

Public Speaking Lecture Notes

Week 4

Chapter 6

Analyzing the Audience

Audience Analysis is the process of gathering and analyzing information about the audience members' attributes and motivations with the explicit aim of preparing your speech in ways that will be meaningful to them. *This is the single most critical aspect of preparing for any speech.* What are your listeners' attitudes with respect to your topic? What might they need or want to know? How will their values influence their response to your presentation? How much do audience members have in common with one another?

Maintaining an **audience-entered approach** throughout the entire speech preparation process – from selection and treatment of the speech topic to making decisions about how you will organize, word, and deliver it – will help you prepare a presentation that your audience will want to hear.

Adapt to Audience Psychology: Who Are Your Listeners?

- One of the most important psychological principles you can learn as a speaker is that audience members, and people in general, tend to evaluate information in terms of their own – rather than the speaker's – point of view.
- Being audience-centered does not mean that you must abandon your own convictions or cater to the audience's whims. This is called pandering.
- Pandering will only undermine your credibility in the eyes of the audience.
- ❖ **Appeal to Audience Members' Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values**
 - Attitudes are our general evaluations of people, ideas, objects, or events.
 - Attitudes are based on beliefs – the way in which people perceive reality.

- Both attitudes and beliefs are shaped by values – our most enduring judgments about what’s good and bad in life, as shaped by our culture and our unique experiences within it.
 - We have fewer values than either attitudes or beliefs, but they are more deeply felt and resistant to change.

❖ **“If the Value Fits, Use It.”**

- Evoking some combination of the audience’s values, attitudes, and beliefs in the speeches you deliver will make them more personally relevant and motivating.
- Successful speakers will touch directly upon these values in their presentations.

❖ **Gauge Listeners’ Feelings toward the Topic, Speaker, and Occasion**

- It is important to Assess the audience’s feelings and expectations towards:
 - The topic of your speech
 - You as the speaker
 - The speech occasion
- This perspective taking will help you anticipate listeners’ reactions and develop the speech accordingly.

Gauge Listener’s Feelings Toward the Topic

- If the topic is new to listeners.
 - Start by showing why the topic is relevant to them
 - Relate the topic to familiar issues and ideas about which they already hold positive attitudes.
- If the listeners know relatively little about the topic
 - Stick to the basics and include background information.
 - Steer clear of jargon, and define unclear terms
 - Repeat important points, summarizing information often
- If listeners are negatively disposed toward the topic
 - Focus on establishing rapport and credibility.
 - Don’t directly challenge listeners’ attitudes; instead begin with area of agreement
 - Discover if they have a negative bias in order to tactfully introduce the other side of the argument.
 - Offer solid evidence from sources they are likely to accept
 - Give good reasons for developing a positive attitude toward the topic.

- If listeners hold positive attitudes toward the topic
 - Stimulate the audience to feel even more strongly by emphasizing the side of the argument with which they already agree.
 - Tell stories with vivid language that reinforces listeners' attitudes.
- If listeners are a captive audience
 - Motivate listeners to pay attention by focusing as much as possible on what is most relevant to them.
 - Pay close attention to the length of your speech.

Gauge Listeners' Feelings toward the Speaker

- Listeners have a natural need to identify with the speaker and to feel that he or she shares their perceptions
 - Look for ways to establish a common bond, or feeling of identification between you and the audience. Do this by:
 - Emphasizing those aspects of the topic which the audience is likely to agree.
 - Share a personal story, emphasizing a shared role or other mutual bond.
 - Strategic use of inclusive language such as *we, us, you, I, and me*.
 - Physical presentation
 - ◆ We are more likely to identify with someone who dresses like or, or how we aspire to dress than someone who does not.

Gauge Listener's Feelings toward the Occasion

- Part of any audience analysis is anticipating audience reactions to the circumstances calling for the speech
- Different occasions cause people to bring a different set of expectations and emotions.
 - A captive audience will tend to present a greater challenge than one that is voluntary

Adapt to Audience Demographics

Demographics are the statistical characteristics of a given population. These characteristics would include age, ethnic and cultural background, socioeconomic status, religious and political affiliations, gender, social group

membership, place of residence, sexual orientation and disability to name a few.

❖ **Appeal to Your Target Audience.**

- Knowing audience demographics helps you identify your target audience
 - Those individuals with similar characteristics, wants, and needs whom you are most likely to influence in your direction

❖ **Age**

- Each age group brings with it its own concerns and psychological drives and motivations.
 - The quest for identity in adolescence (ages 12-20) differs markedly from the need to establish stable careers and relationships in early adulthood (ages 20-40)
 - Adults in their middle years (40-65) tend to grapple with issues related to career, children, aging parents, and increased awareness of mortality.
 - With seniors (65 and older) physical changes and changes in lifestyle assume greater importance.
- Being aware of the age range and generational identity of your audience allows you to develop points that are relevant to the experiences and interest of the widest cross section of your listeners.

❖ **Ethnic or Cultural Background**

- Understanding of and sensitivity to the ethnic and cultural composition of your audience are key factors in delivering a successful speech. You are all but certain to encounter audience members of different national origins. Members may have a great deal in common with you. Others struggle to understand you. Some members of the audience may belong to a distinct **co-culture**, a social community whose values and style of communicating may or may not mesh with your own. .

❖ **Socioeconomic Status**

- Socioeconomic status (SES) includes income, occupation and education.
 - Income determines people's experiences on many levels.
 - Given how pervasively income affects people's life experiences, insight into this aspect of an audience's makeup can be quite important.

