

# How to Write Speaker Bios and Abstracts That Get Selected

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When was the last time you read and retained every word of a speaker's bio? Or got to the end of a bio that actually made you *more* excited to attend that speaker's session? Don't worry if you can't recall one; speaker bios are notoriously predictable, clinical, and uninspiring. Most deserve little more than a speed read, a distracted skim across their impressive list of achievements, quickly glossed over, quickly forgotten.

Even when a speaker is uniquely impressive or deservedly celebrated, their bio rarely reflects those appeals. Or why. They usually offer some version of a self-congratulatory CV, a list of accomplishments, jobs, titles, awards, board positions. None of which benefit the audience or suggest a positive experience in hearing that speaker's presentation.

A great bio is rare, and sets us up for a great story to come. Because a great bio *is* its own story, the one we use to engage and energize our audience long before we step into the spotlight.

## Avoid the Average

The average bio reads something like this:

- [SPEAKER] is a specialist in [SUBJECT] with [#] years of industry expertise.
- After graduating from [UNIVERSITY] with a [DEGREE] they started their career with [COMPANY] as a [JOB TITLE] in charge of [IMPORTANT WORK].



- [SPEAKER] joined [NEXT COMPANY] in [YEAR] as a [NEW JOB TITLE] and served on the board of directors of [MAJOR BRAND/S] where they led a team of [VERY LARGE #] and was awarded the [IMPRESSIVE HONORS].
- At [NEXT COMPANY] they helped design and build [WELL-KNOWN WIDGET] and have been invited to speak at [LISTOF MEETINGS/PUBLICATIONS/MEDIA OUTLETS.]
- [SPEAKER] is on faculty at [COLLEGE], is an avid [ATHLETE/PAINTER/COOK/SAILOR/ COLLECTOR/ETC], and member of [EXCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION].

As an audience member, how much of that do you care about, connect with, or recall after reading it? Impressive achievements are standard bio fare, but they're not a story.

Most introductory bios focus entirely on the speaker but offer little value to potential attendees. If your name is on the session, we already know you're qualified and worthy to give that presentation. What we don't know is what's in it for us if we choose to attend your talk. A better speaker bio demonstrates obvious passion for your subject, insight into your personality, personal and professional motivation, and genuine excitement for providing benefit to your audience.

Whether your bio is 50 words or 500, it should include five key elements: **Expertise, Value, Experience, Change, and Excitement.**

## **Expertise**

The first line of your bio is both an introduction to and inspiration for your attendee. Open with your most impressive area of specialty, the one you are most passionate about and proud of, that makes you want to get up in the morning and get to work.

Instead of opening with your job title, turn that title into **expertise** that pays off for others. A standard first line is, "Joan Johnson is Senior VP of Product Marketing at Millennial Capital and a Fellow in Global Finance at Corlear University." A better opening is, "Joan Johnson is a 25-year veteran of building better marketing teams that support our next generation of global game changers." In the first few words we recognize Joan's strength and **expertise**, but also focus on the personal interests and goals of Joan's audience.

## Value

Audiences care about one thing; themselves. Until they recognize the clear and compelling **value** you offer, they're unlikely to tune in or prioritize your message. Once you've successfully introduced your expertise, the next line of your bio should show that you're speaking for the benefit of your listeners instead of for your own glory.

Connect your qualifications to a series of anticipated audience payoffs. For example, "As a Helbert Award-winning author, Jim has developed new methods of speed and accuracy in security risk remediation that helps IT directors and data center managers become security rock stars for their company." Jim has successfully combined his CV with a promise to deliver **value** for his viewer.

## Experience

Your audience isn't as interested in your list of achievements as they are in how those achievements pay off for them if they attend your talk. A better bio doesn't just spotlight your **experience**, it also connects that **experience** to what you've learned and how you put your skills to work for others.

No one will remember Barbara's accolades, but they will remember how "Barbara was on the startup team of Barrier Group and named to Doucy's 30 Under 30 for her groundbreaking work in analytics streamlining, which she loves to share with fellow cloud and infrastructure experts who want more control over their networks." Good for Barbara, and good for us.

## Change

The only talk worth giving is the one that promises positive **change** for our audience. That **change** should be confidently stated in your bio. You're not in the spotlight to impress, but to create real impact and genuine progress for your attendees.

A list of job titles won't do that. Neither will a series of humble brags. Offer the skill along with the **change** that skill creates: "As VP of Sales for Westland since 2014, Martin gives his teams and everyone he meets the power to leap over career obstacles and reach the next levels in your careers." We hear both Martin's credit and how his talk is about to **change** our lives for the better.

## Excitement

Too many bios end with university degrees, recent publications, or industry awards. Your audience doesn't care, so they shouldn't be the last things they read about your session. End your bio with anticipation, something your attendees will start getting **excited** about right away.

Your best story isn't about you but about the great work you do in service of your community, team members, and partners. Close your bio with a challenge, an offer, or an enticement that makes the audience curious about your offering and eager to get into the room with you. Conclude with energy and motivation, two things we'll care about far more than your personal CV.

## Ideal Bio Length

How long should your speaker bio be? In some cases, as long as you need to tell the story. In most cases, your bio length will be specified or controlled by the event producer welcoming you to their platform. You may only get 50-100 words to tell your story, or you may be allowed 1000 characters, roughly 140-250 words or 8-12 sentences. A successful 5-sentence bio might be structured like this:

1. Name and current job title plus primary area of passion and personal success.
2. Years in the industry and largest point of pride that benefits others.
3. 1-2 awards or accolades tied to achievements the audience can relate to and leverage.
4. Career-driven focus that offers a better future for attendees.
5. Closing argument for why this talk is must-see or a challenge that inspires readers to attend.

## Bottom Line

Craft a better speaker bio that's as much about others as it is about you. Share your accomplishments in a way that demonstrates you'll be a valuable partner and source of knowledge for those who attend your talk. You're not applying for a job; you're applying to be a trusted and valued mentor for others. That's the bio that serves you best. The one your guests want to read.

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