

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Lecture 4: Analyzing Audiences

LERISSA DANIELA, S.S., M.Pd.



**“For of the three elements in speechmaking—
speaker, subject, and person addressed— it is
the last one, the hearer, that determines the
speech’s end and object.” – *Aristotle***



I re-emphasize here the concept of public speaking as an audience-centered activity that I stress.: **At each stage in crafting your speech, you must be mindful of your audience.**

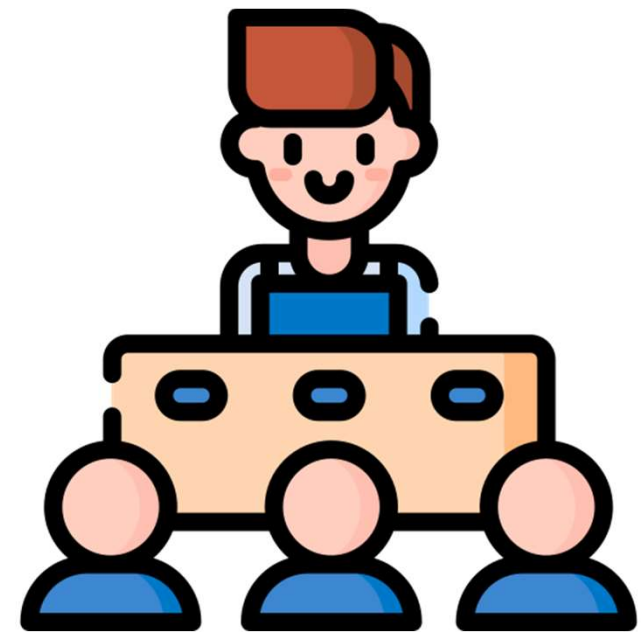
When you are speaking, you want listeners to understand and respond favorably to what you are saying. An audience is one or more people who come together to listen to the speaker. Audience members may be face to face with the speaker or they may be connected by communication technology such as computers or other media. The audience may be small and private or it may be large and public. A key characteristic of public speaking situations is the unequal distribution of speaking time between speaker and audience. As an example, the speaker usually talks more while the audience listens, often without asking questions or responding with any feedback. In some situations, the audience may ask questions or respond overtly by clapping or making comments.

When you think of your audience, don't think of some undifferentiated mass of people waiting to hear your message. Instead, think of individuals.

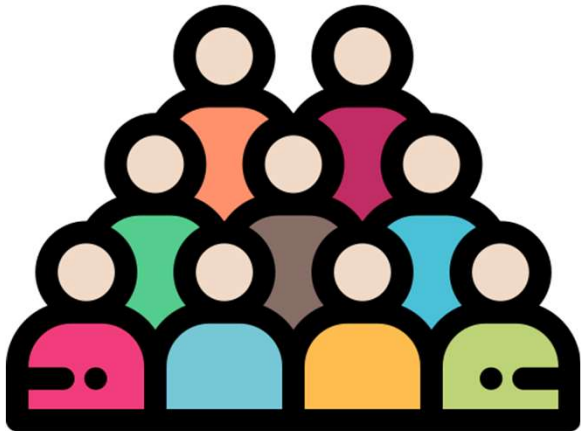


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- ▶ Public speaking is the process of speaking to a group of individuals, each with a unique point of view. Your challenge as an audience-centered public speaker is to find out as much as you can about these individuals. From your knowledge of the individuals, you can then develop a general profile of your listeners. If you are presenting your speech online or via video and you can't literally see your listeners, consider visualizing who your listeners are both before and during your message preparation and presentation.



Become an Audience-centered Speaker



Gather information about your audience.

