

KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Identify the Audience

One of the important task is to consider the audience to determine how best to achieve our objectives in the context of these people. Essentially this is done by identifying their aims and objectives while attending our talk. If we can somehow convince them that they are achieving those aims while at the same time achieving our own, we will find a helpful and receptive audience. For instance, if you are seeking approval for a new product plan from senior management it is useful to know and understand their main objectives. If they are currently worried that their product range is out of date and old fashioned, you would emphasize the innovative aspects of your new product; if they are fearful about product diversification you would then emphasize how well your new product fits within the existing catalogue.

This principal of matching the audience aims, however, goes beyond the simple salesmanship of an idea - it is the simplest and most effective manner of obtaining their attention at the beginning. If our opening remarks imply that we understand their problem and that we have a solution, then they will be flattered at our attention and will be attentive to our every word.

UNDERSTANDING THE AUDIENCE

Though audience consists of individual listeners, they must have certain common characteristics which enable them to assembly for participation and reciprocity. The speaker has to find out those characteristics in order to determine his method and style of delivery. His correct Judgment of the audience helps him to organize the details of the message in such a way that it becomes best adaptable to the audience. He has too consider the age, sex, occupation, education, religion, social status and economic level of his audience. before preparing his speech for them. Such a consideration will give him some idea about the linguistic competence and academic background of the audience; and secondly, it will help him to draw inferences about the beliefs, values, opinions, interests and attitudes of the audience. He Can use these inferences to change, mould and reorganize his arguments and to present them with good impact on the audience. He must take it for granted that the audience belonging to different social classes and occupations have different views and- values. The formal language style can be of maximum impact for one class of the society, whereas it may not be favored by the other. The speaker's use of language and choice of words must match the language .competence of the. audience. He has to use familiar terminology. and the connotations of his words must be understood by the audience. If he uses figurative and. utopian language style, he must think about its appropriateness for the audience. Before constructing his message with a persuasive appeal, the speaker has to determine how the audience members are likely to react about

a given issue. There are always some people who resist to change their views and values, some are partly resistant to it, whereas others may have very low resistance. The speaker's persuasive argument is easily adaptable to those having low resistance and to those who are receptive to almost anything said by the speaker. It means that some members of the audience are more persuasible than others to almost any message. It is generally found that the persuasible persons give more respect to the opinions of others than to their own. They tend to have low self-esteem which does not allow them to form their own views values and opinions.

Analyze Your Audience

Once you have your purpose firmly in mind, you should think about another basic element of your speech or presentation: your audience. As Brady Keys points out, analyzing your audience is an important step because you'll be gearing the style and content of your speech to your audience's needs and interests. When you're preparing to speak, be sure to review the discussion of audience analysis in Chapter 5. Of course, for even more insight into audience evaluation (including emotional and cultural issues) consult a good public speaking textbook.

If you're involved in selecting the audience, you'll certainly have information about their characteristics. However, you'll often be speaking to a group of people you know very little about. You'll have a much better chance of achieving your purpose if you investigate the audience's characteristics before you show up to speak. Ask your host or some other contact person for help with audience analysis, and supplement that information with some in-formed estimates of your own. The Checklist for Audience Analysis summarizes these points.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Famous quote of Rudyard Kipling, the Indian born English author, may provide a clue about the aim and objectives of communication:

'I keep six honest serving-men (they taught me all I knew), their names are: What and Why and When and How and Where and Who.'

The six questions are the "Who?" "What?" "Why?" "When?" "Where?" and "How?" of perfect presentations. Finding out the answer to them before you even begin to think about what you are going to say, is the essential first step to effective preparation.

What to know about your audience?

- Who are my audience and how many in number?
- What is their attitude, friendly or hostile?
- Are they supportive or disruptive?
- Are they interested or disinterested?
- Have they been forced to come or attending voluntarily?
- Are they indifferent in their attitudes?
- Are they well informed people or unconnected to the topic?

- What is their level of knowledge?

It is entirely essential to know the age group, level of education, social status, etc. of your audience. Therefore, find out as much as you can about who will be attending your presentation. Have you invited some of the audience? Does it consist of your colleagues? Once you know who will be attending, it will be easier for you to structure your speech to elicit the best response from them.

