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Don't Let Your Audience Write Your Ending

Lauren Ansley

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September 2, 2026

Don't Let Your Audience Write Your Ending

Have you ever sat through a presentation where the speaker absolutely crushed it? They were polished. Engaging. Confident. Had the room in the palm of their hand the entire time...

And then they ended with:
"Any questions?"

...and just like that, the whole thing unraveled.

Cue the awkward silence.
Or the one hyper-specific question that only applies to that one person.
Or the question they already answered... but now we're revisiting it anyway.
Or worse... a question the speaker doesn't know the answer to.

Oof.

And suddenly, the person who looked so polished 30 seconds ago now feels a little flustered or thrown off and the strong finish they earned just... fizzles.

I know this because I've done it. Many times.

Picture this: I wrap up, say "Any questions?" and cue the crickets.
After a couple of seconds of awkward silence I say, "Okay well, thanks everyone!"
Applause starts (which, for the record, is one of my favorite sounds)...

Then I spot a hand in the back.

And because apparently, I attract awkwardness into my life, I stop the applause to take the question, instead of simply inviting them to talk to me afterwards.

Here's the Fix

One of my favorite public speaking tips is simple:

Never close with Q&A. Close with your final thought.

Because as the speaker, you set the tone from start to finish.

Not the audience. Not the guy three rows back trying to stump you. You.

Why This Matters

Your opening matters. But your closing? That's what I like to call your mic drop moment. It's the last thing your audience hears. The last thing they feel. The thing they're most likely to remember.

And when you end with Q&A, you're essentially handing over that moment and saying, "Here, you take it from here."

Hard pass.

You just spent all that time as the subject matter expert preparing in advance and then all that time delivering something thoughtful engaging and intentional...

And you want to end on: "Can you go back to that slide with the chart?" I don't think so. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm fairly certain, that is not the legacy you're going for.

A Better Way to Do It

If you want to include Q&A, great. I'm all for it. I love a good Q&A moment. Just don't let it be the very ending.

Try this instead: "We have time for a few questions, and then I'll leave you with one final thought."

Take a couple of questions. Wrap it up cleanly. Then go into your close.

If you're not doing Q&A, keep it simple: "And I'll leave you with this..."

And then actually... leave them with something. I recommend something like a quote, a quick story, one last take away.

(Note: The moment you signal you're wrapping up, you are officially on borrowed time. Your audience is refocused and ready for you to end. So you have about 5 minutes or less to wrap it up!)

What to Say in Your Closing Moments

Your final thought doesn't need to be (and shouldn't be) long. It just needs to be intentional. It could be:

- "If you remember nothing else from today, remember this..."
- "My challenge to you is..."
- "The next time you have the opportunity, I encourage you to..."

Or share a quick story, a quote, a takeaway that ties everything together. Something that lets you end with clarity and confidence.

The Bottom Line

Your audience should remember your message, not their question.

So yes, take questions if they add value and you have time. But don't let your audience write your ending for you.

Because the best speakers don't just start strong... They finish strong.

About the Author

Lauren Ansley is a conference emcee, workshop facilitator, and audience engagement partner with a background in stand-up comedy. She believes connection is a skill, not a personality trait, and brings warmth, wit, and a room-reading instinct that helps every audience feel genuinely engaged.

Through her Work the Room framework, Lauren helps conferences and organizations create experiences where people connect with one another, communicate with confidence, and walk away with ideas that actually stick. She partners with associations, corporations, and event professionals to intentionally weave connection throughout the entire experience.

A TEDx speaker coach, podcast host, and self-proclaimed introvert with extroverted tendencies, Lauren understands how to read the room, draw people into the experience, and create interaction that feels natural rather than forced. Her sessions are energetic, practical, and highly interactive because when people participate, ideas stick.

Lauren is based in Charlotte, North Carolina, and works with conferences and organizations nationwide.

Planning an upcoming event? Lauren is always happy to connect, brainstorm ideas, or explore ways to elevate the attendee experience. Learn more at www.LaurenAnsley.com.

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