Analyze the information you have gathered

use your information to ethically adapt to your listeners

Become an Audience-centered Speaker

- ▶ The first step to become an audience-centered public speaker is to **gather information about your audience.** You can gather some information informally, just by observing your listeners or asking general questions about them. Or you can take a more formal approach and administer a survey to obtain more specific information about them.
- ▶ **The next step is to analyze the information you have gathered.** Categorize and evaluate what you have gathered to determine your listeners' psychological profile as well as to consider the occasion at which you are speaking.
- ▶ The last step is to **use your information to ethically adapt to your listeners.** As our audience-centered model illustrates, each decision that you make when designing and delivering your message should consider the needs and backgrounds of your audience.
- ▶ In this meeting, we'll talk more about those three steps in more detail and discuss the process of analyzing your audience before, during, and after you speak. The audience-analysis skills and techniques will help you throughout the entire public-speaking process, as you select a topic, determine the purpose of your speech, develop your central idea, generate main ideas, gather supporting material, firm up your organization, rehearse, and deliver your speech.
- ▶ As an audience-centered speaker, you should try to find out as much as you can about your audience before planning your speech. You might wonder, "How do I go about gathering information about my audience?"

Gathering Information about Your Audience

Informal

- Observation, interview

Formal

- Survey

Gathering Information about Your Audience

There are two approaches you can take: an **informal** one and a **formal** one.

The simplest way to gather information about your audience members informally is just to observe them and ask questions before you speak. Informal observations can be especially important in helping you to assess obvious demographic characteristics. Demographics are statistical information about characteristics such as age, race, gender, sexual orientation, educational level, and ideological or religious views of a population such as an audience. For example, you can make some inferences from their appearance about how many members of your audience are male or female, as well as about their ethnic or cultural traits and approximate age.

Gathering Information Informally

- ▶ You were going to address a meeting of your local Parent-Teacher Association about a new business you were opening to help students and parents develop science projects, you could attend a meeting before your speaking date.
- ▶ You might note the general percentage of men and women in the audience and the ages of the parents who attended. You could also ask whether most parents who show up for PTA meetings are parents of elementary, middle-school, or high-school students.

Gathering Information Formally

- ▶ If your topic is the best approach to finding a rental apartment in your area, for example, use demographic questions to find out how many members of your audience own a home and how many are currently living in an apartment.
- ▶ You might also ask how they found their current apartment, how many are now searching for an apartment, and how many anticipate searching for one.

Analyzing Information about Your Audience

- ▶ Audience analysis involves gathering and interpreting information about the recipients of oral, written, or visual communication. Audience analysis is the process of examining information about the listeners who will hear your speech. That analysis helps you to adapt your message so that your listeners will respond as you wish. You analyze audiences every day as you speak to others or join group conversations.
- ▶ For example, most of us do not deliberately make offensive comments to family members or friends. Rather, we analyze our audience (often very quickly), and then we adapt our messages to the individuals with whom we are speaking. Public speaking involves the same sort of process.
- ▶ Precisely what do you look for when analyzing the information that you have gathered about your audience?



Analyzing Information about Your Audience

How are audience members similar to one another?

How are audience members different from one another?

How can I establish common ground with the audience?

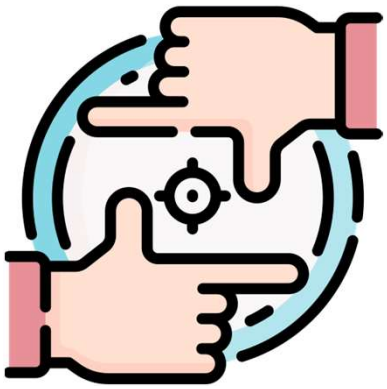
Analyzing Information about Your Audience

Ask yourself the following questions.

1. **How are audience members similar to one another?** Knowing what several members of your audience have in common can help you to craft a message that resonates with them. For example, if your audience members are approximately the same age, then you have some basis for selecting examples and illustrations that your listeners will understand.
2. **How are audience members different from one another?** It is unlikely that all the audience members for the speeches you give in class will have similar backgrounds. The range of cultural backgrounds, ethnic ties, and religious traditions among students at most colleges and universities is rapidly expanding. You can note a range of differences in age and gender as well as perspectives about your topic.
3. **How can I establish common ground with the audience?** To establish common ground with your audience is to identify ways in which you and your listeners are alike. The more your listeners identify with you and the goals of your message, the more likely they are to respond positively.