Therefore, while evaluating the audience and ensuring useful communication of your message, you need to take into account the cultural values and opinions held by your audience. Consider how they might react to any delicate issues raised in your speech and also be well aware that this could affect the rest of your presentation if their reactions are negative or antithetical to the raised issue. If the participants of the audience are known to hold strong opinions on your chosen subject, be careful of introducing such antithetical and debatable issues without supporting your point of view. Also, remember that humor can easily cause offence, so use it sparingly in your speech.

The size of the audience will have a significant impact on the way you structure your presentation. With small groups there is enormous opportunity for two-way interaction you can answer questions as you go along, or you can ask your audience for- their opinions about the questions and issues you are raising. With 'large groups, the communication is almost entirely one-way- the speaker in this case, requires a very different attitude.

What the audiences want to know

- What is the subject matter?
- What exactly you wish to communicate.
- What is the need to do so?
- What kind of event -, is it a brief overview, a keynote address or a call to action?
- What level of detail should you give?
- What do they already know and what they need to know?

A careful thinking about the above points shall provide you with deeper insights into all the 'what's' of your presentation and sufficient information of this kind about the listener would permit you to discern between the essential and the superfluous areas of the material to be presented.

Therefore, selection of the material for the presentation should be guided by the following:

- The objective-Whether some of the information you have, is relevant to the objective of the presentation?
- The audience-Do they know most of this already?
- Timing-How long have you got?
- Must, Should, Could-Sometimes, it is possible to choose on the basis of what the audience must, should and could know.

It is always tempting to tell people everything you know about a subject, especially, if it is one you know well. The more you know, the more disciplined you need to be. Be highly selective to suit your audience.

The structure of a talk should follow the pattern of the following:

- Tell them what you are going to tell them
- Tell them in detail
- Tell them what you have told them

Like you hear and watch in the news bulletins on the television, - ‘First the main points - The news in detail- The headlines once again’, you need to tell your audience what you are going to cover in your speech, then expand on each of those points and finish by recapping what you have said.

A. Audience Size and Composition

1. Estimate how many people will attend.
2. Consider whether they have some political, re-ligious, professional, or other affiliation in common.
3. Analyze the mix of men and women, age ranges, socioeconomic and ethnic groups, occupations, and geographical regions represented.

B. Probable Audience Reaction

1. Analyze why audience members are attending the speech or presentation.
2. Determine the audience’s general attitude toward the topic.
 - a. Decide whether the audience is very interested, moderately interested, or uninterested.
 - b. Review how the audience has reacted to similar issues in the past.
 - c. Determine which facets of the subject are most likely to appeal to the audience.
 - d. Decide whether portions of your message will create problems for any members of the audience.
3. Analyze the mood that people will be in when you speak to them: tired from listening to other presentations like yours or fresh because your presentation comes early in the agenda, interested in hearing a unique presentation, restless from sitting too long in one position and needing a minute to stretch.

4. Figure out which sort of backup information will most impress the audience: technical data, statistical comparisons, cost figures, historical information, generalizations, demonstrations, samples, and so on.

5. Predict audience response.

a. List ways that the audience will benefit from your message.

b. Formulate an idea of the most desirable audience reaction and the best possible result (what you want the audience to believe or to do afterward).

c. Anticipate possible objections' or questions.

d. Analyze the worst thing that might happen and how you might respond.

C. Level of Audience Understanding

1. Determine whether the audience already knows something about the subject.

a. Analyze whether everybody has about the same amount of knowledge.

b. Consider whether the audience is familiar with your vocabulary.

2. Estimate whether everybody is equally capable of understanding the message.

3. Decide what background information the audience will need to understand the subject.

4. Think about the mix of general concepts and specific details you will need to explain.

5. Consider whether the subject involves routine, recurring information or an unfamiliar topic.

D. Audience Relationship with the Speaker

1. Analyze how this audience usually reacts to speakers.

2. Determine whether the audience is likely to be friendly, open-minded, or hostile toward your purpose in making the speech or presentation.

3. Decide how the audience is likely to respond to you.

a. Analyze what the audience expects from you.

b. Think about your past interactions with the audience.

c. Consider your relative status.

d. Consider whether the audience has any biases that might work against you.

e. Take into account the audience's probable attitude toward the organization you represent.

4. Decide which aspects of your background are most likely to build credibility.