Let’s rewind to April 2020 – we were in lockdown and I had just lost every client overnight, and I had no idea what to do.”

“Let's rewind to exactly 90 seconds before your last important conversation went sideways – what made it go so wrong, and could you have made a different choice?”

“Let's rewind to that moment in childhood when someone first told you that you couldn't do something – and how that voice might still be influencing your decisions today.”

“Let's rewind to 1999 (for those of you who can remember it!), before smartphones hijacked our attention, when our average concentration span was 20 seconds instead of the 8 seconds it is today.”

“Let's rewind to your first day in your first job, when you still had those fresh eyes ... what problems and opportunities could you see that everyone else had become blind to?”

**Pro Tip:**

You can use it to lead into a story or some information. Whatever it is, Keep the scene tight and relevant to your talk.

## Hook No 17. “If you only remember one thing...”

**Why It Works:**

This line frames what's coming as high-value. It primes your audience to *pay attention* and makes them feel like insiders.

**Example Script:**

“If you only remember one thing from this talk, remember this – your habits are louder than your goals.”

“If you only remember one thing from what I have said today, I hope you remember this – communication is not what I say – it's what you hear.”

“If you only remember one thing from today, let it be this – your genetic code is not your destiny – it's just the starting point.”

“If you only remember one thing about cybersecurity – the biggest vulnerabilities aren't technical, they're us, they're human.”

“If you only remember one thing about architectural design, let it be this – beautiful spaces change human behaviour.

**Pro Tip:**

Make whatever if it is you want them to remember relevant to your core message and make it interesting or surprising.

## Hook No 18. “I wasn't planning to share this, but...”

**Why It Works:**

People tune in because they sense something real and unscripted is coming. It creates intimacy and surprise.

**Example Script:**

“I wasn't planning to share this, but I once burst into tears in the middle of a client meeting,”  
(*Brief pause*) It turned out to be the moment that finally built real trust.”

“I wasn’t planning to share this, but I remember the exact moment I realized I had to quit my job and disappoint my family.”

“I wasn't planning to share this, but while I was putting together my talk for today, my daughter asked me a question over breakfast that completely changed what I wanted to say.”

“I wasn't planning to share this but, there's a story from my personal life that illustrates this concept better than any business example ever could.”

“I wasn't planning to share this but a conversation with a competitor last week revealed a blind spot we all have in this field.”

**Pro Tip:**

Use only if the story is genuine and genuinely adds depth – don’t fake it.

---

## Hook No 19. “This might be uncomfortable...”

**Why It Works:**

This line builds tension and signals bravery. It also alerts your audience to *pay attention* – something important is coming.

**Example Script:**

“This might be uncomfortable to hear – but most of us hide behind PowerPoint because we’re afraid of being *seen*.”

“This might be uncomfortable for us, but the way we test our kids in education measures all the wrong things and promotes the wrong behaviours.”

“This might be uncomfortable but, I'm going to share the number one reason most of us in this room won't achieve any of our goals this year.”

“This might be uncomfortable but, I'm going to ask you to question a core belief that might be limiting your potential without you realizing it.”

“This might be uncomfortable but, I'm going to ask you to think of a time when you let fear make a decision for you, and then ask yourself how that’s affected your life.”

**Pro Tip:**

Follow up with support and solutions – don’t just stir emotion.

---

## Hook No 20. “Everything changed for me when...”

**Why It Works:**

People love turning points. This line signals transformation and frames your talk as a personal journey your audience can learn from. We all want to feel transformation is possible.

**Example Script:**

“Everything changed for me when I realised failure isn’t personal –it’s just data.”

“Everything changed for me when I realized confidence isn’t something you’re born with – it’s something you practice.”

“Everything changed for me when I saw how changing a single line of healthcare policy affected thousands of patient lives and outcomes.”

“Everything changed for me when a mentor asked me one simple question that no one had ever bothered to ask before. And this was the question...”

“Everything changed for me when I discovered that my biggest competitor wasn't another company – it was the limiting story I kept telling myself.”

**Pro Tip:**

Link the moment of change to the benefit your audience wants.

---

## So there you have 20 Hooks to grab your audience!

The way you start a presentation will determine whether people tune in – or tune out. Adapt these hooks for your audience, and grab **attention**, **build connection**, and **own the room**!

---

## Here’s how to learn more speaking skills ...

Find even more FAST & EFFECTIVE techniques to accelerate

YOUR speaking JOURNEY on my website.

Yes I want to know more...

“Becoming a confident public speaker ...  
...is like getting life’s cheat code!”

*Mai Davies*