Adapting to Your Audience

- ▶ Audience adaptation is the process of using information you've gathered when analyzing your audience to modify your message in a way that helps your audience clearly understand your message and helps you achieve your speaking objective. If you only analyze your audience but don't use the information to customize your message, the information that you've gathered will be of little value. Using your skill to learn about your listeners and then to adapt to them can help you to maintain your listeners' attention and make them more receptive to your ideas.
- ▶ When you are speaking in public, you should remember the principle: An effective public speaker is audience-centered. Being audience-centered does not mean that you should tell your listeners only what they want to hear or that you should fabricate information simply to please your audience or achieve your goal. If you adapt to your audience by abandoning your own values and sense of truth, then you will become an unethical speaker rather than an audience-centered one.





Considering audience

To whom am I speaking?

What does my audience expect from me?

What topic would be most suitable for my audience?

Considering goal

What is my objective?



Considering content

What kind of information should I share with my audience?

How should I present the information to them?

How can I gain and hold their attention?

What kind of examples would work best?

Considering delivery

What language or linguistic differences do audience members have?

What method of organizing information will be most effective?

Analyzing Your Audience before You Speak

Demography

- age
- gender
- sexual orientation
- culture, ethnicity, and race
- group membership
- socioeconomic status

Psychological

- Attitude
- Belief
- Value

Situational

- Time
- Size of audience
- Location
- Occasion

Demography Analysis

- ▶ Demographics are statistics on population characteristics such as age; gender; sexual orientation; culture, ethnicity, and race; group membership; and socioeconomic status. These categories often underpin the individual's experiences and beliefs, so you should tailor your speech accordingly. Presenting at a conference in London will be a very different experience to presenting in Shanghai. The structure of your speech and words you use will probably be very different.
- ▶ Using demographic factors to guide speech-making does not mean changing the goal of the speech for every different audience; rather, consider what pieces of information will be most important for members of different demographic groups.
- ▶ The question or challenge for a public speaker is “How do I adapt to listeners with such different backgrounds and experiences? Here I would like to offer several general strategies.



