

## **Skip the Apology: Retain Your Presentation Credibility**

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An accomplished physician and researcher from Puerto Rico was presenting at a conference of her peers in the United States. “First,” the doctor began, “I want to apologize for my English.”

Sitting in the audience, I felt the energy drain out of the room. Audience members collectively caught their breath, preparing to sit through a problematic presentation.

I wanted to rewind the tape and skip the apology. Like other speech coaches, I advise against apologizing in a speech—especially during the introduction.

A primary goal of an introduction is to establish the speaker’s credibility. To begin with an apology is to begin by undermining your own credibility and set a negative tone for the presentation. Not only did the doctor’s apology expose a lack of confidence, it diverted attention from her expertise. The apology was entirely unnecessary—the doctor’s skills as a clinician and a researcher had earned her the right to present.

It is appropriate to acknowledge an obvious difference that might distract audience members from your content, something like a heavy accent or the presence of a wheelchair. The doctor might have begun, “I’ve come from Puerto Rico to report significant findings from my research. These findings may impact your clinical practice in substantial ways. As we work together today, you might notice that English is not my first language. Sometimes my brain goes faster in Spanish than my tongue can translate.

The same is true if you should encounter a problem with the room, with the equipment, or with another speaker failing to arrive on time. If the audience knows about the problem, acknowledge it. Then confidently report how you are going to handle the situation and get on with it. If you appear to take the situation in stride, the audience will as well.

Acknowledge differences and problems that arise, but skip the apology. Your credibility—and often the success of your presentation—depend on it.

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