- Occupation - The nature of people's work has a lot to do with what interests them.
 - These interests are tied to several other areas of social concerns such as, politics, economy, education and social reform.
 - Personal attitudes, beliefs and goals are also closely tied to occupational standing
- The level of education strongly influences people's ideas, perspectives, and range of abilities.
- A higher levels of education appears to be associated with greater fluctuation in personal values, beliefs, and goals.
 - People with higher levels of education may be more open to changing their minds.
- If the audience is generally well educated, your speech may need to be quite sophisticated
- If the audience is less educated you may choose to illustrate points using examples and illustrations

❖ Religion

- Don't assume that everyone in your audience shares a common religious heritage.
- Don't assume that all member of the same spiritual tradition agree on all issues.
 - Catholics disagree over birth control and divorce
 - Jew disagree over same-sex unions
- Awareness of and audience's general religious orientation can be especially helpful when your speech addresses a topic as potentially controversial as religion. Capital punishment, same-sex marriage, and teaching about the origins of humankind – all are rife with religious overtones and implications.

❖ Political Affiliation

- Beware of making unwarranted assumptions about an audience's political values and beliefs.
- Unless you have prior information about the audience's political values and beliefs, you won't know where your listeners stand.

❖ Gender

- Gender is our social and psychological sense of ourselves as males or females.
- Making assumptions about the preferences, abilities, and behaviors of your audience members based on their presumed gender can seriously undermine their receptivity to your message.
 - Sexist language casts males and females into roles on the basis of sex alone
 - Gender stereotypes over simplify and often distort ideas about the innate nature of what it means to be female or male
- Try to anticipate the audience's attitude with respect to gender
- Depending on the audience composition, ethnicity, and cultural background and age may also come into play

❖ Disability

- Disability is another demographic variable to consider when analyzing and audience.
- 19 percent of the population, has some sort of mental, physical, emotional or employment disability.
- Over 14 percent of those enrolled in college and graduate school are counted as disabled.

Adapt to Cultural Values

Chances are that you will find yourself facing listeners who hold different cultural perspectives that may or may not mesh with your own. Your foremost concern should be to treat your listeners with dignity and to act with integrity. You do this by infusing your speech with the pillars of character:

- Trustworthiness
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Fairness

Values are central to who we are, familiarizing yourself with those of your listeners can help you to communicate with sensitivity.

❖ Hofstede's Value-Dimensions Model

- Individualism versus Collectivism
 - Individualistic cultures emphasize the needs of the individual rather than those of the group.
 - Collectivist cultures consider personal identity, needs, and desires are viewed as secondary to those of the larger group. Believe that the wishes of the parents and the family group must come before their own.

❖ Uncertainty Avoidance

- Uncertainty avoidance – the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguity.
- High-uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to structure life more rigidly.
- Low-uncertainty avoidance cultures are more accepting of uncertainty in life and therefore allow more variation in individual behavior.

❖ Power Distance

- The extent to which a culture values social equality versus tradition and authority. *High levels of power distance* tend to be organized along more rigidly hierarchical lines, with greater emphasis placed on honoring authority. *Low levels of power distance* place a higher value on social equality.

❖ Masculinity versus Femininity

- *Masculinity and femininity dimensions* refers to culture values traits. Masculine traits include ambition, assertiveness, performance and overt displays of manliness. Feminine traits stress nurturance and cooperation.

❖ Long – versus Short-Term Time Orientation

- *Time orientation* refers to the degree to which a culture values behavior that is directed to future rewards, such as perseverance and thrift, versus behavior that is directed toward the present, such as expecting quick results.

Lewis's Cultural Types Model

Richard D. Lewis offers a model that classifies cultures according to whether they are linear-active, multi-active or reactive.

Linear-Active Cultures

- People in linear-active cultures approach tasks systematically, preferring to do one thing at a time and in an organized fashion. Tend to be cool, factual, decisive planners. Germany, Switzerland, and United States, and Great Britain rank highest in linear-active traits; Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Arab Middle East rank lowest.

Multi-Active Cultures

- Multi-active cultures tend to do many things at once, people oriented, and extroverted. Warm, emotional, talkative, and impulsive. Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and the Arab Middle East rank highest.

Reactive Cultures

- Reactive cultures, people rarely initiate discussions or actions, preferring to listen to what others have to say first. Tend to be courteous, accommodating, good listeners. Japan, China, Vietnam, Korea and Thailand rank highest in reactive traits.

Value dimensions and cultural patterns identified by Hofstede and Lewis reflect those of the dominant culture; they do not necessarily reflect the behaviors of all the groups living within a society

Focus on Universal Values

If you have trouble discovering this information, you can focus on certain values that are widely or even universally shared. These include: love, truthfulness, fairness, unity, tolerance, responsibility and respect for life.

Techniques for Learning about your Audience

- ❖ **Interview Audience Members**
- ❖ **Survey the Audience**
- ❖ **Consult Published Sources**

Analyze the Speech Setting

❖ **Size of Audience and Physical Setting**

- The size of the audience and the physical setting in which a speech occurs can have a significant impact on the outcome of the speech.

❖ **Time and Length of Speech**

- Both the time at which your speech is scheduled and its length will affect listeners' receptivity to it.

❖ **Speech Context (Rhetorical Situation)**

- Any speech or presentation you deliver will always occur in a particular context. By being alert to any of these contingencies, you can address them in your speech.