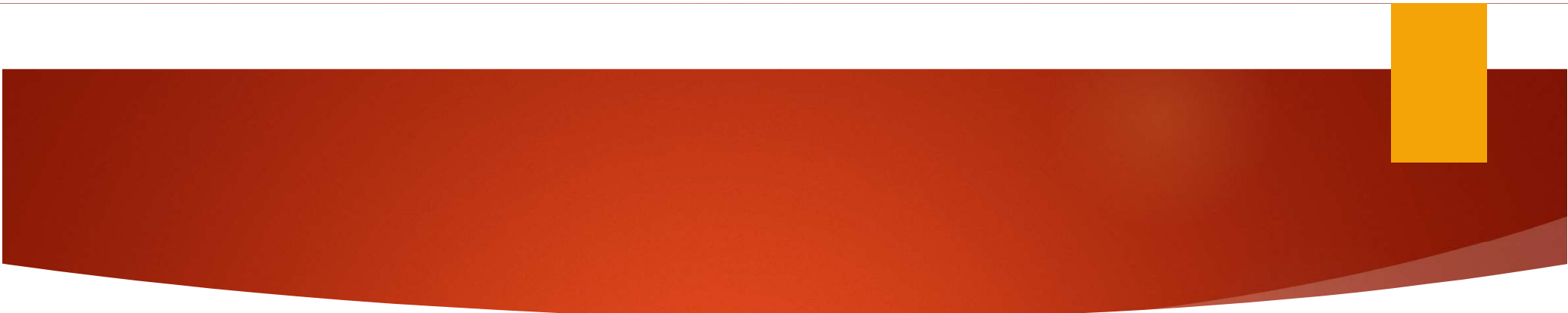


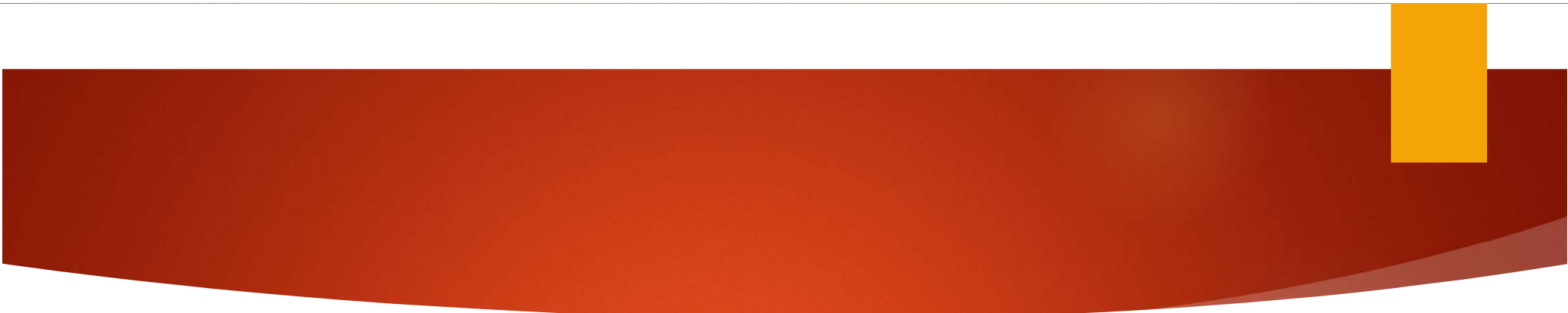
Focus on a target audience

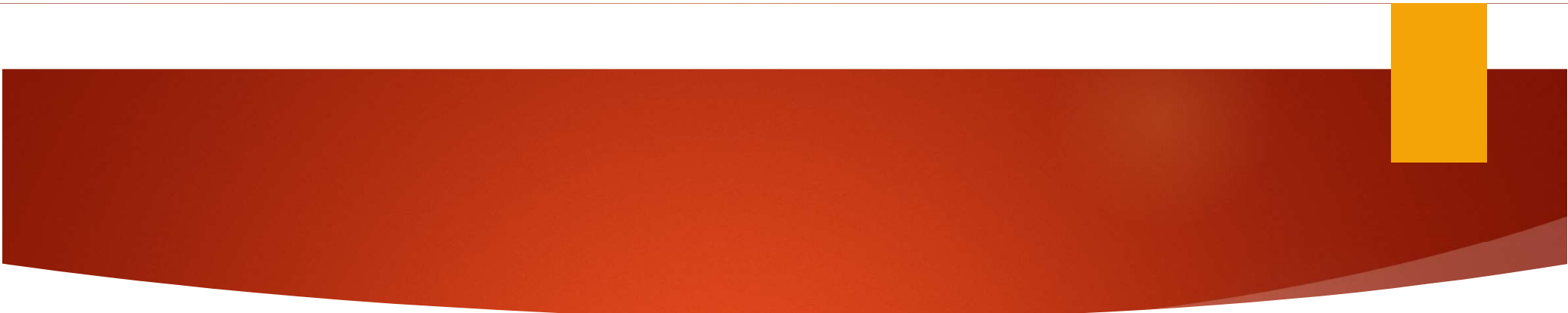
Use diverse strategies for a diverse audience

Identify common values

Rely on visual materials that transcend language differences

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- ▶ **First, you could decide to focus on a target audience.** A target audience is a specific segment of your audience that you most want to address or influence. The challenge in consciously focusing on a target audience is not to lose or alienate the rest of your listeners—to keep the entire audience in mind while simultaneously making a specific attempt to hit your target segment. For example, Sasha was trying to convince his listeners to invest in the stock market instead of relying on the Social Security system. He wisely decided to focus on the younger listeners; those approaching retirement age have already made their major investment decisions. Although he focused on the younger members of his audience, Sasha didn't forget the mature listeners. He suggested that older listeners encourage their children or grandchildren to consider his proposal. He focused on a target audience but didn't ignore others.

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- ▶ **Second, consciously use a variety of methods of adapting to listeners.** Another approach you can adopt, either separately or in combination with a target audience focus, is to use a variety of strategies to reflect the diversity of your audience. On the basis of your efforts to gather information about your audience, you should know the various constituencies that will likely be present for your talk. To reach the majority of the people in a diverse audience, you can use variety of supporting materials; personal stories or experiences; and visual support.

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- ▶ **Third, seek common ground.** Identifying common cultural issues and similarities can help you to establish common ground with your audience. If you are speaking about an issue on which you and your audience have widely different views, identifying a larger common value that is relevant to your topic (such as the importance of peace, prosperity, or family) can help you to find a foothold so that your audience will at least listen to your ideas.
 - ▶ **Lastly, consider using powerful visual images to present your key points.** Pictures and other images can communicate universal messages—especially emotional ones. Although there is no universal language, most listeners, regardless of culture and language, can comprehend visible expressions of pain, joy, sorrow, and happiness. An image of a mother holding the frail, malnourished body of her dying child communicates the ravages of famine without elaborate verbal explanations. The more varied your listeners' cultural experiences, the more effective it can be to use visual materials to illustrate your ideas.

Psychological Analysis

- ▶ The aim of psychological audience analysis is to discover what your audience may be thinking before and during your presentation.
- ▶ Your listeners will already hold “attitudes, beliefs, and values” toward the ideas you will inevitably present.

Attitude

Belief

Value

Psychological Analysis

- ▶ The aim of psychological audience analysis is to discover what your audience may be thinking before and during your presentation. Your listeners will already hold “attitudes, beliefs, and values” toward the ideas you will inevitably present.
- ▶ As a result, it is always important to know where your audience stands on the issues you plan to address ahead of time. The best way to accomplish this is to sample your audience with a quick questionnaire or survey prior to the event. This is known as the third category of audience analysis, or psychological description. When performing a description you seek to identify the audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Psychological Analysis

- **An attitude reflects likes or dislikes.** Do you like healthy food? Are you for or against capital punishment? Should movies be censored? What are your views on nuclear energy? Your answers to these widely varied questions reflect your attitudes.
- **A belief is what you hold to be true or false.** If you think the sun will rise in the east in the morning, you hold a belief about the sun based on what you perceive to be true or false.
- **A value is an enduring concept of good and bad, right and wrong.** For example, you like healthy food because you believe that natural products are more healthful. And you value good health.

Before you speak, it is useful to know how members of an audience feel about your topic. Are they interested or apathetic? How much do they already know about the topic? If the topic is controversial, are they for it or against it? Knowing the answers to these questions from the outset lets you adjust your message accordingly.

So far, we have concentrated on the people who will be your listeners as the primary focus of being an audience-centered speaker. You should also consider your speaking situation.

Situational Analysis

TIME

- Considers the time of day as well as audience expectations about the speech length

SIZE OF THE AUDIENCE

- The larger the audience, the more likely they are to expect a relatively formal style

LOCATION

- Visit the place where you will speak to examine the physical setting.

OCCASION

- Knowing the occasion helps you to predict both demographic characteristics of the audience and the members' psychological state of mind.

Situational Analysis

TIME.

You may have no control over when you will be speaking, but in designing and delivering a talk, a skilled public speaker considers the time of day as well as audience expectations about the speech length. If you are speaking to a group of exhausted parents during a midweek evening meeting of the band boosters club, you can bet they will appreciate a direct, to-the-point presentation more than a long oration. Also be mindful of your time limits. If your audience expects you to speak for twenty minutes, it is usually better to end right at twenty minutes or even a little earlier.

Situational Analysis

SIZE OF THE AUDIENCE.

- ▶ The size of your audience directly affects speaking style and audience expectations about delivery. As a general rule, the larger the audience, the more likely they are to expect a relatively formal style. With an audience of ten or fewer, you can punctuate a very conversational style by taking questions from your listeners. If you and your listeners are so few that you can be seated around a table, they may expect you to stay seated for your presentation.
- ▶ A group of between twenty and thirty people—the size of most public speaking classes—will expect more formality than will an audience of a dozen or fewer. Your speaking style can still be conversational, but your speech should be appropriately structured and well organized; your delivery may include more expansive gestures than you would display during a one-on-one chat with a friend or colleague.
- ▶ Audiences that fill a lecture hall will still appreciate a direct, conversational style, but your gestures may increase in size, and if your voice will be unamplified, you will be expected to speak with enough volume and intensity that people in the last row can hear you. You may need to amplify your voice with a microphone.

Situational Analysis

LOCATION.

In your speech class, you have the advantage of knowing what the room looks like, but in a new speaking situation, you might not have that advantage. If at all possible, visit the place where you will speak to examine the physical setting and find out, for example, how far the audience will be from the lectern. Physical conditions such as room temperature and lighting can affect your performance, audience response, and the overall success of the speech. Room arrangement and decor can also affect the way an audience responds.

If your speaking environment is less than ideal, you might need to work especially hard to hold your audience's attention. Although you probably will not be able to make major changes in the speaking environment, it is ultimately up to you to obtain the best speaking environment you can. The arrangement of chairs, placement of audiovisual materials, and opening or closing of drapes should all be under your control.

Situational Analysis

OCCASION.

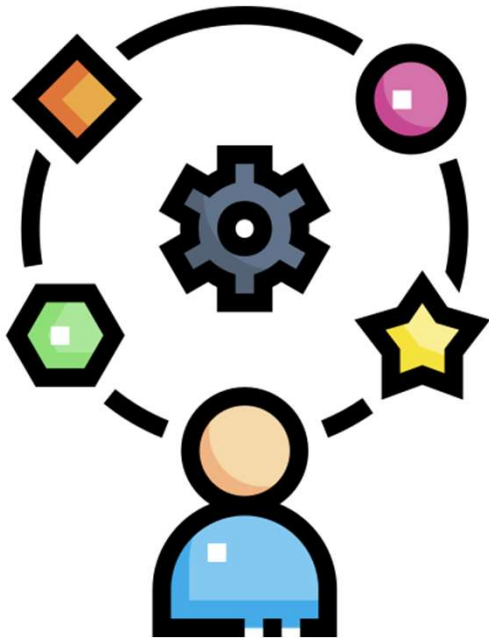
Another important way to gain clues about your listeners is to consider the reason this audience is here. What occasion brings this audience together? The mind-set of people who have gathered for a funeral will obviously be different from that of people who have asked you to say a few words after a banquet. Knowing the occasion helps you to predict both demographic characteristics of the audience and the members' psychological state of mind.

If you're presenting a speech at an annual or monthly meeting, you have the advantage of being able to ask people who have attended previous presentations what kind of audience typically gathers for the occasion. Knowing when you will speak on the program or whether a meal will be served before or after you talk will help you to gauge what your audience expects from you.

Advance preparation will help you avoid last-minute surprises about the speaking environment and the physical arrangements for your speech. A well prepared speaker adapts his or her message not only to the audience but also to the speaking environment.

Analysis and adaptation do not end when you have crafted your speech. They continue as you deliver your speech.

Adapting to Your Audience as You Speak



- ▶ Many beginning public speakers may find it challenging at first not only to have the responsibility of presenting a speech they have rehearsed, but also to have to change or modify the speech on the spot. I assure you that with experience, you can develop the sensitivity to adapt to your listeners.
- ▶ Generally, a public speaker does not have an exchange with the audience unless the speech is part of a question-and-answer or discussion format. Once the speech is in progress, the speaker must rely on nonverbal cues from the audience to judge how people are responding to the message.



Type of Audience	Example	How to Be Audience-Centered
Interested	Mayors who attend a talk by the governor about increasing security and reducing the threat of terrorism	Acknowledge audience interest early in your speech; use the interest they have in you and your topic to gain and maintain their attention.
Uninterested	Middle-school students attending a lecture about retirement benefits	Make it a high priority to tell your listeners why your message should be of interest to them.
Favorable	A religious group that meets to hear a speech about the importance of their beliefs	Use the audience's initial positive attitude to move them even closer to your speaking goal; explicitly tell them in your speech conclusion what you would like them to do.
Unfavorable	Students who attend a lecture by the university president explaining big upcoming tuition increases	Be realistic in what you expect to accomplish; acknowledge their opposing point of view; consider using facts to refute misperceptions they may hold.
Voluntary	Parents attending a lecture by the new principal at their children's school	Anticipate why they are coming to hear you, and speak about the issues they want you to address.
Captive	Students in a public-speaking class	Find out who will be in your audience, and use this knowledge to adapt your message to them.

Nonverbal Audience Cues

Here are the important nonverbal Audience cues that you can observe during your speech:

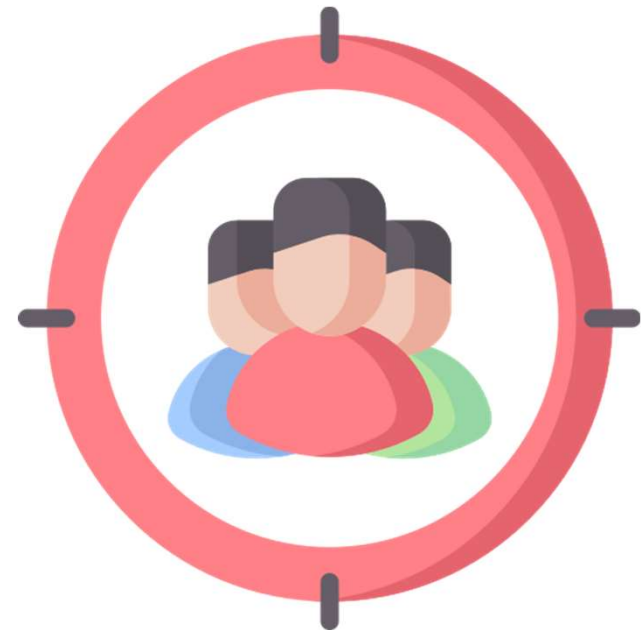
1. **Eye Contact.** You are connected when most audience members look you in the eye while you are speaking. When Audience members don't engage with you, they don't make eye contact with you. They look down, at their phones or watches, or at the program.
2. **Facial Expression.** Audience members have sincere smiles or pleasant facial expressions when they are connected with you. But, the audience is not engaged with you when they frown or display the "listener stupor" look, a blank or unresponsive facial expression, accompanied by a slightly tilted head, often with a hand holding up the chin, which indicates they are probably daydreaming.
3. **Movement.** Audience members who are interested in you will sit fairly still. But, when you are not connected, the audience members fidget, squirm, or increase their general body movement.

Nonverbal Audience Cues

4. Nonverbal Responsiveness. Audience members will nod in agreement, laugh at your humor, or applaud frequently when you and them are connected. The audience members also will respond promptly to your invitations, such as requests for information or a show of hands. When they are not engaged, they do not nod, laugh, or applaud much. The Audience members are slow and sheepish about responding to your invitations.
5. Verbal Responsiveness. Audience members are engaged when they shout out comments or answers to questions, or remark quietly about your presentation to the people near them. Audience members do not respond to questions or shout out negative comments or talk to people near them about topics unrelated to your talk signaling a disengagement.

Although it's not possible to read your listeners' minds, it is important to analyze and adapt to often unspoken cues that can enhance the effectiveness of your message. The first step in developing this skill is to be aware of the cues that let you know whether your audience is hanging on every word or is bored.

- ▶ When your audience becomes inattentive, however, you might need to make some changes while delivering your message.
- ▶ If you think audience members are drifting off into their own thoughts or disagreeing with what you say or if you suspect that they don't understand what you are saying, then a few spontaneous changes may help. It takes experience and skill to make on-the spot changes in your speech.



Strategies for Customizing Your Message to Your Audience

Mention the audience's group, or use individual names, if appropriate.

Mention the place where you're speaking or a recent local news event.

Relate an event from history to the date of your speech.

Show how abstract statistics apply to the audience.

Avoid pandering to listeners or making up information.

Analyzing Your Audience after You Speak

- ▶ Evaluation can help you to prepare your next speech.
- ▶ Post-speech analysis helps you to polish your speaking skill.
- ▶ You can learn whether your examples were clear and whether listeners accepted your message.



Methods for Assessing Your Audience's Response

Nonverbal responses

- Applause, nods, smiles, facial expression

Verbal responses

- Specific comments

Survey responses

- Audience's general reactions

Behavioral Responses

- Behavioral measurements

Conclusion

- ▶ At each stage in crafting your speech, you must be mindful of your audience.
- ▶ Use your knowledge of the audience to adapt your speech accordingly. Adopt the perspective of the audience to identify with them, and test out your ideas with an imagined audience composed of people with the background you have discovered through your research.



Thank you

LERISSA DANIELA, S.S., M.Pd.

lerissa.daniela@gmail.com

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